

# Creating a Brave Nepali Nation in British India: The Rhetoric of *Jāti* Improvement, Rediscovery of Bhanubhakta and the Writing of *Bīr* History

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## Introduction

Reading some of the literature produced on Nepal by academics since 1990, one gets the impression that the country is going through the pangs of birth.<sup>1</sup> In fact an article by the Nepali sociologist Saubhagya Shah is entitled "Throes of a Fledgling Nation" (1993). The idea that Nepal is a "fledgling nation" in the 1990s comes as a shock to those sensibilities long used to years of quasi-scholastic drills celebrating the ancestry of the Nepali nation. Yet a sense of an identity crisis pervades much of this literature, suggesting that Nepal in the 1990s has become, in the words of one Nepali historian, a country where "the search is on for a single cultural identity that would make Nepal a nation-state rather than merely a state" (P. Sharma 1992:7). A fear that this search entails a "hitting at the very basis upon which Nepal was unified" two centuries ago (Raj 1993:30) and will lead to "destabilization" or "national disintegration" prompts these observers to end their analyses in a prescriptive mode.

"The State of Nepal," writes Sharma, "needs to formulate policies relating to minority languages and culture, secure them their new rights in these respects, and lay down a democratic and equitable basis for political power-sharing by ethnic minorities" (1992:9). William Fisher, an American anthropologist who has been doing research on the politics of ethnicity in Nepal, suggests that national unity in Nepal "will come from embracing diversity rather than by imposing uniformity" (1993). In the same vein Shah is of the opinion that now is the time "for innovative measures to strengthen Nepali nationalism by harking back to other

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traditions that can serve to bring all Nepalis together....The national pantheon must therefore include personalities and events, historic as well as mythical, from all communities" (1993:9).

Most of these writers agree that during the reign of the Panchayat system (1962-1990), the monarchy, Hinduism and the Nepali language were considered the triumvirate of official Nepali nationalism.<sup>2</sup> Panchayat's representation of Nepal as the only Hindu kingdom in the world collapsed the first two tenets into a powerful motif of the national culture "palatable to the dominant communities of Bahun and Chhetris, as well as to the elites among the Newars and other communities" (Shah 1993:9). Making the Nepali language its medium, this national culture was propagated through state-owned print and radio media and most forcefully, through the standardization of school-level educational textbooks since the early 1960s. The aim of this national culture was to "implant a vigorous and forceful patriotism among the youth" (Shah 1993:9). It is this national culture which is said to have misrepresented at its best and wiped out at its worst, the cultural identities of many ethnic groups.

Hence one strong prescriptive reaction on the part of those who study the politics of ethnicity and nationalism in Nepal since 1990 has been to attempt to remold the dominant national narratives so that somehow they can encompass all claims to cultural distinctiveness within Nepal while serving, like past narratives, to inculcate loyalty to the Nepali state. While I do not set aside the seriousness with which these proposals are put forward, I feel that surely the first, and perhaps the most important task that historians of Nepal can perform is not to rush to create new national narratives for the nineties, but to examine how the old national narratives were constructed and disseminated to make plausible a heroic account of the Nepali nation. It is from this position that I note that despite language and spatial politics having been two of the platforms from which scholars have analyzed the politics of nationalism and ethnicity in Nepal (e.g., Bandhu 1989, Gaige 1975, Sonntag 1995), they have thus far paid no attention to the construction of the foundational historical narratives of the Nepali nation itself as part of the politics of culture in Nepal.

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2 On the political history of Nepal during the Panchayat era see Joshi and Rose (1966), Baral (1977), and Shaha (1992). See Sangraula (2047 v.s.) for commentary on the political culture that became hegemonic under the Panchayat system.

The above characterization of Panchayati nationalism consisting of the three themes mentioned earlier leaves out one other important theme—that of Nepali national history written in a very particular template—from the corpus of Panchayat-sponsored Nepali nationalism. Hence, leaving out Hinduism and monarchy from the discussion detailed in this paper, I argue that the Nepali *bhāṣā* (language) and a particular rendition of the history of an independent Nepali nation constitute two central elements of the foundational narratives of the Nepali national identity. The ground work for the making of these national historical narratives that would become central to the Panchayat era state-produced Nepali nationalism in Nepal was laid during the first half of this century in British India by a small group of variously expatriated Nepalis. This group of Nepalis included both temporary migrants of an aspiring middle-class and India-born children of permanent migrants from different cultural and class backgrounds. While Rana rulers of Nepal and their intellectual bards did not build a historical genealogy for the Nepali nation, in a different political context, the Nepali proto middle-class actors in British India did exactly that via the self-conscious fostering of the Nepali language and the writing of a *bīr* (brave) history of the Nepali nation (Onta 1996b). Their work is the subject of this essay.

In the first two decades of this century a discourse of self-improvement designed broadly around the two themes of general education and the progress of the "*Gorkhā* language" was generated from Banaras by a small group of Nepalis. Its force was found to be compelling in Darjeeling and by early 1920s it had become an important site for the production of "the rhetoric of improvement" (Joshi 1995). Since the mid-1920s this rhetoric was applied toward familiarising the putative *Gorkhā jāti* (community/nation) to its own history, both literary and political. Darjeeling-based Nepali language activists made a more decisive effort to rename their *bhāṣā* as Nepali (cf. Burghart 1984) and they rediscovered Bhanubhakta as a potent *jāti* icon for this purpose. In the 1930s and the 1940s, these *jāti* advocates rendered Nepali history in the *bīr* mode by constructing and disseminating the pantheon of brave warriors from the 'unification era' (1740s to 1816)—from Prithvi narayan Shah to Balbhadra—as independent Nepal's national history. Thus these Nepalis first identified the Nepali *bhāṣā* as an essential element of a unifying historical narrative for their own self-identity as a community. Later they rendered Nepal's non-colonized past in a *bīr* mode as another essential element of that narrative. Hence, for this group of Nepalis, the Nepali language and a *bīr* history of the Nepali nation formed a set around which

projects of inculcating self-consciousness and promoting self-improvement of the Nepali *jāti* could be organized (cf. Hutt 1988:22-151, K. Pradhan 1984:73-81). These cultural discourses, developed in places like Banaras and Darjeeling by a small group of people as part of variously localized projects of *jāti* self-improvement, later became available to larger groups of Nepali nationalists situated in multiple locales in Nepal and India and were adopted by the post-Rana and Panchayati states in Nepal for their own purposes.<sup>3</sup>

Two points need to be mentioned here. First, this study is largely based on published works in the Nepali language. These include memoirs, auto/biographies, essays in various collections, journals, magazines, and textbooks. For historians who are used to doing their research based on state or other publicly archived collections, my more than usual reliance on published sources might seem odd but it is necessary to remember two things to understand why I have done so. First, the process of the cultural production of Nepali language and national history that I describe here took place largely via published media. Secondly, unpublished sources that might have been relevant to my study have not been properly archived in Nepal or India. As far as the relevant newspapers and magazines published in India in the early part of this century are concerned, none have been microfilmed to my knowledge and were thus not available to me. Some of the materials first published in these newspapers by the persons discussed below have been later included in their collected works and I have used them extensively. Many of the scholars who write about the politics of cultural identity within Nepal, often in English or other European languages, continue to neglect published sources available in Nepali or other languages of Nepal. I hope this article will function as a partial index to a small part of the relevant published corpus in the Nepali language and exemplify the benefits that might accrue if scholars of Nepal were to become more familiar with these sources.

Secondly, in this essay I have concentrated in the writings of only a few people who contributed in a key manner to the making of the above-mentioned two central elements of the dominant national historical

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3 The scenes in Dehra Dun and Calcutta are also important to the overall discussion of the projects of *jāti* improvement of Nepalis in India. *Gorkhā Saṁsara*, a weekly paper published by the Gorkha League in Dehra Dun from 1926 was an important forum through which various social activists elaborated their ideas and agendas (G. Bhattarai 2045 v.s., S. Sharma Bhattarai 2045 v.s.). For Calcutta see Namdung (1992:34-44, 223-241).

narrative of Nepal. I have selected a few samples from their available writings to support my argument and hence make no attempt to characterize the entirety of their contributions to the cultural processes described herein. For the latter project to be possible, researchers would need far better access to the relevant historical materials than was the case for me. To delimit the scope of this paper, I have also paid no attention to other voices, in Banaras, Darjeeling and elsewhere, that might have been critical of the projects of the people discussed here. Therefore this essay must be read not as a comprehensive account of the work of Nepali *jāti* activists in British India but more as a pointedly partial introduction to their life and oeuvre, and the making of the national historical narrative that is dominant in Nepal today.

### **Improving the *Gorkhā Jāti* through Language Worship**

Parasmani Pradhan (1898-1986), the doyen among Darjeeling-based Nepali language activists for much of this century, has recounted that in 1915, as a 17-year old ninth grade-student in a government run high school in Darjeeling, he was the secretary of a small organization in the school called *Hindi Sāhitya Samāj* (Hindi Literature Society) which also ran a small library (2028 v.s.:19-20). When he proposed that the library also hold some books in the *Gorkhā bhāṣā* for Nepali students, the executive committee rejected his proposal. Parasmani resigned abruptly from that organization, began another one called *Gorkhā Sāhitya Samāj* and collected appropriate books and magazines for it.<sup>4</sup> Looking back, Parasmani would identify this small decision on his part as one of the early efforts in the Darjeeling area to give a separate identity to what is today called the Nepali language.<sup>5</sup>

Around the same time Parasmani—Kalimpong-born son of a Newar migrant father from Nepal—realized that the school curriculum allowed students to take their exams in Hindi and some other languages but Nepali

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4 In referring to Parasmani Pradhan by just his first name, I am following the convention prevalent in Nepali literary circles. This usage is especially true for those authors whose last names are shared by many others. But there are exceptions to this rule and I shall follow them as well whenever appropriate. *Khaskurā*, *Pahāḍiyā*, *Parbatiyā*, *Gorkhāli*, and *Gorkhā bhāṣā* have been some of the names used to designate what is today called the Nepali language (K. Pradhan 1982:3-50).

5 The literary scene that developed in the Darjeeling area in the early decades of this century included participants in Kurseong, Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Unless otherwise stated, I will use Darjeeling to refer to all three locations in general. For a study that just focuses on Kalimpong, see Dayaratna Sa. Bhi. (1983).

as a language had not been approved for the same purpose in the schools. When the vice chancellor of Calcutta University came on an observation tour of his high school, Parasmani presented him a petition signed by himself and a few other students requesting that the University recognize the Nepali language in the same way as it did Hindi, Bangla, Urdu and Tibetan. Upon hearing this, a Bengali man, a lawyer and a former student in the same high school who accompanied the vice chancellor remarked that the Nepali language was the language spoken by coolies and *kawaḍis* (those who make a living by scavenging miscellaneous stuff) in Darjeeling and had not yet attained the status of a language appropriate for such recognition (P. Pradhan 1969b:109-110).

Since the mid-nineteenth century, tea gardens had been opened as commercial ventures in the district of Darjeeling.<sup>6</sup> A large percentage of garden coolies were recent migrants from Nepal, especially east Nepal. Census returns from early decades of this century indicate large numbers of Rais, Magars, Gurungs, Tamangs, Limbus, Newars and Chetris to be present in the district.<sup>7</sup> Nepali was not the first language for many migrants but it became so for many of those born in the Darjeeling area in the second half of the nineteenth century. Spoken by speakers from various Tibeto-Burman language backgrounds, the Nepali language in Darjeeling in the early part of the century was somewhat distinct from the more sanskritized version written and spoken by educated *Nepalis* in Kathmandu or Banaras. It is likely that the Bengali man might not have been aware of all this, but he certainly was partaking in the association of the *Gorkhā* language with the laboring class of coolies when he hurled his insult on the petition presented by Parasmani and his friends.

While this remark prevented the petition from receiving any immediate attention from the vice chancellor, the insult felt by Parasmani and his friends prompted them to engage vigorously on behalf of the Nepali language. They used the pages of the weekly produced from Banaras,

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6 Relying on two different sources, Subba (1992:45) reports that there were 39 gardens in 1866, 56 in 1870, 113 in 1874, 153 in 1881 and 177 in 1891.

7 See K. Pradhan (1982:34) for a break-down of census returns for Darjeeling district between 1872 and 1951 by ethnic groups. Figures for 1901 show 33,133 Rais, 24,465 Tamangs, 14,305 Limbus, 11,912 Magars, 11, 597 Chetris, 9, 826 Kamis, 8,378 Gurungs, 6,470 Bhramans, 5,770 Newars, 4,643 Damais, 4,428 Sunuwars, etc. in a total district population of 249,117. In 1891, out of the total district population reported as 223,314 some 88,000 reported their place of birth as Nepal. Pradhan estimates that around 1870, tea garden coolies and their families constituted 70 percent of the total Nepali population in Darjeeling. In 1941, this percentage is said to be around 45.

*Gorkhālī*, to fight their cause and requested that the headmaster of the Durbar High School in Kathmandu, Sarada Prasad Mukherji, contact Calcutta University on their behalf.<sup>8</sup> As a result of these efforts, on 24 July 1918, the Calcutta gazette announced that the Nepali language had been approved for study and examination purposes in matric (10th grade), Intermediate and Bachelors in Art (P. Pradhan 2028 v.s.:18). Parasmani himself had passed the matric exams in Hindi by then but other students could now study and take those three in the name of "*Nepali, Pahāḍiyā* or *Khaskurā*." Once the Nepali language was recognized by Calcutta University, textbooks were necessary as teaching material in the classrooms. An appropriate version of its grammar had to be written and literature had to be created for the students. In a write-up in the September 1918 issue of *Candrikā*, a magazine he had started in January of that year, Parasmani welcomed the University's decision but cautioned his readers and fellow language activists that unless the necessary textbooks could be prepared, the community itself would have to experience a great shame (1978:7).<sup>9</sup>

*Candrikā* was a monthly magazine put out from Kurseong. This magazine tried to emulate the sophistication of the Nepali language embodied in its predecessors, in particular, *Gorkhālī*, a weekly launched in September 1915 from Banaras. This weekly was not the first effort at Nepali publishing from Banaras, a city where for some time substantial numbers of Nepalis had been present as students, retirees, or self-exiled scholars of religious and other subjects. In 1902, a monthly with the title *Upanyāstarāṅgini* had been launched but it lasted only two issues. Four years later, *Sundarī*, a monthly, was put out by Rasik Samaj, an organization mainly run by students, but it too died early into its second year of publication. In 1908, Rammani Acharya Dixit (under the pseudonym of Matriprasad Sharma Adhikary) published another monthly, *Mādhavi* which lasted for close to two years. In his very first editorial,

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8 Durbar High School was the only English-model high school in Nepal at that time. It had been opened in the mid-1850s by the Ranas for their own children. Since the mid-1870s, children of those who worked for the Ranas were also allowed to attend this school. Well into the 20th century, some of the teachers in the school were from India, particularly Bengal.

9 Details on Parasmani's efforts regarding the preparation of teaching materials can be found in P. Pradhan (1969a:1-7, 2028 v.s.:94-156) Also see various essays in P. Pradhan (1969b) which consists of some of Parasmani's most important essays dealing with the Nepali language and literature and related pedagogical aspects. Pradhan and Lamu (1984) consists of a useful set of articles on Parasmani's life and work.

Rammani wrote, "There are no good grammars or dictionaries in our Nepali language, nor have any especially useful books been published" (Devkota 1967:46). In September 1914 a monthly magazine, *Candra*, edited by a certain Madhav Prasad was published advocating the cause of the Nepali language. In its very first issue, the editorial stated, "Even though it has lakhs of speakers, the Nepali language lags behind all others. The reason for the progress made by the British, French, Germans, and others who live in other countries is their national language." Four issues later when its circulation had not picked up, the editor complained that it was clear that "our countrymen do not possess a love for knowledge" (Devkota 1967:46-47). A total of twelve issues were published before the magazine was shut down. All these journals, especially *Sundarī*, *Mādhavi* and *Candra*, advocated in one form or another, the need for language development as being key to the total upliftment of the *Gorkhā/Nepali jāti*. Even though each of them was short-lived, they contributed to the dispersion of that idea amidst the small Nepali reading public.<sup>10</sup>

*Gorkhālī*, edited in name by Suryabikram Gyawali (1898-1985) with much of the work being done by his mentor Deviprasad Sapkota, was the first Nepali weekly to be published from Banaras.<sup>11</sup> In its very first issue of 1915, it published an editorial which read in part:

It is most regrettable to note that while people of all *jātis* are engaged in the development of their languages, our *Gorkhā* brothers have allowed their language to lag behind all others. Our language is just as capable of enhancing knowledge and learning as any other. Calcutta University considers our language to be weak and does not recognize it in its curricula. Without knowing or hearing the truth of the art of knowledge, development of a language can not happen. Hence as a service to our *Gorkhālī* brothers, we have started a press called the Himalaya Press in Kashi, the sacred center of learning, and have started a weekly paper named *Gorkhālī*.<sup>12</sup>

10 On *Sundarī* see Dixit (2036 v.s.[2017 v.s.]:29-37). On *Candra* see S. Sharma Bhattarai (2044 v.s.:218-233). For lengthy discussions of Nepali language periodicals in India, see Sundas (1976), H. Chetri (1993) and D. Sharma (2052 v.s.).

11 Dharanidhar Koirala (2033 v.s.:32) identifies Sapkota as the editor of *Gorkhālī*, not in name but in terms of real work. He says that students studying in the colleges of Banaras assisted in its production. Gyawali has claimed that Dharanidhar has done injustice to his role as editor of *Gorkhālī*, (J. Chhetri 1993:14). Tanasharma (2027 v.s.a:91) identifies Gyawali as the publisher and editor.

12 Quoted in Devkota (1967:47-48). Cf. translation in Hutt (1988:144-45).



Supported by language activist-students such as Dharanidhar Koirala (1893-1980), *Gorkhālī* was able to emphasize the standardization and development of the language, both eliminating some Hindi influences from it and improving its style. In addition to poems and literary articles, the weekly carried writings advocating social reform and the spread of education in the *Gorkhā jāti* (Tanasharma 2027 v.s.a:91). In one of his contributions, Dharanidhar called the advocates of the Nepali language to visit village after village, home after home, to spread the language and wake all *Gorkhā* brothers up with messages about the need for general education and learning (Koirala 2033 v.s.:32).<sup>13</sup>

Parasmani was familiar with the Banaras-based Nepali language and literary activities and had subscribed to *Candra* soon after its publication in September 1914. Around the same time, he was starting his own projects, reading whatever was available in the Nepali language and writing both poetry and prose in it even as he took Hindi in school (P. Pradhan 1974c:preface). His first publication in a Banaras journal was an essay called "Adhyavasāya" which was published in the ninth issue of *Candra* in May 1915. Translated that title means "Perseverance" and in the essay, extracting quotes from the likes of Napoleon and poet Longfellow, Sanskrit normative literature and the story of penance of Prince Dhruva from Hindu mythology, Parasmani argued that "There is nothing in this world that can not be achieved with perseverance" (1974a[1915]:105).<sup>14</sup> He concluded by stating

Just as we can not climb a mountain in one leap, we can not do great work without diligence. If we do not waver from our purpose and are diligent, God will look after us. It is hoped that our *Gorkhā* brothers will keep these various examples in their mind and will not backdown from any challenge but instead always move forward with energy (1974a[1915]:107).

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13 *Gaū gaū ra gharghar ghumighumi sabale mātribhāṣā karāū*  
*Vidyā Vidyā ra sikṣā bhani bhani aba lau dājubhāi jagāū.*

This stanza was later included in his poem "Natra Barbād Bhayo" (D. Koirala 2020 v.s. [1920] :35).

14 The Napoleon quote is "There was nothing like impossibility, it was the word to be found only in the dictionary of fools." The following extract from Longfellow is apparently from his poem called "The Ladder of Saint Augustine":

The heights by great men reached and kept,  
Were not attained by sudden flight;  
But they, while their companies slept,  
Were toiling up-wards in the night.

In the following issue of the same magazine, Parasmani published an essay called, "Vidyā" (Knowledge). In it, he argued that it is through knowledge that human beings are able to accomplish any task, big or small. Amidst extracts from quotes from works in English and Sanskrit, Parasmani reminded the readers that in a bygone era, there was no other place which matched Hindusthan in the terrain of learning but due to lack of proper diligence on the part of Hindusthanis, people of other countries had recorded more progress than in Hindusthan in more recent times (1974b[1915]:108-11). He concluded by saying,

In our incarnation as human beings we can not do anything without acquiring knowledge. It is hoped that our *Gorkhā* brothers will keep in mind the above lines and always engage in the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge (1974b[1915]:112).

In these two essays Parasmani demonstrated that his world was an already calibrated set of countries which had recorded differential progress. Although Hindusthan, the country of his residence, had lagged behind many others, Parasmani showed great belief in the notion of self-improvement through knowledge and perseverance. While both essays end by reminding his *Gorkhā jāti* brothers of the importance of learning and hard work, they do not highlight the *jati*-specific agenda for the *Gorkhās* on which he dwelled at great length in his later writings.

Immediately after *Candra* stopped being published, *Gorkhālī* was launched from Banaras as a weekly in September 1915. Parasmani published several poems, essays and letters on miscellaneous topics in this weekly paper. In 1916, his translation of a Bengali novel by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, was published as a serial in it (P. Pradhan 2028 v.s.:3-9). But it is his essay, entitled "*Gorkhā Bhāṣā Pracār*" (The Spread of *Gorkhā Bhāṣā*), published in January 1917 that is of most interest to us here (P. Pradhan 1969c[1917]:91-97).<sup>15</sup> In it he charted the terrain of the language-related activities being done in different locales by quoting from his personal communication with some of the leading personalities in the field located in different parts of India and Nepal and surveyed the different debates which characterized their work. Parasmani noted that after realizing that their language was in a comparatively poor state of existence (*hinaavasthā*), *Gorkhālīs* were saying that they needed to

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<sup>15</sup> Extracts from and comments on this essay can also be found in P. Pradhan (2028 v.s.:21-29).

develop their language and were publishing new works in an effort to enhance its literature. Since it is not possible to develop any language without a grammar, said Parasmani, three or four books of grammar had also been published. This was not counting the three published by Darjeeling-area missionaries Kilgour, Turnbull and Ayton which Parasmani concluded were "useless" since they were written by those who had not understood the language well. Among the useful ones, Parasmani identified the one written by Kathmandu-based Guru Hemraj Pandit to be the best.

In terms of publication he noted the fact that the *Gorkhā Grantha Pracāarak Maṇḍalī* initiated by Harihar Acharya Dixit in Bombay had published some good original books and translated volumes for some years but since it had not been able to sell adequate numbers of them, further publication had been halted. Parasmani quoted Acharya Dixit as saying "In our community, there is no desire for any learning. Curse to us *Gorkhā prajās*" (1969c[1917]:93).<sup>16</sup> The Rana government had started the *Gorkhā Bhāṣā Prakāśini Samiti* in Nepal but Parasmani laments that such a big office had printed so few books.<sup>17</sup> But he also noted that more than books themselves, newspapers and magazines were more potent media for the spread of the language since they reached a comparatively larger reading audience. Noting that magazines like *Sundarī*, *Mādhavi*, and *Candra* had passed away after showing their beauty for a brief time, he lamented that members of the *Gorkhā jāti* had not shown any interest in the newspapers and magazines in their own language as well.

Parasmani also wrote about spelling and style of language in print. His critique on this subject was directed mainly against *Gorkhe Khabar Kāgat*, a monthly that had been published by Darjeeling-based missionaries since about 1901. Edited by Ganga P. Pradhan, a Nepali who had converted to Christianity, the paper drew the latter's ire both for its language and its avowedly Christian and anti-Hindu stance.<sup>18</sup> Parasmani took *Kāgat* to task for variously spelling the same word, for

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<sup>16</sup> I would translate *prajās* as *jāti* in the way it has been used here. Literally it refers to the subject population of a ruler.

<sup>17</sup> Rammani A. D. (1883-1972) requested the Rana premier Chandra Shumsher for permission to open an office that would promote, publish and distribute books written in the Nepali language. Such permission was granted near the end of 1912 and the Samiti's office came into existence in February 1914. Rammani A. D. was its chairman until Chandra's death in 1929 (Acharya Dixit 2029 v.s.:58-83). For a literary biography of Rammani A. D., see Nepal (2050 v.s.).

<sup>18</sup> Ganga P. Pradhan was the father-in-law of H. Pradhan, Parasmani's maternal uncle (P. Pradhan 1972:8). On Ganga P. Pradhan, see Kumar Pradhan (1982), especially ch. 2.

disrespecting all rules of grammar, and for printing materials in Hindi and English as well as Nepali. He accused the paper of having influenced the *Gorkhā* language spoken in Darjeeling in a negative way and said that it would be better to subscribe to papers from Banaras and read them more carefully if one was interested in improving one's language. He was equally hard on the *Kāgat's* Christian agenda and asserted that "Hindu dharma was the fountain of all religions." He asked the editor what religion his ancestors had followed and reminded him of the tomes that had been written "proving" that Christian faith was full of imperfections.

Hence by 1917 Parasmani had identified the terrain, so to speak, upon which and against which his own and his cohort's work on behalf of the *Gorkhā* language would be done in the years ahead. The basic realization was one of *jāti* inferiority in terms of learning and the level of development of the *Gorkhā* language and literature. The lack of standardization and grammar, of adequate books and journals, and of readers who would support extant publications were the constituting elements of the consciousness that identified *Gorkhā* language as one that "lagged behind all others." The road toward improvement was to be formed through hard work that would begin to eliminate these deficiencies. New publications would be necessary, continued pursuit of learning and knowledge would have to happen, more work on the *Gorkhā* language would have to be done, *jāti* glory had to be established in and of itself but also against the onslaught of Christian missionary activity. The next sections describe some of the ways in which these challenges were met.

### ***Candrikā* and the Re-Discovery of Bhanubhakta**

While his tenth grade examinations in Darjeeling were stalled twice because of the leakage of the exam questions during late spring and early summer of 1917, Parasmani went to Kurseong as he usually did when school was in vacation. Although his house was in Kalimpong, he had also found Kurseong to be more invigorating for the kind of work and thinking he was already beginning to do by then. A group of like-minded people had opened a small library there where Parasmani and his friends used to meet to discuss miscellaneous topics. They used to talk about progress, read Nepali books and old issues of *Gorkhālī*, *Candra*, *Sundarī*, and *Mādhavi* and the Hindi monthly, *Saraswati*. In one volume of his memoirs, Parasmani recounts that after reading Hindi newspapers and magazines, he and his friends would feel that the quality of the Nepali language newspapers and magazines lagged behind greatly. "We would feel suffocated," Pradhan adds, "but we were also helpless. We did not

have the necessary resources, we had very little knowledge and skills and the public was behind—far behind" (2028 v.s.:31-32). While waiting for his exams to be rescheduled, Parasmani became an apprentice in a newly established press in Kurseong, a learning experience that would be central to his next big project, the publication of the monthly, *Candrikā* whose first issue came out in January 1918.<sup>19</sup>

In a leading article in the very first issue, Parasmani stated that although 52 lakhs members of the *Gorkhā jāti* spoke the *Gorkhā* language, it was in a decrepit and worrisome state. Restating his belief that newspapers and magazines are very influential in the life of any language, he lamented that even when others describe the *Gorkhā* language as "jungly" (barbarian), the *Gorkhālīs* do not say anything in return. The objective of *Candrikā* was to serve the country, *jāti*, language and literature, stated Parasmani who also hoped that the magazine would contribute toward the standardization of the language and bring all Nepalis, in his words, to the temple of the Devi of Unity where they would see different incarnations of progress (P. Pradhan 1974c:49, Tanasharma 2027 v.s.a:92). Seventeen separate issues of *Candrikā* were published well into 1919 before its publication was stopped. Apart from a few reprints of materials previously published in other journals or magazines and translations of additional materials from other languages (in particular Bengali), many original poems and articles focussing on a variety of subjects were published. Writing contributions came from writers and poets based mainly in Banaras, Shillong, Bombay, Jalpaiguri, and Calcutta among places in India. Contributions from Nepal came from Kathmandu and a few towns in the Tarai such as Birgunj and Siraha. Contributions from the Darjeeling area were also printed but clearly submissions from Kathmandu and Banaras were more important because of the prestige value arising from the publication of writings of these relatively more well-known contributors and Parasmani's own objective to maintain the standard of the language employed in his paper at the level of these more illustrious writers. Given the nature of Rana surveillance over Nepali language publications in India, many who chose to write about issues for which they might have gotten into trouble with Rana officials wrote under different pseudonyms. Even then Parasmani reports that spies working for the Ranas visited his press occasionally (2028 v.s.:44-47).

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19 For one example of how these Nepali-language publications from India might have influenced the political education of some readers in Kathmandu, see Sharma Subedi (2045 v.s.). Cf. Uprety (1992).

Parasmani has published the table of contents of all seventeen issues of his magazine in one of his memoirs and discussed the materials at some length in a second volume (1978:10-17, 2028 v.s.:31-69). A closer look at the contents must wait for an occasion in the future but even a cursory look at the table of contents suggests that the published materials in *Candrikā* emphasized the need for knowledge and education in general, exhorted its readers to engage in all forms of *jāti* improvement, discussed aspects of *Gorkhā* language and activities for its promotion and provoked thoughts against the nature of Rana polity in Nepal (cf. G Bhattarai 2044 v.s.). Poet Dharanidhar Koirala, a brahman from Dumjha in the eastern hilly district of Sindhuli of Nepal who had studied both Sanskrit and English and was then a college student in Banaras, was a regular contributor. Having seen the efforts of his Indian friends in Banaras in the promotion of their own respective languages, Dharanidhar had been inspired to think about Nepal and the Nepali language. The atmosphere in India then was such, he recalled in his autobiography, that no one could but not be inspired to think about progress based on one's own mother-tongue (D. Koirala 2033 v.s.:26). In the third issue of *Candrikā*, Dharanidhar published three poems, two of which are of significance to our discussion here (P. Pradhan 1978:11). In "*Udbodhan*" he called his countrymen to wake up from their deep slumber. A revised version was published later in the year in the tenth issue. In the revised version, this poem read in part:

*Jāga jāga aba jāgana jāga*  
*Lāga unnati viṣe aba lāga*  
*Ghora nīm̄da abata parityāga*  
*Bho bhayo ati sutyau aba jāga*  
*Deśabandhuharu ho, uṭha jāga*  
*Lāga unnati viṣe aba lāga....*  
*Hera lau aruharo saba jāge*  
*Desa unnati viṣe saba lage.*  
*Hāmīharu pani lau aba jagauṁ*  
*Deśa unnati viṣe saba lagaum̄.*

Wake up, wake up, now you wake up,  
Apply yourself now to the task of progress.  
Forsake the deep slumber  
You slept for long, now wake up.  
Oh my countrymen, wake up  
Apply yourself now to the task of progress....

Look around others have awoken  
Applying themselves to the progress of their countries.  
Let us also wake up  
Applying ourselves to the progress of our country.  
(D. Koirala 2020 v.s.[1920]:29-30).

In the second poem, a short one entitled "*Lahai*", Dharanidhar suggested that readers not abandon the poetry of Bhanubhakta [Acharya], a brahman from the central hills of Nepal who lived from 1814-68 and rendered one version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in non-Sanskritized easy flowing Nepali verses.<sup>20</sup> In the twelfth issue of *Candrikā*, he published a poem entitled "*Kavī Bhānubhakta Prati*" (For Poet Bhanubhakta) where, disillusioned with some other relatively non-serious literary productions of his time, he entreated the late Bhanubhakta to enter the body of someone else and show the road to the entire *jāti* which he claimed was on the verge of extinction (D. Koirala 2020 v.s.[1920]:8-9). While there had been at least one other reference to Bhanubhakta in the first two decades of this century, Dharanidhar's invocation of Bhanubhakta's name in the pages of *Candrikā* in 1918 marks the vigorous re-discovery and redeployment of this writer of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Nepali by the language and *jāti* activists of the Banaras-Darjeeling region.<sup>21</sup> In 1920, *Naivedhya*, a collection of Dharanidhar's poems including those that had been published in *Candrikā* was brought out by the author. His "*Kavī Bhānubhakta Prati*" was reprinted therein. *Naivedhya* was well received and five revised editions were published in India between 1925 and 1952. Although no written document has been located as a proof, it is believed that the Ranas did not let this book enter Nepal fearing that its critical and evocative poetry would cause protests against their rule.<sup>22</sup>

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20 This poem was not included in D. Koirala (2020 v.s.[1920]). For its text, see P. Pradhan (2028 v.s.:40).

21 Dixit (2036 v.s.[2017 v.s.]:48) mentions that when Harihar Acharya Dixit reprinted Bhanubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa* in Bombay around 1910, he prefaced it by saying that Bhanubhakta, who wrote verses in Nepali as a service to his fellow country-people at a time when it was prestigious to write in Sanskrit, showed lots of *bhakti* towards his country. I have not had an opportunity to see this preface.

22 *Naivedhya* was critically reviewed by Suryabikram Gyawali in 1922 in a Banaras monthly called *Janmabhumi* (Motherland) which he had started editing that year (2052 v.s.[1922]). Darjeeling-based Nepali Sahitya Sammelan (about which more will be said later) published revised editions of *Naivedhya* in 1925, 1937, 1942, 1948, 1952, 1974, 1975, 1977 and 1979 (J. Chetri 1993:19). A separate edition was published in Nepal by Jagadamba Prakashan in 2020 v.s..

Dharanidhar arrived in the Darjeeling area some time in late 1918 and found his first job in the press in Kurseong replacing Parasmani who went to teach Nepali in Kalimpong. On 1 January 1919 Dharanidhar was invited to speak at the inaugural ceremony of the "Gorkhā Library" in Kurseong. He used the occasion to give a long speech on the cultural and economic disenfranchisement of the *Gorkhā* society, pled for more effort toward overall self-improvement and read his poems, "*Udbodhan*" and "*Natra Barbād Bhayo*." According to Parasmani, the people of Kurseong had never heard such a speech and efforts to keep such a learned man in the area were immediately launched.<sup>23</sup> Later that year, Dharanidhar found a job teaching Nepali at the Darjeeling High School to which he was affiliated until 1949 (P. Pradhan 2028 v.s.:53).<sup>24</sup>

Suryabikram Gyawali arrived in the Darjeeling area in 1923 and he too found a job as a teacher of Nepali in a high school in Darjeeling. Gyawali, Dharanidhar, Parasmani and others formed the *Nepali Sāhitya Sammelan* in Darjeeling in 1924. In the meeting that was called with the intention of establishing this *Sammelan*, Hari Prasad Pradhan, a lawyer who chaired the occasion and who, in the late 1950s would become the chief justice of Nepal stated:

We have thought that the name of this *sammelan* should be '*Nepali Sāhitya Sammelan*' because the word 'Nepali' has a broad meaning. This word designates all the *jatis* of Nepal such as Magar, Gurung, Kirati, Newar, Limbu etc. and also states that these *jātis* and others are part of a single great Nepali nation.

Some people might suspect that this organization is trying to uplift the language spoken by the *Gorkhālīs* but it is not necessary to think that way because Nepali has become the lingua franca of the hills. People who live here might speak different languages but there is no one who does not understand Nepali....Also it does not suit for any *jāti* to claim that this language is only their language (quoted in K. Pradhan 1982:37-38).

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23 This speech was later republished by Parasmani as part of his biographical essay on Dharanidhar (1969d:65-96). It is also included in an anthology of Dharanidhar's works edited by J. Sharma Tripathi (2049 v.s.:157-167).

24 For more on the life and work of Dharanidhar Koirala, see his autobiography (2033 v.s.), G. Bhattarai (2039 v.s.a:111-119), J. Sharma Tripathi (2049 v.s.) and M. Koirala (2049 v.s.).



Parasmani emphasized the same point and added that the development of the Nepali language does not mean that the other languages are to be neglected. Gyawali said that the claim for the distinctiveness of the Nepali *jāti* was legitimate, and added "No matter whether we are Nepalis in Nepal or Nepalis in India, we call ourselves to be a free and independent *jāti*. Indeed we are an independent *jāti*. But one main evidence of independence is one's separate language and literature" (quoted in K. Pradhan 1982:38). If the independent Nepali *jāti* was to record self-improvement, this logic suggested, it needed to construct its own independent literature, which would be the main objective of the *Sammelan*.

Following the recognition of the Nepali language by Calcutta University in 1918 one could study the language in the matric, I.A., and B.A. level in the name of "*Nepali Pahādiyā or Khaskurā*." The *Sammelan* convinced the government of Bengal to issue a notice on 30 July 1926 saying that in its usage the name "*Nepali Pahādiyā or Khaskurā*" would be replaced with just "Nepali." In May 1932 Calcutta University changed the name of "Nepali (*parbatīyā*)" to "Nepali" (K. Pradhan 1982:37). Among other things, the *Sammelan* published several books including reprint editions of Dharanidhar's *Naivedhya* and Motiram Bhatta's 1891 biography of Bhanubhakta in 1927 and 1938. *Sammelan's* reprints of this biography and a 1932 reprint of Bhanubhakta's *Rāmāyana* published from Calcutta were edited by Gyawali (1932). The Gyawali-edited *Rāmāyana* was later reprinted by the *Sammelan* (Gyawali 1954). It also published, between 1933 and 1949, a number of biographies of *bīr* Nepali heroes written by Gyawali and an annual magazine entitled *Nepali Sāhitya Sammelan Patrikā* between 1931 and 1937.<sup>25</sup>

Who is Bhanubhakta? Why did Dharanidhar and Gyawali and the *Nepali Sāhitya Sammelan* choose to highlight and republish the life and work of Bhanubhakta as part of their projects devoted to the assertion of the independent identity of the Nepali *jāti* and its self-improvement? What role did this group of people play in the fostering of a collective hagiographic celebration of Bhanubhakta as the national icon of the *Gorkhā*/Nepali language and *jāti*? How is Bhanubhakta related to the set of *bīr* biographies written by Gyawali and published by the *Sammelan*

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25 For more on the contributions of Gyawali, Dharanidhar and Parasmani toward the growth of the *Sammelan*, see J. Chetri (1993). For more on the *Patrikā*, see J. Chhetri (2051 v.s.).

between 1933 and 1949? The following sections seek answers to these questions.

### **Making Bhanubhakta a National *Bīr***

In the last section I discussed briefly how Bhanubhakta's name was revived as a *jāti* icon in the pages of *Candrikā*. This revival of Bhanubhakta and the subsequent dissemination of his name and work by Darjeeling-based Nepali language activists and the *Nepali Sāhitya Sammelan* was the first step toward making Bhanubhakta a national icon of the Nepali nation. In this rediscovery, the role played by Suryabikram Gyawali is very important and I shall have more to say about his efforts shortly. The use of the word "rediscovery" is intentional and suggests that Bhanubhakta had already been "discovered" at least once before. As the school textbooks in Nepal during the Panchayat era informed the students, this was in fact the case and Motiram Bhatta is said to have done exactly that in the 1880s. Hence I will discuss these two discoveries and argue that contra the claims made in nationalist history, Motiram did not discover in Bhanubhakta an icon of national history. Instead, what he found in Bhanubhakta's writings was flowing poetry written in an easy to understand (i.e. non-Sanskritized) Nepali. For this Motiram praised Bhanubhakta a lot. But it was the later rediscovery of Bhanubhakta in Banaras and Darjeeling that converted him into a *jāti bīr puruṣ* (brave man), a legacy which the post-1950 Nepali state found easy to borrow and disseminate as part of its reification of the national *bīr* pantheon.

Nepali students who grew up reading Panchayat era textbooks would remember that Motiram Bhatta's fame in history is as the person who published the Bhanubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa* in the late 19th century. Motiram's other contributions to Nepali literature are usually subsumed under his identity as the person who introduced Bhanubhakta to the Nepali reading public (e.g., G. Bhattarai 2039 v.s.b). Never in these textbooks is the story of what I have here called the "rediscovery" of Bhanubhakta in the second and following decades of the 20th century told along with the story of Motiram's discovery of Bhanubhakta. In fact, these stories suggest that once Motiram published Bhanubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa* in 1888, its popularity grew organically amongst the Nepali populace (G. Bhattarai 2039 v.s.b:18).<sup>26</sup> Writing against this version of nationalist history first

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<sup>26</sup> For examples of histories of Nepali nationalism which tie it to the organic growth of the Nepali state, see D. Adhikari 2045 v.s. and Stiller 1993.

requires investigation of the original discovery of Bhanubhakta by Motiram and then of the subsequent rediscovery.

In 1888 the *Rāmāyaṇa* written in *sātkānda* (seven episodes) between 1841 and 1853 in the Nepali language by Bhanubhakta Acharya (1814-1868) had been published in Banaras through the effort of Motiram Bhatta (1866-1896), a Kathmandu-born brahman who had spent much of his childhood and intermittent periods of his student life in Banaras. Bhanubhakta's seven-episode *Rāmāyaṇa* included the *Bālkānda* (which he wrote in 1841), *Ayodhyākānda*, *Aranyakānda*, *Kiskindhākānda*, *Sundarkānda* (these four written in 1852), *Yoddhakānda* and *Uttarkānda* (last two written in 1853).<sup>27</sup> Motiram had previously published only the *Bālkānda* in 1884. In 1891 he published a biography of Bhanubhakta, *Kavī Bhānubhaktaacarya ko jivan caritra*, an act for which he is also revered in nationalist history in Nepal. Motiram Bhatta's biographer, Pundit Nardev Sharma who was his distant relative and a member of Motiram's poetry group in Kathmandu during the 1880s and the early 1890s, writes that the families of both of Motiram's parents were educated and respectable brahmans (2037 v.s.[1995 v.s]:8-9).<sup>28</sup> When Motiram was about six years old, he went to Banaras with his mother and sister to join his father who had gone there the year before. He spent the rest of the 1870s in Banaras first attending a Sanskrit school for about four years before being enrolled by his father in a Persian school in the second half of the 1870s. Some time in 1880 or 1881 Motiram returned to Kathmandu to get married. Apart from Sanskrit and Persian which he had studied in school, Motiram was, because of his residence in Banaras for most of the previous decade, influenced by Banarasi Hindi. He did not have a good knowledge of Nepali.

Motiram's biographer Naradev Sharma claims that it was after his own wedding and while attending that of his neighbor that Motiram first became attracted to the verses of the Nepali *Rāmāyaṇa* written by Bhanubhakta. He then searched for the entire *Rāmāyaṇa* and found just the *Bālkānda*. In late 1881 or early 1882 he returned to Banaras with his mother and wife. Once in Banaras Motiram enrolled in an English school but simultaneously started participating in and organizing discussions regarding the Nepali language with other Nepali residents and students of Banaras. While he might have been aware of the efforts of Bharatendu Harischandra—considered by many to be the most influential writer of

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<sup>27</sup> This organization follows that of Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*.

<sup>28</sup> This and the following few paragraphs are based on this work.

19th century Hindi literature—and others on behalf of Hindi in the 1870s, it was only after he returned to Banaras in 1881-82 that Motiram seems to have given much thought to the subjects of language and literature as his own fields of work.<sup>29</sup> After his return to Banaras in the early 1880s, Motiram was certainly aware of Bharatendu's work. Naradev describes that despite an age difference between the two (Bharatendu was 16 years older than Motiram), Motiram and Bharatendu became very good friends because of their common love for language and literature. Naradev writes that with the sudden death of Harishchandra in 1885 at the age of 35, Motiram felt greatly bereaved and he composed verses to console himself (2037 v.s.[1995 v.s.]:22-23).

In the early 1880s Motiram devoted himself toward both finding the written corpus of Bhanubhakta and organizing group efforts in new poetry creation through the practice genre known as *samasyāpurti*. The latter can be thought of as an exercise in poetry internship whereby a meaningful verse is created around a pre-given half or full line. While for seasoned poets this exercise might be thought of as a recreational activity, for novice poets, it constituted a serious training exercise. Naradev writes that having just discovered poetry, Motiram's heart was easily influenced by Bhanubhakta's beautiful verses. As his love for poetry grew, Motiram tried to inspire the creative activity of his circle of friends by collecting their poetry as well. The general absence of publications in the Nepali language and the growth of publications in other languages in Banaras, mainly in Hindi, made Motiram feel both depressed and challenged about the status of the Nepali language.<sup>30</sup> He then contacted his friend Ramkrishna Varma who had earlier shown an interest in starting a press. Varma agreed to invest in a press called *Bhārat Jīvan* and Motiram became its manager. He arranged for the printing of the *Bālkānda* of Bhanubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa* in 1884 and Naradev reports that copies of the same sold rather

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29 Balchandra Sharma (2039 v.s.:126) says that after Motiram returned to Banaras in the early 1880s, he enrolled in the school in Chaukhamba established by Bharatendu. Gyawali (2034 v.s.:51) suspects that this was in fact the case as it was close to the quarters where most Nepalis lived in Banaras. In this essay, Gyawali pays glowing tribute to Motiram and describes the latter's research into Bhanubhakta's life—i.e. the desire to know the truth of his life and work—as a sure symptom of modern thought (2034 v.s.:57). See King (1994) for details on the Hindi movement.

30 See King (1994:37-48) for data on the volume, languages and geographical distribution of publications in North India between 1868 and 1925. Banaras (along with Allahabad and Lucknow) was a major town for all kinds of publications during this period.

briskly in Banaras.<sup>31</sup> A few years later—Naradev is vague on the date but it was in 1888—Motiram published Bhanubhakta's entire *sātkānda Rāmāyaṇa*. Motiram's efforts to introduce and publish Bhanubhakta's work eventually earned him fame as a *raṣṭriya bibhūti* (national icon) in the nationalist history of Nepal. However Naradev, Motiram's biographer, does not dwell at length on Motiram's discovery of Bhanubhakta apart from noting, as has been mentioned above, his early attraction to Bhanubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Instead Naradev focuses much more on Motiram's facilitation of the creative writing potentials of his friends (cf. V. Pradhan 2044 v.s.:82, 263-64).

What did Motiram himself find worthy in Bhanubhakta's works? Motiram recognized that the origins of the progress of the *Gorkhā* language can be traced to Bhanubhakta. He called Bhanubhakta the *ādikavi* or the original poet of the *Gorkhā* language (1964[1891]:5). This is so not because there were no poets before Bhanubhakta writing in the *Gorkhā* language said Motiram. Quite the contrary, there were many known poets but Bhanubhakta, so claimed Motiram, was the first to write in the Nepali language with an understanding of the inner secrets of poetry (1964[1891]:5). Although Motiram himself does not elaborate what he means by "the inner secrets of poetry" (*marma*), critic Krishnachandra Singh Pradhan conjectures that he was referring to the capacity to convey experience, (rhetorical) figures of speech, aesthetics, and immediacy of experience (2040 v.s.:133). Motiram also described Bhanubhakta as a spontaneous poet in whose work meaning and figures of speech were simple and clear (1964[1891]:24-5). In heaping further praise on Bhanubhakta and his corpus that included the *Rāmāyaṇa* and a few other cameo pieces, Motiram recognized how the former's work helped the progress of the *Gorkhā* language by providing a reference inventory of poetry suitable for reading and discussion by future poets (1964[1891]:22-3). A person born in a simple Brahman family, wrote Motiram, had become so popular through his poetry that in the 22 years after his death, not more than two or four percent of the population in the entire kingdom of the King of *Gorkhā* did not know who Bhanubhakta was

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31 Dixit (2036 v.s. [2017]:16-21) informs us that 2000 copies of this *Bālkānda*-only *Rāmāyaṇa* were printed. He also says that this work was dedicated to the then child-king of Nepal, Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah. Dixit argues that at a time when the Rana premier Ranaudip Singh virtually ruled Nepal, this dedication is indicative of the fact that Motiram and his cohort did not yet see themselves as attendants of the hereditary Rana prime minister.

(1964[1891]:27).<sup>32</sup> The last statement is clearly exaggerated and in fact there are good reasons to believe that in an effort to highlight the contributions of Bhanubhakta, Motiram passed off his own cameo compositions as that of Bhanubhakta and fictionalized some aspects of the latter's life as represented in the biography (Acharya 2050 v.s.[2003 v.s.]:199-203; B. Pokhrel 2021 v.s.:193-204; Tanasharma 2027 v.s.b:1-19; Mishra 2047 v.s.). However even in his exaggerated assessments of Bhanubhakta, Motiram does not make him the second unifier [the first being King Prithvinarayan Shah] of the Nepali *jāti* or the icon of *jāti* identity. He recognizes Bhanubhakta's service to the *Gorkhā* language but does not make it the fulcrum of *jāti* improvement even though he was aware, as has been said before, of the comparative "lagged-behind" nature of the *Gorkhā* language. The remaking of Bhanubhakta as a *jāti* icon within the project of creating a history of the *jāti* identity happened as he was rediscovered by Dharanidhar and especially Suryabikram Gyawali after 1918.

Suryabikram Gyawali was born in Banaras in 1898. He spent the first 25 years of his life in that city and was involved in its Nepali literary circles even as a teenager. Even though he was born in Banaras only a few years after Motiram published the biography of Bhanubhakta and the latter's *Rāmāyaṇa*, Gyawali had not heard of Bhanubhakta nor was he aware of the biography written by Motiram during his childhood. In fact, late in his life, he recalled,

When I was a child the biography of Bhanubhakta written by Motiram was not available. When I was in school, I did not know the name of Bhanubhakta. I found out about him later. When people talked about the *Rāmāyaṇa* then, they would refer to it as the *sātkānda Rāmāyaṇa*. Its name had become *sātkānda Rāmāyaṇa*. Only a few people knew that its author was Bhanubhakta (1976a:58).

Elsewhere Gyawali recalls that around 1920 one of his friends discussed Motiram's biography of Bhanubhakta with him and he looked for copies

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32 Much has been written on Motiram by Nepali literary critics and historians. K. S. Pradhan (2040 v.s.:122-143) is a useful guide for an understanding of what Motiram found worthwhile in Bhanubhakta given the state of Nepali language writings in the second half of the nineteenth century. On Motiram's adaptation of Sanskrit plays into Nepali, see Dixit (2016 v.s.). Also see R. Sharma (2039 v.s., 2050 v.s.) and D. Shrestha (2048 v.s.:35-56) for commentary on various aspects of Motiram's work and life. R. Sharma (2045 v.s.) has also edited a volume of Motiram's works.

of it in Banaras. When he could not locate a copy he realized that some 30 years after it had been published, that biography had been largely forgotten. Gyawali mentions that a few years later he found a copy or two of it (2034:59).<sup>33</sup> Hence even as he was familiar with the Nepali *Rāmāyaṇa*, Gyawali's own personal discovery of Bhanubhakta as author is a phenomenon that can most certainly be dated after the year 1918 when in the pages of *Candrikā*, as has been stated earlier, Dharanidhar mentioned the name of Bhanubhakta. These facts are of great importance for our understanding of the making of Bhanubhakta as a *jāti* icon that occurred after 1918. The absence of Bhanubhakta in Gyawali's childhood education allows us to trace the beginnings of the history of the making of Bhanubhakta as a part of the shared "memory" of one *jāti* and nation.

I have not had access to some of Gyawali's relevant writings in this context (e.g., his preface to the 1927 and 1938 reprint editions of Motiram's biography of Bhanubhakta published by the *Sammelan*). But based on what Gyawali has written in various publications, his work on Bhanubhakta and later on the life history of *bīr* Nepalis can be adequately described and assessed for the purposes of my argument. Some of these writings are from those decades themselves. Others are brief memoir-like statements that appeared after he arrived in Kathmandu around 1960.<sup>34</sup>

In the preface to the second edition of his biography of Prithvinarayan Shah (originally published by the *Sammelan* in 1935), Gyawali described himself of the time when he first arrived in Darjeeling in 1923 from Banaras in the following manner:

I arrived in Darjeeling as a 25-year old without much experience and with limited knowledge. I had a little bit of love for the mother-tongue [Nepali] and even less love for my country. Once in Darjeeling, I had the opportunity to have a grand view of the Nepali nation. I could see the many different classes that make up the Nepali

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33 The editions of Bhanubhakta's *Rāmāyaṇa* would include not only the seven-episode *Rāmāyaṇa* published by Motiram in Banaras in 1888 but also a similar volume published by Damaruballav Pokharel in 1886 also from Banaras (Dixit 2026 v.s [2014 v.s.]:1-9), and a concise edition of the same published from Bombay by Harihar Acharya Dixit in 1910. Although the Pokharel-edition came earlier than the Motiram-edition, it is largely forgotten today probably because it was not picked up for reprinting and dissemination.

34 In Nepal, Nepali Sahitya Kala Academy which is now known as Nepal Rajkiya Prajna-Pratisthan (Royal Nepal Academy) had been established in 1958. After his arrival in Nepal, Gyawali was nominated as a member of the Academy some time in 1960 (2016 v.s). He later became its chancellor in 2031 v.s. (1974-75).

*jāti* at a close distance and I learnt a lot about them. Most importantly, love and respect for and trust in the Nepali *jāti* grew in my heart. I also experienced the inherent energy inside the Nepali nation which was the united form of different classes. I also became familiar with its beauty and powerful luster (1976b:a).

After he had the opportunity to participate in the founding of the *Nepali Sāhitya Sammelan* in 1924, an organization with which he was affiliated until he went to Nepal in 1960, Gyawali writes,

The seed of love for the [Nepali] *jāti* that was in my heart began to grow. As a result, through the study of Nepali history, the writing of the life histories of nation-builders, the research into its culture and other related activities, I started to think about sharing with others the new experiences I was amassing. It is for that reason that the works of literature mentioned above appeared as historical essays (1976b:a).<sup>35</sup>

This is the clearest statement that I have found in Gyawali's writings describing both the reason for and the form of the work he did in Darjeeling. He describes his writings to be the result of his love for the Nepali *jāti* even as we would have to argue that both self-contrived and attributed definitions of this *jāti* were greatly limited and in flux when Gyawali did his writings. In fact his corpus was important in creating that *jāti*'s educated sense of itself. In Gyawali's work, the project of creating a separate Nepali language and literature that would be strong symbols of the independence of the Nepali *jāti* was constituted both by the identification and dispersion of Bhanubhakta's work as the case par excellence of service to the Nepali language and the writing of history of the Nepali *jāti* in the *bīr* mode.

Gyawali's available essays give us an adequate sense of the way in which Bhanubhakta was rediscovered as a *bīr puruṣ*—brave man—of the Nepali *jāti* and represented as such during the quarter-century or so after 1918. In this context, one of the important works is a volume edited by Gyawali and published by the *Nepali Sāhitya Sammelan* in 1940 to mark the 70th death anniversary of Bhanubhakta. It contained essay

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35 The literary works he refers to are those mentioned earlier in his preface and include the biographies of Dravya Shah (king who established the kingdom of Gorkha in the mid-16th century), Ram Shah (r. early 17th century), Prithvinarayan Shah, Balbhadra and Amarsingh which were all published by the *Sammelan* between 1933 and 1949. See below.



contributions from authors based both in India and Nepal as well as statements of greetings from different politically important persons in Nepal. Apart from his editorial preface, Gyawali published two essays on Bhanubhakta in this volume.<sup>36</sup>

In the editorial preface Gyawali begins by reiterating the poor and powerless status of his *jāti* which he claims is therefore only able to present a memorial volume to its *jāti* poet Bhanubhakta. The volume, he adds, does not befit the grandeur of Bhanubhakta but says it is a work encompassing the *bhakti*, respect and thanks of the community. Gyawali describes the moment of the release of the memorial volume as one of great happiness for he says in doing so, his community was remembering the deeds of a great *mahātmā*. He describes Bhanubhakta as a *mahabīr* (a greatly brave person) from whose life the community could receive lessons on vitality, power and luster. Only if the community could learn these lessons, he added, would it be able to build a true memorial in whose comparison other physical memorials would be of no value (2026 v.s.a[1997 v.s.]:ca). Gyawali further wrote:

We can build such a memorial....[by] doing service to the mother-tongue, extending the fields of education and by developing our character....Oh Nepalis, let us begin to build that strong memorial. Let us begin our efforts to make the mother-tongue beautiful in an all-encompassing way. Like Bhanubhakta, let us disperse knowledge amongst our population through our mother-language. Knowledge is power and energy and light that destroys darkness (2026 v.s.a[1997 v.s.]:cha).

Gyawali rhetorically asked his readers if they had heard the drums announcing service to the mother-tongue played by Bhanubhakta and if so, why they had remained inactive in that endeavor. He stated further that the dispersion and popularity of Bhanubhakta's work (i.e. the Nepali *Rāmāyaṇa*) was proof of the fact that Bhanubhakta was one *bīr puruṣ* of the Nepali *jāti*. He added:

If we cannot see and understand the greatness [of Bhanubhakta] the fault lies with us....Just because our confused and educationless status

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<sup>36</sup> Thirty years later, this volume was reprinted with an additional section of new contributions to mark the 100th death anniversary of Bhanubhakta (S. Gyawali et al. 2026 v.s.[1997 v.s.]). Mishra (2047 v.s.:62) says that it was only after the publication of the 1940 volume on Bhanubhakta that discussions on him increased inside Nepal.

does not give us a good clear view [of our past] we cannot say Bhanubhakta was not good, not important. Bhanubhakta was good, he was big, he was majestic and since we lack those qualities we have not been able to appreciate his greatness. But time will give us eyes [to see those qualities], power to evaluate [them] and minds to understand Bhanubhakta. After that we will honor Bhanubhakta [properly] and understand his importance (2026 v.s.a[1997 v.s.]:cha).

In closing his editorial preface, Gyawali hoped that the memorial volume he had edited would at least partially eradicate the lack of knowledge about the *jāti* poet Bhanubhakta amongst Nepalis and inspire them to learn more about his life.

Gyawali was successful in eliciting messages appreciating his effort from the then Rana premier in Nepal Juddha Shumshere and some other contemporary important intellectual personalities of Kathmandu such as Mrigendra Shumsher, Hemraj Sharma, Rammani A. D., Lekhnath Paudyal, and Brahma Shumsher. Contributors to the volume included poets and writers such as Mrigendra Shumsher, Arjun Shumsher, Siddhicharan Shrestha, Balakrishna Shumsher (later Sama), Kulchandra Gautam, Chakrapani Chalise, Rudraraj Pandey, Pushkar Shumsher, and Baburam Acharya from Nepal. Contributors from Darjeeling included Dharanidhar, Rupnarayan Singh, Suryabikram Gyawali and Parasmani.

Dharanidhar Koirala published two poems in this memorial book. The one entitled "*Āśā*" described how readers of all ages were fascinated with the verses of the Nepali *Rāmāyaṇa*. The second one was entitled "*Bhanubhakta Sradhdanjali*" (Homage to Bhanubhakta). The last two stanzas of the latter poem indicate the way in which Bhanubhakta's work had become important to this group of language activists:

You [Bhanubhakta] spread the language all over the country  
Arousing selfless devotion to god Ram  
Your unswerving service in uniting variously divided people  
Will be counted heavily in your favour.

Oh Bhanubhakta, the entire *jāti* is fond of  
Your nectar-like sweet verses  
The country will be eternally grateful to you  
For your sweet melodious work of writing  
(Gyawali et al. 2026 v.s.a[1997 v.s.]:6).

In his two essays, Gyawali highlighted the political and historical context in which Bhanubhakta grew up. In the first of these, simply entitled, "Bhanubhakta", he suggested that in the political confusion reigning in the country following the disastrous conclusion of the Treaty of Sagauli (1816), young Bhanubhakta could not decide what he wanted to do with his life. This period of confusion ended with Bhanubhakta deciding to render the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Nepali, a work which Gyawali claims has helped thousands of men and women to find their responsibilities in life (Gyawali 2026 v.s.b[1997 v.s.]:42-5). In the second essay, entitled (in translation) "The Place of Bhanubhakta in the Development of the Nepali *Jati*", Gyawali began by stating that in Nepal, *bīr puruṣ* have been born from time to time and proceeded to glorify the history of the kings of *Gorkhā* whose biographies he had already written, namely, Drabya Shah (credited for founding the kingdom of *Gorkhā* in the mid-sixteenth century), Ram Shah (r. early 17th century) and Prithvinarayan Shah, the mid-18th century king whose conquest campaigns resulted in a "unified" Nepal.

Gyawali claimed that with the larger state put together by Prithvinarayan, Nepali *jāti* was created. When Hindu freedom was lost in India, it was protected in the foothills of the Himalayas by this *jāti*. But, Gyawali wrote, this *jāti* was constituted by different-language-speaking Newar, Kirat, Magar, Gurung and Tamang people. Nepali *jāti*-ness could not articulate itself because of the different languages and customs of these people. An empire (i.e. the Gorkhāli empire put together by Prithvinarayan Shah and his immediate successors) had been built but a fire that could burn its imperial grandeur was inherently present in the above-mentioned situation. In this condition, according to Gyawali, Bhanubhakta wrote his *Rāmāyaṇa* in colloquial Nepali, a work that was read by all the above constituting members of Nepali *jāti*. Bhanubhakta's work plastered the house of Nepali *jāti*-ness constructed by putting one brick on top of another and the Nepali *jāti* found a language to articulate itself (Gyawali 2026 v.s.c[1997 v.s.]:64-68).

In this excessively rhetorical manner, Gyawali established Bhanubhakta as the *bīr puruṣ* whose work in the Nepali language represented the unity of a separate Nepali *jāti*. The first public celebration of Bhanubhakta's birth anniversary was held in Darjeeling in 1945 and the *Nepali Sāhitya Sammelan* started an annual celebration from the following year even though some controversy remained about Bhanubhakta's exact birthdate until the early 1950s. When Parasmani started editing a monthly magazine, *Bhārati*, in the late 1940s, articles

about Bhanubhakta appeared in it regularly. The *Sammelan* established a bust of Bhanubhakta in Darjeeling in 1949 (R. Sharma 2049 v.s.:82-94).<sup>37</sup>

Using the same language for which Bhanubhakta had been identified as a hero, Gyawali proceeded to write works of Nepali history in the form of life-histories of other brave national heroes. These works—written in the *bīr* mode and discussed in the next section—provided depth, both historical and literary, to the free and independent identity of the Nepali *jāti*. The only difference was that Bhanubhakta was a *bīr puruṣ* for having brought about the cultural unification of the Nepali *jāti* through his Nepali-language *Rāmāyaṇa* and the other heroes were *bīrs* who had demonstrated bravery in various war campaigns while creating the territorial basis of the Nepali *jāti*.

### Elaborating the Bīr Pantheon

Literary historian Kamal Dixit has argued that the national consciousness arising from the *Makaiparva* of 1920 compelled Nepalis, both resident within Nepal and expatriates in India, to look for national brave heroes.<sup>38</sup> Since heroes who could be appropriated for national celebration were non-existent in the realm of politics, Dixit has added, everybody's eyes were set on Bhanubhakta (2036 v.s.[2017 v.s.]:48). My discussion in the previous section should suggest that Dixit's characterization regarding the "location" of Bhanubhakta as a national *bīr* in the absence of similar figures in the realm of politics is at most only partially accurate. It was not so much the absence of brave figures in the realm of politics that guided Gyawali and his cohort's initial attention to Bhanubhakta. They rediscovered Bhanubhakta by thinking about *jāti* independence and improvement first through the realm of language and literature. The desire to execute their projects of *jāti*-improvement through service to the Nepali language which they saw as being key to the separate existence of the Nepali *jāti* made Bhanubhakta an ideal hero for their purposes. In addition, it was not the case that heroes were not

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37 Under the sponsorship of the Nepali Siksa Parishad, the first celebration of Bhanubhakta's birthday was held in Nepal in 1953 (R. Sharma 2049 v.s.:82-94). Since then it has been held every year. For examples of how Bhanubhakta was included in school textbooks used in Nepal in the 1970s, see the two chapters concerned with him in Adhikari et al. (2031 v. s.:89-92, 97-101).

38 This incident refers to Rana premier Chandra Shumsher's censor of Krishna Lal Adhikari (and others) who had written a double-meaning passage in a book related to maize (*makai*) cultivation. See Paudel (2045 v.s.) for more details.

found in the realm of politics. Some kings of Gorkha and certain warriors from the 'unification' era were identified by Gyawali as subjects of history and biography which he wrote in the 1930s and the 1940s as part of his effort to construct a *bīr* pantheon that would provide historical depth to the identity of a free Nepali *jāti*.

The first two biographies, both published in 1933, were concerned with two kings of Gorkha who were ancestors of King Prithvinarayan Shah. In the one that is about Drabya Shah, the first Shah king of Gorkha, Gyawali (1933a) presents his family tree and describes his conquest of Gorkha in the mid-16th century. While biographical details of the life of this king are sparse, Gyawali describes the conquest in some detail. This entire work is based on *vamśāvalis* (genealogies).<sup>39</sup> Gyawali's second biography was about the life of Ram Shah, a grandson of Drabya Shah who ruled Gorkha for about 27 years from about 1610 (1933b). Apart from biographical details, the main focus is once again on the triumphs and tribulations of the army of Gorkha under Ram Shah. While reading these two texts, one gets an early indication of the line of thinking regarding the history of the "unification" of Nepal that Gyawali would elaborate in the books he wrote subsequently. His next book, published as the two before by the *Nepali Sāhitya Sammelan* in Darjeeling, was a biography of the 'unifier' of Nepal, King Prithvinarayan Shah (Gyawali 1976c[1935]). Like the two biographies that preceded it, this book is more about the territorial conquest campaigns of Kingdom of Gorkha and less about King Prithvinarayan himself.<sup>40</sup>

Five years later, Gyawali published *Bīr Balbhadra* (2018 v.s.[1997 v.s.]) which was a description of the fierce resistance put up by the *Gorkhāli* commander Balbhadra at Nalapani during the initial phase of the Anglo-Gorkha war of 1814-16. Like the previous works, this was not a biography of Balbhadra but rather a presentation celebrating the bravery of the *Gorkhāli* soldiers. Gyawali is concerned only with elaborating the *bīr* history of the unification of Nepal even as the Anglo-Gorkha war marks an end of that era of Nepali history. A few years later, Gyawali published another book, this time focusing on the *Gorkhāli* commander

39 For a more recent discussion on Drabya Shah based on many extant *vamśāvalis*, see Pant (2041 v.s.:47-64). Drabya Shah ruled for less than twenty years and following his death, his son Purna Shah succeeded him. Purna Shah probably ruled for about 35 years and was succeeded by his son Chatra Shah who died shortly thereafter. His brother Ram Shah then became the king of Gorkha sometime around 1610 (Pant 2041 v.s.:56-83).

40 V. Pradhan (2044 v.s.:80-3, 86-7) says that Gyawali's books fall short as biographies.

Amarsingh Thapa who was central to the *Gorkhali* empire's expansion in the Kumaon and Garhwal regions (2000 v.s.). He used the book to again discuss the Anglo-Gorkha war. Hence these five books, supposedly biographies of *Gorkhali* kings and their commanders were the mold in which Gyawali rendered the unification history of Nepal. In 1949, he published a small book for children called *Nepali Bīrharu* in which short chapters were devoted to several Nepali heroes of the modern era including Bhanubhakta (1956[1949]). Many short versions of Gyawali's *bīr* biographical essays were published well into the 1950s in textbooks and other publications for children (e.g. Gyawali 1955).

Detailed information on how Gyawali put together the above volumes is scarce. Apart from previously published *vamśāvalis*, two different kinds of sources were crucial for the writing of at least two of his works. Before he wrote his book on Prithvinarayan Shah, Gyawali made a research trip to Kathmandu in 1932 or 1933 where he met, among others, Baburam Acharya who had a deep knowledge of modern Nepali history. Gyawali benefited from Acharya's help in person and later corresponded with him at some length regarding the material that made up his book on Prithvinarayan Shah (Gyawali 2029 v.s.).<sup>41</sup> For his book on Balbhadra, Gyawali (2018 v.s.[1997v.s.]:57-8) benefited from books written in English and two essays written in Bengali published near the turn of the century. These essays, which Gyawali translated and appended to his essay on Balbhadra, had in turn benefitted from the published work in English of writers such as G. R. C. Williams (1985[1874]) and James Fraser's 1820 travel account of a visit through the region (Onta 1996a).

Historian Dhanavajra Vajracharya has noted that before Gyawali's book on Prithvinarayan Shah was published, Nepalis knew very little about the "father of modern Nepal" (2044 v.s.:79). It was only after the publication of Gyawali's book, he adds, that interest was shown by Nepal-based intellectuals in the life and work of Prithvinarayan Shah. Vajracharya also credits Gyawali for generating a more general interest in the modern history of Nepal. Scholar of modern Nepali politics, Rishikesh Shaha has stated that he had read Gyawali's *Nepali Bīrharu* "with great profit as a boy" and decided to render it freely in English to satisfy the growing curiosity of his son with respect to Nepal's "past and our national heroes." Shaha adds that he thought he owed this much to his son for he "had seriously neglected" his "responsibility for educating him [his son] in our

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41 We can get some idea of this correspondence through some of Acharya's letters to Gyawali published in P.R. Sharma et al. (2029 v.s.:67-106).

national history" (Shaha 1967[1965]:ix). Without getting into why Shaha might have wanted his son to read "our national history" in English, we might simply note that the title of his version of *bīr* history was *Heroes and Builders of Nepal*. Just these two opinions on the importance of the *bīr* rendition of modern history of Nepal that came from the pen of Gyawali should be sufficient in giving us some idea about how his *bīr* corpus was received by intellectuals inside Nepal.

Hence from Gyawali and Darjeeling came the first effort to render the modern history of Nepal as *bīr* history. The word "history" is important here because there had been, as literary historians Dixit (2018 v.s.) and Shrestha (2047 v.s.[2034 v.s.]) remind us, a *bīr* version of literary writing that seemed to be pervasive amongst the small number of writers during the high days of the *Gorkhāli* empire (i.e. before the signing of the 1816 treaty of Saguali). The point to note is that not only was Gyawali's corpus new in the mode of history writing (rules of evidence and the associated historical episteme), but also that the earlier literary corpus did not try to establish a *bīr* genealogy for the Nepali nation. In contrast, the cultural domain par excellence of the nation as it was imagined outside of Nepal by Gyawali was a territory of *bīr* history.

In this essay I have discussed the way in which variously expatriated Nepalis in India came to construct a *bīr* history of the Nepali *jāti* in the first half of this century. In particular, I have highlighted the work of Parasmani Pradhan, Dharanidhar Koirala, and Suryabikram Gyawali as important moments in this process. The above narrative and the details embodied therein could be thought about in three related contexts. Firstly, the work of Parasmani, Dharanidhar, Gyawali and others can be seen within the local agenda of Darjeeling. Their efforts at cultural production through the use of the Nepali language can be interpreted as a project of differentiation whereby a proto-middle class, deploying its educational and cultural capital, separated itself from the larger Nepali coolie population of the Darjeeling area. The confidence of this class composed of children of poor migrants to India or migrants in search of education in North Indian cities did not come from landed wealth. Instead it was acquired through educational achievements within the formal academy. Hence the arguments of self-improvement espoused by this group revolved so centrally around the spread of education amongst the Nepali population in Darjeeling and beyond.

This class experienced colonial modernity not so much as a direct squeeze from above by colonial masters—although this is certainly there to some extent—but by eclectically feeling always already behind their

other Indian colonized counterparts in the domain of *jāti* consciousness as represented in the development of the written language and literature. By comparing the status of the Nepali language and literature to that of Hindi (as seen in publications from various North Indian cities including Banaras) and Bengali, the members of this class felt a sense of marginalization on a world scale. Hence their rhetoric of improvement was directed toward standardization of their written language, increment of its literary corpus and the writing of historical essays that would serve multiple purposes. Projects in the standardization of the language pushed Parasmani to confront Ganga P. Pradhan and the Nepali he used in his paper, *Gorkhe Khabar Kāgat*. To forward his missionary agenda, Ganga P. Pradhan discussed the word of the Lord in his paper in the kind of Nepali spoken by a majority of laborers in the district of Darjeeling and decried Parasmani's purified written version as one imported from Kashi (Banaras). It was in this context that Parasmani also opposed the Christian missionary activity in the district and defended the Hindu past of his cohort by claiming that it was a shared past of all Nepalis, including those working as laborers in the tea gardens.<sup>42</sup> Although I have not discussed it here, Parasmani's anti-missionary argument can easily be seen as contributing to the cultural construction of a pure Hindu Nepali identity. For our purposes here, however, we simply note that the alignment of missionary work in non-standard Nepali (from the point of view of Parasmani) with the laboring classes provided the fuel to the reformist zeal of Parasmani and his cohort of proto-middle class men. Their agenda of improvement authorized them to both function as reform contractors within the Nepali community at large and to partake in the wider, relatively more elite world of cultural production and political participation in Bengal and British India.

The second context within which the narrative details provided above may be understood is tied to the desire of the leading members of this Nepali community in India to participate in the political sphere of Bengal and British India. To lobby for rights as a single Nepali "community", to make claims as one ethnicity, they had to first establish that they were one community. Numbers were important. Hence the use of language to make the Nepali ethnicity more distinct and visible, numberwise, is noteworthy. Doing away with the ambiguity in the name of the language

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<sup>42</sup> There was also a Buddhist self-improvement movement happening in Darjeeling in the early part of this century. Activists of this movement and Parasmani were involved in various debates that are not addressed here.



itself and calling it "Nepali" and having it recognized by Calcutta University were only two of the ways in which this process happened.

The third and final context within which we can understand the above narrative—and I have in the main been only concerned with this—is to think of the work done in Darjeeling as being an effort by variously expatriated Nepalis to glorify the country of their origin (*mul deś*), Nepal. *Bīr* revivalism through service to the Nepali language was the mode in which expatriate nostalgia and celebration of the *mul deś* occurred. Hence from Darjeeling and the pen of Gyawali came efforts to popularize the life and work of Bhanubhakta and the first rendition of the "unification" history of Nepal as *bīr* history.

We can note a few points regarding this construction of *bīr* history before bringing this essay to a close. To begin with we can ask if this glorification of Shah kings and their generals from the unification era can be thought of as an attempt at mobilizing sentiment against the Rana rulers of Nepal. That is, by showing how *bīr* the nation was when Shah rule was paramount, it could simultaneously suggest how decrepit it had become under the rule of the Ranas. It could also suggest that the reestablishment of the king's power (i.e. demise of the Ranas) was a route to the revival of the former glory of the *mul deś*. The imprisonment of Gyawali by the British government for one year during 1944-45, apparently at the request of the Rana rulers of Nepal, does suggest that even if Gyawali did not intend his work to be a criticism of the Ranas, they might have read his corpus in that manner. Along with Gyawali, Dharanidhar Koirala and Hariprasad Pradhan were also jailed. Gyawali has stated that he and the other two were jailed because they were implicated in some anti-Rana conspiracy even though they were not involved in any anti-Rana politics then current in various cities in India. He thinks the British Government jailed him because they wanted to please the Ranas so that they could continue to get Gurkha soldiers for the army in large numbers as was required during the Second World War. He and others were apparently also accused of spreading dissatisfaction amongst the Gurkha soldiers (J. Chetri 1993:7-8). Literary historian Tanasharma has speculated that the reason for Gyawali's imprisonment was his efforts to give *jāti* consciousness to the Nepali public through the writing of many *bīr* biographies (2027 v.s.a:167). Even in the absence of hard-core evidence, we can safely guess that the Rana state objected to the *bīr* version of national Nepali history and did its utmost, as was usual, to prevent the dispersion of any work on the history of Nepal.

The making of Balbhadra as the last of the unification era *bīr* heroes is another point worthy of note in the *bīr* history that came from Darjeeling. Here we have one expatriate Nepali in one part of India finding the essence of his nation's glory in the heroism of another Nepali over a century earlier in another part of India (Nalapani was arguably never under uncontested Nepali rule and after the 1816 Treaty of Sagauli, it has never been a part of Nepal). While this irony inherent in Gyawali's recognition of Balbhadra has not been noted in this manner before, his contributions toward the writing of *bīr* history have been noted previously (Prمود Pradhan 2044 v.s.). As mentioned above historian Dhanavajra Vajracharya (2044 v.s.:78-80) has stated that Gyawali was instrumental in initiating discussions on the birth of modern Nepal and in showing the bravery of a *bīr jāti*. In a revision of this formulation, I have endeavored to show the specificity of Gyawali's contribution to the popularization of the social 'fact' which celebrates Nepalis as a *bīr jāti*. I have argued here that the historical genealogy that stands today as the *evidence* of this fact is the *outcome* of the historical writings of Gyawali written at a time when the *jāti* itself was being consciously constructed rather than an essential transhistorical characteristic of the people of Nepal that Gyawali just happened to highlight in his work.

### **Conclusion**

In this essay I have described how two aspects of the foundations of the national historical narratives of Nepal was put together in India by variously expatriated Nepalis. Along with a description of the circumstances in which that was accomplished I have shown how projects in the promotion of the Nepali language and the writing of *bīr* history were intricate parts of an overall agenda of *jāti* construction and its progress. While the main inspiration for some (e.g., Parasmani) to engage in *jāti* improvement projects came as members of the Indian Nepali community which sought to assert its existence within the politics of British India, opposition to contemporary social conditions of Nepalis everywhere inspired others for whom the agenda of improvement of the Nepali *jāti* in India included the eventual improvement of the people of Nepal. In the context of experiencing "secondness" on a world scale, a history of the *mul deś* in the *bīr* mode was actively forged in Darjeeling. This particular story of the *bīr deś* that emanated from India was rejected by the Rana state even as it found sympathetic elaborations in the work of some Nepal-based writers such as Balakrishna Sama. After the demise of the Rana state in 1951, it was replaced by a state that would claim its

modernist legitimacy by participating in the then new international development regime. Even as the first of the many five-year plans was being drawn up in the mid-1950s, *bīr* history—as I have described elsewhere (Onta 1996a, 1996b)—was adopted by this state as the dominant mode of national history of Nepal. During the Panchayat era, it was disseminated through the gradually nationalized education system and became, along with the Nepali language, Hinduism and the monarchy, one of the essential features of the national culture of Nepal.

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The British help in rediscovering the glorious past of India is certainly memorable. The distinct contribution of the European scholars to Indian historiography was ideological studies which began with the foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 by Sir William Jones. Then a band of British scholars were dragged to the research on Indian history and culture. The British rule contributed a lot for the growth of scientific spirit of research in the country. The Archaeological Department of India helped a lot in adding new dimension to historical research in the country. The discovery of Ramanujam in the field of mathematics, contribution of S.N. Bose, C.V. Raman and Meghnad Shah in the field of Physics; P.C. Bhanubhakta Acharya, Aadi Kavi in Nepali language literature. Nepali developed a significant literature within a short period of a hundred years in the 19th century. ^ Onta, Pratyoush (1996) "Creating a Brave Nepali Nation in British India: The Rhetoric of Jati Improvement, Rediscovery of Bhanubhakta and the Writing of Bir History" in Studies in Nepali History and Society 1(1), p. 37-76. ^ "Nepal". Ethnologue. Onta P 1996 Creating a Brave Nepali Nation in British India: The Rhetoric of Jati Improvement, Rediscovery of Bhanubhakta and the Writing of Bir History Studies in Nepali History and Society 1 1 37 76. Onta P 1997 Activities in a "Fossil State": Balkrishna Sama and the Improvisation of Nepali Identity Studies in Nepali History and Society 2 1 69 102. Owens B. M. 1989 "The Politics of Divinity in the Kathmandu Valley: The Festival of Bungadya/Rato Matsyendranath" Ph.D. dissertation Columbia University.