

# Identity Jealousy against Lhotshampas-The Evolution of Ngolop: A Sociological Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The crisis of Bhutanese refugees has been neglected in recent scholarly debates, yet it remains an acute case of systematic oppression and ethnic violence in the South Asian context, particularly towards the Lhotshampa community of Southern Bhutan. This research analyses both the political and social dynamics of how the ruling elites of Bhutan, in an act of identity jealousy, portrayed Lhotshampas as Ngolop', or anti-national terrorists, rationalizing their exile in the latter half of the twentieth century. This paper challenges state-sponsored actions like the 1985 Citizenship Act and the 1988 census classifying only Nepali speaking citizens of the south as F1 to F7, as well as 'DriglamNamza' (forced cultural assimilation) which curtailed the Lhotshampas' citizenship, culture, and civil rights. Interviews with refugees living in exile in Nepal, along with archival materials, demonstrate how the Bhutanese state systematically employed legal and administrative means to contrive an absence of Lhotshampa identity, resulting in their mass dispossession. This research re-contextualizes the 'Ngolop' narrative, contending that the abusive methods adopted by the ruling clans, composed of arbitrary arrests, enforced population control, and cultural annihilation which represented authentic anti-national actions. This study exposes the Bhutanese government contradiction in claiming to exercise "Gross National Happiness" while practicing violent exclusionism, illustrating the ongoing impacts of identity-based violence and demanding an unrepresented perspective on the Lhotshampadilemma. The research fundamentally disputes the prevailing historiography, placing the refugee crisis as the outcome of a sustained campaign of systematic state displacement motivated by elite insecurity and ethnonationalist dominance, rather than an unnurtured ethnic conflict.

**Keywords:** Bhutanese refugees, Lhotshampa, Ngolop, identity jealousy, citizenship crisis.

## INTRODUCTION

In the foothills of Himalayas lies a tale of identity crisis and horrific displacement history that evolved in the 1980s and materialized in the early 1990s (Rizal, 2004; Rai, 2013; Hutt, 2003; Dhakal & Strawn, 1994). The identity crisis and displacement framed the untold life hi(stories) of Bhutanese refugees that curled into crisis. It is the prominent event in the history of Bhutan which is undeletable ever that is marked as a dreadful imbroglio and a poignant chapter in the history of South Asia-absolutely connected with the three countries of south Asia i.e. Bhutan, India and Nepal.

Bhutan has long self-prided history of unique approach to nation building process. It has developed a concept of "Gross National Happiness" (GNH) a development framework for its social and economic development (Ura, 2015). It has garnered international attention as it emphasizes holistic wellbeing rather than mere economic progress (Masaki & Tshering, 2020). The present ruling dynasty believes that GNH carries holistic approach including material and spiritual development for the positive development of the human society (Ura, 2015). However, beneath the serene façade of holistic merry making of "gross national happiness", there lies a simmering tension of refugee crisis (Rai, 2013; Hutt, 1996) that is prompted by identity jealousy (Shrestha, 2018).

By (mis)playing conspiracy and (mis)using power and politics against Lhotshampas, the ruling elites let them to surrender to the Drukpa cultural ethos by implementing the policy of 'one nation, one people' and

DriglamNamza, a Drukpa social and cultural etiquette (Rai, 2013; Dhakal & Subedi, 2016) leaving behind the strength of unity in diversity. The whole process of depopulating the Lhotsampa was carried out with the Ngolop perspective developed and levelled against the southerners, the Lhotshampas. It was an act driven by the socio-cultural and political identity jealousy of the ruling elites (Shrestha, 2018; Dixit, 1992).

Lhotshampa is a political identity coined for southern Bhutanese by the ruling elites of Bhutan under which agenda of segregation from the mainstream social, cultural and political spectrum is clearly beheld. The Lhotshampas fought for their identity resurrection, but the process was duly suppressed resulting in becoming refugees in Nepal. The black spot as a tag 'refugee' remains for generations to come against Southern Bhutanese, the Lhotsampa.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Processing the Terror: The Ngolop Activities Against Lhotshampas

When Lhotshampas, the Nepali speaking Nepali origin people, commenced their human rights and democratic movement during late 1980s and 1990s, the regime chose the Dzongkha word "Ngolop" to describe the human rights and democratic activities of Lhotshampa dissidents (Hutt, 2005). Not only Lhotshampas of the south were involved in this movement, the Sarchops of the eastern Bhutan were among others, who were being tagged with this Ngolop nomenclature by ruling elites.

Until 1980s all ethnic groups in Bhutan were living in peace and happy environment however, the declaration of 1985 citizenship act along with sixth five-year plan abruptly changed the mind set of Monarch that terrorized the Lhotshampas (Dixit, 1992).

Under the extreme rule of discriminatory design only Nepali speaking Southern Bhutanese- Lhotshampas were categorized into seven groups differentiating their national characteristics based on the policy framed during 1988 census as below:

F1: Genuine Bhutanese

F2: Returned Migrants (Left Bhutan but returned again in Bhutan)

F3: Census Absentees (not available during the census)

F4: A foreign woman married to Bhutanese National

F5: A foreign man married to Bhutanese National

F6: Adoption Cases

F7: Non-nationals (foreigners/immigrants) (Rai, 2013; Hutt, 2003).

These categories divided family into at least three groups. For example, when husband's family can produce (if not lost during calamities) land tax receipt of 1958; he and his siblings are considered as Bhutanese national i.e. F1 and when wife's family is not able to produce the same, she belongs to F4 and the children were considered non-national too and thus categorized as F5, and they were deprived of citizenship rights. The land tax receipt of 1958 and F1 to F7 categories were prejudicially applied in and among the Lhotshampas of the southern Bhutan. This evil law enacted by Royal Government of Bhutan along with atrocities of security forces of Royal Bhutan army, Royal Bhutan police and the bureaucrats demolished the ever growing social, economic and cultural aspects of Lhotshampas (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The crooked community wrecking act of Royal Government of Bhutan panicked the Lhotshampas and caused an outflux during early 1990s into Nepal as 'refugee' (Rai, 2013; Hutt, 1996, Hutt, 2003, Dixit, 1992).

The amended citizenship act of 1985, implemented in 1988 through national census ensured ethnic discrimination targeted to Lhosampas. It was declared in 1969 by the then king in the unicameral national

assembly that the Drukpa's traditional rules, customs and etiquette were compulsorily enacted by late 1980s against the socio-cultural rights (Bhattarai, 2014) enshrined in the universal declaration of human rights. It was enforced in the name of implementing old Drukpa tradition clad with one nation, one people policy (Rizal, 2004; Dixit, 1992). This deprived Lhotshampas to practice their cultural traditions of keeping long hair by girls and women, putting vermilion colour on forehead and green necklace on neck as a mark of married women, wearing on Daura-suruwal and Gunyo-cholo of Lhotshampas' cultural dresses.

Since 1989 the Nepali language teaching was strictly prohibited and curtailed from the national curriculum (Schappi, 2005; Hutt, 2003, Mathou, 2000; Rai, 2013) and Dzongkha was the only official language declared in 1961 and strictly implemented during the late 1980s. All such political and bureaucratic events and actions against the century long cultural practice of southern Bhutan led to evolution of identity crisis among the Nepali speaking Lhotshampas. The elite performed such a conspiracy and exercised with the power and politics in suppressing the honest and hardworking citizens of the southern Bhutan (Rai, 2013) out of the socio-cultural and political identity jealousy.

The terrorizing policies and practices performed by the Bhutanese elites were based on the declaration of Planning commission of Bhutan (see 1999a; 1999 b) which have heavily thwarted the social, cultural and political dimensions of the Lhotsampa. The scholarships discuss that by 1960s and 1970s majority of Lhotshampas entered the mainstream bureaucracy and political forums holding significant positions in Bhutan's security forces and civil service sectors resulting into citizenship act of 1985 (Hutt, 2005; Rai, 2013; Evans, 2010; Siwakoti, 2012; Wolf, 2011; Dhakal, 2011).

The local rulers in the southern districts used conspiracy politics to blame against the Lhotshampas mystifying the concept of Driglam Namza and Tsawa Sum or the Bhutanization process to prove as incongruent to national policy (Hutt, 2003; Rai, 2003) which ultimately declared Lhotshampas as Ngolop. Nevertheless, it was a power and politics play and deception against the Lhotshampas (Rai, 2013) from the prejudice mindset of ruling elites for speedy depopulating the southern Bhutanese (AMCC, 1995) and to establish the discourse that the democratic southern Bhutanese were wrong, that's how it declared Ngolop, a terrorist, to the citizens who took part in a peaceful democratic demonstration of September-October 1990. The perspective of Ngolop against Nepali speaking Bhutanese citizens was spread among other fellow that established an idea of "ill intention of some Nepali speaking Lhotshampas to take over political power of the Kingdom" (Schappi, 2005; p. 21). It is an insight that the ruling elites feared about losing their political supremacy which propelled identity jealousy against the ever-growing Nepali speaking Lhotshampas. Nevertheless, the taking over of political power of the kingdom was unimaginable truth of the loyal Lhotshampas who had declared their allegiance and reverence to the monarch in the 1940s (Hutt, 2003; Rizal, 2004; Rai, 2013;).

The rising entrepreneurship characterized by hardworking capacity with growing population and educational attainment catalysed the inferior mentality of the local ruling elites and accelerated in committing cruel actions against human rights practiced by Lhotsampa population (Shreshtha, 2018; Rizal, 2004). In this context, Morch (2016) argues that the political dramatization and power and politics play were orchestrated to enhance depopulation which is the hidden blackspot in the history of Bhutan. Furthermore, he argues that the political elites feared and felt susceptible that the ever-growing Lhotshampas in all proportions, if happen to hold on state power dwindles the Drukpa supremacy. This inferiority complex intrigued the doubtful mindset of government elites that triggered labelling Lhotsampa a Ngolop. There is lack of academic literature against Lhotshampa perpetuated through Ngolop perspective, although different researchers and academicians have attempted to explore Bhutanese refugee plights. This indicates that there are deficiencies in literature, in this connection, this article attempts to fill up the deficiency of literature, however, I acknowledge various pertinent scholarships (Villanueva & Duterte, 2025; pp. 20).

### **Subaltern Lhotshampas: Outsiders' Perspectives**

'Lhotshampa' a political term in Dzongkha meaning Southerner, for Nepali speaking immigrants (Phuntsho, 2013). It is radically used with the meaning; 'southern border landers' in Dzongkha, referring to the population of Nepali origin. Bahadur (2020) writes the Lhotshampas are an ethnic Nepali people settled in southern lowland foothills of Bhutan over the last century and a half.

The Nepali language spoken in the southern was termed as 'Lhotshamkha' and the western scholars described them as allochthonous Nepali speaking population in the south (Driem, 1994). All most all the British political officers to Bhutan defined and referred Nepali speaking population as illegal immigrants and outsiders in their reports, naming them derogatorily 'Paharias', 'people of doubtful character', illegal settlers, etc. (White, 1909). Those reports sowed the seeds of scepticism on Bhutanese regime and political elites of Bhutan towards loyal and hardworking Nepali origin Lhotsampa citizens. As Hutt (2003) comments that Bell and White's report of 1904 and 1909 cannot be considered as an authoritative source on the full extent of Nepali settlement in Bhutan (p. 43) because they did not appear to have visited extensively farther and remote areas in the western and eastern Bhutan along the foothills of Bhutanese jurisdiction.

History of Bhutan never accepted southerners, the Nepali speaking population as Bhutanese culturally and politically. However, they were integrating themselves with the Drukpa culture politically and socially although they had been facing discrimination since the decades (Singh, 2017).

In this context, Hutt (2003) finds that every southern Bhutanese household must complete seventy days (i.e. yearly basis) voluntary service on construction of roads and the like as a local development scheme (p.140). The first five-year plan introduced in 1961 constructed highway from Phuntsholing to Thimphu connecting southern Bhutan to Bhutan's capital; while constructing this highway southerners were ordered to contribute voluntarily and compulsory labour (Rai, 2013). He adds the irony that more than one hundred thousand exiled Bhutanese cannot travel on the road constructed by their forefathers (p. 21).

Bhutanese history of early period shows that external politicians, the British East India Company's political officers were much concerned with the increasing population of Nepali immigrants in Bhutan rather than the Bhutanese government. In 1905 John Claude White noted that Nepali population was substantially well distributed and more 'Paharias' (Nepali people) are creeping and building a considerable community (Strawn, 1994, p. 29). On the one hand Bhutanese Drukpa government always feared about the false thought of cultural and political hegemony of Lhotshampas 'the southerners' in the Bhutanese throne, and or fearing the breakup; or takeover of the country (Strawn, 1994; Bahadur, 2020). On the other hand, the British politicians cum scholars always defined and described, and instigated Bhutanese Drukpa government, the Nepali immigrants as poachers. As Collister (1987) quotes the British report prepared by Williamson, the political officer of Sikkim; about the British idea of legal procedure for the extradition of Nepali settlers (p. 30). This condition indicates that the legal status of Nepali settlers was undefined in the early 1930s and raised big question mark on the attitude of Bhutanese government towards the Nepali settlers (Strawn, 1994). It was only the British East India politicians who hatefully defined the Nepali immigrants, provoking the Bhutanese Drukpa government against them because their reports did not mention that the Bhutanese government was ready to expel Nepali settlers, rather they recruited Nepali speaking population to settle down permanently during 1930s (ibid). It suggests that the British political officials played a catalytic role against the Nepali immigrants negatively. Ironically, the Bhutanese government or the Dorjis (officials) used the Nepali speaking population as financial source, for amassing huge amount of money as a tax from the beginning of 1900s (Strawn, 1994; Hutt, 2003).

British political officer John Claude White noted that people of Haa and the Nepalese used to have conflict frequently due to the encroachment on Haa people's grazing land. Noticing this, however, he was surprised that Nepalese were not expelled by the Bhutanese government, for this he believed that they have some legitimacy to live in Bhutan (Strawn, 1994). He further plausibly quoted that it was implausible on behalf of Bhutanese government to let them live rather blocking the forbidden incursions of Nepalis on the land of Haa. He guessed that the Nepalis would easily be chased away by the Haa people who fought several wars to defend their land against their foes in the past. This sort of British mind set recorded in the mainstream history of Bhutan prompted Drukpa government later to conceive against the legal ground of domicile about the Lhotshampas. As Collister (1987; Strawn, 1994) comment that the British were more concerned about the unavoidable influx of Nepalese immigrants. However, British records were unable to pinpoint the beginnings and the extent of Nepali migration into Bhutan (Strawn, 1994).

British were not so aggressive towards the Nepali settlement in Darjeeling and Sikkim as those lands were vastly covered by tea plantation initiated by British East India Company and the Nepalis immigrants fulfilled



the required labourer's demand. By 1859, the first tea estate, Dhootriah Tea Estate, was established in Darjeeling district by British (Tamang, 2017) that has been a source of employment opportunity.

However, during the same period, Bhutanese government denied the development plan brought by British on tea plantation, mineral resource development, and bamboo and timber extraction (Collister, 1987). Since they failed in Bhutan, the labourers were not required and thus, every British political officer who visited Bhutanese government and the British political officers to Sikkim and Darjeeling blatantly reported against the Nepali immigrants to Bhutan. The British wanted Nepali immigrants to be expelled from Bhutan to fulfil the ever-increasing demand of labourers in Darjeeling and Sikkim that's how Sinha (1990) hints about the British critical position towards the Nepali immigrants to Darjeeling and Sikkim.

Many scholars agree that Nepali population migrated in the early nineteenth century (Bahadur, 2020; Strawn, 1994, Collister, 1987; Dhakal & Subedi, 2016; Hutt, 2003) who played an instrumental role in the development process of Bhutan. Although, Nepalese lived a century and a half in the same political and physical environment, southerners were always discriminated by the Drukpa government.

Hutt (2003) referring Bell in 1904 and White in 1905 writes that the Nepalese had settled in Bhutan for many years and Hah-pas winter grazing grounds had been seriously curtailed for the last fifteen years of their observations in Bhutan. It indicates clearly that the settlement of Nepalese in the south-western part of Bhutan was already advanced.

## METHOD AND MATERIALS

This study examines atrocious circumstances faced by Lhotshampa population in Bhutan before 1990s. The qualitative research method is used employing descriptive historical research design. It is an approach to research that helps researchers to investigate and interpret historical events delving into primary and secondary sources, for examples open interviews and informal discussions, and journal articles, documents, artifacts, etc. that help construct a comprehensive understanding of the past (Ahmed, 2024). Based on this framework, this study analytically investigates the past actions of atrocities by the ruling elites against Lhotshampas. This world view is portrayed in this paper describing critically how Lhotshampas were labelled Ngolop and the paper puts forward the reverse argument and explanation based on the coarsest atrocities performed by the Royal Government of Bhutan. The primary and secondary sources of data helped me evaluating the past and linking it with present and future (Mohamud, 2025).

Dawson (2009) mentions that qualitative methods help to clarify perspectives in depth. It helps to reduce biasness through revealing attitudes and experiences of the researcher self by integrating reflexivity into the research process. The principal idea of qualitative research is that it helps to examine how people make sense out of their lived experiences in their minds carving into their own words and consequently describe their understandings in the sense of a behavioural science such as history and sociology (Copley, 2022; p. 9). I used qualitative research method to uncover the multiple realities into light enhancing epistemological understanding of the past events. For this reason, I used credible local, national and international sources of secondary tools specifically clarifying the impact of past lives of participants who lived in Bhutan for generations revealing their impact in their present lives (Slom & Ahmed, 2025).

The open ended interviews allowed participants to share their experiences and opinions openly enabling the researcher to dive deeper into emerging themes (Villanueva & Duterte, 2025). I chose my participants using purposive and convenient sampling methods. The purposive sampling provided me a space to choose participants with similar characteristics i.e. individual who were born before 1970s in Bhutan currently residing in Beldangi and Sanischare refugee camps in Nepal. I used convenience sampling method to select participants based on their availability that who I can access with ease. I used this non-probability sampling to make my data gathering process quick and cost effective.

During the open interviews, many of them liked to speak and give information and their opinions but I was not able to include all of them in the interview frame. So, I visited them out of their home in their work places for major interviews and also visited their homes during the festivals. The secondary sources such as National

Assembly Resolutions, census reports, research articles, periodicals, newspapers, websites, youtube vedios, archives, and various media outlets connected to Bhutanese ruling elites, forms of atrocities rendered in Bhutan, etc.

For substansive local understandings grey literatures were also used that helped building themes on refugee perspectives related to refugee plights. The literatures since early 19<sup>th</sup> century developed by misionaries and diplomats were used to contextualize the external eyes on Bhutanese Lhotshampas and their policies and the political plays of Bhutanese governments. It was essential to provide evidence on Ngolopian perspective of ruling elites against the Lhotshampas.

The literatures were obtained from google scholar and other data bases like research gate, academia, various websites and blogs, news portals, videos, and news magazines. Moreover, this study aimed to make comprehensive understanding of historical context and contemporary developments (Mohamud, 2025) of plights combined with confusions in the refugee camps. While referring such literatures, the researcher delved into the extensive and intensive subject matter about Lhotshampas and their plights within Bhutan and in the refugee camps in Nepal. This comprehensive understanding helped me to construct insights upon the Bhutanese elite's treatment towards Lhotsampa.

I have reviewed through books, journals, newspapers, organizational reports, policy reports, websites youtube videos and magazines, etc. This study lacks proper academic studies dealing with atrocities and identify jealousy of ruling elites, but I have been advantageous in understanding the crisis deeply into the Bhutanese refugee issue. These sources provided relevant information about the issue of plights of Lhotshampas that show identity jealousy perpetuated by the ruling elites' coercive structural and systematic injustices exhibited through Ngolopian behaviour against the Lhotshampas by late 1980s. For examples, discriminatory census policy of 1988 with the implementation of 1985 census policy, the violation of human through categorization of the family members into seven categories from F1 to F7 to list some. Nonetheless, the national newspaper of Bhutan- Kuensel always labelled Lhotshampas with the extreme use of Ngolop after the democratic movement in Bhutan by late 1980s. Referring those secondary materials provided me with comprehensive perspectives of Lhotshampas and ruling elites of Bhutan. However, I was unable to visit Southern Bhutan due to budgetary and personal businesses. For this reason, I spent good time on findings secondary sources appropriately locating the issue.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Theme 1: Labelling Ngolops Against the Lhotshampas, But Who Was in Real Ground?

'Ngolop' the terminology used in Dzongkha language meaning anti-national terrorist (Hutt, 2003, Rai, 2013). It was first used against Lhotshampas who had gathered at places called Garganda, Darkeline, etc located in Jalpaiguri district of the west Bengal state of India bordering southern Bhutan. They were instigated and compelled to gather in those places to prepare themselves for the democratic movement against the Bhutanese regime as it was strictly prohibited to conduct political awareness activities inside Bhutan. It is instanced by the brutal killing of young girls, women and men accusing them as Ngolops. The prominent Lhotshampas who were brutally killed by the ruling elites include Mahasur Chhetri, Dev Narayan Adhikari, Pem Dorji Tamang, Guman Singh Khadka, Kharka Bahadur Rai, Tul Bahadur Gurung, Mon Maya Ghale, Dhan Kumari Kharel, Nir Maya Rai, and so on. There is a huge list of Lhotshampas who were being arbitrarily killed by the local governments during the period of 1990 to 1992 and later years (K. B. Rai, personal communication, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2024)

The anti-social activities during early 1990s were kuenseled weekly blaming on those Lhotsamaps who were gathered to organize themselves to fight against the injustice and atrocities and establish democracy and human rights in Bhutan. They were creating environment of democratic peace movement which resulted in a mass demonstration at the district and subdivision offices throughout the southern Bhutan during the September-October months of 1990.

The anti-social activities conducted and acted by the security forces including Royal Bhutan Police and Royal Bhutan army were parallel to local government office which have remained un-reported - neither addressed by journalists nor by the academicians. The anti-social activities performed by security forces and the local government offices during late 1980s and early 1990s should be termed beyond the Ngolop activities. The Ngolop activities being conducted includes de-nationalizing the Lhotsampas (Rai, 2013; Hutt, 2005) who were already granted citizenship by law, rapping postpartum mother, young school going girls, demolishing houses, thrashing and harassing husbands, sons, and other male members in front of their wives, mothers and all relatives, shouting and yelling discourteous words (prohibited by culture to speak out in front of mother, father and sisters, and close relatives etc.) in the middle of the night at the yard of the house and slamming and banging the doors from outside and threatening with abusive words during the middle of the night.

Closing schools accusing Lhotshampas participating in the democratic peaceful movement, and transforming schools into brutal detention centres, creating scenes and plot artificially for accusation against the citizens who deny leaving the village as scheduled by the local authorities, moved to the detention centres and harassed and tortured for nothing and forced to exile for no reason. Are these treacherous activities not enough to be considered as anti-social and thus who seem to be Ngolop? Ruling elites or the laymen citizens who were later forced to be refugees. This binary question remains at the dark corner of the Lhotshampas' history in Bhutan, unexplored.

## **Theme 2: The Lhotshampas' Struggle of Recognition for National Identity as Bhutanese**

The Lhotshampas had lived in Bhutan for generations. They were farmers, traders, administrators, teachers, entrepreneurs, and the most importantly the huge contributors to Bhutan's economic development (Dixit, 1992, Rai, 2013). However, their distinct language (Nepali), dress, and cultural practices set them apart. As the "One Nation, One People" policy gained momentum after 1988, the Lhotshampas faced increasing pressure to conform towards the DriglamNamjha. As Strawn (1994) declares it is not clear when migration to southern Bhutan stopped, if it had happened, however, it is accepted concern the Nepali origin population was considered as citizens after 1958, it was a cut off year in 1988 (Hutt, 1993; Strawn, 1994; Singh, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2003). The Britishers accounts during 1930s and onwards, Nepali historians writing on Bhutan-Nepal early relations are the evidence of it (Collister, 1987; Dhungana, 2010; Rai, 2013; Dhakal, 2003). Singh (2017) describes that although citizenship was provided to the Nepali origin people, there was discrimination against the cultural practices.

The Nepali speaking Bhutanese were vividly terrorized and traumatized on being lived with stateless identity after implementation of 1985 nationality act. It was implemented through the 1988 census that left them doomily characterized as non-national. Consequently, grouped the family members into seven categories as F1 to F7 this historical event altered the course of many lives in southern Bhutan. As Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) (2008) reports that census of 1988 disclosed large number of illegal immigrants and only those Nepali who produced a tax receipt of 1958 were defined as F1 or the genuine Bhutanese citizens. Further it mentions that many of the people who were considered as illegal had lived for more than twenty years, they could provide the evidence of being resident and lived in Bhutan in 1957 and 1959 but that was of no use, they were required to show tax receipt of 1958 (Strawn, 1994; Hutt, 2003; Hutt, 1993; Shrestha, 2018). Shrestha (2018) argued that the citizenship act of 1958 provisioned southern Bhutanese as Bonafide citizens of Bhutan, and he claims that major and irreparable damage was attained due to the amendment of it in 1985. It was again brutalized by one nation one people policy of 1988 which captured the socio-cultural and political identity complexities of the ruling elites.

For example, all the villages in southern Bhutan were named in Nepali term, Kalikhola, Danabari, Barbote, Lamidada, Khorsane, Toribari, Tala, Malbaase, Taache, Hangey, Kalimati, Singhee, and so on although now for political ends those are changed into Dzongkha names. Such names exist along the southern corridor from east to west along the foothills and the plains bordering India. It means those places were occupied by the Nepali speaking population since the beginning of the settlement.

Hutt (2003, 2005) vividly explains that how the Lhotshampas' history is being trying to be erased by Dzongkhazation of Tibetan or Dzongkha etymologies replacing Nepali nomenclature for naming places to

show the international societies that the Lhotshampas population had been only the illegal immigrants by recent years who did not possess a place in history of Bhutan. During early 1970s southern districts name Hattisar and Nyaoli were replaced with Geylegphug and SamdrupJongkhar respectively. He further mentions that until about 1986 marriage certificate used to be issued in the Nepali language but was replaced by Dzongkha, by late 1980s Nepali language disappeared from the tax receipts. He presents many such names like Labsibotey changed into Goseling and Bokray into Kikorthang, and there are Toribari, Gairigaon, Noonpani, etc. (p. 188). Speaker 2 finds the same situation about the existence of Nepali etymologies in the southern villages however, recently been changed into Dzongkha like; Tala into Darla, Danabari into Chuzagang, Chirang into Tsherang, Charghare into Sangaychholing and all Nepali names are replaced by Dzongkha terminologies.

Politically set by the ruling elites as minority, the Nepali origin Bhutanese citizens of south struggled with Drukpa rulers whose concern was to subdue them because they identified southerners as political, social and cultural threat (NRC, 2008; Frelick, 2008). The polarization of northerners and southerners took greater stage because of the 1988 census which defined southerners as illegal immigrants, although evidence was enough to be the Bhutanese citizens (Rai, 2013). The southerners found themselves disproportionately categorized into seven groups effectively rendering them stateless in one's own motherland. Human Rights Watch (2003) concludes that at any time a government withdraws nationality from an individual or group rendering stateless. The southern Bhutanese were retroactively deprived of their citizenship (AMCC, 1995; p. 6). They were forcefully exiled, labelling them as illegal immigrants, economic migrants, terrorists, anti-nationals, disgruntled Bhutanese and lately even as Indian nationals (Rai, 2013; p. 3).

The theory and the universal practice of census is to carry necessary registration of demographic characteristics of the country's population in regular intervals of five or ten years that makes easier to study the development of age cohorts of the citizens (United Nations Statistics Division, 2022). It also recommends that the national census be taken at least every after 10 years, the ideal period for conducting necessary recordings of population characteristics. It also hints though some countries may require necessary to carry out census more frequently due to major changes in population size, structure and housing conditions. However, the government of Bhutan took it to its extreme extent taking census in every year menacing the population of the south especially in Samchi district, as it has been defined as an open and easy creeping doorway to southern foothills of Bhutan (White, 1909; Hutt, 1993; Colister, 1987).

### **Theme 3: The Exodus: Coercive Play of the National and Local Administrative Elites in Making Refugees**

The 70<sup>th</sup> session of national assembly in 1991 resolved to evict the anti-nationals, i.e. the people who supported or involved in the pro-democracy movement in 1990. The resolution was passed to legitimize the policy that introduced another conspiracy for the exodus of Bhutanese Nepalese a 'Voluntary Migration Forms' written in Dzongkha language (Kharat, 2003; AMCC, 1996). The implementation process was exercised with extreme coerciveness by the local subdivision offices with the active involvement of some local village headmen. Kharat (2003) discusses that since majority Nepali origin Bhutanese citizens could not read it properly, they filled the form to their best surrendering their land, properties and the most critically losing their identity of being Bhutanese citizens that led to become refugees in Nepal.

In this process, schools and administrative offices were turned into detention and torture centres for the targeted people by the local administrators. Nepali friends and relatives were also involved in this to detain and torture other Nepali, working as a secret agent, locally named as 'Chamcha' during that time. The process was sophisticatedly operated. The prominent, old and locally renowned individuals were targeted. The royal army used to arrest such individuals randomly and arbitrarily. Those arrested were taken to the school or block office where they were tortured physically and mentally to their extreme if they did not comply with their demand of filling the voluntary migration form. Finally, forcefully sign the voluntary migration form written in Dzongkha and get exiled.

In this regard Frelick (2008) posits that during late 1980s Bhutanese elites considered a growing ethnic Nepali population as a demographic and cultural threat owing to this evolved a jealous mindset leading to enactment



of discriminatory citizenship laws in 1985. It was extremely executed in 1988 in the name of census which solely directed against the Bhutanese Nepalese, consequently, about one-sixth of the population's citizenship was stripped paving the way for their expulsion from the homeland (NRC, 2008; Hutt, 2003).

The census of 1988 altered the whole course of southern Bhutanese life. The honest, hardworking, peaceful and self-respect lifestyle of southern Bhutanese was turned upside down. It terrorized the Bhutanese citizens because many of them had settle down after 1958 and the Royal Government of Bhutan was hell bent to classify them as illegal immigrants (AMCC, 1995; Rai, 2013). In the same viewpoint Sinha (2015) argues that the southern Bhutanese were living as an underdog migrant in Bhutan, and they had to fight for survival all the time in the hostile administrative and political environment. He further claims that Nepali costumes like; Daura-Suruwal, Dhaka-Topi, Khukuri on their waist and Nepali as Lingua Franca were cultural facets that established common identity of Lhotshampas against the politically dominant ruling elites.

#### **Theme 4: Democratic Movement and the Barbaric Suppression: The U Turn in Lhotshampas' Fate on Becoming Refugees**

In the month of September 1990, there was a peaceful demonstration against the atrocities exhibited by the Royal Government of Bhutan towards southerners in terms of ethnic identity through the process of absolute Bhutanization policy of 'DriglamNamza' (Piper, 1995, Hutt, 2005; Dixit, 1992, Dhakal and Strawn, 1994, Rai, 2013). The demonstration was organized in the pretext of cruelty shown during the 1988 census that declared thousands of genuine Bhutanese citizens non-nationals categorizing them into seven groups in which the nuclear family fell into at least three categories (Rai, 2013, Hutt, 2003).

Piper (1995) explains that to integrate southern Bhutanese explicitly into Bhutanese culture various measures were designed continuously and ostensibly which were not in the consent of southern Bhutanese. Such forceful Bhutanization process led to peaceful demonstration 1990 which was unprecedented in the history of Bhutan in terms of mass demonstration. Kharat (2001) asserts that the southern Bhutanese were deprived of civil and political rights, and the despotic Royal regime did not respond the appeal positively and to make it loud southern Bhutanese demonstrated against the government's discriminatory policy.

After a week or early, the government responded the demonstration reportedly with harsh and brutal acts of royal Bhutan army deployment against the general citizens gathered for demanding human rights. The years that followed were observed with widespread arbitrary arrests, detention of innocent citizens with ill-treatment and torture in the detention centres. In this process, many general citizens lost their lives after the demonstration (Rai, 2013, Dixit, 1992). Hutt (2003) finds that in 1994 the centre for the Victims of Torture (CVICT) in Kathmandu identified 2, 331 victims of physical torture in the refugee camps and tortured by security forces of Bhutan (pp. 215). As Piper (1995) describes the arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment and torture led to exodus of thousands of ethnic Lhotshampas from the homeland.

Bahadur (2022) argues that the use of iron hand by the Bhutanese political system was further seen in dealing with Lhotshampa community during the 1990s, including their public call for a restoration of ethnic minority rights, that triggered waves of suppression and violence in the villages. Consequently, ended into a mass exodus of Nepali speaking Bhutanese citizens to the refugee camps in Nepal. Hutt (1996) discusses that the serious unrest, i.e. often described by the government of Bhutan, started to spread from early 1990 onward in the southern Bhutan by unknown persons which raised attention of the government of Bhutan. The unrest for the government of Bhutan includes postering, pamphlets distribution for awareness against the government policies, and sometimes violent activities.

Scholars mention that the southern Bhutanese- the Lhotshampas were discriminated and neglected by the dominant Drukpa community (Muni, 1991; Kharat, 2001; Bahadur, 2022; Shrestha, 2018; Rai, 2013). The discriminated and neglected fall under this section of southern districts' population and those taking part in the agitation to restore their civic rights overturned into a curse to fall in the category of Ngolops- the terrorists, unfortunately leading them to be refugees in Nepal.

## CONCLUSION

The citizenship act of 1958 of Bhutan provided citizenship guarantee to the Lhotshampas. But the later years, the ruling elites tightened the rights to provision of citizenship by introducing aggressive policies of one nation, one people, Driglam Namza, Tsa-Wa-Sum along with the disgraceful 1988 census provision, demanding the land tax receipt of 1958 as the cut off year of domicile and treacherous categorization of Lhotsampa citizens into seven groups.

Lhotshampas struggled to retain their identity with peaceful democratic movement in late 1990s was ended with exodus. They were accused as Ngolops, an anti-national-terrorist, denationalizing and rendering stateless in the refugee camps in Nepal.

Being a curious observer of the whole process, I conclude that the extreme discrimination and atrocities against the Lhotshampas were branded with the tag called Ngolops by the ruling elites. In precise sense, the activities rendered by ruling elites in the local government offices of southern Bhutan districts against the Lhotshampas were the Ngolopic activities as discussed in the findings and discussion section.

The unjust grouping of Lhotshampas into four groups proposed by Bhutan in the joint verification team of Bhutan and Nepal government is the other example of Ngolop conduct against the Lhotshampas. For deeper understanding of the issue, a subalternist approach is required for further exploration.

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