

## Participation of Gurung Freedom Fighters in the Democratic Movement of Nepal (1950 - 1990)

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### Abstract

*The political scientists have different opinion on the definition of democracy. Some defines democracy as the fall of an authoritarian government and conducting the first democratic elections. Other argues it as liberal reforms of an authoritarian regimes or structural adjustments made in authoritarian regimes or democratic reforms caused by the oppositional parties. In Nepalese context definition of democracy and democratic movement varies to other scholars. In Nepal it was started in against the totalitarian state of one family rule. The history of the Nepali democratic movement and its development is relatively new in the global context. The democratic movement in Nepal, seen as a conflict between the autocratic family and normal public those seeking their independence. As a result, the democratic movement in Nepal began as an anti-Rana movement. Prithvi Narayan Shah was fully aware of the value of public support for constructing a country. He launched the unification campaign with the help of the general public. When his successors abandoned the policy of Prithivi Narayan Shah- peoples participation in the politics, plots and violence entered in Nepali politics. As a result, Jung Bahadur came to the power and established the Rana rule in 1846. The political system, which is based on people's participation for fundamental peoples right started to over throw an authoritarian and oppressive rule. The people were forced to launch a democratic movement in order to defend their rights in the country. Many Nepali heroes had sacrificed their life to established democracy in Nepal. The then state policy of marginalizing common people and absence of subaltern history writing practice, contribution of common people was not mentioned in the history book, especially, the contribution of the ethnic people. This article intends to identify the unidentified contribution of the ethnic freedom fighters – the Gurungs in the democratic movement of Nepal. It is a qualitative study focus on the historical events evaluating the contribution of the Gurung freedom fighters. In-depth interviews and library research method has been applied to gather data on the subject under discussion. It is limited to historical study on the subject. An attempt has been made to include the participation of Gurungs in the democratic movement of the period 1950- 1990. Generalization of the finding of this study can be applicable in the greater context.*

**Keywords:** Democratic movement- Gurung warriors -armed struggle – autocracy- totalitarian state

### Introduction

According to John Locke men could govern themselves in society according to the law of nature for the common good and with as much peace, reason and virtue as had existed in the paradisiacal state of the nature (Marini,1969). Other defines it as a method of collective decision making characterized by a kind of equality among the participants. Some scholar argues that democracy occurs during the time between the fall of an authoritarian government and the conclusion of the first democratic elections. Others denote it as earlier starting points when authoritarian regimes started liberal reforms or when structural adjustments made authoritarian regimes vulnerable enough for opposition parties to press for democratic reforms. There is no common definition of democracy and democratic movement. In Nepalese context both the definition doesn't suit properly.

The history of the democratic movement of Nepal is not so long compared to the South Asian countries. The democratic movement in Nepal started only as an anti-Rana movement in the latter part of the Rana regime. In Nepal it had started against the totalitarian state of one family rule. Some Nepali scholar opines it has started in 1852. Captain Bhotu Singh and Lakhan Thapa rebelled against Jung Bahadur (Manandhar, 1992) is the first attempt. Individuals within the ruling group, notably Jung Bahadur's brother Badri Narsingh, hatched many conspiracies (Pradhan, 1991). At the last days of Jung Bahadur, a Magar resident of Gorkha Bunkot started preaching that he got the right to rule Nepal by killing Jung Bahadur from Mankamana Bhagwati, declaring himself the incarnation of the famous hero of mythical story, Veer Lakhan Thapa (Gurung, 2022). He was a follower of the Josamani saint tradition. Some religious people of that area believed in his words, he gathered some arms and organized a military organization (Gurung, 2022). In his organization 50-60 people including soldiers and civilians joined (Adhikari, 1999). Around Chaitra of 1876, Devidatta platoon raided Lakhan Thapa's monastery and arrested eight people including him. Sixty guns and some other arms were found while searching (Adhikari, 1999). Lakhan Thapa was hanged by Jung Bahadur along with his 6 associates from a tree in front of Mankamana temple (Rana, 1974). This incident is taken by some historians as the background of the rebellion against the Rana regime and the starting point of democratic movement. Some have called Lakhan Thapa's revolt ridiculous, while others have considered it the first public revolt against the colonial rule (Karki, 2022). Similarly, in 1852, Sripati Gurung opposed Jung Bahadur (Shakya, 1999) Sripati Gurung was killed by Jung Bahadur by the Gurung platoon (Manandhar, 1992). Similarly, Shukdev Gurung and Supati Gurung rebelled against Jung Bahadur by declaring themselves Buddhist emperors of nine governments (Manandhar, 1992). In this way, the democratic movement of Nepal, which started as an anti-Rana movement faced many ups and downs, and has reached the state of the present federal democratic republic.

The rebellion started from the time of Jung Bahadur was individual centered but it took the form of an organized movement only in the latter part of the Rana rule, i.e., during the reign of Chandra Shamsher. The political awareness among the people was like zero until the reign of Chandra Samsheer. In the latter part of the Rana period, some conscious and enlightened citizens tried to use the pen against the Ranas. In 1912, Baburam Acharya drew parallels between the Ranas of Nepal and the Shogun rulers of Japan in Nepali Shiksha Darpan (Brajacharya, 1915). Devi Prasad Sharma opposed the Ranas through the Gorkha Sansar (Gautam, 1989). Likewise, Civil Right Committee, Prachanda Gorkha, Praja Parishad – the organized political groups raised voice against Ranas in organized way and were suppressed by the Ranas (Joshi, 1990). In 1950, the democratic movement led by the Nepali Congress ended the feudal familial autocratic system. Political stability could not be maintained even after the attainment of democracy (Karki, 2022). King Mahendra dismissed the democratic government of B.P. Koirala and parliament elected by the parliamentary elections in 1959 and banned political parties on Jan 5, 1960 and imposed Panchayat system (Karki, 2008). The third amendment of the constitution made after the movement in 1980 also banned political parties (Karki, 2008). The people's movement of 1990 re-established democracy in Nepal and a new constitution was promulgated. This constitution gave the democratic right to the people for the first time in Nepal (Constitution of Nepal, 1990).

According to Locke, men live as equals among themselves, free to act and dispose of their possessions as they see fit (<https://www.google.com>). According to Marx, there will be class conflict until and unless there is uniformity. Many studies have been conducted by native and foreign scholars such as Samuel P. Huntington (1993), Uddahav Pyakurel and Indra Adhikari (2015), Surya Mani Adhikari (1999), Rajesh Gautam (1989), T.N. Manandhar, and Niranjana Sharma (1999) on various aspects of the democratic movement. Neither the native nor foreign authors have focused on subaltern history or ethnic participation in Nepal's democratic movement. Samuel Huntington (1993), an American political scientist, identified three major waves of democratization. The first occurred from 1826 to 1926, the second (1943-62) occurred

at the end of World War II, and the third (1974) began with the overthrow of the military regime in Portugal. Over the next 25 years, democracy expanded dramatically around the world. Uddahv Pyalurel and Indra Adhikari (2015) are successful in taking into account a wide range of issues that occurred in Nepal, particularly after the establishment of democracy in the 1950s, in their book *State of Conflict and Democratic Movement in Nepal*. The book attempted to bridge the gap between the past and the present by examining the present through the lens of historical realities. Surya Mani Adhikari (1999) attempted the entire democratic movement of 1990 in his book *History of Democratic Movement in Nepal*. He had covered all incidents, participants, and the entire scenario of the time, but had failed to address the people's contribution on the democratic movement. Rajesh Gautam (1989) attempted to address the 1950 democratic movement through the lens of Praja Parishad in his book *Role of Praja Parishad in Democratic Movement of Nepal*. His contribution to understanding the 1950 democratic movement is commendable. His writing focuses on Praja Parisad and the Nepali Congress party ignoring other stakeholders in Nepal's democratic movement. He has addressed neither other parties nor ethnic participation in his book. The book *Political History of Modern Nepal (2007-2019)*, published by CNAS in 1997, is a significant contribution to understanding Nepal's democratic movement since 1990. T.N. Manadhar and Niranjan Sharma, the authors, are both Tribhuvan University scholars. They have attempted to address the entire situation but have failed to address Nepal's subaltern history.

During the democratic movement of Nepal, various known and unknown martyrs have sacrificed their lives and attained martyrdom. Up-to 1990 because of the autocratic monarchical system there was a practice of writing history of the nobles. History of common people was not recognized by the state itself. Subaltern history wasn't familiar among the Nepali historian. To address the common people's contribution especially the ethnic people's contribution in re-establishing democracy is an honor to the common people. There are many ethnic and marginalized groups of Nepal who have participated in the democratic movement. Gurung are one among them. This article is aimed to focus on the contribution of the Gurung warriors in the democratic movement till 1990. Previous literature in the area has only mentioned the contribution of political parties in the democratic movement of Nepal but the contribution of Gurung Martyrs was not addressed by the previous studies. Although some articles, writings, books, newspapers have been published on the subject and are not complete. No one has done in-depth study and research on this area yet.

This article intends to find the answer of following questions:

- To trace the democratic movement of Nepal
- To evaluate the contribution of Gurung freedom fighters in the democratic movement of Nepal.

### **Method and Materials**

This article is a qualitative study on the contribution of the Gurung freedom fighters in the democratic movement of Nepal. It is a historical study based on descriptive and analytical method. This article focuses on primary as well as secondary sources. For the purpose of primary data in-depth interview (with open ended questionnaire) has been taken from the respondent of University Professors and experts. Six respondents were taken as sample to obtain primary data. Out of six three were female with different age group. In addition, secondary sources such as - research articles, published newspapers, unpublished documents, and un-published thesis has been used as reference materials in this research. In particular, an attempt has been made to present the contribution of Gurungs in the democratic movement of Nepal through analysis. Generalization of the finding of this study can be applicable in the greater context. Frame work for analyzing political movement is studied on the basis of Karl Marx 's Conflict Theory. Marx's class struggle theory describes- "the conflict between haves and haves not. Where haves represent the elites and

has not represent ordinary Nepali people of the society. This article is limited to the contribution of the Gurungs on the democratic movement of 1950-1990 B.S. Contribution of other democracy fighters than Gurungs has not been discussed in this article. Due to the unavailability of material and lack of evidence to confirm the incident researcher is not able to describe the entire Gurung fighters here. An attempt has been made to discuss the recorded events only. On the basis of available details and material received this article has attempted to evaluate the contribution of Gurung freedom fighters as much as possible. After receiving other materials other than this, the event; description and contribution will be discussed in a modified form.

## Data Presentation and Discussion

Democratic movement of Nepal can be divided into 4 phases.

1. Movement before 1950.
2. The movement of 1950.
3. Movement for the restoration of democracy from 1960-1990,
4. 1990 and aftermath

### **First Phase**

Before 1950. only few incidents were recorded in against Rana regime. Those movements were neither organized nor politically motivated. Few people like Sukdev Gurung, Supati Gurung, Sripati Gurung, Lakhana Thapa started armed struggle against Rana especially Jung Bahadur. But that was not focused for establishing people's right nor freedom that was just the personal ego against Jung Bahadur (Karki,2022). Those incidents were not organized and politically motivated but that have meaning in the history which can be traced as the corner stone for future political movement.

### **Organized Movement**

The democratic movement of Nepal started with the Arya Samaj founded by Madhavraj Joshi in 1893. In 1909 Kaushalka Subba Krishnalal Adhikari, Corn Cultivation (Makai Parva), establishment of Prachanda Gorkha, establishment of public library- Library Parva, Mahaveer School “, Movement of Nepal Civil Rights Committee are responsible for the organized movement which aware people for change. It geared up the movement of the Nepal Praja Parishad formed in 1936. On 1940, Shukraraj Shastri, Dashrath Chand, Dharmabhakta and Gangalal were sentenced to death, Tankaprasad, Ramhari Sharma, Chudaprasad, Ganesh Man Singh, Harikrishna was sent to jail in the charge of taking Gathgadi. Gobind Prasad Upadhyay and Bal Bahadur Pandey were sentenced to life imprisonment and

many other people were sentenced to imprisonment (Sharma, 1976). Jayatu Sanskritam movement of 1947, abdication of Satyagraha, King Tribhuvan's escaped to Delhi and after the royal declaration of 7<sup>th</sup> of Falgun in 1950 ended the 104 years of Family rule (Sharma, 1976).

### **Second Phase**

For the stability of democracy, from 1950 to 1958, the second phase of democratic movement took place. During this period Dr. K.I. Singh's Revolt, Movement of Ethnic Democratic United Front, the Raksha Dal Rebellion, Bhimdatta Pant's Rebellion, Satyagraha of Nepali Congress of (1954), the Democratic Front's Classical Disobedience Movement took place. As a result of this movement, an all-party cabinet was formed under the chairmanship of Suvarna Samsher of the Nepali Congress in 1958, and a 109-member parliament was elected for the House of Representatives on 1958. (Devkota, 1980). With the formation of the first elected cabinet under the leadership of BP Koirala 1959, the second phase of the democratic movement ended (Manandhar and Sharma, 1996).

### **Third Phase**

The incident of 1960 not only banned the achievements of 1950, it also curbed political activity and led to the end of the parliamentary system and the beginning of the Panchayat system (Manandhar and Sharma, 1996). When the Panchayat system was established in 1960, various political parties started the third phase of the democratic movement, the sequence of movement was continued until 1990. In between, the first armed struggle of the Nepali Congress of 1961 B.S., Jhapa Movement-1971, second Armed Struggle of Nepali Congress, Harre Varre struggle of 1973, student movement of 1989/90, Satyagraha of Nepali Congress of 1992. and Janawadi Morcha's bomb scandal and The People's Movement of 1990. are the major democratic incident to establish democracy (Adhikari, 1999).

### **Fourth Phase**

In fact, the democratic movement of 1990 and the narration established by it did not appreciate the sentiments of all Nepali people. A new movement started in the country from the latter half of 1994 which was listed as the fourth phase of democratic movement in history naming as Maoist rebellion or Maoist revolution. The armed struggle that lasted for 11 years ended in 2006/2007. as a democratic movement. Nepal's democratic movement is meaningful, which started as an anti-Rana movement and restoring King's power from the Ranas and continued until the restoration of democracy and the establishment of a republic through democratic system.

### **Analysis**

Since Rana period the role of ordinary citizen for the development of a nation wasn't recognized. Political oppression, socio-economic and educational discrimination favored by the ruling Rana class made the educated people angry. They became aware of their political right and started conveying the other people. Gurungs played a vital role educating local ethnic people. Most of the ethnic people were the good soldiers and a good warrior. The Gurung's who got an opportunity to participate in the World War –I and II realized the democratic values of the western world. They were keen to practice such freedom in their country-Nepal. Because of the autocratic system it was quite impossible to reform the totalitarian system without arm struggle. Thus, they engaged in the arm struggle which was organized by the Nepali Congress Party. In this context, the role of the Gurungs among other participants in the democratic movement of Nepal is remarkable. It has not been discussion about the contribution of the Gurungs, who played such an important role in the history. An attempt has been made to briefly discuss the participation of the Gurung warriors in the democratic movement (from 1950 to 1990).

While discussing the role of the Gurungs in the democratic movement of Nepal, it becomes imperative to first discuss about Sripati Gurung, Sukdev Gurung and Supati Gurung who started the rebellion against Jung Bahadur. In 1852, Shripati Gurung personally opposed Jung Bahadur (Shakya, 1999). Similarly, Shukdev Gurung and Supati Gurung rebelled against Jung Bahadur by declaring themselves Buddhist emperors of the nine kingdoms. Shukdev Gurung was sentenced to life imprisonment while Supati Gurung disappeared. He was last seen in the Gorkha Palace area and then disappeared (Manandhar, 1992) which remarked as the starting of democratic movement. Despite the fact that the movement led by these Gurungs is not organized and motivated according to democratic principles. If we contextualize the movement in that time period, we can say it was a mild stone for the movement. It may be considered normal in the twenty-first century, but in that context, it represents a significant leap. Evaluating Gurung's role in the democratic movement marks the beginning of Nepal's Subaltern history and contribution of Gurung warrior in the democratic movement of Nepal.

## **Gurung Participation**

From Varanasi intellectual awakening was formulated. A weekly newspaper named Gorkhali was published in 1915, edited by Mani Singh Gurung. According to Grishma Bahadur Devkota, this newspaper was published until number 12 (Pradhan, 1991). Under the leadership of Nepal Democratic Congress, Nirmal Lama, Dhanprasad Gurung, Hauvir Ale, Than Bahadur Gurung etc., tried a movement in Syangja and Nuwakot in the month of March 1950. In this context, some people were injured when the government opened fire on the unarmed procession (Karki,2022). At that time, Dhanprasad Gurung and Than Bahadur were arrested along with twenty of their friends (Pradhan, 1991). On the 26th and 27th of Kartik 1950, the Nepali Congress attacked Birganj and started armed struggle. The Liberation Army led by Major Purna Singh Gurung attacked Barek, captured after 15 hours of hard struggle. Buddhi Singh Gurung of Mukti Sena and eight others were seriously injured (Adhikari, 1999). In the revolution of 1950, Purna Bahadur Gurung, a warrior who fought in capturing Chainpur (12 December 1950) in the eastern region, was the leader. Chainpur was captured under the leadership of Hapu Gurung (Shakya, 2000). Mr. Hasta Bahadur Gurung participated in the Biratnagar front of 1950. movement (Shakya, 2000). Man Bahadur Gurung was a Gurung soldier who was martyred in the 1950 at Biratnagar struggle (Shakya, 2000). At midnight on 1951 Muktisena attacked Pashupatinagar led by Lakpa Chiring, KB Gurung and others. KB Gurung was made the civil administrator and Lakpa Chiring Sherpa the military commander. Muktisena maintained its control over the entire area from Maikhola to the east (Adhikari, 1999). On the 26th of Paush 1950, a huge procession of about 25,000 people took place in Pokhara, which was led by Min Bahadur Gurung (Gurung,2022). The procession occupied the court and the jail. The military commander surrendered and Min Bahadur Gurung was made the military administrator of Pokhara (Joshi, 1991). Even in Syangja, a people's government was established on the 27th of Paush under the leadership of Jaman Singh Gurung (Adhikari, 1999). Bakhan Singh Gurung established civil administration in Chitwan (Gurung,2022). In Bandipur, 6 people including Dharmadhvaj Gurung were killed by army (Mishra, 1989). On the 14th of Baisakh, 3 people, including Durga Bahadur Gurung, were killed by police firing in Hetouda (Adhikari, 1999). In the bombing of 1985, R.P.S. Dambarjung Gurung also died (Adhikari, 1999) These are the example of Gurung participation on the democratic movement.

Ethnic groups of Nepal Gurung and Magars are known as dedicated and courageous fighters in the history. Due to this character, they were enrolled in British Army during and after world wars. In course of war, they have visited many countries and experienced people's right, experienced democracy. When they return back to the country, they were frustrated from the system which was adopted in Nepal. This is the reason that makes Gurungs to participate in the movement. According to Marxists theory rebellion starts from the point of exploitation. Marx's class struggle theory describes- "the conflict between haves and haves not. In that period haves represent the elites and haves not represent ordinary Nepali people of the society. The Gurungs, who are social outcasts, took part in the democratic process to reform the system. Their contribution was commendable. Because of state policy and the history writing practices of an elite group of people, it was overlooked. To write true history, one must first understand Subaltern history. This is only the beginning of writing Subaltern history that acknowledges Gurung as an important component of the democratic movement.

## **Conclusion**

Since the democratic movement of 1950 up to 2006/2007 various known, unknown Freedom fighters have contributed for democracy. The Gurung's are the one. History of democratic movement is a vague area. It is difficult to cover the whole movement in one article. Besides, there are lot of freedom fighters from different communities and ethnic background. Because of the feudalistic governance system people's history has not been written before 1990. Attempt has been done on people's history after the popular

democratic movement of 1990 thus a new trend has been developed in the Nepali historiography. Instead of factual history people are randomly writing to fulfill the vested interest of particular community. It is very much seen in ethnic community. History should be fact base not the manipulation of the events. If we priorities such history it will undermine the contribution of freedom fighters who had sacrificed their life for nation. Considering the Gurungs, who aren't recognized by the society, participated in the democratic process of systemic change. Their contribution was admirable, but it was overlooked due to state policy and the history-writing practices of a feudalistic society. Understanding Subaltern history is the process of modern history which recognizes Gurung as a key figure in the democratic movement of Nepal.

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