



MECHANISM OF SOCIAL CONTROL OF THE GORKHAS OF ASSAM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DARRANG DISTRICT

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Abstract

Social life is one of the unique achievements of human beings, yet social norms and values vary significantly across different societies. Every society has its own set of do's and don'ts that all members are expected to follow. Society not only defines the boundaries of acceptable behavior but also prescribes penalties for those who violate these boundaries. Social control is a system developed by societies to regulate behavior, curb undesirable activities, and maintain social order. In fact, the process of social control likely predates the formation of culture itself.

Among the Gorkhas of Darrang district, the social control system is primarily based on customary laws. The study villages uphold several notable customary laws. Whenever disputes or problems arise, they are typically resolved by local institutions such as the village development samiti, club members, and senior citizens.

The purpose of this research paper is to examine the social control system practiced by the Gorkhas, focusing on how customary laws coexist with the principles of legal pluralism.

Keywords: *Social control, Gorkhas, Customary Laws, Legal Pluralism*

Introduction

Social life is one of the most remarkable achievements of humankind. However, the norms and values that guide social behavior vary significantly from one society to another. Every society establishes a set of do's and don'ts—rules that its members are expected to follow. These not only define acceptable behavior but also lay down the consequences for violating those boundaries.

To ensure order and cohesion, societies develop systems of social control. These systems aim to discourage undesirable behavior and promote adherence to accepted norms. In fact, the process of social control likely predates organized culture itself.

Among the Gorkha community in the Sipajhar area of Assam's Darrang district, social control is maintained through customary laws and traditional mechanisms. Disputes or issues that arise within the community are typically resolved by local institutions such as the Village Development Samiti, youth clubs, and respected senior citizens.

What makes this approach particularly notable in the contemporary context is its emphasis on resolving conflicts without resorting to police or judicial intervention. This grassroots system of justice not only fosters harmony but also reduces the burden on the formal legal system.

This study focuses on selected villages inhabited by the Gorkha population in Darrang district, highlighting their unique and community-based approach to social governance.



Interpreting Social Control Mechanism

The survival and smooth functioning of any society depend on the presence of social harmony, solidarity, and order. However, social harmony does not emerge spontaneously—it requires conscious effort and cooperation from individual members of the society. Social order is maintained when individuals conform to certain accepted standards of behavior or societal norms. This conformity must prevail over self-centered impulses, placing the welfare of the group or society above personal interests and pleasures.

Since an individual alone may not always act in accordance with these collective interests, society exercises control over its members. This mechanism is known as social control—referring to the ways in which society regulates individual behavior to ensure cohesion and the common good.

Social control represents a form of influence that society or a community exerts over individuals, with the aim of promoting both individual and collective welfare. These mechanisms of control are universal in nature and have existed across societies since ancient times.

Depending on the historical and cultural context, societies employ various tools and strategies to achieve social control. These can be broadly categorized into two types: formal and informal controls. Formal control includes systems such as laws, education, and physical enforcement. Informal control, on the other hand, includes elements like folkways, mores, customs, traditions, conventions, religion, morality, social sanctions, rights, rituals, and ceremonies.

To implement these controls, societies establish different agencies and institutions. Through these means—both conscious and unconscious—societies manage to guide and regulate the behavior of their members, ensuring social stability and continuity.

The Gorkhas

The Gorkhas of Darrang district are among the earliest settlers in the region, having established their presence around the year 1886. Originally migrating from eastern Nepal, they chose to settle along riverbanks, char (riverine) areas, forests, and hilly terrains—locations conducive to cattle breeding, which was their primary occupation. Their settlements are predominantly concentrated in the southwestern part of the district, particularly under the Sipajhar Revenue Circle. In addition, some Gorkha families are also found in and around Mangaldai town and the char areas of Darrang district. Notable Gorkha villages in these regions include Mowamari, Bangalpota, Bhetamara, Bhokolikanda, and Dhalpur.

This study focuses on three Gorkha-inhabited villages—Hirabari, Kiringbori, and Tekeliakur Grant—located in the greater Sipajhar area in the southwest corner of Darrang district.

Hirabari is a small village situated approximately 15.5 kilometers from Sipajhar town. It falls under the jurisdiction of the Bajnapathar Gaon Panchayat. The village is bordered by Bajana Pathar to the north, Baman Pathar and Kurua to the south, the Rangamati–Kurua embankment to the east, and Tekeliakur Grant village to the west.

Kiringbori is located around 14 kilometers from Sipajhar and comes under the Ganesh Kuwari Gaon Panchayat. It is a small village comprising about 45 Gorkha households.



Tekeliakur Grant is the largest among the three villages, consisting of approximately 150 households. It falls under the BajanaPatharGaon Panchayat and is situated about 17 kilometers west of Sipajhar. These villages not only represent the settlement patterns of the Gorkhas in Darrang district but also reflect their cultural resilience, adaptation to the environment, and socio-economic structures shaped by their historical migration.

Observations

Internalized control occurs when an individual refrains from certain behaviors by understanding and anticipating their consequences. In every society, breaking rules or laws results in some form of predictable reaction. However, there are instances where social control is exercised without direct intervention from the community. In such cases, control is so deeply ingrained within the individual that they effectively punish themselves and experience personal shame.

Among the Gorkhas in the studied villages, many examples of internalized control can be observed. Most of these are based on moral values, which children learn empirically from their parents and elders as they grow up. The Gorkhas are Hindus and regularly refer to religious texts that emphasize moral conduct. They avoid disobedience to elders, incest, theft, and encroachment on others' property, among other prohibitions.

When human behavior is regulated by external institutions or agencies, it is called externalized control. Every society establishes institutions designed to formally encourage conformity to social norms. These institutions function as sanctions. Externalized control can be classified in different ways; according to the eminent anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown, these include positive and negative sanctions, as well as primary and secondary sanctions.

In the studied villages, village headmen are elected through a community voting process. Each village has various institutions and organizations such as the Village Development Society, Village Defence Party (VDP), Youth Club, Women's Forum, and Cultural Organization. The Village Development Society and the Village Defence Party play a major role in enforcing external social control. These institutions work towards the overall development of the village and protect it from theft and external threats. The members of these bodies, including a president, secretary, treasurer, members, and advisors, are elected every two years. They take necessary steps for the welfare of the community.

For example, in Kiringbori village, about nine years ago, a Kshatriya man married a girl from another community. He was summoned for a trial, fined Rs. 501, and required to host a feast for the villagers. The trial was conducted in the presence of the government-appointed village headman and members of the Village Development Society, and the issue was resolved amicably.

In a more serious case from Tekeliakur Grant village, in 2019, Krishna Pradhan molested a seven-year-old girl. The villagers caught him, hung slippers around his neck, applied lime to his forehead, and dragged him thrice through the village. He was made to promise not to commit such a crime again. Since then, no similar incidents have occurred. This punishment served as a strong deterrent.

The Village Defence Party is an active organization formed with the assistance of the Sipajhar police station to combat frequent cases of theft involving cattle, mustard seeds, paddy, valuable necklaces, and



jewels during the night. VDP members patrol the village at night in groups of four. Other committees focus primarily on the development of arts and culture.

Based on empirical studies, it has been found that these villages have been successful in maintaining peace and harmony. They have not required the intervention of the police or modern courts in any cases over the past five years.

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