

**CONTRIBUTION OF BHASA SAMITI / AKHIL BHARATIYA NEPALI BHASA SAMITI  
(ALL INDIA NEPALI LANGUAGE COMMITTEE) IN THE NEPALI LANGUAGE  
MOVEMENT (1956-1992)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Constitution of India guarantees the right to preserve cultivate and promote the language and culture of all its subjects equally without any distinction. The Nepalis too desired to preserve their socio-cultural heritage especially their language as a mark of their Indian identity. In this context the Nepali language movement was one of the first united efforts of all the Nepali speaking community of India to assert their identity as Indian citizen which ultimately led to the rise of feeling of nationalism through linguistic path and ultimately resulted in an outburst in the form of 'Nepali Language Movement' or locally known as 'Nepali Bhasa Andolan'. It was not an easy task and was achieved after a long struggle of thirty six years (1956-1992) in which various organisations had contributed a lot for the cause of the recognition of the Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. These organizations popularized the movement in different parts of India thus helped in generating the consciousness among the Nepali speaking community about their language and their rights as an Indian citizen. In this backdrop, the formation of the 'Bhasa Samiti / Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasa Samiti (All India Nepali Language Committee)' was one of the significant chapters in the history of the success of the Nepali Language Movement.

**Key Words:** Nepali, language, national, Darjeeling, convention

**INTRODUCTION**

On 31<sup>st</sup> January 1972, in order to intensify and give a common voice to the demand of Nepali language a common platform called 'Bhasa Samiti' was formed under the chairmanship of K.B. Singh with its head office at Darjeeling. This was undoubtedly an epoch making event in the History of the Nepali Language Movement which was later came to be known as the 'Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasa Samiti'. It was during the early seventies of the twentieth century that the people fighting for the recognition of the Nepali language realised that the demand did not just belong to a particular region, individual, association, institution or organisation but it had a national character therefore there was a need for a national level organisation and as a result 'Bhasa Samiti' was renamed as the 'Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasa Samiti' (A.B.N.B.S, All India Nepali Language Committee). Soon, after its commencement many of its branches were formed all over the country which later became the driving force of the language movement. The main aim of the committee was to unify all the other organizations fighting for the cause of the Nepali language to form a national platform which will act as the driving force and a moderator for the Nepali Language Movement to ventilate its grievances in the national level. And through its mouthpiece called 'Hamro Bhasa' the Samiti was able to awaken and unify the multi-ethnic Nepali community under the umbrella of Nepali language. Not only that from time to time 'Hamro Bhasa' even used to make appeal to the masses to use Nepali language in all the officials' works and also urged the people to notify the Samiti if anyone faces any difficulties while doing so.

Soon after the formation of 'Bhasa Samiti', on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1972, the Committee convened its first meeting where the representatives of various castes and communities and social organizations were invited. On 19<sup>th</sup> February 1972, a huge Public meeting was organized where all the major political parties and organisations of Darjeeling were invited and asked to present a program on what the party had done and will be doing in near future for the cause of the Nepali

language. It was in this occasion that the entire major political parties viz Communist Party, Gorkha League, Marxist Communist Party and the Congress Party represented by Bhadrabhadur Hamal, Jagat Chettri, Sandup Lepcha and Madan Thapa respectively spoke in favour of the constitutional recognition of the Nepali language. Again on 24th February 1972, Committee's third meeting was organised and this time various literary, cultural, social and educational organizations were asked to speak in support of the Nepali language and was even requested to send official letters to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Consequently on 11<sup>th</sup> April and again on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1972, Samiti's delegation met her and even read out its memoirs, which raised questions on the relationship between national security and the recognition of the Nepali language that she pointed out earlier. But again the Prime Minister pointed out that the "question of the constitutional recognition of Nepali language should be viewed from the point of view of security. And, if Nepali language is included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, many others may also make similar demands and this may create a huge problem" (Rai, 1972). In this connection she even pointed out that Dongri and Manipuri languages may also put similar demands in the near future. Further, she even questioned that what facilities Nepali speakers have not got so far and if it is so she is even ready to provide it for them (Rai, 1972). And it was during this meeting it was decided that the problem of language can only be resolved through peaceful negotiations and in order to do so a meeting was fixed with the Prime Minister in December 1972. After that from 1972 to 1975 the members of the Samiti met the Prime Minister as many as five times. But as usual every time they only got false promises and assurances and had to return empty handed (Gurung, 1993). And within the span of twenty years Bhasa Samiti met the then Prime Ministers for about twenty-three times in order to clarify the stand for the Constitutional recognition of the Nepali Language. It would not be wrong to say that it is because of the untiring effort of the members that Bhasa Samiti was able to take an all India character in a very short span of time and as a result various branches of the Samiti was opened one after another in as many as thirteen States of the country namely, West Bengal, Assam, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu-Kashmir, Punjab and Tripura. In fact Bhasa Samiti soon became a symbol of the unity of the entire Nepali community in India and through the publication of various pamphlets, brochures, booklets and most importantly its mouthpiece called 'Hamro Bhasa' (Chhetri, 1993), Samiti had greatly strengthen the movement.

It was only after the formation of the Bhasa Samiti the voice of the people for the constitutional demand for the recognition of the Nepali language became very strong. On 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> December 1974 Samiti organised its First Convention in Udalgari Assam where thousands of delegates from all over India participated and as a result many new branches were opened in various places (Pradhan, 1993). On 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1978 its Second Convention was organised in Darjeeling where a joint committee under the leadership of Indra Bhadur Rai was formed and it was during this convention Bhasa Samiti was renamed as the 'Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasa Samiti' (All India Nepali Language Committee). Apart from Nepali, delegates from all the other languages like Konkani, Manipuri, Dogri, Maithili, Rajasthani etc who were also demanding their language to be recognised by the Indian Constitution were invited. Along with it the Samiti also stress on the recognition of the Nepali language by the Sahitya Akademi as it was believed that it was one of the requisite condition to get recognised from Akademi before it gets its place in the Eighth Schedule and this will open new avenues for the growth and development of the language. Not only that Samiti along with various other political parties, literary and social organisations under the guidance of the personalities like Parasmani Pradhan and Siddharth Shankar Ray strived for it (Chhetri, 1993). As a result on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1974, the Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi recommended the recognition of the Nepali language and finally on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1975, Nepali language was recognised by the Sahitya Akademi (Pradhan, 1993). This was undoubtedly one of the biggest achievements for the entire Nepali speaking population of India. But sadly, after few months a National Emergency was declared (1975-1977) and the movement for the language recognition came

to a halt and as a result all the branches of the Samiti became almost inactive. But soon after the emergency period got over the Samiti again started its work for the sake of the recognition of the Nepali language with a new zeal.

On 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1980 Samiti organised its Third Convention with a huge procession demanding the recognition of the language at Darjeeling. Apart from these series of conventions, on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> November 1881, the 'Delhi Jau Abhiyan' (March to Delhi Campaign) was organised by the Samiti. This was one of its kind programmes where a press conference was held and other programmes like processions, bicycle rallies, slogans, speeches and distribution of leaflets explaining the importance of Nepali language in various other languages like English, Hindi and Nepali were distributed. It was followed by the Fourth Convention which was held in Dehradun on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1982 and after the deliberate discussion a Five Member High Powered Committee was formed whose chief function was to decide the further programme of the Samiti. The convention was even graced by the first Chief Minister of Sikkim, Shri Nar Bahadur Bhandari who later played a key role in the constitutional recognition of the Nepali language. After two and a half month on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1998, a meeting of the Five Member High Power Committee was organised in Darjeeling, where it was decided that a nationwide national level programs will be launched and was informed the same to all the branches of the Samiti and the States to actively participate in the programme. As a result a relay hunger strike was observed followed by various processions (Bicycle / Torchlight parade) and numerous meetings were held all over the country. From 7<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> February a historic march from Dehradun to Delhi was organised covering 263 kilometres. Thirty-six senior nation-wide delegates representing various branches of the Samiti along with five hundred people reached Delhi on 18<sup>th</sup> and from 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> February four day continuous hunger strike was organised at the Boat Club, New Delhi along with it large procession was organised at Rajghat. On 24<sup>th</sup> February 1984, due the intensity of the ongoing hunger strike Section 144 was implemented and the Delhi police even arrested the participants. But due to the strong protest and demand of the Samiti members they were realised within 24 hours and after that a general meeting was organised in the evening of 25<sup>th</sup> February 1984. Again on 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> June 1984, Fifth Convention was organised in Jaigaon, Dooars. This time the youths of Dooars actively participated in the movement and marched from Coronation Bridge popularly known as Baghpul (Teesta) to Jaigaon (Pradhan, 1993) which was followed by various other programmes.

It was during this time around 1984-1986, due to the outbreak of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling the dire need for the new central office of the Samiti was felt and on the occasion of the fifth convention the matter was considered as urgent and discussed thoroughly. The trend was continued and as a result even the Samiti's Sixth convention was also held at Nalbari district of Assam, on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> December 1986. Just the day before the convention that is on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1986, G.N.L.F leader Subhas Ghising declared openly that "from now onwards the demand for the recognition of the Nepali language will be carry forward solely by the Bhasa Samiti" and as a result it was decided in the convention that the Samiti will morally support the Gorkhaland movement at the national level (Pradhan, 1993) and it did so to some extent but on the contrary the G.N.L.F. party did not supported the cause of the Nepali language instead demanded the recognition of the Gorkha Bhasa and this led to a huge controversy and confusion among the people and created a huge hurdle in the path of the constitutional recognition of the Nepali language movement and ultimately delayed it for some time. But it could not stop the tide of the language movement and as a result movement continued in other parts of the country like Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Sikkim. Again in April 1989, the Seventh Convention was held at Dehradun, Uttar Pradesh and it was in this convention that the central office of A.B.N.B.S was shifted from Darjeeling to Dehradun and an outline for the upcoming program was prepared. From 1989 to May 1990 Samiti vigorously worked for the revival of the deviated branches of A.B.N.B.S and it was during this period scholars and writers sought to find sufficient historical facts and evidence to resolve the language controversy and through various

means tried to explain it to the public. Another turning point in the struggle for the recognition of the Nepali language came on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1990 when 'Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasa Sammelan' (All India Nepali Language Conference) was organised under the auspices of Sikkim Sahitya Parishad (S.S.P) at Gangtok where 1001 delegates including the members of A.B.N.B.S came together and took a historical decision of forming a national level body, Bharatiya Nepali Rastriya Parishad (B.N.R.P.), headed by the Honourable Chief Minister of Sikkim, Nar Bahadur Bhandari to advance further the language demand and conduct all the further programmes by keeping mutual relations between A.B.N.B.S and B.N.R.P. was taken (Pradhan, 1993). This was certainly a historical moment as this union greatly accelerated the Nepali Language Movement and ultimately led to its recognition by the constitution of India.

## **CONCLUSION**

The formation of Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasa Samiti (A.B.N.B.S) was undoubtedly a big step forward for the cause of the Nepali Language Movement. In fact, there was a time when people used to go to the Samiti with even their personal grievances like when they were deprived of basics like monthly ration and free/bad food in the hospital which were totally out of the context of the language (Shrestha, 2017). It proves the popularity and the place of the Bhasa Samiti among the general people. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that under its leadership a second and certainly the most significant phase of the nationwide mass movement for the recognition of the Nepali language was started under the aegis of A.B.N.B.S. After its formation the Samiti truly became the voice for the millions of Nepali language lover.

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