

**THE NEPALI IDENTITY AND  
SUB-ETHNIC ASSERTION  
IN DARJEELING**

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## CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled “**The Nepali Identity and Sub-Ethnic Assertion in Darjeeling**” submitted by **Bidhan Golay** is in partial fulfillment of Master of Philosophy degree from the University. The work presented is original and has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree of this or any other University to the best of my knowledge.

I recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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*For  
Appa, Aama  
and  
Manju*

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## INTRODUCTION

The times we are living in is one of the most crucial phase in human history. The more we look at the contemporary global political situation, the more we get worried. It is in many ways confusing also. At one level, the global political and economic forces have put the traditional community organisations under acute moral, social and economic pressure, and are in most cases facing decline. At the other level, quite paradoxically, the same forces are lending support to ethnicity in increasing its strength, in terms of social organization, moral legitimization, consciousness and movement. Since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ethnicity has gained enough salience to attract the attention of the social scientists. Some see it as fragmentary, and as a serious set back to the larger human goal of freedom and justice. While others welcome it as an expression of disenchantment with modernity, and seem to celebrate the diversity.

Caught within the quagmire of the politics of integration and the politics of difference are the Nepalis of Darjeeling. The Nepalis-an assortment of diverse groups-are a distinct ethno-cultural grouping inhabiting primarily the hilly regions of the district of Darjeeling in West Bengal. Down the ages the Nepali community has seen many political and social movements helping it grow and mature. The evolution of Nepali identity is unique in many ways. A common Nepali identity was constructed subsuming all the distinct sub -ethnic groups. But this common identity was not constructed at the cost of the specific identities of the sub- groups. It has in fact waddled through, striking a fine-balance between external unity and internal differentiation. It is, to use the cliched term, a unity in diversity.

However this historically constructed Nepali identity, many feel, is under severe strain in recent years. The challenge is coming mainly from the sub-groups, which are reasserting their allegedly long effaced historical identities. More and more Nepalis are now shunning the generic Nepali identity and propping up their sub -ethnic/ tribal identity. We have described this phenomenon as *sub ethnic*

*revivalism.* The fact that an otherwise somnolescent society is engaging in animated debates concerning the future of the Nepali identity gives us an idea of the magnitude of the revivalism.

It is within this context that this study makes a modest attempt to study the phenomenon of sub-ethnic revivalism in Darjeeling. In spite of being fully aware that justice cannot be done to an issue so complex as this, it will try to trace the history of the politics, society and culture of the Nepalis in whatever limited capacity. It will nevertheless look into the historical process of the formation of Nepali ethnicity encompassing the various sub-ethnic groups with specific references to political, social and cultural movements. This approach makes a break from the conventional approach which identifies the spread of Nepali language as the fundamental basis of Nepali ethnicity and identity. It will also try to explore the causes behind the evolution of a distinct Nepali society and culture as compared to that of Nepal. Moreover, it will not confine itself to the study of the evolution of Nepali nationalism. It will go beyond this to grapple with the phenomenon of sub-ethnic revivalism, which many fear, will lead to the fragmentation of the Nepali identity.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

Ambitious as this study is, in both its approach and objectives, it was bound to face problems at the level of methodology. The problem got further compounded as it aimed at being more analytical than descriptive. The study relies on both primary and secondary sources. For this purposes a fieldwork was conducted in the said area. The secondary sources were accessed in the local libraries, whereas primary sources were in the nature of extensive interviews with local intellectuals. The study deliberately refrains from studying the sub-ethnic organizations as these groups have more or less the same characteristics. Moreover, it would have been impossible to do justice to these groups in studies at this level. It can be taken up at a later date. Some of the postulates put forward in this work are conjectural,



assuming that being cultural located to the area of study helps in getting as close to the truth as possible. The study represents an attempt to passionately recreate the evolution of the Nepali identity without losing the critical bearings of a researcher. Whatever views and ideas put forward are without any fear or favour.

#### **CHAPTERISATION:**

In chapter 1. "Ethnicity: Contending Perspectives: A Theoretical Overview", an attempt has been made to bring forth the three broad approaches in the study of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts. The three strands, viz, the primordialist, the instrumentalist, and the constructivist position has been explained. Some of the writings of scholars representing the three approaches has been discussed in some detail. The chapter also makes it very clear that the study will take the constructivist theories as the analytical model for studying the sub-ethnic revivalism in Darjeeling.

The second chapter titled "Darjeeling: A Historical Overview" tries to retrace the political and socio-cultural history of the place. While doing so it makes an attempt to deconstruct some of the colonial distortions which were uncritically accepted by the so-called mainstream academia. The central theme in the chapter is the migration of Nepalis from Nepal. While admitting that a sizeable section of the Nepalis migrated from Nepal, it nevertheless tries to show that the migration of Nepalis started much earlier i.e. late eighteenth century. This involved an indepth analysis of the socio-economic and political condition of Nepal (push factors), as also the British colonial expansion in Darjeeling, establishment of tea gardens, modernization of Darjeeling, recruitment in the army, etc. (pull factors). Statistical figures culled from various gazettes have been illustrated to show the impact of these factors in the flow of population into Darjeeling.

Keeping the constructivist framework in mind the third chapter titled, " The Formation of the Nepali Ethnicity: Emergence of a New Identity", tries to map the socio-cultural and political trajectories of the evolution of the Nepali ethnicity. Some effort has been made to recapture the psyche of the migrating masses within

the given historical context. This is done by trying to understand their worldview. It has tried to identify the institutions and organizations that have contributed in strengthening the process of ethnicity building. Institutions like marriage, miteri, social organization like Nepali Sahitya Sammelan, Gorkha Dukh Niwarak Sammelan, Srithitkari Sammelan, Himalaya Kala Mandir and many others which have not found mention have been put in a perspective. Towards the end of the chapter it looks at the broad political movements contributing to the assertion of Nepali identity in Darjeeling.

The fourth chapter titled " Nepali Identity and Sub- Ethnic Revivalism: Challenges and Implications", form the main chapter dealing with the issue of revivalism in Darjeeling. The first three chapters are in a single continuum. The basic theme of Nepali identity is the underlying concern of these chapters. But the fourth chapter represents a dilemma in this continuum. An ambitious effort is made to contextualise the current sub-ethnic revivalism. Some causes have been identified behind this upsurge. A closer analysis of the nature of the phenomenon has been put forward. But even here the importance of Nepali identity has been underscored. Since the basic objective was not just to study the phenomenon in isolation but to juxtapose it with the larger Nepali identity, the subject is approached with a deeper understanding of the Nepali culture: its basic structure, foundations and symbols. And while trying to locate the structures and foundations there has been an attempt to bring out the similarities and differences with that of Nepal. Finally, the chapter offers a critical appraisal of the debate about the issue of assertion of sub-identities. It will try to see to what extent these assertions are an effort towards democratisation of the social space. Does the emerging sub-identity jeopardise the larger Nepali identity or does it enrich it? An attempt will be made to provide answers to some of these pressing questions.

## Chapter I

# ETHNICITY: CONTENDING PERSPECTIVES: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

### INTRODUCTION:

If the first half of the twentieth century was characterised by conflicts among nation-states, then the second half has been characterised more and more by conflicts among ethnic groups. This alarming trend has become self evident throughout the world and particularly in Eastern Europe, parts of Africa and Asia. On the face of it the world appeared to be a well-integrated entity with its constituent units more and more interdependent than at any previous period of history. There was no imminent threat to its unity. But this trend has been reversed everywhere. National loyalties and ethnic ties have become stronger and deep-rooted than ever. This general ethnic resurgence has to a considerable extent negated the underlying assumptions of the modernist-Marxists and Liberals- that as history marches forward the forces of modernity will transcend all forms of primordial and traditional allegiances leading ultimately to internationalisation of culture and identity. Today, the hitherto dominant cosmopolitan ideals are being challenged by various ethnic groups forcing them to work with nation-states and it's increasingly ethnic culture<sup>1</sup>.

This ethnic resurgence is however not limited at the level of nation- states only. It goes beyond that. The hitherto dormant ethnic groups, which had agreed to remain within a consensual framework of modernising state based on the ideology of development, have started reasserting themselves<sup>2</sup>. It is with this understanding of society and politics, particularly in the third world that this study aims to understand

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony D. Smith: "The Ethnic Revival In the Modern World", Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> For details see, Andreas Wimmer, "Who Owns the State? Understanding ethnic conflict in post colonial societies", in Nation and Nationalism, Vol.3, Part 4, December 1997, pp. 631-657.

the phenomenon of sub-ethnic revivalism and its underlying causes in Darjeeling. Ethnic resurgence can be of different types. Scholars have given different labels ranging from tribalism to postmodernism. In fact much of the scholarship in the West on ethnic conflicts are biased. Any kind of ethnic conflict in the Western world is seen as a legitimate demand of the ethnic group or groups based on the idea of right of self-determination. But ethnic conflicts in Africa and Asia are seen as quintessentially a tribal war of the pre-modern type. This biasness among the scholars and the inherent complexity in the nature of ethnic resurgence has resulted in the growth of a rich body of literature on ethnicity and ethnic conflicts. Thus it is necessary to qualify concepts like ethnicity and ethnic conflict.

Ethnic conflict does not necessarily mean violence and bloody wars. Since conflict is a constitutive aspect of all societies, including democratic, ethnic conflicts can also be of a non-violent nature<sup>3</sup>. Given the nature of the society and politics of the area under study it becomes necessary to focus more on the theories of ethnicity and the accompanying approaches rather than on the theories of violent conflict. As the current phase of ethnic resurgence in Darjeeling is of non-violent nature, a clearer understanding of the bases and motives of such resurgence becomes imperative. In the following pages there will be a survey of the various approaches and the corresponding theories to the study of ethnicity. But a discussion of the various theories does not necessarily imply a ready acceptance of the theoretical framework for explaining the conditions obtaining in the said area. Before we go into the discussion of various theoretical positions a clarification of concepts is of utmost importance.

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Gujko Vockovic, "Ethnic Cleavages and Disintegration: The Sources of National Cohesion and Disintegration. The case of Yugoslavia", Centre for Multi-ethnic and Transnational Studies, University of Southern California, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Los Angeles, 1997, p.28.

## **ETHNICITY DEFINED:**

The concept of ethnicity, like many other concepts in social science is loaded with meanings. There is no single, universally accepted definition of the concept of ethnicity. The word ethnicity is derived from the Greek word “ethnos”, which in turn is derived from the word “ethnikos” meaning heathen or pagan. Its first usage is attributed to an American sociologist David Reisman in 1953<sup>4</sup>. Scholars have defined ethnicity in various ways. Anthony D. Smith defines ethnic group as a named human population, with a myth of a common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural elements; a link with a historic territory or homeland; and a measure of solidarity<sup>5</sup>. Paul R. Brass defines ethnic group as any group of people dissimilar from other people in terms of objective cultural criteria, and containing within its membership either in principle or in practice, the elements for a complete division of labour for reproduction forms an ethnic group<sup>6</sup>. But for the purpose of this study the most acceptable definition is given in the Encyclopaedia of Nationalism. It defines ethnic group as a collectivity within a larger society which has a real or imagined common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, a cultural focus upon one or more of the following: area of origin, language, religion, nationality, kinship patterns, physical appearances such as skin colour<sup>7</sup>. From the above definition of an ethnic group, ethnicity can be defined as an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction. It is also defined as phenomenon of an ethnic group coming to self-awareness that enables it to affirm its identity and pursue its interests. Thus, ethnicity is the summation of its impulses

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “Ethnicity, race and nation” ,in Montserrat Guibernau et.al. (ed) “The Ethnicity Reader : Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration”, Polity press, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony D. Smith, “ The Ethnic Origins of Nations”,Oxford Basil Blackwell, 1986, p.24.

<sup>6</sup> Paul R. Brass, “Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison” Sage Publication, New Delhi, 1991, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Athena S. Leoussi, “Encyclopaedia of Nationalism”, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 2001, p. 69-70.

and motivation for power and recognition... the driving force in the emergence of ethnic movements.<sup>8</sup>

### **ETHNICITY AND RACISM:**

Ethnicity is often used interchangeably with race in popular political and academic discourses. The two concepts need to be distinguished. A racial group consists of a people who are believed to share a similar biological descent, usually identified in terms of skin colour or body form. Even though it lacks a scientific validity as a category, the belief that such differences exist forms the basis for social action. Racism, in other words, is an ideology. Ethnic groups on the other hand are distinguished by a variety of characteristics, singly or in combination, such as language, religion, geographical origin, kinship, etc, which are cultural in character. In relations between groups identified as “races”, there is more likely to be dominant-subordinate relationship in which members of the other race are subordinated and stigmatised. Relation between people identified as members of an “ethnic group” tend to be competitive in character<sup>9</sup>.

### **APPROACHES AND THEORIES OF ETHNICITY:**

There are basically three theoretical approaches to the understanding of ethnicity. The three approaches are: primordial approach, instrumentalist approach, and constructivist approach. Each of these approaches and their corresponding theories are discussed below in detail.

### **PRIMORDIALIST APPROACH:**

The basic postulate of the primordialist approach is that there is an objective basis in the membership of the ethnic group through common descent, which the

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<sup>8</sup> Urmila Phadnis, "Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia", Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p.16.

<sup>9</sup> T. K. Oommen: "Citizenship, Nationality and Ethnicity" Polity Press, U.K. 1997, p. 58.

members share. Consanguinity within the members of a group which is more or less endogamous historical-cultural community is the basis of ethnicity. They further argue that primary blood ties lead to overriding emotional attachment and allegiances. Ethnicity is ascribed; it is, given, and as such transcends individual orientation and personal circumstances. It is a property of the group and everyone is born into a group. These blood ties thus, explain the strength of the ethnic attachment in the modern world and emotions tied to them<sup>10</sup>. Some these postulates can be traced in the writings of Edward Shils, Steven Krosby, and Clifford Geertz.

Edward Shils defines a nation as a reality, a collectivity, the referents of which are birth in a specifically bounded territory, residence in that bounded territory or descent from persons resident in that territory<sup>11</sup>. He lays great importance on the idea of “bounded territory”. Since for him it is impossible for men to live without the primordial, nations based on biological primordiality existed even before the onset of modernity in Europe. But once societies grew in size and territorial extent, they turned more to territory as the basis for unity in place of biological primordial criteria. The idea of territoriality gains importance because when nationality is inherited what is transmitted is territoriality, and not blood nor and physical qualities. This non-biological quality transmitted by descent transform into a presumed biological quality so that a nationality becomes an ethnic group in the sense that the members of a nationality comes to believe that, in addition to inherited residence, they share common blood or other physical or physiological features. Shils lays importance on tradition also. Nation, for him, is a collectivity in which the past and the present exist simultaneously. Nation exist because of the sensitivity of the human beings to the primordial facts of descent and territorial location<sup>12</sup>. What is more, nations themselves are not likely to disappear even if

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<sup>10</sup> Athena S. Leoussi, *op.cit.* p. 71.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Shils, “Nation, nationality, nationalism and civil society”, in “Nation and Nationalism” Vol. 1, Part 1, March, 1995, p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.100.

nation-states were to disappear. This is so because human beings cannot divest themselves of their primordiality. The need of the human mind to expand beyond the boundaries of the individual self, the need of communication not only with the deities but with other human beings and the impossibility of completely sloughing off their primordial dispositions are jointly features of the persistent formation of the communion of human being with each other<sup>13</sup>.

Similar ideas can be traced in the writings of Clifford Geertz. He traces the reasons for the resurgence of nationalism and ethnicity in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and most often multi-racial states, which are moving in the path of modernisation. He says the people of the new states are animated by two powerful, thoroughly interdependent, yet distinct and often actually opposite motives- the desire to be recognized as responsible agents, whose opinions matter, and the desire to build an efficient, dynamic and modern state<sup>14</sup>. The first motive is actually the search for identity. The second motive is a demand for progress, for a rising standard of living, more effective political order and greater social justice. Geertz explains how these two interrelated; yet contradictory impulses operate in a new state. In the new states, Geertz says, the project of social reform and material progress which formed the basis of anti-colonial nationalism, presupposes the establishment of an over-arching and somewhat alien civil order through the absorption of diverse ethnic groups into a culturally undifferentiated mass. But this precondition for the establishment of a modern state also means subordination of familiar identifications like blood, race, language, locality, religion and traditions. Geertz further points out that the fundamental problem of the new states is that they are abnormally susceptible to serious disaffections based on primordial attachments. By primordial he means a set of "givens", that which stems from being born into a particular

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p..110

<sup>14</sup> Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in New States", in John Hutchison et. al. (ed.) *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, Vol. 1, Routledge, London, 2000, p.119.



religious community, speaking a particular language, and following a particular social practice. These congruities of blood, speech and custom and so on are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering coerciveness creating ties among certain groups<sup>15</sup>. But in contrast to this, national unity in modern states are maintained not by calls to blood and land, but by a “vague” intermittent and routine allegiance to civil state, supplemented by a greater or less police force and ideological exhortations. But since in modernising societies, where the tradition of civil politics is weak, and where the technical requirements are poorly understood, primordial attachments tend to be repeatedly, and in some cases continually proposed as the preferred basis for the demarcation of the autonomous political units. This ultimately leads to the tension between primordial sentiment and civil politics. This tension, according to Geertz, can only be moderated but not entirely dissolved<sup>16</sup>.

#### **MODERNIST OR INSTRUMENTALIST:**

Instrumentalism is a doctrine that ideas can primarily be explained by their uses for their beneficiaries rather than by their accurate representation of truth or reality. Instrumentalism, thus understood, stands opposed to primordialism. The modernist or the instrumentalist portrays ethnicity as part of the modernisation process. Claims to ethnicity in their view are products of political myths, created and manipulated by cultural elites in pursuit of advantages and power. They treat ethnicity as a remnant of the pre-industrial order gradually declining in significance as the modern state and national integration advance, and the assimilation of ethnic minorities occurs. Modernity will, according to the modernist, erode ethnicity as a principle<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 120-122.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> Athena S. Leoussi. op. cit. pp. 70-71.

The writings of scholars like Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Tom Nairn, Karl Deutsch, Paul R. Brass, etc, have been influenced by these ideas.

Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent. Nationalism is a sentiment as well as a movement. Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment<sup>18</sup>. Gellner's definition of nationalism is parasitic on two things: "state and nation". The state, according to Gellner, is a modern institution, one, which constitutes a highly distinctive and elaborate social division of labour. It comes at a particular stage of history. As far as nation is concerned, he says it is not an inherent attribute of humanity. It has come to appear as such in the post agrarian industrial society. He thus sees "nationalism as a product of industrial society". It is a principle of organisation of human groups into large, centrally educated, culturally homogenous units. Nationalism does not have roots in human nature but in certain kind of now pervasive social order. It is the external manifestation of a deep adjustment in the relationship between the polity and the culture<sup>19</sup>.

Eric Hobsbawm, a well- known Marxist historian also holds a position similar to that of Gellner. To Hobsbawm the fundamental characteristic of the modern nation and everything connected to it is its modernity<sup>20</sup>. He insists that nationalism comes before nations, that is, nationalism makes nation. The two propositions that stem from the above statement are that for Hobsbawm, "nation is a product of industrial revolution". Secondly nations are "artificial constructs" or

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<sup>18</sup> Ernest Gellner, "Nation and Nationalism" , Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983,p.1

<sup>19</sup> Ernest Gellner, 'Nationalism as a product of industrial society', in Montserrat Guibernau et.al. (ed.) "The Ethnicity Reader", Polity Press, 2001,p.66.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Nation and Nationalism Since 1780" , Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.14

inventions deliberately engineered in a historically unique way by the ruling classes to serve their needs to compete for the loyalty of the lower classes<sup>21</sup>.

Another important scholar who belongs to the modernisation school is Karl Deutsch. In his seminal work, "Nationalism and Social Communication: An inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality", he tries to show how nationalism as a feature of pre-commercial, pre-industrial peasant people will erode as modernisation in the form of urbanisation, industrialisation, schooling, communication and transportation increases. He says that specific ethnic identities will wither away as a result of "social mobilisation" leading to "national assimilation". Furthermore, after studying the factors that determine social mobilisation and the rate of mobilisation he concludes that national assimilation is amenable to social engineering. To quote him: "too often men have viewed language and nationality superficially as an accident, or accepted them submissively as fate. Infact, they are neither accident nor fate, but the outcome of discernable process, and as soon as we begin to make the process visible, we are beginning to change it"<sup>22</sup>.

The modernist thesis that ethnicity as a remnant of pre-industrial order will decline with the increase in social mobilisation and communication has not gone unchallenged. Scholars like Walker O' Connor and Anthony D. Smith have in their works shown how modernity itself products conditions creating urge in the people to search their traditional roots. The sense of the loss of identity in the impersonal modern world drives people to reassert their traditional identities in varying degrees.

Walker Connor in his article "Nation-building or nation-destroying", rejects Deutsch's doctrine that the process of modernisation will lead to lessening of ethnic unconsciousness in favour of identification with the state. Contrary to this postulate

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<sup>21</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm and T. Rangers (ed.) "The Invention of Tradition", Cambridge University Press, 1984.

<sup>22</sup> Karl W. Deutsch, "Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality", MIT, 1966, p.164.

he shows through his global survey that there were number of states, which were troubled with disharmony. More importantly, this trend was not limited to developing countries of Western Europe, which were technologically and economically advanced<sup>23</sup>. Infact, he posits an inverse correlation between modernisation and the level of ethnic dissonance within multi-ethnic states. He says that an increase in communication and mobilisation tends to increase cultural awareness among the minorities by making their members more aware of the distinctions between themselves and others. The individual not only becomes aware of alien ethnic groups; he also becomes more aware of those who share his identity<sup>24</sup>.

Anthony D. Smith tries to trace the causes of ethnic resurgence in the processes of modernisaton brought about in the pre-independence colonies of the West. He says the evolution of “scientific state” based on the tenets of techno-scientific revolutions and efficiency not only brought about far reaching changes in the West but also in the colonies of Asia and Africa. The scientific state that emerged in the colonies was both impersonal and effective compared to the traditional state. The chief elements of the scientific state were: assimilation of the diverse population; discrimination against some of the sub-groups; a levelling intervention and centralisation; and finally, most important, the attempt to apply the latest scientific methods and techniques to the problems of government<sup>25</sup>. This policy resulted in the destruction of the diverse languages and more importantly the “religious weltanschauung” of the people. The ideals of scientific world were no doubt accepted by the colonial elites. They came to feel the impact of the scientific state in its material and psychological sphere. Inspite of the attendant “cultural alienation” from the traditional society they lived within it. The traditional society

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<sup>23</sup> Walker O' Connor, “Nation-building or Nation-destroying”, in *World Politics*, Vol. XXIV, Princeton University Press, 1972, p. 327.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 329.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony D. Smith, “Theories of Nationalism”, Camelot Press Ltd., 1971, p. 234.

was their first inspiration. Their first exposure was to their ancient tradition; they were impressed with the sentiments of loyalty to the values of their groups. This dilemma among the colonial elites led to the problem of “dual legitimization”. Infact, the tradition bounded elites tried to embrace the western techno-scientific temper but it was the rejection of the colonial people by the colonial masters that lead to resurgence of ethnicity.

### **CONSTRUCTIVIST:**

The constructivist approach stand opposed to both the primordialist and the instrumentalist in many ways. The constructivist criticize both the approaches for their over emphasis on the properties of groups, nation and society. Instead, the constructivist or situationalist puts emphasis upon the ways in which people socially construct their ethnicity in a situational way. For the constructivist what really matters is that people define themselves as culturally distinct from others. Shared descent is secondary and may be manufactured or invented. Fictive kinship, invented blood ties may serve their purpose as well as real ties<sup>26</sup>. The inter-ethnic relation within the Nepali community comes somewhat close to this formulation. Some of the constructivist theories will be discussed in the following pages. Scholars like Federik Barth, Donald Horowitz and Dipankar Gupta loosely fits into this category.

Frederik Barth has tried to add a new dimension in the field ethnic studies. He has tried to focus more on the nature of ethnic boundaries and boundary maintenance rather than on their internal constitution and history. Barth defines ethnic groups as categories of ascription and identification by actors themselves. The ascription becomes an ethnic ascription when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity presumptively determined by his origin and background.

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<sup>26</sup> Athena S. Leoussi, *op.cit.* p. 72.

He criticizes the conventional definition of ethnic group which relies on the distinctiveness of cultural boundaries there by forcing us to assume that boundary maintenance is unproblematic<sup>27</sup>. He also criticizes the idea that categorical ethnic distinctions depend on the absence of spatial mobility. On the contrary, he says that cultural boundaries persist but it does despite the flow of personnel across them. This exclusion and inclusion in cultural groups is regulated through, what he calls “social processes”. He also rejects the idea that common culture be taken as a primary and definitional characteristic of ethnic group organization. Instead, he says culture is nothing but an “implication” or “result” of inter-ethnic relations. This is so because, for Barth, cultural features that signal the boundary keep changing. This becomes possible because the membership is based on only socially relevant criteria<sup>28</sup>. Thus, for any process of inclusion or exclusion the features that are taken into account are not the sum of “objective differences” but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant. Infact some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied. Thus the critical focus of investigation becomes the ethnic boundary that defines group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.

Barth also looks at the social evolution of multi ethnic societies. He says that constant interaction among different ethnic groups result not only in the formulation of common codes and values, but also a structuring of interaction which allows the persistence of cultural differences. He further adds that in all organized social life what can be made relevant to interaction in any particular situation is prescribed. This structuring of interaction involves a set of prescriptions governing situations of contact, and allowing for articulation in some sectors or domains of activity, and a

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<sup>27</sup> Frederik Barth, (ed.) “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Culture Difference”, George Allen and Unwin, 1969, p.11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp. 14-15.

set of proscriptions in social situations preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors, and thus insulating parts of the culture from confrontation and modification<sup>29</sup>. This is exactly what the various sub-ethnic groups in Darjeeling seem to have undergone in the early part of the social evolution. Another important aspect of inter ethnic relations is the acceptance of the principle that standards applied to one such category can be different from that applied to another.

The constructivist notion of porousness of cultural boundaries and changing patterns has received further sophistication in the hands of Donald L. Horowitz. He also questions some of the premises of both the primordialist and the instrumentalist. He rejects the primordialist notion of “givenness” as flawed because ethnic groups change their boundaries. Some ethnic groups die while others are born. He also attacks the instrumentalist thesis that ethnic loyalties and symbols are mere instruments used for forwarding the interests of the cultural elites of a particular ethnic group. He says that at times ethnic affiliations seem to possess competitive advantages over other forms of affiliation. So passion and interest cannot be the only wellspring of human behaviour.<sup>30</sup> As an alternative he defines ethnicity as something based on myth of collective ancestry which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Some notion of ascription, however diluted and affinity deriving from it are inseparable from the concept of ethnicity. However, these boundaries of blood and birth are not absolute<sup>31</sup>. Membership in an ethnic group is both a matter of birth and choice.

He also introduces the concept of “ranked group” and “unranked groups” in the discourse of ethnicity. Ranked ethnic group are those where there is a

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, “The Deadly Ethnic Riot”, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p.44.

<sup>31</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, “Ethnic Groups in Conflict”, University of California Press, 1985, p. 52.

coincidence of ethnicity and class. Where the groups are cross class then it becomes unranked groups<sup>32</sup>. The ethnic groups in Darjeeling belong to the latter category.

He emphasizes on the contextual character of ethnic group and group identity. This change in character of ethnic groups can be either towards assimilation or toward differentiation. Assimilation involves the simplification of identities in a more heterogeneous environment. Differentiation, on the other hand entails drawing fine distinctions among people in a less heterogeneous environment. With changes in context, groups can adjust their identity downward as well as upward. This becomes possible if lower (sub-ethnic) levels of identity provide a pre-existing basis of cohesion to which group can repair when the context seems to shrink<sup>33</sup>. He, thus, shows that culture is important only to the extent of providing some ineluctable prerequisite for an identity to come into being.

He says assimilation and differentiation among different ethnic groups are carried through a mechanism of social perception. What happens is that while forming boundaries the members use their perceptual apparatus to exaggerate the similarities among themselves and “their” differences with the “other”<sup>34</sup>. And this process of combination is facilitated by cultural mechanisms like intermarriage like, passing- “forgetting” origins and the like- as well as the merger. And logically absence of all these marks the process of fragmentation. He also talks about the role of cultural movements in shaping and reshaping ethnic boundaries.

Dipankar Gupta in his “Context of Ethnicity”, takes a similar position. He says studies in ethnic, communal or sectarian mobilizations should pay serious attention to the concept of identity. He points out to the growing consensus about identity being not permanently inscribed in our psyche, but one, which undergo

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 21-22.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid,p.68.

<sup>34</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *op.cit.* p.46.



context related changes<sup>35</sup>. This is the fundamental position from which he tries to understand the Sikh separatist movement in Punjab. In studying the case he rejects both the primordial and instrumental theories of ethnic conflict. He criticizes the primordial approach for its tendency to seek the cause of conflict in cultural and historical constitution of the most egregious party in the dispute. Moreover, it explain problems by tracing it to an irreducible cultural factor, and to peculiarities inherent in certain communities. He says such an approach has to be rejected because it fails to explain the variation in primordial tensions<sup>36</sup>.

On the other hand though he concedes the superiority of the instrumentalist approach over the primordial, he feels it over emphasizes the machinations of political leaders, giving the impression that the mass of followers are always gullible. He calls it an updated elitist theory, where elites are always in control.<sup>37</sup>

In place of the above two approaches he proposes what he calls the 'triadic approach'. This approach places importance on the "context of ethnicity". He says that while studying the limits and potentialities of ethnic and communal movements one must necessarily go beyond the level of warring dyads, and factor in the tiradic element, i.e. the context.<sup>38</sup>

So in the case of Sikh separatist movement he sees the government as the triadic factor. The movement for Khalistan was initially just an anti-Hindu movement. But since some of the actions of the government were seen as pro-Hindu by the Sikhs it transformed into a separatist movement. He further makes an interesting observation regarding the role of enemy in any given ethnic conflict. He says that for an ethnic situation to develop there should a clear enemy. Many

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<sup>35</sup> Dipankar Gupta, "The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective", Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996,p.1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid,p.11.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid p.137.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.12.

movements have not taken off because no good enemy could be found<sup>39</sup>. So in Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena's local's vs outsiders movement, which was primarily directed against the South Indians and Muslims dropped the South Indians because it failed to be a good enemy.

So what follows is that cultural logic does not follow the same pattern everywhere. They are not only conditioned by the contingent sociological correlates but are also inherently malleable and forever adjusting to a dynamic and shifting world. Some of the postulates discussed in this section will be used to understand the recent phenomenon of sub-ethnic revivalism in Darjeeling.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

## Chapter II

### DARJEELING: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW.

#### INTRODUCTION:

Darjeeling, better known as the “Queen of Hills”, is predominantly a hill district situated at the northern most tip of West Bengal. It was one of the leading hill stations during the colonial days, and the legacy has still lived on. The majestic Kanchanjunga overlooking the hills coupled with its famous tea gardens is a every visitors delight. It occupies, strategically speaking, a very important position. It shares its borders with Nepal in the west and Bhutan in the east. In the north of its borders is Sikkim, which until its incorporation into the Indian Union in 1975 was a sovereign monarchy. The word Darjeeling is derived from the words *Dorje* and *Ling*. History has it that there use to be a monastery on the Observatory Hill under the charge of a certain Lama named Dorje. The Lama, responsible to the Durbar of Sikkim had the specific duty of collecting taxes from a ‘population of hundred souls’ living in and around the monastery. Thus, *Dorje-Ling* at that time meant village governed by Dorje. The same name was extended to the whole district when the British annexed it in 1850.<sup>1</sup> Darjeeling as it stands today is spread over an area of 3149 sq kilometers with a population of 16,05,900 in 2001<sup>2</sup>.

In terms of ethnic composition it is a veritable ethnic mosaic. The Nepalis form the predominant group followed by the Bhutias and the Lepchas. It also has a small group of Bengalis, Biharis and Marwaris. The Bengalis are primarily engaged in white-collar profession, while the Marwaris or *kāiya* (local appellation) and

<sup>1</sup> E.C. Dozey, “A Concise History of the Darjeeling District Since 1835”, Printed and Published at The Art Press, 1, Wellington Square, Calcutta, 1916, pp.37-38.

<sup>2</sup> District Statistical Handbook, Govt. of West Bengal, Published by the Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics.

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Biharis or *Madhise* (local appellation) are engaged mainly in trade and commerce. Given this diversity, and more importantly the title of the work, it is necessary to delineate the meanings of the words “ethnic” and “sub-ethnic” as it is to be used here. Most of the scholarship dealing with ethnic studies on Darjeeling has sought to draw broad lines between three major ethnic groups, viz., Nepali, Bhutia, and Lepcha. But in the case of this study, new ethnic boundaries are being drawn without actually rejecting the conventional ones. Thus the word ethnic here would mean “Nepali”--- this excludes the Bhutias and Lepchas. The word sub-ethnic on the other hand will mean the constituent castes within the Nepali group. But the word Nepali as it will be used here should be understood more in the cultural sense<sup>3</sup> rather than in the racial sense. This has been done so because the Nepali culture with its inherent flexibility has formed the overall foundation over which has grown the specific religio-cultural identities of the Bhutias and Lepchas. In other words the idea of Nepali has been built around symbols and imageries that belong to the Nepalis.

However, it is not as if the Bhutias and the Lepchas are insignificant in the society and politics of Darjeeling. Infact broad political alliance between the three groups, viz, Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas was forged in the shape of Hill Men’s Association as early as (c.1921). But what has followed after that is the aggressive politicization of the Nepalis, particularly in the tea gardens, resulting in the marginalisation of the other two groups from the political space of Darjeeling.<sup>4</sup> The other reason for marginalisation atleast in the case of the Bhutias is because of the blurring of the boundaries between the indigenous Bhutias and the refugee Tibetians there by creating confusion over the political status of the indigenous Bhutias.

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<sup>3</sup> Kumar Pradhan, “Pahilo Pahar”, Shyam Prakashan, Darjeeling, 1982, p.4

<sup>4</sup> The findings of Chie Nakane and Tanka Bahadur Subba regarding the factors contributing to the Nepalese domination over Lepchas and Bhutias will be dealt in the third chapter.

## **EARLY HISTORY:**

Much of the early history of the place and its people are shrouded in mystery because of the lack of any authoritative account. What we read as history of Darjeeling has been written mainly by British botanists and naturalist thereby creating enough confusion. There are very few works which deal directly with the political status of Darjeeling prior to the Treaty of Sugauli. (1815). Worse still, there are no authoritative accounts of the history of settlement. One of the possible reasons is because Darjeeling did not have an independent political existence. Since it was a part of Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim at various point of history, its history can be traced only by looking into the history of these three kingdoms. Thus, labels like “no mans land” were coined during the Gorkhaland movement in the mid 80s. This uncertainty has led to the creation of a hyphenated identity in the shape of Indian-Nepalis living in Darjeeling.

## **ANGLO-GURKHA WAR (1814-1816):**

Darjeeling’s political status prior to the Treaty of Sugauli was characterized by uncertainty. All the territories of present Darjeeling prior to the war against Nepal in 1788 belonged to Sikkim. This war was not an isolated incident in itself. It was closely connected with Nepal’s policy towards Tibet. Monopolization of trade routes to Tibet had always been the state policy of Nepal. Infact the treaty following the war between Nepal and Tibet in 1775 had stipulated that Tibet would trade only through routes in Nepal. But in 1784 Tibet opened a trade route through the Chumbi Valley leading to Sikkim. Thus, the logical conclusion of Nepal’s Tibet policy was to stop this circumvention by conquering Sikkim itself. The war in 1788 saw the Gorkhali soldiers come in as far as Rabdentse, the then capital of Sikkim. A column of the Gorkhalis had penetrated as far as Chontong. They were also stationed at

Darjeeling and Nagari.<sup>5</sup> The frontiers of Nepal by the turn of the century extended thirteen hundred miles from river Sutlej in the west and upto river Tista in the east.

But before long Nepal had to fight another war against the British in 1814. The war following a boundary dispute along the thirteen hundred miles stretch in the south of Nepal ended with the capitulation of Nepal. Since Sikkim had helped the British in its war efforts it demanded the restoration of the pre-1788 boundary with Nepal. The Treaty of Sugauli (signed on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1815 and ratified on 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1816) between Nepal and British East India Company led to the permanent demarcation of the frontiers of Nepal.<sup>6</sup> Nepal had to forgo all the territories lying west of river Mahakali and all the territories lying east of river Mechi. Even though Nepal's territory was reduced, the British did not return those territories which Sikkim legitimately claimed as its own. The territory lying between Mechi and Tista (the territory which now forms Darjeeling, Kurseong and Siliguri sub-division of the Darjeeling district) was restored to Sikkim by a separate treaty signed at Titaliya between Sikkim and the East India Company on February 10<sup>th</sup> 1817.<sup>7</sup> The treaty also stipulated that Sikkim would hereafter submit to the arbitration of the Company any dispute between Sikkim and Nepal. The two treaties laid the foundations for British hegemony in this part of India.<sup>8</sup>

But peace did not last long between the two Kingdoms. Disputes and differences arose when Nepal tried to help Lepchas rebel against the Bhutia king of Sikkim. The relations were further aggravated following a boundary dispute concerning river Mechi and Sidhi Khola.<sup>9</sup> Sikkim as per article three of the Treaty of Titaliya reported the matter to the British for arbitration. Accordingly, in 1828

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<sup>5</sup> Kumar Pradhan, "The Gorkha Conquest: The Process and Consequences of Unification of Nepal with Particular Reference to Eastern Nepal", Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1991, pp.131-134.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.142.

<sup>9</sup> Kumar Pradhan, "Pahilo Pahar", Shyam Prakashan, Darjeeling, 1982, p.18.

General Lloyd in company with Mr. J.W. Grant, the Commercial Resident at Malda was sent for arbitration. On their way to Rinchinpong they saw the hills of Darjeeling from Chungthung. Quoting a letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1829, L.S.S.O' Malley says that it is through this letter that we learn that Lloyd visited the " old Goorkha (sic) station called Darjeeling" for six days in February 1829, and was immediately struck with its being well adapted for the purpose of a sanitarium.<sup>10</sup> Lloyd, in his representations to the Governor General Lord William Bentick, highlighted the strategic value of the place as it 'commanded the entrance' into Nepal and Bhutan. Lord William Bentick deputed Capt. Herbert, then Deputy Surveyor General along with Mr. Grant to explore the possibilities of establishing a sanitarium at Darjeeling. Following a positive assessment the Court of Directors approved the project with the motive of establishing a permanent cantonment for a European regiment. Accordingly, General Lloyd opened negotiations with the Raja of Sikkim. The negotiations ended with the execution of the deed of grant by the Raja of Sikkim on 1st February 1835. This oft-quoted deed of grant runs as follows:

" The Governor- General having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of his Government, suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, I, the Sikkimputte Rajah, out of friendship for the said Governor-General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, that is, all the land south of the Great Rangit river, east of the Balasun, Kahail and Little Rangit river, and west of the Rungno and Mahanudi rivers".<sup>11</sup>

Tanka Bahadur Subba, however, has rejected this official version relating to the transfer of Darjeeling to the British. He calls the entire episode "a mysterious story". He has brought to the fore some glaring discrepancies in the events leading to the execution of the deed of grant. He records that it was on January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1835 that a proposal was first passed to send Major Lloyd "to open negotiations with the Sikkim

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<sup>10</sup> L.S.S. O'Malley, " Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling", Logos Press, New Delhi, 1989, p.20.

<sup>11</sup> A.J. Dash, "Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling" Bengal Government Press, Alipore, 1947, pp.37-38.

Rajah for the transfer of Darjeeling to the British Government.” Lloyd first met the Rajah on the banks of Teesta on February 12<sup>th</sup> 1835. But he first made a written request on February 19<sup>th</sup> 1835 only. Following the request the Rajah had granted the permission to build houses and in no case did the Rajah ever intend to part with Darjeeling. When the British Government became aware of the unwillingness of the Rajah in meeting their request the Council sent an order to Lloyd on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1835 directing him to abstain from urging any further negotiations with the King. Surprisingly, Lloyd on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1835 wrote back saying that he had acquired the grant of Darjeeling exactly as he desired and that it was in his possession. So the mystery remains as to how could Lloyd obtain a deed dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 1835 when he made a formal request for the first time only on February. <sup>12</sup>

Be that as it may, the Britishers went ahead with their plan. Shortly, in 1836, General Lloyd and Dr. Chapman were sent to “explore the country, to ascertain the nature of the climate, and to investigate the capabilities of the place”. Having spent the winter of 1836 and a part of 1837 the two gentlemen reported favourably. Accordingly, General Lloyd was appointed Local Agent to oversee new settlements. <sup>13</sup>

It is said that when General Lloyd and Dr. Chapman visited Darjeeling in 1836, all they found was some huts recently erected by the Raja of Sikkim, in which they spent a night shivering with cold, without food or bedding. Elsewhere, there is a reference to a report by Dr. Campbell, who appointed as the Superintendent of Darjeeling claimed to have raised the population from “not more that hundred souls in 1839 to about 10,000 in 1849, chiefly by immigration from the neighbouring states of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.”<sup>14</sup> If one observes the above two narrations

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<sup>12</sup> Tanka Bahadur Subba, “ Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of Gorkhaland Movement” , Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1992, pp.34-36.

<sup>13</sup> L.S.S. O’Malley, op. cit. p.21.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.22.



little, carefully one would notice that there is a measured emphasis on the fact that Darjeeling was nothing more than “a destitute of inhabitants”.

Dr. Kumar Pradhan, a local historian has, however, rejected this version of the history of Darjeeling, which has been taken as an authoritative account. In his “Pahilo Pahar”, he points out that when Campbell reported that the population was not more than hundred souls he was referring to the places in and around the Observatory Hill or at the most to the present Darjeeling town. This is so because what the British had got as Darjeeling in 1835 was a narrow strip of land comprising not more than 138 sq. miles. This excluded places like Poolbazar, Sukhiapokhari, Mirik, Siliguri, and Kalimpong. (Kalimpong until 1865 was under Bhutan.) He has dismissed most of the gazetteers as they have taken Campbell’s report as the basis and taken the figure alluded by him as the population of not just of Darjeeling town but of the entire Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong and Siliguri sub-division.<sup>15</sup>

In a similar vein Pratap Chandra Pradhan has also tried to show that there were settlements much earlier also .By referring to, what he calls “untold history”, he says there are enough archeological evidences to show that there were Mongoloid Nepalis living in these parts. There are also other evidences, which lend credence to the theory that there was a Magar Kingdom in this place.<sup>16</sup> J.D. Hooker has also written about the presence of Magars in Sikkim. To quote Hooker: “... the Magars, a tribe now confined to Nepal west of river Arun, are aborigines of Sikkim, whence they were driven by the Lepchas westward into the country of the Limboos, and by these latter further west still”.<sup>17</sup> Many others have argued that the name Magarjung, a place in Darjeeling comes from the word Magar. But this is not to deny that migration or for that matter large-scale settlement did not take place in Darjeeling.

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<sup>15</sup> Kumar Pradhan, “Pahilo Pahar” Shyam Prakashan, Darjeeling, 1982, pp. 19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Pratap Chandra Pradhan, “Purano Gorkha Thum Darjeeling Uhile Ra Aahile Gorkhaland Tira”, Deep Prakashan, Darjeeling, 1984, pp. 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> J. D. Hooker, “Himalayan Journals”, Ward, Lock and Co. Ltd., London, 1891, p.95.

But to call Darjeeling “ a destitute of inhabitants” is certainly an over exaggeration. Even while admitting that a large part of the region was covered by dense forests there are enough indications, confirming the settlements of Limbus and Lepchas. More importantly, the large-scale eastward movement, which is seen as the product of the British policy had started much earlier.

But once the Britishers started settling in Darjeeling they became ‘the unconscious tool of history’; they laid down modern infrastructure in the shape of roads, buildings, schools, and other civic amenities. Secondly, they introduced modern western ideas, which in many ways redefined the outlook of the people who for ages had lain trampled under the autocratic rulers of Sikkim and Nepal. These aspects will be dealt in greater detail in the subsequent chapters.

#### **BRITISH TERRITORIAL EXPANSION IN DARJEELING:**

The Britishers were enthralled by Darjeeling not just on account of its cool climate is quite clear from the representations of Capt. Lloyd to the Governor-General. Other than the climate, Darjeeling was to serve their strategic and trade interests. So it was quite natural that they would not remain content with the narrow strip of land. (25 miles long and 5 to 6 miles wide). The relation between the Rajah and the British was not cordial right from the beginning. According to Fred Pinn the Raja while granting Darjeeling had only given the house –building license and not more. But Lloyd was clever enough to make amendments on his own without [any] consultation with the government.<sup>18</sup> What follows after 1835 is the gradual territorial aggrandizement by the British. In 1849 the none too cordial relation between the “old and infirm” Raja and the British reached the lowest ebb with the seizure of Sir Joseph Hooker and Dr. Campbell. The Britishers were “kicked and buffeted” and released after six weeks on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1849.

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<sup>18</sup> Fred Pinn, “The Road of Destiny: Darjeeling Letters, 1839.” ,Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1986, p.123.

In 1850 the British force crossed the Great Rangit. The Sikkim terai, which was handed back to Sikkim under the Treaty of Titaliya, was captured. Further more, the British captured the portion of the Sikkim hills bounded by Ramam on the north, the Great Rangit and Tista on the east, and by the Nepal frontiers on the west, a tract of country containing about 5000 souls.<sup>19</sup> In all, the above captured territories added 640 sq miles of territory to the existing 138 sq miles. A further addition to this came about as a result of the Anglo-Bhutanese War of 1865. Following the Treaty of Sinchula (1865), the Bhutan Duars, with the passes leading into the hills were ceded to the British in return for an annual subsidy. In the following year, the hilly tract lying east of Tista, which is now known as Kalimpong, was added to the present district.

#### **MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT:**

Even while admitting that the Nepalis in Darjeeling have a strong case in saying that they were living there much before the coming of the British the fact remains that a sizeable section of the people did migrate from Nepal. So the real issue here is when did they actually start migrating? ; And what were the causes behind such a large-scale exodus? But before we address these two key questions a brief discussion of the phenomenon of migration and some of the theories is important. Migration is almost as characteristic of Homo Sapiens as tool making and culture building. From their probable origin in Africa, human groups had spread out to occupy all the major land areas of the earth. Migration is a geographical phenomenon that seems to be a human necessity in every age.<sup>20</sup> Migration has been defined in various ways. S.N. Eisenstadt considers migration, as a physical transition of an individual on a group basis from one society to another. This transition usually

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<sup>19</sup> L.S.S. O' Malley, op.cit. p.24.

<sup>20</sup> Majid Hussain, "Human Geography", Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1999, p.151.

involves abandoning one social setting and entering another and different one.”<sup>21</sup> The famous sociologist Everett Lee defined migration “as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. No restriction is placed upon the distance of the move or upon the voluntary or involuntary nature of the act and distinction is made between external and internal migration.”. Some of the scholars who formulated theories on migration are E.G. Ravenstein, Everett Lee, W. Zelinski. For the purpose of our study we will consider Everett Lee’s theory of migration as it is considered to be the most comprehensive theory on migration. Everett Lee generalized four factors that influence the decision of an emigrant. These are:

- a) factors operating in the area of origin;
- b) factors operating at the destination;
- c) factors that operate as intervening obstacles; and
- d) personal factors that are specific to individual.<sup>22</sup>

The above factors can be broadly classified as “push” and “pull” factors of migration. The push factors are present in the area of origin, and the pull factors are likely to be present at the area of destination.

In case of the Nepalis migration into Darjeeling the push factors can be broadly categorized as the adverse socio-economic and political conditions in Nepal, whereas the pull factors were the British policy of encouraging enlistment of ethnic Nepalis into the British Indian Army, establishment of tea gardens in Darjeeling, clearing of forests, building roads, etc. We will discuss these factors in the following section.

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<sup>21</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, “Analysis of Patterns of Immigration and Absorption of immigrants”, in Leszek A. Kasoniski and R. Mansell Prothero (ed.) “People on the Move: Studies in internal Migration”, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1975, p.3.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Majid Hussain, op. cit. p.175.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONDITION IN NEPAL:**

Nepal is predominantly a rural economy whose agriculture is subsistence. The state as the all-powerful entity was the biggest landowner. This traditional state landlordism was known as *Raiker*. Within this broad system of raiker, the state allowed the co-existence of other forms of land tenure, like *Birta*, *Guthi*, and *Jagir*. There was also in addition to the above three forms, the communal ownership practiced among the indigenous tribes known as *Kipat*. The system of birta, jagir, and guthi simply understood was the grant of the state land to either an individual or to a religious institution. Birta was a form of state disbursement of land to the nobility, civil or military officers and Brahmans for the sustenance and continuity of the state. Jagir was another form of a land tenure in which the members of the nobility as well as civil or military employees got land as their emolument for the services rendered to the state. The state started paying salaries to its officers in the form of land grants because it had land in abundance after the capture of eastern Nepal. Moreover, the system of “in-kind” rent payments had created problems of collection, storage and disposal of agriculture rent. It was difficult for the state to use land as a direct source of monetary revenue other than assigning land as emoluments to its officers.<sup>23</sup>

The land grant and assignment policy followed by the Gorkhali state favoured particular classes and communities in the society to the exclusion of others. They tended to be concentrated for the most part among the Brahmans, Chhetris and Thakuris mostly from western Nepal, who sustained the political authority of the new rulers. Gurungs, Magars, Tamangs, Limbus, Khambus and Newars generally did not receive such favours. On the contrary, they suffered encroachment leading to a gradual depletion of the lands they had obtained during the previous regimes as a

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<sup>23</sup> Mahesh Chandra Regmi, “A Study in Nepali Economic History, 1768-1846.”, Manjushree Publishing House, New Delhi, 1971, pp.38-39.

result of birta grants and jagir assignments<sup>24</sup>. The beneficiaries of the birta and the jagir grants were entitled to collect revenue from all sources in the area covered by them. In addition to this, they enjoyed the right to dispense justice and exact unpaid labour. In such a system the peasants cultivating in birta and jagir land were subjected to exploitation of the worst type. In the case of jagir the assignee who was normally in active military or civil services seldom lived in his jagir land. So he left the cultivation of his Jagir to the *mohi* or the cultivator. The absentee *jagirdar* sold his *tirja* or the authority to collect taxes to brokers called *dhokres*. These dhokres profitted by collecting more than their investment. Similar was the case in birta lands where the *birtawals* exploited the *adhiyars*. Under such a system rural indebtedness became the most common feature. In addition to this the peasants were to provide free and compulsory labour like *jhara*, *kagate hulak* and *thapale hulak* to the state. But one of the important aspects of this compulsory labour was that the upper castes were exempted from such obligations.

While the general policy of the Gorkhali State was to maintain the existing economic system, its policies did affect the kiptat system practiced by the indigenous tribes in central and eastern Nepal. The kiptat system was a system of communal ownership of land by a particular ethnic group. The ownership rights were generally customary, acquired on account of settlement over a long period of time. This kiptat system was a major hurdle for the state whose primary objective was maximization of raiker land. Prithivinarayan Shah initially followed a conciliatory policy towards these groups. But these assurances did not appear to comfort the tribes who preferred migration to the adjoining areas of India and Sikkim in the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was only after the Limbus, in particular, joined the Chinese in the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.40.

war against Nepal in 1788-93 that the Nepali State restored their traditional rights over their land.<sup>25</sup>

Mahesh Chandra Regmi has alluded to a very important aspect of the Nepali economy. He says there was never a disparity between population and land. He infact sees the factor of low ratio between land and population, as the reason behind state imposition of forced labour. Similarly Kumar Pradhan in his, “The Gorkha Conquest”, has looked into this aspect in a greater detail. He rejects all those theories that assign the cause of migration to an increase in population and the consequent pressure on land.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, he argues that land was plentiful and that vast tracts of land in the terai had yet to be reclaimed. Infact people from the adjoining Indian plains were often induced to migrate into the Nepal terai to hoe up the land.<sup>27</sup>

Inspite of this fact migration did become an increasing phenomenon in the first decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the volume only increased after the Anglo-Gurkha War (1814-1816). A better understanding of the causes can still be had if we look into the nature of the Nepali State. R.S. Chauhan in his, “Society and State Building in Nepal”, has referred to the Nepali state under Prithivinarayan Shah as “compensatory power”. Chauhan defines a compensatory state as a weak state in which the execution of its commands depends on the awards or incentives it can bestow on its subordinates. It does not become strong and determined enough as to compel its subordinates to carryout its will. Though the state at times may issue threats but these threats are hardly heeded. Its commands are executed only when

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp.49-51.

<sup>26</sup> See L.S.S. O' Malley, op. cit. p.37.

<sup>27</sup> Kumar Pradhan, “The Gorkha Conquest”, Oxford University Press, 1991, pp.178-179. Also See, Nanda R. Shrestha, “The Political economy of economic underdevelopment and external migration in Nepal”, in Political Geography Quaterly, Vol.4. No.4, October, 1985, pp.247-298.

those in charge of the execution receive more than what is stipulated in the rule or is legitimately due to them.<sup>28</sup>

The three most important pillars of this expansionist state were monarchy, army, and bureaucracy. The social structure was based on caste hierarchy and social discrimination. At the top of this hierarchy were the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Thakuris who monopolized all the important positions in the state and society. Below them were the “proletarized” masses mainly of the Mongoloid origin. The supremacy of the upper caste meant the imposition of the Hindu religious and social values, which were at variance with the tribal communitarian values. This aggressive hinduisation campaign which was actively supported by the state had an important impact. The practice of bonism and shamanism peculiar to the Mongoloid groups was disrupted. Moreover, the concept of caste and its hierarchy, which was alien to these people, were introduced thereby transforming tribe or *jati* in to caste or *jat*. Thus the society was clearly divided into two groups. The upper castes that drew their sustenance from the state formed a group at the top, and the Mongoloid tribes who were mostly peasants formed the group below. It was this section of the people who left their homes and hearths towards Munjlan (India). Here it is interesting to note that Darjeeling then was known as Munjlan meaning land of Mughals. It gives a strong indication as to when they actually start migrating. Darjeeling, which is the anglicized version of Dorjeling was popularized only with the coming of the British. Even to this day Darjeeling is still referred to as Munjlan in many parts of Nepal.

This process of migration started spiraling after the Anglo-Gurkha war, and it only increased further with the consolidation of the British power in Darjeeling. It is to be noted that Darjeeling prior to the coming of the British did not provide any economic opportunities. But people did come to this part mainly for two reasons.

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<sup>28</sup> R.S. Chauhan, “Society and State Building in Nepal: From Ancient Times to Mid-Twentieth Century”, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1989, p.76.



Firstly, since most of the migrants came from mid hills known as *Pahar*, their choice of Darjeeling was natural given its geographical similarity. Secondly, they could not migrate to the terai regions of Nepal because they feared *awoole joro* (literally meaning fever of the low lands). However, with the settlement of the British, Darjeeling provided new economic opportunities in the shape of labourers in building roads, clearing forests, recruitment in the British Indian Army, labourers in tea gardens and cinchona plantations.

### **BRITISH COLONIAL EXPANSION IN INDIA AND THE RECRUITMENT OF GURKHAS IN THE BRITISH INDIAN ARMY:**

It was the Anglo Gurkha war of 1814- 1816 that gave the opportunity to the British to witness the valour and bravery of the Gurkha soldiers. John Ship, then an ensign in the 87<sup>th</sup> Foot, had paid tribute to the Gurkhas in the following words:

“I never saw more steadiness or bravery exhibited in my life. Run they would not and of death they seemed to have no fear, though their comrades were falling thick around them, for we were so near that every shot told”<sup>29</sup>

In one of the ironies of history it was the defeat of the Gurkha soldiers under Amar Singh Thapa that prompted General Ochterlony to write to the East India Company recommending for the recruitment of “the short, broad chested, flat faced, snub nosed men with their *khukuris*”<sup>30</sup> into their ranks. What had happened was that even though the British were successful in the war, the victory itself was a pyrrhic one. It was achieved amidst a run of reverses and deaths of veteran generals.<sup>31</sup> Since the army was the principal factor behind the British colonial expansion they saw reason in recruiting the Gurkhas into their army. The British managed to extract a

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Kamal Raj Singh Rathaur's, “The Gurkhas: A History of the Recruitment in the British Indian Army”, Nirala Publications, New Delhi, 1983, p.30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.33.( Khukuri is a traditional short knife of the Gurkhas)

<sup>31</sup> Kanchanmoy Mozumdar, “Recruitment of the Gurkhas in the Indian Army 1814-1877” in The Journal of the United Service Institution of India Vol.LXXXVIII, April-June, 1963, p.143.

commitment from Amar Singh Thapa allowing the troops to enter into the services of the British government. Accordingly, three battalions were raised. The Nusseree Battalion and the Sirmoor Battalion were raised on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1815. The Kumaon Battalion was raised on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1815.<sup>32</sup> These Gurkhas played an important role in the subsequent British colonial expansion. They displayed their raw courage and valour in the Anglo-Maharatta War of 1817-18, and the Anglo-Sikh War of 1845-46. It also won its first honours at the siege of Bharatpur in 1825-26.

It is not as if the Gurkhas were merely the handmaids of the British. There was more to it than meets the eye. Kanchanmoy Mozumdar points out to the political considerations of the British policy. He says from the British point of view the martial population of Nepal was burning with the itch for wars against them. But the state policy under Bhim Sen had been to conserve their energy so as to release them at the opportune moment against the British in India. So a state of enforced and uncertain peace prevailed, which could terminate abruptly in a violent collision at any time when the British were assailed with various problems. So it was politically prudent on the part of the British to employ these people in the British army.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the British wanted to reduce the influence of the Brahmins in the army by recruiting more Muslims and Gurkhas.

But there were other causes that contributed to the hordes of people joining to British Indian Army and armies of other princely states. The usurpation of power by the Ranas in 1846 had led to drastic changes in the state policy of Nepal. It was felt by Jang Bahadur Rana that to stay in power he had to check the army and the bureaucracy which had entrenched themselves under the Shahs. This understanding had led to steady curtailment of the powers of the army. Even more so, a large number of soldiers were given compulsory retirement. But fearing that such a large-

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<sup>32</sup> Kamal Raj Singh, *op.cit.* p.53.

<sup>33</sup> Kanchanmoy Mozumdar, *op.cit.* pp. 145-146.

scale retrenchment would trigger backlash, the Ranas allowed the Nepalis to get them recruited in the British army. They were free to go to Lahore cantonment for this purpose.<sup>34</sup> But prior to this also there were instances where the Gurkhas had joined the Khalsa or Sikh army after the treaty signed between the Khalsa and the Nepal government in 1839.<sup>35</sup> Thus the word *Lahure*, which was initially used to Gorkha soldiers going to Lahore has now become synonymous for all Gorkha soldiers.

But the enlistment of the Gurkhas in the British Indian Army was not easy. Jang Bahadur Rana, contrary to his public pronouncements, threw spanners to the British design. Since the British could not enter Nepal to enlist the Gurkhas, they established recruiting depots at the borders of Gorakhpur, Almora, Shillong, and Darjeeling. The commanding officers of these recruiting centres used to send *gallawalas* (recruiting agents) secretly and always at a great risk to various parts of Nepal. Experienced Gurkha subedars went to their homes in Nepal charged with the duty of inducing young Nepalis to join the British army.<sup>36</sup> Thus followed the large-scale migration of Nepalis into India, and particularly into the adjoining hill areas. By 1864 the British Government issued a charter providing for the Gurkha Regiments to buy land for permanent stations at Dharmasala, Dehradun, Almora, Bakoh, etc.,

In Darjeeling itself there was no recruiting depot prior to 1890. The first Gurkha recruitment depot appears to have opened in Darjeeling in 1890. The office was first situated at Darjeeling Bazar in Kutchery loaned by the Deputy Commissioner for an hour or two each morning.<sup>37</sup> In 1901 the British Mountain Battery at Ghoom vacated the accommodation in Katakpahar area and in 1902 the

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<sup>34</sup> R.S. Chauhan, op.cit. p.124.

<sup>35</sup> Tanka Bahadur Subba, op. cit. p.57.

<sup>36</sup> Kanchanmoy Mozumdar, op. cit. p.148.

<sup>37</sup> Based on the documents from the archives of Gorkha Recruiting Depot, Jalapahar, Darjeeling.

Gorkha Recruiting Depot was allotted the entire accommodation for occupation at the lower portion of Katakpahar.

### **COLONIAL CAPITALIST ENTERPRISE: THE TEA INDUSTRY IN DARJEELING:**

Among the many factors behind the large-scale migration of Nepalis from Nepal the starting of tea industry is the most important one. The establishment of tea industry in India was the British response to the dangers of monopoly trade over tea held by the Chinese. But it was not in Darjeeling that the British first started tea plantations. Many Britishers had reported about the discovery of tea bushes in Assam. After confirming that those were tea bushes, tea production started in Assam in 1836. By 1839 the industry had grown considerably under the Assam Tea Company. In 1840 it produced 10,000 lbs of tea which by 1858 rose to 7,70,000. On January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1839, the East India Company did the first auction sale. But the tea brokers were quoted as saying the tea was “not of good quality, but a curiosity”. It was this report that was instrumental in Dr. Chapman’s obtaining sanction to give the Chinese variety a chance. Accordingly, the first lot of seeds and plants were imported into Darjeeling in 1841 along with a number of Chinamen (sic) to teach the pioneers in this industry how to lay out gardens and manufacture tea.<sup>38</sup> But it was Dr. Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling who laid the foundations of the tea industry. By 1840 he had started experimental plantations, Seeing that prospects were good, others followed, the seeds being supplied by the government. Mr. Jackson, in 1852 is suppose to have reported that both the Chinese and Assam varieties were doing well in Dr. Campbell’s garden in Darjeeling. So was the case of the extensive

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<sup>38</sup> E.C. Dozey, op.cit. pp.195-196.

plantations of Dr. Withcombe, the Civil Surgeon, and of Major Crommelin of the Engineers at Lebong.<sup>39</sup>

By 1856-57 tea industry had firmly established itself in the district as a viable commercial enterprise. The Makaibari and Alubarie gardens were planted out in 1857. The Tukvar Tea Company, Mundakothi, and the Darjeeling Tea Company followed this. In 1860 Mrs. H.C. Taylor and Dr. Roberts of Raniganj laid out the Neej Kaman, and the Rangmok Tea Estate in Sonada respectively. In 1866, the Dooteria, Nahore, and Margeret's Hope Gardens were planted, while the year following, the Lebong Tea Company, and the Himalayan Tea Company came into being. By 1866, i.e., only ten years after the establishment of the industry on a commercial basis, there were thirty-nine gardens each having an average acreage of 256 ½ acres and an aggregate yield of 133,000 lbs of tea. In Kurseong too the Springfield, and Castleton were laid out in 1871. Similarly, Eden Vale in Toong, Maharanee Tea Estates were laid out in 1874.<sup>40</sup>

**Table 1 shows the expansion of the tea industry after 1870.**

Year	Number of gardens	Area under tea (in acres)	Outturn (in lbs.)
1874	113	18,888	39,28,000
1885	175	38,499	90,90,500
1895	186	48,692	1,17,14,500
1905	148	50,618	1,24,47,500
1910	148	51,281	1,41,37,500
1915	148	54,024	2,03,03,500
1920	148	59,356	1,58,50,000
1925	148	59,356	1,87,32,500
1930	148	59,356	2,08,70,500

<sup>39</sup>“ West Bengal District Gazetteer: Darjiling”, Printed and Published by the Superintendent of Printing, Govt. of West Bengal, Kadarpara, 1980, p.228.

<sup>40</sup> E.C. Dozey, op. cit. pp.196-197.

1935	148	59,356	2,07,98,000 black 2,28,000 green
1940	142	63,059	2,27,43,000 black 9,87,500 green

Source: A.J. Dash, Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling, op. cit. p.114.

Since 1940 production increased considerably inspite of difficulties with transportation and costs. In 1942 the output was 26,478,000 lbs of black tea and 1,242,000 lbs of green tea. In 1943, 25,593,000 lbs of black tea were produced and 2,572,000 lbs of green tea.<sup>41</sup>

**Table 2 shows the distribution of tea gardens in Darjeeling in 1940.**

Thana	Number of Tea Estates
Darjeeling	19
Jorebungalow	16
Sukhiapokri	9
Pulbazar	2
Rangli Rangoliot	9
Kurseong	25
Mirik	5
Siliguri	27
Kharibari	11
Phansidewa	13
Kalimpong	0
Gorubathan	6

Source: A.J. Dash, Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling, p.114.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.44.

From the above figures one can notice that the tea enterprise expanded to areas mainly in the east of Tista. This was so because of certain policies enforced by the British to prevent exploitation of the hillmen. After the annexation of Kalimpong, the Government would not lease any portion of it for tea cultivation except very special reasons. There were restrictions on transfer of holdings in the Hill Khasmahals of Kalimpong from hill men to plainsmen, except for special reasons. There were further restrictions on transfer from Bhutias and Lepchas to Nepalis.<sup>42</sup>

The increase in the number of tea gardens, their productivity and the area under cultivation was possible only with the corresponding increase in the availability of cheap labour.

**Table 3 shows the impact of tea industry on the population growth of Darjeeling district from 1861-1966.**

Year	No. of tea estates	Total area in hectares under tea	Approximate yield in kilograms	Average yield in kgs. Per hectare	Total No. of all kinds of tea workers	Total of working force	Percentage of tea workers to total working force
1861	22	1317	19323	15	2534	-	-
1871	56	-	-	-	8000	94712 (in 1872)	8.45
1881	155	11,489	23,40,719	204	-	1,55,179	-
1891	177	18,462	49,48,997	268	-	1,55,207	-
1901	170	20,948	61,39,720	293	40,451	1,55,235	26.06
1911	156	20,853	64,64,079	310	39,561	1,51,604	26.09
1921	168	23,897	63,87,117	267	48,710	1,74,167	27.97
1931	169	24,777	92,97,204	375	63,665	1,29,070	43.33
1941	136	25,585	1,12,56,182	440	69,699	1,33,306	52.28
1951	138	25,345	1,32,82,995	524	69,590	1,37,541	50.60
1961	145	27,709	1,80,50,271	651	59,844	2,66,105	22.49
1966	144	28,121	1,73,98,000	619	-	-	-

Source: A.J. Dash, Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling, p. 100.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.115.

It has to be noted that though much of the mass migration was voluntary, the British planters still did not hesitate to use the services of the ubiquitous *sardars*. It was the duty of the sardar to go to Nepal and bring back young and healthy labourers to work in the tea gardens. The sardars in return got commission from the British employers. Such was the power of the sardars in those days that the weekly wages were paid to the labourers through the sardars. Though this system was convenient for the management, it was unsatisfactory for the labourers. The sardars use to levy commission upto 3 pies per rupee on payments in addition to that allowed by the management. Sardars almost in every tea garden were entrusted with the duty of enforcing discipline and attendance. And for this he got one pice for every worker turning up for work.<sup>43</sup> Another important aspect of the migration policy was that the import of labour was on the basis of 'family' and not 'individual'. This affectively curbed the chances of labour mobility from one place to another and the scope to employ even the children at less than half of the wage of an adult.<sup>44</sup>

#### **MODERNISATION OF DARJEELING: LAYING OF INFRASTRUCTURE:**

Darjeeling, prior to the coming of the British was devoid of, what can be called modern infrastructure. O'Malley has remarked that 'roads and railways of the district are a creation of the British rule'. However, this 'creation' has to be put in a perspective. The first major road construction was done within four years of its 'occupation' of Darjeeling (O' Malley). Between the year 1839-42 Lord Napier of Madgala, the then Lieutenant in the Engineers was deputed to construct a road from Siliguri to Darjeeling. This road known as the Old Military Road was built through the winding hills of Pankhabarie to Kurseong and then along the spurs until it reached Senchel from where it descended to Jorebunglow. But as the town started

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.120.

<sup>44</sup> Tanka Bahadur Subba, "Dynamics of a Hill Society: The Nepalis of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas", Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1989, p.4.



growing, and more importantly with the expansion of the tea industry this road was found unsuitable for wheeled traffic owing to its steep gradient. So in 1861, sanction was obtained for the construction of the Cart Road. The road from Darjeeling to Kurseong was opened in 1864, and the whole road was completed in 1869.<sup>45</sup>

The laying down of Darjeeling Himalayan Railway known as the “Toy Train” started under the Managing Agency of Messrs. Gillanders Arbuthnot & Co. in 1879. The portion between Siliguri and Kurseong (52 km.) was opened on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1880 and that between Kurseong and Darjeeling (29 km.) in 1881. In 1913 the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Extension Co. started construction of the Tista Valley (Siliguri-Gielkhola) project and was completed in 1915.) The railway line was abandoned due to landslides and severe earthquake of 15<sup>th</sup> August 1950.<sup>46</sup> The whole railway track is considered an engineering marvel. It was used both for passenger and freight.

The above three factors, viz, the recruitment in the British Indian Army, the growth of tea industry and the building of roads and railways were the major factors behind the large scale migration from Nepal. But among the three factors the growth of the tea industry was the most important one. This resulted in giving a peculiar characteristic to the ethnic landscape of Darjeeling.

**Table 4 shows the growth of population of Darjeeling during the last hundred years.**

Year	Total population in the whole district	Total population in three hill sub-divisions	Total number of Nepali speaking people in the district
1835	100	Campbell's estimate.	

<sup>45</sup> L.S.S. O' Malley, op.cit.p.132.

<sup>46</sup> West Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjiling, 1980, op.cit. p 317.

1850		10,000	
1869		22,000	
1872(1 <sup>st</sup> Census)	Official	94,712	
1881		1,55,179	
1891		2,23,314	88,000
1901		2,49,117	1,34,000
1911		2,65,550	1,52,167
1921		2,82,748	1,66,974
1931		3,19,635	1,61,308
1941		3,76,369	1,75,285
1951		4,45,260	2,23,88
1961		6,24,640	
1971		7,81,777	
1981		10,24,269	
1991		13,35,618	

Source: Census Reports.

With the passing of time the Nepalis who were a heterogeneous group in many ways coalesced into a unified whole. There are numerous factors that have contributed in the formation of a common identity based of the idea of *Pahar* (Hill), *Kamaan* (tea garden), and *Maato* (literally soil). This new identity was flexible enough to accommodate within it the specific cultures and beliefs of the different ethnic groups.

## Chapter III

### THE FORMATION OF THE NEPALI ETHNICITY: EMERGENCE OF A NEW IDENTITY.

Darjeeling as we have seen in the preceding chapter witnessed tremendous social, economic and political changes from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These changes have come about mainly for two reasons. One, there was a heavy influx of Nepalis in this region resulting in significant demographic changes. Secondly, this period witnessed the gradual consolidation of the British power in Darjeeling. It is as veritable crucible from which has emerged the idea of a Nepali identity subsuming the specific ethno-cultural identities of the various ethnic groups. Indeed, nation building had always been one of the major goals of the Nepali State.<sup>1</sup> But it was in Darjeeling that the process came to fruition. Scholars like Harka Gurung and Kumar Pradhan have acknowledged this fact.<sup>2</sup>

So the question arises: What were the specific conditions in Darjeeling that expedited the processes of the making of the Nepali ethnicity; and secondly, what were the characteristics of these processes. But before addressing these questions it is imperative to clarify what we mean by the formation of the Nepali ethnicity. Formation of the Nepali ethnicity here refers to the general processes in which each of the discrete sub-ethnic groups consciously or unconsciously overcame their particular identities within a specific environment in favour of a larger collectivity based on symbols and goals agreeable to all. It also refers to the gradual

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<sup>1</sup> See Prayag Raj Sharma, "Nation- Building, Multi Ethnicity, and the Hindu State", in David N. Gellner, et.al. (ed.) *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*, Harwood Academic Publishers, Netherlands, 1997.

Also see, Richard Burghart, "The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal", in *Journal of Asian Studies*, November 1984, Vol.XLIV, No.1, pp.101-122.

<sup>2</sup> Kumar Pradhan, "Pahilo Pahar", Shyam Prakashan, Darjeeling, 1982, p.22.

See, Harka Gurung, "Nepali Nationalism a Matter of Consolidation", in *Himal: South Asia*, Vol.14, No.3, March, 2001, p.22.

engendering of political consciousness thereby transforming the hitherto ethno-cultural groupings into a single political community.

But since the chapter deals with the formation of the Nepali ethnicity and not of the Bhutia or the Lepcha ethnicity, such an exclusion calls for an explanation. The cultural and political space of Darjeeling has historically been dominated by the Nepalis. Domination of the Nepalis does not, however, imply a total marginalization. Infact, members of both the ethnic groups, i.e., Bhutias and Lepchas had, till some time, played a significant role in the politics of Darjeeling. The contributions of Hillmens Association and Hill People's Social Union are cases in point. But as mentioned in the preceding chapter, Darjeeling witnessed a gradual political mobilization of the vast majority of the Nepalis living in *kamaans* (tea gardens) and *bustees* (non-tea garden agricultural settlements) that led to the elimination of the other two groups from the political space. Moreover, the renaissance in the field of art, music, literature and other civil society institutions has taken place primarily within the Nepali group. This has led to the creation and rediscovery of symbols and icons like *Khukuri* ( <sup>traditional</sup> Nepali knife), Nepali *topi* (cap), leaders like Damber Singh Gurung, Deo Prakash Rai, etc, that have represented the social and political aspirations of the Nepalis. The Gorkha National Liberation Front (G.N.L.F.), in the mid 80s, did coin slogans like *Bhote, Lapche, Nepali, hami sabai Gorkhali*, meaning Bhote Lepcha and Nepali we all are Gorkhali. But it did not cut much ice. In this context the studies of Chie Nakane and Tanka Bahadur Subba on Sikkim are quite revealing. Chie Nakane while trying to analyze the causes of the Nepali domination over the Lepchas and Bhutias has tried to explain it from the viewpoint of 'difference in the pattern of life, which is closely related to the religious difference between the Buddhists and Hindus.'<sup>3</sup> She says

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<sup>3</sup> Chie Nakane, "A Plural Society in Sikkim", in C. Von Furer-Haimendorff (ed.), "Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon: Anthropological Studies of Hindu Buddhist Contact Zones", Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1966, p.256.

and processes of Nepali domination in Darjeeling are similar to that of Sikkim the process was nevertheless lot smoother. This was so mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the Lepchas and Bhutias were far less in number in Darjeeling. Secondly, Darjeeling apparently did not have a feudal system as in Sikkim where the Bhutias formed the landed aristocracy. This should perhaps explain why the socio-cultural evolution in these two places has taken different trajectories.

### **EVOLUTION OF A CRUCIBLE: EMERGENCE OF A NEW SOCIETY**

While trying to map the evolution of the Nepali ethnicity we will use some of the theoretical tools supplied by the constructivist theorists discussed in the first chapter. But as mentioned earlier, the use of the constructivist tools should not imply a total acceptance of it as an explanatory model. In analyzing the processes of the formation of the Nepali ethnicity it will be useful to look into what can be called the *objective* and *subjective* factors or condition of ethnicity formation. By objective factors we mean the obtaining society, culture, politics, etc,. Whereas subjective factors would mean the inherent characteristics of the ethnic groups. Both the subjective and the objective factors have complemented each other. In other words, if the new objective factors have accentuated the subjective attributes of the ethnic groups, then the subjective conditions in turn have led to changes in the objective world. Another important aspect of this ethnicity formation was that *all most all movements that contributed to the ethnicity building be it in the field of art, literature, music, society and politics have more or less run parallel to each other.* And through these movements have emerged a new social consensus and terms of interaction in a multi ethnic society. Coming back to the original question of the specific conditions in Darjeeling, it will be useful to compare and contrast it with Nepal. This will not only help us in understanding Darjeeling better, it will also help us to pick those characteristics and factors that have facilitated in the building of a common ethnicity.

One of the important characteristics of the Nepalis in Darjeeling was that a sizeable section of the population was migrants from Nepal. It is not just migration but the causes of migration and the nature of migrants that are crucial. It is quite clear by now that the Nepali State in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a Hindu state. Over the centuries, nature worshipping, animists or Buddhist communities were gradually Hinduised mainly due to the conquest of non-Hindu communities by Hindu kings and the migration of Parbatiyas (Bahuns, Chhetris, and Thakuris) to different parts of Nepal. The spread of the Parbatiyas provided the motive force of Hinduisation. This Hinduisation, in fact, was nothing but Parbatiyasation, i.e., the spread and imposition of the culture of the Parbatiyas, most significantly their language, Nepali (originally known as Khas Kura), and religion, Hinduism.<sup>7</sup> Prayag Raj Sharma has also talked about two-stage Sanskritisation process in Nepal. The first stage, he says, was marked by a heavy importation of Sanskritic ideas in their untransmuted forms to all socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of the lives of the hills, and the second stage, by the absorption of these Sanskritic ideas into a regional and locally expressed forms. So an acculturation of Hindu-Ethnic cultures materialized in the second stage.<sup>8</sup>

This project of Sanskritisation was actively enforced by the state. The process further intensified with the promulgation of *Muluki Ain* (a national civil code) by Jang Bahadur Rana in 1854. Interestingly, this code led to the creation of a five fold division of society in which majority of the ethnic (Mongoloids) groups were clubbed together as *matwalis* (people for whom drinking liquor is not a taboo). This caste division had a clear convergence with class divisions. It was this section of the people, who subjected to oppression of all forms that migrated to Darjeeling. The migrants consisted mainly of Magars, Gurungs, Tamangs, Limbus,

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<sup>7</sup> Rajendra Pradhan, "Ethnicity, Caste and a Pluralist Society", in Kanak Mani Dixit, et.al. (ed.) "State of Nepal", Himal Books, Katmandu, 2002, pp.3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Prayag Raj Sharma, "Caste, Social Mobility and Sanskritisation: A Study of Nepalis Old Legal Code", in Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies", Vol.V. No.4., 1977, p.292.

Khambus, Bhujels, Newars, Sunuwars, and other lower castes. The migration of the upper castes to Darjeeling on the other hand took place very late, and moreover majority of them went further east to places like Assam and Meghalaya.

It has to be borne in mind that inspite of the aggressive nation building exercise of the Nepali State, it had failed in many ways. It was no doubt a Hindu polity but it still lacked certain crucial features, which prevented it from being a fully Hindu society. A detailed study of this form of Hinduism will be done in the next chapter. Most of the ethnic groups, who were generally tribals, lived in homogenous autarchic villages known as *kipats*. Infact most of the villages had names of the tribal group inhabiting that particular village.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the nature of the topography and the ecosystem around the villages had a direct bearing on their way of living. The most difficult task for the tribals was the arrangement of food for their subsistence in the mountainous wilderness. It required back breaking efforts to clear, prepare and protect agricultural fields. These activities were possible only through collective efforts.<sup>10</sup> Making arrangements for diverting water from the river or rivulets to the field, paving paths with stones, construction of houses, roofing, making of animal sheds required collective efforts and corporate living. This corporate life was not restricted merely to economic activities only. It extended to social and religious sphere also. Every clan performed certain rituals jointly.<sup>11</sup> Rites were performed for the benefit of the entire village wherein evils were supposed to be driven away from the boundaries of their habitation.<sup>12</sup> The nature of the topography also had a strong influence over the rate of social development. It became a permanent barrier against any form of spatial mobility thereby limiting interaction among these ethnic groups.<sup>13</sup> In such a social system the concept of private property was more or less alien. Land was owned as a

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<sup>9</sup> Village names such as Rai Gaon (village), Magar Gaon are still found in certain parts of Darjeeling.

<sup>10</sup> Institutions like *parma* and *huri* are still prevalent in many villages even today.

<sup>11</sup> The ritual of worshipping Nature Gods knowns as Sansari puja is still vibrant in Darjeeling. In almost all the cases the puja is an enterprise of the entire village.

<sup>12</sup> R.S. Chauhan, "Society and State Building in Nepal: From Ancient Times to Mid-Twentieth Century", Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1989, p.20.

<sup>13</sup> Dor Bahadur Bista, "Peoples of Nepal", Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Katmandu, 1967, p.XII.

community and not as individuals. This had an important bearing on the other aspects of their life. Marriages were strictly within the ethnic group, and moreover, for most these groups marriage with maternal cross cousins were institutionally sanctioned, ~~and~~. Life centered around the communal land and a village headman, who was both a priest and a dispenser of justice.

In spite of the limited interaction among these groups they shared many things in common. Most of the ethnic groups lived in societies ~~and~~ governed by similar *communitarian values*. They shared a similar worldview and social institutions with minor variations. R.S. Chauhan calls it the *Bon Syndrome*. The central idea of the bon syndrome, Chauhan says, was the idea that side by side this world, there exists a supernatural world with numerous gods, goddesses, ghosts of the dead, spirit associated with animals, plants, forests ~~and~~ with other animate and inanimate objects. The spirits are both benevolent and malevolent. They believed that all supernaturals, good or evil, though living outside this world, have innumerable manifestations with which this world is infected. It was a common belief to see human sufferings and pleasures as a result of anger or gratification of these spirits. They saw the hand of supernatural force behind crop failures, disease, deaths or any unexpected calamity. However, all persons were not capable of recognizing, communicating, controlling, pleasing or warding off these spirits. Hence, there grew a class of people who by training could control or appease these spirits through certain established rules and sacrifices. These classes of men were called by different names.<sup>14</sup> The Khambus called them *Mangpas*. The Limbus called them *Phedanbas*. The Tamangs called them *Bonbos*. But these peculiar institutions had been set aside owing to the aggressive Hinduisation of the state. Caste consciousness had already set in and had formed the basis of social organization.

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<sup>14</sup> R.S. Chauhan, op. cit. pp.20-21



## MIGRATION AND CHANGING CASTE STRUCTURE:

Most of the migrants who migrated to Darjeeling were not only from the lower castes but also from lower classes. This convergence had an important significance on the emerging caste and class structure in Darjeeling. Hinduism has, historically, undergone changes at two stages. Hinduism as practiced in Nepal is not quite the same as practiced in North India or anywhere else for that matter. And the Hinduism that obtains in Darjeeling is further different from that of Nepal.<sup>15</sup>

**Table. 5 illustrate the caste structure in Darjeeling.**

STATUS	CASTE	TRADITIONAL OCCUPATION
HIGH (UPPER)	Bahuns	Priest
	Thakuris	Aristocrats
	Chhetris	Warriors
MIDDLE ORDER	Newars	Businessmen
	Rais,	Agriculturalists
	Limbus, Yakhas, Thamis	
	Magars, Sunuwars	Agriculturalists
	Gurungs	Sheperds
	Tamangs	Horse traders/ cavaliers
	Bhujels	Beaten rice makers
	Jogis	Ascetics
	Yolmos	Paper makers
	Sherpas	Porters
LOW (UNTOUCHABLES)	Sunars	Goldsmiths
	Kami	Ironsmiths
	Sarki	Cobblers
	Damai/Darji	Musician/tailors

Source: T.B. Subba: Dynamics of a Hill Society. p56.

Note: The occupational division is only an ideal form. The actual social division of labour does not follow the above pattern.

Note: Except for the high order there is no internal hierarchy within the middle and lower order.

<sup>15</sup> T.B. Subba, "Caste Relations in Nepal and India", in "Social Change", December, 1985, Vol.15. No.4. p.23.

Tanka Bahadur Subba has traced some distinctive features in each of the above tier. The high castes, he says, wear or are suppose to wear sacred threads, have Aryan features and are often fair complexioned. The middle caste members are not suppose to, and do not wear sacred threads, have Mongoloid features, and are often yellowish in complexioned. The untouchables also have Aryan features but they are not suppose to wear the sacred threads and are often dark complexioned. Almost all the middle castes (Mongoloids) have their own dialects, while the high and untouchable castes do not have individual dialects as such. Even culturally, the high castes and low castes have greater degree of adherence to the caste principles than the middle castes that being tribes before do not have much inclination towards the principle of purity and pollution.<sup>16</sup>

This caste structure has a bloated middle. It also has many unique features. For instance, though the caste ranking did not undergo a radical change, it was devoid of many Brahmanical elements. This system has many features derived from the tribal social system. One of the important reasons behind this lax caste system is that unlike in Nepal where most settlements were mono ethnic, the settlements in the tea gardens and bustees were invariably multi-ethnic. Moreover, an unfamiliar environment and a common new master formed the compelling factors behind the growing social interactions. Even the use of surnames, which is normally derived from one's caste or clan, underwent a change. Whereas Bahuns in Nepal use their clan names such as Timalisina, Riyal and Adhikari, in Darjeeling they seem to use the generic Sharma. The Khadkas, Thapas, and Basnets use Chhetri as generic name. Limbus are known as Subbas, a title given to local rulers

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<sup>16</sup> T.B. Subba, "Dyanamics of a Hill Society: The Nepalis of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas", Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1989, p.58.

by the Shah Kings in Nepal. Khambus call themselves Rais, which is a name for a local ruler.<sup>17</sup> So is the case of Sunuwars who call themselves Mukhias.

### **ETHNICITY AS KINSHIP:**

Ethnicity in reality is an extension of the feeling of kinship to a larger fictive super family, one that extends outside in space and down the generations in time. This fellow feeling and sense of brotherhood forms the binding factor for any given group. In the case of Darjeeling the sense of *Nepali daju-bhai* (Nepali brotherhood) has pervaded the whole of the Nepali society. It will therefore be interesting to look into the factors and foundations of this feeling of common brotherhood. Most of the conventional writings on Nepali ethnicity seem to have identified the spread of Nepali language as the most important factor binding the heterogeneous group. But T. B. Subba on the contrary presents an alternative thesis. In his own words: [The society in Darjeeling] “being a predominantly a Hindu society, the caste system automatically forms the basis of their social organization and almost every aspect of this society is pervaded by the same. But they are also class stratified. *The influence of the caste system, rather than the adoption of “Nepali” as their mother tongue for many, was instrumental in making their society an organic whole. Remove the caste system and the constituent parts will fall apart.*”<sup>18</sup>[Emphasis mine]. But the role of the Nepali language as a uniting factor cannot be overlooked. Acknowledging its importance as a strong identity marker it will only be in the fitness of things to deal with it under a separate head. The caste system nevertheless seems to be a strong reason in preventing the Bhutias and Lepchas from a real integration inspite of a considerable acculturation of these two groups into the Nepali group. For instance, a Lepcha or a Bhutia may not know any language other than Nepali, yet he is never considered so except by some lay people in the plains of India. On the other hand a

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<sup>17</sup> T.B. Subba, “Nepal and the Indian Nepalis”, in Kanak Mani Dixit (ed.), “The State of Nepal”, Himal Books, Katmandu, 2002, p.129

<sup>18</sup> T.B. Subba, “Dyanamics of a Hill Society”, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1989, p.8.

Limbu or a Rai may speak in no language other than in his own yet he becomes a “Nepali” to the outsider.<sup>19</sup>

One of the significant factors of integration, other than the caste system, is the historical, collective memory of oppression and migration. This material history has not only been a part of the folklore but has also been subjectively reconstructed in many famous literary works. Novels like Lilabhadur Chhetri’s , “*Basai*” (Settlement), and “*Brahmaputra Ko ChheuChhau*” (On the Banks of Brahmaputra), Laina Sing Bangdel’s, “*Muluk Bahira*” (Outside the Homeland), and Rudraraj Pande’s “*Prayaschit*” (The Penance), were all based on the motif of exploitation and migration.<sup>20</sup> The reasons are similar for the instant popularity of Manbahadur Mukhia’s drama, “*Ani Deorali Roonchha*” (And the Valley Cries) not only in Darjeeling but also in Nepal. Songs like *Nau Laakhe Tara Udayo* had struck an emotional chord of the Nepalis in Darjeeling. A lyrical poetry written by Agam Singh Giri and sung before the visiting King Mahendra by Gagan Gurung in 1959 it became an instant hit. The song was , infact, banned by the Indian Government alleging that it had shown India in a poor light. The following lines are worth quoting in this context.

*Na samjha aaja Nepali sanchole yahan bancheko;*  
*Kada kai majha pahadi phul chhaina ra kahan hanseko;*  
*Suna ko sapana aanshu ma kina po bandhi lyayau nee;*  
*Mana ko aago nevhaua kina po yahan aayau nee.*

Don’t think the Nepalis are living here [in Darjeeling] peacefully;  
Living amidst thorns, the flowers of the hills are without their smiles;  
Tying your dreams of gold with tears why did you bring it here;  
To douse the flames of your heart why did you come here?

[Translation mine]

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp.7-8.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Hutt, “Being Nepali Without Nepal: Reflections on a South Asian Diaspora”, in David N. Gellner et. al. (ed.), “Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal”, Harwood Academic Publishers, Netherlands, 1997, p.102. p.140.

This historical memory was sustained by the colonial perception of the internal group boundaries of the Nepalis.

As the society was evolving the institution of marriage seems to have been instrumental in the coalescing of a common ethnicity. Unlike in Nepal where marriages were within the ethnic groups, marriages in Darjeeling were and are in most case inter-ethnic. This has led to the dilution of the specific ethnic identities of the next generation Nepalis. Another important factor was the institution of *miteri* (fictive kinship). Such a system was in practice in Nepal for two reasons: affective and instrumental. The stringent caste system had always prevented social interaction among the ethnic groups. Miteri would thus provide a means through which people could enter into some kind of a social pact. It also served instrumental purpose in that the hostile geographical conditions which prevented exchange of resources could be neutralized by entering into miteri relationship.<sup>21</sup> There are two rules governing the miteri relationship. First, one can enter into a bond (*mit launu*) only with someone outside one's own clan or caste. Secondly, it is entered only between persons of the same sex.<sup>22</sup> Entering into miteri relationship entails social, ritual and sometimes economic obligations and responsibilities. It includes mutual aid and assistance as needed, open and generous hospitality. It also entails helping each other in construction project, agricultural work, a personal crisis, or in the form of financial or social or political support. Further, these responsibilities as mit or miteni did not confine to the two individuals. It had collateral fictive relations like *mit bau* (mit's father), *mit aama* (mit's mother), *mit daju* (mit's brother), etc.,<sup>23</sup> Such a strong institution seems to have cemented social bond between the diverse ethnic groups in a complex hierarchical system that otherwise separated the

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<sup>21</sup> Donald A. Messerschmidt, "Miteri in Nepal: Fictive Ties that Bind", in *Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies*", Vol.IX, No.4, 1982, pp.19-20.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p.15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp.22-23.

members of these endogamous groups. The institution was zealously preserved till sometime. But now the practice has become less common.

One of the important characteristics of the emerging Nepali ethnicity was that most of the ethnic groups were unranked. Unranked group here means the non-convergence of class and ethnic group.<sup>24</sup> This seems to have prevented the emergence of any particular group into a position of preponderance. Thus the emerging proto middle class derived its members from almost all sub-groups. Coming back to the central theme of kinship, it had important implications for the evolving new culture. This culture was an “implication” or “result” of an inter-ethnic interaction. It involved a general process of inclusion through “social processes”. The social processes here involved selective amnesia, i.e., forgetting their historical past, of their distinctiveness, their *kipats* and their chieftains but remembering their recent experience of migration. Thus the culture, which emerged out of this melting pot, has a blend of Indo-Aryan and Mongoloid culture.<sup>25</sup> It is also predominantly of a folk nature.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore a constant interaction among the ethnic groups led to the building of a consensus on common codes and values. Thus a Nepali is known for his liberal views on matters pertaining to social and religious. There is something formal in the Nepali culture. Infact, these interactions itself were structured through “prescriptions” and “proscriptions”. It meant articulation in some sectors or domains of activity and prevention of articulation in some others. For instance, each of the ethnic groups has their own shamans (priests) who preside during occasions of birth and death. They also have their own customs and rituals governing marriage. Any kinds of debate concerning these peculiarities are

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<sup>24</sup> For details see, Donald L. Horowitz, “Ethnic Groups in Conflict”, University of California Press, 1985, pp.21-22.

<sup>25</sup> Smt. Sunita Pradhan, “Nepali Bhasa Sahitya Ra Sanskriti ma Aantarik Sambandha”, in Pawan Chamling et. al. (ed.), “Sanskriti Bishesanka, Year 19. Issue.34. April 1999, Nirman Prakashan , Sikkim , pp.215-217.

<sup>26</sup> Indra Bahadur Rai, “Paripekchha ma Bharatiya Nepali Sanskriti”, in Pawan Chamling et. al. (ed.) Sanskriti Bishesanka, p.14.

proscribed. What can be debated are the secular aspects, but that too is limited to only certain aspects. Similarly, unlike in Nepal where beef eating is a taboo, it is not so in Darjeeling. The upper caste people may criticize it in private but not in public.

Thus it is quite clear that the culture that evolved in Darjeeling has two sets. It has a general culture based on the consensus governing social, economic and political life of all the sub-ethnic groups. Alongside this general culture, there exists sub-cultures governing situations of birth, marriage and death within the ethnic group. Earlier in Nepal the practice of big funeral was not there. It was only the close relatives who participated in it. But under the influence of the British, the Nepalis started organizing big funerals where all the ethnic groups participated. In a way the sub-cultures ceased to operate as an exclusive domain of a particular ethnic group.<sup>27</sup> Given the historical context, the general culture dominated the particular sub-cultures. It does not, however, mean that these cultures were banished. Rather its importance was never emphasized. This is so because ethnicity always has a contextual character. Within the context of an evolving, incipient society the ethnic groups made every effort to assimilate by simplifying their peculiar identities. This process of assimilation was further reinforced with the emergence of a vibrant civil society.

### **CONSOLIDATION OF NEPALI ETHNICITY : LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY:**

Even while admitting that the formation of Nepali ethnicity had reached a stage of maturity by the turn of the nineteenth century, it was by no means complete. The obtaining political and socio-economic <sup>conditions</sup> had facilitated the amalgamation of the diverse groups on the basis of common language, i.e., Nepali, and a common culture, particularly the secular aspects. But there are no indications

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<sup>27</sup> This point was shared by Sri Indra Bahadur Rai, a litterateur, during an interview with him on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

to suggest that these common features were consciously projected as identity markers. It came about only in the beginning of the twentieth century. It may be assumed that the latter half of the nineteenth century was the gestation phase of colonial modernity, particularly in the field of modern western education.<sup>28</sup> With rapid urbanization in Darjeeling a proto middle class emerged by the first quarter of the twentieth century. It also witnessed the emergence and maturation of many civil society institutions, which later on articulated the issues of Nepali identity. It is during this period that Darjeeling witnessed many social, cultural and literary movements. These movements have not only consolidated the Nepali society but have also facilitated in articulating its political demands at various stages.

The Nepalis are always emotional when it comes to their language. This Nepali language, which is the lingua franca not only of the Nepalis but also of other ethnic groups like the Bhutias and Lepchas is rightly regarded as the fundamental identity marker of the Nepalis. The language itself belongs to the Indo-Aryan group and is spoken in Darjeeling, Sikkim, pockets of North-Eastern states, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. The name “Nepali”, however, has been used only from the first quarter of the last century. The root of Nepali (Language) is *Khas Kura*, a language spoken by the Khasas in Western Nepal. With the entry of the Rajputs following the Muslim invasion in India, the Khasa empire started disintegrating from the thirteenth century. This led to the eastward movement of the Khasas. A number of principalities arose on the ruins of Khasa empire and various dialects of the Khasa speech were spoken in these areas. It appears that the name Khas Kura itself was given by the Tibeto-Burman speaking Mongoloids. The Newars of Katmandu called it *Khay-Bhay*. It was also known as *Parbatiya* or mountain dialect. Among the number of principalities, the house of Gorkha became the most powerful kingdom. Prithivinarayan Shah conquered the kingdoms of the

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<sup>28</sup> For details see, Dick B. Dewan, “Education in the Darjeeling Hills: A Historical Survey, 1835-1985”, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1991.



Nepal valley between the years 1768-69, and subsequently the eastern part was also conquered by his successors. The khasa speech which was spoken in Gorkha became the language of the durbar and the administration. This language then came to be known as *Gorkha bhasa* (Gorkkha language).<sup>29</sup> This Gorkha bhasa played a pivotal role in uniting the ethnic groups.<sup>30</sup> In Nepal the people use to speak in their own language with their friends and kin groups. More importantly, the need for a common language did not arise as these villages were generally mono-ethnic. It is interesting to note that most of the Tibeto-Burman languages are mutually unintelligible. In the case of Rais, there are different languages for different clans. Hence the saying, *jati Rai uti kura*, meaning there are as many languages as there are as many Rais. With the change in the settlement pattern, and more importantly the new social conditions created fertile ground for the growth of a single common language. Thus the Nepali language formed the basis for interaction among these groups.

Though Kumar Pradhan has cited many instances where “Nepali” was used to denote the Gorkha bhasa, the language in Darjeeling was popularly known as Gorkha bhasa till the formation of *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* (Nepali Literature Organisation) in 1924.<sup>31</sup> Even in Nepal, the state funded literary institution was named *Gorkha Bhasa Prakashini Samiti*. It was only in 1932 that the Government of Nepal replaced the name Gorkha bhasa with Nepali bhasa. Prior to the establishment of Nepali Sahitya Sammelan, there were many social organizations named after Gorkha; *Gorkha Library*, *Gorkha National Theatre Party*, *Gorkha Samiti*, *Gorkha Association*, etc.. There were literary journals like *Gorkhali* published from Varanasi, and *Gorkha Khabar Kagat*, a monthly published in Darjeeling since about 1901 and edited by Ganga Prasad Pradhan.

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<sup>29</sup> Kumar Pradhan, “A History of Nepali Literature”, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1984, pp.1-11.

<sup>30</sup> C.M. Bandhu, “The Role of Nepali Language in Establishing the National Unity an Identity of Nepal” in *Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies*, Vol xv. No.3-4.,1989, pp.121-177.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.10.

However, it was with the establishment of Nepali Sahitya Sammelan on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1924, that the literary activities were streamlined. The establishment of this organization marked the use of Nepali in place of Gorkha. Arguing for the language to be named Nepali instead of Gorkha, Hari Prasad Pradhan at the first meeting called for the establishment of the Sammelan had stated :

“We have felt that we might have to name this organization as Nepali Sahitya Sammelan because the word Nepali denotes a broader meaning. This word will signify all the jatis [ethnic groups] of Nepal like Magar, Gurung, Kirati, Newar, Limbu, etc.,.It will also help us in showing that all the above jatis are part of the one great Nepali nation. People might think that the real intention of this organization is to impose the language of the Gorkhalis, but these fears are baseless because Nepali has now become almost like a lingua franca of Himachal Pradesh. Though people living in this part speak different dialects there are hardly any who don't understand Nepali language...Moreover, no particular jati can claim the Nepali language to be their own.”<sup>32</sup>

[My Translation]

Hari Prasad Pradhan was elected the president of the Sammelan. The main objectives of the Sammelan were outlined as follows;

- a) To work for the development and promotion of Nepali language, literature and culture;
- b) Publication of original and translated literature;
- c) To hold literary seminars, exchange programme, writers meet, symposium ,etc, to further the cause of Nepali language;

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Kumar Pradhan, “Pahilo Pahar”, Shyam Prakashan, Darjeeling , 1982, pp.37-38.

- d) Publication of literary magazines, souvenirs and other periodicals, to encourage young and upcoming writers and poets;
- e) Research of ancient history, ancient literature, cultural heritage and civilization of Nepal.<sup>33</sup>

While assessing the role of Nepali Sahitya Sammelan, the contributions of Suryabikram Gewali, Dharnidhar Koirala, and Parasmani Pradhan, popularly known as *Sudhapa* stands out in prominence. Pratyoush Onta traces the discourse of self-improvement designed around two themes of general education and the progress of the Gorkha language as the major theme in the works of *Sudhapa*.<sup>34</sup> Dharnidhar Koirala's poem titled *Udbodhan* (clarion call) published in the third edition of *Chandrika*, and edited by Parasmani Pradhan, belongs to such genre.

The poem runs as follows:

*Jaga jaga aba jagana jaga;  
Laga unnati vise aba laga;  
Ghora nindra abata parityaga;  
Bho bhayo ati suteu aba jaga;  
Desh bandhu haru ho utha jaga;  
Laga unnati vise aba laga;  
Hera lau aru haru saba jage;  
Desa unnati vise saba lage;  
Hami haru pani lau aba jagaun;  
Desa unnati vise saba lagaun.*

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<sup>33</sup> R.P. Lama, "Nepali Sahitya Sammelan, Darjeeling: An Introduction", Published by Nepali Sahitya Sammelan on the occasion of the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations: (1924-1999), 1999, p.12.

<sup>34</sup> Pratyoush Onta, "Creating a Brave Nepali Nation in British India: The Rhetoric of Jati Improvement, Rediscovery of Bhanubhakta and the Writings of Bir History", in *Studies in Nepali History and Society*, Vol.I, No.1, June, 1996, p.39.

Rise up now, you rise;  
Now march towards the path of progress;  
Forsake that slumber now;  
Enough you have slept, get up now  
My dear country men, get up, rise up;  
March towards the path of progress;  
Look around you; others have already woken up;  
They are working hard for the progress of their country;  
So let us also now wake up;  
Let us also work hard for the progress of our country.

[My Translation]

While trying to look into the contributions of Sudhapa, one cannot but acknowledge the deep impact it had over the Nepali society. Their concern for the development and progress of the Nepali jati went a long way in giving a new meaning and direction to a community which was starved of icons and path finders. Notwithstanding their social contributions it can be said that some of their writings fell short of its political role. And this can<sup>be</sup> said so in the case of the works Suryabikram Gewali in particular. His biographies of Gorkha kings like Drabya Shah, Ram Shah, Prithivinarayan Shah, and Gorkhali commanders like Bir Balabhadra and Amar Singh may have no doubt reflected his hatred for the Ranas<sup>35</sup> but it in no way helped the Nepalis in shaping an independent political identity in India.

In spite of this we should not overlook the greater role of Nepali Sahitya Sammelan as an institution. Before 1932, the Calcutta University had recognized Nepali as a language to be taught till B.A. But it was referred to as "*Nepali Pahariya*" or "*Khaskura*". It was the result of the efforts of the Sammelan that led to the renaming of Nepali Pahariya or Khaskura as simply "Nepali" by the Calcutta

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<sup>35</sup> Suryabikram Gewali was imprisoned by the British Government for one year during 1944-45, apparently at the behest of the Rana rulers of Nepal.

University on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1932. Subsequently, Nepali was recognized as an official language along with Bangla (for the hill district) in 1961.<sup>36</sup> By the 1970s the demand for the inclusion of Nepali in the VIIIth Schedule of the Indian Constitution had already gained momentum. The All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti was established on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1972. It was the joint efforts of the literary organizations like Nepali Sahitya Sammelan , All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti, Bharatiya Nepali Rashtriya Parishad, and other social and political organization that led to the inclusion of Nepali under the VIIIth Schedule of Indian Constitution in 1992.(The Bill received the assent of the President on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1992)<sup>37</sup>.

### **SOCIAL REFORM AND SOCIO-CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

Social reform in many ways forms the basis or a precursor to many political movements. Unless a given community or a nation becomes socially conscious of itself, it will be very difficult for it to assert in political terms. For instance, the Indian national movement against the British is seen by many as a product of social reforms which were initiated from the early decades of the nineteenth century. Many attribute this awakening to the works of people like Rajammohun Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Jyotiba Phule and many others. But in the case of Darjeeling, we find that the socio-cultural and political movements have run almost parallel to each other. It should , however, be borne in mind that Darjeeling has not seen as many reform movements like in other places. This is not to suggest that there are no contradictions within the society.

Perhaps the earliest social reform movement can be traced to the second half of the nineteenth century. Popularly known as the *joshmani panth* (sect) its origin goes back to Nepal. Nothing definite can be said about its origin. As a religious

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<sup>36</sup> R.P. Lama, op. cit. p.13., p.35.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed study on Nepali language and its role in identity formation see, Alina Pradhan, "The Nepalis of Darjeeling: Search for Identity", Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1999.

movement it was based on a higher philosophy of devotion to *niruguna* or attributeless god. It was opposed to casteism, commercialization of spiritual knowledge and many other vices of Brahmanical Hinduism. The pioneers of this cult were Santa Dhirjedil Das and his disciple Sashidhar. But it was Sant Jnandil Das (c. A.D. 1821-1883), who strengthened and popularized it. Born to a Brahmin family at Fikal near Ilam in Eastern Nepal, his activities were directed against casteism, bigotry, superstitious rituals and sacrifices. Following his arrest and expulsion by the Rana rulers from Nepal, the “rebellious prophet” made Rangbul his base. Like many other mendicants of the cult, Jnandil composed hymns in Snudhukaddi and also in Nepali using folk rhythm. His *Udayalahari*, a poetical work completed at Darjeeling in 1877 gives us a good idea of the joshmani doctrine.<sup>38</sup>

The following are few lines from *Udayalahari*:

*Ain bajryo dhaniko firyo jagamaahaa;*  
*Ghuryaha bichari nisap herchha kaahaa;*  
*Ghusyaha bichari jagatama firchhan;*  
*Dhana bhannya Sadhu jani jani girchhan.*

Laws are made for the rich, such appears the universal rule;  
 From judges taking bribes none can get justice;  
 There are many in the world who are untrue;  
 Like friars who run after wealth;  
 Be sure, they will fall down the precipice.<sup>39</sup>

[Author's Translation]

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<sup>38</sup> Kumar Pradhan, “The Gorkha Conquest: The Process and Consequences of the Unification of Nepal with Particular Reference to Eastern Nepal”, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1991, pp.171-172.

<sup>39</sup> Kumar Pradhan, “A History of Nepali Literature”, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1984, p.63.

His poems were critique of the contemporary society. In one of his poems he writes;

*Dhan jana bhandai gau byari garchha;  
Lagchha ringata bharkhalama parchha;  
Kama ra kisa dhanda dherai garchha;  
Launa khana napai akalaima marchha.*

Run after wealth and kith from hilltops to the valley;  
You will only feel giddy and fall into a ditch;  
Labour and hard work poor peasants do;  
Hungry and naked they die...<sup>40</sup>

[Author's Translation]

It is surprising to see that there are hardly any traces of the legacy of somebody who wrote so powerfully. Many in Darjeeling pride themselves in being progressive in their thought and action as compared to the Nepalese of Nepal. But when it comes to the question of caste they seem to draw lines between *paani nachalne* (i.e. caste from which <sup>drinking</sup> water is a taboo.), and *paani chalne* (i.e. caste from which drinking water is not a taboo). The incidence of marriage between an upper caste and a lower caste is very low and even in those cases it is met with ostracisation from the village.

Thakur Chandan Singh also seems to have spoken against caste prejudices. In his article titled, “Our Low Caste Community”, which appeared in Tarun Gorkha on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1932, he wrote, “The so called Sudras and untouchables who have been trampled by Hindu society for thousand years have now increasingly earned self respect because of spread of education and the impact of independence movement. As a result, the enemies of the Hindu religion have now taken the task of alienating these untouchables from the Hindus and bringing into their fold. *It is now inevitable that the cruel system of untouchability will be*

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.64.

*eliminated . If it is not today, it has to be tomorrow, we have to completely eliminate untouchability in order to usher in progress.*"<sup>41</sup> [Emphasis mine] Many social organizations came up by the second decade of the last century. A prominent one among them is *Gorkha Dukh Niwarak Sammelan* (G.D.N.S.). The G.D.N.S was born in the context of a society which was conservative and unorganized. The sight of an unclaimed body taken to the crematorium hung on a bamboo stick is supposed to have stirred the conscience of the onlookers. This incident is supposed to have led to the formation of G.D.N.S.<sup>42</sup> Socially sensitive youths like Dhanbir Mukhia (Gurung), Harshadhoj Lama, Jitbahadur Khadka, Manbahadur Mukhia and Laloo Pradhan are supposed to have cut their fingers and written the name of the organization.<sup>43</sup> The organization was formally established on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1932. The motto of the organization was "*manavta nai sarvaseshta dharma ho*", meaning humanism is the greatest religion, and among its many objectives the following are the important ones;

- a) to help people who are orphans, physically handicapped or ill irrespective of their religion, caste, community or culture.
- b) to provide help (kind and cash) at times of death, illness or marriage to the people of the weaker sections.
- c) to give a decent burial to unclaimed dead bodies.
- d) to open and run orphanages.<sup>44</sup>

[My Translation]

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Mahendra P. Lama, "Thakur Chandan Singh", *Makers of Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1997, p.25.

<sup>42</sup> From the speech delivered by Kashinath Sharma, the then General Secretary of G.D.N.S. on the occasion of Golden Jubilee Celebrations, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1982.

<sup>43</sup> Ram Sharma, et. al. (ed.), "Mir Mireka Ujyala", G. D. N. S. , Darjeeling, p.15.

Also See, Jiwan Laber, "Hamra Byakti ra Byaktitwa Haroo", Shyam Prakash, Darjeeling, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> G.D.N.S. (Sammelan ko Gyapan Patra ra Byawasthapan ra Niyamawali), *Sammelan's Memorandum Letters and Rules of Organisation as Amended in the Annual General Meeting of 1996*. p.1-2.



The organization had to face stiff resistance from the conservatives, who saw dangers in its efforts to uproot caste prejudices and social evils. It did a commendable job in rehabilitating Nepali refugees fleeing from Burma during the Second World War. It also used to organize *musti daan* (handful contributions) for which the members used to go to each house collecting handfuls of grains and cereals. It also went to tea gardens for distributing blankets, rice, dal and medicine during the earthquake of 1934.<sup>45</sup> It also organized many dramas among which the most popular one was *Ani Deorali Runchha* (And the Valley Cries). The organization is active even now.

Another social organization of significance is *Sri Hitkari Sammelan*<sup>46</sup> (Sri Philanthropists' Association) established in 1945. Its goals were also similar to that of G.D.N.S. It emphasized the importance of education and unity of the community.<sup>47</sup> Within a span of few years the Sri Hitkari Sammelan established *Bhanubhakta*<sup>48</sup> *Vidyalaya* (Bhanubhakta School), *Rashtriya Pustakalaya* (National Library), *Baal Samiti* (Boys' Association), *Nepali Sahitya Parishad* (Nepali Literature Council), *Bhanubhakta Proudr Sikchha Kendra* (Bhanubhakta Adult Education Centre), etc.,<sup>49</sup>

G.D.N.S and Sri Hitkari Sammelan have played a historic role in strengthening the emerging Nepali society. Based on the idea of progress it was a progressive and in many ways a revolutionary force.

As the Nepali ethnicity was consolidating in the social sphere, Darjeeling witnessed the beginning of the cultural renaissance. The significance of this renaissance lies in inventing a "New Nepali", proud of his culture and tradition. It

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<sup>45</sup> Ram Sharma, et. al., (ed.), op. cit. pp.7-10.

<sup>46</sup> Since 1992, Srihitkari Sammelan has become an organization of the upper castes.

<sup>47</sup> Srihitkari Sammelan, Sambidhan, Darjeeling.

<sup>48</sup> Bhanubhakti (1814-1868) was the first modern Nepali poet.

<sup>49</sup> Agam Singh Giri, Amrita Devi Chhetri et. al. (ed.) "Kamal", Published by Kamal Prakashini Samiti for Bhanubhakta Vidhyalaya (Sahitya Bivhag), 1953, pp.59-62.

injected a new life into the people who were otherwise apologetic of their past. This period saw the thorough refashioning of the cultural artifacts symbolizing Nepali pride and identity. One such organization was the *Himalaya Kala Mandir* founded in 1950 with the objective of conserving and promoting Nepali art and culture. Its founder members were Ranjit Ghising, Jainul Avirdin, R.D. Rai, Manbir Singh, Shiv Prasad Singh, Tika Prasad, Tejman Gurung and others. Some of the artists in the troupe were Amber Gurung, Gagan Gurung, Rudramani Gurung and others. They later on founded the Art Academy in 1953. Himalaya Kala Mandir traveled to various places including Sikkim and Bhutan showcasing Nepali art and culture. The high point for this group was the featuring of the song “*lahure ko relimai fesana ramro. Rato rumal relimai khukuri bhireko*”. (The fashion of the soldier relimai is very good. Red handkerchief relimai and the tugging of khukuri.) in the film Humraj in 1965.<sup>50</sup> The legacy of the musical troupe is quite evident in the number of musical groups we find in Darjeeling today.

It is perhaps these social, cultural and literary movements that gave Darjeeling its internal dynamism. This dynamism was in sharp contrast to the stagnating conditions in Nepal. Poets like Balkrishna Sama had once said—“what Darjeeling thinks <sup>today</sup> Nepal thinks tomorrow” If one were to look for the reasons behind this dynamism, it can perhaps be located in the modernizing, anti-colonial nationalism that was sweeping the whole of India. The Nepalis, steeped as they were in traditional and monarchical values started participating in the freedom struggle led by the Indian National Congress. Some of the prominent freedom fighters were Chabilal Upadhyaya, Jangabir Sapkota, Pt. Sankerder Sharma, Capt. Sheetal Bista, Khadka Bahadur Bista, Capt. Ram Singh Thakuri, Dal Bahadur Giri, Pratiman Tamang, Rabila Bhujel, Narbir Lama and others. They Nepalis also got the opportunity to participate in the liberal democratic experiments

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<sup>50</sup> Based on the interview with Jiwan Laber, a well known local biographer, on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

within the framework of Provincial Autonomy. Damber Singh Gurung was elected to the Bengal Assembly in 1937. He went on to become the member of the Constituent Assembly until his death in April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1948. His Middle Temple returned cousin, Aribahadur Gurung, took his place<sup>51</sup>.

### **ETHNICITY AND SEPARATISM:**

In the above sections we have focused on the movements in the sphere of society and culture. It is now appropriate for us to look into the political movements in the life of the Nepalis. The inevitability of the Nepali separatism, as many would feel, stems from two important factors. First the idea of a *bir Gorkha* (brave Gorkha) was made known to the outside world by the colonial power. The valour and honesty did serve the British colonial interests. Perhaps the Nepalis will have to live with this historical burden for many more years<sup>to</sup> come. Lest the Nepalis cease to be their handmaids, the Britishers employed various politico-administrative policies to sustain the distinctiveness of the Nepalis from the mainstream. Secondly, separatism becomes a compelling strategy because of the crisis of identity at two levels. At one level is the need to create an identity, which is distinct from other Indians. At the other level is the need to differentiate themselves from the people of Nepal with whom they share many things in common. It is a sort of a dilemma in which the social and cultural urges drive them closer to Nepal, and the political prudence which compels them to draw lines.

In this context one cannot see the Gorkha National Liberation Movement of the mid 80s as a sudden upsurge. The movement was no doubt novel both in terms of popular participation and violence. But the spirit of separatism is not something new for this region. Perhaps the seed of such separatism was laid down by the

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<sup>51</sup> For biographical details of Damber Singh and Aribahadur Gurung, see, Bhagirath Rawats, "Baas Salkirahechha", (Abode is Burning), Published by Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, D.G.H.C., Darjeeling, 1996.

British themselves. The division of conquered territory into various categories like regulated, non-regulated areas on the basis of location, character and importance was a standard administrative policy of the British. Though the Indian Councils Act, 1861 did abolish such distinctions, it was the Act of 1870, which in many ways restored the pre-1861 position under which the Governor-General or Lieutenant General was empowered with the authority to enact legislation by means of executive order for less advanced districts. In pursuance of this policy Darjeeling was put under the “non-regulated” scheme for the purpose of ‘preservation of indigenous system of the simple people’. This arrangement was further reinforced by the Act No. XV of 1874, which led to the creation of “scheduled district”. The scheduled district was replaced by another arrangement known as the “backward tract” under the Government of India Act, 1919. Lastly, a new administrative designation “partially excluded area” was given vide Government of India Act. 1935.<sup>52</sup>

In all the above cases the policy of preservation and continuance of exclusivity of the area is quite evident. In each of the arrangements, the Governor-General, the governor, or sometimes both were vested with special powers concerning policies and administration.

The earliest instance of the demand for separate administrative set-up goes back to 1907. A similar demand was placed before the Chief Secretary, Government of West Bengal on November 8, 1917, pleading for the creation of ‘separate unit by the representatives of Darjeeling District’. These activities were streamlined with the establishment of the Hillmens Association sometime in 1918. Some of the prominent members were Bahdur Rai, Hari Prasad Pradhan, S.W.Ladenla, P.P.Pradhan, etc.,

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<sup>52</sup> Dyutis Chakrabarti, “Gorkhaland: Evolution of Politics of Segregation”, Special Lecture, No.X, Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University, Darjeeling, 1988, pp.6-9.

The Hillmens Association put forward several prayers and petitions demanding exclusion from Bengal. This organization was, however, rocked by the deteriorating fraternity among the Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas. It was subsequently replaced by Hill People's Social Union. Formed in 1934, it symbolized the political coalition of the three main communities, viz., Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas. It started a Nepali daily aptly named "Nebula", ("N" for Nepali, "Bu" for Bhutia, and "La" for Lepcha.)<sup>53</sup>

But it was the *All India Gorkha League* (A.I.G.L.) that took up the issue of identity in a more vigorous way. The A.I.G.L., infact is a later reincarnation of the *Gorkha League* formed by Thakur Chandan Singh on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1924 in Dehradun. Among its many objectives was its desire to integrate the Gorkha society into the Indian national mainstream.<sup>54</sup> In Darjeeling itself, the now famous All India Gorkha League was formed on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1943. Addressing a two thousand odd audience at the Rink Hall, the first President of A.I.G.L., Sri Damber Singh Gurung had read out the objectives finalized in the meeting at Kalimpong on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1943. The foremost reason for the formation of the organization, the President had emphasized, was to secure the political rights of the Nepalis living in India. It is interesting to note that the constitution of the A.I.G.L. defined Gorkha as any person who is considered to be a subject of Nepal, and who has settled in India.<sup>55</sup> More importantly, it pledged to have connection with the independent country of Nepal, the mother country of Gurkhas with devotion and loyalty.<sup>56</sup> It is very difficult to raise questions about its political maturity when we look at its contributions to the Nepali society in India. Perhaps they needed some more time before they could snap the emotional ties with Nepal. The A.I.G.L. became the

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<sup>53</sup> T.B. Subba, "Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of Gorkhland Movement in Darjeeling", Har- Anand Publications, Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1992, pp.75-83.

<sup>54</sup> Mahendra P. Lama, op.cit. p.35.

<sup>55</sup> Bhagirath Rawat, op. cit. pp.139-140.

<sup>56</sup> Bhai Nahar Singh et. al. (ed.), "History of All India Gorkha League 1943-1949." Nirmal Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1987, p.1.

foremost platform for voicing the demands of the Indian Nepalis. In its numerous memoranda to the British Government as well as to the Indian leaders it put forward a strong case for the need for a separate administrative unit in Darjeeling. Another notable experiment of A.I.G.L. was the demand for *Uttarakhand*, mooted by Randhir Subba in 1949.

From the very beginning the demand for separation has been raised by parties of all hues. Even the then undivided Communist Party of India is suppose to have submitted a memorandum to Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Vice President of the Interim Government and Liaquat Ali Khan, the then Finance Member, demanding *Gorkhasthan*, an independent nation comprising of the present day Nepal, Darjeeling district and Sikkim, excluding its present North district. The issue of separate state has been the proverbial horse which has been flogged by every party in the hills. In spite of this, the period after the independence has seen the gradual consolidation of the Nepali people: socially and culturally. It was a phase of political socialization and participation in the political process. Movements for the inclusion of the Nepali language in the VIIIth schedule contributed in a major way, to the larger movement for assertion of identity and the demand for some kind of regional autonomy.

### **GORKHA NATIONAL LIBERATION: THE APOGEE OF IDENTITY MOVEMENT:**

It is towards the end of the 1970s that the Nepalis started articulating their political demands in a more clearer terms. Perhaps the objective conditions had changed considerably forcing the identity movement to take a different trajectory. It is not as if demands for separate state were not made previously, but it was during this phase that the demands were backed up with popular participation and violence. The Pranta Parishad and the Gorkha National Liberation Front (G.N.L.F.) were the key players during this phase. Pranta Parishad in its document titled "Why

Gorkhaland” put forward its demand for separate statehood on the basis of distinctiveness of the people living in the district of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri (Doars) ethnically, culturally, linguistically, socially and historically. It argued that the “locking up” of the Gorkhas with West Bengal has reduced the region to the position of “subservient colony of Bengal”. Highlighting the history of the separatist movement it reiterated the demand for nothing less than a “full fledged statehood for the region of Darjeeling and Doars.”<sup>57</sup>

It is , however, with the G.N.L.F. that the identity movement scaled new heights. The G.N.L.F. was formed on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1980. It can be credited for bringing the issues of identity and citizenship into the political discourse in a more alarming way. The issue of identity and citizenship seems to have acquired special significance particularly in the wake of the expulsion of the Nepalis from Assam and Meghalaya between 1980 and 1985.<sup>58</sup>The G.N.L.F. is closest when it comes to the analysis of the causes of crisis of identity of Indian Nepalis. It contended that the crisis stems from the presence of Nepal as an independent sovereign state, and more particularly Article VII of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950. The said treaty binds both the signatories to grant, on reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership or property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and privileges of a similar nature. This clause, according to the G.N.L.F., blurs the distinction between citizens of Nepal living in India, and people of Nepali origin who are citizens of India. Hence the demand for its abrogation. Another important aspect of this movement was the remoulding the Indian Nepalis as Gurkhas. This,

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<sup>57</sup> Why Gorkhaland ? A Document Issued by Pranta Parishad on the occasion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1986. Published by Pranta Parishad , Darjeeling, pp.1-3.

<sup>58</sup> B.P. Mishra a faculty with the Centre for Himalyan Studies, North Bengal University, sees these incidents in the North-East as the primary reason behind the upsurge in Darjeeling. He calls it “transferred anger”.

For details see, B.P. Mishra, “Behind Gorkhaland Agitation”, Mainstream, Vol.XXX, No. 7, Nov.1, 1986, pp.15-19.

they believed would put an end to the confusion the word Nepali generates in India. So the best possible way of creating and preserving this new identity would be through a creation of a separate state of Gorkhaland. Further, it sought to snap cultural ties with Nepal. Notable in this regard is the projecting of Agam Singh Giri as some king of a *jatiya kabhi* (poet representing the community) as opposed to Bhanubhakta.<sup>59</sup>

The practice of keeping pictures of King and Queen of Nepal was also given up during this time. It requires minimum effort to see the political maturity in these measures. It was, in a way, a reassertion of the pledge of allegiance and loyalty to the Indian State.

The G.N.L.F. movement, which was simmering from the early 1980s took a violent form between the years 1986-1988. Under the leadership of Subash Ghising it swept the entire region. The nature of violence and its magnitude must not however blind us from the serious shortcomings of the movement. Though the movement had enough political content it, however, lacked a comprehensive economic programme. It was based more on the nostalgia of a heroic past and emotion. It failed to provide any serious alternative political arrangement. The separatist ideology had enemies within. The C.P.I.(M) supporters in the Hill openly opposed the G.N.L.F. demand for Gorkhaland. So a lot of energy was lot in fighting its own people rather than the alleged enemy. A thorough review of the movement will be done at a later occasion. At this point it is suffice to say that the G.N.L.F. movement enthused the people on the question of identity and citizenship. After much of the lives were lost and properties destroyed the tripartite agreement between the G.N.L.F., the State Government and the Central Government acme to a political understanding. A Memorandum of Settlement was signed between the

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<sup>59</sup> The bust of Bhanubhakta at Chowrasta, the main town square, was beheaded by the G.N.L.F. activists during the agitation. Moreover, the D.G.H.C. stopped celebrating Bhanujayanti from 1989. See, The Telegraph. Calcutta, July, 12<sup>th</sup>, 1989.



G.N.L.F. and the State Government on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1988.<sup>60</sup> Popularly known as the Accord, it provided for the creation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, (now Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Autonomous Council) consisting of a popular chamber with forty two members of which twenty eight were to be elected directly. The Hill Council was given charge of nineteen departments and financial grants were to come from the Government of West Bengal as well as the Centre.<sup>61</sup> On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August another pact of citizenship and language was signed in New Delhi.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>61</sup> Amiya Kumar Samanta, "Gorkhaland Movement: A Study in Ethnic Separatism", A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 2002, pp.117-135.

<sup>62</sup> See Appendix D

## Chapter IV

### NEPALI IDENTITY AND SUB-ETHNIC REVIVALISM: CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS

One of the fundamental arguments throughout the preceding chapters has been the idea of the changing boundaries of ethnic groups. Ethnic groups can be larger or smaller, more or less exclusive. Membership in an ethnic group is a matter of social definition, an interplay of the self-definition of members and the definition of other groups. Most groups change their boundaries slowly and imperceptibly, while some change quickly, deliberately and noticeably. Though ascription is the key characteristic of ethnicity, and it is something acquired at birth, there are possibilities for changing group boundaries through amalgamation or differentiation.<sup>1</sup> And ethnicity as an extended form of kinship is based on certain key elements like shared historical past, area of origin, language, religion, nationality, kinship pattern and physical appearances such as skin colour. But ethnicity in its formation and continuation does not require all the above elements. It is in the nature of ethnicity to emphasize on either one or a combination of some of the elements mentioned above. It is also a fact that the focus of ethnicity on any of the elements is not permanent –it keeps shifting its basis. This shift in the basis of ethnicity results in changes in identity.<sup>2</sup> This change in identity is usually accompanied or followed by cultural change. Though cultural change is the inevitable result of identity change, it however differs from one group to another. If a fairly homogeneous group undergoes an identity change the change in culture may be a limited one. But if the

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<sup>1</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, "Ethnic Identity", in Nathan and Glazer, (ed.) *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, Harvard University Press, 1975, pp.113-115.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.124.

group in question is a conglomeration of diverse groups then identity change leads to marked cultural deviations by the sub-groups.

### **NEPALI CULTURE AND IDENTITY: BASIC STRUCTURE, FOUNDATIONS AND SYMBOLS:**

Nepali culture, as we know, is the product of various historical forces. It evolved in a particular context and many socio-cultural movements contributed in its evolution. As mentioned earlier, it evolved through a process of prescription and proscription within a multi-ethnic setting. This has rendered the resultant culture and identity unique in many ways. We have referred to the general culture and the sub-cultures elsewhere in passing. It is now imperative for us to discuss their facets, particularly of the general culture in greater detail. But it should be borne in mind that the general culture and the sub-cultures are not discrete entities; there are many grey areas. Infact the Nepali identity derives its sustenance from both these cultures.

Historically the principal foundations of the Nepali identity and nationalism *are* the idea of *Pahar* (Hill), *Kamaan* (Tea Garden), and *Maato* (literally Soil). It is a fact that majority of the Nepalis live in the hilly region of the Darjeeling district. Many historical factors were behind this concentration of the population in the hills. But this does not mean that the Nepali populations are confined to the hilly region of the district only. There are many inhabiting the plains of north Bengal. The Hill, however, form the natural habitat for the Nepalis. For the Nepalis the word Hill seems to signify something more than a mere geographical term.

Based on the notion of Pahar is the significance of the tea gardens. Tea gardens have always been at the centrestage of the social and political life of the Nepalis. No one will question the fact that it was the establishment of the tea gardens that had attracted the Nepalis into Darjeeling. The oppressed and brutalized people were fed with stories like, *chiya ko bot ma paisa falchha*, meaning money grows on

tea bushes. Tea gardens have always been a source of hope. It was here that they had begun a new life. Quite naturally tea gardens have been central to popular social and political imaginations.

Linked with this idea of hill and tea garden is the notion of *maato*. The conception of *maato* signifies the love for one's birthplace. Much of the political idioms and symbols are derived from these three concepts. In this context it will be worthwhile to quote two famous poems of Agam Singh Giri. In the poem titled "*Mayaloo Pakha Chiyabaari*", meaning charming glen of tea garden, he writes:

*"Najau farki Nepal uthera bhanchha deorali.  
Farkera hera Munqlan ko mayaloo paakha chiyabaari..."*  
*"Aanshu ko thopa chiya ko buttama yanhi bilaun.  
Mayaloo paakha hererai bethaloo aankha nidaun.  
Purkha ko laas yanhi chha chiyabari maajha ropeko.  
Chinaroo khoja Munqlanmai syaulale kanhi chhopeko..."*<sup>3</sup>

Don't go to Nepal the vale wakes up and cries.  
Turn back and see Munqlan [Darjeeling] its charming glen of tea gardens...  
Tear drops, let it dry among the tea bushes.  
Seeing the charming glen, let the sullen eyes sleep.  
Among these bushes we have buried our ancestors.  
It is in Munqlan that we must look for an identity among these shrubs...

[My Translation]

In the above quoted poem Giri has wonderfully summed up the role of the tea gardens in shaping the destiny of the Nepalis in Darjeeling.

In another significant poem he has brought out the nationalist feelings of Nepalis based on the idea of *pahar* and *maato*. In the poem titled "*Pahar Ki Rani, Darjeelinglai*", meaning dedicated to Queen of Hills, Darjeeling, he writes:

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<sup>3</sup> Mohan Thakuri, (ed.) "Agam Singh Giri Rachna Sanchayan", Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1992, p.142.

*“Maato ko maaya birsera yanha.  
Banchera kepo saar .  
Pahar ki rani Darjeeling lai  
Maya chha barumbaar.  
Deorali paakha bhijauchha aankha  
Timile aaja birsema.  
Algera Himal muskai dinchha  
Timile aaja samjhema.  
Chorera katai najau najau  
Nuhera bhanchha bansghaari.  
Samati deula paitala timro  
Chhekeri bhanchha chiyabari”.*<sup>4</sup>

Forgetting ones love for the homeland  
such a life is futile  
Queen of Hills, Darjeeling  
we'll keep loving you forever.  
The vale and the hill will shed tears  
if you forget them today.  
The soaring mountains will beam  
if you remember them today.  
the bamboos exhort you to stay back  
The tea gardens will stop you.

[My Translation]

This poem was adapted into a song during the height of the G.N.L.F. led agitation in the mid 80s. It became the rallying point for the separatist movement.

This identity that has evolved over the years draw its sustenance from the Nepali culture which itself represents the harmonious blend of the general culture and the sub-cultures of the constituent ethnic groups. We have called it general culture because it has been internalized by almost all the ethnic groups. This general culture consists of both secular and religious aspects. Infact there is very little that

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid p. 144.

can be strictly defined as secular or religious. Every cultural practice seems to have over a period of time found its basis in some myth or a particular worldview. This worldview is largely of a tribal and animistic nature. But the central foundation of the Nepali identity is in the religious practices. These religious practices, which apparently draws from Hinduism is not the Hinduism as understood in the classical sense. Indra Bahadur Rai, a noted writer, has brought out the differences in these religious practises well. He says that our ancestors transformed “*Dushera*” into “*Dasai*” by adding our own *Phulpati* ( a festival held two days before Dasai in which marygold flowers are decorated in a palanquin and taken around the town), *Maar* (the day next to Phulpati when the ritual of offering animal sacrifice is observed), *Bhejo*(the day after maar); we have made *Tyohaar* into *Tiwar* (Diwali) by adding *Bhai Tika* ( a ritual in which the sisters put tika on the forehead of their brothers praying for their longer life and well being.), *Bhailo* ( the night of Diwali where young girls go to each house singing hymns praying for the well being of the family), and *Deuse* ( the day after Diwali where the male members go around the village singing songs for the well being of the family).<sup>5</sup> The conventional explanation behind these practices is the marking of the victory of Lord Ram over Ravana. This victory of good over evil, legend has it, was spread across the kingdom of Ayodhya by young boys and girls through deuse and bhailo.

But lately an alternative historiography seems to have emerged in Nepal. Gopal Gurung in his controversial work, “Hidden Facts in Nepalese Politics “ is suppose to have argued that the festival of Tiwar came about in the Kingdom of a tribal king Balihang. It is said that this popular king had fallen ill and the entire kingdom was praying for his life. And when he eventually recovered the entire kingdom rejoiced. Balihang is suppose to have sent young boys and girls to spread

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<sup>5</sup> Indra Bahadur Rai, “Paripekchha ma Bharatiya Nepali Sanskriti”, in Pawan Chamling ,et.al (ed.) “Sanskriti Bishesanka”, Nirman Prakashan, Namchi, Sikkim, Year 19, Issue 34. April, 1999, pp.13-14.

this news throughout the kingdom. Gurung cites the example of a line in the hymns of Deuse where they say, “*hami aafai aayeko hoinau, Balimaharaj ko hukumle garda*”, meaning we have not come on our own but on the orders of King Bali.<sup>6</sup> It is not for us to judge the authenticity of such claims. But such alternative explanations does point towards the tendency among sub-ethnic groups to sanitise such rituals and festivals off their alleged Hindu elements. To take the argument of Indra Bahadur Rai a little further it can be said that the Hinduism as practiced in Nepal and Darjeeling is an amalgam of Hinduism, Buddhism and Animism. In Nepal Hinduism and Buddhism have been fused to a remarkable degree whereby their sectarian distinctiveness is often obscured. In most cases public festivals and popular rites are devoid of any strong sectarian overtones. Gods like *Ganesha, Bhairave, Mahakala*, or some of the Goddesses like *Kumari, Vajrayogini* and *Matsyendranath* are worshipped as much by the Hindus as by the Buddhists.<sup>7</sup> In Darjeeling itself a classic example of this interface between Hinduism and Buddhism are the temples at *Mahakal Dara* (Observatory Hill). The main temple has deities of both the Hindu and Buddhist pantheon. On the left is a *Bahun* (Hindu Priest) and on the right is a *Lama* (a Buddhist Monk) presiding over the puja. And an even more interesting is temple of Kali next to the main temple where a Lama presides over the matter. Further below is the abode of *Sumnima Paruhang* (God and Goddess of the Kirats). These temples symbolize the multi cultural nature of Darjeeling. Even Dasai, which is the main festival of the Nepalis in Darjeeling has numerous animistic elements. A week before Dasai the practise of performing *Kul Puja* (Propitiation of ancestors) is observed by all ethnic groups including the Bahuns and Chhetris. This puja usually involves sacrifice of an animal or a fowl. It is interesting to note that the upper castes who are normally vegetarian use radish or *lauka* (a vegetable from the gourd

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<sup>6</sup> This point was reiterated by Tika Prasad Rai, a noted Sanskrit scholar, in an interview on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Prayag Raj Sharma, “Nepali Culture and Society: Reflections on Some Historical Currents” in K.P. Malla (ed.) “Nepal Perspectives on Continuity and Change”, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Nepal, 1989, pp.140-141.

family) as a surrogate animal. In essence these Hindu festivals are sans many features which are quintessentially Hindu.

A close observation of Darjeeling would further reveal that the dehinduisation of rituals has gone a step further. If one compares the religious practices in Nepal and Darjeeling we find that many rituals, which are religiously observed in Nepal are conspicuous by their absence. And even if they are observed they lack their pristine form. Rituals like *Thulo Ekadashi* (a ritual in which the Hindus eat once a day and take a dip in holy rivers), *Janai Purnima* (a ritual in which the Brahmins wear new sacred threads), *Teej* (a day in which married daughters are called back home and given good food), *Matha Tirtha Aunsee* or *aama ko anuhar herne deen* ( a day in which sons and daughters come with sweets and gifts to see their mother), *Kushe Aunsee* or *bau ko anuhar herne deen* (a day in which sons and daughters come with gifts to see their father) are not known in Darjeeling. It is to be borne in mind that most of these rituals are observed mainly by the Hindu upper castes. The reason for their non-observance in Darjeeling is because of the demographic composition in which the semi-Hindu ethnic groups (Mongoloids) form the overwhelming majority.

In place of these rituals another set of semi-Hindu, semi-Animistic and secular cultural practices have gained salience. Occasions like *Maghe Sangrati* (the practise of propitiating nature Gods for a good harvest), *Asar Pandhra* (the final day of sowing paddy people eat beaten rice with curd), *Saune Sangrati* ( it is the celebration marking the end of the sowing season), *Guru Purne* ( a full moon day in the month of Bhadau all the Jhankris [Shamans] go to the Mahakal Dara to pay their obeisance to their gurus). From these observations it can be deduced that culture and cultural forms change with the changing context. Within the context of the nation-state of Nepal, the Nepali culture represents the national culture, and outside the boundaries of the nation-state of Nepal, the Nepali culture undergoes changes



inorder to represent the Nepali community.<sup>8</sup> Thus over a period of time this general culture –which includes the Hindu and Animistic- and some parts of the sub-cultures have complemented each other. Infact the sub-cultures have to a great extent shaped the general culture thereby giving it a plural character. Hence the symbols of the Nepali culture are diverse and plural. The *Khukuri* ( a traditional knife) , the *phedangbas*, the *mangpas*, the *bombos*, *damphu* ( a circular musical instrument belonging to the Tamangs made out of ghorals skin fastened together with thirty two bamboo spikes), *Maadal* (a musical instrument of the Magars), *Chaybrung* ( a musical instrument of the Limbus), *Khajari* ( a musical instrument of the Bahuns and Chhetris), *dhaan naach* (literally meaning paddy dance, popular among the Limbus. they call it *Ya-Rakma*, Ya meaning paddy and Rakma meaning to trample) all form part of the same Nepali culture.

#### **POST AGITATION DARJEELING: WIDENING OF ETHNIC CLEAVAGES:**

The G.N.L.F. led separatist movement was the highest watermark in the history of the identity assertion of the Nepalis in Darjeeling. The agitation was in many ways an apocalyptic event. For the people in the hills the agitation had meant hope and promise. The issue of identity and citizenship, for all these years, had been hanging like the sword of Damocles over the heads of the Nepalis. The agitation promised and to a large extent made a successful political and moral claim over the territory they have been inhabiting for so long. Not many will deny the fact that the political uprisings had more or less put to rest the doubts of the average Nepalis. But the golden dreams spawned by the G.N.L.F. have been eluding the people so far. So much more was promised and nothing substantial was delivered.

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<sup>8</sup> Purnaprakash Nepal “Yatri” , “Eyattaka Dristile Nepali Sanskriti”, in Pawan Chamling et.al. (ed.) “Sanskriti Bishesanka”, p.82.

This agitation was a watershed in the political and social life of the hill people. It has brought about fundamental changes in the sphere of politics, economy, culture and society.<sup>9</sup> Many are not happy with the kind of changes in these spheres. One of the most baffling thing about the post-agitation Darjeeling is the problem of political consciousness- or the lack of it. This raises many questions about the nature of the agitation. The agitation, contrary to the expectations of many, failed to cash in the vibrant Nepali ethnicity in transforming it into a mature nation. The G.N.L.F. leadership aroused the masses on the basis of fear and emotion rather than on any sound comprehensive political ideology. They harped more on the historical, ethnic, linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of the Nepalis from the Bengalis.<sup>10</sup> The demand for a separate state would have been much more tenable if it were to be based on ideas like relative deprivation, internal colonialism or cultural division of labour. The Study Forum, a body of local intellectuals, did provide some intellectual input but Subash Ghising shunned them as the movement progressed. It is this very nature of the agitation that has hindered the growth of political institutions in Darjeeling. It has singularly failed in creating a democratic space in the society.<sup>11</sup> The emerging civil society, which had played a historic role in the formation of the Nepali ethnicity, was brutally crushed.

Another significant impact of the agitation was the breakdown of the traditional authority structures. This breakdown has meant the rejection of the core values.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the void created as result of this breakdown was not filled. There was an ideological vacuum in the society. Coupled with this is the

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed analysis of the impact of agitation, See, Tanka Bahadur Subba, " Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling" Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1992, pp.194-220.

<sup>10</sup> For details of their demands see "Gorkhaland Movement: A Quest for Identity" Compiled by Mahendra P. Lama, Published by Department of Information and Cultural Affairs" D.G.H.C., 1996.

<sup>11</sup> I owe this point to Prof C.B. Rai, former Principal of St. Joseph's College, North Point , Darjeeling.

<sup>12</sup> By core values I mean the traditional communitarian spirit which formed the guiding principle of the society.

deteriorating economic condition in the hills. The three T's (Tea, Timber, and Tourism), which formed the bedrock of the hill economy, are in shambles today. Many of the tea gardens have closed down and there are already reports of starvation deaths in these places. The rural (non tea garden) economy has collapsed and hordes of people are now migrating to the towns putting pressure on already overstretched infrastructure and resources. Class divisions have become stark, as also the spread of the growing *nouveau riche* culture.

There is this fear lurking in the minds of many Nepalis about the growing influence of the Tibetians. The economic advancement of these Tibetians is attributed to their schedule tribe status, which student bodies like All Gorkha Students' Union (A.G.S.U.) allege are unlawful. The A.G.S.U., infact, has pleaded with the government to draw distinctions between Bhutias, who are earlier inhabitants, and Tibetians, who are refugees since 1959. The growing influence of the Tibetan culture is seen as a direct challenge to the Nepali identity, culture and symbols. This has caused some kind of a rightwing reaction from the Nepalis.

The A.G.S.U. has responded to this perceived threat with calls for economic boycott. Since 1996, they have been organizing *Gorkha Ekta Diwas* (Gorkha Unity Day) wherein they showcase Nepali art and culture. On that day they felicitate successful Nepalis from different walks of life. Some of them who have been felicitated so far are Capt. Ram Singh Thakuri (a veteran of the Indian National Army and the composer of national anthem), Capt. Dhan Singh Thapa (a recipient of Param Vir Chakra [highest gallantry award] for his exploits during the Chinese aggression in 1962), Indra Bahadur Rai ( a well known writer, winner of the Sahitya Akademi award 1977.), and many others.<sup>13</sup> There is a growing tendency among the Nepalis to construct the Tibetians as “the other”. This tension seems to

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<sup>13</sup> Based on an interview with Roshan Giri, President of All Gorkha Students Union, on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003.

explode at the slightest of provocations. One such incident was the protest rally organized by *Darjeeling Kalakaar Sangathan* (Darjeeling Artists' Forum) and *Gorkha Sanskriti Sangha* (Gorkha Cultural Group) over the programme titled "Darjeeling: Pahad Ki Pukar" (Darjeeling: Call of the Hills) in Doordarshan (state run Television network) on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1995. The protestors criticized the channel for focusing only on the Tibetians which, 'constituted only one percent of the hill population.'<sup>14</sup> It described the television programme as a conspiracy to deny the Nepalis of their rights to live in the country. They issued veiled threats to those who tried to 'attack or insult the Nepali culture'.<sup>15</sup>

It is this failure of the hill society, politically and economically, that has given birth to new social movements in the shape of sub-ethnic revivalism. The mushrooming of the sub-ethnic organizations represents an effort by the diverse groups to use a cultural mode for their economic and political advancement. These sub-ethnic organizations have gained salience and legitimacy as it seems to be filling the ideological vacuum created after the agitation.

### **SUB-ETHNIC REVIVALISM: A SHIFT FROM MACRO TO MICRO IDENTITIES:**

It is by now quite clear that the Nepali identity is a multi-layered constructed identity. It is a product of amalgamation, which involved superimposition of new layers of identity on old, without displacing the old levels. But only rarely and only over very very long periods of time can the process of amalgamation succeed in producing so complete a fusion as to obliterate the component sub-groups.<sup>16</sup> But the Nepalis of Darjeeling had to a certain extent reached a stage of maturity. But with the changing circumstances the sub-ethnic groups seems to be shifting its focus

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<sup>14</sup> "Protest Against D.D. Programme", Hindustan Times, July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1995.

<sup>15</sup> "Biased D.D. Programme Sparks Protest: Hill Bodies Up in Arms" The Telegraph, July 19, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, "Ethnic Identity", in Glazer and Moynihan (ed.) "Ethnicity: Theory and Experience" Harvard University Press, 1975, p.139.

away from the constructed identity, i.e. the Nepali identity toward a more ascriptive identity, i.e. the sub-ethnic identity. So what we have in Darjeeling now is the polarization of the Nepali community on sub-ethnic lines. Perhaps the most proximate causes can be traced in the Backward Classes Commissions' hearings held in Darjeeling in 1992. Since the Commission required every sub-ethnic group- the sub-ethnic groups are seen as castes within the overall caste system- to be represented by an organization, the sub-groups had to organize themselves formally. Another significant factor behind this revivalism is the nationality movement currently underway in Nepal under the aegis of *Nepal Janajati Mahasang* (Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities). Originally known as Nepal Federation of Nationalities, it was formed in 1990 as a common platform for seven different ethnic organizations; four represented Newars, Tamangs, Magars, and Gurungs; the other three were Kiranti bodies, one representing Limbus, two Rais. Since the U.N. resolution of December 1993 calling for a decade of Indigenous Peoples, its ranks have been swelling.<sup>17</sup> Presently, it represents fifty-nine ethnic groups. The newly enacted, National Foundation for Uplift of Adivasi/Janajati Act, 2002 defines adivasis/janajatis as those ethnic groups or communities who have the following characteristics:

- a) those who have their own ethnic language other than Nepali;
- b) those who have their own distinct traditional customs other than those of ruling high castes;
- c) those who espouse distinct culture other than the Hindu culture of dominant groups;

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<sup>17</sup> David N. Gellner, "Ethnicity and Nationalism in the World's only Hindu State", in David N. Gellner et.al. (ed.) *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*, Harwood Academic Publishers, Netherlands, 1997, p.20.

- d) those who have distinct social structure that does not fall under hierarchical varna or caste system;
- e) those who have written or oral history that traces their line of descent back to the occupants of their territories before the annexation into present Nepal;
- f) those who are included in the list of adivasis/janajatis published by the H.M.G. (His Majesty's Government).

Some of the objectives of N.E.F.I.N. are;

- a) to play an active role in the development [process] by uniting the Indigenous Peoples /Nationalities and promoting fraternity among them;
- b) to formulate common policies and develop leadership for Indigenous Peoples/Nationalities by co-ordinating with these organisations;
- c) to facilitate in the development of language, literature, script, religion, culture, and education of Indigenous Peoples/ Nationalities, and assist in the preservation and promotion of their rights;
- d) to promote international fraternity by demonstrating solidarity against discrimination based on race, origin, ethnicity, language, religion and gender, etc.<sup>18</sup>

But to attribute the phenomenon of sub-ethnic revivalism to the above causes only will be an oversimplification of the matter. Sub-ethnic organizations like All India Tamang Buddhist Association (A.I.T.B.A.) had been demanding tribal status since the early 80s. And since 1992, we have seen the mushrooming of such sub-ethnic organizations. It is not the organization in themselves but the nature and the direction towards which these organizations are heading that is important. These

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<sup>18</sup> visit [www.nefen.org](http://www.nefen.org).

organizations, which emerged purely for an instrumental purpose, i.e., demand for schedule tribe status is now acquiring symbolic and expressive value.<sup>19</sup> There is also the added danger of the “spill over effect” in this sub-identity. Right through we have been maintaining that shifts in the “center of gravity” of ethnic identity is a result of some external stimuli. But in the case of spillover effect the identity becomes independent or functionally autonomous of the stimuli that produced it and may become so internalized as to be invoked even in contexts quite different from the one in which it was formed.<sup>20</sup> It remains to be seen whether the sub-identity movements will come to such a stage or not. But even while admitting that the whole thing is fuzzy we can still make some sense if we try to understand the politics behind these sub-ethnic movements. And we must admit that this politics bears the stamp of the obtaining material conditions. The most important objective of their politics has been the demand for schedule tribe status. Infact, major sub-groups like Tamangs and Limbus got the tribal status in January 2003. The other groups have at this point acquired the Other Backward Classes (O.B.C.) status. Some of the sub-groups that have acquired O.B.C. status are Sunuwars, Magar (including Rana and Thapa), Dhimal, Jogi, Bungchheng, Thami, Bhujel, Rai, Khawas, Chamling, Nembang, Sampang, Dewan, and Christians converted from schedule castes.<sup>21</sup>

It is this politics that is primarily responsible for the shift from the macro Nepali identity to micro sub-ethnic identity. This shift in the centre of gravity in identity has meant the redefinition of their culture, religion and language by these sub-groups. Many among these sub-groups are or have withdrawn from the composite general culture. It has been their argument that Dasai popularly known as *Tika*, which forms the central pillar of the general culture is a Hindu festival. More

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Bell, “Ethnicity and Social Change”, in Nathan and Glazer (ed.) op.cit. p.165

<sup>20</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, op.cit. p.119.

<sup>21</sup> Source: Office of the District Welfare Officer, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Darjeeling.

importantly, the ethnic groups who were hitherto under the Hindu caste system cite historical reasons for their hinduisation . They maintain that it was the expanding Hindu state which had destroyed their tribal and animistic traditions, and forced them to accept the state religion and its caste system. So the shunning of Dasai, is seen as a form of expressions of their righteous anger. No one can dispute the veracity of their claim. Indeed Hinduism had destroyed their traditional social systems and integrated them into the hindu fold. The effects of this historical domination can still be seen in the kind of domination of the upper castes (Bahuns Chhetris and Thakuris) have in the political and administrative structure of the Nepali state. So the organization of these ethnic groups under a common platform demanding greater democratization can be seen as some kind of a poetic justice on the part of these groups.

However, to start a similar kind of a movement in Darjeeling by drawing direct analogies with Nepal will be quite dangerous. Such a move stems from ignorance at two levels. At one level is their ignorance of the socio-economic and political realities of Nepal. At the other level is their inability or refusal to understand the nature of identity of the Nepalis in Darjeeling or for that matter in the whole of India vis- a-vis the Indian state. Let us for a while grant them that the conditions in Nepal and Darjeeling are not very different, even then the activities of these groups still leaves many questions unanswered. Revivalism has historically been the most commonly used form of protest against any external oppressive and hegemonic system.<sup>22</sup> But the kind of revivalism that these sub-ethnic groups are resorting to against the perceived Hindu hegemony exposes their hypocrisy. If one is to go by the above quoted definition of *janajati* (tribe) in Nepal, then one of the important characteristics is *their distinct social structure that does not fall under the hierarchical Varna or caste system* [Emphasis mine]. So rejection should also

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<sup>22</sup> For details see, Partha Chatterjee, "The Nation and its Fragments" Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994. Pp.1-6.



imply the rejection of the Hindu social structure and not mere symbols like Dasai and Tiwar. For once it has to be realised that Hinduism is a monolithic structure whose tentacles run deep and wide.

Whether we accept it or not, the fact remains that the Hindu caste system is the organizing principle of the hill society. If the objective of this neo-tribalism had been the dismantling of this caste system then it would have been the most progressive force at this historical juncture. But sadly this is not the case. Rather there seems to be a conscious effort on the part of this sub-ethnic group to modify their group behaviour. Even as they are withdrawing themselves from the general culture, they are giving a new emphasis and meaning to their own particular sub-cultures. All the accretions perceived to be foreign are being weeded out and efforts are being made to give these religio-cultural practices their pristine form. What this means in terms of inter sub-ethnic relations is that new boundaries are being drawn over the earlier somewhat fused general and sub-culture. There is also this tendency among the sub-group to make their sub-cultures an exclusive domain for their group. This is what brings the sub-ethnic identity into a direct confrontation with the generic Nepali identity.

#### **NEPALI VS SUB-ETHNIC IDENTITY: A NEW FORM OF INTERNAL CONTRADICTION:**

Contradictions whether internal or external have always been a part and parcel of the Nepali society. These contradictions have expressed themselves in numerous forms. The present phenomenon of sub-ethnic revivalism is an expression of this contradiction in cultural terms. And since so much of the Nepali identity rests on a peculiar kind of culture, any deviations from it, many feel, will jeopardize the very existence of the Nepali identity. It is this realization that has sparked a row within the Nepali community. Though nothing can be said conclusively about the fate of these sub-ethnic movements we can still rest assured that the Nepali identity

will not take a serious dent. At this juncture those people who are raising a hue and cry over the non-observance of Dasai by the Tamangs<sup>23</sup> in particular can only be called alarmists.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps they are not aware of the resilience of the Nepali identity. And those of the sub-ethnic groups including Tamangs who are dreaming of carving out an exclusive niche for themselves within the larger society are being too ambitious about their project. Here, it is important to mention that the call by the All India Tamang Buddhist Association for the boycott of Dasai did not cut much ice.<sup>25</sup> Infact, a rival organization named *Tamang Boudha Ghedung* (Tamang Buddhist Society) formed in 1994 has not only opposed the A.I.T.B.A.'s call for boycott of Dasai but is also advocating for the distinction of Tamang Buddhism from that of Tibetan Buddhism. The bone of contention between the two groups are the matters concerning funeral rites. It has been the argument of the A.I.T.B.A. that the practise of shaving one's head, beard, eye brows, especially by the male members, forsaking oil and salt in food and wearing a white cloth on the tonsured head during the death in the family should be given up as there is no scriptural sanction for these practices. They give examples of the Tibetians and Bhutias in this regard. The Tamang Boudha Ghedung on the other hand contend that the Tamangs, who are originally from Nepal have unique Buddhist traditions. They point out that institutions like Tamba (village headmen), bombo (shaman), thunda sorshi (bidding farewell to the spirit of the dead by close relatives) are peculiar to the Tamangs only and not prevalent among the Tibetians and Bhutias.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See, "Hill Observes Tika" The Statesman, Siliguri, October 7, 2003. Also " Tamangs asked to stay away from Dasami" The Statesman, Siliguri, October 15, 2002

<sup>24</sup> See, Deo Kumari Mukhia, "Pratikriya Ek: Gunaso Anek" (One Reaction: Several Grievances), Ajabholi, Siliguri, October 31, 2002.

Also See, Ratan Bomzon, "Dasai Ko Tika Ani Tamang" (Dushera and the Tamangs), Sunchari, Siliguri, October 28, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> "Tamangs Split over Dashain Celebrations" The Statesman, Siliguri, October 7, 2003.

Also see edit page, Sunchari, Siliguri, October 21, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Based on an interview with Bhim Yonzon on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

Also see his, "Tamang Rim Thim Baare Aahileko Hohalla" (Debates Concerning Tamang Rituals and Tradition), in a Bulletin issued by Tamang Boudha Ghedung, Darjeeling, May, 2001, pp.4-5.

In spite of all this, the optimism about the future of Nepali identity stems from several factors. One of the primary reason is that we cannot define these groups as ethnic groups in the strictest sense of the term. Any group wishing to be treated as a separate group should have a cultural practice altogether different from that of others and also the elements for the complete division of labour for reproduction.<sup>27</sup> In Darjeeling even if the sub-groups had distinct cultural practices earlier much of it has become redundant now. For example only a miniscule section of the people can speak and write in their ethnic language. Furthermore, there is no internal division of labour within these groups. The only group, which has an internal division of labour, are the Newars. This has meant mutual dependence among the sub-groups both in Nepal and in Darjeeling. Moreover, inter sub-ethnic marriages has led to the creation of fused identities among many Nepalis. This acts as a strong check against any centripetal tendencies. Another important factor is the plural nature of the general culture and the Nepali language. The Nepali culture as we know is an organic whole in which the Nepali language is the most commonly accepted medium of interaction. It is very difficult to imagine a situation in which each of the sub-ethnic groups speak in their own language among themselves and agree upon a language other than Nepali.<sup>28</sup> Further still, the sub-ethnic identities are not strong enough to sustain itself outside the notional Nepali cultural boundaries.<sup>29</sup> For any outsider all the sub-ethnic groups look alike, speak the same language and have more or less the same cultural practices. Infact the sub-ethnic groups, or tribes as they wish to call themselves, will switch from the macro to micro identity and vice versa depending on the situation. In Darjeeling they may wish to be identified as Magars, Gurungs or Tamangs. But if the same set of people were to meet say in Kolkota they will instinctively identify themselves as Nepalis.

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<sup>27</sup> Paul R. Brass' definition of ethnicity. See page No. 7 of **this work**.

<sup>28</sup> Nepali language is also called Parvate, meaning language of the Parvatiyas, i.e., Bahuns and Chhetris.

<sup>29</sup> Tanka Bahadur Subba uses the term "cultural Nepal". See, "Nepal and Indian Nepalis" in Kanak Mani Dixit, et.al. (ed.), "The State of Nepal" Himal Books, Katmandu, 2002, p.128.

All along we have been trying to grapple with the issue of sub-ethnic revivalism, giving an impression as if this was the only thing happening in Darjeeling. This is certainly not the case. If the neo-tribals are at the one extreme end of the continuum then at the other extreme end of this continuum are the apolitical and confused western intoxicated youths. Westernisation is not something new to the Nepalis in Darjeeling. But the manner in which it has been able to penetrate to every classes in the society sends confusing signals. It is a sociological dilemma, which needs to be explored.

## CONCLUSION

The present study concerning the Nepalis of Darjeeling may be called a study from "within". The advantages of being "culturally located" were exploited with some success in trying to subjectively recapture the evolution of the Nepali society. It has to be admitted that the objectives set forth in this study were too broad in its canvas. Naturally, quality and precision were the first casualties. But as a word of some justification, it has to be said that the issue of sub-ethnic revivalism is too contemporary to have generated a serious literature on it. In any case marginal communities like the Nepalis operate within its own peculiar set of structural handicaps, which prevent a free flow of views and ideas. It is these very structural handicaps, particularly its persisting political and economic backwardness that is behind the recent sub-ethnic revivalism. And the fact that the Nepalis are politically and economically backward is itself one of the reasons for undertaking this study.

By now it is quite clear that the study was not merely a dispassionate presentation of facts and events. Rather, the research owed its very birth to certain misgivings about the recent sub-ethnic revivalism. In fact, these misgivings are in themselves an outcome of a sense of victimhood, which every educated Nepali has towards the Indian state. This halo of victimhood is donned by every hill leader. Whether these grievances are true or imaginary is a different issue altogether. Thus, the political and socio-cultural milieu of Darjeeling has determined the approach and postulates of this work in a major way. The approach, even at the cost of appearing grandiose, has been a novel one. So far most of the literature on the formation and the basis of Nepali ethnicity have overemphasized the factor of language at the cost of other crucial historic factors. This work, in a way, makes an attempt to fill this vacuum.

One of the major problems among the people of Darjeeling is their limited knowledge of the local history. It is one thing to say that the history of Darjeeling is distorted and poorly documented. But quite another for the literate section to having not read any. The written history does not form a part of the syllabi at any level in the educational system. So, whatever little history people know are in the form of oral history, interwoven with myths and anecdotes, passed down the generations.

One of the most sensitive issue in the case of the Nepalis is that of migration. In fact the people are not really comfortable with this word. And their discomfiture is a result of their ignorance of their history. This issue of migration was efficiently exploited by the Government of West Bengal during the height of the G.N.L.F led agitation. In its white paper titled "Gorkhaland Agitation: The Issues: An Information Document", published in 1986, "there is an exclusive chapter titled, "A Historical Outline of the Migratory Movements". Quoting extensively from A. J Dash, W. W. Hunter and others, it has tried to show that the Nepalis are basically "immigrants" and the population of Darjeeling in 1839 was "not more than hundred souls". In the same section it says "*only the terai part of the territory ( and not the hills ) was for a time conquered by Nepal from Sikkim...*" But there are enough evidences to suggest that a major portion of the Hills of Darjeeling had come under the invading Gorkha army. L.S.S.O' Malley himself has quoted General Llyod's letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1829 wherein Llyod talks about his visit to the "old Goorkha [sic] station called Darjeeling. The exact location of Llyod's camp is in a place called Ghoom Bhanjyang just ten kilometers away from Darjeeling town. Even in the case of Darjeeling's population being not more than one hundred, Kumar Pradhan in his "Pahilo Pahar" has shown that when Dr. Campbell wrote this he was referring to a mere 138 square miles only and not the entire hills.

There is lot of confusion regarding the time and the actual causes of Nepalis migration into Darjeeling. Standard literature on migration in Darjeeling sees the growing disparity in the land- population ratio in Nepal as the primary reason. The

Nepalis are projected as economic migrants who came in huge numbers as new economic opportunities opened up in Darjeeling. And the economic opportunities grew only with the coming of the British in Darjeeling. Mahesh Chandra Regmi, the doyen of Nepali economic history and Kumar Pradhan has however, given a different account of the agrarian situation of the 19th century Nepal. Regmi argues that it was the abundance of land that had forced the state to impose *jhara* (forced labour) on the peasants. Pradhan, arguing on a similar vein says that people in huge numbers were in fact induced to migrate into Nepal terai to hoe up the land. But these are only passing references in their works. Some serious research on this issue is the need of the hour. For this, the Nepali community should produce their own scholars. It will be a pity if they are expecting some one else to do it for them. Within this issue of migration there are some interesting facts. If we were to admit- we have been admitting- that it was the deteriorating economic condition in Nepal that drove the Nepalis towards Darjeeling, then why would the British take the services of *gallawalas* (recruiting agents) for enlisting Nepalis into the British Indian Army. The same was the case in the tea gardens where the *sardars'* (agents) noble duty was to go the Nepal to bring back young and healthy labourers to work in the tea garden. Another important aspect of the colonial migration policy was that labour was imported on the basis of family, and not individual. This was done to effectively curbe the mobility of the labour. Some of these issues should be addressed whenever such a research is undertaken.

Looking into the aspect of the formation and internal dissension within the community, it is very important to put the whole process in a perspective. It makes sense to compare the context in which the Nepali identity emerged, with the present content in which it is showing signs of internal cracks.

Furthermore, it is important to look deeper into the changing nature of the foundations and forces of Nepali ethnicity and identity. One of the obvious changes is the historical context in which the Nepali community emerged. Within the

colonial context, the various ethnic groups underplayed their cultural differences towards an amalgamated unity. The subjective factors of this amalgamation, we have identified was the communitarian spirit and a peculiar worldview which was shared by almost all the ethnic groups. In fact this communitarian spirit, which is now fast receding, has stood the community in good stead for all these years. The other factor was the collective experience of migration, which had occupied large spaces in their memories. The tea gardens represented a vigorous and demanding social and economic life. Most of the members in the family were employed in the tea gardens in different capacities. It was a phase of general stability in both the tea garden and bustees (non- tea garden, agricultural settlements). The social and cultural movements that we have discussed, though confined more or less to urban centres maintained an organic relationship with the tea gardens and bustees. Over and above all these were the political movements which clearly articulated the social and economic aspirations of the people. Leaders like Damber Singh Gurung, Randhir Subba, Ratan Lal Brahmin, Ganeshlal Subba, Deo Prakash Rai and many others had done enough for the cause of the Nepalis in Darjeeling. Politics in general had earned its legitimacy. But times were changing and so was the social and economic situation in the hills. At one level the political movements was giving some clarity to the political identity of the Nepalis, and the foundation of this political identity was sought in a separate state for the Nepalis in West Bengal. At the other level these political parties failed in the sphere of economy. This has led to the erosion of legitimacy of politics. The tea gardens which occupied the central position in social and economic life of the Nepalis is facing crisis. This crisis has led to the disruption of economic life in the hills.

The society though appearing modern is still a traditional society. This traditional society is now witnessing aggressive commercialization at all levels. It is not commercialization *per se* but the consequences of commercialization that is a worrying factor. It must, for once be realized that the social cement that binds the



various ethnic groups is the spirit of community life. Social institutions like *parma* (it is a unique practice in which people go and work in each others field on a reciprocal basis), *huri* (a practice in which people move in huge groups to help in tilling and sowing), *maran pukar* (a system in which the entire village contributes both in cash and kind to a bereaved family) and many others are symbolic of this spirit. Even marriages are usually an affair of the entire village. These institutions effectively neutralized the economic disparities in the society. What commercialization has done is to commodify these social services which so far were rendered through the time honoured institutions. It is quite surprising to see the people welcome these changes without realizing the dangers.

It is in this context that we are witnessing a rampant sub-ethnic revivalism. There is an organic relation between the growing economic crisis, the breakdown of social consensus, and the sub-ethnic resurgence. What is really worrying is the search for salvation by the people in such revivalism. It is all very fine to preserve ones own culture and tradition. But the question is whether mere ethnic symbols, culture and tradition in itself will address the basic issues of life. The problems of poverty, starvation, illiteracy, social and economic disparities can only be addressed by a politics that is based on civic values and principles. The Nepali community as whole has to be rekindled by this kind of politics. The process has already started with the kind of civil society activities that are growing in Darjeeling. Non Government Organizations (NGOs) are actively participating in restructuring social and economic life of the people. It remains to be seen how much they will succeed in their goal. Nevertheless, the question that arises is why is the Nepali community is taking so much time to transform itself into a mature, rational community. The problem lies at a more fundamental level. The community lacks in vigorous intellectual and social science traditions. It has no doubt many leading litterateurs but hardly few social scientists. As a community it has failed to produce its own intellectuals. The few that are around are usually at a state of inertia.

These are some of the persisting problems ailing the Nepali community in Darjeeling. As a matter of strategy to tackle these issues, the community should get its act together. So far as the issue of sub-ethnic assertion is concerned, it does not pose a serious threat to the Nepali identity and culture. The inherent flexibility and diversity lends stability to it. Infact the sub-ethnic assertions can actually add vitality, and enrich the general culture. In the context of the Indian state the Nepali community as a whole should do away with its persisting minority complex. Sociologists define minority in terms of certain behavioural characteristics rather than a mere numerical designation. These groups have a set of attitudes - those of group identification from within the group and those of prejudices from without - and a set of behavior- those of self-segregation from within the group and those of discrimination and exclusion from without.<sup>1</sup>

The Nepalis should actively participate in politics both at the regional and national level. In most cases the Nepali are the victims of the ignorance of the so called mainstream people. The only way the Nepalis can tackle the issue of identity crisis is by fully understanding the nature of the Indian state itself. Most of the political and economic problems are no doubt result of the callousness on the part of the state and central governments. But this should not absolve the Nepalis from their lack of seriousness. If it expects it to be taken seriously by the governments at both the central and state level it will require an image makeover. The image of "happy go lucky" people has done incalculable damage to them. To start with they can sublimate their raw and macho energy into some constructive projects. The most common refrain among the hill people is the lack of scope for the emerging talents. Perhaps the people should start thinking of creating the scope themselves rather than wait for someone else to do it for them.

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<sup>1</sup> See the entry on " Minority " , in International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences.p.365

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **TEXT OF THE TREATY OF SUGAULEE, 2<sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER, 1815 BETWEEN EAST INDIA COMPANY AND THE COUNTRY OF NEPAL.**

Treaty of peace between the Honourable East India Company and Maharajah Birkram Sah, Rajah of Nipal, settled between Lieutenant- Colonel Bradshaw on the part of the Honourable Company, in virtue of the full powers vested in him by his excellency the right Honourable Francis, Earl of Moira, knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, one of his Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, appointed by the Court of Directors of the said Honourable Company to direct and control all the affairs in the East Indies, and by Sree Gooroo Gujraj Misser and Chunder Seeku Opedeea on the part of Maha Rajah Girmaun Jode Bikramsah Bahauder, Shumsheer Jung, in virtue of the powers to that effect vested in them by the said Rajah of Nipal, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1815.

Whereas war has arisen between the Honourable East India Company and the Rajah of Nipal, and whereas the parties are mutually disposed to restore the relations of peace and amity which, previously to the occurrence of the late differences, had long subsisted between the two States, the following terms of peace have been agreed upon:-

#### **Article 1**

There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the Honourable East India Company and the Rajah of Nipal.

## **Article 2**

The Rajah of Nipal renounces all claim to the lands which were the subject of discussion between the two States before the war and acknowledges the right of the Honourable Company to the sovereignty of those lands.

## **Article 3**

The Rajah of Nipal hereby cedes to the Honourable the East India Company in perpetuity all the under mentioned territories, viz.

First . The whole of the low lands between the Rivers Kali and Rapti.

Secondly – The whole of the low lands (with the exception of Bootwul Khass) lying between the Rapti and the Gunduck.

Thirdly-The whole of the low lands between the Gunduck and Coosah, in which the authority of the British Governments has been introduced, or is in actual course of introduction.

Fourthly – All the low lands between the Rivers Mitchee and the Teestah.

Fifthly – All the territories within the hills eastward of the River Mitchee including the fort and lands of Nagree and the Pass of Nagarcote leading from Morung into the hills, together with the territory lying between that Pass and Nagree. The aforesaid territory shall be evacuated by the Gurkha troops within forty days from this date.

#### **Article 4**

With a view to indemnify the Chiefs and Barahdars of the State of Nipal, whose interests will suffer by the alienation of the lands ceded by the foregoing Article., the British Government agrees to settle pensions to the aggregate amount of two lakhs of rupee per annum on such Chiefs as may be selected by the Rajah of Nipal, and in the proportions which the Rajah may fix. As soon as the selection is made, Sunnuds shall be granted under the seal and signature of the Governor General for the pensions respectively.

#### **Article 5**

The Rajah of Nipal renounces for himself, his heirs, and successors, all claim to or connexion with the countries lying to the west of the Rive Kali and engages never to have any concern with those countries or the inhabitants thereof.

#### **Article 6**

The Rajah of Nipal engages never to molest or disturb the Rajah of Sikkim in the possession of his territories; but agrees, if any difference shall arise between the State of Nipal and the Rajah of Sikkim, or the subjects of either, that such differences shall be referred to the arbitration of the British Government by which award the Rajah of Nipal engages to abide.

### **Article 7**

The Rajah of Nipal hereby engages never to take or retain in his service any British subject, nor the subject of any European or American State, without the consent of the British Government.

### **Article 8**

In order to secure and improve the relations of amity and peace hereby established between the two States, it is agreed that accredited Ministers from each shall reside at the Court of the other.

### **Article 9**

This treaty, consisting of nine Articles, shall be ratified by the Rajah of Nipal within fifteen days from this date, and the ratification shall be delivered to Lieutenant- Colonel Bradshaw, who engages to obtain and deliver the ratification of the Governor-General within twenty days, or sooner, if practicable.

Done at Segowlee, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of December 1815.

PARIS BRADSHAW, Lt. Col. P.A.

Received this treaty from Chunder Seekur Opedeea, Agent on the part of the Rajah of Nipal, in the valley of Muckwaunpoor, at half- past two o'clock p.m. on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1816, and delivered to him the Counterpart Treaty on behalf of the British Government.

D.D. OCHTERLONY,  
Agent, Governor-General.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **TREATY OF TITALYA BETWEEN EAST INDIA COMPANY AND THE COUNTRY OF SIKKIM 10<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 1817**

Treaty, Covenant, or Agreement entered into by Captain Barre Latter, Agent on the part of His Excellency the Right Honorable the Earl of Moira, K.G. Governor-General & C. & C. & C. & C and by Nazir Chaina Tenjin and Macha Teinbah and Lama Duchim Longdoo, Deputies on the part of the Rajah of Sikkimputtee, being severally authorized and duly appointed for the above purposes, 1817.

#### **Article 1**

The Honorable East India Company cedes transfers, and makes over in full sovereignty to the Sikkimputtee Rajah, his heirs or successors, all the hilly or mountainous country situated to the eastward of the Mechi River and to the westward of the Teesta River, formerly possessed and occupied by the Rajah of Nepaul, but ceded to the Honourabl east India Company by the Treaty of peace signed at Segoulee.

#### **Article 2**

The Sikkimputtee Rajah engages for himself and successors to abstain from any acts of aggression or hostility against the Goorkhas or any other State.

**Article 3**

That he will refer to the arbitration of the British Government any disputes or questions that may arise between his subjects and those of Nepaul, or any other neighbouring State, and to abide by the decision of the British government.

**Article 4**

He engages for himself and successors to join the British Troops with the whole of his military force when employed within the hills, and in general to afford the British Troops every aid and facility in his power.

**Article 5**

That he will not permit any British subject, nor the subject of any European and American state to reside within his dominions, without the permission of the English Government.

**Article 6**

That he will immediately seize and deliver up any dacoits or notorious offenders that may take refuge within his territories.

**Article 7**

That he will not afford protection to any defaulters of revenue or other delinquents when demanded by the British Government through their accredited Agents.

## Article 8

That he will afford protection to merchants and traders from the Company's Provinces, and he engages that no duties shall be levied on the transit of merchandize beyond the established custom at the several golahs or marts.

## Article 9

The Honorable East India Company guarantees to the Sikkimputtee Rajah and his successors the full and peaceable possession of the tract of hilly country specified in the first article of the present agreement.

## Article 10

This Treaty shall be ratified and exchanged by the Sikkimputtee Rajah within one month from the present date and the counterpart, when confirmed by his excellency the Right honorable the Government General, shall be transmitted to the Rajah.

Barree Latter  
Nazir Chaina Tinjin  
Macha Timbah  
Lama Duchim Longadoo

The Co.'s  
Wafer Seal

The  
governor-  
general's  
Small Seal

(Sd) Moira  
(Sd) N.B. Edmonstone  
(Sd) Archd. Seton  
(Sd) GEO. Dowdeswell

Ratified by the governor-general in Council, at Fort William, this fifteenth day of march, one thousand eight hundred and seventeen.

(Sd.) J. Adam

Acting Chief Secretary Govt.



## APPENDIX C

### MEMORANDUM OF SETTLEMENT ON THE GNLF AGITATION

The following is the text of the memorandum of settlement reached among the Centre, the West Bengal Government and the GNLF, following the tripartite meeting between the Union Home Minister, Mr. Buta Singh, the Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu and the GNLF President, Mr Subhas Ghisingh, at New Delhi on July 25.

#### 1. Separate State of Gorkhaland

On the overall national interest and in response to Prime Ministers call, the GNLF agrees to drop the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland. For the social, economic, educational and cultural advancement of the people residing in the hill areas of Darjeeling district, it was agreed to have an Autonomous Hill Council to be set up under a state Act. The Salient features of the Hill Council would be as follows:

- The name of the council will be “Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council”.
- The council will cover the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling district, namely, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong, plus the Mouzas of Lohagarh T.G., Lohagarh Forest, Rangmohan, Barachenga, Panighatta, Choto Adalpur, Paharu, Sukna forest, Sukna Part-1, Pantapati Forest-1, Mahanadi Forest, Champasari Forest and Salbari Chhat Part II within Siliguri subdivision.
- The State Government agrees to release to the council after it is formed, or acquire for it the use of such land as may be required and necessary for

administrative and developmental purposes, anywhere in or around 'Darjeeling more' in Siliguri subdivision.

- The executive powers of the council will cover the following subject to the provision of the central and state laws:
  1. The allotment, occupation or use or setting apart, of land other than any land which is reserved forest, for the purpose of agriculture or grazing, or for residential or other non-agricultural purposes, or for any other purpose likely to promote the interest of the inhabitants of any village, locality or town;
  2. The management of any forest, not being a reserved forest;
  3. The use of any canal or watercourse for the purpose of agriculture;
  4. Agriculture;
  5. Public health and sanitation, hospital and dispensaries;
  6. Tourism;
  7. Vocational training;
  8. Public works- development and planning;
  9. Construction and maintenance of all roads except national highways and state highways;
  10. Transport and development of transport;
  11. Management of burials and burial grounds, cremation and cremation grounds;

12. Preservation, protection and improvement of livestock and prevention of animal diseases, veterinary training and practice;
  13. Pounds and the prevention of cattle trespass;
  14. Water, that is to day, water supplies, irrigation and canals, draining and embankment, water storage;
  15. Fisheries;
  16. Management of markets and fairs not being already managed by municipal authorities, panchayat samiti or gram panchayats;
  17. Education-primary, secondary and higher secondary;
  18. Works, lands and buildings vested in or in the lawful possession of the council;
  19. Small scale and cottage industries;
- The council shall exercise general powers of supervision over panchayat samitis, gram panchayats and municipalities falling within the area of the councils jurisdiction.
  - The general council will have a total of 42 members out of which 28 will be elected and the rest nominated by the state government.
  - There will be an Execute Council and the chairman and vice chairman of the general council will be ex-officio members of the executive council with the chairman of the general council functioning as the Chief Executive Councillor. The chief executive councillor will nominate 5 members to the executive council

from out of elected members of the council and the state government will nominate 2 members to the executive council from out of the non-official nominated members of the general council.

- The Chairman of general council cum chief executive councillor will have the ex-officio status and privileges of a minister in the Council of Minister in the state.
- The Bill for setting up the Hill Council will be introduced and passed in a special session of the state legislature which has been summoned. The election of the Hill Council will be held by the 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1988.
- Restoration of Normalcy
- Review of Pending Criminal Cases. It is agreed that a review will be done by the state government of all the case registered under various laws against persons involved in the GNLFF agitation. Action will be taken in the light of the review not to proceed with prosecution in all cases except those charged with murder. Release of persons in custody will follow the withdrawal of cases. This review will be completed within 15 days of signing of this agreement.
- Action against government servants. The State Government agrees to withdraw all cases of disciplinary action taken against employees in the context of the agitation. There will be no victimization of government servants.
- The GNLFF agrees to issue a call to its cadre for the surrender of all unauthorized arms to the district administration. It will be made clear in the call that such

surrenders made voluntarily within the prescribed date will not attract any prosecution.

- The GNLF hereby agrees to withdraw all agitational activities and to extend full cooperation to the administration for the maintenance of peace and normalization of the political process in the hill areas of Darjeeling.

(Source: The Hindustan Times, August 23, 1988)

## APPENDIX D

### TEXT OF NOTIFICATION OF CITIZENSHIP ISSUES

The following is the text of the notification on the citizenship issue following the signing of memorandum of settlement with the Gorkha National Front President Mr. Subhas Ghisingh:

Whereas it has come to the notice of the Central Government that there have been some misconceptions about the citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution of India of certain classes of persons commonly known as Gorkhas who had settled in India at such commencement.

And whereas it is considered necessary to clear such mis-conceptions, it is hereby clarified as follows:

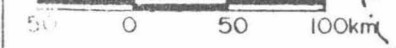
1. As from the commencement of the constitution that is, as from 26.1.1950, every Gorkha who had his domicile in the territory of India, that is, in the territories which on 26.1.1950 became part of or constituted the territory of India as defined in Article 1(2) of the constitution of India, and
  - (a) Who was born in the territory of India, or
  - (b) Either of whose parents was on in the territory of India, or
  - (c) Who had been ordinarily resident in the territory of India for not less than five years before such commencement shall be a citizen of India as provided in Article 5 of the Constitution of India.

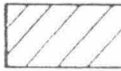
2. No such person as is referred to in paragraph (1) above shall be a citizen of India or be deemed to be citizen of India if he has voluntarily acquired the citizenship of any foreign state, as provided in Article 9 of the Constitution of India.
3. Every person who is a citizen of India at the commencement of the Constitution as aforesaid shall continue to be such citizen subject to the provisions of any law that may be made by Parliament as provided in Article 10 of the Constitution of India.
4. The provisions of the citizenship Act 1955 and the rules and orders made thereunder shall apply to the persons referred to in paragraph (1) after the commencement of the Constitution.

(Source: Indian Express, August 24<sup>th</sup> 1988).

WEST BENGAL

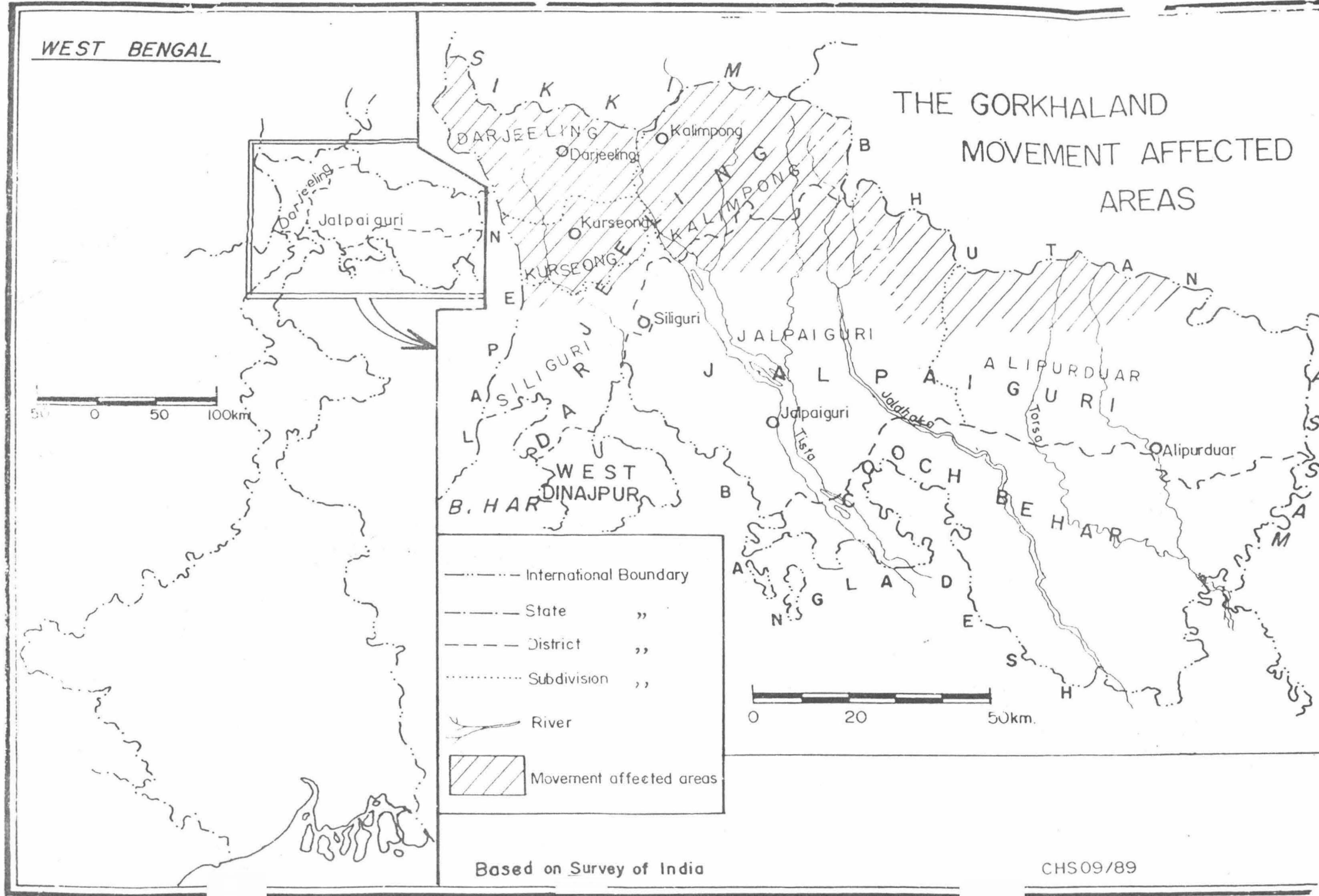
THE GORKHALAND MOVEMENT AFFECTED AREAS



- International Boundary
- State        "        "
- District     "        "
- ..... Subdivision   "        "
- ~~~~~ River
-  Movement affected areas

Based on Survey of India

CHS09/89



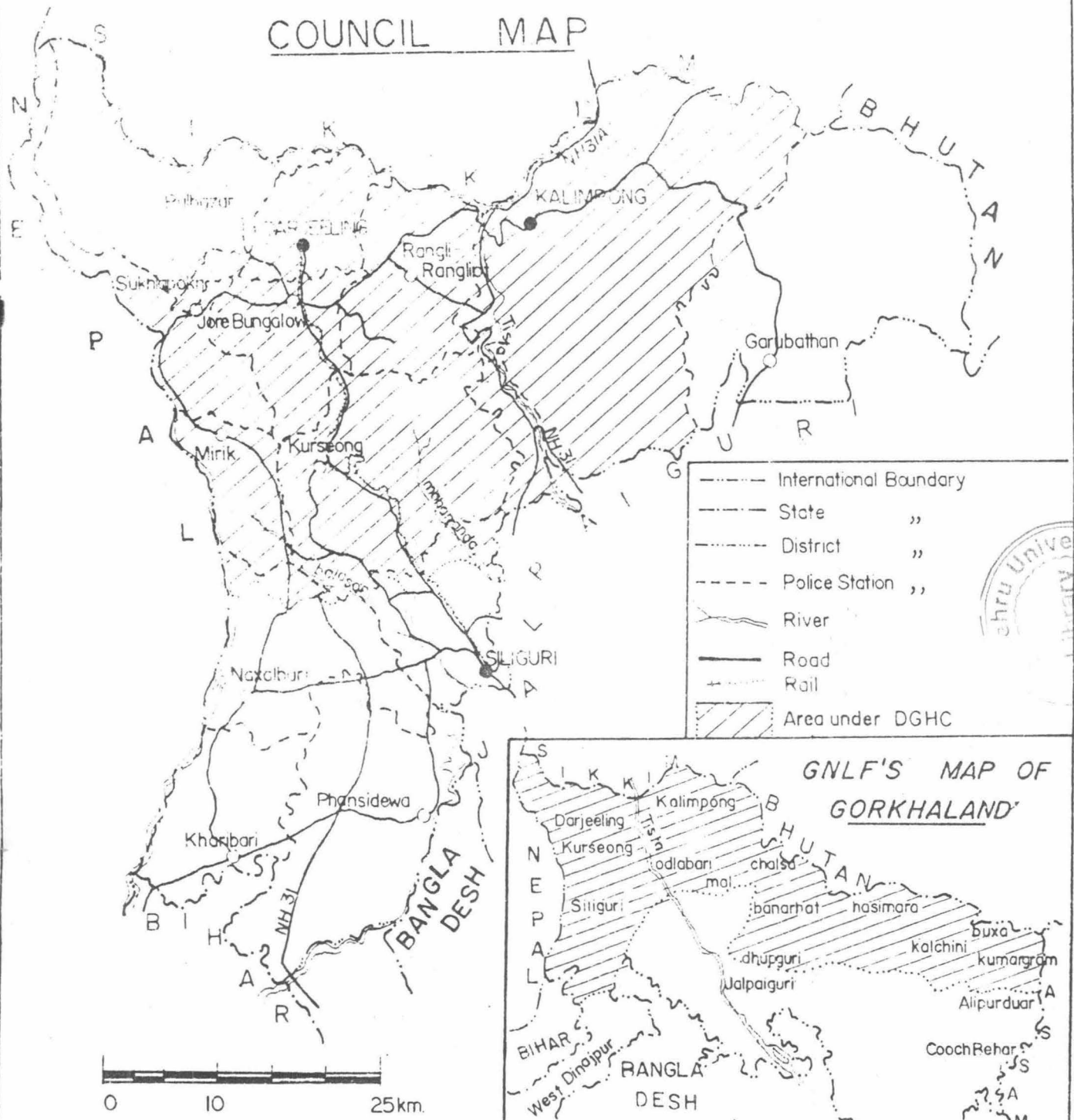


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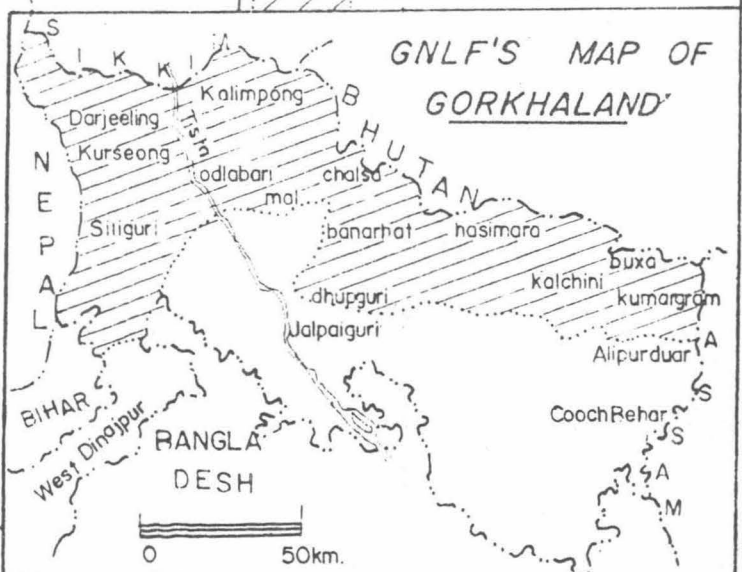
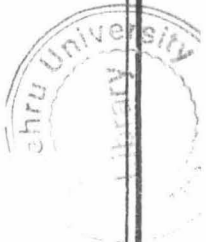


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# DARJEELING GORKHA HILL COUNCIL MAP



- International Boundary
- - - State " "
- . - . District " "
- - - Police Station " "
- ~ ~ ~ River
- Road
- + + + Rail
- ▨ Area under DGHC



Based on Census of India 1981

CHSIO/89

Source The Telegraph