A STUDY OF THE INDIAN NEPALI COMMUNITY: IDENTITY AND THE STATE

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Certified that the Thesis entitled

'A STUDY OF THE INDIAN NEPALI COMUNITY: IDENTITY AND THE STATE' submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of **Prof. Partha Pratim Basu, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.** And that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/ elsewhere.

Countersigned by the

Supervisor: Candidate:

Dated: Dated:

In memory of my father late

Raju Manger

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PREFACE

After submitting my M.Phil. dissertation, a thought-provoking discussion with my former RAC member, Dr. Asha Singh, on the question of *how a community situates itself within a nation* first sparked my interest in the concept of nationalism. I began exploring texts on nation formation and nationalism, which gradually deepened my engagement with the subject. A subsequent conversation with Prof. Manabi Majumdar further expanded my academic curiosity, leading me to explore themes such as multiculturalism and pluralistic societies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I immersed myself in postcolonial studies, eventually finding it to be a compelling theoretical framework for my research. However, it was under the guidance of my supervisor, Prof. Partha Pratim Basu, whose expertise and encouragement allowed me to refine my ideas, that this thesis truly took shape. I feel deeply fortunate to have embarked on this scholarly journey under his mentorship. His vast experience, coupled with the intellectual freedom he provides his students, has been instrumental in shaping my thesis. This research has been greatly influenced by the works of distinguished scholars such as Sudipta Kaviraj, Partha Chatterjee, Aijaz Ahmad, and Benedict Anderson, whose writings on nationalism and nation formation inspired me to examine these concepts in relation to the state. At the same time, the nexus of politics, culture, language, resource distribution along with an introspective study on the nature of the nation state result in identity formations which are usually malleable. Within this theoretical framework, I have chosen to study the Indian Nepali community.

ABSTRACT

This research critically examines the assertion of identity by the Indian Nepali community within the Indian nation-state, analysing both historical and contemporary factors that shape this process, with particular emphasis on the role of *othering*. It seeks to explore the material and cultural challenges confronting the community and investigates the strategies employed in negotiating and reproducing its identity amidst these challenges. The study aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of identity politics in the context of marginalized communities in India, shedding light on broader implications for social cohesion, policymaking, and cultural recognition in a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse nation. Employing a comprehensive theoretical framework, this research engages with Postcolonial Citizenship, the Politics of Recognition, Theories on Othering, as well as Instrumentalist and Primordialist perspectives, alongside broader studies on nationalism, nationhood, and the state. The study is structured into four distinct chapters, each addressing a critical aspect of the Indian Nepali community's identity formation.

The first chapter examines the role of Indian Nepali literature as a significant instrument of cultural production and the standardisation of the Nepali language in India. Through an analysis of various literary texts, this chapter explores their relevance in reflecting and shaping the socio-political developments within the community. The second chapter focuses on the tea industry in Darjeeling as a lens through which to analyse the significance of land (*bhoomi*) and its sociopolitical implications. It investigates how policies concerning land ownership and usage affect the Indian Nepali community, given that land remains intrinsically linked to citizenship and, consequently, to identity formation. Building upon this foundation, the third chapter examines the ways in which citizenship claims, often rooted in connections to land, manifest in ethnic movements and alternative assertions of identity. It engages with theories on the state to study how communities negotiate their place within the national imagination, often by leveraging state mechanisms. The final chapter delves into identity formation through the process of othering, tracing its historical roots to the colonial construction of the "martial race" theory and critically assessing its enduring contemporary implications. It further investigates the micro-narratives of everyday experiences of othering and how these coalesce into broader macro-narratives that shape communal identity.

Ultimately, this study endeavors to provide a nuanced analysis of the identity politics surrounding the Indian Nepali community, exploring the diverse challenges it faces and strategies employed in response. By doing so, it aims to offer critical insights into the dynamics of ethnic identity, and recognition within the Indian nation-state.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDNS	:	GORKHA DUKHA NEVARAN SAMAJ
CPI (M)	:	COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA MARXIST
NUPW	:	THE NATIONAL UNION OF PLANTATION WORKERS
INTUC	:	INDIAN NATIONAL TRADE UNION CONGRESS
DCKMU	:	DARJEELING CHIYA KAMAN MAZDOOR UNION
CPI	:	COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA
DGHC	:	DARJEELING GORKHA HILL COUNCIL
HPWU	:	HILL PLANTATION WORKERS UNION
GNLF	:	GORKHA NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT
GJMM	:	GORKHA JANMUKTI MORCHA
DTDPLU	:	DARJEELING TERAI DOOARS PLANTATION LABOUR UNION
IGJF	:	INDIAN GORKHA JANSHAKTI FRONT
WBLRA	:	WEST BENGAL LAND REFORMS ACT
NGNBP	:	NIJO GRIHA NIJO BHUMI PRAKALPA
NEFP	:	NORTH EAST FROMTIER PROVINCE
HPSU	:	HILL PEOPLE'S SOCIAL UNION
AIGL	:	ALL INDIA GORKHA LEAGUE
DDCC	:	DARJEELING DISTRICT CONGRESS COMMITTEE
DDHPLIC	:	DARJEELING DISTRICT HILL PEOPLE'S LANGUAGE IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE
ABNBS	:	AKHIL BHARATIYA NEPALI BHASA SAMITI
AGSU	:	ALL GORKHA STUDENT UNION
AIBTA	:	ALL INDIA TAMANG BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION
ABTBS	:	AKHIL BHARATIYA TAMANG BAUDHA SANGH
GTA	:	GORKHALAND TERROTORIAL ADMINISTRATION
PPS	:	PERMANENT POLITICAL SOLUTION
RGI	:	REGISTRAR GENERAL OF INDIA

CONTENTS

Introduction

Statement of research problem and its significance

The Indian Nepali community in Darjeeling and the surrounding North-Eastern Himalayan region offers a case of identity formation shaped by historical, sociological and political challenges. The community's history, documented primarily through early colonial sources, has mostly been associated with migration from neighbouring Nepal, as labour, recruited for tea industry in Darjeeling. This has likely contributed to a pattern of "othering," where the Indian Nepali community is viewed as distinct from the larger Indian cultural milieu, impacting how it is represented in national discourses. This framing plausibly influence how the community asserts its collective agency and self-representation.

The Nepali language has deep significane for the Indian Nepali community, serving not just as a means of communication but as a vital expression of cultural identity and unity between the different ethnic groups. Recognising the language under the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution was seen by the community as essential for preserving their linguistic heritage, ensuring cultural cogency, and securing social and political rights. However, the role that Indian Nepali literature played in supporting these efforts remains insufficiently explored. This research seeks to understand how literature contributed to advocating for the standardisation and formal recognition of the language. The study will investigate the connections between language, literature, and identity to provide insights into how cultural production influences minority identities and their positioning in a postcolonial society. Such an analysis could illuminate the broader implications of cultural expressions in shaping socio-political realities and identity politics in India.

The uncertainty over being granted land rights or *parjapatta* by the tea garden workers heightens anxieties of ownership and belonging to a land tilled by their ancestors and simultaneously of being recognised as Indian citizens. In addition poor working conditions, low wages, non payment or underpayment of bonuses faced by tea garden labourers reveal vulnerabilities and instances of economic exploitation, bringing out the community's socio-economic struggles. Concurrent mobilisation by the community, such as the regional movements for autonomy named *Gorkhaland* and demand to be recognised as tribes, *Jan Jati* movement calls attention to ongoing political challenges and the pursuit of recognition, indicating the urgency given to integration within the Indian state and constitutional machinery.

This research aims to investigate how the Indian Nepali community asserts its identity within the Indian nation-state, examining the historical and contemporary factors that contribute to this process, including the role of "othering." It attempts to study how and what are the challenges (material and cultural) to the community's identity and the response by the community in negotiating and reproducing its identities through those challenges. The research aspires to enhance the understanding of identity politics surrounding marginalized communities in India and to shed light on broader implications for social cohesion, policy-making, and cultural recognition in an ethnically and culturally diverse nation.

Review of literature and research gaps

The body of literature that I intend to examine revolves around themes of Nepali Literature and subsequent literary developments, Language, Postcolonial Citizenship in the context of the Indian Nepali Community, Tea industry in Darjeeling, the concept of Othering, Indian Nationalism and Colonial historiography.

Mark Turin's article, *Mother Tongues and Language Competence: The Shifting Politics of Linguistic Belonging in the Himalayas*[1] situates language as integral to a sense of belonging, particularly emphasising how events in Nepal evoke the emotive power of linguistic attachments. He engages with census-taking and surveys as classificatory instruments that not only document but also shape a collective sense of belonging, using Sikkim as a focal case to highlight the incongruence between native language instruction in schools and broader linguistic policies. Turin's scholarship intentionally distances itself from identity politics, emphasising instead the utility of linguistic competence and heritage as frameworks for understanding belonging. My research draws upon Turin's foundational argument that language and belonging are interwoven, however, it departs from his perspective that these constructs ultimately become subsumed within identity politics, whether by choice or inevitability. While his study references the use of Lepcha and Dzongkha within Sikkimese educational contexts and attempts a comparative micro-analysis, it remains limited to the region of Sikkim and does not extend to broader implications.This creates a research gap where an exploration of how the Nepali language embodies and negotiates belonging within larger

[1] Mark Turin, "Mother Tongues and Language Competence: The Shifting Politics of Linguistic Belonging in the Himalayas," in *Facing Globalization in the Himalayas: Belonging and the Politics of the Self*, eds. Gérard Toffin and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2014), 371–396.

socio-political structures is needed, advancing the discourse beyond Turin's regional and comparative focus.

Kumar Pradhan's, *History of Nepali Literature*[2], is recognised as one of the earliest comprehensive documentations of Nepali literature, offering an essential contribution through his translations of significant verses and notable works. This endeavour broadens the accessibility of Nepali literature, fostering wider readership and deeper engagement. Kumar's scholarship has also been pivotal and extensively referenced to in my review of literatures, in examining the inception and development of Indian Nepali literature. Kumar's methodical approach, which chronologically traces the emergence of various literary genres, is invaluable for understanding their role in mirroring and shaping the social realities of the Indian Nepali society at that time. However Kumar's work lacks an understanding of the implications of literary evolutions and their influence on cultural production, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between literature, culture, and identity, where literature acts as a catalyst for culture, and culture, in turn, shapes identity.

Rhoderick Chalmer's doctoral thesis, *We Nepalis : Language, Literature and the Formation of a Nepali Public sphere in India, 1914-1940*[3], supplements Pradhan's work as it explores additionally two new forums. The creation of a Nepali Public sphere and the formation of *Jati* consciousess. Chalmer's thesis explores how a Nepali public sphere emerged and developed in India during the early 20th century. It suggests that examining the rational and critical ways of communication within this sphere, and how these methods extended into social, cultural, and political structures, is key to understanding the creation of a modern Nepali identity that remains influential today. The main chapters highlight how popular publishing built a significant audience and provided the foundation for more analytical journals. They also examine the main ideas and challenges of the rhetoric focused on social progress that these publications promoted. Additionally, the thesis looks at how this rhetoric was reflected in different organisations and social structures, and how social mobility reshaped power dynamics while other forms of exclusion continued to limit participation in public life. Finally, it assesses how these processes came together to shape a well-defined, self-aware Nepali social identity and sense of community. However Chalmer's work omits understanding of the specific socio

[2] Kumar Pradhan, *A History of Nepali Literature,* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1984) 1-226.

[3] Rhoderick Chalmers, *We Nepalis: Language, Literature, and the Formation of a Nepali Public Sphere in India, 1914–1940* (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2003), ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (11015826).

political challenges that drove the need for the awareness on community consciousness. His work is also relegated to a specific time period.

Himalayan Voices: An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature [4]by Michael Hutt's represents an important English translation of notable modern Nepali literary works, aimed primarily at non-nepali readers or those unfamiliar with the language. This contribution is commendable for broadening the reach of Nepali literature and offering readers an understanding of translated literary genres which I have referred, extensively too. However, while Hutt effectively focuses on translation and introductory insights, there is a notable research gap regarding the comprehensive explanation of the deeper meanings and socio-political significance of these works. This limitation points to the need for further in-depth analysis that can resonate with Nepali works, providing them with a fuller appreciation of the cultural and historical implications embedded in their literary heritage.

Henceforth there is a research gap which fails to assess the role of the Nepali language in shaping Indian Nepali political identitiy which is significant, as it helps define group affiliations and serves as a tool for expressing political demands. Political identity encompasses broader aspects of belonging, representation, and collective aspirations that may cut across territorial or cultural boundaries. While language serves as a key factor in creating and sustaining these identities, its influence is mediated by larger political, social, and economic conditions. These structural forces often shape the extent to which linguistic identity can translate into effective political agency, reflecting a dynamic interplay between local identity markers and overarching systems of power. This thesis attempts to address this research gap.

L.S.S O'Malley's *Bengal District Gazetteer* [5] and Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*[6] remains one of the earliest colonial record of the history of Darjeeling. However it can be critiqued that Malley and Jule's record has been from a primarily colonial perspective and motive. The historiography of Darjeeling, as initially recorded by L.S.S. O'Malley and Jules in the Bengal District Gazetteers, have long been regarded as a foundational colonial documentation encompassing the region's history, demographics, industries (such as tea and

[4] Michael James Hutt, *An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[5] L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer: Darjeeling* (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907)

[6] Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling* (Alipore: Government Printing, Bengal Government Press, 1947).

forestry), public administration, and education. However, O'Malley and Jule's account reflects an unmistakably colonial perspective, prioritising British administrative and economic interests while marginalising or overlooking indigenous experiences and pre-colonial historical narratives. The inherent bias of colonial historiography has been critiqued for constructing a narrative that positions the British 'discovery 'and subsequent development of Darjeeling as pivotal, effectively framing it as the inception of the region's history. This perspective serves to eclipse the region's complex pre-colonial existence and indigenous socio-political structures. They fail to comprehensively document or give due weight to the indigenous socio-political landscape prior to British intervention. This gap in historical literature has led to a popular yet misleading perception that Darjeeling's history began with its British 'discovery'. Moreover, this omission may have contemporary implications for the identity and citizenship issues faced by the Nepali community, whose immigration narrative has been disproportionately highlighted.

The current body of literature inadequately addresses the broader scope of Darjeeling's pre-colonial history and the region's indigenous narratives. There is scope to fill the gap by critically examining how colonial historiography, typified by O'Malley's account, contributed to shaping public memory and identity in Darjeeling, and by reconstructing a more balanced historical narrative that integrates pre-colonial records and local oral traditions. There arises a research gap to research aims to alternatively see the colonial framing of Darjeeling's history and explore the implications of such historiographical biases on contemporary identity formation and socio-political issues in the region.

The Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling, particularly its first phase, has been extensively documented by scholars such as *Tanka Bahadur Subba in Ethnicity, State, and Development: A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling*[7] and Amiya K. Samanta in *Gorkhaland Movement: A Study in Ethnic Separatism*[8]. Both works offer detailed, ground-level analysis of the events and developments characterising the early stages of the movement. These studies provide valuable descriptive insights and chronological summaries, capturing the immediate dynamics of the movement. However, the predominant focus on empirical accounts and event-centric reporting has resulted in a limited analytical framework, restricting

[7] T. B. Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling*, (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications in association with Vikas Publishing House, 1992).

[8] Amiya K. Samanta, *Gorkhaland Movement: A Study in Ethnic Separatism*, (New Delhi: A.P.H Publishing Corporation, 2000).

a deeper understanding of the movement's broader implications within the Indian socio-political landscape.

The existing scholarship on the Gorkhaland Movement has largely been confined to empirical narrations and case studies that do not adequately incorporate theoretical frameworks to explore the movement's broader significance. This gap is evident in the limited exploration of how the movement intersects with key theoretical constructs related to the Indian state, nationhood, and nationalism. The absence of such theoretical engagement limits the capacity to understand the movement's complex motivations, the ideological underpinnings, and its implications for ethnic identity and regional politics within the context of India's state-building and national identity formation. Analysing the movement through this lens could provides a more nuanced rationale for understanding ethnic movements and their challenges to the Indian state. This approach could bridge the divide between descriptive accounts and theoretical analysis, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of ethnic separatist movements in contemporary India.

The edited volume *Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories, Politics, Environments* [9] by Sara Shneiderman and Townsend Middleton presents an anthology that seeks to "rethink Darjeeling's status in the postcolonial imagination." While it provides substantial insights into the region's history, socio political movements, environment issues and incorporates a people-centered perspective, it lacks a rigorous postcolonial critique. The collection does not quite adequately engage deeply with the examination of colonial legacies and discourses that continue to shape regional identities, knowledge systems, and socio-political structures in postcolonial India. This allows scope for analysis through the lens of postcolonial citizenship and theory of recognition. It also calls for a greater understanding of the need for integration and recognition.

Piya Chatterjee's, *A Time for Tea: Women, Labor, and Post/Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation* [10] looks at the tough working conditions on tea plantations in India. She explains how the media potrays female tea workers as peaceful and happy in advertisements, which hides the hard truths they face, like low pay, tough work, and forced labor supported by a

[9] Townsend Middleton and Sara Shneiderman, eds., *Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories, Politics, Environment,* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[10] Piya Chatterjee, *A Time for Tea: Women, Labor, and Post/Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

system of control. Chatterjee mixes personal stories with academic views to show how these women are both valued and exploited under colonial, postcolonial, and modern systems. She also talks about her own journey as a feminist researcher. The book concludes by discussing how power, gender, caste, and ethnicity keep social hierarchies in place in plantation villages, and it touches on themes of control, agreement, and resistance in the lives of these women.

Sarah Besky, *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*[11], looks at the daily lives of tea workers in Darjeeling, a place known for its famous tea and long-running fight for regional self-rule that began in colonial times. The book explores how ideas about fairness, value, and justice changed with the introduction of fair-trade practices and local political movements. It claims to be first book to study how fair-trade works in large tea plantations and shows that these policies often fail to address the bigger environmental, historical, and social issues affecting workers. The book spans disciplines of anthropology, sociology, geography, and environmental and food studies, as it questions how well fair-trade policies actually help local communities. Besky is one of the few scholars who has attempted to view the tea industry and issue of labour in plantations within the broader matrix of socio political movements. However there could have been greater introspection on the concept of land (since she has touched on it) paving the way for critical study on the significance of land ownership or parjapatta for the workers. No doubt wage and working conditions are the pivotal issues but the concept of land or *bhoomi* rights for workers encompass the broader matrix for identity. This further paves the scope for study of recent policies and the community response along with it's greater socio political significance.

The concept of the "martial race" has been critically examined by scholars such as David Omissi and Lionel Caplan. In *The Sepoy and the Raj*, Omissi delves into the colonial rationale behind creating martial categories, analysing the processes and implications of these constructs on communities classified as such. Similarly, Caplan's *Martial Gurkhas: The Persistence of British Military Discourse on Race* [12] interrogates the enduring legacy of colonial military discourse, focusing on the racial essentialism embedded in these categorisations and their impact on the classified groups. Both authors highlight how the British used these constructs

[11] Sarah Besky, *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[12] Lionel Caplan, "Martial Gurkhas: The Persistence of a British Military Discourse on Race," in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb (London: Oxford University Press, 1995).

to solidify imperial control, creating hierarchical and racialised systems that shaped the identities of these communities.

Cynthia Enloe extends this critique in her seminal work, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies*,[13] introducing the concept of the "Gurkha Syndrome." Enloe argues that the designation of specific ethnic groups as martial races was a strategic tool for colonial powers. These groups, deemed unlikely to gain control of the state apparatus, were integrated into military service as reliable enforcers of the colonial system. This process institutionalized structural subordination and reinforced a sense of difference between the "martial races" and other groups, entrenching systemic inequalities.

Building on these foundational critiques, Bidhan Golay's, *Rethinking Gorkha Identity*[14] draws from Omissi and Caplan to argue against the colonial essentialisation of identities such as the Gorkhas. Golay advocates for re-examining and liberating the Gorkha identity from these colonial constructs. He proposes a historiographical approach that challenges the reductive frameworks imposed by imperial powers, emphasising the need for a more inclusive and hybrid understanding of identity.

While existing literature provides critical insights into the concept of the martial race and its colonial underpinnings, a significant theoretical gap remains in the broader examination of "othering." Omissi and Caplan critique the martial race category as a mechanism of "othering," where the British defined themselves in opposition to the communities they categorized. Enloe's concept of the "Gurkha Syndrome" further illustrates how this system institutionalized subordination. However, these works primarily focus on the martial race framework, leaving unexplored the intersection of other factors contributing to processes of "othering" and the responses of the affected communities.

This gap calls for a comprehensive theoretical paradigm that extends beyond the martial race construct. An analysis grounded in the theory of "othering" along with micro narratives can offer a deeper understanding of how colonial powers not only created and perpetuated these categories but also shaped community responses to these imposed identities. Such an approach

[13] Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980).

[14] Bidhan Golay, "Rethinking Gorkha Identity: Outside the Imperium of Discourse, Hegemony, and History," *Peace and Democracy in South Asia* 2, no. 1–2 (2006): 43.

would illuminate the broader dynamics of identity formation, resistance, and adaptation within colonial and post-colonial contexts.

Research Objectives

1. Language and Belonging: To explore how the Nepali language fosters a sense of belonging and collective identity among Indian Nepalis, encompassing diverse ethnic groups. To analyse the need and importance given to the constitutional recognition of the Nepali language and its impact on the socio-political identity of Indian Nepalis.

2. Cultural Production and Identity Formation: to assess the role that literary development plays in developing the Nepali Language and understand the need for cultural production within the broader context of Indian Nationalism and Nation formation.

3. Movements and Mobilisation: To examine the historical and political catalysts behind movements such as Gorkhaland and *Janjati*, identifying their underlying motivations and socio-political significance. To assess how these movements embody broader campaigns for rights, recognition, and self-determination within the Indian state and constitutional machinery.

4. Land Rights and Identity in Plantation Labour: To understand the pivotal role of land ownership in shaping the identity and aspirations of tea plantation workers in Darjeeling. To evaluate how the socio-economic realities of tea workers and the organisational structure of the tea industry impact regional politics and ethnic identity formation.

5. Othering and Community Dynamics: To analyse the mechanisms of "othering" and their role in constructing identities, social hierarchies, and power dynamics in Darjeeling and among Indian Nepalis. To investigate how these processes of exclusion manifest in contemporary contexts and how communities have responded through cultural, political, and social initiatives.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, combining thematic literary analysis, ethnographic inquiry, structured and unstructured interviews, and secondary data analysis to examine its research themes. Given its interdisciplinary nature, the methodology is designed to ensure coherence across chapters while capturing the complexities of literary, socio-political,

and ethnographic dimensions. The first chapter involves a textual analysis of Nepali literary works that have been translated into English. The selection of texts was determined by the availability of translations, as the researcher was not equipped to conduct original translations. Once a corpus was identified, these works were examined for recurring themes, stylistic developments, and their broader cultural significance. Additionally, an informal interview was conducted with the Secretary of the Nepali Sahitya Akademi in Darjeeling, which, although unstructured, provided valuable insights into the historical progression and socio-political significance of Nepali literature. This session offered a framework and timeline for understanding the evolution of Nepali literary traditions and aided in contextualising the selected texts.

The second chapter, which focuses on the tea industry, is based on qualitative interviews with three categories of participants: tea estate managers, trade union members, and tea plantation workers. While structured interviews were conducted with managers and union representatives, gaining access to tea plantation workers proved to be more challenging, as certain estates restricted entry to researchers. Interviews with workers were conducted in two formats, first, in group settings, where collective responses provided insights into shared experiences, and second, through individual interviews, which allowed for more personal narratives and nuanced perspectives. Policy documents, labour laws, and union agreements were analysed to contextualise the perspectives shared in the interviews. This approach allows for a comparative analysis between official policies and lived experiences, highlighting potential gaps between policy intent and implementation. The integration of policy analysis with qualitative interviews ensures a more comprehensive understanding of labour relations, worker rights, and industry dynamics within the tea sector.

The third chapter primarily relies on secondary data analysis. Content analysis approach was employed to extract key arguments from these sources and to position them within the study'sbroader theoretical and empirical framework. The fourth chapter, on the other hand, involves structured interviews with members of the community from various professional backgrounds to capture diverse perspectives on cultural, historical, and socio-economic issues. Finally, the study is situated within specific theoretical frameworks that guide the interpretation of the collected data. Some limitations, such as translation constraints, restricted access to workers, and dependence on secondary data, are acknowledged. However, these challenges were mitigated through alternative data collection strategies and theoretical contextualisation.

Ethical considerations are integral to the study. Informed consent is obtained from all participants, who are informed of the study's purpose, their rights, and confidentiality protocols before participation. Anonymity and confidentiality are maintained through the use of pseudonyms to protect participant identities. By integrating personal narratives, historical contexts, policy frameworks, and literary analysis, this methodology ensures a holistic examination of the Indian Nepali community's identity and its interaction with the state.

Theoretical Framework

- **Primordialist and Instrumentalist**: Primordialists argue that political identities are inherent and naturally evolve from dominant cultural identities of the past. In contrast, instrumentalists contend that political identities are consciously selected from a broad spectrum of cultural identities, with the choice based on which identity is perceived to offer the greatest political advantage. [15] While it is acknowledged that modernisation significantly transforms historical identities, through industrialisation, urbanisation, advancements in communication, increased literacy, shifts in state power, and the intellectual influence of modern science. It is also recognised that individuals cannot freely choose their identities without limitations. Various external factors, such as deep-rooted ties to traditional identities, impose constraints on this selection. [16]Although the Robinson-Brass debate primarily focused on Indian Muslims, particularly in North India, its relevance extends to broader discussions on identity formation.

The work *Language, Religion, and Politics in North India* highlights the role of elite groups in shaping political identities by strategically using cultural symbols. However, it does not disregard the influence of pre-existing cultural values or inter-group dynamics in determining how effectively elites can manipulate these symbols. The framework developed in the study does not adopt an extreme instrumentalist stance, nor does it assume that either elites or the communities they claim to represent are devoid of cultural foundations. Instead, it starts with a fundamental question: In a multi-ethnic society where cultural distinctions exist and conflict

[15] David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp, eds., *Political Identity in South Asia*, (New York: Routledge, 1979), preface, ix–x.

[16] Ibid., x.

both actual and potential arise, what key factors determine whether these distinctions will be used to forge political identities? [17]

The model emphasises several crucial elements, including the role of elite groups, the relationship between social mobilisation and assimilation among ethnic communities, the formation of political organisations to advance group identities and interests, and the impact of government policies. However, the study does not suggest that the cultural and religious traditions of ethnic groups can be endlessly reshaped by elites**.**[18] Analysing individual cultural symbols and the way religious and political elites assign new meanings to them does not fully capture the essence of identity formation. This process involves the strategic manipulation of multiple symbols to construct a group's identity. The key lies in how these symbols are interconnected and the relative importance assigned to each, as these factors shape the boundaries of communities or contribute to their dissolution. A crucial consideration is the idea that, despite shifts in ethnic group boundaries, a fundamental cultural core endures over time.[19]

- **Postcolonial Citizenship**: Postcolonial citizenship has been employed in a descriptive way to designate how patterns of migration and local contours of cultural diversity are intimately connected to national colonial histories. [20] Alternatively, it has been used to point towards the impact of Western colonial ideologies on race and ethnic relations and the formation of global anti-colonial and anti-imperial solidarities. [21] Postcolonial citizenship offers a new way of understanding belonging and identity, building on, but not entirely replacing, the concept of multicultural citizenship. Multicultural citizenship aims to incorporate diverse cultural practices and identities into the civil, political, and social rights that are part of traditional citizenship. However, it often assumes that the nation itself is unchanged, viewing cultural communities as fixed groups while treating the dominant culture as the unaltered core. Postcolonial citizenship, on the other hand, highlights how struggles for recognition are closely tied to the idea of the nation. It emphasises that the

[17] Paul R. Brass, "Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity Among the Muslims of South Asia," in *Political Identities in South Asia*, eds. David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (New York: Routledge, 1979), 42-43.

[18] Ibid., 42-43.

[19] Ibid., 66.

[20] Ulba Bosma, *Post-Colonial Immigrants and Identity Formation in the Netherlands*, (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2012).

[21] Michael. J. Schueller, *Locating Race: Global Sites of Post-Colonial Citizenship,* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009).

national community is not a settled or fixed entity, but a dynamic space where different groups and individuals assert competing claims and engage in political struggles.

Furthermore, while postcolonial citizenship recognises the significance of national imaginaries, it does not limit itself to the territorial boundaries of the nation-state. Accordingly, thinking through the lens of postcolonial citizenship affords an enlarged perspective on nation. It surveys the ways in which local national formations and regimes of misrecognition are produced and patterned by global relations, entanglements and interconnections related to European colonialism.[22] In its most general sense, multicultural citizenship, as a differentiated form of citizenship in which individuals are not treated as abstractly uniform but embodied representatives of group identities, acknowledges these realities. Citizenship is not merely a legal category affording a formal identity, but denotes the participatory dimensions of belonging to a political community.[23] Ideas of multicultural citizenship have been, and continue to be, crucial to facilitating the equal membership and political participation of cultural minorities, even as their particular expressions are historically and nationally contextual. They have also been integral to reimagining discourses and symbols ofbelonging, as well as collective identities and the commonalities presumed to bind a political community together. [24]

Postcolonial citizenship complements multicultural citizenship by highlighting how national culture, identity, and belonging are connected to multicultural politics. It shows that multiculturalism has been criticised for focusing too much on differences and assuming that interactions between different cultures don't change much. Postcolonial citizenship highlights how debates about recognition and political community are part of multicultural struggles, underscoring disagreements and controversies. Postcolonial citizenship also helps us understand how national identity changes in culturally diverse settings. Multiculturalists often support strong national identities that include everyone, but they usually leave it to governments to decide. Postcolonial citizenship shows that minority groups themselves play a

[22] Racheal Busbridge, *Multicultural Politics of Recognition and Postcolonial Citizenship: Rethinking the Nation,* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[23] Nira Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations,* (London:

Sage, 2011).

[24] Tariq Modood, "Multiculturalism, Citizenship and National Identity," *Open Democracy*, May 16, 2007, www.opendemocracy.net/faith-europe_islam/multiculturalism_4627.jsp (accessed May 20, 2023).

role in creating more inclusive national identities and that this process is important. It demonstrates that when minority groups demand recognition, it leads to a diversification of national culture, even in countries without official multiculturalism policies.

- **Politics of Recognition**: In his essay, *The Politics of Recognition*, Charles Taylor emphasised that "due recognition" is not just a mere courtesy, but a fundamental human need. Building upon Hegelian philosophy, recognition theory posits that our sense of self and identity is shaped through our interactions and relationships with others and the larger communities we belong to. These relationships also establish moral expectations and notions of the good life. However, Frantz Fanon, a Martinican psychiatrist and anti-colonial theorist, challenged the Hegelian model of recognition, particularly in the context of colonialism.

In his work *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon argued that relations of recognition in colonial settings reinforce the dominant position of the colonisers and compel the colonised to identify with oppressive structures.[25] Following Fanon's insights, contemporary postcolonial scholars like Andrew Schaap suggest that minority groups seeking recognition in Western societies risk perpetuating their marginalisation and reinforcing unequal power dynamics, thereby becoming dependent on the state and dominant society. This critical perspective has led some, such as Coluthard, to question whether recognition is the appropriate framework for minority demands. Instead, they advocate redirecting efforts towards other avenues in the pursuit of social justice in anti-colonial struggles.

Recognition theory adds strength to the critique of colonial power by showing how colonialism aims to deny equal worth and respect to the colonised. It involves not only the refusal to recognise them as equal human beings with moral rights but also the portrayal of them as culturally and socially inferior to the colonisers. This leads to the internalisation of feelings of inferiority among indigenous and colonised peoples. Moreover, recognition theory explains why colonised peoples resisted colonialism instead of passively accepting their subjugation. It also supports the idea that European colonialism should be rolled back, allowing people in the Third World to freely express their true identities. This aligns with the modern concept of authenticity, emphasising the importance of being true to oneself.[26] Recognition theory as

[25] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* (United Kingdom: Pluto Press, 1986).

[26] Charles Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition, in Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

assumed by Fanon can help us understand how colonialism affects the mental and emotional well-being of the colonised. It sheds light on how colonialism can distort their sense of self and their perception of the world around them.

Recognition theory not only challenges the association of modernity exclusively with the West but also provides the foundation for anti-colonial movements. It supports the belief that culture plays a crucial role in achieving justice, as it rejects assimilation as unjust. Assimilation not only devalues the culture being assimilated but also hinders genuine freedom, autonomy, and equality by enforcing conformity to a dominant power. Prominent anti-colonial thinkers outlined pathways to decolonisation that align with the principles of recognition. They emphasise the importance of valuing cultural distinctiveness, including traditions, beliefs, and ways of life, as a means to grant the colonised equal dignity and respect. Bhabha's exploration of the politics of recognition presents an important perspective. He discusses a conflict between the right to preserve one's culture and the act of representing that culture. Bhabha argues that demands for representation and recognition from minority groups, based on factors like race, class, gender, or generation, arise from an intercultural perspective. This intercultural aspect is often overlooked in theories of recognition.[27]

- **Othering**: The concept of *Othering* is a fundamental element of postcolonial theory and has also been incorporated into critical studies on racism. It refers to a discursive process through which different subjects are constructed both dominant figures in positions of power and those who are subordinated within these structures. To analyse this phenomenon, a degree of abstraction is necessary, as *Othering* simultaneously encompasses both the characteristics of discourse and the way it shapes individual subjectivity. The term, originally based on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories, was redefined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak within the framework of postcolonial thought and has since been extensively used, particularly in anthropology. Scholars such as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha have explored *Othering* in relation to discursive and political practices. Additionally, in everyday language, the term is frequently used to describe acts of stereotyping and racism[28]

[27] Racheal Busbridge, *Multicultural Politics of Recognition,* n.a.

[28] Oscar Thomas-Olalde and Astride Velho, *Othering and Its Effects – Exploring the Concept,* (Austria: University of Innsbruck, 2011), 27.

Chapters

1. **Tounge and Text:** This chapter intends to explore the birth and development of Indian Nepali Literature and consequently the significance that literature holds for the community and their cultural and political identity

2. **Land Rights:** This chapter intends to look at the tea plantation industry in Darjeeling along with the issue of land rights. It intends to analyse the relationship between the workers, their issues, land rights and what impact it has for identity politics and political mobilisations of the community and region.

3. **Citizenship:** This chapter intends to analyse how the community attempts to strengthen it's citizenship claims particularly by negotiating with institutions of the state.

4. **Othering:** This chapter through the theoretical framework of othering and micro narratives with members of the community attempts to navigate how the community views othering and it's causes and response which inturn gives an insight into macro narratives and mobilisations.

Chapter 1

Tongue and Text in Culture, Identity and Belonging

> *Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orator and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and the social production of wealth, their relationship to nature and to other beings*.[29]
>
> *- Ngugi Wa Thiong'O*

1. Introduction

Benedict Anderson in his work *Imagined Communities* has conceptualised nations as "imagined communities", and advocated that it was not sociological factors like language, religion or race, but, print capitalism, being one of the prime institutions, through which this imagined community came into existence. Following from Anderson I would like to briefly sketch Prof. Partha Chatterjee's take on Anderson's conception of nations as 'imagined communities'. Prof. Chatterjee in his seminal work, *The Nation and It's Fragments* holds a particular reservation to Anderson's concept. He states, " If the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?" [30] Prof. Chatterje further goes on to demarcate between the two spheres or domain, "the material and spiritual"[31]. The material or the 'outside' being one of "economy, statecraft, science and technology"[32] over which, Prof. Chaterjee claims, the West's superiority reigned, while the East succumbed. The spiritual which was the inner or spiritual domain which reflected "essential marks of cultural identity" and it was here that the East tries to assert its dominace and create a nationalism that is quintessentially non western.

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[29] Ngugi Wa Thiong 'O, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1981), 16 .

[30] Partha Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 33.

[31] Ibid., 33.

[32] Ibid., 33.

I will relegate my discussion to language as propogated by Prof. Chatterjee. He agrees with Anderson that print capitalism facilitated the institutional space for the development of the "modern national language".[33] Prof. Chatterjee discusses this interchange taking the case of Bengal, that the educated bilingual elite began to regard their native language as a core aspect of their cultural identity, one that needed to be safeguarded from colonial influence. As a result, language emerged as a crucial domain where the nation first had to assert its authority and subsequently adapt it to meet the demands of modernisation. The reason for my enaggement with Anderson and Prof. Chatterjee, primarily is not to relegate Indian Nationalism as so simple an affair, but rather to demonstrate the significance that language has played in creating a cultural spere in Indian Nationalism therefore having a historical and socio political significance in Indian nation formation. Secondly demonstrate the importance of language particularly through a corpus of literature in creation of culture and identity which is essentially centered on difference.

In discussing the "outer domain," which Professor Chatterjee describes as the material sphere of the state, we revisit the opening paragraph of this introduction. Here, he contrasts the European and American models of the nation-state, emphasising that "difference" does not serve as a valid criterion within the material domain. He argues that the colonial state was not merely responsible for introducing the structural frameworks of modern governance to the colonies but was inherently incapable of completing the modern state's normalising mission. This limitation, he explains, stemmed from its foundational principle of colonial difference—maintaining the ruling group's distinct and foreign identity.[34] Over time, as nationalist movements gained momentum, this outer domain expanded and eventually transformed into the national or postcolonial state, which was significantly influenced by the ideals of modern liberal democracy. Although Professor Chatterjee later critiques the nationalist movement for failing to accommodate differences and instead enforcing cultural uniformity, that aspect falls beyond the scope of this discussion.However, the focus here remains on two key points. First, the role of language as a crucial marker of cultural identity, which is fundamentally rooted in the notion of difference and second, the impact of print capitalism, which facilitated literary production and, in turn, contributed to cultural expression through various literary forms.

[33] Ibid., 36.

[34] Ibid., 39.

The chapter's primary objectives through the theoretical framework presented is to study Nepali literary development by analysing key texts and works which allows us to understand, firstly the underlying factors which promoted Nepali literary developments and comparatively understand it's significance by relegating it to developments in language and literature in the Indian national sphere. Secondly to interpret the values that this body of Nepali literary corpus encompasses which not only mirrors the socio political realities of the Indian Nepali community but is also symbolical of the aspirations of a marginalised community within the nation state. This exploration constitutes what may be termed the "inner domain," where language serves as a marker of cultural identity. It needs to be understood here that the reason a chapter is being dedicated to the study of Nepali Literature is to consolidate the foundation to study language and the relationship between language and literature. To essentially understand how literature serves as a vehicle for language or to put in in the words of Ngui, "Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orator and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and the social production of wealth, their relationship to nature and to other beings."[35]

Once the corpus of Nepali Literature is studied the thesis attempts to study the "outer domain," specifically the community's engagement with the mechanism of the liberal democratic state to gain recognition. This is exemplified by efforts to secure the inclusion of the Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and Janjati movement. However this enagagement with the state cannot be viewed in exclusion rather it is essential to study in in conglomeration with other variables of identity which coalesce with language. This is located in the third chapter within broader sociopolitical contexts and engages with the primordialist and instrumentalist perspectives along with postcolonial citizenship theories.

2. Lingua Franca or Verkehrsprache

Paul Brass notes how elites assign fresh significance to symbols to foster identity and distinguish one group from others. [36] In-migration brings individuals together in unexpected

[35] Ngugi Wa Thiong 'O, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, 16.

[36] Paul R. Brass, "Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity Among the Muslims of South Asia," in *Political Identity in South Asia*, eds. David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (Abingdon: Routledge, 2024), 49.

ways, sometimes creating new speech forms and often elevating regional tongues to the status of *lingua franca* or *Verkehrsprache*.[37] The Indian Nepalis are constituent of diverse ethnic groups, *Rai, Khas, Sanyasi, Brahmin, Yogi, Mangar, Newar, Tamang, Gurung, Limbu, Sunuwar, Yakha, , Kami, Damai, Sarki* and *Gharti*. Unlike their counterparts in Nepal caste hierarchy and ethnic divisions are fairly lax among the Indian Nepali Community. Indian Nepalis are characterised by a high degree of cultural hybridity and Nepali serves as the *lingua franca* enabling collective consciousness. It was with the growth of the Nepali language that a sense of commonness developed among the various ethnic groups. Recognising the role of language in consolidating the Nepali community in Darjeeling, Dr. Kumar Pradhan explains how as migrants settled in Darjeeling, they communicated in Nepali as a shared or secondary language alongside their native Tibeto-Burman tongues. Over time, the need for a common medium in daily interactions led to a decline in the use of their original languages, with Nepali gradually becoming the dominant or first language. This linguistic transition played a key role in shaping a collective Nepali identity in Darjeeling, as language became the cornerstone of *jati* consciousness ."[38]

Malcom Yapp and David Young note in *Politics in South Asia* how language plays a crucial role in shaping political identities, as it helps form group connections and articulate political demands. However, political identity is not limited to nationalism. It also reflects broader notions of belonging, representation, and shared goals that often transcend borders and cultures. While language is essential for building and maintaining these identities, its impact is influenced by broader political, social, and economic contexts. These larger forces determine how much a linguistic identity can drive political action, highlighting the ongoing interaction between local identity traits and wider systems of authority.[39] Pradhan highlights that in all his works, the term "Nepali" conveys a cultural meaning, representing an identity that could be considered a nation, though it extends beyond the borders of any one country. He also argues that this term reflects a linguistically unified community that isn't limited by national borders.

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[37] Mark Turin, "Mother Tongues and Language Competence: The Shifting Politics of Linguistic Belonging in the Himalayas" in *Facing Globalization in the Himalayas: Belonging and the Politics of the Self*, ed., Gerard Toffin, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Limited, 2010), 375 .

[38] Rajendra Dhakal, "The Urge to Belong: An Identity in Waiting" in *Indian Nepali: Issues and Perspectives*, ed., T. B. Subba, A. C. Sinha, G. S. Nepal, and D. R. Nepal, (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2009),152–153.

[39] David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp, *Political Identity in South Asia* (London: Curzon Press,1979) preface.

The role of language demonstrates key distinctions between Nepalese and Indian Nepalis. The diverse Indian Nepali population, from an earlier time, embraced the Nepali language as both a common means of communication and a significant cultural symbol. Several factors influenced this like the need for effective communication among those from varied linguistic backgrounds, a readiness to adopt a language gaining educational and cultural recognition, and a growing awareness of Nepali as a unifying force for a fragmented community that could otherwise disappear in the vastness of India. The quick adoption of Nepali, followed by campaigns for its formal recognition in India, shows how political and economic influences shaped language and identity.

Moreover, the economic power of higher castes in Nepal did not carry over into the migrant community. The rise in educational opportunities from the late nineteenth century gave many minority groups the chance to move into the emerging middle class. This middle class, much like in other linguistic movements, led the effort to secure status for Nepali. The acceptance of Nepali as a common language among the diverse Nepali migrant population was a natural process but was accelerated by their awareness of being a small minority in a large country. This sense of unity, created by shared vulnerability, was further strengthened by the relatively fluid caste and class distinctions in the early settler communities. Most were economic migrants without formal skills and were not traditionally Hindu, leading to greater intermarriage and less rigidity in following the caste rules that were enforced in Nepal. In essence, the Nepali community could not conform to a singular ethnic identity. However, the Nepali language, as the one unifying cultural factor, quickly became a key symbol of the Indian Nepali identity. The push for language rights initially came from the intrinsic value of the language and evolved into a central point for broader political demands. Nepali speakers developed a strong sense of a supra-ethnic yet sub-national identity. Efforts to gain official recognition for Nepali in India date back to the early twentieth century.[40]

David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp in the preface analyse how in modern societies, social status is fluid and based on individual accomplishments, requiring constant evaluation and reallocation. To engage effectively with others, individuals rely on cultural identity, which often becomes a political force. Tayor and Malcom note how Gellner highlights the importance

[40] Rhoderick Chalmers, "Nepal and the Eastern Himalayas" in, *Language and National Identity in Asia*, ed. Andrew Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 96.

of communication in this context, placing even greater emphasis on education. He argues that a fully developed modern individual must receive a standardised education, which necessitates a national framework. This education is delivered in the language of the political entity, reinforcing the link between language and governance.[41] By 1911, the University of Allahabad had recognised Nepali as a second language for matriculation in the United Provinces. In 1918, Calcutta University acknowledged it as a vernacular language for composition in matriculation, intermediate, and B.A exams. At the same time, efforts were underway to introduce Nepali as a medium of instruction in schools and to create the textbooks necessary for this. Gradually, these initiatives succeeded, and in 1935, Nepali was approved for teaching and examination in all primary schools in Darjeeling with a majority of Nepali students. By 1949, Nepali became the language of instruction up to middle and high school levels in the predominantly Nepali-speaking areas of Darjeeling. The creation of a distinct Indian Nepali identity was not only an internal need but also played a significant role in shaping the public image of Indian Nepalis. Despite the geographical closeness, ties between Indian Nepalis and their ancestral homeland weakened after the initial waves of migration. By the twentieth century, migration to Darjeeling and Sikkim had largely stopped, and these populations formed their own social and cultural systems. However, there were ongoing debates about the best way to pursue recognition for the community.[42]

3. Traditional Nepali Literature

The origin of Nepali can be traced prior to the formation of the Indian or Nepali nation in a political sense. Nepali has seen many developments in terms of nomenclature itself over a span of centuries. Before it came to be known as Nepali, the language was referred to by several names, including "Khas Kura, Gorkhali, Parbate, or Parbattiya". This development in language nomenclatures common to various Indian languages like Bengali or Hindi which until the the sixteenth century was associated with various terms until these languages were mobilised to accommodate their respective political parlance.[43] The genesis of Nepali Literature is considered to have begun with *Adikabi* (first writer) Bhanubhakta Acharya. Born in 1814 at

[41] Malcom Yamm, " Language, Religion and Political Identity: A General Framework", in *Political Identity in South Asia*, eds. Malcom Yapp and David Taylor, (London: Curzon Press, 1979), 11.

[42] Rhoderick Chalmers, "Nepal and the Eastern Himalayas" in *Language and National Identity in Asia*, ed. Andrew Simpson ,(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 96.

[43] Kumar Pradhan, *A History of Nepali Literature*, (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1984), 3.

the village of Ramgha in Tanahii in the family of a Brahmin scholar-priest. Since most people did not understand the Sanskrit language, he translated the epic Ramayana into the Nepali language preserving the lyrical narration style. Bhanubhakta's major works are the *Ramayana, Badhuiikshii* (Advice to the Daughter-in-law), *Prasnottari* (Catechism) and *Bhaktama* (Garland of Devotion).[44]

During that period, Asian languages like Nepali were mostly passed down through oral traditions, with little written material or literary impact. Written texts in South Asia were predominantly in Sanskrit, making them inaccessible to the general population. Only Brahmins and a few individuals educated in Sanskrit could access religious scriptures and literary works. While many poets composed in Sanskrit, Acharya chose to write in Nepali, which helped popularize the language and gained him favor with the Rana rulers. His deep admiration for Ram's heroic deeds motivated him to make the story available to Nepali speakers. [45] Post Bhanubhakta the development of Nepali Literature can be traced to the establishment of printing presses in the middle of the nineteenth century which facilitated the production of literary texts. The significance attached to the establishment of the printing press primarily is the shift of Nepali literary production from oral to print. Prior to the establishment of printing presses for Nepali publication, majority nepali works were oral in nature. Print enabled a literary culture to thrive. Benedict Anderson in his breakthrough work *Imagined Communities* has noted that it was 'print capitalism 'which provided the new institutional space for the development of the modern national language.

Partha Chatterjee writes about how the specific circumstances of the colonial era prevented a straightforward replication of development patterns. In Bengal, for example, it was through the efforts of the East India Company and European missionaries that the first printed books in Bengali appeared at the close of the eighteenth century, with the first narrative prose works commissioned in the early nineteenth century. During this period, English replaced Persian as the administrative language, becoming the dominant medium of intellectual influence on the emerging Bengali elite. A pivotal point in the evolution of modern Bengali occurred in the mid-nineteenth century when this bilingual elite undertook the cultural task of equipping their native language with the necessary tools to become a suitable medium for modern culture. This led to

[44] Ibid, 36.

[45] Interview with Mahendra Pradhan, at Nepali Sahitya Akademi office, Darjeeling, Chowkbazar, 2023, 1;45pm.

the establishment of an entire institutional framework of printing presses, publishing houses, newspapers, magazines, and literary societies. The bilingual intelligentsia began to view their language as central to their cultural identity, a domain from which the colonial presence needed to be excluded. Thus, language became the first zone over which the nation asserted its sovereignty and then transformed to meet the needs of the modern era.[46]

Benaras played a pivotal role as the first publishing houses of Nepali texts were in Benaras. Motiram Bhatte who published many works of the poet Bhanubhakta acquired the patronage of Bhartendu Harishchandra along with Ramkrishna Verma set up the *Jivan* Press in Benaras. Prose was the first genre of Nepali texts to have been produced in the wake of the printing press. With the publication facilities that Benares afforded, books came out in Nepali which included a large number of poetical works. These works show three distinct poetical streams running parallel to each other. The first stream was that of poets who wrote in accordance with the rules of Sanskrit prosody. When we examine further the literary era between Bhanubhakta, until the new voices of the modern age, we find not much of a change in the form and content. Part of the problem was the residual effects of imperialist scholarship, colonially determined educational apparatuses, and the colonial etiquettes of mapping our history, in cultural as much as the political domains.[47]

According to Aijaz Ahmed, in the cultural realm, this method of periodisation was further reinforced by the colonial focus on high textuality, mechanisms of monarchical and imperial centralisation, and languages of authority in both religious and material domains. These concerns naturally led to the elevation of Vedic and Sanskrit texts for the Hindu/Classical period, Persian and Mughal texts for the Muslim/Medieval period, and the prominence of English texts for the British/Modern era. This was the conceptual framework within which colonial institutions of research and education were first constructed, as evidenced by the career of William Jones and the entire complex history from the founding of Fort William College in 1800 to the establishment of the first three modern universities in 1857-58, with Macaulay's Minute of 1835 in between. However, the actual development of colonial society was fraught with contradictions, and both Christian missionaries and colonial officers soon realised that

[46] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories,* (Princeton, New Jersey:Princeton University Press, 1993), 7.

[47] Interview with Mahindra Pradhan, secretary, Sahitya Akademi, Darjeeling, dated 15th November, 2023, 1;45pm.

neither Sanskrit, Persian, nor even English could function as a language of command for governing the souls and bodies of the Indian masses,or even the colonial clerks. They needed to be addressed in the regional languages spoken by the people themselves.[48]

The early history of printing presses and colonial education grids makes this point quite evident. While an English-language press continued to evolve, with much being imported from England for the British as well as the emerging Indian Third Estate, the first two printing presses at Serampore and Fort William were primarily established to publish material in Indian languages for both Indians and Europeans. The history of subsequent developments in printing presses across the country is closely tied to the demand for textbooks and educational materials in indigenous languages, particularly for reformist pedagogies. This was clearly linked to the evolving educational frameworks sponsored by the colonial state, Christian missionaries, and Indian reform movements, where much of the teaching and instruction occurred in native languages, regardless of Macaulay's policies or others.[49]

Ahmed further states that in the Oriental Colleges and academies established for this purpose, specialised training in classical Indian languages such as Sanskrit, Farsi, and Arabic was provided. However, most of the scholarship in these languages was preserved through traditional institutions and privately organised circuits, although some regular schools and colleges also offered instruction in them. English emerged as the language of higher education, particularly at the university level, while schooling in the local vernacular was standardised across the country. Only a small number of exclusive public schools taught English in an exclusive manner. Since these literatures originated in regional languages during a period when India was undergoing both colonial subjugation at a subcontinental scale and an unprecedented form of bourgeois unification influenced by both colonial administration and the anti-colonial movement, the writers of these literatures often had a deep interest in navigating the relationship between regional particularities and civilisational unity.[50]

Motiram Bhatta was the most prominent literary figure of the era. He is credited with introducing "kiila padya" (knotty verses) and, drawing inspiration from Urdu, composed several Nepali ghazals. His short poems were featured in various journals and anthologies of

[48] Aijaz Ahmed, *In Theory: Classes, Nations ad Literature,* (New York, London: Verso, 1992), 265-266.

[49] Ibid., 266.

[50] Ibid., 266.

the time, and he often incorporated his own poetry into the plays he translated. Among his major works are "Gajendramoksha", which narrates the myth of an elephant's salvation by Vishnu, as well as "Prahladbhakti Katha" and "Ushicharitra", both based on mythological themes. In "Pikdut", he follows the style of Kalidasa's "Meghdoot", using a bird as a messenger of love. His other notable works include "Kamal-Bhramar Samvad (a dialogue between a lotus and a bumblebee), Bhramargit (The Song of the Bee), and Kavi Samuhavarilan (The Description of Poets)." Beginning his literary career in 1883, Motiram is believed to have produced numerous works before his untimely death at thirty, though not all have been published.[51]

In the early phases of Nepali literature, the majority of writers were well-versed in Sanskrit, having received their education in Benaras. Their primary focus was on translating classical Sanskrit texts into Nepali. This era witnessed the rise of erotic literature, along with the growth of both prose and poetry. However, these literary works offered little to no reflection of the contemporary Nepali society. While a few authors showed sparks of innovation and originality, their influence remained relatively limited. The second wave of Nepali poetry introduced a more close connection to the grassroots, working-class voice through *lahari* sahitya, which was written in folk rhythms, providing a raw and authentic portrayal of life. This literature captured the essence of the common people, making it distinct from the more formal Sanskrit-influenced writings. The third stream of poetry took on a devotional tone, produced by key figures from the indigenous Josmani cult. Interestingly, a small group of these writers infused a sense of social consciousness into their work, a quality rarely found in secular literature of the time.[52]

The development of Nepali literature in this early period highlights the complexities of its growth, with a clear divide between the classical, Sanskrit-based tradition and the more grassroots, folk-influenced forms of writing. The initial focus on translation and eroticism indicated a limited engagement with the socio-political realities of Nepali life. However, as the lahari sahitya and devotional poetry streams emerged, literature began to reflect the voices of the lower classes and their lived experiences. The appearance of social awareness in the devotional works was particularly notable, as it suggested that spirituality could intersect with

[51] Kumar Pradhan, *The History of Nepali Literature*, (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1984), 54.

[52] Interview with Mahendra Pradhan, Seretary Sahitya Akademi, Darjeeling, 2023, 1;45pm

a broader understanding of societal issues, even if such awareness was not yet fully realised in secular writing.

Henceforth we can see how early Nepali literary works were fixated with Sanskrit and religion. It is only with the passing of time that Nepali Literature witnessed works on economic, social and political issues. For example in 1899 Darjeeling was affected with heavy landslide in 1899. Dakman Rai in his work *Darjeeling ko Pairako Sawai* (the landslide in Darjeeling) addressed the British Raj.[53] "Dhanyai raichha sarakar char varna palne, dhanko lalach dekhai had masu galne. Angrejiko yani dharam bado khubai mane, duniyalai fakai fakai bal baisa khane."[54] It translates to "Bravo to the government which keeps four varnas in shape and tempting with money our bones and flesh does take. This is the trait that the English have, I know, by wooing, others live they swallow."[55]

He was equally critical of the businessmen from the plains who he would describe as cheating the simple hill folk. When the atmosphere of Bengal was thick with Swadeshi and radical movements, a paper named *Gorkha Sathi* was published from Calcutta in 1907 with the avowed objective of fostering among Indian Nepalis a love for their country. Henceforth in this phase of Nepali literary progression, often classified as traditional, a noteworthy role was played in facilitating the rise of print capitalism and establishing the foundation for extensive publishing endeavours. This period marked the initial instance where Nepali readers engaged with printed editions of Nepali literature. Nonetheless, even amidst its evident commercial success, a prevailing constraint persisted within the Nepali literary milieu in Benaras, a dominance of caste and class by educated Brahmans who did not accurately represent their evolving readership. Another characteristic of this phase was the overtly Brahminical dominance which did not allow lower groups authentic participation or expression.[56]

The Nepali literary scene experienced a notable shift as it moved from a focus on publishing to the rise of public debate. Although some journals faced interruptions, they played a crucial role in shaping a literate and engaged audience by creating a space for discourse. The journal *Sundari* is a prime example of how these publications linked commercial printing, literary creativity, and public discussion. The publishers of *Sundari* were motivated by the desire for

[53] Pradhan, *History of Nepali Literature*, 58.

[54] Ibid., 58.

[55] Ibid., 58-59.

[56] Ibid., 59.

social progress, noting that many countries were advancing by publishing journals in various languages. They identified a similar need in their own community and believed that using the vernacular, rather than Sanskrit, would make their content more accessible to the general population. This approach aimed to bridge the gap and involve more people in literary and social conversations, showcasing a commitment to making these discussions widely available.[57]

Chandra, a monthly from Benares in 1914 propagated the cause of the Nepali language because it held that the reason behind the progress of the English, French and German peoples lay in the development of their respective languages. Parasmani himself later wrote, "the main aim of the monthly *Chandrika* was to bring about *unnati* of the Nepali language and uniformity in language". The development of Nepali as mother tongue *(matrabhasa)* was a recurrent theme of *unnati* discourse. Indeed more than a theme, for the central role assigned to language in the overall project of social progress made it impossible for many writers to conceive of any *unnati* without *bhasonnati (unnati* of language). This position is evident from the very outset of the publication of *Chandra*. There is no room for misunderstanding the invocatory verse it chooses to grace its masthead in the first and every subsequent issue[58], " Progress of one's own language is the root of all progress, without knowledge of one's own language the pangs of the heart cannot be erased. Do not delay,o' best of friends, rise up now and erase the pangs. Make progress in your own language which is the first root of everything." [59]

Another publication, Gorkhali contained articles on themes like social reformation, spread of education and the standardisation of the language. *Chandrika*, the first literary journal to come out from Kurseong in 1918, was edited by Parasmani Pradhan. It lived for about two years but in this brief span the paper published a large number of articles and poems. Like others Chandrika also emphasised the importance of the language, education and social reform. It praised Gorkhali for its boldness and the courage that it had given to the Nepali speakers in general. *Adarsa*, edited by Seshmani Pradhan from Kalimpong in Darjeeling was to create an interest in economic enterprises.[60]

[57] Rhoderick Chalmers, *We Nepalis: Language, Literature and the formation of a Nepali Public Sphere in India,* 1914-1940, (School of Oriental and Asian Studies: Proquest, 2018), 113-114.

[58] Ibid.,133-134.

[59] Ibid., 133.

[60] Ibid., 133.

To delve deeper into the context in which Nepali *jati* consciousness emerged, it is crucial to examine the discourses that revolved around the concepts of *vidya* (learning) and *unnati* (progress). This connection was further accentuated by an increasing realisation of their significance, particularly in relation to the evolution of Nepali literature. At the heart of these discourses was a palpable sense of being left behind, both socially and culturally. This perceived backwardness acted as a catalyst for social reforms, instigating a movement to address and rectify the areas in which Nepali society seemed to lag. This movement aimed to bring about reforms that were not only practical but also reflective of a deeper desire for progress and improvement.

Central to this endeavour was the Nepali language itself. The language became a focal point for several reasons. Firstly, it was a means of articulating and advocating for the changes and reforms that were sought. Secondly, as the vehicle for literary expression, the language played a critical role in shaping public opinion and fostering collective consciousness. The efforts to refine and elevate the Nepali language mirrored the broader mission of advancement and progress. Amidst these developments, the Nepali public sphere experienced substantial growth. This growth was not limited to just one aspect but was multi-dimensional. On one hand, it facilitated the spread of socio-political awareness by providing a platform for discussions, debates, and dissemination of ideas. On the other hand, it contributed significantly to the evolution of Nepali literature, providing writers and thinkers with a space to engage with the changing socio-cultural landscape.

This confluence of factors gave rise to a symbiotic relationship between literature and the evolving Nepali identity. The progress made in literature, fuelled by the discourse on learning and progress, became a reflection of the larger aspirations of the Nepali society. It was not just about artistic expression, it was about defining and shaping the identity of a community that was grappling with the complexities of modernity and cultural evolution. In essence, the discourse on learning and progress, along with the urgency to address perceived backwardness, laid the foundation for a varied transformation. This transformation implied the reformist zeal to uplift society, the linguistic and literary rejuvenation, and the growth of a public sphere that facilitated awareness and cultural evolution. Together, these elements nurtured the growth of a distinctive Nepali identity that was deeply rooted in both its historical legacy and its aspirations for a more progressive future.

4. Modern Nepali Literature

Modern Nepali Literature has undergone a rapid evolution . While the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the emergence of a small number of significant works, mostly in verse genres, it was not until the early twentieth century that modern Nepali Literature truly began to develop. The concept of modernity in literature is subjective, but for Nepali literature, it can be argued that it began when literature became innovative and began to reflect contemporary society instead of simply revisiting traditional themes. Therefore, the modernisation of Nepali Literature started in the 1930's, marked by the publication of Lakshmiprasad Devkota's famous poem Muna Madan (1935), the early plays of Balkrishna Sama, and the first anthology of Nepali short stories, *Katha Kusum* (1938). This process gained momentum with the emergence of a new generation of writers in the 1960s (known as the third dimension of Nepali literature or *Tesro Ayam*). Today, contemporary Nepali literature is a rich blend of indigenous style, prose, and free verse genres, infused with philosophical insights gained from exposure to the world beyond the hills.

Tesro Ayam (Third Dimension)

Tesro Ayam (Third Dimension) was a significant periodical as it was the first attempt by Nepali writers to develop a cohesive theory about their literature's nature and purpose. It could be argued that this new movement, of which *Tesro Ayam* was the primary publication, represented the first expression of self-aware modernism in Nepali literature. While many Nepali writers aimed to create modern literature based on their own ideas, none had yet put forth a philosophy that would establish the principles and beliefs of contemporary Nepali literature. The literary journal *Tesro Ayam* was created and managed by Bairagi Kainla, Ishwar Ballabh, and Indra Bahadur Rai, who shared similar beliefs. Their perspective, as expressed in Kainla's editorial pieces and Rai's essays, was that traditional Nepali literature lacked depth and needed to develop a "third dimension", in order to accurately reflect the interconnectedness of life and be perceived objectively. Tesro Ayam was a periodical but later signified a range of literary works which represented a new genre of Nepali literature. Kainla, in the editorial statement of the second edition of *Tesro Ayam*, expressed criticism of the traditional style of Nepali literature stating how the overly sentimental writing of earlier authors was not only trivial but it also served as a means of avoiding responsibility and, consequently, evading life's realities. This type of literature appears one-dimensional, lacking depth, insight, or a broader vision. He

further elaborated how without a genuine engagement with life, it failed to resonate with the intellectual demands of the modern era."[61]

Bairagi Kainla

Bairagi Kainla's most noteworthy works are two of his poems, "A Drunk Man's Speech to the Street After Midnight" [62](*Mateko Mancheko Bhashan: Madhyardtpachiko Sadaksita*)[63] and "People Shopping at a Weekly Market"[64](*Hat Bharne Manis*). [65]

*"*A Drunk Man's Speech to the street after midnight"[66]

(Mateko Manche ko Bhashan: Madhyarat Pachiko Sadaksita)[67]

The poem begins on a note:

> When I emerge from the wine shop, long after midnight has passed, cockerels crow their welcome from every coop and perch, flapping their wings in rebellion. My very breath, drenched in alcohol fumes, is a great storm in this atmosphere,this lifelessness, this system. Grand mansions line the street,weakness hides in their foundations: now now now they will soon collapse! [68]All my steps are earthquakes today, volcanoes erupt in each sensation, how have I lived to such an age in these cramped and crumbling houses, too small for a single stride? I am saddened,even now they sleep, self-defeated men, tangled together like worms in the pestilent houses of the earth, and do they sleep so late? [69] Today I am more immense than the world, my breath is shut in by the ground of this street, I stamp all over the road. People say I am drunk,Keep left, people say we should keep to the verge, but people should walk all over this street, as many as it can

[61] Taranath Sharma, *Nepali Sahitya ko Itihas (*History of Nepali Literature*)*, (Kathmandu: Sankalpa Prakashan, 1982) n.a.

[62] Michael James Hutt, *An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature,* (Berekeley: University of California Press, 1991), 103.

[63] Ibid.,103.

[64] Ibid., 106.

[65] Ibid., 106.

[66] Ibid., 103.

[67] Ibid., 103.

[68] Ibid.,103-104.

[69] Ibid., 104.

contain,the police pick up all who keep lo the verge, saying, This one's drunk, and that one,too![70]

The above is a small excerpt from the poem. It delves into profound themes of rebellion, societal constraints, and personal transformation ironically through the lens of intoxication. The speaker, emerging from a wine shop after midnight, experiences a profound sense of empowerment and expansiveness that starkly contrasts with the confining nature of their surroundings. This juxtaposition serves as a powerful metaphor for the individual's struggle against societal norms and expectations. The poem offers a scathing critique of societal structures and norms, symbolised by the narrow streets and cramped houses that dominate the urban landscape. These physical constraints serve as a tangible representation of the invisible social barriers that limit individual freedom and expression. The speaker's intoxicated state acts as a catalyst, allowing them to perceive the inherent fragility and inadequacy of these structures. This is vividly illustrated in lines such as "Grand mansions line the street, weakness hides in their foundations," [71]which suggest that even the most imposing societal institutions are built on shaky ground.

The state of inebriation is thus portrayed not as mere escapism, but as a form of enlightenment, enabling the speaker to see beyond the limitations imposed by society and envision a world of greater possibilities and potential. The tension between confinement and freedom emerges as a central theme, permeating every aspect of the poem. The speaker feels acutely constrained by both the physical environment and the weight of societal expectations. The narrow streets serve as a literal manifestation of these constraints, while the presence of the police symbolises the enforcement of social conformity. In stark contrast, the speaker's intoxicated state serves as a means of transcendence, allowing them to break free from these boundaries and experience a sense of vastness that makes them feel "more immense than the world."[72] This expansion of consciousness challenges the very foundations of societal norms and invites readers to question the validity of accepted limitations.

The poem also offers a pointed social commentary, critiquing the mechanisation of human life and the erosion of individuality in modern society. This criticism is particularly evident in the

[70] Ibid.,104.

[71] Ibid., 104.

[72] Ibid., 104.

vivid description of "faceless men"[73] whose heads are filled with "letters and papers,"[74] suggesting a loss of humanity in favor of bureaucratic efficiency. The comparison of human lives to "machine parts, soon obsolete" [75]further points to the dehumanising effects of a society that values productivity over personal fulfillment. This imagery serves as a stark warning about the consequences of unchecked modernisation and the importance of preserving human dignity and individuality. As the poem progresses, it builds towards a powerful climax that calls for revolution and renewal.

The speaker invokes historical and mythological figures, specifically calling upon the "sixty thousand cursed sons of Sagar" to rise up and transform the world. This allusion to Hindu mythology adds a layer of cultural richness and depth to the poem, suggesting that the desired transformation is not merely social but also spiritual in nature. By drawing on this mythological reference, the poem connects the speaker's personal experience to a broader cultural and historical context, implying that the struggle against societal constraints is a universal and timeless human experience. The poem's treatment of intoxication as a means of achieving clarity and vision is particularly noteworthy.

Rather than depicting drunkenness as a form of escape or self-destruction, the poem presents it as a tool for expanding consciousness and gaining insight into the true nature of reality. This perspective challenges conventional notions about intoxication and invites readers to consider alternative ways of perceiving and interacting with the world around them. In its entirety, the poem presents a complex and nuanced exploration of the human condition, juxtaposing the expanded consciousness of the intoxicated speaker against the rigid constraints of society. It advocates for a radical reimagining of social structures and human potential, suggesting that true freedom and fulfillment can only be achieved by breaking free from the limitations imposed by conventional thinking and societal norms. Through its vivid imagery, cultural allusions, and powerful themes, the poem invites readers to question their own assumptions about society, individuality, and the nature of reality itself.

[73] Ibid., 104.

[74] Ibid., 104.

[75] Ibid., 104.

"People Shopping at a Weekly Market" [76]

(Hat Bharne Manis)[77]

The poem *People Shopping at a Weekly Market* [78]vividly captures the deep-rooted impact of colonialism on contemporary society, illuminating the pervasive themes of materialism and economic exploitation. The striking image of individuals selling their own blood to purchase food starkly conveys the desperation of those forced to resort to extreme measures for survival. This portrayal serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring lack of economic opportunity and resources, a condition directly linked to the colonial past. Colonialism, with its systemic extraction of wealth and exploitation of native populations, created a legacy of uneven distribution of wealth, leaving many former colonies grappling with deep-seated inequalities:

> Naked hills are licked clean by a locust swarm which hides the sky, *Mikjiri* flowers borne by the hills wilt on the century's breast,crawled upon, half-burned.Clumsily flowing, overturning, in laces and buttonholes,in the market's bounds, in a crowd of countless shadows, in a mist, the gun smoke of a great war, in a storm, their eyes are wheeling. [79]A void, the beginning to which life has returned in pieces, each eye has its own void, a great lake of emptiness filling their eyes. But the guilty arc mired in damp shadows in this small yard, feet bound by compromise,their eyes poured out into footprints, their lives emptied out down both sides of New Road, empty pots lie still here and there, the market of people held tight in their eyes, …These people filling the marketplace,mselling blood at the blood bank nearby to pay for rotting potatoes, gathering up pieces of their will to live, packing their being into a bag of shrouds, they are quite unaware that death left today, knowing the price of life.[80]

The poem draws attention to this historical continuity, showing how the vestiges of colonialism persist through the neocolonial forces of capitalism that still dominate global economic systems. In critiquing modern society's values, the poem underscores the dominance of materialism and consumerism, which are portrayed not merely as contemporary phenomena

[76] Ibid., 106.

[77] Ibid., 106.

[78] Ibid., 106.

[79] Ibid., 106.

[80] Ibid., 108.

but as extensions of colonial ideologies. The imposition of these values on colonised societies during the colonial period has led to their persistence in postcolonial contexts. The relentless pursuit of material wealth, the prioritisation of consumerism over human dignity, and the commodification of life itself can all be viewed as byproducts of the capitalist structures introduced during colonial rule. These forces continue to shape and exploit postcolonial societies, perpetuating cycles of poverty and alienation.

Moreover, the poem's rich use of language and imagery reflects the complex cultural hybridity that characterises postcolonial societies. This hybridity is not only a mark of the cultural syncretism imposed by colonialism but also a testament to the resilience and adaptability of colonised people who, despite these impositions, continue to carve out spaces for their own cultural expression. The poet's use of metaphors drawn from both Western and indigenous traditions enriches the text and highlights the dual nature of the postcolonial experience, where cultures are interwoven, often in contradictory and tension-filled ways. At the same time, the poem's nuanced exploration of these themes suggests a possibility of redemption and transformation.

While the critique of colonial legacies is sharp and unyielding, there is also an underlying call for change. The poem, in presenting these stark realities, invites readers to reflect critically on the socio-economic and cultural systems that govern our world today and to envision alternatives that challenge the inequities born of colonialism. Ultimately, *People Shopping at a Weekly Market* offers a layered and complex critique of the lasting effects of colonialism on modern society. By foregrounding economic exploitation, consumerism, and cultural hybridity, the poem speaks to the deep contradictions inherent in postcolonial life. It is a powerful call for readers to confront these legacies and to reckon with the ongoing struggles faced by postcolonial societies as they continue to navigate the global forces of neocolonialism. In doing so, the poem emphasizes not just the scars left by colonialism, but also the potential for renewal, transformation, and a reimagining of social and cultural futures.

Indra Bahadur Rai

Indra Bahadur Rai, a revered figure in Indian Nepali literature, significantly contributed to shaping and enriching the language and its literary traditions. Alongside contemporaries like Bairagi Kainla and Ishwor Ballav, he spearheaded the *Tesro Aayam* (Third Dimension) movement, which infused modern sensibilities into Nepali writing. Rai's notion of "totality" in literature, emphasising the interconnectedness of life and art, set him apart. His introduction

of *Leela-Lekhan* further pushed the boundaries of characterisation, drawing on multiple perspectives to reveal the complexities of individuals—a technique reminiscent of Rashomon. This approach allowed him to delve into social, socialist, and psychological realism, presenting his characters as products of the many ways they were perceived by others. Rai's engagement went beyond literary innovation. He was a passionate advocate for the inclusion of Nepali in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, making him a key figure in the articulation of Indian Nepali identity. His fiction resonates deeply with the diasporic experience, reflecting a community's yearning for unity through a language that, though not originally their's, carried the weight of everything they had left behind. Despite his distinctive stylistic choices, Rai's work stands as a powerful testament to the resilience of a culture navigating its place in a foreign land [81]

One of Rai's most noteworthy works is *Maina's Mother is Just Like Us*[82] which translates to *Maina ki Ama Hami Jastai.*[83] The story begins with Maina's mother who is a small vegetable seller selling greens. She is approached by a cutsomer inquiring the price of the greens, who is taken aback hearing the price and also complains that they have turned yellow and walks away. The author starts the story giving an insight into the hardship that Maina's mother faces on a regular basis which is reflective of the author's attempts to showcase the condition of the general population in Darjeeling. Rai then goes on to showcase the general frustration of the people in Darjeeling and how they all intend to move outside the place in search of better opportunities:

> No point living in Darjeeling now, a man is saying. Everyone here is looking for work. If you've studied, it gets you nowhere. We can't get enough to eat living here. When we came there were very few people, but now many more have come and our numbers have increased.[84] There's not even enough grass for our animals. We should move somewhere else…Over the hills to Assam. We should move to the northeast… Its little

[81] Thadathil, George. "Indra Bahadur Rai (1927-2018)." *Indian Literature* 62, no. 5 (307) (2018): 22–28. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26792185.

[82] Prem Poddar, Anmole Prasad eds., *Gorkhas Imagined: Indrabahadur Rai in Translation*,trans. Michael Hutt, (Kalimpong: Mukti Prakashan, 2009), 75.

[83] Ibid., 75.

[84] Ibid.,76.

> roads, little machines, little houses are the proof. [85]There was very little to support them, so they became wanderers, scattered through the great land of India. Bunched together, they would all have died. The time had passed when they could have moved and advanced their civilisation: their immediate needs were what forced them to abandon their homes.Yes, we should move somewhere new.[86]

Through this excerpt, Rai meticulously highlights the historical migration to Darjeeling centuries ago in search of better livelihoods and opportunities. However, despite having lived there for generations, the lack of development and economic prospects is now forcing Indian Nepalis to leave Darjeeling and migrate to other parts of India in pursuit of a more stable future. The absence of work despite education points to the harsh reality that survival, rather than progress, dictates migration patterns. Rai's portrayal reflects the ongoing cycle of diaspora and migrant labour, illustrating how economic constraints compel communities to abandon their homes. A key takeaway from his work is the realisation that staying together would only deepen their financial struggles, making migration an unavoidable choice. Although Rai wrote this story decades ago, the fundamental challenges in Darjeeling remain largely unchanged, and the pattern of displacement and labour migration continues, reinforcing the enduring struggles of the Nepali diaspora in India.

Rai then attempts to highlight other conversations happening in the market plac:

> "I've heard that all the plants and grasses here are medicines. If you knew which ones, you could cut them and sell them, said someone without a single penny in his pocket, clutching a small bag of rice. [87]I've heard that there are mine underground near our house. There might be a copper mine right there in my garden. We should make the lowlands pay for water from our rivers, said another person, just coming home."[88]

The excerpt highlights themes of poverty, resource exploitation, and unrealised economic potential in Darjeeling, emphasising the frustration and desperation of its people. The speaker's remark about all plants and grasses being medicinal reflects an awareness of the land's natural

[85] Ibid., 76.

[86] Ibid., 76-77.

[87] Ibid., 79.

[88] Ibid., 79.

wealth, yet his lack of money reflects the irony of living amidst abundance while struggling for survival.

His desire to cut and sell medicinal plants suggests that economic opportunities are scarce, forcing people to rely on extraction and informal labor to make a living. Similarly, the second speaker's mention of copper mines beneath their home conveys the belief that Darjeeling possesses untapped economic resources, yet these remain inaccessible or unexploited for local benefit. The suggestion that the lowlands should pay for Darjeeling's water reveals resentment toward economic inequality, where the region's natural resources benefit outsiders while locals continue to struggle. In the broader context of Darjeeling, this passage highlights ongoing economic hardships, lack of development, and the exploitation of resources that fail to uplift the local population. It reflects a history of economic neglect, labour migration, and unfulfilled aspirations, where the people recognise the potential of their land but remain powerless to fully benefit from it.

Despite the hardships Rai demonstrates through Maina's mother's character a sense of belonging, identity, and an unbreakable bond with the land. In the story Maina's mother states, "we don't want to go anywhere else. All of us should have a house where we can open the window each morning and look at the Himalaya. Here man is unhealthy he quickly tires of most things; his thirst is quickly quenched. But with one thing we are never fed up, and that is the Himalaya." [89] Rai also refers to the periodic political turmoil that has taken place in Darjeeling over the past several decades through the metaphor "The color of the flag has gone into the shadows, a loudspeaker blares in her ear."[90]

The story conveys themes of displacement, survival, inequality and existential anxiety, depicting the struggles of a woman navigating the overwhelming marketplace. The contrast between the natural landscape and the chaotic bazaar highlights the tension between traditional life and economic necessity. The marketplace, filled with noise and movement, symbolises the loss of home and belonging, as livelihoods are pushed into public spaces. The grinding stone, which belongs in a home, represents the disruption of domestic life, emphasising how people are forced to abandon their roots for survival. The repeated question, 'Why did you come

[89] Ibid., 80.

[90] Ibid., 83.

here?" [91]reflects a deep sense of alienation and uncertainty, as if society itself is questioning the presence of those struggling to make a living. Despite fear and discomfort, the protagonist Maina's mother continues to sell her goods, determined to secure her place for the next day. The story ultimately highlights the resilience of marginalised individuals, the struggle for economic stability, and the ongoing cycle of labour and survival.

The Long Night of Storm: Stories[92] is a collection of Indra Bahadur Rai's short stories which have been translated by Prawin Adhikari. There are sixteen short stories under the title *which* demonstrate the scope of I.B. Rai's vision. They deal with large scale events such as war, exile and migration as adeptly as they explore the ordinary and the mundane. The movement of people and their complex relationship with the land of their origin is a recurring theme in these stories.[93] The first story *Long March from Burma* [94]narrates the terrifying experiences of a Gorkha family who had to flee from the Japanese invasion of Burma during the Second World War. The story follows a fifteen year old girl and her parents who were part of the Gorkha community in Burma, and their challenging journey to India. The story gives us an insight into the struggles which accompany migration and the hardships faced by refugees.

Rai begins the story on a note of chaos describing how the British forces were in full retreat, withdrawing their troops from and Rangoon and Victoria Point, making their way toward Imphal in Manipur through Mandalay. With no one left to oppose the advancing enemy, the region was gripped by a desperate exodus. From the early hours of the morning, groups of people some on foot, others packed into bullock carts—hurried along the rugged path leading to Sumprabung. The scene was one of complete abandonment; even stray dogs seemed to have vanished, as everyone focused solely on escaping the looming threat.[95] The author in this opening passage demonstrates the chaos and devastation that war brings. The description of the British retreating and the people fleeing in desperation highlights the disruptive nature of war, as people are forced to abandon their homes and belongings in order to save themselves.

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[91] Ibid., 84.

[92] Prawin Adhikary, *The Long Night of Storm*, trans. Prawin Adhikari from Nepali by Indra Bahadur Rai, (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publication Private Limited, 2018).

[93] Shradha Ghale, "The Lives of Others", *The Kathmandu Post*, March 10, 2018, accessed January 10, 2023, https://kathmandupost.com/miscellaneous/2018/03/10/the-lives-of-others.

[94] "The Long March in Burma" in *The Long Night of Storm*, trans. Prawin Adhikari from Nepali by Indra Bahadur Rai, (New Delhi: Speakin g Tiger Publication Private Limited, 2018), 5-25.

[95] Ibid., 5.

The absence of any resistance or support also points to the helplessness of the people caught in the midst of the conflict. The mention of "not a dog" coming in this direction also emphasises the complete abandonment of the area, as even the animals have fled. This opening sets a tone of fear and desperation, highlighting the impact of war on ordinary people.

Rai then introduces the protagonist of his story, Subedar Shivajit Rai, his daughter Jamyang, his wife the Subedarni. The Subedar reflects with deep regret on the inevitability of their departure, lamenting that if such a day had to come, it would have been better to leave earlier, during more favorable times. He realizes that an earlier departure would have allowed him to safeguard his possessions, his wealth, home, and land. As he sits, lost in thought, he notices that the tea his wife had prepared has grown cold, its surface now covered with a thin white film. The weight of displacement is evident in the Subedar's sorrowful reflections. He then breaks the news to his wife that they, too, must leave. In response, his wife expresses a stoic acceptance of their fate. She states that if their time in this land has come to an end, then so be it. However, she remains hopeful, believing that if fortune favors them, they will one day return to Machina and reclaim the happiness they once knew.[96]

As they prepare to leave, the atmosphere shifts. The bullocks are yoked once again, and the departure is marked by more activity and noise than the solemn journey of the previous day. Songs fill the air, and Jayamaya joins the lively crowd. Young boys, full of energy and mischief, take aim at birds perched on tree branches, pausing their journey to retrieve their targets. There is no sign of fear—only laughter and a sense of excitement. Rather than a forced migration, the journey feels like a joyous excursion, as if they were traveling not as displaced people but as carefree wanderers on a picnic from Burma to India.The passage above presents a stark contrast to the chaos and fear that marked the beginning of the story. The theme of resilience and adaptability of the human spirit is highlighted as the Gorkha community manages to find moments of joy and laughter amidst the difficult and trying circumstances of their journey. The fact that people are singing duets, young boys are engaging in playful activities and everyone is laughing, in spite of the danger and uncertainty they face, suggests that they are trying to make the best of their situation. [97]

[96] Ibid.,5.

[97] Ibid., 6-7.

We can see here how Rai tried to demonstrate the importance of community and togetherness. The Gorkha community is depicted as a tight-knit group that helps and supports each other during their journey. The fact that they are all travelling together towards a common destination shows that they are bound together by a common goal and purpose. Their sense of unity and camaraderie helps them to overcome the challenges and difficulties they face along the way. Adversity and migration often have a way of bringing people together, forging strong bonds as communities face shared struggles. For the Gorkha community, these challenges have profoundly shaped their sense of identity, weaving a fabric of solidarity that has held them together through difficult times. When people are uprooted from their homes, as many Gorkhas were in Burma, Asssam or Bhutan, the experience of leaving behind familiar landscapes, traditions, and languages can create a deep sense of loss and alienation. But in that loss, they often find one another. The shared hardships of displacement, discrimination, and marginalisation foster a collective resilience, a recognition that together they are stronger than they are alone. In these moments, the Gorkha community began to coalesce, finding comfort and strength in their shared identity, language, and culture.

However as the author proceeds with the story we see this glimmer of hope get fainter with time as the migrants are faced with adversaries like severe weather conditions, sickness, shortage of food, fatigue and death. The author has encapsulated the variety of themes in the narrativisation of the migrants journey which engulfs the reader into the bitter and harsh world of the migrant. Human endurance and resilience is one as despite the incredibly harsh conditions, the characters in this passage keep moving forward, driven by a determination to survive. They push themselves to their limits, enduring hunger, fatigue, and illness, all in the hopes of finding a better life. The fragility of life is a constant presence in this passage, with characters falling ill and dying from disease and exhaustion. The characters are forced to confront the reality of their own mortality, as they witness the deaths of their loved ones and face the possibility of their own demise.

The physical and emotional toll of their journey is also a prevalent. The gruelling conditions they endure, such as cramped calves, torn clothing, and rain-soaked clothes, highlight the physical hardships they face. The fact that they are constantly on the move and unable to rest demonstrates the urgency of their situation and the desperation to reach safety. The theme of sacrifice is also evident, as individuals within the group put their own lives on the line to care for others, such as the son who carries his ailing mother for an entire day and falls sick himself as a result. The soldier who tends to a sick comrade for nearly a month, even when there is no

hope of recovery, is another example of the sacrifices made in the face of immense adversity. The bonds of family is recurring theme in this passage are often motivated by their love for their family members, with parents sacrificing their own well-being for the sake of their children. The death of Subedarni is a particularly poignant moment, as Subedar is devastated by the loss of his wife and forced to carry on without her. The river Takab symbolises the many obstacles and risks that refugees and migrants face as they flee from their homes. It also symbolises the vulnerability of women, children, and elderly people in such situations, as they are unable to cross the river and are forced to wait on the riverbanks for the rains to cease.

In the final phase of the story Subedar drowns in an attempt to cross the river. Jamaya is saddened. However after a few days the river subsides and the migrants can cross easily. I.B Rai pens, "Soon, the days of rains ceased and the river began to subside with each day. Soon, it came no higher than the waist. Now all who had survived began crossing the river. After having sent so many to their deaths in the swell of the river, those who crossed easily now experienced a guilt borne of unknown crimes—as if it was a sin to continue living while others had perished."[98] This creates a sense of sadness and guilt among the survivors, who feel that they have somehow failed those who did not make it:

> Fighter planes, machine guns, and a narrow path through the jungle marked the beginning of yet another arduous journey. Jayamaya had little memory of this part of the trek. Only one event stood out, after two days of walking, she encountered Lieutenant Baghbir Mukhiya running wildly in the opposite direction, disheveled and almost unrecognisable, except for his voice.[99] He was shouting frantically All my people are here! How can I leave alone? My wife, my children, everyone is here! Who do I have to go to? And with that, he ran off, still shouting... After twenty-two days of travel, Jayamaya's group finally reached Lekhapani in Assam. As they glimpsed a few whitewashed buildings and a speeding motor car in the distance, no one had any words left to speak. In nobody's heart was the joy of arriving.[100]

Rai portrays here the idea of trauma and how it can affect people in different ways. Jayamaya, one of the survivors, is so overwhelmed by the experience that she cannot remember much of

[98] Ibid., 16.

[99] Ibid., 16.

[100] Ibid., 16.

what happened on the journey. Lieutenant Baghbir Mukhiya, on the other hand, becomes unhinged and runs away screaming, unable to cope with the loss of his loved ones. The final part of the passage shows the survivors arriving at their destination after a long and difficult journey. However, there is no sense of joy or relief among them. Instead, they are still burdened by the trauma of what they have been through and the guilt of surviving while others did not. Loss and Trauma are recalcitrant themes here.

I.B Rai's fiction gives the reader an emphatic insight into the psychological, physical, emotional condition of migrants and the process of migration. Migration is a substantial element of diasporic literature in the wider context of the nation state as well. Migration plays a significant role in the narratives of nation formation, nationalism, and state in India, as it challenges popular notions of homogeneity and the idea of a singular national identity. The history of India is marked by a long and complex process of migration, from the ancient movement of people across the Indian subcontinent to the more recent patterns of labor migration and refugee movements. In the popular narrative of nation formation in India, the idea of a singular national identity has been central, and often defined in terms of religion, language, and culture. This narrative has been used to promote a sense of unity and to counter the challenges posed by regional, linguistic, and ethnic diversity. However, the reality of migration challenges this notion of homogeneity, as it brings together people from different linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, creating hybrid and diverse communities.

Indra Bahadur Rai, like many other writers, delves deeply into the effects of migration on the Indian Nepali community, revealing how it complicates their sense of identity and belonging within India. For the Indian Nepalis, migration isn't just a distant memory, it's an ongoing challenge that continues to shape how they are perceived and how they see themselves. Despite being settled in India for generations, their identity is often reduced to their historical status as migrants, creating barriers to full acceptance as Indian citizens. This constant reference to their migratory past makes it difficult for the Indian Nepali community to consolidate their identity within the Indian nation. Though they are a part of India's social fabric, the persistent association with their colonial-era migration history has left them vulnerable to being seen as outsiders. This struggle is rooted in the way colonial records and narratives portrayed Gorkhas as foreigners or immigrants, and these labels have stuck, creating a sense of exclusion even within their own homeland. Rai and other writers explore how Indian nationalism, which emanated primarily against colonialism, often elevates certain identities while sidelining others.

In this framework, communities like the Indian Nepalis, whose history doesn't fit neatly into the narrative of indigenous identity, are left on the margins. The problem is compounded by colonial history, which categorised and used Gorkhas in ways that reinforced their status as the *other*. Even today, this colonial legacy lingers, influencing how the Indian Nepalis are seen within the modern nation-state. Rai's works calls attention to this ongoing struggle, showing how Indian Nepalis remain caught in the shadow of their migratory past. He argues that to truly understand their place in India, the country must grapple with these complex histories, acknowledging the community's experiences rather than reducing them to their colonial past. Through his writing, Rai offers a more inclusive vision of identity, one that takes into account the rich, layered experiences of communities shaped by migration.

Another important theme that Rai's chief protagonist, the Subedar (a rank in the army) is symbolic of is the ideology of *martial race* (a colonial construct), which has an impact on the postcolonial identities of the Gorkhas. During the British Raj in India, several governance strategies were developed and the empire's military power was built on specific axes, one of which was the concept of martial races. This ideology suggested that certain groups of men were naturally or culturally inclined towards martial activities. Only recently have historians started to examine the role and impact of the martial race ideology during the late Victorian era of the colonial period. This treats martial race ideology as an imperial construction, a strategic set of beliefs born out of specific recruiting needs, a uniquely colonial comprehension of Indian society, and nineteenth century conception of race.[101] The colonial canon between the British and the Gorkha was one of the master and servant. Henceforth in post colonial nation and narratives the Gorkha is valorised as loyal and brave emblematic of an individual who 'serves'. It is appropriate to quote Lionel Caplan here, "The Gurkhas seem to have been caught in a time trap woven by their military chroniclers."[102] The transmission of a particular relationship to history across generations is known as inheritance. It raises the question of whether the historical influences that shape present day existence should be acknowledged to

[101] David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj : The Indian Army, 1860-1940* , (London: Macmillan Press, 1994).

[102] Lionel Caplan, "Martial Gurkhas: The Persistence of a British Military Discourse on Race" in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb(London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 277.

provide a sense of identity and significance or abandoned for an alternative source of identity. [103]

In *Mountains and Rivers*[104], Rai employs extensive metaphors to depict the Nepali village and it's inhabitants. The opening passage features two metaphors that enhance this depiction. The first metaphor describes the village and a three-story house in it, (metaphor of house used by many Nepali authors to represent Indian nepali community) evoking an image of a singular, cohesive structure with multiple levels. It emphasises the concept of a communal home where everyone shares the same living space and experiences. The house's construction, made of aged materials like stone, mud, and wood, implies a sense of tradition and ancestry. The use of the word *bequeathed* reinforces this idea, suggesting that the village has been passed down through generations, akin to an inherited home. The second metaphor presents the villager's dream of prosperity as a "dream that had bound them together." [105]This imagery reflects a shared aspiration that unites the villagers and provides them with a sense of purpose. However, it then shifts to a darker tone with the phrase, "the awakening was different,"[106] implying that the dream has not been realised, leaving the villagers disillusioned. The sun shining "as if a reluctant favor"[107] further emphasises their disappointment and the sense that the villagers are trapped in their circumstances. These metaphors indicate that the villager's struggles are not new but have persisted for generations.

The narrative centers on two brothers. The elder brother, frustrated with his impoverished village life, tells his younger sibling that he does not belong to this united community and is destined for a different path. As the brothers converse, an old man and a young man passing by recite a poem, "Mountains green and flowers, Needlessly swept away by rivers. Rivers, bright birds, Unimpeded was their movement—Needlessly obstructed by mountains.Shanti!Shanti!Shanti!"[108] The young man remarks, "Hills are us, who stay behind.

[103] Julie Mullaney, *Postcolonial Literatures in Context*, (London:Continum Publishing House, 2010),8-10.

[104] "Mountains and Rivers", in *The Long Night of Storm*, trans. Prawin Adhikari from Nepali by Indra Bahadur Rai, (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publication Private Limited, 2018), 26-37.

[105]Ibid., 17.

[106] Ibid., 17.

[107] Ibid., 17.

[108] Ibid., 19.

Rivers are those who leave." [109]The old man responds, "Rivers forever hurry to somewhere, but also always remain here. Hills are fluid and ever-changing too."[110] This metaphor compares hills to those who stay behind and rivers to those who depart. It implies that the young man perceives himself and others who remain as steady and rooted, like hills, while those who leave are in constant motion, like rivers. The old man's response highlights the paradox of the metaphor. He notes that while rivers seem perpetually on the move, they remain present in some form. Conversely, hills, which may appear fixed and unchanging, are influenced by erosion and other natural forces that cause them to shift and evolve. This metaphor connects to the concept of diaspora, the dispersal of individuals from their original homeland. Diaspora not only involves leaving a part of oneself, one's culture, and one's community behind, but it also highlights the tension between the constancy and fluidity of existence. This tension is mirrored in the diaspora experience, where individuals adapt to new environments while remaining connected to their roots and past.

The old man's statement, "Hills are fluid and ever-changing too," [111] serves as a reminder that though people may depart from their homeland, their culture and identity are not static, they can also change and evolve over time. This bears relation to diaspora, where individuals often cultivate a hybrid identity, blending their original culture with that of their new environment. Overall, the metaphor underscores the complex and nuanced nature of leaving one's homeland and being part of a diaspora engaging with both constancy and fluidity, and the necessity to adapt while remaining anchored to one's roots. Diasporas are critical in articulating colonial and postcolonial identities, serving as dynamic forces of cultural exchange and hybridisation. They are characterized by multiple attachments to both homeland and host land, often transformed by successive movements. "Old" diasporas pertain to communities resulting from early modern, classic capitalist, or nineteenth-century indenture. These diasporas arise from specific historical, social, and geopolitical circumstances, yet they represent a vibrant feature of a world defined by constant human movement, resources, and media, linked through familiar and emerging power circuits, including global capital.

Diasporas are frequently lauded as quintessential manifestations of late modernity, associated with accelerated social mobility and enhanced recognition of cultural exchange and

[109] Ibid., 19.

[110] Ibid., 19.

[111] Ibid., 19.

transformation processes. However, this recognition often overlooks how diasporas might perpetuate both enabling and disabling attachments to notions of *home*, *homeland*, or nation. The entrenched power structures leading to or arising from dispersal are frequently obscured or ignored. While some critics herald new transnational identities and belonging models, they may overlook the strong allure of the nation-state for marginalised or displaced groups who often find comfort in secure national territories. Thus, the appeal of national identities remains compelling despite the exaggeration of transnational affiliations over national ones. The story proceeds with a member of the Nepali diaspora who is a beneficiary of the reservation policy in India. He visits Nepal, to look into the condition of those he has left behind, in a "government car" which implies he is in a position in the government. The protagonist, who is staying in a hotel and does not have a house of his own, feels a sense of bitterness and dejection when he stands before his clan-home, which he sees as strong, bright, mirthful, capable, and confident. Despite the fact that the old clan-home has gained a new section and smaller, prettier houses surround it, he is unable to fully connect with it. The protagonist's sense of displacement and disconnection is further highlighted when he muses on the relationship between the green of the mountains and the water in the rivers, the white of the rivers and the rocks of the mountains. He wonders if he is raining tears, which can be interpreted as a symbol of his sense of loss and longing for a sense of belonging and connection.

The significance of the passage lies in its exploration of the complex relationship between identity, memory and belonging. The protagonist is struggling to reconcile his past with his present, and is grappling with questions about the nature of life, knowing, and connection. The passage suggests that identity is not fixed, but is rather a fluid and evolving concept. The protagonist's musings on the Zen master's words suggest that even though we may be physically separated from our roots and our past, we are never truly disconnected from them, which is the paradigmatic condition of postcolonial diaspora. Indrabahadur Rai through his metaphoric narratives gives an insight into the struggles of the Indian Nepali Diaspora in the broader context of the national allegory. Julian Mullaney argues that the significance of transnational connections is often exaggerated, as marginalized, dispossessed, or displaced communities continue to find a strong sense of security and belonging within the framework of a nation-state and its clearly defined territorial boundaries.

Another theme that the protagonist in the *Mountains and Rivers* represents is Hybridity. The protagonist has imbibed features of both nations that he does not feel at place in any. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity refers to the process of cultural mixing and fusion that occurs

when different cultures come into contact with each other. It is the idea that when two or more cultures interact, they create something new and different from the original cultures. Bhabha's concept of hybridity challenges the notion of cultural purity and emphasises the complexity and fluidity of cultural identity. According to Bhabha, hybridity is not simply the blending of two cultures, but a more complex process in which different cultural elements are combined in unique and unpredictable ways. The result of this process is a new cultural identity that is neither wholly one culture nor the other, but something in between. Bhabha argues that hybridity is not just a product of colonialism and globalisation, but is also present in all forms of cultural exchange. Hybridity allows for the emergence of new and dynamic forms of culture, and it is through this process of hybridisation that cultures evolve and change over time. Overall, Bhabha's concept of hybridity highlights the importance of recognising and valuing cultural diversity, and the need to embrace cultural complexity and fluidity in our understanding of cultural identity.[112]

Another of I.B Rai's seminal work is the novel *Aja Ramita Cha,* which has been translated to *There's a Carnival Today*[113], by Manjushree Thapa.The novel provides a portrayal of life in postcolonial Darjeeling, capturing the struggles and aspirations of its people. Set in the 1950's, the story unfolds against a backdrop of growing unrest, as tea estate workers rise in protest against harsh labor conditions. At the center of the narrative is Janak, a well-known businessman and community leader, who finds himself on the brink of financial, political, and moral collapse. His business is failing, and he faces a lawsuit from Jayabilas, a Marwari trader and former friend with whom he once shared a partnership. In the political sphere, Janak has lost influence to Bhudev, his rival in the worker's movement, who now holds greater power. To make matters worse, Janak's son, Ravi, whom he had high hopes for, has chosen a modest career as a schoolteacher and has become involved in the worker's movement on the tea estates. Convinced that Bhudev is using Ravi as a pawn to further undermine him, Janak struggles to maintain his footing. In his personal life, despite having a loving and stable marriage with Sita, Janak finds himself irresistibly drawn to Yamuna, the wife of a friend who is gravely ill. Meanwhile, tensions reach a boiling point when tea estate workers, angered by the arrest of their fellow labourers, march into town. As more people join, the demonstration rapidly grows, culminating in a violent police crackdown. As the story comes to an end, Janak, despite his

[112] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[113] I. B. Rai, *Aja Ramita Cha,* trans. Manjushree Thapa as *There's a Carnival Today* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publishing Private Limited, 2017).

personal and professional turmoil, resolves to reclaim his standing and forge a new path forward. Through its richly woven narrative, the novel paints a sweeping portrait of Darjeeling in the early years after independence, shedding light on its social, political, and economic transformations.

The novel encapsulates two pivotal incidents that serve as a mirror to the postcolonial predicament in Darjeeling. The first event pertains to the labour turmoil in the tea estates, while the second revolves around the emergence of the Gorkhaland political movement. Both of these events are marked by a pervasive sense of violence, which forms a defining trait of their respective narratives. The history of Darjeeling in popular colonial narratives dates back to the time when the British were looking for a sanatorium. Darjeeling because of its climate and geography was considered archetypal. With time the British found the soil ideal for tea plantation, which, however, required labour. The land was declared as a wasteland (*terra nullius*) which enabled the colonisers to acquire and sell it for a nominal price. The plantation industry boomed and Darjeeling became synonymous as a tea and tourist haven.

Post independence the plantations were sold to businessmen from the plains primarily Kolkota and adjacent plains. However the interplay of capitalism and politics is a feature of the tea plantations. Charles Pinderhughes describes hierarchical socio-economic structures as systems of control that operate within a nation, affecting specific populations in geographically distinct areas. This system, he suggests, contributes to long-standing disparities among groups, affected population and the land they inhabit, situating them within the historical or ongoing framework. The concept of hierarchical socio-economic structures has been widely explored in postcolonial literature, particularly in the context of tea plantations. While many former colonies achieved political independence, economic and social structures within tea estates often remained shaped by colonial legacies. The labour force, largely composed of historically marginalized communities, continued to experience limited mobility and unequal access to resources, reflecting enduring patterns of economic dependence and social stratification. [114]

Among the various forms greviances put forward by tea garden workers, the denial of land rights stands out as particularly severe. Even today, tea garden workers remain without access to land ownership.They may have worked in the gardens for generations, yet they do not have

[114] Pinderhughes, Charles. "Toward a New Theory of Internal Colonialism." *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 25, no. 1, Informa UK Limited, Mar. 2011, pp. 235–56. *Crossref*, https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2011.559702.

any (land rights/ *parjapatta*) to their ancestral land and the homes they live in, as contrast to most parts of the country where land right have been granted to tillers. Although land reforms were introduced across West Bengal between 1978 to 1980, granting land rights to sharecroppers and landless farmers, these reforms were not extended to the tea-growing regions of North Bengal. As a result, most residents of Darjeeling hills, Terai, and Dooars still lack *parja patta*, meaning their ancestral lands are not officially registered in their names. Tea plantation workers remain trapped in a semi-feudal system, where failing to provide labour for the tea gardens can lead to eviction from their ancestral homes. This is because the legal ownership of the land remains with the tea companies, not the workers or their families. In 2019 the West Bengal government permitted the tea companies to use fifteen percent of the land in the garden for 'alternative use purposes'.[115]

Rai's novel uses the tea plantations as a symbol of both economic dependency and cultural entrapment. The narrative explores the relationship between land ownership, citizenship, and socio-economic marginalisation, offering a nuanced critique of postcolonial realities. The tea estates serve as a microcosm of broader societal issues, illustrating the limited economic opportunities and upward mobility available to Nepali workers. This economic vulnerability is intrinsically linked to land ownership dynamics, as the plantations and this disparity in land ownership reflects the community's exclusion from economic power and political agency, despite their integral role in the tea industry. Rai's work delves into the complex issue of citizenship and belonging for the Indian Nepali community. The novel touches upon the political struggles surrounding the demand for Gorkhaland, a separate state for Indian Nepalis, which stems from a perceived lack of recognition and rights from the Indian state.

This struggle for citizenship and rights is portrayed as inextricably connected to the community's quest for land ownership and economic empowerment. The author's literary style blends realism with social commentary, providing an intimate portrayal of daily life in the tea plantations. Through vivid descriptions and nuanced character development, Rai illuminates the hardships, familial struggles, and personal conflicts arising from hybrid cultural identities. *There's a Carnival Today*, presents the tea plantations as a symbol of colonial legacy, critiquing the continued exploitation of Indian Nepali labour post-independence. The interconnection of

[115] Raju Bista, "Exploited for Generations: Tea Garden Workers Struggle for Land Rights in Darjeeling Hills, Terai, and Dooars," *Firstpos*t, accessed March 30, 2023. https://www.firstpost.com/politics/exploited-for-generations-tea-garden-workers-struggle-for-land-rights-in-darjeeling-hills-terai-and-dooars-10173161.html).

tea, land, and citizenship in the narrative represents the entanglement of economic exploitation, land disenfranchisement, and political marginalisation. Citizenship is portrayed not merely as a legal issue but as deeply intertwined with economic and cultural rights. In conclusion, Rai's novel offers a scholarly exploration of the postcolonial condition of the Indian Nepali community in Darjeeling. Through the prism of tea, land, and citizenship, the work unveils the profound socio-economic challenges faced by the community, ambiguous citizenship status, and hybrid cultural identity. Rai's literary approach, combining realism with social commentary, provides a compelling portrayal of the community's navigation of its complex postcolonial reality.

Conclusion

This chapter builds on Prof. Chatterjee's argument that the spiritual domain was instrumental in defining cultural identity, with language playing a pivotal role in shaping a cultural sphere. A robust body of literary works contributed to fostering a cultural dimension to Indian nationalism. Over time, as nationalist politics gained prominence, the outer domain expanded, transforming into the national or postcolonial state, heavily influenced by the ideology of the modern liberal democratic state. However, Prof. Chatterjee also critiques how nationalism, as a hegemonic project, failed to accommodate differences and instead pursued a process of cultural normalisation. In this context, the chapter concludes that creating a robust literary tradition was essential for standardising the Nepali language and establishing a cultural sphere for Indian Nepalis within the Indian nation. Indian Nepalis, comprising diverse ethnic groups, adopted Nepali as their *lingua franca t*o enable collective consciousness. The Nepali language thus played a vital role in consolidating the Indian Nepali identity. This aligns with Paul Brass's observation that, in some cases, linguistically diverse ethnic communities adopt or shift their language to foster unity within the group or differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups. Literature, in this sense, provided the Indian Nepali community with a medium for imagining itself as a cohesive cultural and political entity, fostering a sense of collective belonging and shared identity.

The Nepali language not only shaped the Indian Nepali identity but also facilitated political mobilisation, such as the movement for its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This recognition became a cornerstone of Indian Nepali nationalism, reflecting broader themes of belonging and representation. However, the role of language must be viewed within broader political, social, and economic contexts, which are explored in other chapters

of this thesis. Together, these factors drive political action and identity formation, with literature providing the symbolic and cultural framework through which the community could imagine itself and articulate its aspirations. The genesis of Nepali literature can be traced back to the establishment of Nepali printing presses in Benaras, notably the Jivan Press set up by Motiram Bhatta. The early literary works were predominantly prose and poetry, influenced heavily by Sanskrit. Three distinct streams of poetry emerged during this period: one adhering to Sanskrit prosody, another reflecting grassroots voices through folk rhythms, and a third with devotional themes from the Josmani cult. Over time, Nepali literature began addressing broader economic, social, and political issues, moving beyond its initial religious and Sanskritic fixation. For instance, Dakman Rai's Darjeeling ko Pairako Sawai addressed the devastating landslides in Darjeeling in 1899, reflecting a shift towards socially relevant themes.

The chapter also highlights the critical role of journals in fostering cultural and linguistic progress among Indian Nepalis. Publications like *Gorkha Sathi, Sundari, and Chandrika* linked community advancement to linguistic and cultural development, emphasising the importance of language as a tool for progress and identity formation. These journals, along with other literary efforts, created a space for cultural imagining, where Indian Nepalis could articulate their unique experiences and aspirations, helping to shape their collective consciousness. Furthermore, the chapter examines the contributions of the *Tesro Ayam* literary movement, particularly the works of Indra Bahadur Rai. Two of his translated works, *The Long Night of Storm: Stories and There's a Carnival Today*, provide profound insights into postcolonial Darjeeling. These works explore themes such as war, migration, hybridity in identities, and the struggles of ordinary lives against larger socio-political backdrops. They capture the complexities of Indian Nepali identity and its evolving relationship with the postcolonial condition, offering a literary space to reimagine the community's place within the broader Indian nation. In conclusion, this chapter analyses how literature was not only central to shaping the Nepali language and Indian Nepali identity but also provided the community with a scope for cultural imagining. Through literary production, the Indian Nepali community envisioned itself as a distinct cultural and political entity, articulating its demands, expressing its struggles, and fostering a sense of shared belonging. The evolution of Nepali literature from its Sanskritic roots to addressing contemporary issues reflects the broader cultural, social, and political transformations of the community, with literature acting as a crucial medium for imagining and solidifying their collective identity.

The translation of Indian Nepali literary works to English is significant because it addresses the issues of language, power, and identity that are central to the identity discourse. Furthermore, translation plays a crucial role in shaping the cultural identity of Indian Nepali literature. Translation also allows for the exchange of cultural ideas and promotes a dialogue between different cultures, fostering a sense of cultural diversity and inclusivity. Indian Nepali literature encompasses various genres such as poetry, prose, and drama, and has a rich cultural heritage. However, the Nepali language is not widely spoken outside of Nepal and the few geographies in India. Thus, translation plays a crucial role in enabling a broader audience to appreciate the literary works of Indian Nepali authors. Moreover, the translation of Indian Nepali literary texts into English promotes cultural exchange and understanding. It enables readers from diverse linguistic backgrounds to engage with the literary works of Indian Nepali authors, gaining insight into their culture, traditions, and way of life. Additionally, it fosters a sense of global community, promoting empathy and understanding among people from different cultures.

The relation between identities, politics, power, and emotions becomes evident in the process of constructing personal and collective senses of self and nation. Within this context, linguistic competence stands as a crucial determinant and constituent of belonging. While linguistic anthropologists have extensively explored the role of language in shaping individual identities through various modalities, less attention has been given to the concept of belonging. Historically, languages have played a pivotal role in the formation of nation states, with efforts to unite diverse populations under a single linguistic banner aimed at fostering national unity. Language, as a symbolic marker of identity, often serves as a boundary device, accentuating differences and contributing to the maintenance of borders. The diverse historical experiences of migration contribute to the nuanced expressions of linguistic belonging in the eastern Himalayas. Here, languages once primarily utilitarian have transformed into markers of belonging due to their emotional, symbolic, and political significance. The evolution of language into a form of heritage and an inherent right strengthens the connection between language and belonging. Therefore linguistic affiliation, which is not only intertwined with personal and cultural identities but also shaped by political motivations and power dynamics. The journey of language from a practical tool to an emblem of heritage signifies its significance

in constructing a sense of belonging that resonates on emotional, symbolic, and political levels.[116]

In summation, the Nepali language within the Indian Nepali community demonstrates the socio-political, economic, and cultural forces on linguistic and community identity dynamics. The rapid ascendancy of Nepali to prominence, catalysed by campaigns for official recognition and influenced by the broader socio-economic milieu, epitomises the language as an emblem of identity and unity among the diverse Nepali origins.This linguistic evolution, however, transcended a mere linguistic transition, it metamorphosed into a crucial conduit for advocating reformist agendas, fostering a collective consciousness, and articulating shared aspirations. Within this framework, literature emerged as a paramount tool for manifesting the transformative potential of the Nepali language in the Indian Nepali community's identity formation. Through literary expressions, the community navigated the evolving socio-cultural landscape, carving a space for discourse, introspection, and collective introspection.

[116] Mark Turin, "Mother Tongues and Language Competence: The Shifting Politics of Linguistic Belonging in the Himalayas," in *Facing Globalization in the Himalayas: Belonging and the Politics of the Sel*f, eds. Gérard Toffin and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2014), 371–396.

Chapter 2

Tea and Land Rights Nexus

> *The antithesis between lack of property and property, so long as it is not comprehended as the antithesis of labour and capital, still remains an indifferent antithesis, not grasped in its active connection, in its internal relation, not yet grasped as a contradiction.*[117]
>
> *- Karl Marx*

1. Introduction

The Darjeeling tea industry serves as a crucial lens for understanding the socio-political dynamics of the region and its inhabitants, particularly the Indian Nepali community. Historically, the industry has been at the nexus of economic, political, and cultural currents, shaping not only the livelihoods of those working in the tea gardens but also the collective identity of the community. This chapter embarks on an exploration of the colonial history of the Darjeeling tea industry, tracing its growth and expansion, while focusing on two pivotal issues that have historically driven labour movements which are, the working conditions of tea cultivators including wages, bonuses, living conditions and the enduring struggle for *parjapatta* (land rights).

Tea cultivation, being a hereditary occupation in the region, has ingrained land rights as a central crux of labour movements in the region. Generations of workers have tilled the soil since before India's independence , reinforcing the notion that parjapatta is not merely a demand but an inherent right for those who have cultivated the land for centuries. This issue is deeply connected to the broader identity politics of the Indian Nepali community, which, despite being historically linked to migration as tea workers and coolies, asserts a deep affinity with the land. In this context, land rights are more than just a legal or economic matter, they symbolise the community's claim to belonging and citizenship in an imagined national space, one shaped by colonial histories and postcolonial aspirations.

The tea industry also holds significant cultural symbolism for the Indian Nepali community, representing both an economic cornerstone and an element of collective identity. Politically, it

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[117] Karl Marx, "Private Property and Communism" in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan, (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 39.

has been a site of grassroot mobilisation and resistance, most notably in the demand for Gorkhaland. The demand for *parjapatta* has resurfaced in the context of the recent *Five Decimal Land Scheme*, which has sparked protests for its perceived inadequacies. This chapter critically examines these contemporary movements and the coaction between land rights, labour struggles, and identity, drawing from interviews with trade union leaders, tea garden workers, and managers. In this broader framework, the Darjeeling tea industry emerges not only as an economic enterprise but as a site where questions of colonial legacies, land ownership, labour rights, and ethnic identity converge. By investigating these themes, this chapter intends to explore and analyse how the Indian Nepali community continues to negotiate its place in the socio-political landscape of the nation, using the tea gardens as a focal point for their claims to land, belonging, recognition and most importantly citizenship. It also intends to understand the relationship between land or *mato* (through the tea industry) and citizenship, as perceived by the Indian Nepali community, particularly those residing in Darjeeling.

2. History

In the *Bengal District Gazetteers*, chapter six titled "The Tea Industry" Arthur Jules has extensively written on the history of Darjeeling Tea industry. He notes that before Dr. Campbell was reassigned to Darjeeling in 1889, officials had already begun exploring the potential for cultivating and producing tea within East India Company controlled regions. The tea plant was first identified growing naturally in Assam in 1821, and in 1884, Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor General, assembled a committee to provide recommendations on introducing tea farming in India. The government initiated trial plantations in Upper Assam, Kumaon, and Garhwal. By 1889, private businesses entered the industry, leading to the establishment of the Assam Tea Company.[118] Dr. Campbell conducted trials in Darjeeling, and the positive results motivated others to try growing tea using seeds provided by the government. In 1852, a report by Mr. Jackson noted that both China and Assam varieties were thriving in the garden managed by Dr. Campbell in Darjeeling. Additionally, successful cultivation was observed in larger estates owned by Dr. Withecombe, the Civil Surgeon, and Major Crommelin of the Engineers, located in a lower valley known as Lebong. Despite these advancements, Dr. Hooker and several others believed that the high moisture levels and limited

[118] Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, (Alipore: Government Printing, Bengal Government Press, 1947), 113.

sunlight in Darjeeling's elevated terrain would likely make commercial tea cultivation unprofitable.[119]

He further writes how by 1856, tea cultivation had progressed beyond initial trials to a larger, commercially viable scale. In January 1857, Rev. T. Boaz, L.L.D., noted that tea plants had been successfully grown from seeds at various locations. Captain Masson cultivated them at Takvar, Mr. Smith at Kurseong, a company at Hope Town, Mr. Martin on the Kurseong flats, and Captain Samler, acting as an agent for the Darjeeling Tea Concern, between Kurseong and Pankhabari. Expansion gained momentum, and in 1856, the Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company established the Alubari tea estate, while the Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank set up another plantation on the Lebong spur. By 1859, Dr. Brougham had initiated the Dhutaria tea estate, and between 1860 and 1864, the Darjeeling Tea Company founded estates at Ging, Ambutia, Takdah, and Phubsering, while the Lebong Tea Company developed plantations at Takvar and Badamtam.[120] During this period, additional gardens, now recognised as Makaibari, Pandam, and Steinthal, were also established. The first experimental tea estates in the Terai region were introduced around this time, and in 1862, Mr. James White launched the region's first commercial plantation at Chumpta, near Khaprail. Prior to this, he had developed one of the district's largest tea estates at Singell near Kurseong. By 1866, additional gardens had emerged in the Terai, reflecting the increasing recognition of the area's favorable soil and climatic conditions. The government encouraged investment by offering land under attractive conditions, which led to significant growth. By late 1866, 39 tea estates were operational, covering 10,000 acres and producing over 433,000 pounds of tea annually. By 1870, the number of gardens had increased to 66, spanning 11,000 acres, with a workforce of 8,000 laborers, yielding an annual harvest close to 1,708,000 pounds.[121]

Colonial data till date remains the primary source of study in the historiography of the region. In L.S.S O 'Malley's *Darjeeling District Gazetteer*, chapter three on "People", Malley descriptively writes on how the expansion of Darjeeling District represents one of the most notable cases of population growth recorded in Bengal. When the British took possession of the hill region in 1835 through the Deed of Grant, the land was predominantly covered in dense

[119] Ibid., 113.

[120] Ibid., 113.

[121] Ibid., 113.

forest, with only a minimal number of inhabitants. The few residents who had lived there had been forced to leave due to the harsh rule of the former local authority. [122]At that time, the entire area, spanning 138 square miles, was believed to have a mere 100 people. However, circumstances changed significantly under Dr. Campbell, the district's first Superintendent, who aimed to build trust in British administration among the indigenous hill communities, attract nearby tribal groups to settle in the area, and develop Darjeeling into a key commercial hub. His efforts proved highly effective, and by 1850, the population had grown to approximately 10,000. Sir Joseph Hooker even drew a comparison between Darjeeling's rapid expansion and that of Australian settlements, noting similarities in both infrastructure development and the influx of migrant families from surrounding regions. By 1869, an informal population survey estimated that the number of inhabitants had exceeded 22,000.[123]

Malley's account provides us with valuable insights into the colonial enterprise's commercial ambitions within Australia and its subsequent application to the context of Darjeeling. Malley astutely employs terminology such as "altered state of affairs"[124] and "induce confidence"[125] to exemplify the British coloniser's deliberate efforts in shaping the perception of their rule in a favourable light. Notably, Hooker draws a parallel between the expansion of Darjeeling and the establishment of an Australian colony, shedding light on the comparable trajectories of population growth in both regions. A pivotal aspect, briefly mentioned in the preceding chapter but deserving of emphasis, pertains to the civilising mission pursued by the colonisers. This mission was often pursued at the expense of maximising profits. Two salient points arise here, firstly, the recruitment of labour, which played a crucial role in furthering colonial ambitions and secondly, the coloniser's keen interest in the tea industry, which became a lucrative avenue for generating substantial gains. To facilitate this pursuit, the British leveraged the Wasteland legislation, briefly alluded to in the previous chapter discussing citizenship.

It is essential to expound upon these dynamics, which brig together economic exploitation with the civilising mission, illustrating the complexities of colonial endeavours. The strategic employment of carefully chosen language by the colonisers helped create a narrative that

[122] L.S.S. O Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer : Darjeeling* (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907), 35.

[123] Ibid., 35.

[124] Ibid., 35.

[125] Ibid., 35.

justified their rule and served to bolster their commercial interests. Moreover, Hooker's comparison between Darjeeling and Australian colonies reveals how the mechanisms of population growth and resource exploitation operated in analogous ways across disparate colonial contexts. Delving deeper into the concept of the civilising mission, it becomes evident that the purported mission of bringing civilisation to the colonies often camouflaged the ulterior motive of profit accumulation. This dual pursuit of civilising and economic agendas allowed the British to effectively cultivate tea production in Darjeeling, thereby gaining an unrivalled economic advantage. The Wasteland legislation, on the other hand, served as a critical tool in legitimising land appropriation, furthering the coloniser's commercial interests.

Wasteland Regulation and Growth of Tea Plantations

In pre-colonial setting, the Darjeeling tract was neither pre-defined as Zamindari Khas, self-cultivated holdings neither was it put under Raiyati (occupancy of the cultivating tenants). For Darjeeling, the system of land holding under Permanent Settlement Act, 1793 or under Bengal Tenancy Act 1885 had always remained as misnomers. The proprietary right over land and forest was a concept traditionally alien to the indigenous people of Darjeeling. People were only obliged to give a share of their labour or the result of his labour to the Raja of Sikkim. This system of paying the state through labour was prevalent in all the Himalayan principalities till nineteenth century.[126] The expansion of tea plantation in Darjeeling was rapid during early years of colonial rule due to extraordinary special powers and huge discretionary powers vested in the Superintendent, Darjeeling, by the East India Company Board of Directors located in Calcutta. The patronisation and encouragement went to the extent whereby the planters could grow tea without paying revenue taxes, normally imposed on agricultural land. [127]It is found that a total of 46 tea plantations were exempt from revenue obligations, covering approximately 74,286 acres, whereas estates that were subject to taxation spanned 82,127 acres. The Wasteland Regulation of 1859 facilitated the allocation of unused land through auctions, setting a minimum price of Rs. 10 per acre. Consequently, from 1859 to 1862, over 9,000 acres

[126] Hope Namgyal, "The Sikkimese Theory of Land Holding & the Darjeeling Grant" *in Bulletin of Tibetology* 3, no.2 (November 1966) as cited in "Tahiti Sarkar, Transformed Human- Nature Relations: A Saga of Darjeeling under Early Colonial Dispensation" International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI), March 14, 2018 accesssed on November 30, 2024, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3651074.

[127] Tahiti Sarkar, "Commercial Cash Crops ad the development of Capitalist Economy: A Study of colonial tea plantation in Darjeeling hills," *Karotaya: NBU Journal of History*, 11(n.d)101-107.

of hill land were auctioned publicly, fetching an average price of around Rs. 12 per acre. It was only with the introduction of the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act in 1953 that all previous freehold rights were abolished, resulting in all tea plantations being brought under the revenue-paying system.[128]

In an effort to entice settlers to Darjeeling, Campbell offered particular encouragement and incentives. Under different sets of regulations issued at different times, the British government offered land on particularly advantageous terms in order to encourage the development and expansion of Darjeeling's tea business. However, the government quickly had to devise methods to control the settlement of would-be tea planters. Thus, regulations pertaining to the management of plantation's land changed over time in response to practical needs. [129]The documents indicated that land grown with tea was owned under no less than twenty distinct tenures. It was not until early 1854 that the Board of Revenue first considered applying the Old Assam regulations for leasing waste lands to Darjeeling. The public was content with the current regulations, therefore Dr. Campbell successfully fought against their introduction. It was unclear to what kind of rule Campbell was talking. The authority to award leases likely rested with him and was exercised at his discretion. Many letters were exchanged with the Board of Revenue on the renewal of the 1853 leases, which were due to expire in 1858. After its initial renewal in 1859, it appears that nothing further was done until 1860.[130]

Priya Chatterjee writes how the Government legislation known as the Wasteland Rules sought to make land available for plantation colonisation. The clearing of jungles, construction of bungalows, and planting of tea nurseries were all hindered by a serious lack of labourers. There was a severe shortage of labourers in the tea industry in 1859, with 11,111 available workers compared to the 21,111 needed. The first tea planters association was established in 1859 by tea planters who saw the need to bring in foreign labour. Their goal was to facilitate the emigration of coolies from lower Bengal to Assam. By 1861, the Chotanagpur Plateau had supplied nearly two-thirds of the plantation worker force. Assamese and Bengali locals turned their noses up at the new plantings, leaving the planters bewildered. They caused accounting problems and losses because they thought the locals were unmotivated and lazy. Raising the

[128] Tushar. Kanti. Ghosh, *Tea Gardens of West Bengal: A critical Study of Land Management*, (Delhi: B.R Publishing House, 1987) 117.

[129] F. M. J. Pinn, *The Road of Destiny: Darjeeling Letters, 1839* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[130] Ibid., n.a.

tax burden in an effort to get peasants to work for wages was unsuccessful. Plantation's insatiable need for rice drove up the agrarian tax burden, forcing farmers to forego growing other profitable crops in favor of rice. The inhabitant's apparent lack of initiative was seen by colonial officials and planters as a reflection of their fundamental laziness. An optimistic perspective of settled agricultural labor became pessimistic when essential sloth was blamed for the supposed lack of effort caused by the plentiful food supply from the rich land.[131]

King Maharaja Chandra Jung Bahadur Rana of Nepal had restricted hiring Nepalis from within Nepal for military and tea company service, which worried the colonial officials in the Darjeeling District. Only members of the Damai, Sarki, Kami, and Gaini castes were allowed to enlist. Some planters were worried that a lack of physically capable workers might result from these regulations. Nevertheless, the planters persisted in hiring from the same lower-caste groups, especially the Kamis (blacksmiths), who ultimately formed the most important workforce among the Nepali populations in the North Bengal plantations, even if they objected. As a result, colonial officials sorted populations that came to the plantations according to how advanced or rudimentary they were considered to be in terms of labour.[132]

Colonial authorities implemented two separate settlement programs in North Bengal. A major shift in land tenurial relations occurred in the first, which established judicially supported absolute proprietorial rights. Designating wastelands and enacting flexible leasing regulations to construct large-scale plantations was the second option. A system of categorisation that connected the value of land to the various forms of labour served as the basis for these settlement plans. This link was critical in classifying different immigrant and local groups. This led to the development of a typology, which mapped out a spectrum contrasting the rudimentary and the more established occupational categories. The plantation worker's recruitment and management were greatly aided by this classification scheme.[133]

Jeff Koehler enunciates on how both the nation and Darjeeling tea had entered a new epoch. Fearing a permanent loss of authority, some European landowners ceded their territories to affluent Indians. In certain circumstances, suppliers assumed ownership. The new owners often experienced a diminished connection to the property. The previous managers of Darjeeling had

[131] Piya Chatterjee, *A Time for Tea: Women, Labor, and Post/Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation*, (United States of America: Duke University Press, 2001) 67-69.

[132] Ibid., 78-79.

[133]Ibid., 61-62.

profound connections to the region, being descendants of the first planters and possessing significant commercial and marital affiliations. The plantation laborers venerated them as celestial patriarchs. Tea transcended mere commerce; it embodied a lifestyle. Numerous new proprietors were affluent entrepreneurs seeking to minimize expenses, maximize profits, and manage their enterprises remotely. They prioritized riches before traditions.[134]

The Capital Issue Control Act of 1947 initiated the structure of tea estate development, specifically its management and ownership patterns. In certain instances, the authorities had the power to deny permission for the capital issue, and all joint-stock enterprises operating in the country, whether they are based in India or abroad, were required to get official permission for bonus issues of all varieties. When it came to granting incentives and obtaining authorisation for capital issuance, the collective tea businesses that operated under joint stock encountered obstacles. As a result, certain tea plantations that were previously possessed by foreign entities elected to transfer proprietorship to Indian entities. The Foreign Exchange Regulation Act of 1947 and the Export Import Control Act of 1947 were also implemented, which further accelerated the changes. Subsequently, numerous tea estates were transferred to Indian nationals, who subsequently converted them to various forms of ownership, including public limited and private limited. These entities were under the administration of Indian agency houses, boards of directors, managing partners, and individuals.[135]

3. Labour Movements

The demand for land rights or Parjapatta has its historical origin in the colonial practice of *Hattabaha*r or eviction from the land. The tea industry serves as a distressing chronicle of the severe torment, brutal treatment, and exploitation endured by its labour force. The wielded instrument of oppression, known as *Hattabahar*, continued its ruthless enforcement even after the nation gained independence. This cruel measure was invoked against any worker found breaching the rules of the tea gardens, resulting in the immediate termination of their employment and the expulsion of their entire family from their ancestral lands.The ramifications of a *Hattabahar* notice were absolute, allowing for no negotiation or reconsideration.

[134] Jeff Koehler, *Darjeeling: A History of the World's Greatest Tea* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) 221-229.

[135] Assam Tea Directory Handbook, Year 1999-2000.

Raj Tamang (name changed), the secretary of a Tea Union, offered insights into the oral history surrounding the Hattabahar practice. He cited the example of such a practice within the Ringtong Tea Garden, where a worker who was listening to the radio found himself subjected to hattabahar, forcibly evicted from his place. In another instance Tamang stated that a worker was evicted from his home after he was found tying his shoe laces in between work. Tamang emphasised that in the colonial structure, deliberate depictions and practice of colonial masters on horses, residing in grand mansions and bungalows, aimed to accentuate the contrast between the master and the worker, thereby reinforcing hierarchical dynamics. These depictions served as tools of class symbolism and power play, dissuading workers from embracing any facet of modernity like western attire and resulting in their expulsion from the gardens. [136]

Tamang emphasised the significance of the Hattabahar practice extends beyond historical confines and holds relevance in contemporary times. The practice laid the foundation for the current Prajapatta land rights issue, a prevailing concern. The crux of the Prajapatta issue revolves around the displacement of workers from the land they have cultivated for generations. In essence, Hattabahar served as a precursor to the Prajapatta issue, with historical implications that continue to shape the contemporary discourse. Initially employed as a punitive measure, Hattabahar took a different trajectory in 1907 with the formation of the Hillmen Association, subsequently leading to the establishment of the Gorkha Dukha Nevaran Samaj (GDNS). The 1940's marked a pivotal period with the formation of the first district committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM) and the Gorkha League. This era coincided with the Bengal Famine and witnessed the peak of working-class movements. Notably, it was during this time that there was a concerted effort to abolish the Hattabahar movement, primarily driven by the demand for increased wages and land rights. Tamang concluded that consequently, the Margarets Hope Movement emerged as a significant milestone in labor history, reflecting the complex interplay of economic, social, and political factors during that period.[137]

Rohit Sharma's doctoral thesis delves into the historical events surrounding the labour movement in Darjeeling in 1955. Despite the passing of the Plantation Labour Act in 1951 for tea garden workers, its gradual implementation since 1954 and the lack of labour welfare initiatives by tea planters fueled discontent. The initial organised protest occurred in 1955, with

[136] Interview with Raj Tamang (name changed), Naya Bazar, Kurseong, 24th September 2023, 1:30pm.
[137] Ibid.

a focus on demanding a compulsory minimum bonus due to the rising ration prices and substantial profits of tea planters in 1954. Led by unions like Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha and Darjeeling District Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union, the workers expressed dissatisfaction in a joint statement in May 1955. Despite attempts at conciliation, including meetings with the Assistant Labour Commissioner, the unions decided to initiate a strike from June 22, 1955, if their five crucial demands were not met. These demands encompassed increased wages, a bonus for 1954, amendments to standing orders, compensation for garden closures in 1951-1952, and elevated pay scales for staff.

This oppressive practice persisted until April 1959. The practice of Hattabahar was delved upon by Aman Rai (name changed) and Raj Tamang. Rai stated that in 1955 there was a movement in Margaret's Hope Tea Garden which put an end to the practice of Hattabahar. Tea workers after their retirement were not given any land rights, rather, they were evicted from their land. Maila Baje also known as Ratan Lal Brahmin and Deoprakash Rai were the leaders of the movement. Placing their demands as the workers were on a peaceful rally the police fired on the peaceful protestors which led to the death of six workers, Shova Rai a pregnant woman, Kaley Limbu a 14 year old boy, among the six[138].

Government responded with repressive measures, arresting union leaders and employing police , intimidation tactics. The strike peaked on June 25, 1955, marked by indiscriminate police firing on peaceful protesters in Margaret's Hope Tea Estate, resulting in the tragic deaths of several workers. This event garnered widespread support for the worker's cause in Darjeeling. Under public pressure, the government released arrested leaders and withdrew warrants. Negotiations ensued, involving the Deputy Labour Minister, Deputy Commissioner, and members of the Peace Committee. The government accepted the five demands in principle, committing to no victimisation of workers for participating in the strike. In January 1956, the Bonus Sub-Committee of the Industrial Committee on Plantations reached a settlement in New Delhi. [139]

The Labour Minister and the Minister for Commerce and Industry established a bonus payment formula for 1953-1956, marking India as the first country to grant bonuses to workers based on profits in the plantation industry. The 1955 movement united the majority of tea gardens

[138] Interview with Rai at Union Office, Darjeeling, 29th October, 2023 11am.

[139] Ibid.

and brought together the Communist Party of India and the Gorkha League, challenging stereotypes about Nepalese workers. The movement signified a departure from past traditions, emphasising the unity of the Nepalese people in their fight against capitalist exploitation and heralding a new era.[140] Following the inception of the Margaret's Hope movement, there has been a discernible shift in the focal points of labour movements towards issues encompassing wages, bonuses, and living conditions. This transition underscores a pivotal reorientation in the collective consciousness of labour advocacy, wherein the aforementioned concerns have emerged as paramount agendas.[141]

The National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW) emerged in the 1960's due to organisational shortcomings within the Congress Party, which were highlighted by the comparative strength of the Communist Party of India and Gorkha League during the 1951-52 general elections, especially in the hill areas where tea garden workers constituted a significant portion of the labor force. Mrs. Maitrayee Bose, a seasoned leader of the Indian National Trade Union Congress, spearheaded the establishment of a labour cell in the Darjeeling hills in the early 1960s. With Mrs. Bose and Laxman Pradhan leading the charge, a branch unit of INTUC, known as NUPW, was formed, receiving support from Punya Prakash Rai, local Congress MP's, and Municipal Commissioners. Over time, NUPW gained popularity and credibility by advocating for worker's rights, including challenging the management of Rungneet Tea Estate during a lockout and addressing wage non-payment issues at Fagu Tea Estate in 1962-63. Government intervention, especially by the Labour Minister, played a crucial role in resolving these conflicts, including the lifting of the lockout.[142]

The inception of the Darjeeling Cha Kaman Mazdoor Union (DCKMU) in 1971 heralded a new era, expanding its influence deeply into the grassroots and paving the way for the establishment of similar unions in tea gardens across Darjeeling, as well as in parts of Terai and Dooars. Following the split of the Communist Party of India (CPI) into CPI and CPI(M), and the emergence of the Darjeeling Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union, confusion gripped

[140] Rohit Sharma, *Trade Union Movements in the Tea Gardens of Darjeeling* (PhD diss., North Bengal University, 2005).

[141] Ibid.

[142] Sarad Gurung, "Labour, Trade Union, and Tea Industry: Contextualizing Indian Plantation System," *Journal of Advances in Social Science and Humanities* 7, no. 1 (2021): 1395–1401, https://doi.org/10.15520/jassh.v7i1.559.

plantation workers. This ideological divide within trade unions fueled further fragmentation, scattering workers into different factions and impeding the growth of cohesive leadership within the gardens. Intra-union conflicts ensued, resulting in tragic loss of life among workers and providing management with the opportunity to exploit division tactics. Consequently, the efficacy of collective bargaining for workers diminished, eroding trust in union leadership and prompting workers to seek alternative means of livelihood.[143]

The Gorkhaland agitation of 1985, spearheaded by Subash Ghising, and the subsequent formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988, led to the establishment of the Himalayan Plantation Workers Union (HPWU) in 1989, supported by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), to champion the cause of plantation workers. In 2007, the landscape shifted once more with the decline of the GNLF under Subash Ghising and the ascent of the Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha (GJMM) under Bimal Gurung. This precipitated the formation of the Darjeeling Terai Dooars Plantation Labour Union (DTDPLU), which aimed to advocate for separate tripartite negotiations involving employers, employees, and trade unions to address the issue of tea worker wages.[144]

Labour movements are social and political movements that arise from a variety of factors. One significant driver is the demand for land rights, particularly in regions where land ownership is contested or unequally distributed. The Gorkhaland movement serves as a prime example, where the quest for identity and autonomy is closely tied to the struggle for land rights. Beyond issues of land rights and identity, labour movements are also motivated by more immediate and tangible concerns related to worker's economic well-being. Chief among these concerns are demands for fair wages, timely bonuses, and other benefits. These demands stem from the everyday realities faced by workers, including exploitative labour practices, inadequate compensation, and precarious working conditions.

Bonus and Wages

The Plantations Labour Act, 1951, regulates the conditions of work in plantations and provides for the welfare of plantation labour, which includes tea garden workers. The Act envisages employers to provide housing, medical facilities, sickness and maternity benefits and other forms of social security measures to the workers. There are provisions for educational facilities

[143] Ibid., 1398.

[144] Ibid., 1398.

for the worker's children, drinking water, conservancy, canteens, crèches, and recreational facilities for the benefit of the tea plantation workers and their families in and around the work places in the tea estates. The Plantation Labour Act is implemented by the respective state governments for which separate rules have been framed by them.[145] In an interview a female worker at a Tea Garden (location and name not disclosed), which is one of the oldest tea garden in Darjeeling, highlighted that the primary concern. affecting workers at the time was the issue of low wages and untimely bonus. The disparity between the remuneration received by workers in Darjeeling plantations, pegged at a mere two hundred and fifty rupees for a day's labour, and the perceived level of skill required for their tasks prompts a critical examination of the implementation mechanisms governing minimum wage standards in the tea garden sector. [146]

Despite the arduous nature of their work and the purported skill set demanded, these workers find themselves economically marginalised relative to their counterparts in other sectors, notably daily wage labourers. This incongruity reflects systemic deficiencies in enforcing minimum wage regulations within the tea industry, thereby exacerbating socio-economic disparities and engendering discontent among the workforce.[147] Rai points to the lack of future security, citing the absence of any form of insurance for the workers. Despite existing labour welfare laws, Rai critiqued the ironic state of minimum wage in 2023, asserting that workers, instead of progressing towards fair wages, continue to grapple with minimum wage standards. Notably, Rai brought attention to the significant disparity between the compensation of generational skilled labour in Darjeeling Tea Gardens and that of regular daily wage workers. He traced the activism for minimum wage back to 2013, highlighting a shift from mere vocal demands to active pursuit. Rai advocated for the implementation of a minimum wage act specifically covering tea garden wages, adjusting them according to the current price index. However, he acknowledged the staunch resistance against such measures within the industry.[148]

The persistent failure to implement the minimum wage, despite numerous consultations with stakeholders, points to a deep-seated issue of self-determination in Darjeeling tea gardens. The

[145] Ministry of Labour and Employment, *Social Security Schemes for Tea Garden Workers*, 2021, accessed February 27, 2024, https://pib.gov.in/pressreleaseshare.aspx?prid=1696814.

[146] Interview with tea worker, 12th November 2023, 1pm, Darjeeling, Garden 1.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Interview with Rai, secretary Trade Union(name disclosed) at union office, Darjeeling, 29th October, 2023, 11am.

concept of a bonus typically refers to an additional payment or reward given to tea garden workers beyond their regular wages. This bonus is often provided during certain times of the year, such as after the tea harvest season or during festive occasions. The bonus serves as a form of incentive or recognition for the hard work and dedication of the tea garden workers. It is often based on factors such as the quality and quantity of tea produced, as well as the financial performance of the tea estate. The amount of the bonus can vary from year to year and may be negotiated between management and labour representatives.[149]

The Darjeeling tea industry has grappled with systemic irregularities concerning the equitable distribution of bonuses, notably during the auspicious Dusshera festival, celebrated as *Dasai*, which holds profound cultural significance for the Nepali community in Darjeeling. A prevailing trend has emerged where numerous tea gardens claim financial losses, prompting premature closures without fulfilling their mandated operational durations. Consequently, this premature cessation deprives workers of their rightful bonuses and associated benefits. In response to these challenges, tea unions advocate for legislative intervention to rectify the systemic deficiencies. They argue that the absence of robust implementation mechanisms facilitates the exploitation of regulatory gaps by tea garden proprietors, allowing them to evade their contractual obligations, particularly those stipulated in lease agreements. Thus, the imperative for legislative action arises from the need to ensure that tea garden owners uphold their commitments to workers, particularly regarding timely bonus disbursements and adherence to operational obligations. [150]

These challenges mirrors broader issues within the Darjeeling tea industry, implicating regulatory frameworks, labour relations, and socio-economic dynamics. They highlight the necessity for comprehensive strategies that safeguard the rights and well-being of tea garden workers while promoting sustainable practices within the sector. Addressing these irregularities necessitates collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholders, including governmental bodies, tea unions, industry representatives, and civil society organisations. Such concerted action is crucial for establishing and enforcing robust regulatory mechanisms that foster fairness, transparency, and accountability throughout the tea production value chain. In addition to boosting morale and providing extra income for workers and their families, the bonus also plays a role in maintaining labour relations and stability within the tea industry.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.

However, the distribution and calculation of bonuses is often a source of contention between management and labor unions, particularly if there are disputes over fairness or transparency in the process.

A female worker expressed dissatisfaction with the non-disbursement of allowances for essential needs like ration and wood for cooking. This lack of support in providing basic necessities adds an extra layer of challenge to the worker's livelihoods. It signifies the broader issues related to welfare and working conditions within the tea estate. Currently, the tea estate consists of twenty two workers. Tamang (name changed), a fifty-year-old worker, shared that she joined the Tea Estate (Estate name not disclosed) in 2004, taking over the role from her mother-in-law. This highlights the familial and hereditary nature of occupations within the tea estates, where the responsibility is often passed down through generations. The continuity of such family-based occupations adds a historical and cultural dimension to the work dynamics, with individuals inheriting not just the profession but also the associated challenges and aspirations.[151]

The allocation of labour tasks among the workers within the tea plantation appears to be undifferentiated, with all workers engaging in various activities related to tea cultivation. The standard work duration typically spans eight hours, commencing after the workers have attended to their domestic responsibilities at the outset of the day. For many workers, their routine involves performing household chores before heading to work. One respondent shared her pre-employment experience, mentioning that before entering the tea industry as a labourer, she used to gather wood for fuel, while her husband and in-laws were employed as labourers in tea gardens. In addition to their work in the tea gardens, a significant number of workers engage in pig farming to generate supplementary income. It is noteworthy, however, that there is a lack of safety measures for the workers, exposing them to potential hazards.[152]

Working Conditions

The geographical proximity of the tea garden to the adjacent forest poses additional challenges, as encounters with wildlife such as bears, snakes, or cheetahs are not uncommon. The absence of designated resting areas or *Tawa* within the plantation compounds the safety concerns for

[151] Interview with tea worker, Tamang (name changed), Darjeeling, 13th November, 2013, 1:30pm from Plantation 1.

[152] Ibid.

workers. Only a solitary seating facility is available, often situated at a considerable distance. Consequently, workers are compelled to independently address safety issues, especially during adverse weather conditions. In regions characterised by heavy and continuous rainfall, such as the hilly areas where these tea gardens are located, the absence of a designated shelter or *tawa* becomes particularly significant. Torrential rains during the rainy season necessitate that workers continue their tasks using umbrellas for protection. Workers expressed a collective desire for the provision of a sheltered area, a *tawa*, where they could seek refuge amid heavy downpours, emphasising the importance of improved working conditions and safety measures within the tea plantation. [153]

The absence of designated seating areas or *Tawa* for the workers highlights issues related to workers rights and amenities within the labour framework. The worker's reliance on makeshift solutions during adverse weather conditions, such as using umbrellas for protection, echoes the importance of addressing basic needs and ensuring a conducive work environment. In conclusion, the experiences of tea plantation workers encompass issues in formalisation, livelihood diversification, occupational health and safety, environmental justice, and worker's rights. The complexity of their work dynamics calls for a nuanced understanding and the implementation of policies that address these interrelated issues, contributing to improved working conditions and the overall well-being of tea plantation workers.[154]

The absence of a division of labour among workers within the tea plantation reflects a form of undifferentiated work roles, where all labourers are engaged in various activities related to tea cultivation. This scenario aligns with agrarian economies, where undifferentiated labour may signify limited job specialisation and potentially impact overall productivity. The standard work duration of eight hours adheres to common labour practices, yet the integration of household chores into the daily routine adds a layer of complexity to the worker's schedules. The worker's engagement in multiple tasks, from household responsibilities to tea plantation work, is reminiscent of the concept of informalisation in labour studies. Informalisation refers to the blurring of boundaries between formal and informal work, where individuals often juggle various roles to sustain their livelihoods. The experience shared by the respondent, who

[153] Interview with tea workers, during their lunch break, 15th November, 2023, Darjeeling, 12:30pm. Garden 2.

[154] Ibid.

previously gathered wood for fuel, points to the nature of labour activities within the tea industry.[155]

The practice of pig farming among workers to supplement income as livelihood diversification is often a coping mechanism for rural communities facing economic uncertainties. In the context of tea plantation workers, such diversification reflects their resilience in seeking alternative sources of income. The lack of safety precautions for workers poses significant concerns health and safety. The hazardous working conditions, compounded by the close proximity of the tea garden to the forest, exemplify the challenges faced by workers. The potential encounters with wildlife call discussions on environmental justice and the impact of industrial activities on local ecosystems.[156]

Practices

During my conversation with a seasoned worker, he nostalgically reflected on the bygone era when the work culture was robust and efficient. According to him, the key to the earlier success lay in the timely completion of tasks, albeit at the cost of gruelling work. The worker vividly illustrated a notable example of the demanding nature of their tasks. A specific assignment required tilling six acres of land within a given period, say a week, before moving on to the next six acres. However, he lamented that the integrity of data was compromised. Managers, when questioned by higher authorities, falsely reported task completion on one block while still working on the previous acre. This manipulation of information contributed significantly to the eventual decline of the tea estates.[157]

In stark contrast, the worker painted a picture of a more positive work environment during his earlier years. Workers were incentivised to enhance productivity, and upon completing tasks within or even ahead of the stipulated time, they were rewarded with additional holidays. This created a mutually beneficial scenario where both workers and management were content. The management celebrated meeting targets, while the workers enjoyed the extra leisure time. The worker attributed the decline in fortunes to the closure of the tea gardens. The shutdown disrupted the delicate balance between worker satisfaction and management goals, leading to

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Interview with retired tea worker, at his residence, 18th November, 2023, 3pm.

a breakdown in the previously successful work culture. The once harmonious relationship between efficient work practices and employee rewards was severed, contributing to the downfall of the tea estates. [158]

The tea plantation industry faces a critical challenge marked by the absence of sustainable practices, evident in the stark lack of new plantations despite ample available land. Remarkably, the number of tea bushes remains static, mirroring those planted during the British colonial era. This stagnation in plantation expansion raises concerns about the industry's adaptability and forward planning.The persistent reliance on tea bushes established by the British reflects an unaltered agricultural landscape, indicative of a lack of innovation or modernisation in cultivation techniques. This stagnation is exacerbated by the absence of new fertilisers, contributing to a decline in productivity over time. The decline in tea productivity has led to the emergence of vast barren or unproductive lands, underscoring the urgent need for sustainable agricultural practices in the tea plantation sector.[159]

Another dimension of the sustainability challenge lies in the absence of water harvesting facilities. Few tea gardens have embraced modern irrigation methods, other plantations rely solely on natural rainfall. This practice not only demonstrates a vulnerability to changing weather patterns but also highlights the need for investment in water management infrastructure to ensure consistent and reliable water supply for tea cultivation. The economic ramifications of unsustainable practices are reflected in the remuneration of tea workers. In 2009, tea workers started with a wage of rupees ninety. The stagnation in plantation practices has directly contributed to the decline in tea productivity, subsequently impacting the livelihoods of workers.[160] This highlights the interconnectedness of agricultural sustainability and labour welfare in the tea plantation industry.

The absence of a hierarchical structure among workers, coupled with the lack of division of labour or staff grading, presents a unique organisational dynamic. This peculiar situation arises from the dwindling number of workers choosing to pursue or continue in this profession. The homogeneity in the living vicinity of all workers near the tea gardens further accentuates the communal nature of their living and working conditions. In conclusion, the challenges facing

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid.

the tea plantation industry extend beyond immediate concerns about productivity decline and remuneration. They underscore the urgent need for sustainable practices, technological advancements, and infrastructural investments to ensure the long-term viability of the tea cultivation sector.

Living Conditions

Over time, some essential facilities such as water and electricity have been established in the tea gardens. However, during the summer months, residents still find themselves compelled to fetch water from the source, indicating that there are lingering challenges in ensuring consistent access to basic resources. In terms of healthcare, there has been a noticeable shift. Previously, a doctor would make periodic visits to attend to the health needs of the workers. However, since the estate came under new ownership, these occasional visits by the doctor have ceased. Consequently, the workers now rely predominantly on a government healthcare centre for their primary medical requirements, highlighting a potential gap in healthcare accessibility. Despite the changes in healthcare provision, the workers have demonstrated a resilient sense of community. They celebrate festivals together, emphasising the close-knit bonds within the community. This communal spirit serves as a source of mutual support and solidarity among the workers, contributing to a shared identity and sense of belonging.[161]

Education is another area of concern for the workers. While there is a primary school nearby, the workers express a preference for sending their children to English Medium Schools, even if it means putting in extra hours at work. This aspiration reflects the value placed on education and the willingness of the workers to make sacrifices for their children's educational opportunities. However the workers stressed that they would be the last generation of workers since none of their children would want to take up the occupation since the job security wasn't there and it was a low paying job as compared to the aspirations of today's youth. [162]

Identity, Politics and Policies

When queried about the identity of workers, emphasis was placed on the significant political influence wielded by tea workers within the political landscape in the hills. Their impact is palpable both in electoral participation and political mobilisation, with recognition of their

[161] Interview with tea workers, 22nd November, 2023, 1pm.Planation 3.

[162] Ibid.

pivotal role in elevating specific political parties to power or electing representatives. This acknowledgment is contextualised by the demographic weight of the tea estate population, which surpasses that of urban bazaars or municipal areas. Workers underscored their dual role in demanding accountability from the local administrative body and officials often deflect accountability by asserting that tea gardens fall outside their jurisdiction. [163]

Paradoxically, during electoral campaigns, officials actively solicit votes from tea workers. This illuminates a complex dynamics at the intersection of politics, governance, and labour relations. The political agency of tea workers reflects their socio-economic significance and collective mobilisation within the region. Furthermore, the discrepancy between political rhetoric and administrative responsibility underscores governance challenges and questions of accountability within decentralised administrative structures. This urges the need for nuanced analysis of power dynamics and political participation within marginalised communities like tea workers, highlighting broader themes of representation, voice, and democratic governance in the context of subnational political formations.[164]

Initially, the workers expressed pride in their identity as tea garden labourers. However, their sentiment has since shifted to one of regret as they witness their deteriorating conditions and realise their lack of alternative qualifications for other employment opportunities. Their uncertain future mirrors the precarious state of the Darjeeling Tea Industry. While they once found pride in their role as stewards of the land, they now face the harsh reality of sudden tea garden closures, with owners absolving themselves of legal responsibilities and leaving workers in limbo. Despite their challenges, workers lament the absence of government or labour policies that benefit them.[165]

Instead, they highlight their active and collective political participation, emphasising their unity and close-knit community. Their involvement in movements such as the Gorkhaland agitation, though ultimately unsuccessful, underscores their commitment to advocating for their rights.The political landscape, characterised by factionalism between various political parties adds another layer of complexity. Workers perceive elected representatives and political parties as morally obligated to amplify their voices and address their grievances. During the lockdown,

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid.

their plight was exacerbated, with only limited assistance from a certain political party which later went on to win the seat in the local election from that particular locality.

Aman Rai, President of a Union and secretary of twelve unions , provided a comprehensive perspective on the socio-political dynamics of Darjeeling, drawing attention to the indispensable role played by the working class in shaping movements in the region. His insights align with the fact that approximately seventy percent of Darjeeling's land area is dedicated to tea plantations, making the workforce a crucial determinant in the local socio-political milieu. Rai's reference to the Gorkhaland movement in the 1980's reflects a historical precedent where worker's participation fueled the initial momentum. This aligns with academic discussions on the grassroots origins of movements, emphasising the agency of labour in challenging established power structures. The Marxist orientation of the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist further underlines the class-conscious nature of movements in Darjeeling, echoing scholarly analyses of the intersection between political ideologies and working-class mobilisation. Examining the historical expansion of tea gardens in Darjeeling, Rai delves into the pre-independence colonial status of these plantations, adding an important historical dimension to the discourse.[166]

The linkage between the existence of Darjeeling Tea Gardens and Tea Workers prior to independent India and the identity claims of Indian Nepalis introduces a socio-political dimension grounded in historical facts. This aligns with scholarly examinations of identity politics and territorial claims, where historical precedence becomes crucial in justifying contemporary demands. Rai's observation of profit distribution patterns from the colonial era to post-independence reflects a historical-economic continuity that academic literature often explores. The critique of a capitalist structure of operation and ownership in the Tea Gardens resonates with academic discourses on the socio-economic dimensions of plantations and the inherent power imbalances within such structures. Rai characterised the Tea Gardens by a capitalist structure of operation and ownership. He explained that in every renewed call for Gorkhaland, the first leadership reigns have consistently been taken up by the *Shramik*, underlining the enduring struggle for their rights and recognition despite the passage of time.[167]

[166] Interview with Rai, secretary Trade Union(name disclosed) at union office, Darjeeling, 29th October, 2023, 11am.

[167] Ibid.

Rai further elucidated a nuanced perspective on the significance of tea labourers, citing examples of influential figures such as Subhash Ghising, Bimal Gurung, and R.B. Rai. He narrates their role in spearheading movements, wherein tea workers constituted the foundational support. Emphasising the centrality of land, or *bhoomi* in their mobilisation efforts, these leaders strategically integrated this theme into their movements. He highlighted the persisting semi-colonial system in the region, questioning why, despite generations of tax payments to the government, Darjeeling continues to experience what he perceives as a form of semi colonial governance. This, he asserted, is a primary source of discontentment, often fuelling movements. The issue of land or *Bhoomi* emerged as a central theme in Rai's discourse, serving as a catalyst for various movements. He pointed out the lack of enforcement of the Plantation Labour Act, emphasising the deterioration in housing, medical facilities, sanitation, and health. Rai argued that the Tea Industry operates largely outside the purview of bureaucracy and administration, with no specific legislation governing the sector. While there exists the Plantation Labour Act, he deemed it generic, highlighting the need for a Tea Act tailored to the unique challenges of the industry, which is distinctly industrial rather than agricultural.[168]

Rai underlined the significant economic role of tea gardens in Darjeeling, with a majority of the population employed in this sector. The seasonal nature of tourism and the dominance of big businessmen from the plains raised concerns about the limited contribution of tourism revenue to the local economy. Rai stressed the necessity of specific legislation, such as a specifically formulated Tea Act, to safeguard the interests of tea workers and ensure sustainable practices in the industry. Addressing the economic dynamics, Rai noted that only about ten percent of the population is employed in the government sector, while around sixty fully functional tea gardens play a pivotal role in the local economy. He lamented the closure of several tea gardens and highlighted the challenges faced by workers, particularly the Shramik, when gardens are abruptly shut down by owners citing losses. This, Rai argued, adversely affects worker's benefits like Provident Fund, Gratuity, and wages. The issue of leasing tea gardens for thirty years came under scrutiny, with Rai revealing a gap between the lease duration and the owners willingness to run the gardens for the agreed period. This misalignment often results in closures and negatively impacts workers. Rai proposed the need

[168] Ibid.

for a bounded agreement with tea owners to prevent premature closures, safeguarding the interests of the workers and ensuring the stability of the tea industry.[169]

Within the realm of government policy, Rai highlighted a significant aspect of the tea industry, where tea produced in the gardens undergoes auction and is subsequently acquired by major corporate conglomerates. Rai pointed out a substantial price disparity between what tea owners initially sell to these conglomerates and the subsequent selling or exporting prices set by the conglomerates. Consequently, it is these large business entities that ultimately garner substantial profits, creating an environment where bargaining for tea owners is limited, fostering a semblance of monopoly. Contrary to the earlier business policy wherein tea owners determined auction prices, the current landscape sees conglomerates fixing prices, leaving tea owners constrained with what they receive. Rai noted that while there might be little room for negotiation, tea firms strive to avoid losses, relying on either quality or quantity to sustain profitability. With a direct correlation between the ever-increasing tea consumption and population growth, Rai argued that profits from the tea industry are often redirected into other ventures by tea owners. He illustrated this point using the example of a Tea Group, which, despite having ten gardens under the company, eventually faced losses in diverse businesses and prematurely exited the tea sector by closing down gardens.[170]

Nevertheless, the workers emphatically asserted that they represent the terminal generation in their profession, as their offspring exhibit little inclination to inherit the occupation. The dearth of job security and meagre remuneration, especially when contrasted with the aspirations of contemporary youth, were cited as formidable deterrents. This underscores broader issues related to the attractiveness and sustainability of employment in the tea plantation sector, intertwining with discussions on labor market dynamics and generational shifts in occupational preferences. In delineating the identity of tea workers, the pivotal role they play in shaping the political landscape of the hills. Their influence extends beyond the confines of the tea estates, permeating the political sphere during elections and rallies. The acknowledgment of their instrumental role in propelling a political party to power or electing an official member emphasises the political agency inherent in this community. Notably, the tea estate population

[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid.

surpasses that of the bazaar or municipal areas, accentuating the demographic weight of this workforce.

3. Land Rights or *Parjapatta*

The ramifications of garden closures extend beyond the workers to encompass their families, as they typically depend on a singular income source. Jay Gurung, who has been with the organisation since 2010 and has climbed the professional ladder, brings attention to the Parjappata issue. As a member of the group of Trade Unions (organisation name changed), Gurung expresses concerns about the potential repercussions of the 2019 Tea and Tourism Policy on the intricate social and economic fabric of tea gardens. Gurung suggests that if implemented, the policy could exacerbate existing challenges, leading to the deterioration of both the social and economic aspects of tea gardens. There is an anticipation of widespread frustration among the local populace, resulting in a migration towards alternative employment opportunities. Gurungs skepticism extends to the policy's purported ability to generate local employment, with a strong emphasis on the potential challenges posed by outsourcing labour post-implementation.[171]

One critical implication highlighted by Gurung is the possible reduction of the tea industry to a mere exhibition, with detrimental consequences for the Gorkha community. Drawing parallels with instances where indigenous populations have been marginalised due to capitalist expansions and population influx, Gurung warns of the looming risk of the Gorkhas becoming a minority in their own land. This serves as a cautionary tale against the enduring impacts of unchecked policies on local demographics. Gurung contends that the reluctance of the contemporary generation to engage in tea garden work, opting instead for strenuous urban employment, underscores the imperative for sustainable policies. Despite the premium prices of tea in foreign markets, Gurung asserts that the industry's sustained viability hinges on proactive governmental intervention and the continual enhancement of policies.[172]

Parjapatta refers to land rights or a title deed. It is a term used to denote legal ownership or a formal document that grants rights to a specific piece of land. In the case of tea estates in Darjeeling and other regions, *Prajapatta* would be a document that establishes the legal

[171] Interview with Jay Gurung (name changed) of Group of Trade Unions, 25th November 2023, 2:30pm, Darjeeling.

[172] Ibid.

ownership of land, and it may include details such as the boundaries of the land, the owner's name, and any specific conditions or restrictions related to the land.The absence of *Parjapatta* for tea workers signifies that they do not have legal ownership or formal rights over the land where their homes are situated. This lack of land rights can have implications for the socio-economic conditions of the tea workers, affecting aspects such as housing security and the ability to transfer or inherit the land. In regions like Darjeeling, where the tea industry has a historical context rooted in colonial practices, the issue of land rights and *Parjapatta* is often intertwined with broader discussions about labour rights, living conditions, and the overall socio-economic well-being of the tea workers and their families. Efforts to address the concerns of tea workers in Darjeeling involves considering and rectifying the historical legacies related to land tenure and ownership.[173]

Tea estate lands in North Bengal operate under a lease system, dating back to the enactment of the Land Reforms Act in 1955. In this arrangement, companies are granted leases by the state government to cultivate tea for a specified period, while the ownership of the land remains with the government. Across generations, tea workers have established homes on land within the plantations. This practice is observed in Darjeeling, Dooars, and the Terai region[174]. Despite the absence of official figures from the Tea Board of India, a 2013 report by the West Bengal Labour Commission indicates that major tea estates in these regions have a population of 1,124,907, including 262,426 permanent and over 70,000 casual and contract workers. The historical context of this system traces back to the colonial era, where families residing within the estates are obligated to have at least one member employed in the tea gardens, as mandated by estate owners. Failure to comply may result in the loss of their homes. Notably, workers lack ownership rights over the land and, consequently, do not possess title deeds, commonly known as *parjapatta*. The dependency on kinship for permanent employment within North Bengal tea gardens has prevented the emergence of a free and open labour market. This circumstance contributes to the persistence of bonded labour practices.[175]

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[173] Vivek Chettri, "Remove 5-Decimal Land Cap for Tea Dwellers: Joint Forum in North Bengal,"*The Telegraph Online*, September 8, 2023, https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/remove-5-decimal-land-cap-for-tea-dweller-joint-forum-in-north-bengal/cid/1957446.

[174] Sarkar, Niladry. "Bitter Brew: Darjeeling's Tea Garden Workers are Paid Poorly, Have No Land Rights." *IndiaSpend*, January 2023. Accessed December 1, 2024. https://www.indiaspend.com/assam/bitter-brew-darjeelings-tea-garden-workers-are-paid-poorly-have-no-land-rights-850456.

[175] Ibid.

4. Five Decimal Land Scheme

The "Scheme for Distributing Homestead Pattas Among Landless Tea Garden Labourers in North Bengal," sanctioned by the West Bengal Government's Department of Land and Land Reforms, Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation, Land Policy Branch on August 8, 2023, claims to be a state intervention aimed at addressing protracted landlessness among tea garden laborers. The scheme proposes the reclamation and allocation of surplus or underutilised lands from tea estates, permissible under Section 6(3) of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953. This initiative is designed to distribute homestead pattas to eligible retiring or landless labourers, as well as long-term occupants, with each receiving a land grant of up to 5 decimals. The geographical focus includes the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Kalimpong, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, and Uttar Dinajpur. The procedural rigor mandated by the policy includes district-level surveys by magistrates and collectors, along with recommendations for land resumption. Of note is the explicit inclusion of female beneficiaries, either as joint or sole recipients, with particular consideration given to female-headed households. The policy allows for governmental revocation of pattas in cases of non-compliance with its stipulations, ensuring accountability. [176]

However, the scheme's introduction has sparked significant protest, with opposition emerging from tea garden workers, unions, and other stakeholder groups. One core grievance centers on the ambiguity surrounding terms like "granting", "distributing," and the disconcerting nature of terminologies such as "surplus," "long-term occupiers," and "deeds of settlement." These uncertainties have compounded the apprehensions of workers, as highlighted by political figures like Ajoy Edward of the former Hamro Party, who raised concerns about the scheme's framing and the workers discomfort with its legal underpinnings, particularly Section 6(3) of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act. The scheme was propogated also by fears of potential land grabs by migrant populations from across the porous Indo-Nepal border, a concern articulated by representatives like Shri Arijit Raha of the Consultative Committee of Plantation Associations (CCPA). [177]

[176] Government of West Bengal, Department of Land & Land Reforms and Refugee Relief & Rehabilitation, *Proposal for Granting Homestead Patta on Surplus/Unutilised Resumed Land of Tea Gardens to the Eligible Beneficiaries through a Scheme,* Memo No. 3078-LP/1A-03/17, August 1, 2023.

[177] ibid

The apprehension is that such migrants could exploit the policy, obtaining pattas intended for tea garden workers and destabilising the local socio-economic fabric. This adds another layer of complexity to an already contentious issue of land rights in North Bengal, where tea garden land has deep historical and ancestral significance. Further, the Joint Forum, representing over twenty tea unions, voiced opposition to the proposed limitation of five decimals of land per beneficiary. They argue that many tea garden residents have ancestral claims to these lands, historically cultivated for both tea and agricultural crops such as cardamom and oranges. By portraying them as "landless" the government is seen as neglecting their long-standing connection to the land. The Forum advocates for full land rights and proper documentation to reflect the residents historical land use, rather than merely conferring minimal homestead pattas.[178]

This opposition reflects deeper structural tensions regarding land ownership, colonial legacies, and the recognition of indigenous rights. The scheme's introduction thus underscores the broader contestation between the state's regulatory framework and the lived realities of tea garden workers, wherein the notions of "landlessness"and "occupancy" are contested, not only in a legal sense but also in terms of historical justice. The scheme also invited concern and skepticism as the scheme does not guarantee five decimal of land but upto by decimal. Majority families own and are settled on more than five decimal of land. Another concern that arose was the continuity of land ownership as the scheme did not guarantee heredity rights to the next of kin. Therefore the scheme was met with protest and uproar as an attempt to uproot and dislocate the workers from their traditional land once again heightening anxieties of belonging.

5. Tea and Tourism Policy, 2019

The 2019 Tea Tourism and Allied Business Policy, initiated by the West Bengal government, permits tea gardens in specific districts to allocate a portion of their land for eco-friendly tourism and related ventures. Under this policy, tea estates can utilise up to 15% of their total area, not exceeding 150 acres, for activities such as tea tourism and construction, adhering to existing regulations and ecological considerations. The policy allows for a diverse range of ventures, including tourism, plantations, animal husbandry, energy projects, and social

[178] Chettri Vivek, "Remove 5-decimal land cap for the tea dweller: Joint Forum in North Bengal", *The Telegraph Online*, September 8, 2023, https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/remove-5-decimal-land-cap-for-tea-dweller-joint-fo- rum-in-north-bengal/cid/1957446.

infrastructure. Proposals are scrutinised case by case by a Screening Committee comprising government, Tea Board, and Tea Association representatives. The policy emphasises guiding principles such as maintaining tea plantation areas, preventing labour force reduction, and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations.[179]

It also encourages employment opportunities for locals and provides provisions for amalgamating areas, shifting labor quarters, and utilising existing structures. The lease procedure allows tea gardens to engage in alternative businesses without requiring resumption under the West Bengal Estates Act, with specific conditions for minority shareholding in joint ventures. The policy also outlines the utilisation of existing structures, such as guest houses, for temporary accommodation. The application and approval process involves district Collectors, the Screening Committee, and final approval from the Cabinet on Industry, with the Industry Department overseeing processing. Projects must commence within three years of approval, and an agreement is signed with the district Collector. Notably, the policy supersedes the 2013 Tea Tourism Policy, aiming to promote sustainable land use, environmental compliance, and local community benefits in the tea industry.[180]

A prevalent skepticism has emerged regarding the "Tea and Tourism Policy" and its implications, particularly questioning the resistance it faces despite the potential for positive economic impact in regions characterised by lower levels of development. The argument posits that the policy could be a source of employment generation through tourism, a sector upon which a significant portion of the local population depends. This prompts a natural inquiry into the basis for resistance against a policy seemingly aligned with economic development objectives. In response to such inquiries, a worker from the tea gardens highlighted a crucial dimension of the issue. The majority of tea plantation workers, the worker argued, are characterised by low levels of literacy and possess only basic educational qualifications. This raises concerns about the applicability of employment opportunities arising from the tourism sector, given its distinct skill requirements and expectations. For instance, if there are 100 workers in a tea garden, it is not guaranteed that all 100 would find employment within the tourism venture. The worker emphasised that the hospitality industry necessitates certain skills

[179] Government of West Bengal, Department of Land & Land Reforms and Refugee Relief & Rehabilitation, *Tea Tourism and Allied Business Policy, 2019*, Memo no. 3816-LP/3T-14/15, November 28, 2019.

[180] Ibid.

and qualities that might be lacking among the tea garden workforce. Consequently, only a limited number might secure roles such as home guards or security guard duties, with the bulk of the workforce likely to be sourced externally.[181]

The worker further highlighted the potential influx of labour from outside, effectively importing workers to meet the demands of the tourism industry. This phenomenon, in turn, could lead to the displacement and socio-economic marginalisation of the local workforce, who have been longstanding residents in the region for generations. The fear is that migration driven by the tourism industry could transform the demographic landscape, diminishing the historical presence and influence of the local workers. [182]Scholarly discourse on the subject underscores the importance of understanding the socio-economic implications of tourism policies, especially in regions with unique labor dynamics and historical contexts. These perspectives contribute to a nuanced examination of the potential consequences of the Tea and Tourism Policy, urging policymakers to consider the intricate socio-economic fabric of the affected regions.

In the analytical discourse, these issues points to the intersectionality of economic, social, and cultural dimensions within the tea industry. The concerns surrounding the minimum wage, Parjappata, and the Tea and Tourism Policy are critical components of a complex web influencing labour dynamics, economic development, and cultural identity. The potential consequences of policy decisions on local populations are explored throughout, drawing parallels with broader patterns of marginalisation observed in indigenous communities globally. The call for government intervention is consistently framed within the context of fostering sustainability and mitigating adverse socioeconomic impacts on the tea industry and its associated communities.

In comparing the performance South India tea gardens, a discernible disparity emerges, notably in the southern sector of the tea industry. In this region, tea workers experience more favourable conditions, enjoying significant privileges coupled with secure land rights. Rai attributes this contrast to a fundamental factor: the distinct status accorded to tea workers in the south, who are recognised as Indian citizens and consequently possess full ownership rights. This recognition is substantiated by a broader societal acceptance within the Indian Nation. In

[181] Interview with tea garden workers, Plantation 4, Darjeeling, 29th November, 2023 11:30am.

[182] Ibid.

contrast, Rai contends that Gorkhas, historically relegated as outsiders and migrants, face a persistent challenge in gaining acceptance as legitimate inhabitants despite generations of residence and cultivation on the land. This lack of acknowledgment by the Indian Nation leads to a discrepancy in rights and status. Rai argues that, even with the formal conclusion of colonial rule, Gorkha labourers continue to operate within a semi-colonial framework.[183]

An examination of Rai's accounts points to repercussions inherent in the disparate conditions experienced by tea plantation workers in Assam and South Indian Plantations. The divergent treatment they receive transcends mere economic considerations, delving into profound issues of citizenship, belonging, and entitlements. Rai's statement that the overarching concept of citizenship emerges as a pivotal determinant, wherein the acknowledgment of Indian citizenship bestows specific privileges and entitlements upon tea workers in the southern region, thereby fostering a more equitable socio-economic framework. This recognition extends beyond the confines of legal parameters and is intricately interwoven with a broader societal acceptance, reflecting the identity complexities and a sense of belonging within the framework of the Indian Nation. Conversely, the plight of Gorkha *shramik* brings to the forefront the enduring repercussions of historical perceptions and categorisations. Despite their enduring ties to the land, the portrayal of Gorkhas as outsiders and migrants elucidates the persistent consequences of such narratives. This portrayal not only impacts their social standing but permeates into their economic and land rights, perpetuating a semi-colonial dynamic. [184]

The worker's concern extended beyond economic considerations to the environmental impact of tourism. This unexpected awareness revealed a nuanced understanding among the workers, who, despite their limited formal education, recognised the fragility of the local ecosystem. Their call for sustainable practices in tea tourism hinted at a collective responsibility to balance economic development with environmental preservation. What emerged from their reflections was a poignant connection between the tea industry and the socio-economic identity of the workers. Despite finishing their education at a basic level, the workers displayed an acute awareness of the potential shifts in their lives. The fear of the tea gardens closing down resonated not only as a threat to their livelihoods but as a transformative event that could reshape the very fabric of their socio-economic existence. Another worker voiced doubts regarding the motives behind the tea and tourism policy, expressing skepticism towards the 5

[183] Second interview with Rai, secretary Trade Union, November 1, 2023, Darjeeling, 11:30am.

[184] Ibid.

decimal land allocation scheme. According to him, this scheme seems designed to displace tea garden workers from their ancestral land by labelling them as "landless" and imposing stringent criteria for land occupancy. For instance, while the land allocation could extend up to 5 decimals, there is no assurance that it won't be less. The policy also mentions eligible families, implying that eligibility criteria could be subject to arbitrary decisions by authorities. Although the land would be heritable, it would not be transferable. [185]

Many harbour suspicions that the government's 5 decimal scheme is aimed at distributing minimal land to workers while utilising the surplus land for tourism development, thus displacing those deemed ineligible. This situation underscores the intersection of capitalism and politics, where government policies purportedly aimed at welfare may serve vested interests and perpetuate socioeconomic disparities. From an academic perspective, this scenario epitomises several significant themes. Firstly, it highlights the intricacies of land ownership and distribution in regions with complex historical legacies, such as former colonial territories like tea gardens. Secondly, it points to the power dynamics at play between marginalized communities, government authorities, and corporate interests, showcasing how policies ostensibly aimed at development can disproportionately impact vulnerable populations. Thirdly, it exemplifies the relation between economic systems and political agendas, demonstrating how policies purportedly promoting economic growth can perpetuate inequalities and social injustices.[186]

6. The Case of Rangeet/ Kanchan View Tea Garden

The case of Kanchan View Estate also known as Rangeet Tea Estate potray an example of how cooperation can be sought between the tea plantation and labour force particularly in the context of the operation of the Tea and Tourism Policy while at the same time safeguarding workers land and labour rights. The case of Kanchan View Tea Estate also serves as an example of the challenges inherent in the tea industry of West Bengal, shedding light on land management, labour relations, and community engagement. Initially established as a traditional tea plantation, the estate's forayed into tourism with the Tea and Tourism Policy, 2019. However, this expansion had precipitated complex legal and administrative issues concerning land rights and usage.

[185] Ibid.

[186] Ibid.

The estate's involvement in legal disputes and agreements regarding land leasing and the estate's interactions with labour unions indicated ongoing efforts to navigate labour relations within the tea industry. Matters such as gratuity payments and employment opportunities for workers dependents, fair labour practices and social welfare provisions within plantation economies, engagement with neighbouring communities, need to preserve local markets and educational institutions were some of the issues. The case of Kanchan View Tea Estate provides valuable insights into the complexities of land management, labour relations, and community engagement within the context of the tea industry. It exemplifies broader socio-economic impacts of tea plantation diversification, the efficacy of labour regulations in safeguarding worker's rights, and the role of corporate social responsibility in mitigating adverse effects on local communities. Additionally, it points to the need for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate legal, economic, and social perspectives to address the multifaceted challenges facing tea estates in the region. The following is a simplified version of the court proceedings.

Kanchan View Tea Estate is owned by Ajit Kumar Agarwala through inheritance and since 1964, the Kanchaan View Tea Estate has been lessee under the governance of the West Bengal government, with a lease renewed in 2003 for 30 years. The estate applied for a long-term lease under the Tea Tourism Policy, resulting in the allocation of twenty four acres of land. However, due to geographical changes, some houses and part of Saraswati Primary School were included in the leased land. Various litigations were filed for possession recovery, involving the Darjeeling Court, Calcutta High Court, and Circuit Bench at Jalpaiguri, along with representations before government authorities.[187]

Disputes regarding encroachment removal and other matters have persisted for the past three years, despite rounds of discussions involving district officials and police authorities. Recently, the estate management, along with lessees and stakeholders, agreed to resolve these disputes after prolonged discussions. The agreement entails the withdrawal of defamation suits initiated byAjit Kumar Agarwala, as well as the retraction or settlement of certain civil or criminal cases filed by the management of Kanchaan View Tea Estate and/or Terai Resorts and Country Club

[187] Proceedings of the meeting held on 17th day of march 2023 at the conference hall, Siliguri state guest house, Siliguri district, Darjeeling at the request of the management of Kanchan view tea estate, operating tea unions, both Samaj and other stake holders", accessed from Hamro Party Office, Darjeeling on November 2023.

Pvt. Ltd. Furthermore, the management commits to operating the tea estate in compliance with the regulations outlined in the Plantation Labour Act, ensuring that no employees are terminated due to Tea Tourism Projects.[188]

Both companies, serving as lessees of land under the Tea Tourism Project, pledged to prioritise employment opportunities for the direct dependents of Kanchaan View Tea Estate workers. Additionally, they undertake to offer training, if necessary, at their own expense, and to consider residents of Kanchanview T.E. for employment opportunities based on qualifications and capabilities, subject to proper verification. The Operating Trade Unions assure that workers will diligently perform their duties without interfering in the day-to-day operations of the tea estate, committing to work obediently for eight hours.[189]

Addressing the shortage of workers hindering tea plantation operations, workers pledged to minimise absenteeism and agreed to encourage family members and other residents to work in the tea estate, with the management providing employment opportunities. Furthermore, the management assured that current residents of the tea estate will not be disturbed and will issue No Objection Certificates (NOCs) after conducting a proper survey of non-planted land owned by them, granting them the liberty to apply to the State Government for land leases or titles in accordance with state laws. Lastly, the management of Kanchaan View Tea Estate agreed not to disturb the Lower Chitray Bazar, comprising sixteen shops, and to erect a wall up to four feet in height to prevent further encroachments. No additional shops will be permitted, and existing ones will remain undisturbed.[190]

The backside of the stalls will be reserved for photography purposes to support the livelihood of local residents and the Lower Chitray Bazar. Additionally, the management of Kanchaan View Tea Estate and Terai Resorts & Country Club Pvt. Ltd. agree not to disturb the Upper Chitray Bazar, consisting of twenty shops. It was further agreed that the wall behind Shops seventeen to twenty two will be reduced to a height of 4 feet, while a full wall with necessary fencing will be constructed from Shops Number one to sixteen onwards, enclosing the entire area leased for Tea Tourism. However, it was mutually decided that the staircase after Shop number sixteen and the tea plantations behind Shops No. Seventeen to twenty two will be

[188] Ibid.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Ibid.

retained for photography purposes to support the livelihoods of local residents and the Upper Chitray Bazar. [191]

Furthermore, the management pledged not to disturb the Saraswati Primary School and its adjoining playground, ensuring that they are managed according to the directives of the lessor, the District Magistrate of Darjeeling. The local community assures that no illegal activities, such as gambling, will take place in the school premises, and the area will be surveyed and demarcated for clarity. Two roads will be constructed simultaneously: one connecting the village to Char Dhura and the community hall, and the other exclusively leading to the tea estate factory from Lower Chitray Bazar. These roads will be built under the supervision of the Public Works Department (PWD), with guard walls and protective measures to prevent damage to nearby houses. It is emphasized that no further encroachments on the leased land of the tea estate and Tea Tourism Projects will be tolerated. All parties involved in disputes agree to work together with the management to prevent fresh encroachments and resist outsiders with vested interests in land grabbing, jointly safeguarding the property from encroachers.[192]

The management of the two Tea Tourism Companies has assured that the hospital to be established will provide assistance to the residents of the tea estate on a "no profit no loss" basis or cost basis. Only the operating trade union shall have authority over the day-to-day operations of the garden, with any grievances to be resolved through the labor department exclusively. All gratuity payments have been made in accordance with the Gratuity Act, with additional sums up to Rs. 30,000 as per a bipartite agreement dated 23.03.2019. Any disputes regarding gratuity can be raised by aggrieved workers through their operating trade unions with the labor department or tribunal, to be addressed by the management through established mechanisms. Both Terai Resorts & Country Club Pvt. Ltd. and Kanchaan View Resorts Pvt. Ltd. have leased 24 acres of land at market value assessed by the State Government, making them the rightful owners of their respective land parcels. The management of both companies pledges to adhere to the lease conditions and prioritise employment for the direct dependents of tea estate workers based on qualifications and job nature. Following the unfortunate fire incident, the Manager's Bungalow cum office will be reconstructed within the remaining

[191] Ibid.

[192] Ibid.

leasehold area of the tea garden, preferably near the factory for improved supervision and control. [193]

Compensation will be provided for any private gardens, trees, bushes, occupied or patta land uprooted or used during road or boundary construction, to be determined through mutual discussion and consultation. The operating trade unions and the Samaj representing Kanchanview Tea Estate residents pledge full cooperation to the management and the two companies establishing and operating the tea tourism projects, aiming for overall development of the Hills and offering support. In case of any disagreements, resolution will be sought through the lessor or administration. Failure to comply with any of the stated conditions will result in the matter being referred to the administration for a joint meeting of all parties to resolve the issue promptly, with the option for legal proceedings if necessary. The construction of both roads and boundaries may now commence, as the joint survey of the road from Lower Chitray to the factory, demarcation of both Chitray bazaars, village road connection, and the Sunil Rai & Wangyal Lama house near the Tibetan Refugee Centre, as per the report of BLLRO, have been completed to the satisfaction of all signatories and stakeholders. There are no pending disputes regarding both roads, both Chitray bazaars, and other matters as stated above.[194]

7. Managerial Perspective

Manager, Happy Valley Tea Estate

Rajat Thapa, with a dozen years of experience in the Tea Industry, previously associated with CV Tower, has been engaged in the Happy Valley Tea Garden for the past year. This garden holds paramount significance as it serves as the economic backbone for the inhabitants of the Darjeeling Hills. Thapa, during a discourse on the historical trajectory of tea cultivation in India, underscored the unique standing of Happy Valley as the second oldest tea garden. Notably, he emphasised the preservation of antiquated tea processing machinery within Happy Valley, contributing to the retention of the tea's original aroma and flavour. Sustainability emerged as a focal point for Thapa, encompassing social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Principles such as the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of wildlife corridors were highlighted. Thapa detailed an integrated waste management system aimed at reducing

[193] Ibid.

[194] Ibid.

pesticide usage. Strategic planting of soil-fixing plants like Guatemala in landslide-prone areas showcased the commitment to natural resource conservation. The allocation of lands to specific communities for cattle raising, utilising dung for compost during harvesting seasons, and the adoption of biodynamic and bio organic practices suggests their commitment to sustainable practices.[195]

Thapa posited the pivotal role of economic sustainability for both the tea industry and its workforce. He contended that economically empowered workers contribute positively to productivity, ultimately benefiting management. The provision of free medical facilities, including visiting doctors and compounders, along with housing facilities, was acknowledged as part of the comprehensive welfare provided to the 60-70 families associated with the Happy Valley Tea Garden. Notably, Thapa addressed workforce reduction concerns, detailing the allocation of land within the estate, specifying 122 hectares for plantation and 20 hectares for housing facilities. In terms of organisational dynamics, Thapa elucidated on the issuance of No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to workers, both active and retired, highlighting the management's commitment to their well-being. However, he noted that NOCs for new settlements depended on managerial discretion. The management's continuity was acknowledged, highlighting the consistency in the tea produced and the workforce employed despite changes in managerial leadership.[196]

Thapa's insights extended to the realm of tourism, with the conduct of guided tours and an emphasis on maintaining proper hygiene within the estate. The longevity of the Happy Valley Tea Company's stewardship, spanning over a year, was highlighted, illustrating the enduring nature of the tea and the workforce despite managerial changes. In analysing these aspects academically, Thapa's narrative provides a rich account of sustainable practices, economic considerations, and organisational dynamics within the tea industry. These insights align with broader themes of corporate social responsibility, sustainable management practices, and the interplay between economic viability and social welfare in the context of agribusiness. In response to inquiries regarding challenges, Thapa highlighted a significant event in 2023 when the management of the tea garden underwent a transition. During this period, the garden faced a temporary closure lasting three to four months due to the inability of the previous owner to

[195] Interview with Rajat Thapa, Manager, Happy Valley Tea Estate, Darjeeling, December, 2023, 24th Nov.

[196] Ibid.

fulfil the puja bonus obligations. This financial constraint led to unrest among the workforce, who abstained from their duties, resulting in the neglect of the garden and allowing the unchecked growth of tea bushes and weeds. The situation was further exacerbated by the inherent limitations in human resources.[197]

This episode underscored several challenges, including financial instability, labour disputes, and the subsequent need for rapid rehabilitation of the garden within a predefined timeframe. The task at hand required careful management and utilisation of the available human resources to restore the garden to operational efficiency. Thapa attributed the success in overcoming these challenges to the collaborative efforts and support of the workers, emphasising their instrumental role in facilitating the prompt rejuvenation of the garden. This scenario encapsulates the need for crisis management, organisational resilience, and the interdependence between management and the workforce in agribusiness.[198]

Regarding cultural heritage, Thapa asserted the pivotal role of Happy Valley as a significant cultural heritage site in Darjeeling. However, he expressed concern about a disinterest among the current generation in engaging in tea garden labour, emphasising a reluctance to have their parents associated with such work due to a perceived stigma. This perception, he argued, was deemed derogatory and no longer considered beneficial. Despite this, Thapa pointed to the business-centric nature of the tea industry, highlighting that a thriving industry ultimately benefits workers in the long run. He also pointed out the inherent perks associated with working in tea gardens, particularly the comfort of working in one's own locality. Thapa elucidated on the correlation between the number of workers in tea gardens and the quality of tea produced. Using the example of one hectare of garden, he suggested that having ten workers would result in optimal tea yields. This is attributed to the ability of a larger workforce to meticulously select the finest tea leaves, thereby enhancing the overall quality of the tea. In contrast, a reduced workforce, such as three workers in the same area, may lead to a higher quantity of leaves being plucked within the same timeframe, potentially compromising the quality. Thapa also noted the heightened competition in the tea market as a factor contributing to reduced tea profits.[199]

[197] Ibid.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid.

These insights bring forth themes related to labour dynamics, quality control in agribusiness, and the intersection of cultural perceptions with economic activities. Drawing on literature related to agricultural labor markets, quality management in the production process, and the impact of societal perceptions on career choices, a comprehensive analysis can be crafted to explore the intricate relationship between cultural heritage, workforce preferences, and the economic sustainability of the tea industry. Henceforth, one potential avenue considered was the transformation of tea gardens into tourist attractions. Emphasising the paramount importance of peace and harmony for overall operational efficacy, Thapa highlighted the managerial challenge of sustaining rather than closing down tea gardens. The manager, he argued, plays a pivotal role in maintaining equilibrium between the workforce and bureaucratic structures. The detrimental impact of absenteeism on tea gardens was underscored, with Thapa expressing concern over prevalent political interference.[200]

Thapa contended that political pressures adversely affect the promotion system, citing instances where politically active but professionally unengaged labourers were inexplicably elevated in rank. Such instances, he asserted, not only undermine the merit-based promotion system but also serve as disincentives for other workers. In response to labor union demands, Thapa asserted a commitment to meritocracy in the promotion process. Reflecting on the intertwined aspects of identity, employment, and ownership, Thapa posited that the preservation of tea gardens is synonymous with the retention of the workforce and, consequently, the preservation of identity. However, he raised a notable concern by highlighting the absence of Nepali ownership of tea gardens, suggesting that this itself constitutes an identity crisis. The above point into the complexities of managing tea gardens, encompassing challenges related to labor dynamics, political influences, and identity considerations.[201]

Manager 2, Tea Estate (name not disclosed)

Jay Deep (name changed), the manager at a tea garden, stated that he had been working in the industry for almost two decades. He shared insights into his extensive experience in the Dooars tea industry, emphasising the critical role of the regular tea census or survey. This serves dual purposes within the tea estates: first, by meticulously monitoring the residential status of

[200] Ibid.

[201] Ibid.

workers, it ensures the authenticity of the labour force, essential for compliance with labour laws and fostering a sense of belonging among employees. Second, it regulates the settlement of new families, enabling the estates to manage their resources more effectively and maintain a sustainable balance between population growth and available infrastructure. Moreover, his highlighted the importance of periodic surveys, such as the tea census, in facilitating estate management. These surveys play a vital role in identifying and addressing various infrastructure issues, such as drainage problems and house maintenance requirements, in a timely manner. By proactively managing estate maintenance, the tea estates can minimise disruptions to operations, enhance productivity, and ensure optimal working conditions for the workforce. This he stated was missing in Darjeeling tea gardens which is the root cause for many problems.[202]

Jay Deep's emphasis on sustainability practices in the tea industry like Thapa suggests the web of interdependence among various factors. Outdated machinery, frequent garden closures, and absenteeism collectively exacerbate productivity challenges, thereby diminishing profitability and limiting opportunities for improvement. Outdated machinery poses a significant hindrance to productivity within the tea sector. Research indicates that obsolete equipment leads to operational inefficiencies, increased maintenance costs, and suboptimal resource utilization. As a result, tea estates employing outdated machinery struggle to maintain competitive production levels, ultimately impeding their ability to generate profits.[203]

Frequent garden closures further compound the industry's sustainability woes. These closures, often triggered by factors such as labour disputes or market fluctuations, disrupt supply chains, erode investor confidence, and exacerbate financial instability within the tea sector. Consequently, closures perpetuate a cycle of reduced productivity and profitability, hindering long-term growth prospects. Absenteeism among tea plantation workers amplifies these challenges by undermining workforce productivity and morale. High rates of absenteeism diminish operational efficiency, increase production costs, and compromise product quality. Moreover, absenteeism reflects broader socio-economic issues such as inadequate access to

[202] Interview with Manager 2, Darjeeling, Estate 2, 1st December 2023, 10am.

[203] Ibid.

healthcare, substandard living conditions, and seasonal migration trends, exacerbating the industry's sustainability challenges.[204]

Conclusion

This chapter finds that the primary concerns and grievances of tea plantation workers revolve around several critical issues, including low wages, delayed and inadequate payment of bonuses, abrupt garden closures, non-disbursement of allowances for essential provisions such as rations and firewood, lack of safety measures, limited or non-existent access to modern healthcare facilities, and ineffective government policies. Above all, workers express acute anxieties about the threat of displacement from their ancestral lands, encapsulated in the persistent issue of land rights, commonly referred to as Parjapatta. Conversely, tea garden management highlights challenges such as financial instability, labour disputes, political pressures and interference, absenteeism, and frequent strikes. Despite these divergent perspectives, both parties converge on the pressing need for improved infrastructure and the adoption of sustainable practices to enhance productivity and ensure the long-term viability of tea cultivation. A shared concern emerges regarding the declining interest in tea garden labour as a profession. The current workforce is increasingly unwilling to encourage their descendants to follow in their footsteps due to persistently low wages and a lack of job security. This declining local labour pool poses a significant threat to the sustainability of tea garden operations.

While analysing the perspectives of both workers and management it can be said that the tea plantation industry in North Bengal particularly in the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri are caught in a vicious cycle of underdevelopment which affects both parties and accentuates further greviances simultaneously. Virginius Xaxa's work on underdevelopment in the context of North Bengal's tea plantations provides allow us to understand plantation system as a mechanism of historical and structural exploitation. Central to Xaxa's work is the notion of a plantation economy that relied on the creation and perpetuation of a system of interdependence between plantation labourers and the estates, rooted in colonial modes of production. This interdependence was not one of mutual benefit but rather a carefully structured dynamic

[204] Ibid.

designed to maximise the extraction of labour while minimising costs for the plantation management.[205]

One critical feature of this system was the allocation of surplus plantation land to labourers as free grants for the cultivation of subsistence crops. They used these small plots to produce essential food grains, primarily through family labor or reciprocal exchanges within the labor community. This arrangement served multiple purposes. It acted as a compensatory mechanism for the loss of their ancestral lands, provided a supplement to the meager wages they received, and effectively bound labourers and their families to the plantations. By ensuring that labourers had access to subsistence farming, the estates minimised their dependence on local markets to meet basic needs, thereby sustaining the plantation economy at minimal cost. Crucially, this arrangement also enabled colonial capital to exploit elements of the traditional economy while ensuring the labour force's continued availability at an exceptionally low cost.[206]

In addition to the subsistence farming system, the estates institutionalised a practice of subsidised consumer supplies to further entrench this dependency. Workers were provided with basic necessities, including rice, cereals, mustard oil, kerosene, salt, and gur (jaggery), as well as clothing items such as dhotis, saris, and blankets upon their arrival. Complementing these provisions were additional benefits such as free healthcare, medical facilities, housing, and fuel. These provisions reduced the laborer's reliance on external markets and created a self-contained ecosystem within the plantation economy. However, this system also deepened the labourer's dependency on the estates, effectively tying their livelihoods and survival to the plantation system. This codependency was, however, far from equitable. While it provided labourers with the means to barely sustain themselves, it primarily served the interests of plantation owners and colonial capital. The estates maximised profits by externalising the cost of labour reproduction to the subsistence economy, while the hierarchical structure ensured that any surplus value generated by the labourers was siphoned off by European planters and elite Indian intermediaries. [207]

[205] Virginius Xaxa, "Colonial Capitalism and Underdevelopment in North Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly* , Vol. 20, No. 39 (Sep. 28, 1985): 1659-1665.

[206] Ibid.,1662.

[207] Ibid., 1662.

Xaxa concludes that the reason for underdevelopment of the North Bengal tea plantation is not in underdevelopent as defined by measures of development set by capitalist countries but in a systematic process which is ingrained in historical and structural processess. He warrants a sort of core periphery in operation where profits from the plantations were not used to enrich the plantation economy, which in turn would have sustained it in the long run.[208] Today the plantations of North Bengal are characterised by poor infrastructure and facilities, low quality output, labour unrest and poorly implemented policies which threaten the viability of this plantation in the long run.

Upon analysing the demands of tea garden workers, it becomes evident that these grievances are primarily economic in nature. However, government policies, rather than addressing these issues systematically and sensitively, have intensified anxieties, leading to the transformation of economic grievances into ethnic and political concerns. For instance, the five decimal scheme, perceived by many respondents as a policy aimed at demarcating "excess land," restricts generational land-tenurial workers to only five decimals of land, which is also non-inheritable by their descendants. This provision starkly contrasts with the reality, as most workers currently possess significantly more land, often exceeding five acres.

The use of terminology such as "landless" in the scheme has further heightened fears of alienation, sparking concerns about identity and belonging. These fears are strategically mobilised by political elites, who reframe the economic issue of land tenure into an ethnic narrative. Many workers simultaneously suspect that the true intent of the five decimal scheme is to appropriate land for tourism and tea plantation policies, displacing indigenous communities in the process. This exacerbates longstanding anxieties about Indian Nepalis being labeled as "outsiders" and the potential for their displacement from ancestral lands.

Moreover, although North Bengal is governed by the Tea Plantation Act, the majority of its provisions remain unenforceable, adding to the workers 'frustrations. A manager's suggestion of implementing a tea census to monitor the population and prevent new migrants from acquiring land is an instance of a simplistic measure that could supplement policies to be implemented in a sensitive manner. These policies and administrative measures reflect the relation between economic grievances and ethnic identity, where land rights serve as both a material necessity and a symbol of heritage and belonging.

[208] Ibid., 1659.

The enduring struggles of tea workers have inturn consistently shaped the socio-political dynamics of Darjeeling and vice versa. Leaders such as Subhash Ghising and Bimal Gurung have strategically framed land rights and identity as central to their mobilisation efforts, emphasising bhoomi (land) as a unifying cause. Drawing from Paul Brass's perspective, the manipulation of symbols of identity by elites plays a critical role in mobilising support and consolidating political power. Brass argues that such symbols are often redefined and mobilised by elites to serve their interests, as seen in the framing of land rights as both a material and symbolic issue which the elites claim will find it's solution within the Gorkhaland movement. Conversely, Robinson's primordialist view suggests that such identity-based movements stem from deeply rooted, inherited qualities that bind communities together. From this perspective, the Gorkhaland movement's focus on land rights and identity is not merely a product of elite manipulation but reflects an intrinsic and historical connection between the Nepali community and the land they inhabit. Henceforth these isuues can be viewed from a middle ground between the views of the instrumentalist and primordalist.

Beyond the contributions of leaders like Subhash Ghising and Bimal Gurung, contemporary political figures have also foregrounded land rights, linking them to symbols of political and ethnic identity. The newly formed Indian Gorkha Janshakti Front (IGJF), for instance, has called upon the West Bengal government to amend the West Bengal Land Reforms (WBLR) Act to incorporate provisions specific to the region's unique socio-political context. In a letter addressed to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, IGJF chief convenor Ajoy Edwards criticised the Nijo Griho, Nijo Bhumi Prakalpa (NGNBP) scheme, which provides five decimals of land to the homeless and landless. He argued that such a scheme fails to address the distinct historical and cultural realities of the Hills, Terai, and Dooars. According to Edward, the residents of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Terai, and Dooars, including those in tea gardens, cinchona plantations, DI Fund land, and forest areas have inhabited these lands for centuries, predating Indian independence, and thus cannot be classified under the same framework as the landless elsewhere in Bengal. Edwards further urged the state government to amend the WBLR Act to recognize the historical ownership claims of the region's people.[209]

[209] "IGJF Writes to Mamta Banerjee, Demands Land Rights Based on Physical Posession", *Sikkim Express*, January 5, 2025, 10:45 pm, accessed on Jan 7, 2025, https://sikkimexpress.com/news-details/igjf-writes-to-mamata-banerjee-demands-land-rights-based-on-physical-possession#google_vignette.

During the official launch of the IGJF in December 2024, Edwards issued a public appeal to tea garden workers, advising them to oppose land surveys. In contrast, the Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGPM), currently in power in the hills, has argued that conducting surveys is essential for issuing patta (land ownership documents), even for the land that tea garden workers currently occupy. In this context, the Land and Land Reforms Department issued an order on August 1, 2023, directing District Magistrates in six districts of North Bengal to prepare proposals for granting homestead patta to eligible families. The scheme aimed to distribute surplus or unutilized land in tea gardens, with a limit of five decimals per family. However, this proposal drew significant opposition from hill-based political factions, triggering protests and demonstrations. Subsequently, Anit Thapa, Chief Executive of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), requested the state government to pause the land survey process. On September 12, 2023, the state issued a notification directing the District Magistrates of Darjeeling and Kalimpong to halt surveys and related activities. However, a subsequent notification on November 2, 2023, instructed the District Magistrates to resume survey activities in the tea gardens within the GTA jurisdiction on an "as is where is" basis, without stipulating specific area limitations.[210]

These evolving legislative and administrative measures highlight the contentious nature of land rights in the hills, reflecting a broader socio-political struggle for identity and autonomy. The framing of such issues within an ethnic framework refects the intersections of historical grievances, contemporary governance, and political mobilisation in Darjeeling and its surrounding regions. It can thus be concluded that economic grievances are often mobilised to adopt an ethnic and politically charged dimension. This perspective is similarly articulated by Dr. Mona Chettri, who argues that, "in the Darjeeling hills, ostensibly straightforward economic concerns are reframed through an ethnic lens by political leaders, trade unions, and local intellectuals. As a result, the economic marginalisation of the Nepali community is perceived as intrinsically tied to their ethnic identity. This rearticulation significantly influences how the region's relationship with broader state structures is constructed, structures that are often viewed, perhaps justifiably, as neglectful of the district's development and

[210] Amitava Banerjee, "IGJF Writes to CM Seeking Amendments to Land Reforms Act," *Millennium Post*, January 5, 2025, 11:20 p.m., accessed on Jan 7, 2025 https://www.millenniumpost.in/bengal/igjf-writes-to-cm-seeking-amendments-to-land-reforms-act-593546.

welfare, while primarily exploiting its resources. Consequently, this reductive framework has fostered an antagonistic dynamic between the state and the people of the region."[211]

Sarah Besky writes on how the nexus between tea labour and the Gorkhaland movement is a complex interplay where both material and symbolic linkages to the land, partly stemming from the historical context of tea plantation, form the essence of Gorkhas assertions of Indian citizenship. Central to the Gorkhaland movement's pursuit of justice is a vision of territorial sovereignty, grounded in the enduring connection to the land of Darjeeling. As permanent inhabitants of this region, Gorkhas conceptualise justice as a set of entitlements deeply entrenched in their inherent ties to the locality, fortified by a shared language. However, these assertions are nuanced by the fact that Gorkhas derive their distinct identity from a historical narrative of displacement from Nepal and subjugation in the colonial tea industry. Gorkhas navigate their sense of belonging through a dual framework: one rooted in historical and relational dynamics, where their history of plantation labour and servitude under the British and subsequent planters plays a pivotal role, and another based on primordial notions, wherein timeless concepts of natural affinity to the land take precedence, detached from the narrative of tea production.[212]

[211] Mona Chettri, "Choosing the Gorkha: At the Crossroads of Class and Ethnicity in the Darjeeling Hills," Asian Ethnicity 14, no. 3 (2013): 293–308, https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2013.764763,

[212] Sarah Besky, *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*, University of California Press, 2013.

Chapter 3
Citizenship

India, the objective reality of today's history, whose objectivity is tangible enough for people to try to preserve, to destroy, to up- hold, to construct, and dismember, the reality taken for granted in all attempts in favour and against, is not an object of discovery but of invention. [213]

- Sudipta Kaviraj

1. Introduction

The trinity of state, nation and nationalism define the field of cultural pluralism. They constitute an epistemology of political reality. In the Kantian sense, the nation-state system has become a model of the world firmly implanted in the political cognitions of mankind, and in particular political elites. It provides the categories through which the chaotic flow of events is given structure and meaning. [214] The state, Kaviraj describes emerged after Independence and drew heavily from two contradictory lineages: the evolving structures of the colonial state and the ideological movements of Indian nationalism.[215] He presents' Indian nationalism 'as a field of ideas rather than as a doctrine, evolving, unstable, volatile, capable of sudden shifts in emphasis and political direction.[216]

In India, Partha Chatterjee has offered the interesting and powerful hypothesis that nationalists accepted the Orientalist construction of Indian society and the limitedness of social reconstruction, and the present difficulties of the state begin from there.[217] Sanjib Baruah has written extensively, advocating how the contemporary nation-state aspires to control the shared imagination of its entire population. It seeks to position the state-defined political entity as the exclusive custodian of a homeland's cultural expressions, as well as the collective memories

[213] Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 167.

[214] Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism,* quoted in Crawford Young , *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism,* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press,1976), 13.

[215] Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institutions of India: Politics and Ideas,* 6.

[216] Ibid.,7.

[217] Ibid., 37.

and aspirations of its people, even while making nominal acknowledgments of diversity. However, in India, an inheritor of a vast imperial legacy and a creation of an anti-colonial movement the existence of multiple competing narratives must be reckoned with. Within a complex social landscape that remains beyond full state influence, distinct subnational identities continue to thrive alongside the larger national consciousness. [218]

Baruah in the context of his work which is centered around Assamese subnationalism proposes that subnational movements should not always be perceived as threatning national unity or the structure of the nation-state, bur rather proposes that imaginings of the nation can always be revised to accomodate new identities or new imaginings sometimes which emerge in the form of subnational movements. Baruah does not totally discredit works that acknowledge the antagonism and tensions that subnational movements bring with them, but enunciates alternate, inclusive forms of recognition. He also uses the metaphor of *Bharat Mata* or Mother India and sub nationalities as children in one of his work. [219]

Henceforth in the context of the larger framework of imagined national community , this chapter seeks to critically explore how the Indian Nepali community employs a "Pan-Indian grammar"[220] to establish its position within the national imagination, foster a strong sense of belonging to the Indian nation-state, and strengthen its claim to citizenship. The chapter argues that the community's efforts are primarily channeled through engagement with constitutional processes, state institutions, and a critical re-examination of colonial historiographies to support its claims. It highlights two main strategies utilised by the community.

First, the construction of an imaginative geography to embody an ethno-space, as exemplified by the regional movement for "Gorkhaland" and second, the Janjati movement, which advocates for tribal status for twelve Gorkha ethnic groups, thereby bolstering claims of indigeneity. This chapter employs Baruah's observation and will look into how the rhetoric employed in both the phases of the Gorkhaland movement is particularly aimed to fit into the nationalist imagination and consequently an effort to foster recognition and belonging to the nation state as true citizens.

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[218] Sanjib Baruah, *Politics of Subnationalism: Society versus State in Assam,* in *State and Politics in India,* ed. Partha Chatterjee, (New Delhi:Oxford University Press, 1998), 497.

[219] Ibid, 1-199.

[220] Ibid, 1-199.

The Jan Jati movement on the other hand employs the mechanism of the modern liberal state and constitution. In this context Nilamber Chettri has written on how at the heart of this discussion is the constructed identity of an indigenous tribal community residing in the Himalayan foothills. Claims based on these identities are primarily articulated using anthropological terminology, emphasising rights and the acknowledgment of indigenous status. The increasing prominence of such claims suggests that tribal discourse in Darjeeling is deeply connected to matters of entitlements and a broader effort to reclaim their historical roots, redefine their role in society, and reinforce their place within the nation-state.[221]

The chapter also analyses how failure of the Gorkhaland movement has been one of the driving factors for the search for alternate forms of identity. However this chapter contends that both of these movements represent alternative means of securing affiliation with the Indian nation-state. *Gorkha* or *Tribe,* both these forms of categorial mobilisation highlight the "anxiousness to belong"[222] and therefore in Townsend Middleton's words, " They were geared as much towards the attainment of affirmative action and autonomy … to reaffirm these communities being-in and being-of the nation and themselves. They were in other words always a *politics to belong.*''[223] To enhance this analysis, the chapter will simultaneously assess colonial historiographies, the Indian nation state and theories of citizenship and recognition.

The concept of *Gorkha* or *Tribe* can also be viewed through the lens of postcolonial citizenship. Racheal Busbridge, in the introductory section of her book *Multicultural Politics of Recognition and Postcolonial Citizenship* explains how minority communities seek acknowledgment, they play an active role in redefining the idea of the nation by introducing alternative perspectives on identity, culture, and inclusion that reflect their distinct experiences and rights. This phenomenon is referred to as postcolonial citizenship. It strives to bring multicultural realities into focus by reshaping the understanding of national belonging. A key aspect of postcolonial citizenship is its emphasis on questioning power structures that unjustly

[221] Nilamber Chettri, "From Jat-Jati to Janjati: Demands for Recognition as Scheduled Tribe and Claims of Indigeneity in Darjeeling." *Sociological Bulletin* 66, no. 1 (2017): 75–90. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26625665.

[222] Townsend Middleton, *The Demands of Recognition: State Anthropology and Ethnopolitics in Darjeeling,* (California: Standford University Press,2016), 32.

[223] Ibid., 32.

elevate some groups as more representative of the nation while sidelining others.[224] The struggle for acknowledging cultural diversity is deeply connected to reshaping national identity. As minority groups seek recognition, they integrate the concept of the nation into their movements, urging a perspective that views multiculturalism beyond mere governmental policies or institutional initiatives. Rather than being confined to official frameworks, postcolonial citizenship offers insight into how these processes take shape, even in the absence of formal multicultural policies.[225]

2. Colonialism and Darjeeling

Postcolonial citizenship has been employed in a descriptive way to designate how patterns of migration and local contours of cultural diversity are intimately connected to national colonial histories[226] . Postcolonial critics advocate recognising how colonial history has influenced ideas about cultural differences, especially the divide between the West and the Rest. They encourage moving away from rigid, fixed ideas of cultural identity and instead embracing a view of culture as mixed, diverse, and ever-changing.[227] Critically assessing colonial histories leads us to an understanding of today's cultural and social relationships. It reminds us that each nation has it's own unique story, sense of identity, and idea about who belongs. Understanding these histories can help us rethink how we see diversity and national identity, opening new ways to understand ethnic, racial and cultural differences.[228] The Darjeeling hills in South Asia have a rich historical significance as a crossroads in the region. Throughout history, the borders and territorial claims of Darjeeling have experienced periodic shifts due to the influence of various regional powers. However, it is important to acknowledge that the history of Darjeeling predates the arrival of colonial rule. Before the British arrived, the Darjeeling hills, particularly Kalimpong, played a crucial role in trans-Himalayan trade networks. Traders and goods from

[224] Rachel Busbridge, *Multicultural Politics of Recognition and Postcolonial Citizenship: Rethinking the Nation,* (London: Routledge, 2018), 12-13.

[225] Ibid., 13.

[226] U. Bosma, *Post-Colonial Immigrants and Identity Formation in the Netherlands,* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2012) quoted in Racheal Busbridge, *Multicultural Politics of Recognition and Postcolonial Citizenship: Rethinking the Nation,* (London:Routledge, 2019) 9.

[227] Busbridge, *Multicultural Politics of Recognition and Postcolonial Citizenship: Rethinking the Nation,* 9.

[228] Ibid., 9.

Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet, Bhutan, and even distant regions would traverse the area, creating a vibrant exchange of commerce and cultural interactions.[229]

In the precolonial era, the concept of sovereignty in the Darjeeling Hills was dynamic and subject to contestation. As pointed out by historian Catherine Warner, the local population engaged in the practice of paying tribute to and forming alliances with various powers depending on the prevailing circumstances. These allegiances would shift over time reflecting the complex and fluid nature of sovereignty in the region. British rule effectively reterritorialized the region, however the borders separating British India and Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan hardened as new sovereign claims were laid upon the region and its people[230].

When the British and others asserted their claims over the people in the Darjeeling region, it became difficult to determine exactly who lived there. This question has remained uncertain for a long time. According to early colonial records, it was believed that the area had a small population consisting mainly of indigenous groups like the Lepcha, Limbu, and Bhutia. However, these records are incomplete and do not reflect the true diversity of the local population. Due to the influences of trade, migration, and changing control of the region in the pre-colonial period, it is likely that the local population was more diverse and larger than what the British recognised.[231] L. S. S. O'Malley recorded in his Bengal District Gazetteer, "the hill territory of Darjeeling having thus been ceded, General Lloyd and Dr. Chapman were sent in 1836 to explore the country, to ascertain the nature of the climate, and to investigate the capabilities of the place. Here they spent their winter of 1836 and part of 1837 and on the receipt of their reports, it was finally decided to adopt Darjeeling as a sanitarium". [232] He further highlights how the development of the district has largely been shaped by two key factors namely, the selection of Darjeeling as a health retreat and the introduction of tea cultivation in the region. Grant and Lloyd played a crucial role in recognizing the area's

[229] Tina Harris et al., "Global Encounters, Local Places: Connected Histories of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and the Himalayas—an Introduction," *The Journal of Transcultural Studies* 7, no. 1 (July 21, 2016): 50–53, https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.ts.23542.

[230] Catherine Warner, "Flighty Subjects: Sovereignty, Shifting Cultivators, and the State in Darjeeling, 1830–1856", *Himalaya: The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*, 2014: 24-32.

[231] Ibid., 24-32.

[232] L.S.S O Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer : Darjeeling* (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907), 21.

refreshing climate as beneficial for rejuvenating exhausted workers from the plains, while Lloyd was instrumental in securing the hills for this purpose.[233]

Ruenne Bennike in her article, *Frontier Commodification: Governing Land, Labour and Leisure in Darjeeling*, explores how the idea of *terra nullius* that is land seen as empty or unclaimed, was used to justify European expansion, especially in Australia and Antarctica. Although not explicitly applied in the annexation of Darjeeling, similar concepts shaped British views of the Himalayan frontier. The British framed Darjeeling as "empty" or lacking inhabitants, property, and sovereignty, legitimising their colonisation Bennike writes.[234] However, Bennike highlights that this narrative ignored the region's complex pre-colonial history. Before British control, the Barfung clan, a powerful Lepcha group, held significant influence in Darjeeling and Sikkim, managing local politics and territory.[235]

Their power waned after the assassination of their leader, Bholod, in 1826, leading to the Kotapa rebellion and a temporary depopulation of the area. This created the "empty" image that the British later emphasised. British sources acknowledged this history but downplayed it. Instead, they focused on Nepali immigration and depicted the indigenous Lepcha as passive and unassertive, reinforcing the idea that British intervention was necessary and inevitable. Dr. Archibald Campbell, Darjeeling's first superintendent, was celebrated as its founder, credited with transforming the area into a thriving hill station through British entrepreneurship and governance. This colonial narrative reshaped Darjeeling's history, highlighting British achievements while erasing the region's dynamic pre-colonial past.[236]

The history of Darjeeling is a powerful example of how colonial powers rewrote narratives to justify their control. By portraying the land as "empty" or lacking governance, the British erased the region's rich precolonial past and the influence of indigenous groups like the Lepcha and the Barfung clan. This wasn't just an oversight, it was a deliberate strategy, similar to what was done in other colonial contexts, where lands were labeled as unclaimed to make conquest seem natural and necessary. What's particularly striking is how colonial records selectively

[233] Ibid., 29.

[234] Rune Bennike, "Frontier Commodification: Governing Land, Labour and Leisure in Darjeeling, India," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 40, no. 2 (March 27, 2017): 6–8, https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2017.1289618.

[235] Ibid., 7.

[236] Ibid., 8.

presented demographic changes. While they highlighted Nepali immigration, they downplayed the long-standing diversity of the region, reinforcing the idea that British rule brought order to a supposedly passive and underdeveloped land. Figures like Dr. Campbell were celebrated as visionary leaders, while the indigenous histories and shifting sovereignties that predated British rule were largely ignored. This kind of historical framing still affects how we see places like Darjeeling today. A more honest look at its past reminds us that identity, land, and belonging are never fixed, they've always been fluid and contested. Acknowledging these complexities helps us move beyond colonial narratives and better understand the cultural and political realities that continue to shape the region.

History of Land

The historiographic modality as enunciated by Cohn, played a crucial role in British India, encompassing various aspects of knowledge production and control. History held ontological power for the British, shaping their understanding of the social and natural worlds. They aimed to govern India by codifying and reinstating previous ruling practices and incorporating existing administrative personnel. Thus, knowledge of Indian history and state practices was highly valued in building the colonial state. One aspect of the historiographic modality was the investigation and documentation of revenue collection methods through land settlement processes.[237] During colonial times, Darjeeling was governed differently compared to other areas. It was first considered a Non-Regulated Area, then became a Scheduled District in 1874, a Backward Tract in 1919, and a Partially Excluded Area in 1935. The history of Darjeeling being portrayed as a unique and exceptional place is noteworthy. The British discovery of Darjeeling, often mentioned in historical accounts, revolves around the arrival of Captain George Lloyd and J. W. Grant in Dorjeling. They declared the curved ridge to be an ideal location for a colonial hill station and sanatorium. [238]

This account follows the conventional pattern of a discovery narrative, where adventurous explorers come across an untamed, sparsely inhabited land, claim authority over it, and influence the local population who are often portrayed as reserved and underdeveloped so as to align with colonial ideals. After acquiring Darjeeling through a contentious Deed of Grant

[237] Bernard. S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India,* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 5.

[238] Townsend Middleton and Sara Shneiderman, *Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories, Politics, Environment*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 30-31.

from Sikkim in 1835, the British entrusted Dr. A. Campbell with the task of transforming it into a hill station sanatorium. Having previously served as an Assistant to the British Resident in Nepal, Campbell assumed the position of Darjeeling's first Superintendent in 1839, a role he maintained for the next twenty years. Both Campbell and his assistant, Lieutenant Napier, wielded significant administrative power. Since Darjeeling was classified as a 'Non-Regulated Area, 'governance was tailored to suit its unique conditions and requirements.[239]

In practice, Campbell had unrestricted control over Darjeeling's development, shaping it according to his vision. His duties were extensive, including land distribution, foreign relations, labour recruitment, revenue collection, law enforcement, judicial oversight, and the overall management of infrastructure and progress. His authority and influence did not go unnoticed. A government report from 1854 highlighted his pivotal role, stating that since Darjeeling's acquisition in 1838, Campbell had single-handedly overseen its administration. At the time he took charge, fewer than twenty families resided in the region, but under his leadership, the population grew to 10,000. With no direct assistance, the report credited him entirely for the town's expansion and the successful establishment of the sanitarium"[240]

The fact that one person had so much power shows how the government allowed Darjeeling to change quickly. What is interesting is that even though the administrative system in the 1840's and 1850's was advanced, official reports praised Campbell's accomplishments under this special arrangement. They even compared the way Darjeeling was governed to taking care of a private property and making money from it.[241] Campbell's authority was legally uncertain, and doubts were raised regarding its legitimacy. An official report from 1854 acknowledged this issue, stating that complex disputes over rights were inevitable and that the Superintendent's legal jurisdiction would likely be debated. To address these concerns, the report suggested the necessity of passing a legislative act to clearly outline and define the Superintendent's powers.[242]

[239] Ibid., 30-32.

[240]Ibid., 31.

[241] Ibid., 31.

[242] Ibid., 32.

According to this review, Campbell's authority was fragile and required reinforcement. However, bureaucratic concerns were easily overshadowed by his remarkable accomplishments. The transformations that took place during the 1840's and 1850's were profound. With the construction of roads and houses, the British began to see Darjeeling as both a retreat and a profitable investment opportunity. Wealthy individuals acquired vast tracts of land, and by the mid-1850's, they were actively developing tea plantations that would soon bring Darjeeling international recognition. Yet, official records provide little insight into the experiences of the native population affected by these developments. What they do reveal, however, is the emergence of a system that promoted unrestricted business activity, paving the way for significant capitalist expansion.[243]

Both the government and private investors collaborated to gain control over land in Darjeeling. Under Campbell's leadership, native and communal lands were transferred to European investors. This approach was later formalised across India, permitting the transformation of so-called wastelands into private property. The specifics of this have been explored in the preceeding chapter on tea and labour in Darjeeling. By classifying vast sections of the hills as uninhabited, large portions of Darjeeling were sold off. This strategy proved advantageous for the British, as it not only generated tax revenue but also laid the foundation for capitalist expansion, particularly in the tea industry.[244]

Indigenous cultivators residing in the hills were largely overlooked, and their lands were seized with little acknowledgment. Later assessments exposed the flaws in this land allocation system, revealing that many areas labeled as "uncultivated" were, in fact, home to native cultivators. The shift to private ownership enabled a select group of British elites and plantation investors to dominate Darjeeling, with the alliance between political power and economic interests shaping the region's trajectory. This was facilitated by unique administrative policies that granted Campbell and other officials extensive authority. The establishment of a colonial ideal depended on concealed regulations and the overlooked existence of local communities.[245]

Critically annalysing the colonial historiography on the region we can assume that the story of Darjeeling's development under British rule is a striking example of how power, economics,

[243] Ibid., 31.

[244] Ibid., 32-34.

[245] Ibid., 32-35.

and governance were deeply enmeshed in the colonial project. The British didn't just govern, they shaped the land, laws, and economy to serve their own interests. By designating Darjeeling as a Non-Regulated Area, they created a loophole that gave figures like Campbell sweeping authority, allowing them to operate without much oversight. This flexibility wasn't accidental, it was a deliberate strategy used across British India to extract wealth while sidestepping legal accountability. What's particularly revealing is how the British framed their actions as a civilising mission. The official narrative credits Campbell for Darjeeling's transformation, but it conveniently ignores the displacement of native communities. Declaring lands as "uncultivated" made it easier to seize them, turning Darjeeling into a hub for private investors and tea plantations. The collusion between government and business wasn't just about administration, it was about profit. This history forces us to rethink the romanticised tales of colonial development. Darjeeling's past is a reminder that colonialism was as much about economic control as it was about political domination.

Colonial Administration and Early demands for Autonomy

In 1907, the first ever demand for separate administrartive set up for the district of Darjeeling was placed before the government by the "leaders of the hill people". Here as Tanka. B. Subba elaborates the "Hill people" here refereed to the Lepchas, Bhutia amd Nepalis. Subba quoting Chakravati states that this demand is considered to have arisen due to the widespread ideas of reforms and the anti-partition wave in Bengal. However Subba states his skepticism on crediting this demand for separate administrative unit to the anti partition wave. Subba states that , "had it been completely so, the demand would not have arisen two years before the establishment of Morely-Minto Reforms committee. Even if they knew that this committeee was in the offing an ethnicity of the Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalis could not have emerged so suddenly." [246]

Subba notes that the demand for separation in Darjeeling between 1866 and 1907 was influenced by the evolving relationships between the hill communities (Lepchas, Bhutias, and Nepalis) and the plainsmen, particularly Bengalis. The hill communities had developed a sense of unity through interdependence in trade and agriculture, supported by a shared use of the Nepali language, which helped foster a collective "hill ethnicity." However, they faced certain socio-economic challenges compared to the plainsmen, which created a sense of disadvantage.

[246] Tanka. B. Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling*, (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House,1992), 76.

Communication between the hill people and plainsmen was limited, as it mostly took place among the educated and business classes using English or Hindi. Subba suggests that interactions with the settlers and officials of other communities sometimes created tensions, as the latter often held positions of influence due to their education and administrative roles. This dynamic contributed to a feeling of marginalisation among the hill people. In response, they sought support from the British, hoping to counterbalance these challenges. However, British reluctance to grant separation stemmed from Darjeeling's strategic and economic importance.[247]

In 1917, representatives from Darjeeling submitted a request to the Government of Bengal, asking for the creation of a separate administrative unit. This proposal was also sent to E.S. Montague, the Secretary of State for India, and Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy. The main signatories included leaders from the Bhutia, Lepcha, and Nepali communities, such as S.W. Ladenala, Dr. Yen-singh Sitling, and Khadga Bahadur Chhetri, among others. The proposed unit would include Darjeeling and parts of the Dooars in Jalpaiguri. They also suggested forming a larger province called the North-Eastern Frontier Province (NEFP), which would encompass areas like Darjeeling, Dooars, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh. Their request was motivated by several factors, including geography, ethnicity, history, religion, and language. For the NEFP, they added reasons related to health, education, and national defense. The demand reflected concerns about their distinct identity compared to the Bengali population. Although they raised this issue again in 1929 during the Simon Commission's visit, the proposal was never implemented.[248]

The Hillmen's Association played a significant role in uniting the diverse hill communities of Darjeeling. Though formalised in 1921, there are indications that a collective group had existed as early as 1907. Drawing from the observations of historians Bagahi and Danda, Subba writes how the association officially emerged in 1921 under leaders like Indra Bahadur Rai, Hari Prasad Pradhan, and Sonam Wangel Laden La. However, records, including a memorandum from 1930, suggest that it was already active by 1919. In 1920, the Hillmen's Association collaborated with the Darjeeling Planter's Association to advocate for the separation of Darjeeling and the Dooars from Bengal. By 1930, the Association submitted a memorandum to Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India, calling for Darjeeling to be removed from

[247] Ibid., 76-77.

[248] Ibid., 77-78.

Bengal and turned into an independent administrative unit. This memorandum, signed by key figures like H.P. Pradhan and Gobardhan Gurung, focused mainly on safeguarding the rights of the Gorkha community. It proposed granting special representation to Gorkhas in regions where they were in significant numbers, akin to minority protections.[249]

A later memorandum, submitted in 1934, reflected a shift in focus. It stressed on the benefits of Darjeeling's status as an "excluded area," which protected land ownership and provided preferential treatment in government jobs. The memorandum expressed concerns about losing these protections and reiterated the demand for Darjeeling to be made an independent administrative unit. [250] The shift in focus within the Hillmen's Association's 1934 memorandum represents a nuanced transition from broader political demands to more immediate and localised concerns about economic and social protections. In earlier documents, particularly the 1930 memorandum, the association emphasized the need for Darjeeling's administrative separation from Bengal to protect the cultural and political interests of the hill communities, particularly the Gorkhas. However, by 1934, the discourse shifted towards safeguarding land rights and ensuring preferential treatment in government employment. This change reflected a growing concern about the material conditions of the hill population, highlighting the perceived threats of land alienation and economic marginalisation.

The concerns articulated in the 1934 memorandum resonate with contemporary issues such as the *Parja Patta* (land rights) movement[251] (which is discussed in the preceeding chapter, in the context of the Tea Industry) and demands for tribal recognition or the *Janajati* movement [252] discussed in the latter section of this chapter. In both historical and present contexts, the

[249] Ibid., 78-80.

[250] Ibid., 80-81.

[251] The term *parjapatta* translates to land rights, encompassing the ability to transfer land ownership. While the previous chapter primarily focused on its implications within the context of the tea industry and plantation zones, it holds broader significance across the region. Notably, in most areas of Darjeeling, excluding those within municipal boundaries, *parjapatta* is not yet operational. Consequently, residents are generally deprived of hereditary rights, as legal provisions for land transfer remain absent. This lack of ownership rights generates pervasive anxieties, as land tenure and property rights are deeply entwined with notions of citizenship, belonging, and socio-political inclusion over time.

[252] The *Janajati* movement, advocating for the recognition of eleven ethnic groups as Scheduled Tribes, is rooted in the imperative of reclaiming historical identities and preserving cultural heritage. This demand further extends beyond cultural preservation to address the quest for substantive equality through constitutional provisions, particularly reservations. These measures, currently benefiting six to seven communities in Darjeeling, are seen as pivotal for fostering economic empowerment and, consequently, social advancement.

question of land ownership remains central to discussions about identity, autonomy, and economic stability. The demand for special protections, including safeguards against land dispossession and access to employment opportunities, highlights a persistent anxiety about the community's socio-economic vulnerability. Many of the ongoing challenges in Darjeeling, can be traced back to these historical concerns. The emphasis on protecting land and securing employment in government services reflects a broader struggle to address economic insecurity. The demands for autonomy and special protections may not be only political but are also deeply rooted in economic considerations (which has been brought up by participants in chapter four on *Othering*).

The Hill Peoples 'Social Union (HPSU) was established to address rising tensions among the Lepchas, Bhutias, and Nepalis in Darjeeling during the 1920's and 1930's. The primary cause of discord was a demand by the Nepali community to adopt their language as the medium of instruction in schools. This demand was influenced by the Indian National Congress's 1920 resolution advocating linguistic reorganisation of provinces. The issue gained prominence in 1925 when a government committee was formed to evaluate its validity. Prominent leaders from the Bhutia and Lepcha communities, including Laden La and Dr. Yensingh Lepcha, opposed the proposal. However, a subsequent committee in 1927 recommended that Nepali be introduced in Darjeeling's schools.[253]

Recognising the need to mend divisions among the hill communities, Laden La organized a large meeting on December 23, 1934, in Darjeeling. The event drew about 600 attendees from areas such as Kalimpong, Kurseong, and nearby tea plantations. Several notable speakers, including Gobardhan Gurung, Motichand Pradhan, and others, addressed the gathering. Parasmani Pradhan proposed forming a new organization aimed at fostering unity and promoting social progress among the Lepchas, Bhutias, and Nepalis. The Union's leadership included Laden La as President, with key figures such as Gobardhan Gurung and Dr. Yensingh Lepcha serving as vice-presidents. The executive committee featured representatives from various communities. In February 1935, the Union launched a monthly magazine named Nebula, combining elements of the three community names," Ne" for Nepali, "Bu" for Bhutia,

[253] Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development*, 81-83.

and “La” for Lepcha. Over time, Nebula became closely associated with the organization itself.[254]

Despite these efforts to encourage harmony, political dynamics shifted. Laden La, aware of the importance of Nepali support for his career, envisioned the HPSU as a supportive wing of the Hillmen’s Association. However, the Union’s influence diminished with the arrival of elections in Darjeeling in 1936. The introduction of a legislative seat for the region marked a turning point, and by 1937, the Union had lost momentum and faded from prominence.[255]

The All India Gorkha League (AIGL) emerged during the 1940s amid growing concerns about the political future of the Gorkhas in pre-independent India. The earlier Hillmen’s Association, which had united Lepchas, Bhutias, and Gorkhas, became inactive, leaving a leadership vacuum. Dambar Singh Gurung, a young lawyer driven by his commitment to the Gorkha cause, took charge, rallying support through discussions with prominent leaders. On March 7, 1943, a meeting in Siliguri led to the formation of the All India Nepali, Bhutia, and Lepcha Association. However, as the Bhutias distanced themselves, the association was renamed the All India Gorkha League on May 15, 1943, at a meeting in Darjeeling, with Gurung as its first president. The League’s primary goal was to secure the rights and recognition of Gorkhas, addressing their socio-political uncertainties.[256]

The League expanded rapidly across India, gaining support in regions like Assam, Dehradun, and Kangra. Its publication, *Gorkha*, played a crucial role in spreading its message. In 1944, Gurung submitted a memorandum to Viceroy Wavell, emphasizing the need for Gorkha recognition as a distinct community. The AIGL initially collaborated with the Communist Party of India (CPI) but later opened its doors to members of other political groups, ensuring leadership positions remained reserved for those dedicated to its mission. The League’s objectives included securing minority status for Gorkhas, representation in provincial legislatures, and advocating for political prisoner’s release. Despite Gurung’s untimely death in 1948, leaders like Deo Prakash Rai continued the movement. The AIGL’s efforts laid a

[254] Ibid., 81-83.

[255] Ibid., 80-82.

[256] Ibid., 84-86.

strong foundation for the political representation and rights of Gorkhas in India, ensuring their voices remained significant in national discourse.[257]

One cannot help but draw a parallel between the early demands for autonomy and the Indian Independence movement in terms of strategies, ideological influences, and the articulation of demands rooted in cultural and political recognition. These parallels allow us to observe how regional movements drew inspiration from national struggles while tailoring their demands to local contexts. For example the first demand for a separate administrative setup in Darjeeling in 1907 emerged in the aftermath of the anti-partition movement in Bengal (1905-1911). Similar to how Bengal's nationalist leaders protested the partition as an attack on regional unity and identity, the hill people framed their demand as a means of protecting their distinct socio-cultural identity. Both movements leveraged constitutional and administrative reforms as tools for asserting political autonomy, reflecting a shared strategy of engaging with the colonial state through institutional means. Both movements emphasized the importance of self-governance as a way to preserve cultural distinctiveness within a broader political framework.

Likewise, the 1917 demand for autonomy by the hill people was directly influenced by the Home Rule Movement led by Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The Home Rule Movement's call for self-governance within the British Empire resonated with the hill people's aspirations for local control over their administrative affairs. Both movements framed their demands in terms of political decentralisation and greater participation in governance. The Home Rule Movement's emphasis on constitutional reform and local self-governance mirrors the hill people's demand for autonomy, reflecting a shared belief in the gradual attainment of political rights through negotiation and reform rather than outright confrontation.

More importantly, in 1920, the hill people demanded the introduction of Nepali as the medium of instruction in schools, a move inspired by the Indian National Congress's Nagpur Resolution advocating for linguistic reorganisation based on regional languages. This demand was not merely about education but about asserting cultural identity, similar to how the INC's linguistic policy sought to accommodate regional identities within the nationalist framework. The linguistic demands in Darjeeling echoed the nationalist strategy of using language as a tool for cultural and political mobilization. Both movements recognized the centrality of language in fostering a sense of community and legitimising claims for autonomy.

[257] Ibid., 84-86.

Lastly, organizations like the Hillmen's Association, Hills People Social Union, and the Gorkha League played a pivotal role in articulating the political aspirations of the hill people, much like the Indian National Congress and other nationalist bodies did for the broader independence movement. These organisations functioned as platforms for collective action, emphasising the importance of unity and strategic mobilisation in achieving political goals. Both the autonomy movement in Darjeeling and the Indian national movement were characterised by a dual strategy of negotiating with the colonial state while simultaneously fostering a sense of collective identity. The emphasis on negotiation and strategic alignment with nationalist discourses highlights a shared approach to achieving political goals. Both movements sought to balance local autonomy with national unity, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity in the nation-building process.

3. Post Independence

The Uttarakhand Movement of 1949, led primarily by Randhir Subba, alongside figures like S.P. Pradhan and Shiva Kumar Rai, argued that the region's ethnic minorities, including Gorkhas, Lepchas, and Bhutias, faced systemic underrepresentation in local and state legislatures. The proposed solution was the creation of a separate province called "Uttarakhand," encompassing areas such as Darjeeling, Sikkim, Jalpaiguri, and parts of the Dooars. Subba envisioned an inclusive political structure where no single group would dominate, ensuring cultural preservation for all communities. Although the idea gained grassroots support, internal disagreements and shifting priorities, including the departure of key leaders to participate in Nepal's revolution, led to its decline. A few years later, the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee formally dismissed the proposal.[258]

Around the same time, the Communist Party of India (CPI) briefly championed a more radical idea," Gorkhasthan," an independent nation comprising Nepal, Darjeeling, and parts of Sikkim. Spearheaded by leaders like Ratanlal Brahmin and Ganeshlal Subba, this demand sought to leverage Soviet-inspired notions of self-determination. However, Subba advocates that it was less about feasibility and more about expanding the party's influence in Nepali-speaking areas. By 1951, the CPI shifted its stance to advocate for regional autonomy, realising the impracticality of their earlier position. Both movements reflected deeper aspirations for

[258] Ibid., 86-88.

recognition and autonomy, though they ultimately faltered due to political realities and competing priorities.[259]

In 1952, Nehru visited Darjeeling and Kalimpong. In 1953, eleven districts of Madras state were joined to form what is now Andra Pradesh. On 21st May 1955, the President of the District Shramik Sangh, Daulatdas Bokhim submitted a memorandum to the chairman of the *States Reorganisation Commission,* when the latter visited Darjeeling. A year later in 1956 the SRC recommended the addition of nine districts of the former Nizam of Hyderabad's dominions and as. As a result the state of Andra Pradesh was formed with Hyderabad as its capital. Madhya Pradesh also came into existence the same year. [260] Bokhim's memorandum asserted that the Kochayas, Meches, Lepchas, Bhutias, Nepalis, and Rajbanshis are the region's original inhabitants, with customs, traditions, and social systems distinct from those found in the rest of West Bengal. Historically, North Bengal was a self-sufficient region that remained separate from Bengal before its partition and was once governed by the rulers of Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal. The memorandum emphasized that the people in this area differ from the rest of West Bengal in multiple ways, including geography, economy, climate, language, and cultural traditions. It proposed that a plebiscite would be the most effective way to determine the future of these districts. In light of these differences and historical factors, Bokhim strongly advocated for the formation of a Part "C" State in North Bengal, encompassing the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar.[261]

It was in April 1954, the Communist Party of India (CPI) formally articulated the demand for "regional autonomy" in the hill areas of Darjeeling. Subsequently, on May 15, 1955, the Darjeeling District Congress Committee (DDCC) echoed a similar call, though framed as a demand for a 'statutory district council.' By 1957, this collective aspiration had gained further momentum, with the Congress, the CPI, and the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) jointly presenting the demand for regional autonomy to Jawaharlal Nehru during his visit to Darjeeling. In 1967, the momentum continued when the United Front government in West Bengal passed a resolution in the State Assembly endorsing this demand.[262] Not to be left

[259] Ibid., 89-91.

[260] Basant. B. Lama, *Through the Mist of Time*: *The Story of Darjeeling,* (Kurseong: Nilima Yonzone Lama Publications, 2008), 212-213.

[261] Ibid., 212.

[262] Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development,* 91.

behind, the *Darjeeling Congress Committee* hurriedly joined the bandwagon of electoral promise and at a public meeting held in Kalimpong on 25th August 1968 passed a "unanimous resolution" demanding an "autonomous administrative set up" for the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling. [263] In response to this, a meeting of the WBPCC was held on September 21, 1968 at the Congress Bhawan, Calcutta in which the above resolution of the DDCC was discussed. But that meeting held under the presidentship of P.C. Chunder simply noted that "positive measures will have to be taken to resolve these problems".[264]

In the late 1970's the CPM proposed an "autonomous area" for Darjeeling. On 21st June 1977 the Left Front Government came to power in West Bengal. In 1981, the West Bengal Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous resolution supporting the formation of an autonomous district council comprising the district of Darjeeling and and contigous area of Dooars, which was subsequently forwarded to the central government in Delhi.[265] On 2nd August, 1980, Subhasg Ghising, President of the newly formed *Gorkha National Liberation Front* (GNLF) submitted a memorandum to Indira Gandhi. After a few months he sent another surly telegram to the then Chief Minister Jyoti Basu.[266] However A.K. Samanta speculates that there was no apparent response from either the Prime Minister of India or the Chief Minister of West Bengal to these communications. It remains uncertain whether Ghising's letter ever reached the Prime Minister's attention or if her office even considered evaluating the seriousness of the threat. It is likely that the letter was simply forwarded to the State Government and then disregarded. However, the State Government could not afford to be as indifferent, as they had the necessary resources to track developments. Despite this, they also failed to accurately gauge either Ghising's leadership potential or the significance of the issues he raised in his brief letter and telegram. This miscalculation may have been due to the prominence of Prant Parishad's intense agitation for a separate state, which had the backing of the AIGL, making Ghising appear relatively insignificant at the time.[267]

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[263] Lama, *Through the Mist of Time*, 213.

[264] Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development*, 92.

[265] Lama, *Through the Mist of Time,* 213.

[266] Ibid., 214.

[267] Amiya K. Samanta, *Gorkhaland Movement: A study in Ethnic Separatism*, (New Delhi:A. P. H Publishing Corporation, 2000), 121.

Henceforth it is clear that in the early eighties, at this point, Ghising had not yet gained popularity. It is also important to note here that from 1907 until mid eighties before Ghising gained momentum, the period as exemplified above was marked by memorandums and petitions for self rule. In 1981 Indra Bahadur Rai founder of the Pranta Parishad had also submitted a memorandum, to Indira Gandhi. On 13th April 1981, P.T.Lama of AIGL sent a letter to home minister Zail Singh. In 1982 Samar Mukherjee, Somnath Chatterjee and Anand Pathak proposed to table a bill in parliament for an autonomous region to be carved out in Darjeeling. Three years later in 1985, Anand Pathak moved an independent member's constitution amendment bill proposing to form an autonomous region in the Darjeeling district and adjoining areas where Nepali speakers were in majority. The bill however was defeated. Basant Lama has analysed that at this point frustrations were building up at the lack of results and concrete action and this partly allowed the rise of Ghising who seemed promising.[268] Ultimately the decline of the AIGL folllowing the death of D.P rai in 1983 and the Pranta Parishad being on the verge of disintegration due to crisis of leadership, the GNLF led by Ghising was slowly filling up the vaccumm in the hills.[269]

4. Language Recognition Movement (1920- 1992)

Tanka Bahadur Subba classifies the Nepali language movement into three phases. First phase was characterised by the demand for introduction of Nepali as a medium of instruction. The second phase which began from 1953 was marked by demand for the inclusion of Nepali in the eight schedule with no significant results. The third phase beginning from 1972 was characterised by active mobilisation, movement and propoganda for constitutional recognition.[270] Rhoderick Chalmers has chronologically listed the steps in the recognition of the Nepali language. In 1820 the Nepali language was recognised as language for study at Fort William College. It was also in the same year that J.A. Ayton's *Grammar o f the Nepalese Language* was published. In 1911 it was recognised as second language for matriculation in United Provinces by University of Allahabad.[271]

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[268] Lama, Through the Mist of Time, 214-215.

[269] Samanta, *Gorkhaland Movement*, 123.

[270] Subba, *History of Ethnic Movement in Darjeeling*, 92-93.

[271] Rhoderick Alasdair Macdonald Chalmers, *We Nepalis: Language, Literature and the Formation of a Nepali Public Sphere in India, 1914-1940* (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 11015826, 2003), 175.

In 1918, Nepali language was recognised as vernacular for composition in matriculation, intermediate, and B.A examinations of Calcutta University. Chalmers notes Parasmani Pradhan's response, " Dear readers! You have become joyful hearing this joyous news; but alongside it is another problem ... our language has gained a place in Calcutta University but where are the Nepali books for the course of study? ... we must now start to write these or later we will have to suffer great shame."[272] Chalmers also observes how Suryavikram, who brought up a similar concern to Pradhan, emphasised the need for action. He pointed out that while their movement had led to the recognition of their language, the challenge now lay in providing suitable educational materials. He questioned what response they could offer when Calcutta University required textbooks for instruction. Referring to *Shrigardarpan*, he implied that relying on existing materials would not be sufficient. Instead, he stressed the urgent need to develop fifteen to twenty textbooks without delay. According to him, dedicating immediate and full attention to this task was crucial, as failing to do so would lead to setbacks in the future.[273]

In 1926, the Nepali Language was recognised as a 'principal vernacular 'of Bengal by Indian Naturalization Act. Some Nepali books were approved for use in all classes of primary schools and primary stages of middle Vernacular Schools in Bengal.[274] In 1935 it was recognised as vernacular for teaching and examination in all primary schools in Darjeeling district with a majority of Nepali students. In 1939 it was recognised as medium of instruction up to middle school level in the district of Darjeeling. In 1949 as medium of instruction in all primary, middle and high schools in the predominantly Nepali speaking areas in the district of Darjeeling. 1953 as medium for school final (matriculation) examination under Calcutta University.[275]

The second phase was marked by demands for the Nepali language to be included in the eight schedule. T.B. Subba notes that the push to make Nepali an official language in Darjeeling grew stronger after the 1953 States Reorganisation Commission. The Commission's 1955 report raised the hopes of Indian Nepalis, The commission report contained the following lines,

[272] Ibid., 175.

[273] Ibid., 175-176.

[274] Ibid., 175.

[275] Ibid., 175.

"If seventy or more percent of the total population of a district consist of a group which is minority in the state as a whole, the language of the minority group and not the state language shoud be the official language in the district."[276]

On January 18, 1956, Anand Singh Thapa, the editor of *Jagrat Gorkha*, made the first formal appeal for recognition. In a letter to the President of India, he questioned the fairness of treating Nepali as a foreign language in independent India, despite the constitution allowing the official use of languages spoken by the state's people. He pointed out that over five million people spoke Nepali. The President forwarded the letter to the Official Language Reorganisation Commission, and its head, B.G. Kher, responded. Anand Singh Thapa sent additional remarks in a follow-up letter dated February 23, 1956.[277]

Subba notes that, in February 1961, Bidhan Chandra Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, referred to the 1951 census data to state that Nepalis constituted nineteen percentage of the population in the Darjeeling district and 26% in the hills. Based on this data, he suggested that Nepali did not meet the criteria to be recognized as an additional language at the district or municipal level. However, he also encouraged the Nepali-speaking community to wait for the results of the 1961 census, which could potentially support their request for official language status in West Bengal.[278]

In response, an all-party meeting was organized on March 31, 1961, at the Gorkha Dukha Nivarak Sangh (GDNS) Hall in Darjeeling. During this meeting, the Bhasa Manyata Samiti, later referred to as the Darjeeling District Hill People's Language Implementation Committee (DDHPLIC), was formed. In a press statement co-signed by leaders such as Ganesha Subba (CPI) and I.B. Rai (AIGL), questions were raised regarding the significant discrepancy between the 1941 census, which recorded the Nepali population at sixty seven, and the 1951 census. Concerns regarding these figures were also expressed in various articles published in local newspapers and magazines.[279]

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[276] Subba, *History of Ethnic Movement in Darjeeling,* 93-94.

[277] The DC News Desk, "Nepali 'Bhasa Andolan': Re-telling the Story," *The Darjeeling Chronicle*, November 12, 2017, accessed on January 15, 2023, https://thedarjeelingchronicle.com/nepali-bhasa-andolan-re-telling-story/.

[278] Subba, *History of Ethnic Movement in Darjeeling,* 94.

[279] Ibid., 94.

Amid continued political efforts, public protests, and the findings of the Darjeeling Enquiry Committee, the Nepali language was eventually recognised as an additional language under the West Bengal Official Language Act of 1961. However, the implementation of this recognition was delayed for over a decade.[280] After 1961, the push to include Nepali in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution was largely limited to newspapers and magazines. Literary publications such as *Diyaalo* and *Diyo* also addressed this issue in their editorials. However, these efforts were considered ineffective and remained restricted to a small audience.[281] In 1969 the Nepali Bhasa Sangharsha Committee was formed to achieve the goal of constitutional recognition.[282]

It was only from 1972 onwards that sustained efforts were made towards Nepali language recognition. On January 3, 1972, the Nepali Bhasa Samiti was formed and later renamed the Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasa Samiti. The first public gathering took place on February 13, 1972, where various communities and organisations were invited to express their support. A second meeting, held on February 19, focused on uniting major political parties, while a third, on February 24, engaged educational, cultural, and literary institutions. The headquarters of the Samiti was set up in Darjeeling. The Samiti encouraged organisations to send formal appeals to the Prime Minister, requesting the inclusion of Nepali in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution. State assemblies began passing resolutions in support of this demand, with West Bengal doing so on July 2, 1977, followed by Tripura on June 28, 1978, and Sikkim on September 22, 1982.[283]

On April 11, 1972, the Samiti's first delegation met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. However, the delegation was disheartened when she described the constitutional recognition of Nepali as a "matter of security." Later that year, on October 29, during her visit to Darjeeling, her opposition to recognising Nepali sparked widespread protests at the event. The following day, Darjeeling came to a standstill as residents staged a complete shutdown to voice their demands. The protests prompted the Prime Minister to invite the Samiti delegation to Raj Bhawan, where a memorandum outlining their demands was submitted. On December 28, 1972, a meeting was

[280] Ibid., 96.

[281] The DC News Desk, "Nepali 'Bhasa Andolan': Re-telling the Story."

[282] Subba, *History of Ethnic Movement in Darjeeling,* 96.

[283] The DC News Desk, "Nepali 'Bhasa Andolan': Re-telling the Story."

convened in Salt Lake, Kolkata, attended by representatives of the Samiti, local political groups from Darjeeling, and significant literary organizations. The meeting concluded with a decision to organize an all-party conference in New Delhi to strengthen the movement.[284]

Professor Tridib Chakrabati and Sudip Munshi note that on September 29, 1977, a group of Indian Nepalis met the Prime Minister. This group included representatives from various branches of the Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasha Samiti (ABNBS), an organisation dedicated to promoting the Nepali language. The General Secretary of ABNBS presented a case advocating for the inclusion of Nepali in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The arguments spoke on fulfilling aspirations as over five million Indians speak Nepali as their mother tongue. Recognising Nepali would address their long-standing aspirations and alleviate feelings of exclusion and insecurity. Such inclusion would grant benefits that aid the development of a linguistic minority and foster national unity.[285]

The petition also centered on support over time as the demand for recognition has been raised for many years and has gained backing from social, cultural, and political leaders. The communication highlighted that, in December 1971, when a Member of Parliament from Darjeeling submitted a memorandum for Nepali's inclusion, seventy four MP's, including some who were current cabinet ministers, endorsed it. It also discussed the existing official status as Nepali already holds official language status in West Bengal and is the primary language for most people in Sikkim. The West Bengal Assembly had passed a resolution urging the central government to grant constitutional recognition to Nepali, and Sikkim's assembly was expected to follow suit. Earlier petitions had also been submitted. During a visit to Darjeeling on November 21, 1975, the ABNBS expressed hope that the government would honor assurances given by the former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and address the community's aspirations. However, the subsequent meeting with Morarji Desai left the ABNBS representatives disappointed.[286]

On December 11, 1977, a nationwide 'protest day 'was declared to challenge this position, with significant attention given to the hill regions within Darjeeling district. The Gorkha League,

[284] Ibid.

[285] Surendra Munshi and Tridib Kumar Chakrabarti, "National Languages Policy and the Case for Nepali," *Economic and Political Weekly* 14, no. 15 (April 14, 1979): 701–709, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4367504, 705.

[286]Ibid., 705.

however, organised its own separate and successful bandh earlier on December 5. In contrast, other political parties in Darjeeling, including the Janata Party's local unit, joined forces with numerous cultural and social organizations, student groups, trade unions, and others for a unified demonstration. This protest was deemed successful, as reflected by the large number of participants in rallies and meetings, the nonviolent nature of the event, and, most importantly, the collective support of both hill residents and those from the plains for the constitutional recognition of the Nepali language.[287]

It was observed that for a language to secure a position in the Indian Constitution, it first needed recognition by the Sahitya Akademi in New Delhi. This goal was actively pursued by several literary and political organisations, with significant contributions from notable figures such as Dr. Parasmani Pradhan and Siddharth Shankar Ray. Their collective efforts bore fruit in December 1978 when the Nepali language received official recognition. In 1977, the Congress party faced a defeat in the central elections, but by 1978, Indira Gandhi revisited Darjeeling as the Congress (I) president. During this visit, she engaged in extensive discussions with members of the Bhasa Samiti, assuring them that their demands would be seriously considered if she regained power. Although she returned as Prime Minister in 1980 following the collapse of the Janata Government, no concrete actions followed.[288]

In an effort to escalate the matter, a National Meet was convened in Delhi on November 7–8, 1981, where government representative Shri Pranab Mukherjee announced that a bill would be introduced in Parliament during its first session in 1982. Subsequently, the Bhasa Samiti held its fourth national conference from June 5–7, 1982, passing resolutions to amplify the movement at the national level. Nar Bahadur Bhandari, the Chief Minister of Sikkim at the time, pledged his full support for the inclusion of Nepali in the Constitution's Eighth Schedule. Despite continued rallies, sit-ins, and media campaigns by the Bhasa Samiti and Nepali-speaking citizens across the nation, the government remained unresponsive. Frustration grew, culminating in a three-day hunger strike beginning October 2, 1983, in multiple locations, including the national capital. This protest drew widespread attention.[289]

[287] Ibid., 705.

[288] The DC News Desk, "Nepali 'Bhasa Andolan': Re-telling the Story".

[289] Ibid.

Even after repeated memoranda and reminders to the Prime Minister, no progress was made. Following the assassination of Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984, CPIM MP Sathya Gopal Mitra tabled a bill on March 15, 1985, advocating for the language's inclusion. However, the government's assurances once again proved hollow, leading to waning hopes and disillusionment within the community. To revive momentum, the All India Nepali Language Conference was held in Gangtok on June 11–12, 1990, resulting in the establishment of a new body, the "Bharatiya Nepali Rashtriya Parishad," under Nar Bahadur Bhandari's leadership. This organisation intensified efforts, including mobilising support from Members of Parliament and meeting Prime Minister V.P. Singh on September 4, 1990. Despite detailed discussions, the government displayed little urgency.[290]

When P.V. Narasimha Rao assumed office as Prime Minister, the Parishad intensified its advocacy through nationwide seminars. In 1991, Dil Kumari Bhandari was elected as MP from Sikkim, marking a significant turning point. She introduced a private member's bill, which was debated in Parliament on April 24 and May 8, 1991. During these debates, Bhandari addressed and clarified misconceptions raised by opposing parties. Prime Minister Rao subsequently convened an all-party meeting on June 17, 1992, led by Home Minister H.B. Chauhan. With resolutions from three legislative assemblies already in place, the path for progress seemed clear. Chauhan assured that a bill proposing the inclusion of three languages would be introduced in the upcoming session.[291]

The monsoon session commenced on July 8, 1992, and the bill for Nepali's inclusion was circulated but not immediately presented. On August 19, 1992, during a heated Parliamentary debate, Dil Kumari Bhandari passionately defended the language, famously questioning, "If Nepali is a foreign language, then who am I?" Ultimately, on August 20, 1992, the Lok Sabha passed the bill to include Nepali, Konkani, and Manipuri in the Eighth Schedule with overwhelming support. Rajya Sabha MP R.B. Rai recalled the elation upon learning of the bill's passage in the Lok Sabha, describing the atmosphere of celebration among MPs, including Bhandari. The bill officially amended the Constitution, with Nepali designated as entry 11 in the restructured Eighth Schedule. Upon its passage in the Rajya Sabha, Rai expressed deep gratitude, emphasizing that the historic event fostered national unity and

[290] Ibid.

[291] Ibid.

granted Nepali-speaking citizens a distinct ethnic identity within India. The notification for this landmark decision, part of the 71st Constitutional Amendment, was issued on September 1, 1992.[292]

Professor Chakravarti and Munshi, writing in 1979, had argued that the demand for constitutional recognition of the Nepali language would addresses not only linguistic and cultural considerations but also deeper emotional and social dimensions of integration. They emphasised that the primary driver of this demand was the "sense of insecurity" felt by the Indian Nepali community. This insecurity, they argued, had grown due to the absence of a coherent language policy and doubts about the government's ability to effectively safeguard minority rights without granting Nepali constitutional recognition. By recognizing Nepali, the authors suggest, the government would reassure the community about their status and rights within India, fostering "deep emotional integration" with the national mainstream.[293]

Chakravarti and Munshi had contended that recognising Nepali would be in the larger national interest, as it would strengthen India's unity and security rather than weaken it. They warned that the continued reliance on a "technocratic" and unimaginative approach, which overlooks the social and emotional underpinnings of the Nepali demand, would risk further alienating the community. While the government has implemented certain measures for the Nepali-speaking population, the authors argue that these were insufficient as they had failed to address the root causes of insecurity. Without meaningful action, they suggest, grievances could deepen, potentially leading to social and political instability.[294]

At the time of writing, the authors highlighted that the task of recognising Nepali was both expedient and procedurally actionable. They note that resolutions from two state legislative assemblies, including West Bengal's, had already recommended Nepali's inclusion in the Eighth Schedule, providing a clear political pathway for the Central government to act. Additionally, they asserted that recognising Nepali would fall squarely within India's internal affairs and should not be influenced by external considerations. In conclusion, Chakravarti and

[292] Ibid.

[293] Munshi and Chakrabarti, "National Languages Policy and the Case for Nepali," 708.

[294] Ibid., 709.

Munshi had presented Nepali's recognition as an urgent political opportunity to address longstanding grievances and a critical step toward fostering national unity.[295]

5. Gorkhaland Movement

Phase 1 (1986-1988): The Ghising Era

Meriam Wenner in her article , *Challenging the State by Reproducing it's Principles: The Demand for "Gorkhaland betwen Regional Autonomy and the National Belonging"* [296] proposes to challenge the conventional binary that positions regionalism and nationalism in opposition. Instead of treating them as mutually exclusive or antagonistic forces, Wenner seeks to reconceptualise their relationship as interdependent and reinforcing. By arguing that ethno-regional movements for autonomy do not inherently oppose the broader framework of Indian nationalism, Wenner suggests that these movements are integral to the ongoing creation and negotiation of national identity. This approach destabilises the notion that regional demands for autonomy or recognition automatically undermine national unity. Instead, it views these movements as active participants in the production and reproduction of national consciousness.

By operating at multiple levels of society and engaging in complex processes, regional movements contribute to the pluralistic nature of the Indian nation-state, where diverse identities can coexist within a broader nationalist discourse. Wenner's framework invites a rethinking of the regional-national dichotomy, encouraging an understanding of regionalism not as a threat to nationalism but as an essential element in its evolution and sustenance. This mutual reinforcement allows for a more nuanced understanding of the layered and multi-scalar dynamics that shape the Indian state and its various identities. This section will analyse the two phases of the movement through Wenner's analysis that, "imaginative geographies endowe the demanded territory with meaning and render it an ethnospace, while presenting it as viable part of a nation."[297]

The Gorkha National Liberal Front was established on July 24, 1980, due to the deterioration of the Prantiya Sangstha,(group formed by Indra Bahadur Rai) attributed to its chaotic

[295] Ibid., 709.

[296] Miriam Wenner, "Challenging the State by Reproducing Its Principles: The Demand for 'Gorkhaland 'between Regional Autonomy and National Belonging," *Asian Ethnology* 72, no. 2 (2013): 199–220.

[297]Ibid., 199.

leadership, which was unable of generating innovative strategies beyond conventional protest plans and insufficient to maintain the youth's excitement. In the beginning of June 1980, Subhash Ghising, while on a subscription collection expedition in the Nepali-populated regions of Assam and Mizoram, obtained the opportunity to engage with few Mizo insurgents whose actions left a significant impression on him. He became convinced that a party with radicalised objectives and stance would have a greater influence than a political organisation with a conventional name and agenda. He proclaimed the establishment of the Gorkha National Liberation Front on July 24, 1980, asserting that every word of the party was meticulously selected.[298]

The objectives of the party were as follows. Firstly, the establishment of a homeland for Indian Nepalis. Secondly, the inclusion for the Nepali language under the Eighth Schedule Thirdly, the abrogation of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Friendship and last the employment of son of the soil, with a focus on increased recruiting in the military. The ethnic demands were prioritised, however, there were also economic demands, including the revitalisation of the the region, land distribution for the landless, reforestation efforts, expansion of gardens, enhancement of the hill aesthetics to promote tourism, and restoration of economic equilibrium. Separatism had been the predominant issue in the region for over four decades, however it never attained the magnitude it reached in the 1980's. Ghising's merit is in forecasting demand within the framework of identity and citizenship concerns, which incited apprehension and uncertainty within the community. The objective atmosphere across the country throughout the 1980s provided unparalleled impetus to the GNLF's action plan formulated by Ghising.[299]

In 1983, against the backdrop of the anti-foreigners agitation in the North-East, Subhash Ghising highlighted the Citizenship issue concerning Indian Nepalis by linking it to the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between India and Nepal. He contended that the treaty had significantly impacted the fate of the Indian Gorkhas by, in his words, "mixing the citizens of Nepal and India in a single basket of illusion." His primary objection was to article seven of the treaty, which provided reciprocal rights to the nationals of both countries regarding residence, property ownership, participation in trade and commerce, freedom of movement, and other privileges. Ghising argued that this arrangement effectively reduced Indian Nepalis

[298] Amiya K. Samanta, *Gorkhaland Movement: A study in Ethnic Separatism*, (New Delhi:A. P. H Publishing Corporation, 2000), 117.

[299] Ibid.,117-118.

to a status of "reciprocal citizens." In his book, Amiya K. Samanta contends that Ghising exploited widespread misconceptions surrounding the citizenship question to foster an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. Samanta further notes that the treaty of 1950 does not undermine the citizenship of Nepali settlers who arrived in India before that year, as they were granted Indian citizenship under the provisions of the 1950 Indian Citizenship Act. He also observes that the anti-foreigner agitation had become deeply entrenched and pervasive.[300]

The politics of sub-nationalism is premised on a poetics about a homeland and it's people. If nations and nationalities are *imagined communities*, it is a poetics that transforms the geography of an area into a primal, *home-like* or sacred space and transforms a people into a collectivity with imagined ties of shared origins and kinship.[301] Subhash Ghising's political movement, though framed with historical and territorial rhetoric, was fundamentally anchored in an attempt to assert the loyalty and belonging of the Indian Gorkhas to the Indian nation. His focus on land and territory, particularly the demand for Gorkhaland, was not merely about geographic or administrative autonomy but was deeply intertwined with the quest for recognition and inclusion within the national framework. By stressing historical narratives, Ghising sought to legitimise the movement and frame it as a continuation of longstanding grievances, but the underlying objective was to secure a distinct place for Indian Gorkhas within the Indian national identity.

A key aspect of Ghising's strategy was his insistence on using the term "Gorkha" rather than "Nepali," a deliberate move to differentiate between the Nepalis of Nepal and the Indian Nepalis. This distinction was crucial in highlighting the unique identity of the Indian Gorkhas, distancing them from any association with the foreign identity that the broader anti-foreigner agitation in the North-East often sought to portray. In essence, Ghising was trying to create a narrative that positioned Indian Gorkhas as distinct from foreigners, emphasising their rightful claim to Indian citizenship and their longstanding contribution to the nation. The speech Ghising delivered in Kurseong on June 2, 1985, which was widely circulated through cassettes, became a powerful tool in mobilizing support for the Gorkhaland movement. In this speech,

[300] Ibid., 126-127.

[301] Baruah, *Politics of Subnationalism: Society versus State in Assam,* in *State and Politics in India,* 500.

he made a strident case for the creation of a separate state for Gorkhas, highlighting the precariousness of the Gorkha citizenship status in India.[302]

By suggesting that Indian Gorkhas, particularly those who migrated from Nepal, could be disowned at any time, Ghising played upon the existential fears of the community. He portrayed the Gorkhas as being in a situation of entrapment, where their survival was at stake, and the creation of Gorkhaland was framed as a solution to this crisis. His rhetoric thus went beyond mere territorial claims and delved into the emotional and psychological insecurities of the community, positioning Gorkhaland as a means of securing their place within India. Amiya K. Samanta notes that while Ghising made references to the existence of microstates with small populations, his demands were not secessionist in nature.[303] Instead, Ghising sought the creation of a separate state of Darjeeling within the constitutional framework of India. This underscores that, despite his strident rhetoric and the political fervor surrounding the Gorkhaland movement, Ghising's ultimate goal was not to challenge India's territorial integrity but to affirm the Indian Gorkhas belonging within the Indian state. [304]

His invocation of territorial demands was, in this sense, a vehicle for broader identity politics aimed at securing recognition and protection for the Gorkha community. In an academic context, Ghising's movement can be understood as an articulation of sub-national identity politics that does not necessarily undermine the national project but seeks to negotiate a place within it. His emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Indian Gorkhas and their long-standing contribution to India reflects a desire for cultural recognition and political autonomy, but within the confines of the Indian nation-state. Ghising's political rhetoric, therefore, should not be viewed solely as a separatist or regionalist demand but as a complex form of identity assertion that engages with the postcolonial state's challenges in managing its diverse communities. His movement highlights the tensions between regionalism and nationalism, but also demonstrates how regional identity movements can seek to reinforce their place within the larger national framework rather than oppose it entirely.

One primary reason for the mobilisation of the Indian Nepali community, is characterised by an anxiety of belonging as term popularised by Townsend Middleton. The community's fear

[302] Samanta,*Gorkhaland Movement: A study in Ethnic Separatism,*133.

[303] Ibid., 133.

[304] Ibid., 134.

of being outsed from their homeland is primarily driven by Nepali exodus in the North East. The postcolonial era in Darjeeling witnessed a range of political demands arising from the conditions of life during that time. By the 1970s, the various Nepali-speaking communities in the region had coalesced into a strong multi-ethnic community that increasingly identified themselves as Gorkhas. Throughout this period, individuals of Nepali heritage experienced unsettling reminders of their precarious position within India. Disturbing incidents of ethnic cleansing targeting Nepali speakers occurred in Mizoram in 1967, in Assam and Meghalaya in 1979, and in Manipur in 1980, which forcefully highlighted the daily discriminations faced by Nepali speakers across the country.[305]

K. L Pradhan, in his essay *Mizoram Gorkhas: Issues and Problems* highlights that the Gorkhas settled prior to 1950 did not have nay problem until the 1980's. Before 1980 there was no restriction with regard to trade, employment, higher education, post matric scholarship, land settlement etc. It was in 1980's that the problem persisted. He attributes the cause to a wave of migration from Nepal who were engaged primarily as labour force, cowherders and lumberjacks. These events underscored the challenges and struggles faced by Nepali-speaking communities in asserting their rights, preserving their cultural identities, and securing a sense of belonging within the larger Indian context. The experiences of ethnic cleansing and discrimination not only posed immediate threats but also created a sense of vulnerability and marginalisation for the Nepali-speaking population.

Middleton notes how these events instilled a lingering sense of unease among the people of Darjeeling, which continues to shape and influence the sociopolitical dynamics in the region.During this time, the language committee also took steps to advocate for language recognition. In the 1970's and early 1980's, regional political organisations such as the AIGL and the Pranta Parishad expressed their aspirations for ethnic autonomy, though their attempts did not succeed. The rise in ethnic violence against Nepalis in the North-East, combined with ongoing structural marginalization that left the people of Darjeeling both physically and symbolically excluded within the nation-state, strengthened the belief that the Gorkhas of Darjeeling required a distinct territory of their own.[306]

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[305] Michael J Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan,* (New Delhi:Oxford University Press, 2003).

[306] Townsend Middleton and Sara Shneiderman, eds. *Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories, Politics, Environment,* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 12.

The movement, which took place between 1986 and 1988, was marked by significant violence and resulted in the loss of approximately 1,200 lives. In 1988, a trilateral agreement led to the establishment of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), which functioned as the highest administrative body overseeing district, village, and municipal governance. While the DGHC lacked legislative and policing authority, it was granted control over development funds and economic planning, receiving substantial financial support from the central government. As part of the 1988 agreement, the GNLF officially abandoned its demand for a separate Gorkhaland state and agreed to disarm in return for the rehabilitation of its fighters.[307]

Phase 2 (2007)

In September 2007, the victory of Prashant Tamang, a local from Darjeeling, on the television show *Indian Idol* , brought immense joy to the Indian Nepali community. His win was more than just a personal achievement it symbolised a rare moment of visibility for the Indian Nepali Community on India's national stage, a community often confined to the margins of both geographical and social landscapes. For the community, who had long struggled against the stereotypes that Tamang's victory represented a form of cultural recognition that transcended their everyday struggles. However, this moment of celebration quickly soured when a radio DJ in New Delhi made a series of offensive remarks. The Disc Jockey joked with his listeners that with Tamang's win, there would be no Nepali left to serve momos or guard their homes[308], comments that tapped into widespread stereotypes of Gorkhas as subservient, menial workers catering to the upper echelons of Indian society.

These remarks were not isolated, they embodied the latent racism and cultural ignorance that had long plagued the Gorkha community. What had initially been a source of collective pride turned into a stark reminder of their persistent marginalisation. The stereotypical image of Gorkhas as *chowkidars* (watchmen) reduced them to roles of servitude, overshadowing their diverse contributions to the nation. The reaction to these derogatory comments was swift and widespread, igniting a wave of protests across the hills of Darjeeling. The Gorkha community,

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[307] Bethany Lacina, *Electoral Competition and the Gorkhaland Movement* in *Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories, Politics, Environment* , eds. Townsend Middleton and Sara Shneiderman, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 104.

[308] Townsend Middleton, "Until Gorkhaland: Agitation in the Remains." In *Quinine's Remains: Empire's Medicine and the Life Thereafter*, 1st ed., 76–96. University of California Press, 2024. http://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.12949123.9.

already sensitive to its fraught identity within India, rallied in defense of not only Tamang but also their dignity. Thousands of supporters took to the streets, with a large group marching to Siliguri on September 28 to file a complaint against the DJ in the court. [309]

What began as a peaceful demonstration soon devolved into a violent confrontation. A scuffle broke out at the head of the procession, and soon after, a Bengali mob retaliated against the Gorkha protesters. The clash revealed underlying ethnic tensions in the region, where the relationship between the Gorkhas and the Bengali majority had often been strained due to historical and territorial disputes. Amidst the escalating violence, around eight hundred Gorkha protesters found themselves cornered, seeking refuge within the courthouse grounds. The image of bricks raining over courthouse walls and vehicles set ablaze symbolised the vulnerability of the Gorkha community, not just in that moment but in a broader social sense. It was only when the army intervened that the violence subsided, with the Gorkhas finally freed from their besieged position.[310] This incident highlighted the precarious position of the Gorkha community, where even in moments of triumph, they were reminded of their status as outsiders. The violence in Siliguri, fueled by inter-ethnic tensions, underscored the deeply ingrained social divisions particularly in the region. The event served as a poignant reminder that, despite moments of recognition, the deeper struggles of marginalised communities often remain unresolved, simmering beneath the surface of public consciousness.

Organizations like the All Gorkha Student Union (AGSU) quickly associated the events with the ongoing, unresolved demand for Gorkhaland. On September 30, AGSU issued a statement: "The recent riots in Siliguri have pushed us to raise our voices. The incident has made us realise that Gorkhas are not safe. We are constantly required to prove our identity in this country. This is happening because we don't have our own land... The Gorkhas need a land of their own!"[311] Just over a week after the riots, on October 7, more than twenty thousand Gorkhas gathered in Darjeeling to form a new political movement, the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM). Headed by Bimal Gurung, a former GNLF leader, the party promised to achieve what the GNLF had failed to, Gorkhaland. Seizing the momentum, the GJM forcefully removed Subash Ghisingh and the GNLF from power.

[309] Townsend Middleton, "Until Gorkhaland: Agitation in Remains", 89.

[310] Ibid., 89.

[311] Ibid., 89.

In her doctoral dissertation, Miriam Wenner examines how Gurung consolidated power, identifying two key factors contributing to his ascent. The resources he had at his disposal (such as knowledge, networks, and financial means) and his reputation as a generous, robust, and competent leader. His ability to employ force, or muscle power, is tied to his perceived strength, bravery, competence, and directness, alongside his generosity as a readily accessible social worker. These traits are deeply rooted in Gurung's personal history and how the community views it. While residents of Darjeeling and its surrounding areas were familiar with Gurung well before his challenge to Ghisingh, others came to know him through the Prashant Tamang campaign.[312]

She further notes Gurung's vision for a new dawn was marked by his declaration to pursue the Gorkhaland movement through a democratic, non-violent, and Gandhian approach, distinguishing it from Ghisingh's violent revolt of 1986. Gurung framed his leadership as one that would transcend party politics and prioritize inclusivity, with the people positioned at the top, holding leaders accountable. His rhetoric drew on the concept of the S*achet Janta* meaning the enlightened and vigilant citizenry, who would no longer tolerate being misled by their leaders. These promises directly appealed to those who had felt marginalised and overlooked during Ghisingh's two-decade-long rule. At the same time, he escalated the Gorkhaland agitation, primarily through acts of civil disobedience aimed at the communist-led West Bengal state government.[313]

Interparty violence, intimidation, and coercion became central to the GJM's hold on power. Initially, Bimal Gurung, backed by significant popular support, led the movement with a bold slogan: "Gorkhaland or death."[314] However, as the years of agitation continued with little progress, the GJM's effectiveness came into question. Leaders from opposing factions, such as Madan Tamang of the AIGL, criticised the GJM for its unfulfilled promises, especially as the movement seemed to be heading towards another administrative compromise. This arrangement resembled the DGHC, which had marked the end of the first Gorkhaland Movement in 1988. Both administrative structures concentrated power in the hands of a single

[312] Mirriam Wenner, *Monopolising a statehood movement: Gorkhaland Between Authoritative parties and Aware citizen*s, (Ph.D Diss, Zurich University, 2015), 148.

[313] Ibid, 153.

[314] Sara Shneiderman, Townsend Middleton, *Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories, environment and Politics*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 16.

leader (first Ghisingh, then Gurung) without delivering meaningful political or economic reforms that could benefit the wider public. As the GJM's shortcomings became more apparent, they began suppressing opposition voices. On May 21, 2010, in an attempt to idstifle democratic opposition, a GJM mob attacked Madan Tamang and his party, resulting in his murder in broad daylight in the center of Darjeeling.[315] Such political crimes and intimidation tactics were the hallmark of Gurung's reign.

(2017)

The agitation against the imposition of Bengali Language in schools in Darjeeling quickly turned into a full-scale movement for Gorkhaland, leading to widespread violence, multiple casualties, and a 104-day shutdown that crippled Northern Bengal. The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), after winning most hill municipalities in the May civic polls, faced resistance from the Trinamool Congress, which made gains in the region. Protests erupted in June, with GJM leader Bimal Gurung reigniting the demand for Gorkhaland. Violent clashes, police shootings, and an indefinite strike followed, forcing the government to deploy the army. The unrest intensified after three protesters were killed, leading to widespread support for Gorkhaland from other hill parties. As the shutdown dragged on, internal rifts emerged within GJM. Leaders Binay Tamang and Anit Thapa were expelled for partially withdrawing the strike but gained control in Gurung's absence . Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee appointed Tamang to lead hill development. After talks with the government and Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, the strike was called off after 104 days, though tensions persisted, with Gurung went into hiding.[316]

The primary moive behind these movements can be traced to the fundamental desire for belonging and securing a legitimate place as citizens within the nation. On a broader scale, this yearning reflects an existential struggle for recognition. However, these movements often manifest episodically, frequently ignited by incidents of cultural marginalisation, which are exacerbated by politicised rhetoric. Regardless, it is within this imagined homeland that a resolution to the myriad identity-related dilemmas is sought. Consequently, while these

[315] Shneiderman, Middleton, *Darjeeling Reconsidered*, 16.

[316] *The Indian Express*, "2017: The Year When Darjeeling Hills Simmered in Gorkhaland Movement," December 26, 2017. Accessed September 18, 2024. https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/Dec/26/2017-the-year-when-darjeeling-hills-simmered-in-gorkhaland-movement-1737026.html.

movements may be co-opted for political gain by various actors, at their core lies a profound aspiration for autonomy and belonging. The people, despite recurrent failures, remain deeply invested, participating with unwavering commitment.

6. Tribal/ *Jan Jati* Movement

Origin, Hinduism and the Muluki Ain

Nepal consisted of numerous small and divided principalities, inhabited by diverse caste and ethnic communities. During the mid eighteen century, Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ambitious ruler of the Gorkha region, sought to unify these fragmented territories into a single political entity. His efforts transformed the region into what became known as a Hindu kingdom. This transformation imposed an orthodox Hindu caste structure on Nepal's varied ethnic groups, complicating efforts to redefine Nepalese identity. The kingdom's establishment as a Hindu nation was not an organic or spiritual occurrence but a result of political strategies employed by the Shah and Rana dynasties. These rulers reinforced their vision of a Hindu state by promoting the Nepali language, sidelining others like Newari and other ethnic tongues. Consequently, Nepal's identity was shaped more by political motivations than divine purpose, though religion played a critical role in defining the connection between the monarchy and its people.[317]

Migration from Nepal, like elsewhere, has historically been influenced by a combination of factors that either pushed people to leave or pulled them to new regions. In the late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries, movement predominantly headed eastward, resulting in lasting settlements beyond Nepal's present boundaries. This shift aligned with the spread of Nepali language, Brahmanical dominance, and agricultural techniques such as plough farming and maize cultivation. The Shah kings of Gorkha furthered this migration during their eighteenth century unification efforts. However, the process began centuries earlier with the establishment of the Karnali basin kingdom by the Khasa dynasty, whose rulers likely spoke a precursor to modern Nepali. Over time, the Khasa lineage intermarried with Rajput settlers and local Kshetri communities, gradually extending their cultural and political influence eastward. This

[317] Sangay Tamang, Hoineilhing Sitlhou, " Identity, Contestation and Ethnic Revivalism among Nepalis in Darjeeling", *Economic and Political Weekly* 53, no. 1, (January 6, 2018): 33.

expansion led to the assimilation of native groups, the decline of Tibeto-Burman languages, and the establishment of a more unified Parbatiya identity.[318]

In eastern Nepal, the eastward movement gained momentum following Gorkhali annexation of Kiranti-inhabited territories, home to Rai and Limbu communities. By 1780, the Gorkhalis had taken control of the Darjeeling hills and parts of western Sikkim, maintaining authority until 1816. They encouraged Parbatiya farmers to relocate to less populated areas in the east, which put pressure on indigenous lands and prompted many locals to migrate. Financial hardships, worsened by taxation changes requiring cash payments, caused widespread economic distress, leading the government to suspend loan repayments for a decade in 1834. According to historian Pradhan, twelve to fifteen percentage of the Kiranti population moved from eastern Nepal to Darjeeling between 1840 and 1860. Citing a Limbu manuscript, Imansingh Chemjong's account of Vijaypur notes that Gorkhali actions against local leaders led to the displacement of approximately 32,000 Limbus who settled in Sikkim, Darjeleing and Assam.[319]

Tamang and Sithlou further note how the roots of Hinduism in Nepal can be traced back to the Lichhavi period (450–750 CE) and further solidified during the Malla dynasty (750–1482 CE) which goes even before Prithvi Naryan Shaw. However, it was under the Gorkha rulers that Hinduism became a key tool for reinforcing social order and the authority of the monarchy. The kingdom adopted a hierarchical structure based on four social divisions (varnas) and thirty castes (jats), with Prithvi Narayan Shah's *Divya Upadesh* serving as the ideological foundation. These doctrines eventually influenced Nepal's legal system, culminating in the introduction of the *Muluki Ain* by Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana in 1854.[320]

During the authoritarian Rana rule (1846–1951), Nepalese society was structured according to strict traditional Hindu principles. The legal framework was formalised through the *Muluki Ain* of 1854, which sought to integrate the Dharmashastras into both civil and criminal law across Nepal's diverse population. Under this system, all social groups were classified as jat, but the legal and judicial system enforced significant distinctions. At the apex of this hierarchy were

[318] Michael Hutt, "Being Nepali without Nepal" in *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in a Hindu Kingdom*, ed., David N Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and John Whelpton, (Netherlands:Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 109.

[319] Hutt, "Being Nepali without Nepal", 111.

[320] Tamang, Sitlhou, "Identity, Contestation and Ethnic Revivalism among Nepalis in Darjeeling", 34.

the Tagadhari, those entitled to wear the sacred thread who formed the societal elite. Below them were the Matwali, or alcohol-consuming groups, which encompassed various subordinated communities. [321]

These groups were further categorised into enslaveable and non-enslaveable subgroups, as well as into "clean" castes and "untouchables." Most of the present-day ethnic minorities, often referred to as "tribal," were part of the Matwali category but were considered "clean." Within this classification, some groups were enslaveable, while others were exempt from enslavement. In some cases, members of the Matwali communities could advance to the non-enslaveable category if their leaders possessed sufficient influence or connections. This process of upward mobility was gradual, with a few Matwali groups attaining non-enslaveable status over time, which also granted them the legal right to be recruited into certain positions.[322]

The caste system in Nepal became increasingly inflexible over time, with political and economic authority concentrated in the hands of the upper-caste Bahuns (Brahmins). This dominance enabled them to exert significant control, resulting in the displacement of numerous ethnic communities from their ancestral lands. Many of these displaced groups found Darjeeling, located in British-controlled India, to be a favorable location for resettlement.[323] While the broader history of migration from Nepal requires separate exploration, favoritism and nepotism based on caste during the Shah and Rana regimes forced various ethnic and caste communities to abandon their lands. These uprooted individuals eventually became a source of inexpensive labour for the burgeoning capitalist industries in British India.[324]

Mona Chettri describes Darjeeling's transformation from a sparsely inhabited area with Lepcha, Magar, and Limbu communities to one of India's most renowned hill stations, deeply intertwined with the legacy of British colonialism. The modern district of Darjeeling, located in northern West Bengal, emerged from lands once ruled by the Himalayan kingdoms of Bhutan and Sikkim. In the late eighteen century, as British trade expanded, tea emerged as a highly lucrative commodity. Following the success of tea plantations in Assam, Darjeeling

[321] David. N. Gellner, " Caste, Ethnicity and Inequality in Nepal", *Economic and Political Weekly*. May 19, 2007, 1823.

[322] Ibid.,1823.

[323] Tamang, Sitlhou, " Identity, Contestation and Ethnic Revivalism among Nepalis in Darjeeling", 34.

[324] Ibid., 34.

experienced rapid growth in its tea industry. Alongside tea, the cultivation of cinchona also flourished, turning the region into a critical site for colonial ventures and establishing it as a frontier settlement under British control. The development of plantations, recruitment into the British army, and the creation of various other industries drew waves of migration, especially from eastern Nepal, where people sought to escape debt and economic hardships under the oppressive Gorkha monarchy.[325]

The promise of prosperity in tea cultivation popularised by phrases like "money grows on tea plants" (*chiyako botma paisa phalcha*) enticed many to move eastward, viewing Darjeeling as a viable alternative to their struggles under the Gorkha regime. However, their migration brought little relief, as they merely traded one form of socio-economic exploitation for another, moving from the suppressive Gorkhali rule to the exploitative system of British colonialism.[326] The Indian Nepalis who had embraced a homogenous identity of " Indian Nepalis" or adopted the political category of the "Gorkha" are a conglomerate of different ethnic groups. Post independence these groups gave primacy to the Nepali language which served as the *lingua franca* which was accompanied by mobilisations for autonomy. However the subsequent failures of the statehood movement have paved the way for embracing alternative identities of tribes. These groups by embracing their indigenous identities are advocating for tribal status which will provide them with a plethora of opportunities and find a place in the institution of the modern liberal state. This section will explore the tribal movement also known as the *janjati* movement in Darjeeling.

In the post-independence era, Rajni Kothari argues that a centralising political structure has been a defining feature of India's recent political course. He suggests that the growing involvement of the state has led to significant shifts in the social fabric. This expansion of governmental influence, which he refers to as 'governmentalism, 'results in the redefinition of political identities. However, Kothari does not view this transformation as a threat to national unity. Instead of the emergence of entirely new ethnic identities, existing ones are rearticulated within a political context. Once framed in these terms, these identities are able to coexist and adjust through typical political negotiations. In contrast to common assumptions about an "identity crisis" in societies lacking a unified national identity, Kothari asserts that it is

[325] Mona Chettri, " Choosing the Gorkha: At the Crossroads of Class and Ethnicity in Darjeeling Hills," *Asian Ethnicity* 14. no.3(2013): 294., DOI: 10.1080/14631369.2013.764763

[326] Ibid., 294.

precisely through the political expression of distinct identities that a more enduring pattern of social integration is achievable.[327]

Owing significantly to the advocacy of the Mandal Commission, the Indian government undertook a significant overhaul of its reservation policies, which had long remained stagnant. In 1980, B.P. Mandal's report brought fresh momentum to the practice of allocating a portion of government jobs and public university seats to marginalised groups. Although a similar system had been in place since 1950, it was not until the introduction of updated benefits in the 1990's that tangible advantages began to reach communities categorised as Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), or Other Backward Classes (OBC). For the first time, membership in one of these classifications could meaningfully influence an individual's prospects in education or employment. Among the Nepali-speaking population of Darjeeling, disillusionment with the unfulfilled promises of the Gorkhaland movement led many to pursue recognition as a Scheduled Tribe, offering an alternative route to secure entitlements from the central government. [328] In the words of Turin and Shneiderman, " This also meant dismanting the sacred cow of pan-Nepali identity in favour of many discreete tribal identities."[329]

Over the course of two centuries, the shared experiences of the Nepali diaspora in Darjeeling led to the erosion of distinct ethnic, linguistic, and regional identities, giving way to a unified sense of Nepaliness rooted in the Nepali language. By the 1990's, as the significance of tribal identity grew, groups of Nepali descent from Darjeeling and Sikkim began reconnecting with ancestral identities that had become unfamiliar over time. Residents of Darjeeling ventured into Nepal's midhills, retracing the routes of their migrant fore fathers , seeking cultural resources to support their campaigns for tribal recognition in India. Simultaneously, ethnic organisations in both regions initiated interactions with seasonal workers from their own communities who maintained ties between Nepal and India through frequent migration.[330]

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[327] Rajani Kothari, *Politics in India*, (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), 247 in *Political Identities in South Asia*, eds. Malcom Yapp and David Young, (New York: Curzon Press Ltd, Routledge, 1979), 18.

[328] Sara Shneiderman and Mark Turin, "Seeking the Tribe: Ethnopolitics in Darjeeling and Sikkim," *Himal Southasian*, March-April 2006, 55.

[329] Ibid., 55.

[330] Ibid., 55-56.

The timing of these developments is significant. The push for tribal recognition has coincided with a global surge in indigenous movements, most notably the uprisings in Latin America during the 1990's. These movements elevated issues of culture, identity, and difference to international prominence. In response, the United Nations declared 1995-2004 as "A Decade for Indigenous People," establishing the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples in 2000 and adopting the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. This global discourse on indigeneity has become a powerful tool for marginalised groups worldwide. Although the Indian government refrains from legally recognising indigeneity, using terms like "tribal" and "adivasi" instead, tribal movements in India have actively engaged with the global indigenous rights framework. Over the past two decades, indigeneity has emerged as a central theme in minority politics across South Asia.[331]

Domestically, the growing demands for affirmative action have paralleled the liberalisation and privatisation of India's economy. As neoliberal reforms have deepened inequalities, more communities have turned to the state for support. This places the Indian government in a difficult position. On one hand, it cannot abandon its welfare commitments, rooted in its post-independence socialist legacy, without provoking widespread unrest. On the other hand, it remains committed to integrating India into the global neoliberal economy, which ideally requires the state to reduce its role in daily governance. This tension reflects the postcolonial state's ongoing struggle to balance its socialist past, the expectations of its citizens, and its neoliberal aspirations.[332]

Prior to colonial rule, there was no overarching term to collectively define tribal communities. Anthropologists argue that the concepts of "caste" and "tribe" emerged as constructs shaped by colonial powers, with the British solidifying these identities through systems of categorisation and record-keeping. The awareness of tribes across India as a unified and distinct entity is a modern phenomenon, fostered by colonial governance and reinforced by the post-independence state.[333] Nicholas Dirks in his foreward in Bernard Cohns, *Colonialism and it's Forms of Knowledge: The British in India,* writes on how the cultural dimensions of

[331] Townsend Middleton, *The Demands of Recognition: State Anthropology and Ethnopolitics in Darjeeling,* (Standford, California: Standford University Press, 2016), 10.

[332] Ibid., 11.

[333] Virginius Xaxa, *State, Society, and Tribes: Issues in Post-Colonial India,* (New Delhi:Pearson Longman, 2016), 1.

colonialism have often been overlooked or reduced to the narrative of inevitable modernisation and global capitalism. However, colonialism itself was fundamentally a cultural mechanism of domination. Colonial rule not only relied on knowledge for its expansion but also actively generated it. [334]

This knowledge reshaped and redefined cultural forms in societies newly labeled as "traditional," constructing new binaries between rulers and subjects, Europeans and Asians, modernity and tradition, the West and the East. Furthermore, Cohn suggests that the study of colonial states must be intertwined with the broader historical study of modern nation-states. Colonial administrations served as arenas for experimentation, where practices like record-keeping, representation, and certification turned information into a tool of governance and power.[335] Nilamber Chettri asserts that for over a century, ethnicity has operated as the central lens through which key demands in Darjeeling have been expressed. Both in the colonial era and after independence, the aspirations of the region's population were framed in ethnic terms. Yet, these demands have shifted considerably over time due to changes in political dynamics and the state's engagement with them. Therefore, to fully grasp the unfolding ethnopolitical scenario in Darjeeling, one must adopt a diachronic approach that considers the development, maintenance, and eventual decline of ethnic associations, alongside shifts in the nature of their demands. Repeated movements by ethnic groups to gain recognition and visibility before the state have shaped ethnic identities and opened new discursive spaces for identity politics.[336]

An investigative modality encompasses the identification of necessary information, the methods by which relevant knowledge is gathered, and the processes of organizing and classifying that data. It also involves transforming the collected knowledge into practical formats such as published reports, statistical data, historical accounts, gazetteers, legal frameworks, and encyclopedias. Some investigative practices within the colonial framework were broad in nature, such as historiography and museology, while others focused on specific tasks like identifying and documenting archaeological sites. More structured modalities, like the survey and census, were explicitly tied to administrative functions. Most of these

[334] Foreword by Nicholas. B. Dirks in Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and It's forms of knowledge : The British in India*, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1996).

[335] Ibid.

[336] Nilamber Chettri, *The Politics of Ethnic Renewal in Darjeeling: Gorkhas and the Struggle for Tribal Recognition*, (London:New York, Routledge Publications, 2023).

investigative approaches were developed in connection with institutional and bureaucratic processes that followed fixed routines. Over time, certain modalities evolved into formal sciences such as economics, ethnology, tropical medicine, comparative law, and cartography, with their practitioners becoming recognized as professionals in these emerging fields.[337]

Nilamber Chettri accounts how the campaign for Scheduled Tribe (ST) recognition in Darjeeling began with the Tamangs, who advocated through organisations such as the All-India Tamang Buddhist Association (AITBA) and Akhil Bharatiya Tamang Baudha Sangh (ABTBS). AITBA submitted early petitions for their inclusion on the ST list. Around the same time, the Limbus also began organising for similar recognition, establishing branches in key areas like Siliguri, Kurseong, Darjeeling, Dooars, and Mirik. These efforts focused on cultural revitalisation, including the preservation of language, traditions, and scripts, and were reinforced by the dissemination of literature that highlighted their identity. The movement gained further traction with the establishment of the All India Limbu (Subba) Tribal Association in 1993. In 1996, the West Bengal government recommended adding the Limbus to the ST list. This broader ethnic revival in the hills accelerated after the Limbus and Tamangs were officially granted Scheduled Tribe status in 2003.[338]

Discussions on implementing the Sixth Schedule in Darjeeling gained traction in the early 2000s, driven by demands for Scheduled Tribe (ST) recognition and GNLF activism. Subash Ghisingh initially opposed separate ST classifications, advocating instead for the collective recognition of all Gorkhas as a unified tribal group. However, after the Tamangs and Limbus were granted ST status, he shifted his focus to securing Sixth Schedule status for Darjeeling, despite the region's tribal population being below the required threshold. Ghisingh argued that the Gorkhas shared a common tribal culture rooted in traditional practices and nature worship. His campaign led to the approval of a new Sixth Schedule-based Council in 2005, with the West Bengal Assembly supporting the proposal in 2006. Nevertheless, the plan faced widespread public resistance, as many saw it as a weak compromise that undermined the larger Gorkhaland movement.[339] This also led to the end of Ghising's reign, succeeded by his former associate Gurung.

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[337] Cohn, *Colonialism and It's Forms of Knowledge:The British in India,* 5.

[338] Chettri, *The Politics of Ethnic Renewal in Darjeeling: Gorkhas and the Struggle for Tribal Recognition,* 68-67.

[339] Ibid., 69-70.

By 2011, the hopeful momentum that had characterised the tribal uprisings of 2006–07 and the Gorkhaland Movement (2008–11) had dissipated, replaced by a sobering recognition of the limitations of these identity-based struggles. The proposal for inclusion under the Sixth Schedule had been abandoned, and there was a growing resignation to the fact that the realisation of Gorkhaland remained an unattainable goal for the time being.The 2014 elections reignited hopes for Gorkhaland while highlighting tribal identity politics within Darjeeling, shaped by West Bengal's power dynamics. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) promised Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to Darjeeling's "left-out" communities, aiming to attract votes and weaken the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha's (GJM) dominance. However, this strategy carried counter-insurgency undertones, as Banerjee opposed Gorkhaland. Her promises sought to fracture GJM's support and diminish demands for statehood.[340]

Despite these efforts, the BJP, which supported Gorkhaland, defeated the TMC candidate, signaling enduring support for the movement. However, fulfilling the ST promise remains uncertain, as ST designation falls outside Banerjee's direct authority, though informal pathways to recognition exist. Additionally, Banerjee created Development and Cultural Boards for the Lepcha and Tamang communities in 2013-2014. These semi-autonomous bodies safeguarded tribal welfare while bypassing the GJM-led Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), thereby eroding its influence. These boards exemplified a counter-insurgency strategy to divide Gorkhas, weaken the Gorkhaland movement, and maintain West Bengal's territorial integrity.[341]

In April 2016, the Union tribal affairs ministry established a committee led by then joint secretary Ashok Pai to examine the demand for ST status. However, Pai's subsequent transfer resulted in Vishu Maini, the ministry's deputy director-general, assuming leadership. Maini and other committee members conducted a field survey in Darjeeling in November.[342] As per the BJP's pledge in its 2019 Lok Sabha and 2021 assembly election manifestos, the classification of the tribes is integral to addressing the Gorkha issue by providing a Permanent

[340] Middleton, *The Demands of Recognition,* 114.

[341] Ibid., 115.

[342] Basant Kumar Mohanty, "Relook at Gorkha ST Status Plea," *The Telegraph Online,* June 15, 2017, Accessed September 10, 2024. https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/relook-at-gorkha-st-status-plea/cid/1325212.

Political Solution (PPS).These tribes include Gurung, Mangar, Rai, Sunwar, Mukhia, Jogi, Thami, Yakha, Bahun, Chettri, and Newar. Addressing the rally, Bista emphasised the strategic significance of the Darjeeling hills, Terai, and Dooars from a national security perspective.He highlighted the region's importance as a key tourism destination, the second-largest tea producer in the country, a hub for hydro-development, cinchona, medicinal plants, and a potential hub for cross-border trade and commerce, referring to it as a "golden duck."[343]

In 2021 the Print had reported that the central government is considering granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to eleven hill-tribe communities in the Darjeeling, Terai, and Dooars regions, fulfilling a longstanding demand by the indigenous population. This move aligns with the BJP's promise of a permanent political solution (PPS) for the Gorkha issue, as mentioned in their 2019 and 2021 election manifestos. BJP MP Raju Bista from Darjeeling emphasised that the government is actively working on this matter, aiming to correct what he described as a "historic injustice," where 11 Gorkha sub-tribes, previously classified as hill tribes, were left out of the ST list after independence. The recognition of these tribes would allow them access to various state benefits. This action is part of a larger strategy by the BJP to strengthen its influence in north Bengal, where the party won six Lok Sabha seats in 2019.[344]

Meanwhile, BJP's political opponents, such as both factions of the Gorkhaland Janmukti Morcha (GJM), dismiss the promises as a bluff, citing the need for significant amendments to the Registrar General of India (RGI) rules before any progress can be made. Additionally, the factions note that the necessary administrative steps have not yet been completed. The demand for greater autonomy, such as union territory status for the region, and an audit of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration funds have also been raised by local leaders. However, critics argue that while the BJP speaks of change, no concrete action has been taken to amend the required regulations for ST inclusion. In sum, while the BJP is pushing the recognition of Gorkha sub-tribes as ST's to consolidate political support, opposition factions claim the initiative lacks substance and is primarily aimed at garnering votes.[345]

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[343] Ibid.

[344] Ibid.

[345] Madhuparna Das, "11 Bengal Hill Tribes Will 'Definitely Get ST Status 'as Govt Works on Gorkhaland Solution," *The Print*, July 16, 2021, 11:03 a.m. Accessed September 21, 2024. https://theprint.in/politics/11-bengal-hill-tribes-will-definitely-get-st-status-as-govt-works-on-gorkhaland-solution/696689/.

Darjeeling MP Raju Bista stated on 21st April 2024 that Union Home Minister Shah has assured him that the re-inclusion of 11 left-out Gorkha sub-tribes in the Scheduled Tribe list was "under consideration" by the Centre. Shah, who was slated to attend an election rally at Gorkha Stadium in Lebong, Darjeeling, was unable to do so as his helicopter could not land due to inclement weather. In a telephonic conversation with Bista, Shah affirmed that the "BJP is the sole party committed to ensuring peace, progress, and development in the region." He assured that "the people of Darjeeling hills, Terai, and Dooars will receive justice under the Constitution of India".[346]

When viewed through this prism, the emergence of ethnic demands in Darjeeling can be linked to the objectifying and enumerative practices characteristic of colonial governance, practices that have persisted into the post-colonial period. The contemporary ethnic revival in Darjeeling, particularly the push for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, has its roots in colonial systems of classification. These classificatory practices especially the creation of categories such as tribes have deeply influenced the discourse on ethnic claims and counterclaims. Today's political context in Darjeeling illustrates the complex relationship between colonial anthropology and governance in shaping ethnic classifications and the ongoing politics of recognition.[347]

The primary thrust in the movement for recognition as a tribe is to portray one's group as both 'backward 'and 'primitive. 'Not only are the groups classed as OBC involved, but also the former upper castes are actively engaged in this race for tribalism. Within this milieu the term backward denotes not deprivation and a lack, but an opportunity for state entitlements and benefits. Most of these ethnic demands peaked at the aftermath of the two successive waves of Gorkhaland movement. The momentum garnered in the course of the Gorkhaland movement was diverted towards the movement for tribal recognition. The spills over effects of Gorkhaland were crucial in strengthening these discrete ethnic struggles.[348]

The discourse of tribalism in Darjeeling has generated a space within which identity and alterity are produced simultaneously. This has engendered a complex politics of difference that

[346] Damien Lepcha, *Inclusion of 11 Gorkha sub-tribes in ST list under consideration,* https://www.eastmojo.com/national/2024/04/22/inclusion-of-11-gorkha-sub-tribes-in-st-list-under-consideration/

[347] Chettri, *The Politics of Ethnic Renewal in Darjeeling: Gorkhas and the Struggle for Tribal Recognition,*67.

[348] Ibid., 80.

continues to have unintended social consequences for the individual ethnic groups in question and the Gorkha community at large. Although Darjeeling's tribal politics have been shaped by the structures of affirmative action, these ethnopolitical movements also indicate a deeper desire to know about one's past culture and tradition. With an eye towards ethnic rights and renewal, communities seeking ST status have asserted their identities by reviving their historical genealogies and revitalising traditional practices.[349]

Conclusion

This chapter finds that the concepts of state, nation, and nationalism, collectively referred to as the trinity shape the contours of cultural pluralism and political reality. Communities and groups, therefore, organise themselves around these frameworks to secure their position within the national imagination. Scholars such as Partha Chatterjee and Sudipta Kaviraj critique the limitations of Indian nationalism, highlighting its inherent exclusions. Baruah complements this critique by demonstrating how the state seeks to monopolise the collective imagination of its citizens while making attempts to acknowledge diversity. Consequently, it becomes incumbent upon communities to navigate this dynamic by organising themselves around the idea of the state while simultaneously negotiating their place within the broader national imagination, a process often facilitated through political mobilisation. This chapter has looked into how the Indian Nepali community has mobilised around diverse ideas and institutions of the state to claim a space in this imagination. Specifically, it has studied three significant movements, the subnational demand for *Gorkhaland*, the recognition of the Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule, and the push for tribal (*Janjati*) status for eleven ethnic groups.

The Gorkhaland movement when analysed through Baruah's perspective, finds it not as a threat to national unity but as an effort to accommodate new imaginings of citizenship. This movement, rooted in postcolonial citizenship, reflects how minorities seek recognition by proposing alternative notions of national identity and belonging that honour their distinctiveness. Brass's observations on ethnic identity provide an additional lens as ethnic groups often mobilise around cultural symbols and traditions, selecting those elements that foster unity and serve their collective interests. This is evident in the history of the Gorkhaland movement, beginning with the 1907 demand for a separate administrative setup by the Hillmen's Association to foster "hill ethnicity." Subsequent political organisations, such as the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) and later the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) under

[349] Ibid., 128.

Subhash Ghising, leveraged ethnic identity to articulate demands for statehood. Ghising's political trajectory and the rise of Bimal Gurung illustrate how the promise of Gorkhaland remains a unifying and mobilising symbol for the community and is often used by political elites to mobilise the masses at the same time fulfill their political aspirations and ends.

In lieu with the above framework, a new political party Indian Gorkha Janashakti Front ((IGJF) was launched in Darjeeling hills on Sunday (December 22, 2024) with the demand of creation of a separate State of Gorkhaland as its primary agenda. Ajoy Edwards, a prominent leader of Darjeeling hills, who merged his Hamro Party with IGJF, has been appointed as a convenor of the new political outfit. The development assumes significance as the politics of the Darjeeling hills has been centred on the issue of Gorkhaland for the past several decades. The leaders behind the new political outfit asessing a vacuum in the political space in Darjeeling hills, seek to challenge the Anit Thapa led Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGPM). The BGPM, which administers the regional autonomous Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, is perceived to be close to the ruling Trinamool Congress.[350]

After announcing the launch of the party, Mr. Edwards suggested that the new outfit will remain equidistant from both the State and the Centre. While BGPM, with the support of Trinamool Congress, administers the GTA, the Darjeeling hills have been electing BJP MP's to the Lok Sabha over the past two decades. The IGJF has attracted prominent names from the hills such as former IPS officer Norbu Tshering and leaders like Pradeep Pradhan, Prakash Gurung, Yogendra Rai and N.B. Khawash. A day after the launch, BGPM leader and GTA chairperson Anit Thapa said that it is an old idea that any party that raises Gorkhaland issues will flourish, "Gorkhaland is not an issue of any one party. Gorkhaland is a demand of the Gorkha community. It does not mean that if any political party makes Gorkhaland an issue and does politics, it will get Gorkhaland," Thapa remarked that one leader repeatedly starting a new party in the Darjeeling hills is unique and he wishes them all the best for the thinking they have in starting a party.[351] Henceforth it can be concluded how ethnicity has always remained the fundamental mobilising agenda for political parties, as well as meeting their political ends.

[350] Shiv Sahay Singh, "New Political Party Announced in Darjeeling Hills, to Push for Gorkhaland," *The Hindu,* December 24, 2024, 6:17am, accessed on January 6 2025 https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/west-bengal/new-political-party-announced-in-darjeeling-hills-to-push-for-gorkhaland/article69019795.ece.

[351] Ibid.

This observation of politisation of ethnicity also aligns with Dr. Mona Chettri's observation that the political history of Darjeeling demonstrates how the Gorkha identity has been repeatedly revived as a tool for negotiating with the state. Since the emergence of political awareness in the region, various political parties have strategically employed the concept of Gorkha identity. Groups such as the AIGL, GNLF, and CPM have all framed their political agendas around the demand for Gorkhaland, utilizing symbols and language closely associated with Gorkha identity to further their cause.As Subba remarks, " the early pioneers of communism in Darjeeling, Ratanlan Brahmin and Ganeshlal Subba, 'knew what would sell in Darjeeling – not Marxism, Leninsm but Gorkhalism'."[352]

Brass's framework is equally relevant to the *Janjati* movement, which emerged in the political vacuum left by the failed statehood movement. Here, elites from various ethnic groups sought to revive their primordial cultural identities, which had been eroded by migration and modernity, to reassert their distinctiveness. The shift from primordial ethnic attachments towards a more unified identity centered on the Nepali language has been extensively analysed throughout the chapter. This unified identity served as a cohesive base for the Indian Nepali community, fostering a sense of solidarity with the Nepali language serving the base of Indian Nepali Nationalism. However, the resurgence of ethnic primordialism can largely be attributed to two key factors, the failure of the Gorkhaland movement and the principle of substantive equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

The failure of the Gorkhaland movement holds particular significance, as the push for statehood was politically framed as a panacea for the social, economic, and political challenges faced by the Indian Nepalis. The movement's inability to achieve its goals led to a need for alternative pathways to upward social and economic mobility. Consequently, some members and leaders of ethnic associations argued that a return to primordial ethnic identities does not necessarily threaten the homogeneous Nepali identity. On the contrary, they suggested that such an embrace of unique cultural identities could coexist within the broader Nepali identity. This reimagining allows for a more pluralistic understanding of Indian Nepali culture, moving beyond the rigid categorisations imposed by the modern state.

Furthermore, the Darjeeling Hill's significant tribal population presents an opportunity to designate the region as a tribal area with constitutionally protected rights, aligning with the

[352] Mona Chettri, "Choosing the Gorkha: At the Crossroads of Class and Ethnicity in the Darjeeling Hills," *Asian Ethnicity* 14, no. 3 (2013): 300, https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2013.764763.

provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This echoes earlier proposals advocated by Subash Ghising. Even in the absence of statehood for Gorkhaland, such constitutional safeguards could serve as a vital step in preserving the indigeneity and cultural heritage of the Indian Nepali community, providing a foundation for their political and cultural rights within the Indian polity. This duality is further illuminated by the primordialist view, which emphasises the innate and enduring attachments to birthplace, kinship, religion, and language. These attachments provide a foundation for community affinity and identity. In this context, the Nepali language and its literary traditions serve as powerful tools for the Indian Nepali community to articulate their identity and express their aspirations. Movements for language recognition, statehood, and tribal status are thus not mutually exclusive but collectively represent a broader quest for belonging, recognition, and representation. These movements reflect the community's desire to be acknowledged as Indian citizens with historical and emotional ties to the land, while also preserving their unique ethnic identity.

Ultimately, this chapter finds that identity is not a singular construct but a dynamic amalgamation of linguistic, cultural, and political dimensions. In a democratic polity, these dimensions coalesce through everyday practices of citizenship, enabling communities to form a collective imagination. For the Indian Nepali community, the intersection of cultural and political mobilisation offers a framework to assert their place within the Indian state while retaining their distinctiveness. Rather than choosing one identity over another, the community navigates the challenges of citizenship and identity by harmonising these multiple dimensions to create a cohesive and inclusive vision of belonging.

Swatashidda Sarkar in his article, *Gorkhaland and Beyond* writes on how the push for self-governance in the Darjeeling hills is driven by two primary demands. First, there is a call for the acknowledgment of collective social and cultural rights that distinguish them from the Bengali population. Second, the movement aspires to attain self-rule while maintaining the integrity of the nation-state. The Gorkhaland movement, which has persisted for over a century, has been shaped by the intersection of identity politics and the pursuit of autonomy. In advancing its cause, the movement has drawn upon both elements of cultural heritage such as language, traditions, race, history, and attire as well as broader notions of nationality and citizenship.[353]

[353] Swatashidda Sakar, *Gorkhaland and Beyond,* Himal SouthAsian, 2014. Accessed on November 9 2024.http://himalmag.com/gorkhaland-beyond-indias-states-exception/ .

Wenner argues that the Gorkhaland movement represents a web between ethnic identity and national integration. According to Wenner, the demand for a separate state is not an attempt to secede from India, but rather a means of asserting their unique ethnic identity while securing full recognition as Indian citizens. The movement draws on Indian federalism, which allows for the creation of new states, demonstrating that regionalism does not inherently oppose nationalism but can complement it. Gorkhaland, for the Gorkhas, is not only a symbol of their distinctiveness but also a path toward ensuring their safety and full participation in the nation's democratic processes. Wenner emphasises that the Gorkha commitment to democracy and nonviolence strengthens the legitimacy of their demand, presenting it not as a rebellion but as a quest for deeper integration into India's federal structure. Their pursuit of Gorkhaland ties into concerns of national security, suggesting that regional aspirations can align with broader national interests. Furthermore, the movement resonates beyond political elites, finding support among local populations, particularly those in tea plantations, who see Gorkhaland as a promise of development, self-governance, and national recognition.[354]

[354] Mirriam Wenner, *Challenging the State by Reproducing its Principles*, 61.

Chapter 4

Othering

Identities often keep changing boundaries making culture the prime site of contestation of the multiple layers of identities. It should be thought of as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.

- Stuart Hall

1. Introduction

In simple terms, the "other" refers to anyone who is different from oneself. Recognising others is essential for understanding what is considered normal and figuring out one's own place in the world. Colonised people were often depicted as "others" through narratives like primitivism and cannibalism, which help establish a clear divide between the coloniser and the colonised, and emphasise the dominance of the coloniser's culture and worldview. Although this concept is widely discussed in existential philosophy, especially by Sartre, where it explores the relationship between Self and Other to build self-awareness and identity. It's current use in postcolonial theory stems from Freudian and post-Freudian ideas about how our sense of self is formed, particularly in the work of psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Jacques Lacan. Lacan's approach includes a distinction between the "Other" and the "other", which can be a bit confusing, but it's a helpful distinction in postcolonial theory. In Lacan's theory, the other with the small 'o 'designates the other who resembles the self, which the child discovers when it looks in the mirror and becomes aware of itself as a separate being.[355]

"When the child, who is an uncoordinated mass of limbs and feelings, sees its image in the mirror, that image must bear sufficient resemblance to the child to be recognised, but it must also be separate enough to ground the child's hope for an anticipated mastery. This fiction of mastery will become the basis of the ego."[356] This other is important in defining the identity of the subject. In postcolonial theory, it can refer to the colonised others who are marginalised by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre and, perhaps crucially,

[355] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 186.

[356] Ibid., 187.

become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial 'ego'. The Other with the capital 'O ' has been called the grande-autre by Lacan, the great Other, in whose gaze the subject gains identity. Fundamentally, the Other is crucial to the subject because the subject exists in its gaze. Lacan says that, "all desire is the metonym of the desire to be" because the first desire of the subject is the desire to exist in the gaze of the Other.[357]

This chapter seeks to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of Indian Nepali identity, focusing on its historical, cultural, and theoretical dimensions. The analysis begins by tracing the roots of this identity to the colonial martial race theory, a concept introduced by British colonial authorities to categorise and essentialise certain communities as inherently martial. This categorisation not only shaped the perceptions and stereotypes about the Indian Nepali community but also had a lasting impact on their self-identity and societal roles. The primary objective here is to study these colonial constructs (discussed in previous chapters), which has led to the essentialisation and subjectivisation of the Indian Nepali community, imposing a rigid and often reductive identity upon them.

Priyanks Sharma writes on how like many other minority groups, Indian-Nepalis have sought to shape their own representation by selectively highlighting aspects of their history to craft a particular identity for public recognition. However, this process of self-narration takes place within the broader framework of the state, which also constructs and preserves its own version of history. The legacy of colonial and imperialist discourse has not only misrepresented the past but also continues to hinder the community's future. As a diverse and heterogeneous group, Indian-Nepalis have had to conform to the pressures of modernity, which prioritise uniformity and structured order.[358]

The nature of the postcolonial Indian nation-state can be understood through the theoretical lenses provided by academicians like Partha Chatterjee and Sudipta Kaviraj. Chatterjee's concept of the postcolonial state highlights the dualities and contradictions inherent in the Indian nation-building process. He posits that the Indian state operates within a dichotomy of the inner domain of cultural identity and the outer domain of statecraft and governance,

[357] Ibid., 187.

[358] Priyanka Sharma, *Martial Culture: Nation and Identity in Post-1947 Indian Nepali Literature* (PhD diss., Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, 2019), 2. Accessed July 17, 2024. http://hdl.handle.net/10603/356238.

inherited from colonial rule. This duality means that the state often oscillates between modern democratic ideals and traditional, hierarchical structures.[359] Sudipta Kaviraj's analysis further elaborates on the fragmented and multilayered nature of the Indian nation, where multiple histories and identities coexist, often leading to tensions and conflicts in the process of national integration. Kaviraj argues that the Indian state's attempts at creating a cohesive national identity often lead to the marginalisation of communities that do not fit neatly into the dominant national narrative or in other words the subaltern left outside these insitutions and discourses.[360]

The Indian Nepali community's adoption of the *Bir* Gorkha identity can be seen as a response to this marginalisation. By embracing a colonial identity that emphasised their loyalty and bravery, the community sought to assert their place within the Indian nation imaginery, aligning themselves with the state's expectations and hoping to carve a political space fot itself. Sharma writes that it was after the first phase of the Gorkhaland Movement which, led to the creation of a distinct, racialised, and masculine identity known as the *Bir Gorkha*. The term *Bir* has remained a widely used descriptor of Gorkha identity. Ghising argued that for Nepalis seeking recognition and acceptance within the Indian nation-state, it was crucial to sever ties and disassociate completely from Nepal. He believed that adopting the name *Gorkha* would serve as a distinguishing marker for those living in India, who have long faced discrimination due to their Nepali identity an identity that has often rendered them suspect, perceived as foreigners or immigrants from Nepal.[361]

Sharma stresses that this misunderstanding arises from a narrow view of colonialism as just a historical period, ignoring the ongoing practices that continue to affect people and their histories. To start, it is important to understand how certain narratives were created and spread to support a specific version of history. The issue of identity, which is always central to this discussion, is tied to modernity, which required everyone to fit into the idea of a nation. Despite Gorkhas in India, who have been here for generations or have a two hundred year migration history, still facing questions about their loyalty and belonging, it's crucial to critically examine these acts of labeling. More importantly, we need to challenge the underlying discourses that

[359] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and It's Fragements: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories,* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 3-13.

[360] Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institutions of India: Politics and Ideas,* (New York:Columbia University Press, 2010) 9-210.

[361] Sharma, *Martial Culture: Nation and Identity in Post 1947 Indian Nepali Literature,* 23.

support these acts. Therefore, studying Gorkha identity within the framework of the nation, state, and borders is essential.[362]

Adding to the theoretical concept of the nation state is the concept of the *other*. The chapter argues that the community's embrace of pre defined identities can be seen as a part of their quest to belong within the Indian national imagination and to avoid being perceived as the "other". By conforming to the colonial categorisation of martial races, the community is engaged with the gaze of the big Other, internalising and perpetuating the external gaze imposed by colonial and post-colonial authorities. Following independence, former colonies embarked on the intricate process of nation-building, aiming to create a unified national identity that could encompass the diverse groups within the new nation-state. In this context, the other became those communities that did not conform to the dominant national identity. These groups, which could include ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural minorities, found themselves marginalised by nation's narratives and policies.

The post-independence nation-state often imposed rigid identity categories to simplify governance and promote national cohesion. These categories, seen in census data, legal documents, and public policies, frequently failed to capture the complexity of individual and communal identities. Nation-building policies, such as language imposition, cultural assimilation, or uniform civil codes, further marginalise minority groups, creating a sense of alienation and reinforcing their perception as others within the state. This external imposition of identity often leads to the community's struggle to fit into these state-defined categories, perpetuating their experience of otherisation.

Communities continuously strive to assert their identities within these state-imposed constraints, manifesting resistance through cultural preservation, political mobilisation, and other forms of negotiation. This ongoing negotiation involves balancing the maintenance of unique cultural heritages with adapting to the dominant national identity. The internal perception of otherisation, influenced by how the state views these communities and how they view themselves, results in a complex interplay of external imposition and internal response. This dynamic can have profound psychological effects, including a sense of exclusion, reduced self-esteem, and identity crises, while also fostering divisions and tensions within the broader society which has been explored in this chapter.

[362] Ibid., 24.

The chapter aims to critically analyse the dynamics between post-colonial nation-states and marginalised communities, focusing on the historical, political, and social mechanisms that enforce state-imposed identities and otherness. It explores the rationale behind these impositions and their implications for nation-building, while also examining the various ways communities respond through resistance, adaptation, and negotiation. Additionally, the chapter seeks to uncover the subtle and overt processes of otherisation that affect both the perception and treatment of these communities. By dissecting the interplay between external forces and internal perceptions, the chapter seeks to highlight the persistent challenges of otherisation and the resilience of communities navigating their identities within state constraints. It contributes to the broader discourse on post-colonial identity, nation-building, and the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Ultimately, the chapter aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how otherisation shapes social dynamics and the continuous efforts of marginalised communities to carve out a space for themselves within the post-colonial nation-state.

Othering has been established as key concept of postcolonial theory, and as such it has also found entry into critical analyses of racism. In this context, *Othering* is defined as a process in which, through discursive practices, different subjects are formed, hegemonic subjects that is, subjects in powerful social positions as well as those subjugated to these powerful conditions. To arrive at such an analytic description, however, some measure of abstraction is required, because *Othering* denotes simultaneously both the features of discourse structures and processes, and the formation of subjectivity engendered by such discourse. Based on the psychoanalytical concepts of Jacques Lacan, the term *Othering* was re-coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the context of postcolonial theory, and since then it has been widely applied, in particular within anthropology. Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha are both prominent writers who have dealt with discursive and political practices that can be described as othering. The term othering is commonly employed in everyday conversations to describe processes of stereotyping and racism. However, its frequent and casual use in daily interactions risks diminishing its theoretical and analytical significance.[363]

[363] Oscar Thomas-Olalde and Astride Velho, *Othering and Its Effects – Exploring the Concept*, (Austria: University of Innsbruck, 2011), 27.

2. Ethnicity

Analysing Cynthia.H. Encloe's discussions on ethnic boundaries and state security, in her book, *Ethnic Soldiers, State Security in Divided Societies*, the ascriptive interpretation posits that ethnicity is not a static set of attributes and lineage patterns but is instead subject to changing collective definitions and emotional intensities. [364]For the Indian Nepali community, this dynamic nature of ethnicity is evident in their evolving identity within the Indian socio-political landscape. Historically, the community has been perceived through the lens of shared descent and cultural heritage, which includes language, religion, and traditional practices. However, as the community interacts with the broader Indian society, these definitions are continuously reshaped.

Situational theorists argue that ethnicity is not on an inevitable path of decline due to modernity. Instead, it is shaped by ongoing political and social interactions. This perspective is particularly relevant to the Indian Nepali community, whose identity has been influenced by various situational factors. The community's political mobilisation in response to issues such as citizenship rights, recognition of their language, and economic opportunities demonstrates how their ethnic identity is fluid and responsive to changing circumstances. The emergence of organisations and political movements advocating for the rights and recognition of Indian Nepalis exemplifies this situational adaptation.[365]

The role of politics in defining ethnic identities and altering inter-ethnic boundaries is another crucial aspect. Conventional views suggest that politics is merely a reflection of pre-existing ethnic loyalties.[366] However, empirical evidence indicates that politics can actively shape ethnic identities. In the case of the Indian Nepali community, political actions and policies have played a significant role in shaping their collective identity. The community's participation in regional and national politics, efforts to secure representation, and advocacy for their cultural and economic rights have all contributed to the formation and reinforcement of their ethnic identity.

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[364] Cynthia. H. Encloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies,* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), 1.

[365] Ibid., 2.

[366] Ibid., 50-85.

Ethnicity as a collective phenomenon is more efficiently managed by state elites dealing with collectivities.[367] For the Indian Nepali community, this collective identity is evident in their interactions with state mechanisms. The state's approach to managing the community often involves addressing them as a collective entity, focusing on their cultural, economic, and social needs. This collective approach is seen in policies related to educational opportunities, employment, and cultural preservation, where the state engages with the community as a whole rather than as isolated individuals.

3. The Martial Race

The concept of the martial race in colonial historiography exemplifies one of the earliest instances of structural othering . This theory, developed during the nineteenth century, categorised certain ethnic groups as inherently more warlike and suited for military service. The British colonial administration, influenced by their encounters during the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816), began to view the Gorkhas as a martial race due to their perceived bravery and resilience in battle. This classification served dual purposes for the British. On the one hand, it facilitated the recruitment of Gorkhas into the British Indian Army, where their prowess could be utilised for imperial purposes. On the other hand, it marked a form of cultural and racial othering, setting the Nepali Gorkhas apart from other communities within the colonial framework. This stereotyping reinforced the idea of intrinsic differences among various ethnic groups, promoting a simplistic and often demeaning understanding of the diverse societies under British rule. The martial race theory thus contributed to a broader narrative of racial hierarchy and colonial dominance. It ignored the complex socio-cultural fabric of Nepali community, reducing the identity of the Gorkhas to mere physical prowess and martial capability. This reductionist view propagated a form of exoticism and commodification of the community, portraying them as the noble savages of the colonial imagination. Consequently, the concept of the martial race played a crucial role in shaping the colonial perception of Nepali identity, embedding notions of otherness that resonated through subsequent historiography and popular discourse.

[367] Ibid., 50-85.

Recruitment

David Omissi's work, *The Sepoy and the Raj*[368], provides an in-depth analysis of the British Empire's military recruitment strategies, emphasising the economic necessity of enlisting local populations, particularly Asians and Africans, due to the high cost of British soldiers. As the empire expanded in the mid- nineteenth century, it faced the challenge of identifying reliable and effective troops, as poor recruitment decisions could lead to mutinies and threaten colonial stability. In India, the complexity of recruitment was heightened by the intricate social structures, including caste, language, and religion. These factors enabled the British to implement divide and rule policies but also complicated the recruitment of military allies. The Indian Army, the largest indigenous force under European command, was essential to British strategy but posed a significant threat if not properly managed, as demonstrated by the 1857-58 Bengal Army mutiny. Omissi effectively elucidates the economic motivations behind the British strategy of enlisting local populations and the complexities introduced by India's diverse social structures. This is crucial for understanding the colonial mindset that prioritised economic efficiency and social manipulation over the well-being of the local populations.

Omissi notes that the demonstrated effectiveness of well-trained European units against larger numbers of Indian irregulars led the British to drill, train, and arm Indian recruits in the European manner. However, high-caste sepoys often refused to take orders from lower-caste men, limiting promotions and leading to exceptions such as the refusal to serve overseas. This prompted Sir Henry Lawrence in the 1840's to advocate for more diverse recruitment in the Army of Bengal. The 1857 Mutiny catalysed significant changes in the social composition of British-controlled military forces in northern India, shifting recruitment from high-caste regions like Awadh and the North-Western Provinces to the Punjab and lower-caste Hindustan. By the early 1860s, the Indian Army was divided into four main elements, each recruited from different regions and serving in distinct regiments, preventing shared grievances and enabling mutinies in one part to be suppressed by troops from another. Omissi's examination of the strategic changes post-1857 Mutiny is insightful, revealing the British efforts to mitigate risks of future uprisings through strategic regional recruitment.[369]

[368] David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 1994) 4.

[369] Ibid., 4.

The focus on recruiting the so-called martial races of the subcontinent became a colonial obsession, significantly altering the Indian Army's composition. From 1882, recruitment from regions like Madras, Bombay, and Hindustan declined, while recruitment from Nepal and Punjab increased. For example, in 1882, eight out of fourty Madras infantry battalions were disbanded, and new units raised after the 1885 war scare were predominantly composed of Sikhs and Gurkhas. By January 1893, Punjab and the North West Frontier provided a substantial portion of the Indian Army's soldiers. Omissi critically assesses this shift, noting the empire's strategic prioritisation but also suggesting that it understated the social and cultural impacts on regions excluded from new recruitment patterns. The shift towards recruiting martial races highlights the British reliance on racial and ethnic stereotypes to justify their military strategies. This approach not only shaped the Indian Army but also reinforced colonial racial hierarchies.[370]

In 1907, suspicions of misconduct among the Mappila sepoys led to the disbandment of their battalions, replaced by Gurkhas. The failure to identify new martial races in southern India reinforced the trend of northern recruitment. The martial-race strategy thus limited recruitment to a narrow range of communities, significantly reshaping the army by 1914. From the late 1890's, the martial-race theory was formalised in a series of official Recruiting Handbooks, regularly updated until World War II. These handbooks, often authored by British officers familiar with the troops, praised the virtues of favoured classes like Pathans and Dogras, encouraging British officers to trust and value their troops. This positive portrayal was intended to inspire confidence among officers and enhance the effectiveness and morale of the regiments by promoting the belief that they commanded exemplary soldiers. The disbandment of the Mappila sepoys and the reinforcement of northern recruitment underscore the British reliance on the martial-race theory, which was used to maintain control over the Indian Army.[371]

Mechanism of Subjectivity Formation

The objective of the martial-race theory was not only to justify policy but to exercise colonial control. The detailed classifications in the handbooks, such as the listing of 800 Magar and 300 Gurung clans among the Gurkhas, illustrate the British effort to articulate and perfect the martial-race policy. This strategy drew heavily on existing Indian stereotypes and served

[370] Ibid., 15-16.

[371] Ibid., 25.

colonial ends by boosting officer's morale, suggesting they commanded ideal soldiers with presumed warlike qualities tied to perceptions of manliness. However, the British also preferred soldiers they perceived as less intelligent, believing it made them safer and their leadership more necessary. This preference was reflected in the lower literacy rates among sepoys compared to the broader Indian population, as urban India was deliberately excluded in favour of recruits from isolated communities less influenced by Western education and political ideas.

This approach not only maintained colonial power but also perpetuated racial and social hierarchies. The British collected extensive ethnographic details about different communities, which coexisted with collective stereotypes. Some categories used in these classifications were largely invented, although by the 1930s, there was a better understanding of the fluid nature of Indian identities. The martial-race theory also had a racial component, as the British liked to imagine their favoured soldiers as racially pure and of Aryan descent. This theory mirrored the "criminal tribes" legislation, where entire communities were labeled criminal just as others were labeled warlike. [372]

The British ethnographic efforts and racial classifications illustrate the colonial obsession with control and in her article *The Rani of Sirmur*[373], Gayatri C. Spivak delves into the notion of Othering within the framework of British colonial rule in India. Othering refers to the process by which colonising powers create a distinct separation between themselves and the colonised, portraying the latter as fundamentally different and inferior. This process helps maintain the coloniser's sense of superiority and control. Spivak analyses how the reports and practices of British colonial officials contributed to this dynamic. For instance, she discusses the correspondence of Captain Geoffrey Birch, an assistant agent of the British governor, who traveled through the hills of Shimla with a native escort. Birch's letters depicts him as a romantic, almost heroic figure, illustrating how British officials perceived themselves as superior and civilizing forces in a "wild" and "uncivilised" land. This portrayal exemplifies "Worlding", a concept Spivak describes as the imperial discourse inscribing itself onto the colonised space, thereby transforming and dominating it.[374]

[372] Ibid., 44-46.

[373] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (1985): 247–72. https://doi.org/10.2307/2505169.

[374] Ibid., 247-272.

Worlding involves more than just mapping or physically marking territories. It also entails the creation of knowledge and narratives that establish the colonisers as rightful masters and the colonized as subjugated subjects. Birch's self-perception as the master, mirrored by the native recognizing him as such, reinforces the power dynamics. Even though the native is on their own land, they are made to see themselves as inferior through the colonial discourse. Spivak contrasts Birch's relatively benign self-perception with Major-General Sir David Ochterlony's more overtly hostile attitude toward the local people. Ochterlony, a higher-ranking official, described the hill people with disdain, labeling them as brutal, deceitful, depraved, and treacherous. He asserted that the local ruler had no legitimate claim to the land, which should instead belong to the British crown. This attitude underscores the colonial belief in their inherent right to dominate and possess the land and its people.[375]

Spivak emphasises that this reinscription of rights, where the native's subject positions are rewritten as objects of imperialism, is a key aspect of colonial rule. The colonial power redefines ownership and governance, stripping the natives of their autonomy and imposing foreign control. Furthermore, Spivak points out that the colonial power is not monolithic, it comprises various individuals from different social classes and positions, all contributing to the overarching imperial project. The power of colonial discourse lies in its ability to create and maintain these hierarchical structures through knowledge and representation. Spivak also highlights the crucial connection between knowledge and power in these processes. The ability to define and control narratives and identities is fundamental to maintaining colonial dominance. By constructing the colonied as others and inscribing imperial discourse onto colonised spaces, the colonisers reinforce their superiority and justify their rule.[376]

Lionel Caplan notes that the view was becoming widespread that, "as Lord Robert was later to pronounce that eastern races do not possess the qualities that go to make leaders of men. So the Nepalis could only realise their enormous martial potential under the tutelage, supervision and leadership of the British officials."[377] Despite the many changes in the home environments from which the soldiers originate and in the politico-military contexts within which the brigade itself is situated, the gurkhas appear caught in a time wrap woven by their military chroniclers.

[375] Ibid., 247-272.

[376] Ibid., 247-272.

[377] Lionel Caplan, "Martial Gurkhas: The Persiistence of. British Military Discourse on 'Race'," in *The Concept of Race in South Asia,* ed.,Peter Robb (London: Oxford University Press, 1995) 264.

While some officers informally contradict even disclaim, many of the stereotypes offered in the literature, latter day texts continue to essentialise the Gurkhas in much the sae way as they did in the past. Why should idealogies generated within and fostered by an imperial context continue to pervade post imperial militatry writings- images and perceptions often tend to persist through time, despite the changing political and ideological environment in which they arose in the first place. This is especially so where those who represent others exercise dominion over all of the subjects lives.[378] Caplan thus acknwledges that, " The image of the Gurkhas as inherently martial thus reflects the way in which British Officers have for a very long time perceived themselves, and the endurance of such an image may be read as an attempt on the part of the latter to sitaute their own sense of identity in what would seem to be a timeless and unchanging racial essense."[379]

4. The Gurkha Syndrome

Cynthia. H. Encloe, in her book *Ethnic Soldiers, State Security in Divided Societies,* states that throughout history, state elites, both in empires and modern nation-states, have utilised ethnicity as a means to identify which societal groups best fit their security needs. One such strategy involves designating certain ethnic groups as martial races. This approach integrates these groups into military service, especially those who are unlikely to control the state apparatus but are reliable in supporting the state system. By embedding military service within the ethnic identity of these groups, state elites not only ease recruitment efforts but also align ethnic loyalty with state allegiance. However, this often leads to increased ethnic cohesion at the cost of greater susceptibility to state manipulation.

Historically, the role of ethnicity in military organisation has been acknowledged only superficially. Ethnically defined units, often small and from communities with little potential to command the military or state apparatus, reveal much about state pressures and military limits. These units also demonstrate how military engagement can shape ethnic boundaries and communal prominence. This highlights how political institutions not only reflect but also shape ethnic conditions. Military planners might foster ethnic identities deliberately to meet military objectives. This practice, termed the Gurkha syndrome, involves creating dependencies between peripheral ethnic groups and the state military. Many multi-ethnic societies have

[378] Ibid., 227.

[379] Ibid., 279.

stereotyped certain groups as naturally adept at soldiering, such as the Gurkhas, Bedouin, Scots, Sikhs, and others. These groups share characteristics like geographic distinctiveness, which facilitates targeted recruitment and integration into military service.

Encloe states that groups labeled as martial races often reside in geographically distinct areas, typically on state peripheries. This concentration makes them visible and easier to recruit. The regions where these groups live are often remote and near historic invasion routes, initially complicating recruitment but ultimately allowing the state to use these groups against dissident populations without fear of sympathy. Military service becomes a means for these groups to gain respect and legitimacy within the broader social order. Martial races share intra-communal traits that attract recruiters, often being categorised as tribes. This classification is influenced by both state security needs and academic ethnography. Being part of a martial race implies fitness for infantry roles, with groups like the Gurkhas typically recruited for front-line combat rather than logistical support. This necessitates dependence on ethnic outsiders commanding their units, mirroring the larger ethnic security system sustaining state order. These groups are often culturally and politically distant from the majority population, ensuring their loyalty to the regime that provides them with jobs and prestige, even if the rest of the army empathises with civilian dissidents. Low rates of mutiny among these groups underscore their dependency on state support and the authority structures limiting their political engagement.

In contemporary times, Indian Nepalis have been perceived as distinct. Indian Nepalis had traditionally taken to military roles mirrors the Gurkha syndrome, creating a dependency where the community gains respect and legitimacy through military service and military involvement is seen as a means of upward mobility and social acceptance. However, this integration comes at a cost. Increased visibility and strategic importance make the community susceptible to exploitation. Their ethnic identity becomes entwined with their military role, limiting political autonomy and reinforcing intra-communal authority structures. This dependency relationship can lead to long-term repercussions, including constrained ethnic identity and limited political freedom. By understanding these dynamics, we can gain deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by the Indian Nepali community within the current nation-state framework.[380]

[380] Encloe. *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies*, 38-40.

To put it in Encloe's own words, "The 'Gurkha syndrome 'does not feed off Kiplingesque symbols. It is nourished by basic relationships between political-military objectives and asymmetrical power distributions among ethnic groups in a given state. It is for this reason that analysts should remain alert to the persistence and revival of 'martial races''.[381]

5. Reinvigoration of the Martial Category

Nilamber Chettri has attempted to analyse the reinvigoration of this martial identity through his article, "Interrogating Gorkha as Martial Race: Category based on Discrete Identities"[382] in which Chettri has analysed two kinds of identities, enlisted and categorical. Chettri has attempted to highlight the complex interplay between subjective and objective identities in the formation of the Gorkha identity. The concept of "enlisted identities", Chettri notes, how ethnic authenticity was pivotal for recruitment into Gorkha regiments. This process Chettri states, aligns with Bilgrami's idea of "subjective identities," where individuals endorse and embody pre-existing characteristics that define their ethnic group. For example the ethnic groups recruited in the regiments were recruited owing to their sense of being an authentic Magar or a Gurung. Many recruits enlisted themselves into the ranks claiming to be a pure Magar or a Gurung, as enlistment was contingent on their claims to authentic ethnic identity. The unchangeable nature of these endorsed values and their projection into the future reinforces the recruit's sense of belonging to their ethnic group, thus legitimising their claim to the Gorkha identity.

On the other hand the creation of a categorical identity for the Gorkhas, Chettri argues, represents a shift from individual ethnic identities to a broader, homogenised identity. This transformation Chettri indicates, aligns with Bilgrami's "objective identity," where identity is imposed by external theories and not necessarily by the individual's behaviours. This dual identity formation process illustrates how the colonial military's need for reliable soldiers led to the construction of a unified Gorkha identity while still maintaining the significance of individual ethnic identities. Henceforth Chettri affirms that in the context of Darjeeling, the name Gorkha became readily acceptable owing to the political mobilisation which assured an indigenous and national identity to the inhabitants, thus distancing them from citizens of Nepal.

[381] Ibid., 48-49.

[382] Nilamber Chettri, "Interrogating Gorkha as a Martial Race: Category Based on Discrete Identities," *Journal of Studies in History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 2016).

In the past many other names such as *Gorkhali*, *Bharpali*, *Bharatiya Nepali*, *Bhargoli* and *Bharatiya Gorkhali* were devised, however, over the course of time the name Gorkha was retained to refer to the collective identity of the Nepalis in India.[383]

Chettri's observation highlights the evolving nature and significance of Gorkha identity within the post-colonial Indian state. The post-colonial Indian state has played a crucial role in popularising the category of Gorkha, with official definitions adhering closely to the stereotypical images formed during the colonial period. This perpetuation of colonial constructs has imbued the Gorkha identity with considerable social and cultural significance in the post-colonial imagination of the Nepali community in India. Socially and culturally, the Gorkha identity has become a powerful symbol, with people strongly identifying with it. However, the construction of clear-cut social and cultural boundaries is complicated by political contingencies. As a result, in social discourse, Gorkha is treated as both a historical and political category. This encompasses not only those residing in the Darjeeling region but also those supporting the cause of Gorkhaland, indicating a broader, more inclusive understanding of Gorkha identity.[384]

Over the years, the Gorkha identity has evolved into a collective political identity for the Nepali-speaking community. This transformation underscores the dynamic interplay between social, cultural, and political forces in shaping identity. The Gorkha identity, while rooted in colonial constructs, has been reinterpreted and expanded to reflect contemporary aspirations and realities. In the colonial discourse, only an authentic ethnic group of Nepal could be readily enlisted into the ranks to become an authentic Gorkha. In the post-colonial setting the categorical identity of Gorkha took precedence over distinct ethnic identities. In this regard it can be argued that the category of the Gorkha itself was formed, and was crystallised as a social and collective identity within a specific socio-political condition in India. It was informed and invigorated by the social and political importance laid to it, as it was selected to represent the aspiration of the community. In this process the martial quality of the groups was reinvigorated in the imagination of a cultural community and it gets renewed every time these groups assert its place in the nation, or demands rights and recognition from the state. [385]

[383]Ibid.

[384] Ibid.

[385] Ibid.

The interviews with members of the Indian Nepali Community who served in the army reveal a nuanced understanding of broader concepts such as the martial race theory, identity within the postcolonial Indian state, and the interplay of otherness and belonging. The martial race theory, a colonial construct, categorised certain ethnic groups as naturally more warlike and thus more suited for military service. This theory influenced the recruitment policies of the colonial Indian Army and left an imprint on postcolonial India's military structure. The respondent's experiences reflect remnants of this theory in the organisation of different regiments based on caste and region. For example, one respondent mentioned the Jats and their cultural emphasis on honour, illustrating how martial race ideologies continue to shape perceptions and practices within the army. However, their experiences also suggest a shift away from rigid adherence to these colonial legacies, highlighting merit-based progression and the inclusive nature of the army's hierarchical structure.[386]

The narratives also reveal the complexities of identity within the postcolonial Indian state. Many respondents initially joined the army for economic reasons rather than patriotism, seeing it as a viable and respectable career path. Over time, their sense of identity evolved, influenced by the army's inclusive environment and the collective identity it fostered. Majority of the respondents emphasised that they identified themselves as Indian first and then a Gurkha, highlighting the collective over the individual. This shift reflects the broader postcolonial effort to forge a unified national identity that transcends ethnic and regional divisions. Despite these efforts, the respondent's experiences also highlight the enduring challenges of otherness. The army's regimented structure, while promoting unity, also mirrors broader societal structures and cultural divisions. The subdivision of regiments based on caste and region underscores the persistence of traditional identities within the military. Yet, the respondents emphasised that they did not face discrimination within the army, which treated individuals according to their rank and duties. This merit-based environment allowed them to adopt the traits and ethos of their regiments, diluting rigid cultural and regional identities.[387]

Adding another layer to this narrative, a respondent who has risen to the rank of Major asserted that he never felt marginalised or subjugated, and does not believe that an identity crisis persists within the army or the Indian state. His experience underscores the army's role in fostering a sense of equality and inclusion, providing opportunities for individuals to excel based on merit

[386] Interview with ex army participants, March 15, 2024.

[387] Ibid.

rather than ethnic or regional identity. These narratives highlight the dual aspects of belongingness and otherness. While the army fosters a strong sense of unity and collective identity, it also reflects broader societal structures and cultural divisions. However, the experience in the army helps many transcend these divisions, integrating them into a larger national identity and providing a platform for personal and professional growth. This complex interplay of belongingness and otherness within the army mirrors the broader challenges and aspirations of postcolonial Indian society, striving for unity while navigating the legacies of its diverse and multifaceted past.

6. Othering, Identity and Self in the Contemporary

Exploring the intricate construction and perception of identity and otherness within the Gorkha/Indian Nepali community necessitates a shift from macro narratives to micro narratives, offering a detailed understanding of these complex social phenomena. By moving away from broad theoretical constructs and generalised identities, this study approaches individual perceptions through qualitative and ethnographic interviews. This methodological approach enables a deep examination of the lived experiences of community members across various social strata, providing a rich body of personal narratives. The micro narratives derived from these interviews reveal the multifaceted ways identities are constructed, imposed, perceived, and projected. These narratives highlight the fluid and dynamic nature of identity, illustrating that it is not a fixed attribute but rather an evolving construct shaped by various socio-cultural and political forces. This detailed analysis captures subtle variations in identity formation and othering processes that macro-level studies often overlook.

Additionally, the rise of cosmopolitan cultures and globalising forces adds layers of complexity to identity construction. In an increasingly interconnected world, individuals navigate multiple identities that intersect and interact in diverse ways. The study examines which layers of identity are prioritised and how these priorities reflect broader socio-political contexts and individual life experiences. For example, some individuals emphasise their ethnic identity in response to perceived threats or discrimination, while others may foreground their national or cosmopolitan identities to align with global or local cultural trends. This nuanced approach also illuminates how individuals perceive the nation-state and the concept of the "other" in everyday interactions. The way community members negotiate their identities in relation to the nation-state and "others", be it other ethnic groups, nationalities, or social classes, reveals much about their lived realities and social positioning. These perceptions are crucial for

understanding broader issues of inclusion, exclusion, and belonging within the nation-state framework.

Focusing on micro narratives, this section provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of identity and otherness among the Gorkha/Indian Nepali community. It highlights the importance of individual experiences and perceptions in the construction of identity, demonstrating how these micro-level insights can inform and enrich broader sociological and anthropological theories. The findings underscore the interplay between local and global forces in shaping identities and challenge us to reconsider simplistic and monolithic representations of ethnic and national identities in the context of a rapidly globalising world.

Edward Said's conception highlights that knowledge production is always linked to power and politics. The practices of Othering are not accidental or unconscious but are intentional acts of dominance rooted in power politics. These practices objectify and freeze the Others in a specific time and context, reinforcing the power differences between the observers (the West) and the observed (the Orient). Essentially, Othering is a political practice that creates and maintains power dynamics through the production of knowledge about others, legitimising the dominance of one group over another. Said's work suggests that the construction of the Orient was a deliberate act to establish and sustain European superiority, and this process has lasting effects on how knowledge and power are intertwined. By understanding these mechanisms, we can see how the dominant group maintains its power by continuously creating and reinforcing the image of the Other. Moreover, Said's concept of Othering shows that essentialising practices are not just about creating false images but also about making these images seem plausible and useful to maintain the status quo. When these practices become dominant discourses, they make it difficult to see individuals as unique, instead fitting them into generalised and often negative categories. This helps the dominant group justify its actions and maintain control. Many responses echo Said's concept of the other.[388]

To begin the study, respondents were asked about their general understanding of the concept of othering and if they were othered, what were their experiences and what would they draw from it. To maintain the confidentiality and interest of the participants their names have not been disclosed, rather they have been substituted with alphabets." A", who spent most of his student life in Delhi, articulated that the other according to him would be defined as those

[388] Oscar Thomas-Olalde and Astride Velho, *Othering and Its Effects – Exploring the Concept*, 29-32.

outside the mainstream, those who are not involved in influential social, educational, and political spheres. According to "A", the mainstream includes individuals and communities who are visible, whose voices are taken seriously, who wield power and wealth. Conversely, the "other" for him would comprises those who are marginalised, invisible, and struggle to be heard in various aspects of life. He emphasised that mainstream political power is held by communities that dominate administrative, governmental, legal, and educational institutions, and whose cultural expressions, such as language and education, are nationally and globally recognised. His perspective provides a comprehensive framework that connects the macro-level structures of political and economic power to the everyday experiences of marginalisation. [389]

"A" stated that he felt othered in thes sense that there was greater onus on him to prove himself which he encountered personally, in the sphere of work and education. He stresses that he felt the need to out perform others to make a stake. They are expected to continuously prove their usefulness and successful integration, leading to a burdensome double bind he stated. Individuals from marginalised or non-mainstream communities often face significant systemic barriers and biases that create a double bind, particularly in the spheres of work and education. This double bind is characterised by the need to constantly outperform others to prove their worth, while simultaneously navigating an environment rife with subtle microaggressions and implicit biases. Microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional, discriminatory comments or behaviors that can undermine a person's confidence and sense of belonging. Implicit biases, which are unconscious attitudes or stereotypes, can further exacerbate feelings of alienation and inadequacy.[390]

Polical Space and Otherisation

"B", the rector of a college and an educationist with two decades of experience working with communities in the Darjeeling district, offers a rich perspective on the concept of the other and its variations across different regions. Reflecting on his time in the Darjeeling hills, " B" states that he never specifically felt like an outsider, a sentiment contrasting sharply with his experiences in Shillong, where the term "Dhaka", meaning outsider or non-Khasi, is commonly used. This regional distinction highlights how the perception and experience of being the other

[389] Interview with participant A, 10th June , 2024.

[390] Ibid.

can vary significantly based on local socio-cultural dynamics. In the context of Darjeeling, the rector stated that for him the first instance of the creation of an othering or otherness was felt during the first phase of the Gorkhaland movement, referred to as *andolan*, which is crucial to understanding the concept of the other in the Darjeeling hills. During the initial phase of the *andolan*, there was a palpable antagonism towards those perceived as outsiders. The movement's goal of establishing a separate state for the Nepali-speaking Gorkhas inherently involved a process of identity demarcation. This process required creating a clear distinction between the Gorkha identity and the other, those who did not belong to this category.[391]

"B" underscores that this antagonism was a significant aspect of the identity struggle during the *andolan*. Despite the general atmosphere of hostility towards outsiders during this period, he did not feel a sense of being the other, primarily because of his religious role. His identity as a man of religion seemed to offer a form of protection, setting him apart from the broader sociopolitical conflicts. The uniform worn by priests served as a symbolic marker, indicating their neutrality and preventing them from being perceived as total outsiders. This observation points to the relation between religious identity and regional politics, suggesting that religious figures were afforded a unique position that shielded them from the antagonism directed towards others. B's insights reveal how the quest for identity within a geographical setting often involves distinguishing oneself from the other. When a community seeks to claim its identity, part of this process includes asserting a separation from those considered outsiders. The Gorkhaland movement exemplified this phenomenon, with the demand for administrative control being a crucial aspect of the identity claim. By wearing their uniforms, priests like B navigated this complex landscape, maintaining a distinct identity that allowed them to remain neutral and avoid the full brunt of regional antagonism.[392]

"C" who recalls her stay in Delhi during the Gorkhaland movement during which she was a student. She stated that the Gorkhaland movement, which gained significant traction in 2013 and 2017, represented a pivotal moment for the Gorkha community in Delhi to articulate their aspirations and address longstanding questions surrounding their identity and place within the Indian socio-political landscape. This movement provided a crucial platform for the community to express their collective voice and advocate for their distinct cultural and political identity. C elaborated that historically, the demand for Gorkhaland has been rooted in a sense

[391] Interview with participant B, at college campus 5th May, 2024, 3:20pm.

[392] Ibid.

of socio-political alienation and economic marginalisation experienced by the Gorkha community in the Darjeeling hills and adjoining areas. The Gorkhas, an ethnic group of Nepali origin, have long felt that their unique identity and contributions have been overlooked within the broader Indian polity. This perceived marginalisation has fueled a desire for greater autonomy and recognition, culminating in the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland within India.[393]

She noted that, political movements, including the demand for Gorkhaland, are inherently rooted in the socio-economic and political realities of their time. They do not emerge in a vacuum and are not concoted out of thin air, but are often a response to existing grievances and fault lines within society. The Gorkhaland movement reflects deep-seated dissatisfaction with the status quo, highlighting issues of alienation and marginalisation that have persisted for decades. This sense of alienation is not merely a passive state but has been actively mobilised and articulated through various forms of political activism. The leaders and supporters of the Gorkhaland movement have adeptly utilised these existing fault lines to advance their cause. By highlighting the historical injustices and ongoing marginalisation faced by the Gorkha community, they have been able to galvanize support and create a compelling narrative for statehood. [394]

She concluded that the movement definitely is a culmination of grassroot aspirations but more so it can be seen as a quest to belong within the nation, "to not be the other, but a part of it".This process of mobilisation is a fundamental aspect of political activism, wherein existing grievances are harnessed to build a broader movement aimed at achieving specific political objectives. Moreover, the Gorkhaland movement highlights the importance of political narratives in shaping public opinion and driving political action. The process of crafting these narratives involves a deep understanding of the socio-political context and the ability to communicate effectively with a diverse audience.[395]

[393] Telephonic interview with participant C, 23rd June, 2024, 11am.

[394] Ibid.

[395] Ibid.

Identity Politics

"D" posited that otherness is inherent in human nature and is closely intertwined with identity politics. He argued that instead of dismantling barriers, identity politics often intensifies the concept of otherness. He observed that with the rise of right-wing movements and ultra-nationalism, polarisation has increased globally. According to him, the problem of otherness is insoluble because there will always be distinctions between self and other. He suggested that this intrinsic human tendency to differentiate is exacerbated by contemporary political and social trends. D' s contribution situates the discussion of othering within the broader currents of identity politics and global political trends like the resurgence of divisive ideologies and their implications for social cohesion.[396]

He reflected that the dynamics of vote banks, identity politics, and cultural representation are intricate and multifaceted, often reflecting deeper socio-political undercurrents. He stated how historically, identity politics emerged as a reflection of grassroots sentiments, capturing the authentic voices and concerns of marginalised or distinct social groups. However, in contemporary contexts, identity politics has evolved, frequently manipulated by political elites to serve broader strategic objectives rather than genuine community interests. He drew on the examples of certain policies which often fuell divise setiments. This manipulation often centers around vote banks, where policies are designed to appease specific demographic groups, thereby securing their electoral support. [397]

The group's proportional representation in terms of votes becomes a critical factor in political strategy, influencing policy decisions and electoral promises. However D also stated that sometimes greviances stem from everyday policies and practices even though those policies and practices may not have intentions of deliberate othering agendas. He gave the example of Madhyamik Exams which are usually held during the early hours of the winter months. He stated that in the plains area the temperature and accesibility to transport facilities is not an issue, however in hilly regions the freezing temperature and lack of transport facilities in the early hours are huge hurdles to students. Heneceforth this kind of micro practices which fail to

[396] Interview with participant D, 26th June 2024, 1:30pm.

[397] Ibid.

acknowledge differences are overlooked sometimes creates feeling of alienation and hostile feeing in the long run.[398]

"F" , who has worked extensively on ethnic politics provided an analysis of the Indian Nepali community, particularly in Darjeeling and the Eastern Himalayas. He emphasised the relationship between identity, politics, and societal progress. He posits that the community has struggled to transcend generational occupations due to an identity that is not self-fashioned but imposed by historical narratives and external perceptions. This imposed identity has hindered their ability to establish a sustainable and evolving sense of self that reflects their current socio-political reality. This resonates with Bhabha's concept of fixity[399], that the community has struggled to transcend generational occupations due to an identity imposed by historical narratives and external perceptions.[400] According to Bhabha, fixity refers to the portrayal of cultural, historical, and racial differences as rigid and unchanging. This imposed identity, much like the stereotypes Bhabha discusses, is not self-fashioned but rather constructed by external forces, trapping the community in a static representation that fails to evolve with their current socio-political reality. The paradox of fixity is evident here, while this imposed identity aims to create a stable and recognisable image of the community, it simultaneously suggests limitations and inferiority, hindering the community's ability to establish a sustainable and dynamic sense of self. The ambivalence in these external narratives reflects a deeper anxiety about cultural differences, reinforcing stereotypes that need constant reinforcement to maintain control. This dynamic inhibits the community from redefining itself in a manner that reflects its true, contemporary experiences and aspirations, thus perpetuating a cycle of generational occupational stagnation and impeding social progress.

He, acknowledges the pivotal role of politics in shaping society, yet he is critical of the nature of political practices operating within the community too. He describes these practices as corrupt, opaque, and often violent, arguing that such a political environment has not only failed to foster societal advancement but has also perpetuated a cycle that entrenches their identity struggles. Moreover, he laments the lack of effective political leadership, noting that despite their influence, political leaders have been unable to catalyse meaningful change due to the pervasive nature of "dirty politics". He suggests that the community's politics have been more

[398] Ibid.

[399] Homi.K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 1-236.

[400] Interview with participant F, 29th July 2024, 2pm.

of a hindrance than a help in their quest for identity and societal development. However, he does not advocate for forgetting the past, instead, he believes that historical narratives should be harnessed to construct a present that is more reflective of the community's aspirations. Therefore the response of "F"stresses the importance of civil societies in driving incremental change, acknowledging that such transformation is a generational project and cannot happen overnight. Civil society's role in social change is well-documented in academic literature, with scholars like Robert Putnam arguing that robust civil societies are essential for fostering social capital and promoting democratic governance. His analysis ultimately calls for a reevaluation of political practices and leadership within the Indian Nepali community to foster a more sustainable and self-determined identity. [401]

At its core, identity politics involves the mobilisation of individuals based on shared characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, or cultural heritage. This mobilisation seeks to address collective grievances and advocate for group-specific interests within the political sphere. However, this form of politics has stratified, with different levels of identity politics emerging. For instance, while grassroots identity politics may focus on local and immediate concerns, elite-driven identity politics can be more abstract, addressing symbolic issues that resonate broadly but may not translate into tangible benefits for the community. "D" stressed that the concept of othering is central to identity politics. Othering involves defining and marginalising groups perceived as different from a dominant social or cultural norm. While not always consciously advocated at the grassroots level, it can become a powerful tool for political leaders seeking to consolidate their support base by emphasising differences and creating a sense of in-group solidarity. This often results in cultural dominance, where the prevailing group asserts its cultural norms and values over others, even in contexts where geography and history are shared. This dominance perpetuates a hierarchy, marginalising smaller or less powerful groups within the political landscape.

Cultural Capital

"G" who works in the department of tourism, next spoke on, "The analogy of the law of the water—where bigger fish eat smaller fish"—aptly describes the competitive nature of cultural representation. In this scenario, larger and more dominant groups or interests overshadow and consume the smaller ones, reflecting a survival of the fittest mentality within the socio-political

[401] Ibid.

ecosystem. This dynamic is evident in various sectors, including tourism, where cultural representation becomes a contested space. She noted that tourism in regions like Darjeeling exemplifies this phenomenon. Darjeeling is globally renowned as a tourist destination, celebrated for its scenic beauty and colonial heritage. However, the extent to which local culture is authentically represented through tourism is questionable. [402]

Often, tourism narratives are constructed to cater to external perceptions and commercial interests rather than to reflect the region's rich cultural fabric accurately. This selective representation can dilute the true cultural identity of the local community, favouring a homogenised and commodified version of culture that appeals to tourists but misrepresents the lived realities of local residents. In Darjeeling, for instance, the dominant tourism narrative may focus on its famous tea gardens and colonial-era charm, while the diverse cultural practices and heritage of the indigenous communities receive less attention. This skewed representation reinforces cultural dominance, where the broader, more commercially viable aspects of culture overshadow the nuanced and authentic cultural expressions of smaller groups. Consequently, the political and cultural interests of these smaller groups are sidelined, perpetuating a cycle of marginalisation.[403]

She points out that political power is concentrated within mainstream communities that control administrative, governmental, legal, and educational institutions. This reflects Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital,which suggests that the dominant groups in society possess cultural assets that confer power and advantage. These assets include education, language, and other cultural competencies that are recognized and valued within institutional frameworks. Bourdieu's theory helps us understand why certain communities, have more influence and recognition compared to marginalised groups. The control over language and education by these mainstream communities ensures their continued dominance and the marginalisation of others who do not possess the same cultural capital.[404]

Economic Disparity and Resource Allocation

"P" highlights that societal differences are a natural and persistent aspect of human communities. These differences, however, do not inherently generate hostility. It is when the

[402] Interview with participant G, Darjeeling, 1st August 12:30pm.

[403] Ibid.

[404] Ibid.

question of resource distribution arises that antagonism begins to surface. This phenomenon is not unique to any single region but can be observed nationally and internationally. He points out that the most explicit form of othering is manifested through the unequal distribution of resources. Ideally, resources should be distributed equitably among all members of society. However, when this balance is disrupted and inequalities persist, societal dynamics begin to shift, often leading to conflict and resentment.

“J” further elucidates this concept by examining the role of politics in the distribution of resources. According to J , the primary objective of politics is the acquisition of material benefits. Consequently, the concept of othering is prominently seen through the lens of economic distribution. J illustrates this point with the example of the “hill people”, whose sentiments and identity politics have been significantly influenced by issues of development and resource allocation. In the hills, feelings of discrimination are deeply tied to the perceived inequities in development, particularly in areas such as infrastructure, health, education, employment and general policy implementation.

K noted that the sense of othering in these communities is exacerbated by the belief that while one of the major revenues in North Bengal are generated from industries like tea, timber, and tourism, the benefits of these resources do not trickle down to the masses, leaving the local populace feeling marginalised and excluded from the economic gains derived from their region. This economic disparity fuels a sense of injustice and discrimination among the hill people, who perceive that their region’s contributions to the state’s revenue are not adequately rewarded. Moreover, he stated that the tourism industry in Bengal serves as a poignant example of this inequitable distribution. While the region's natural beauty and cultural heritage attract a significant number of tourists, the financial benefits of this influx are not evenly distributed.

Most tourism-related businesses, such as hotels and travel agencies, are owned by individuals from the plains. This ownership structure means that a substantial portion of the revenue generated from tourism does not benefit the local communities who live in the hills and contribute to the region’s attractiveness as a tourist destination. Consequently, locals are often relegated to low-level jobs within the tourism sector, such as working as drivers, cleaners, or low-wage service staff. This employment disparity not only perpetuates economic inequality but also accelerates cultural subjugation, as local traditions and identities are overshadowed by the dominant economic interests of wealthy business owners from the plains. The issue of resource distribution and its impact on social cohesion has been widely studied in scholarly

discourses. Research indicates that equitable resource distribution is crucial for maintaining social harmony and preventing conflict. When resources are concentrated in the hands of a few, it creates a power imbalance that can lead to social unrest and political instability.

L, who is associated with the trade union(who was aso previously interviewed for the chapter on Tea provided an analysis of the societal dynamics in regions such as Darjeeling. He provides a comprehensive understanding of how resource distribution affects social cohesion and fosters a sense of othering. He highlights the tea industry as a prime example of this phenomenon. Despite the high prices fetched by tea at auctions, the government has yet to implement minimum wage laws for tea workers, much less provide them with additional perks and benefits. This economic disparity is a significant source of resentment and is indicative of the broader issues of inequality that plague the region. Recent policies such as the tea and tourism policy aim to boost tourism in the area but often come at a considerable cost to local communities. These policies have led to the eviction of locals from their traditional lands to make way for tourism development, exacerbating feelings of displacement and marginalisation. The contentious issue of prajapatta, which had sparked significant protests, is seen by many as an attempt by the government to oust tea workers from their ancestral lands by continuing to label them as refugees, as evidenced by government notifications. This issue underscores the deep-seated mistrust between the local communities and the government.[405]

His remarks further illuminate the plight of the tea workers. Despite decades of independence and generations living on the same land pre independence , tea workers still lack land rights and face the constant threat of eviction. The government continues to use the migration card to cast doubt on their nationality, perpetuating their status as outsiders and exacerbating their vulnerability. He poignantly questions whether this situation does not epitomise the concept of othering. Academic research supports the notion that the unequal distribution of resources and the lack of legal protections contribute significantly to social unrest and a sense of othering among marginalized communities. For example, studies on the tea industry in India have documented the severe exploitation of tea workers, who often work under deplorable conditions for meager wages. According to a report by the Centre for Development Studies, tea workers in India are among the most underpaid labourers, and their living conditions remain dire due to the absence of adequate labour protections and social security measures. The impact of tourism on indigenous communities often leads to the displacement of local populations and

[405] Interview with participant L, Darjeeling, 2nd August, 2024, 2:30pm.

the disruption of their traditional ways of life This displacement not only causes economic hardship but also leads to cultural erosion and loss of identity, further entrenching the sense of othering.[406]

Racial Othering and Stereotypes

"R", residing in Bangalore, believed that othering often begins with distinctive physical features. He noted that individuals are frequently perceived as not part of the mainstream community due to their appearance. He highlighted that there are two types of othering: deliberate and unconscious. Deliberate othering involves explicit racial profiling and the intentional drawing of distinctions between us and them, this resonates with Said's concept of Othering, how power and knowledge are interconnected. By creating and reinforcing the image of the Other, dominant groups justify their power and maintain their superiority. This process is political and intentional, rooted in the desire to dominate and control, and it continues to shape how we understand and interact with different cultures and peoples.[407]

Unconscious othering is a more pervasive, natural tendency to categorise based on physical attributes, lifestyle, and dress preferences. His insights reflect the pervasive nature of othering across different geographical locations and social contexts. His distinction between deliberate and unconscious othering introduces a crucial dimension to the analysis. Deliberate othering reflects intentional acts of exclusion and discrimination, while unconscious othering reveals the subtler, often internalized biases that operate within social interactions. This dual perspective is essential for recognizing the full spectrum of othering practices and their impacts on individuals and communities.[408]

He added another layer of othering which usually manifest in the form of racial othering or stereotypes. However he added another layer of categorisation. He believes that the cultural categorisation of Indian Nepalis is a complex issue, particularly outside of West Bengal, where they are often grouped under broader, umbrella terms such as North Easterners. Infact he stressed that personally he did not feel that the discourse of Indian Nepalis existed much outside Bengal. There is a sort of "homogenisation" happening particularly in trems of physical

[406] Ibid.

[407] Telephonic interview with participant R, 16th July 2024, 4:10pm.

[408] Ibid.

attributes, food habits and lifestyle preference which thereby is broadly categorised as people from "the North East". He also added that the term "Nepali" itself is frequently used derogatorily, not only towards people of Nepali origin but also towards individuals from the broader North Eastern region of India. This misuse of the term reflects a general ignorance about the diverse cultures and histories within these communities.[409]

A striking illustration of this ignorance and stereotyping is a personal anecdote shared by "R". The narrative describes a situation on a metro where two men were conversing among themselves on the Delhi metro and from their conversations he could tell that they were preparing for competitive exams. One of the men asked Subba if he knew the capital of Arunachal Pradesh. He correctly responded with Itanagar, to which the man retorted that it was obvious he should know the answer, assuming he was from the North East. This exchange was abruptly interrupted by another man who hit the first man on the head, questioning why only he should know the answer, emphasising that as Indians, everyone should be knowledgeable about their country's geography.[410]

However he also noted that, today, there has been a notable shift in the representation of the North East in recent times, addressing a gap that had long persisted in Indian media and public discourse. Historically, these communities were often depicted in a manner reminiscent of Chinese stereotypes, which were not only inaccurate but also derogatory. This misrepresentation perpetuated racial and ethnic biases, marginalising these communities further. His remark enhances a critical issue: the media's role in reflecting and shaping societal perceptions. He concluded that the increased discourse surrounding North Eastern communities is a positive development, reflecting a growing recognition of their cultural and ethnic diversity. This shift in discourse is partially driven by the efforts of activists, scholars, and community leaders who have worked tirelessly to bring the issues faced by these communities to the forefront. Their efforts have resulted in a broader national conversation that acknowledges the unique contributions and challenges of North Eastern communities. However, while this increased visibility is a step in the right direction, it is essential to ensure that it translates into substantive changes in policy and societal attitudes. Representations must move beyond superficial acknowledgments and address the deeper structural inequalities that

[409] Ibid.

[410] Ibid.

these communities face. This includes implementing policies that promote inclusive education, equitable employment opportunities, and social integration.[411]

Perception of Migrant Labour in Neoliberal Economies

S who herself is part of the hospitality industry stated that the contemporary discourse surrounding migrant labour often carries connotations that influence societal perceptions and attitudes. She stated that traditionally a majority of the Indian Nepalis have taken to metropolitan places in search of jobs. The portrayal of migrant workers, especially those in service sectors, reflects broader economic and cultural dynamics. In neoliberal economies, characterised by market-driven policies and privatisation, migrant labour is crucial for maintaining the functioning of various sectors. Migrant workers, often from geographically marginalised regions, fill essential roles that support metropolitan economies. She acknowledged that sometimes there is a discriminatory bias as migrant workers especially from the North East and Darjeeling District usually take to hospitality, wellness and beauty, resturaunts, househelps etc which often leads to discrimatoty remarks or namecalling like "Bahadur", "Durbans" and other racist slurs associating and stereotyping with certain professions. [412]

S along with many other respondents stated that best coping mechanisms is to accept these realities that a major workforce of some ethnic groups are enagaged in these sectors. They stated that it is imperative to shift the narrative and acknowledge the dignity inherent in all forms of labour. Professions undertaken by migrant workers should be recognised for their significance and respected accordingly. Many respondents also responded that when often some slurs were used on them like Bahadur or other racist slurs, they responded positively that, "yes Nepalis do work as security personels and we are proud of it". S light heartedly recalled that when she was once called "chowmein and momo", she responded that they were indeed her favourite food. This in turn exposes the pshyce of the individual person who is attempting to exercise these practise. [413]Butler notes that power's most insidious effects are psychological,

[411] Ibid.

[412] Interview with participant S, 18th July 2024, 5:30pm.

[413] Ibid.

affecting how individuals see themselves and their place in society.[414] Othering uses norms and normalities, as already mentioned, often without the open exercise of violence and control.

Foucault's concept of gouvernmentality differentiates between technologies of dominance and technologies of the self. Processes of subject formation do not only take place by means of disciplining and subjection, but also by means of techniques of the self. One of the historically developed technologies of the self discussed by Foucault is the confession. Let us imagine a person within the virtual discourse of integration who has been defined as the Other. The discriminatory reality in which this person lives defines people as aberrations based on a racist order of knowledge, then criticises those considered as abnormal for their Otherness and insists on assimilative practices in order to become a "good migrant" willing and able to integrate. It is within this discourse that a person confesses to being assimilated. The admission of a hegemonic concept of complete adaption and self-abandonment is based on an implicit confession within a situation of permanent visibility: "Yes, I am an Other." This acknowledgement of being Othered and the consequent assimilative confession is a form of self-representation which, resuming Foucault's or Lacan's propositions, effects a transformation of the minoritised in the sense of an identification.[415]

S stated that the stigmatisation of certain labour groups reflects deeper societal issues related to identity and economic stratification. When individuals are labeled based on their profession or ethnic background, it perpetuates stereotypes and undermines their contributions. It is crucial to foster a sense of pride and ownership among migrant workers. Encouraging individuals to take pride in their heritage and profession can help counteract negative stereotypes and promote a more positive self-image. Accepting and owning one's professional identity, even when it is stigmatised, can be a powerful act of resistance and self-affirmation. When migrant workers embrace their roles with pride, it challenges societal prejudices and transforms negative perceptions into positive recognition. Moreover S stressed that the important question should be, " why do ceratin ethnic groups constitite a certain labour force. The socio economic causes of such migrant labour force should infact be explored."[416]

[414] Judith Butler, *The Pshycic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, (Standford: Standford University Press, 1997).

[415] Michael Focault, *Technologies of the Self*, in "Othering and its Effects", Olade and Velho.

[416] Ibid.

When individuals or society at large derogate certain professions, it often reveals underlying psychological motivations. According to Sigmund Freud's theory of projection, people project their own unwanted feelings or insecurities onto others. By labeling migrant workers in demeaning terms, individuals may be projecting their own anxieties about economic insecurity or social status. Understanding these motivations can help us address the root causes of prejudice and promote more compassionate attitudes towards migrant labour. To understand why certain labour forces are channeled into specific job categories, it is necessary to examine the socioeconomic dynamics at play. Factors such as economic disparity, educational opportunities, and migration policies influence the distribution of labour. These dynamics often result in marginalised groups occupying lower-paid, less secure jobs. Addressing these underlying issues requires a holistic approach that includes policy reforms, educational initiatives, and efforts to reduce economic inequality.

Layers of identity

India, a democratic nation that ostensibly supports pluralism, yet the pervasive nature of othering is evident in various societal structures, as "Q" highlights in his examination of the Janjati movement in Darjeeling. This movement, where non-tribal communities seek inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes category, serves as a crucial lens to understand how othering manifests and how identities are formed in opposition to the other. Q posits that at the grassroots level, identities are continuously formed and reinforced through the process of othering. This intricate layering of identities—first as Indian, then through a pan-Gorkha identity, further as he, and finally through biological identity—demonstrates the impossibility of subscribing to a singular identity, as each layer reciprocally influences the others. He stressed that without the other the self would not exist. Differences persist to know the other.[417]

He critiques the term martial race, a colonial construct historically used to categorise Nepali communities as inherently warlike and fit for military service. He argues that this term should be abandoned due to its derogatory connotations and the systemic exploitation it perpetuates. This label has been manipulated by power elites to maintain derogatory perceptions and marginalise these communities, thus limiting their opportunities in government employment and reinforcing systemic exploitation. On the other hand "V" maintains that this identity as Gorkha which essentialises bravery and courage are positive traits to be considered in an ethnic

[417] Interview with participant Q, 16th August, 2024, 4pm.

group and therefore one can always maintain other distinct identities along with primarily being a Gorkha. B stated that today with the younger generation of the Indian Nepali Community venturing into different fields, the identity reification of the community is gradually changing and moving away from the *khukuri.* L noted that given the changing nature of the job market, these qualities like valour and courage would give one little to no prospects of being employed. He also stressed that the newer generations would be more adept at utilising and developing other skill sets.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to understand the concept of "othering" by examining its theoretical underpinnings and its application in everyday discourse. As a theoretical construct, the concept of the "Other" finds its roots in psychoanalytic traditions, particularly the works of Freud and Lacan, and has been significantly redefined by postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. Through these perspectives, the notion of the "Other" emerges as a critical tool in understanding the construction of identity, as one's self-concept often relies upon the presence and gaze of the "Other." This chapter extends these ideas to analyse the representation of the Gorkha as a martial category, applying this theoretical lens to uncover the layers of identity formation and negotiation.

The analysis reveals a threefold dynamic at play. The external imposition of an identity, the internalisation of that imposed identity, and the community's response to it. The external imposition refers to the colonial construction of the Gorkha identity, wherein individuals of Nepali origin were characterized by traits such as bravery and martial prowess. This colonial logic, however, warrants deeper introspection. It reveals an underlying stereotype that aligns with what has been termed the "Gurkha syndrome," which posits that certain "martial races" living in peripheral geographies are suitable for roles requiring physical valour but are incapable of governance or higher political agency. Such colonial narratives contributed to the formation of a subordinated identity, where valour was celebrated but within a framework of inferiority and marginalisation.

At the same time, the chapter acknowledges the duality of this identity. The Gorkha image, while externally imposed, has also been internalised and celebrated within the community. This internalisation has taken on various forms, including familial reliance on military service for livelihood and a collective pride in the image of the "brave Gorkha" serving the nation. A poignant example of this celebration is found in the popular Nepali rock band Mantra's song,

which vividly embodies the pride and honor associated with the Gorkha identity. The lyrics, "I am the son of a Gorkha, Gorkha is my name; if any evil befalls me, I shall perish them; you can turn the pages of history, or ask my ancestors; we have won the world, Brave warrior, Gorkhali" serve as an anthem of persistence and valour, echoing a collective memory shaped by both history and mythology.

Furthermore, political elites have strategically leveraged this imagery to advance the demand for Gorkhaland. Leaders like Subhash Ghising and Bimal Gurung have valorised the courage and martial legacy of the Gorkha, constructing a sense of political identity tied to the colonial category. This appropriation demonstrates the corelation between pride and pragmatism, as the community negotiates its identity within the broader Indian nation-state. However, the chapter also highlights the repercussions of relying on the colonial category of the Gorkha. Outside areas where Nepali arent in a majority, particularly in mainland India, the Gorkha identity often carries stereotypes that reduce it to professions or roles deemed inferior. For instance, interactions with respondents R and S reveal instances where the term "Nepali" is casually or pejoratively associated with certain labour force or work, perpetuating a demeaning and reductive narrative. This reflects a disjunction between the internal pride of the Gorkha identity within Nepali communities and the external perceptions of Nepalis in broader Indian society. The persistence of this martial identity, while historically significant, faces new challenges in light of contemporary defense policies, such as the *Agniveer* initiative, which may relegate the image of the *Brave Gurkha* to a historical construct or a relic of past glory. The analysis then extends to explore the implications and potential repercussions of these policy changes, emphasising the need to reconsider identity formation beyond colonial legacies.

The work of Bidhan Golay provides a valuable framework for supplementing this analysis, particularly in addressing the intersection of identity, nationalism, and the colonial legacy. By incorporating his insights, the conclusion enriches its critique of the long-standing reliance on colonial identity categories and underscores the urgency of seeking alternative forms of identity assertion in a changing sociopolitical and defense landscape. Bidhan Golay[418] writes, the Gorkha identity has navigated a challenging path, striving to balance its cultural distinctiveness with the demands of Indian citizenship and national culture. This identity, shaped within the community's narrative, had to conform to the postcolonial state's framework, which is

[418] Bidhan Golay, "Rethinking Gorkha Identity: Outside the Imperium of Discourse, Hegemony, and History," *Peace and Democracy in South Asia* 2, no. 1-2 (2006), 43.

entrenched in a universal narrative of capital that typically recognises only the nation as a valid form of community. The issues surrounding Gorkha identity stem from everyday experiences and the need to carve out a political space for its cultural identity in India. The legitimacy of this identity is often claimed through its contributions to anti-colonial struggles, a moral assertion that is reinforced by downplaying its historical connection to Nepal.[419]

This leads to terms like Indian-Nepali, Bharatiya-Gorkhali, or Bhargoli. Part of the problem is also rooted in the approach of Nepali historiography, which has not thoroughly interrogated colonialism and shows a tendency to rely on colonial sources like Vansittart, Hooker, and O'Malley for validation. This reliance on colonial discourses has resulted in these texts becoming the primary sources of knowledge about the community, both externally and internally, often drowning out native voices. The immediate consequence is the endorsement of an idealised, orientalised identity as self-identity. As Edward Said noted, the Orient was Orientalised not only because it was perceived as such by Europeans but also because it could be made so. The colonial knowledge system both constructs and is constructed by these perceptions.

Additionally, the notion of "otherness" plays a crucial role in shaping the Gorkha identity. Otherness, as a concept, refers to the way a group is defined and marginalised by being marked as different from the dominant group. For the Gorkhas, this othering has been a persistent reality, as they are often viewed through the lens of their colonial past and their distinct cultural attributes. This othering reinforces stereotypes and perpetuates a sense of alienation within the national narrative. The true aim of Gorkha historiography should be to reclaim their unique forms of subjectivity from universalising modes, to reconstitute and restore them in history. This involves engaging with canonical texts, reading them critically, and challenging the prevailing discourse. This process will eventually free the Gorkha identity from the dominance of Western historical narratives and their totalising tendencies.[420]

Liberating the Gorkha identity from colonial discourse should pave the way for further hybridisation rather than essentialisation of identity. We must remember that identities are always hybrid and constantly evolve, making culture a contested site of multiple, overlapping identities. In conclusion, the path to a balanced Gorkha identity involves not only

[419] Ibid 43-44.

[420]Ibid., 44.

acknowledging and rectifying the impacts of colonial historiography but also actively resisting the forces of othering that continue to marginalise the community. By critically engaging with historical texts and narratives, and embracing the inherent hybridity of cultural identities, the Gorkhas can forge a more inclusive and dynamic sense of self within the broader Indian national framework. This process will not only enhance the community's political and cultural agency but also contribute to a richer, more diverse national identity for India as a whole.[421]

By shifting the focus from macro-level studies to micro-level narratives, this study, which is based on qualitative and ethnographic approaches, makes it possible to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the ways in which identities are produced, perceived, and negotiated in the context of the Indian Nepali community and the nation-state. The findings challenge simplistic and monolithic conceptions of ethnic and national identities by highlighting the fact that identity is not a fixed characteristic but rather a fluid construct that is molded by a variety of socio-cultural and political variables.

The accounts that were gathered from members of the community highlight the nature and process of individual identity creation. Within the framework of the larger sociopolitical environment, individuals manage their identities in reaction to perceived threats, prejudice, and other factors. For example, some respondents place a greater emphasis on their ethnic identity as a means of affirming their place within a nation-state against the fear of marginalisation, while others place a greater emphasis on their national or cosmopolitan identities in order to connect themselves with existing cultural trends around the world. This dynamic points to the significance of viewing identity as a site of negotiation, where individuals continually redefine themselves in relation to the "other"whether it be other ethnic groups, persons of different nationalities, or social classes.

It is essential to have a solid awareness of the power dynamics that are at play within the Indian Nepali group in order to fully comprehend the notion of othering. Othering is not only an act that occurs by accident or without conscious thought; rather, it is an intentional political practice that has its roots in power relations and that marginalises and objectsifies individuals who are considered to be different as described by Said. The tales demonstrate that members of the community frequently encounter othering in their day-to-day lives, notably in the public spheres, where they feel the need to demonstrate their value within a system that reinforces

[421] ibid

systemic biases and microaggressions. The historical and sociopolitical context of the Gorkhaland movement, which tried to affirm a distinct Gorkha identity in the face of perceived alienation and marginalisation, adds another layer of complexity to this sensation of being othered.

An additional layer of complexity is added to the process of identity building inside the community by the proliferation of cosmopolitan cultures and globalising influences. People who are navigating various identities tend to prioritise different components of their identity dependent on the experiences they have had and the sociopolitical environment in which they find themselves functioning. This fluidity in identity shows the significance of acknowledging the intersectionality of identities, which is the process by which elements such as ethnicity, nationality, and class combine to shape individual experiences. Based on the data, it appears that identity is not just a personal construct but also a collective one, which is influenced by larger sociopolitical narratives and movements.

In addition, the study sheds light on the significance of cultural capital in the formation of identity and otherness. Cultural assets that bestow power and benefit are typically held by dominant groups within society, which often push underprivileged people to the margins of society. It appears from the accounts that the Indian Nepali population is confronted with considerable obstacles when attempting to gain access to cultural wealth, which contributes to the perpetuation of their marginalisation. The portrayal of local culture is frequently commodified and distorted in order to appeal to the preconceptions of outsiders, which further erodes the community's real cultural identity. This dynamic is obvious in industries such as tourism, where it is evident that this phenomenon occurs.

It becomes clear that economic disparities and the distribution of resources are significant elements that play a role in cultivating a sense of othering within the community. Feelings of alienation and resentment are exacerbated by the unequal allocation of resources, particularly among excluded groups who have the perception that their contributions to the economy are being disregarded. Through the use of narratives, the impact of economic policies on social cohesiveness is brought to light, illuminating the ways in which structural disparities can result in conflict and disagreement within communities. Furthermore, the findings highlight the need of ensuring that resources are distributed fairly in order to promote social cohesion and reduce feelings of othering.

Perceptions of identification within the Indian Nepali population are also significantly influenced by racial othering and stereotypes, which play a vital part in the formation of beliefs. The accounts demonstrate how differences in physical appearance and cultural behaviors are frequently interpreted as indicators of difference, which can result in discrimination and exclusion. The study emphasizes the significance of addressing these prejudices and cultivating a more inclusive understanding of identity that acknowledges the diversity that exists within the community.

The way in which migrant workers are perceived in neoliberal economies adds another layer of complexity to the conversation about identity and other identity. According to the testimonies, migrant workers from the Indian Nepali population frequently encounter discrimination and stigmatisation in the labour market. This is a reflection of the larger sentiments that society has regarding particular professions. As a significant act of resistance against negative preconceptions, the findings show that recognizing the dignity of all forms of labor and encouraging a positive self-image among migrant workers can serve as a powerful act of resistance.

The Indian Nepali group is a prime example of the deep layering of identities that exists within the community, which highlights the intricacy of identity development in a secular culture. The narratives demonstrate that identities are continuously established and reinforced through the process of othering, which is a process in which individuals negotiate numerous levels of identity in response to the events they have lived. Due to the fact that one layer influences the others in a reciprocal manner, this dynamic demonstrates that it is no longer possible to subscribe to a unique identity.

In conclusion, the findings of this chapter shed light on the complex construction and perception of identity and otherness that exists within the Indian Nepali group. The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the ways in which identities are formed by individual experiences, socio-political dynamics, and cultural narratives. This is accomplished by giving priority to micro-level narratives. These findings call into question overly simplified depictions of identity and highlight the importance of having a comprehensive grasp of the dynamic relationship that exists between local and global variables in the process of identity formation.

Conclusion

I. Research Objectives

1. Language and Belonging: To explore how the Nepali language fosters a sense of belonging and collective identity among Indian Nepalis, encompassing diverse ethnic groups. To analyse the need and importance given to the constitutional recognition of the Nepali language and its impact on the socio-political identity of Indian Nepalis.

2. Cultural Production and Identity Formation: to assess the role that literary development plays in consolidating the Nepali Language and understand the need for cultural production within the broader context of Indian Nationalism and Nation formation.

3. Movements and Mobilisation: To examine the historical and political catalysts behind movements such as Gorkhaland and Janjati, identifying their underlying motivations and socio-political significance. To assess how these movements embody broader campaigns for rights, recognition, and self-determination within the Indian state and constitutional machinery.

4. Land Rights and Identity in Plantation Labour: To understand the pivotal role of land ownership in shaping the identity and aspirations of tea plantation workers in Darjeeling. To evaluate how the socio-economic realities of tea workers and the organisational structure of the tea industry impact regional politics and ethnic identity formation.

5. Othering and Community Dynamics: To analyse the mechanisms of "othering" and their role in constructing identities, social hierarchies, and power dynamics in Darjeeling and Indian Nepalis. To investigate how these processes of othering manifest in contemporary contexts and how communities have responded through cultural, political, and social initiatives.

II. Findings

The findings of this thesis are structured into two overarching categories, both of which ultimately coalesce in an interrogation of the identity formation of the Indian Nepali community. The first category engages with the challenges, both material and cultural, that have confronted the community, emanating from both statist and societal structures during the colonial and postcolonial periods. The second category examines the modalities of resistance

and alternative identity articulations through which the community has negotiated these existential threats. The precarities surrounding identity are critically examined through the interrelated discourses of land rights and processes of othering in chapter two and four, both of which are addressed through distinct yet interconnected avenues, namely, literary and linguistic movements on the one hand, and ethnic mobilisation on the other, (chapter one and three). While the chapters focusing on literature, land rights, citizenship, and othering constitute discrete analytical interventions, they collectively converge to elucidate the intricate socio-historical formation of Darjeeling and the Indian Nepali community.

The findings point to the inextricable entanglement of culture, language, ethnicity, and land (*mato*) in the production of a composite identity that is foundational to the community's socio-cultural ontology. However, this process of identity formation must be situated within the broader epistemic and structural legacies of colonialism, particularly with regard to historiographical constructions, land tenure regimes, and postcolonial statecraft. These historical contingencies have profoundly conditioned the dialectics of belonging, territoriality, and community assertion, shaping the modalities through which the Indian Nepali community negotiates its positionality within the Indian nation-state. In this light, the study has explored the broader implications of these findings, considering how they have contributed to the larger discourse on nationhood, community, and the politics of recognition.

As mentioned above in the beginning these research objectives have been looked at not as distinct categories but interwoven asects of identity broadly divided into two apsects , the material and cultural challenges and the response to these challenges. Alongside this, the thesis also contributes to the broader theoretical aspects which have been borrowed throughout the study which will be analysed in the latter half of this chapter. Firstly I will relegate the discussion to material and cultural challenges or threats which have been explored in the chapter on land rights and on othering. The chapter on land rights has derived the data from qualitative interviews and discussions with members of the Darjeeling tea industry which include generational tea workers from three tea gardens, members of prominent tea unions and mangers of two tea estates. The chapter on othering consequently gathers data by engaging with members of the Indian Nepali Community from various stratas of life which gives an insight into the micro narratives which have in turn shaped macro socio political discourses.

Material

The chapter on *Land Rights* gives us an insight into the material challenges that are faced by the Indian Nepali Community and also delves into the research objective on *Land Rights and Identity in Plantation Labour* which allows us to *interpret the pivotal role of land ownership in shaping the identity and aspirations of tea plantation workers in Darjeeling.* Most importantly it permits us to *understand how the socio-economic realities of tea workers and the organisational structure of the tea industry impact regional politics and ethnic identity formation.* This chapter finds that the primary concerns and grievances of tea plantation workers which traditionally revolved around several critical issues, including low wages, delayed and inadequate payment of bonuses, abrupt garden closures, non-disbursement of allowances for essential provisions such as rations and firewood, lack of safety measures, limited or non-existent access to modern healthcare facilities, and ineffective government policies have now been encapsulated overtly by acute anxieties about the threat of displacement from their ancestral lands, commonly referred to as *Parjapatta*.

This chapter through interactions with stakeholders of the tea industry primarily trade unions and tea workers find that policies, rather than addressing these issues systematically and sensitively, may have inadvertently intensified anxieties, leading to the transformation land, of grievances into ethnic and political concerns. For instance, the five decimal scheme, perceived by many respondents as a policy aimed at demarcating ,excess landrestricts generational land-tenurial workers to only five decimals of land, which is also non-inheritable by their descendants if they chose to discontinue the profession. This provision starkly contrasts with the reality, as most workers currently possess significantly more land, often exceeding five acres. The use of terminology such as “landless” in the scheme has further heightened fears of alienation, sparking concerns about identity and belonging. These fears are strategically mobilised by political elites, who reframe the issue of land tenure into an ethnic narrative and mobilisation, consequently, which has been looked at in the chapter on Citizenship. Many workers simultaneously suspect that the true intent of the five decimal scheme is to appropriate land for tourism and tea plantation policies, displacing indigenous communities in the process. This exacerbates longstanding anxieties about Indian Nepalis being labeled as “outsiders” and the potential for their displacement from ancestral lands.

This study examines the tea industry as a lens through which to analyse the broader spectrum of land rights issues, extending beyond tea plantations to encompass regions within Darjeeling,

Kalimpong, Terai, and Dooars. These areas, including tea gardens, cinchona plantations, D.I Fund land, and forested regions continue to be characterised by the absence of formal land ownership rights. Residents remain legally designated as occupants of leased land rather than proprietors, highlighting the precariousness of their tenure. This issue is intricately linked to the discussion in the subsequent chapter on citizenship, wherein dominant political narratives envision the secessionist movement for Gorkhaland as a resolution to the identity struggles of the Indian Nepali community. A central motif in the rhetoric of this movement is the deeply emotive association with land referred to as *mato or bhoomi* which galvanises mass support. The prevailing logic suggests that despite generations of residence in these territories, the denial of land rights signifies a failure to recognise Indian Nepalis as full-fledged citizens, thereby amplifying concerns of identity and belonging. Within this framework, the movement for a separate state is positioned as a means through which Indian Nepalis residing in these contested spaces would be accorded formal and unequivocal recognition as permanent citizens. This brings us to the fourth chapter on citizenshp which tries to study *their underlying motivations and socio-political significance of these movements. To assess how these movements embody broader campaigns for rights, recognition, and self-determination within the Indian state and constitutional machinery.*

Here the study finds the nexus between the tea industry and its pivotal role in fuelling political mobilisations in the past. Leaders such as Subhash Ghising and Bimal Gurung have strategically framed land rights and identity as central to their mobilisation efforts, emphasising *bhoomi* (land) as a unifying cause. Beyond leaders like Subhash Ghising and Bimal Gurung, contemporary political figures have also foregrounded land rights, linking them to symbols of political and ethnic identity. The newly formed Indian Gorkha Janshakti Front (IGJF), for instance, has called upon the West Bengal government to amend the West Bengal Land Reforms (WBLR) Act to incorporate provisions specific to the region's unique socio-political context. In a letter addressed to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, IGJF chief convenor Ajoy Edwards criticised the Nijo Griho, Nijo Bhumi Prakalpa (NGNBP) scheme, which provides upto five decimals of land to the homeless and landless. He argued that such a scheme fails to address the distinct historical and cultural realities of the Hills, Terai, and Dooars. According to Edward, the residents of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Terai, and Dooars, including those in tea gardens, cinchona plantations, DI Fund land, and forest areas have inhabited these lands for centuries, predating Indian independence, and thus cannot be classified under the same

framework as the landless elsewhere in Bengal. Edwards further urged the state government to amend the WBLR Act to recognise the historical ownership claims of the region's people.[422]

During the official launch of the IGJF in December 2024, Edwards issued a public appeal to tea garden workers, advising them to oppose land surveys. In contrast, the Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGPM), currently in power in the hills, has argued that conducting surveys is essential for issuing patta (land ownership documents), even for the land that tea garden workers currently occupy. In this context, the Land and Land Reforms Department issued an order on August 1, 2023, directing District Magistrates in six districts of North Bengal to prepare proposals for granting homestead patta to eligible families. The scheme aimed to distribute surplus or unutilised land in tea gardens, with a limit of five decimals per family. However, this proposal drew significant opposition from hill-based political factions, triggering protests and demonstrations. Subsequently, Anit Thapa, Chief Executive of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), requested the state government to pause the land survey process. On September 12, 2023, the state issued a notification directing the District Magistrates of Darjeeling and Kalimpong to halt surveys and related activities. However, a subsequent notification on November 2, 2023, instructed the District Magistrates to resume survey activities in the tea gardens within the GTA jurisdiction on an "as is where is" basis, without stipulating specific area limitations.[423]

These evolving legislative and administrative measures highlight the contentious nature of land rights in the hills, reflecting a broader socio-political struggle for identity and autonomy. The framing of such issues within an ethnic framework refects the intersections of historical grievances, contemporary governance, and political mobilisation in Darjeeling and its surrounding regions. It can thus be concluded that grievances of such nature are often mobilised to adopt an ethnic and politically charged dimension. This perspective is similarly articulated by Dr. Mona Chettri, who argues that, in the Darjeeling hills, economic issues that may seem straightforward are frequently reinterpreted through an ethnic perspective by political figures,

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[422] "IGJF Writes to Mamta Banerjee, Demands Land Rights Based on Physical Posession", *Sikkim Express*, January 5, 2025, 10:45 p.m, accessed Jan 7, 2025, https://sikkimexpress.com/news-details/igjf-writes-to-mamata-banerjee-demands-land-rights-based-on-physical-possession#google_vignette.

[423] Amitava Banerjee, "IGJF Writes to CM Seeking Amendments to Land Reforms Act," *Millennium Post*, January 5, 2025, 11:20 p.m., accessed on Jan 7, 2025 https://www.millenniumpost.in/bengal/igjf-writes-to-cm-seeking-amendments-to-land-reforms-act-593546.

trade unions, and local intellectuals. This framing leads to the widespread perception that the economic marginalisation of the Nepali community is inherently linked to their ethnic identity. Such a reinterpretation plays a crucial role in shaping how the region perceives its relationship with the state, which is often seen, perhaps with good reason, as prioritising resource extraction over development and welfare. As a result, this simplified narrative has contributed to a tense and adversarial relationship between the state and the local population.[424]

On a similar note Sarah Besky observes how the connection between tea plantation labour and the Gorkhaland movement is deeply related, where both tangible and symbolic ties to the land shape the community's assertion of Indian citizenship. The movement's demand for justice is centered on the idea of territorial sovereignty, which is firmly rooted in the longstanding relationship between the Gorkhas and the land of Darjeeling. As long-term residents of the region, they perceive justice as a set of rights intrinsically linked to their deep-rooted connection to the land , reinforced by a shared linguistic identity. However, these claims are shaped by the historical reality that the Gorkhas trace their distinct identity to both displacement from Nepal and subjugation within the colonial tea plantation system. Their sense of belonging is framed through two perspectives, one that emerges from their historical experiences of labor and servitude under British colonial rule and subsequent planters, and another that draws from primordial notions of a natural and timeless connection to the land, independent of their history in the tea industry.[425]

The issue of land rights for Indian Nepalis is closely linked to the open border between India and Nepal, which has historically facilitated cross-border movement. However, the absence of a structured mechanism to regulate new settlers has contributed to the conflation of long-established Indian Nepalis with recent Nepalese migrants. This has led to the recurring misrepresentation of Nepalese migration as a singular and homogeneous phenomenon, often employed as a political or social tool to challenge the legitimacy of Indian Nepalis. To address this, there is a need for well-defined policies that recognise the distinct phases of migration, ensuring that historical settlers who have been integral to India's socio-economic and cultural fabric are not unfairly grouped with more recent arrivals.

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[424] Mona Chettri, "Choosing the Gorkha: At the Crossroads of Class and Ethnicity in the Darjeeling Hills," *Asian Ethnicity* 14, no. 3 (2013): 293–308, https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2013.764763,

[425] Sarah Besky, *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*, (Berkely: University of California Press, 2013).

A nuanced and sensitive policy approach would help delineate the identity and rights of Indian Nepalis while also managing the complexities of new migration patterns. The establishment of such a regulatory mechanism would not only safeguard their legal and social standing but also foster harmony in the region. This, in turn, would contribute to social stability and strengthen relations between Indian Nepalis and the state, paving the way for greater inclusivity and cooperation. Furthermore, this issue calls for a deeper introspection into the nature of the Indian nation and its imagination. The discourse surrounding Indian Nepalis and migration highlights broader questions about national identity, belonging, and the ways in which India's pluralistic ethos accommodates diverse ethnic and historical trajectories. Addressing these concerns through informed policy decisions would reaffirm the state's commitment to an inclusive and historically conscious nation-building process.

Cultural

The fourth chapter looks into the third reserach objective *Othering and Community Dynamics: To analyse the mechanisms of "othering" and their role in constructing identities, social hierarchies. To investigate how these processes of exclusion manifest in contemporary contexts and how communities have responded through cultural, political, and social initiatives.* This chapter has sought to understand the concept of "othering" by examining its theoretical underpinnings and its application in everyday discourse. As a theoretical construct, the concept of the "Other" finds its roots in psychoanalytic traditions, particularly the works of Freud and Lacan, and has been significantly redefined by postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak.

By shifting the focus from macro-level studies to micro-level narratives, this chapter , which is based on qualitative and ethnographic approaches, makes it possible to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the ways in which identities are produced, perceived, and negotiated in the context of the Indian Nepali community and the nation-state. The findings challenge simplistic and monolithic conceptions of ethnic and national identities by highlighting the fact that identity is not a fixed characteristic but rather a fluid construct that is molded by a variety of socio-cultural and political variables. The accounts that were gathered from members of the community highlight the nature and process of individual identity creation. Within the framework of the larger sociopolitical environment, individuals manage their identities in reaction to perceived threats, prejudice, and other factors.

For example, the study found that some respondents placed a greater emphasis on their ethnic identity as a means of affirming their place within a nation-state against the fear of marginalisation, while others placed a greater emphasis on their national or cosmopolitan identities in order to connect themselves with existing cultural trends around the world. This dynamic points to the significance of viewing identity as a site of negotiation, where individuals continually redefine themselves in relation to the "other" whether it be other ethnic groups, persons of different nationalities, or social classes. It is essential to have a solid awareness of the power dynamics that are at play within the Indian Nepali group in order to fully comprehend the notion of othering. Othering is not only an act that occurs by accident or without conscious thought, rather, it is an intentional political practice that has its roots in power relations and that marginalises and objectsifies individuals who are considered to be different as described by Said. The tales demonstrate that members of the community frequently encounter othering in their day-to-day lives, notably in the public spheres, where they feel the need to demonstrate their value within a system that reinforces systemic biases and microaggressions.

The study also finds that the Indian Nepali group is a prime example of the deep layering of identities that exists within a community, which highlights the complexities of identity development in a secular culture. The narratives demonstrate that identities are continuously established and reinforced through the process of othering, which is a process in which individuals negotiate numerous levels of identity in response to the events they have lived. Due to the fact that one layer influences the others in a reciprocal manner, this dynamic demonstrates that it is no longer possible to subscribe to a unique identity. The accounts gathered mostly as micro narratives demonstrate *culture as the prime site of contestation and therefore the need for cultural production.* The study finds that this cultural production is met in the form of language and literary movements on the one hand and ethnic movements on the other (primarily the *Janjati* movement or tribal movement). However as revealed through accounts in the chapter on othering, layers of identity primarily holds true in the sphere of culture too. Literature as discussed in the second chapter and Nepali language recognition movement discussed in the chapter on citizenship primarily look at Nepali culture as a homogeneous entity. However as revealed that identities are hybrid and layered the section on ethnic movements reveal another intricate layer of identity as tribes.

The research objective on *Cultural Production and Identity Formation: to assess the role that literary development plays in developing the Nepali Language and understand the need for*

cultural production within the broader context of Indian Nationalism and Nation formation. In this context, the chapter concludes that creating a robust literary tradition was essential for standardising the Nepali language and establishing a cultural sphere for Indian Nepalis within the Indian nation. Indian Nepalis, comprising diverse ethnic groups, adopted Nepali as their *lingua franca t*o enable collective consciousness. The Nepali language thus played a vital role in consolidating the Indian Nepali identity. The Nepali language not only shaped the Indian Nepali identity but also facilitated political mobilisation, such as the movement for its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This recognition became a cornerstone of Indian Nepali nationalism, reflecting broader themes of belonging and representation. However, the role of language must be viewed within broader political, social, and economic contexts, which are explored in other chapters of this thesis. Together, these factors drive political action and identity formation, with literature providing the symbolic and cultural framework through which the community could imagine itself and articulate its aspirations.

In conclusion, this chapter finds how literature was not only central to shaping the Nepali language and Indian Nepali identity but also provided the community with a scope for cultural imagining. Through literary production, the Indian Nepali community envisioned itself as a distinct cultural and political entity, articulating its demands, expressing its struggles, and fostering a sense of shared belonging. The evolution of Nepali literature from its Sanskritic roots to addressing contemporary issues reflects the broader cultural, social, and political transformations of the community, with literature acting as a crucial medium for imagining and solidifying their collective identity. The relation between identities, politics, power, and emotions becomes evident in the process of constructing personal and collective senses of self and nation. Within this context, linguistic competence stands as a crucial determinant and constituent of belonging. While linguistic anthropologists have extensively explored the role of language in shaping individual identities through various modalities, less attention has been given to the concept of belonging. Historically, languages have played a pivotal role in the formation of nation states, with efforts to unite diverse populations under a single linguistic banner aimed at fostering national unity.

Language, as a symbolic marker of identity, often serves as a boundary device, accentuating differences and contributing to the maintenance of borders. The diverse historical experiences of migration contribute to the nuanced expressions of linguistic belonging in the eastern Himalayas. Here, languages once primarily utilitarian have transformed into markers of belonging due to their emotional, symbolic, and political significance. The evolution of

language into a form of heritage and an inherent right strengthens the connection between language and belonging. Therefore linguistic affiliation, which is not only intertwined with personal and cultural identities but also shaped by political motivations and power dynamics. The journey of language from a practical tool to an emblem of heritage signifies its significance in constructing a sense of belonging that resonates on emotional, symbolic, and political levels.[426]

The recognition of the Nepali language in India was a landmark achievement that not only reinforced the cultural identity of Indian Nepalis but also underscored the critical role of language in South Asian politics. In a region where linguistic identity is deeply intertwined with ethnic recognition, political representation, and social inclusion, the struggle for Nepali language recognition was more than just a cultural movement, but also legitimacy and rights. The official inclusion of Nepali in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in 1992 was a significant step in affirming the Indian Nepali community's place within India's diverse socio-political framework, countering long-standing perceptions of them as outsiders. This victory enabled the growth of Nepali-language literature, media, and education, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage and linguistic continuity. Additionally, it played a crucial role in shaping political consciousness among Indian Nepalis, fueling movements such as *Gorkhaland*, which demand greater autonomy for Nepali-speaking regions like Darjeeling and parts of North-East India. The integration of Nepali into educational institutions and government examinations also opened doors for employment and social mobility, empowering the community in both political and economic spheres.

The *Janjati* or tribal movement, particularly discussed in Chapter three , has gained significant traction following the decline of the Gorkhaland movement. This shift has led to a renewed assertion of ethnic identities, reinforcing claims of indigeneity among various Indian Nepali communities. The movement is primarily driven by the desire to establish a distinct tribal identity, which serves two key purposes. First, it seeks constitutional recognition under the Scheduled Tribes (ST) category, which would provide legal protection and socio-political legitimacy within the framework of the Indian state. Such recognition carries implications beyond cultural affirmation, as it directly influences representation in governance, access to

[426] Mark Turin, "Mother Tongues and Language Competence: The Shifting Politics of Linguistic Belonging in the Himalayas," in *Facing Globalization in the Himalayas: Belonging and the Politics of the Self*, ed. Gérard Toffin and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, vol. 5 (New Delhi: Sage Publishing, 2014), 371–396. *Governance, Conflict, and Civic Action*. ISBN 978-81-321-1162-7. halshs-03083356.

educational and employment quotas, and overall policy considerations. Second, the movement is motivated by the pursuit of affirmative action benefits, which include reservations in government jobs, educational institutions, and other state-sponsored welfare schemes.

Given the socio-economic marginalisation faced by several Indian Nepali groups, inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list is perceived as a crucial step toward securing their rights and ensuring their socio-political empowerment. A critical underlying aspect of this mobilisation is that it implicitly confirms the Indian citizenship status of Indian Nepalis. Historically, questions of belonging and legitimacy have often plagued Indian Nepali communities, with migration narratives being used to challenge their claims to Indian identity. By seeking ST recognition and engaging with state mechanisms, the movement reinforces their position within India's constitutional and political framework, countering exclusionary rhetoric and affirming their place within the nation. The demand for ST recognition by Indian Nepali groups must also be understood in the broader context of the politics of reservation in India. The reservation system, designed as a tool for social justice, was instituted to uplift historically marginalised communities, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). However, over time, it has become a deeply contested and politicised issue. One of the central debates surrounding reservation policies is the balance between historical injustice and contemporary socio-economic realities. While reservations were initially framed as a temporary measure to address structural discrimination, they have become a permanent fixture in Indian politics due to the continued socio-economic disparities and political mobilisation of marginalized communities.

The demand for ST status by Indian Nepalis reflects a broader pattern where communities seek official recognition to gain access to state benefits, often positioning themselves within the discourse of historical marginalization. Furthermore, the reservation system has led to political mobilisation among various ethnic and caste groups, with competing claims for inclusion and benefits. This has resulted in tensions between communities already classified under reserved categories and those seeking inclusion, as well as between marginalized groups and dominant social classes that view reservations as a threat to meritocracy. Political parties have also strategically used reservation policies as electoral tools, promising inclusion or expansion of quotas to garner votes, thereby reinforcing identity-based politics.

To push for the inclusion of excluded Gorkha communities from Sikkim and West Bengal in the Scheduled Tribes list, a "Joint Action Committee (JAC) for Scheduled Tribe Demand" has been formed under the leadership of Sikkim Chief Minister P. S Golay. The decision was made during a discussion in Siliguri, attended by Darjeeling MP Raju Bista and representatives of 11 sub-tribes from Darjeeling and 12 from Sikkim on October 6, 2024. The committee will consist of five members from Sikkim and four from Darjeeling. Additionally, a 22-member team has been tasked with compiling an ethnographic study. A consolidated report will be drafted and submitted to the Registrar General of India (RGI). Highlighting the need for Gorkhas to receive tribal recognition, Bista remarked that the meeting was organized to facilitate discussions and exchange reports on various sub-tribes.[427]

III. Conclusing Observations

In this section, I intend to incorporate key theoretical insights and underpinnings that have been engaged with throughout the thesis. This will not only contextualise the empirical study within a broader academic discourse but also clarify its significance and relevance. To achieve this, I will analyse the key takeaways from each chapter, which will help summarise the main highlights of the study. This approach will also serve to elucidate the interrelationships among the various theoretical frameworks discussed, thereby enhancing the coherence and analytical depth of the research.

A key theoretical framework that this thesis engages with in detail is the study of the Indian nation, its conceptual imaginings, and its relationship with the state. One of the central ideas in this discourse is the notion of the nation as an *imagined community*. Here, culture plays a pivotal role in the construction of national space, a process deeply reliant on historiographical representations of the past. At this intersection, scholars such as Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj, and Aijaz Ahmad have repeatedly offered critical introspections, consistently returning to the fundamental role of culture in shaping national identity. The study finds that this process of cultural construction, one that aligns with the national past and ethos while simultaneously articulating a distinct experience was made accessible to the Indian Nepali community through literature. Accordingly, this thesis underscores the significance of Indian Nepali literary production. However, a critical question emerges, if Indian Nepali literature has

[427] "Golay Forms Committee for Gorkha Sub-Tribes ST Push," *Millennium Post*, accessed February 19, 2024, https://www.millenniumpost.in/nation/golay-forms-committee-for-gorkha-sub-tribes-st-push-582357.

been consistently curated for and by the community, why does the discourse frequently acknowledge Nepalese writers.

The answer lies in this very trajectory of development and transition, which can be seen as a linear reflection of the evolution of the Indian Nepali community. This study initially traces the origins of Indian Nepali literature to Nepalese writers such as Adikavi Bhanubhakta, but as the chapters progress, it examines the role of the printing press in Benaras, the emergence of a public literary culture, and the intersections of social upliftment and *jāti* consciousness. This trajectory ultimately leads to figures like I.B. Rai, whose works encapsulate the realities of postmodern Indian Nepali literature. The study closely engages with Rai's literary contributions, particularly his compilation of short stories, which employs various metaphors to explore themes of hybridity, tea, and politics. However, the flourishing of this literary tradition was contingent upon language. As discussed in the preceding sections, the Nepali language recognition movement provides critical insights into the role of language in South Asian politics, underscoring its significance in shaping literary and cultural identities.

Another significant takeaway from this thesis is the Indian Nepali community's persistent efforts to secure recognition within the framework of the state and constitutional machinery. These tangible markers of recognition are largely attributed to the state, as exemplified by the language recognition movement, which directly engages with the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Similarly, the Gorkhaland movement examined in this thesis as part of a broader response to identity assertion has its roots primarily in issues of land and resource distribution. Drawing on Sanjib Baruah's perspective, this study analyses how such movements strategically employ the "national grammar" to align themselves with the national imagination. Through an analysis of the various phases of the Gorkhaland movement, this thesis finds that its narratives and strategies have consistently evolved in response to national developments.

In this context, the study also engages with Merriam Wenner's framework, which challenges the conventional view that ethno-regional movements and nationalism are mutually exclusive or antagonistic. Instead, Wenner reconceptualises their relationship as interdependent and mutually reinforcing. By arguing that movements for ethno-regional autonomy are not inherently oppositional to the broader framework of Indian nationalism, Wenner highlights their integral role in the ongoing negotiation and construction of national identity. This perspective destabilises the assumption that regional demands for autonomy inherently threaten national unity. Rather, it positions these movements as active agents in shaping and reproducing national consciousness. A similar dynamic is observed in the *Janjati* movement,

which emerged as an alternative identity to the *Gorkha* and found its place within the framework of India's liberal welfare democracy as enshrined in the Constitution.

This necessitates a deeper introspection into a crucial aspect of South Asian politics, namely, the instrumentalist versus primordialist debate, as articulated by scholars such as Paul Brass and Francis Robinson. This theoretical dichotomy, introduced in the introductory chapter, provides a valuable framework for understanding the intersection of identity, language, and political mobilisation. As this thesis aligns with the broader scholarly consensus including Brass's perspective, it finds that adopting an extreme instrumentalist position is untenable. Ethnic identities are often strategically constructed and manipulated by political elites to serve specific socio-political ends, but neither are these identities are conjured out of a vacuum. Rather, they draw upon pre-existing cultural and historical continuities, which lend them a certain degree of legitimacy and resonance within the community.

A key illustration of this dynamic is the role of the Nepali language in shaping Indian Nepali identity. The language recognition movement, which ultimately secured Nepali's inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, was largely championed by the educated elite. Their advocacy sought to consolidate a homogeneous Indian Nepali identity primarily through linguistic standardisation an approach that aligns with instrumentalist reasoning. However, even the most consciously constructed identities must anchor themselves in primordial elements to gain traction. In this case, the historical and cultural depth of the Nepali language, as well as its deep-seated association with the community's heritage, cannot be overlooked. A similar pattern is observable in ethnic movements, which are often mobilised by elites who strategically appeal to primordial ethnic roots. While such mobilisation taps into historical narratives and cultural symbols, it is also deployed for pragmatic purposes, such as securing the benefits of affirmative action and constitutional safeguards.

This interplay between instrumentalist strategy and primordial sentiment underscores the complexity of ethnic identity formation. The Gorkhaland movement further exemplifies this duality. While the movement articulates a demand for territorial and political recognition, its leadership has frequently invoked both an ethnic and a historical claim to legitimacy. On the one hand, the movement has been framed as an assertion of Gorkha identity, distinct from the broader Indian Nepali category. On the other hand, it has strategically engaged with the national political framework, employing the language of constitutional rights, resource distribution, and regional autonomy to align with broader national discourses. As Brass suggests, such movements are not merely expressions of deep-rooted ethnic consciousness but

are also shaped by contemporary political contingencies and elite-driven strategies. The Janjati or tribal movement within the Indian Nepali community similarly underscores this negotiation between primordialism and instrumentalism. The movement consciously revives and embraces tribal roots, emphasising indigeneity, cultural specificity, and historical narratives of marginalisation. However, this revival is not solely about reclaiming an ancestral past, it is also a strategic mechanism for securing political, social, and economic traction.

The Janjati movement positions itself within the framework of India's liberal welfare democracy, seeking recognition and affirmative action benefits within the constitutional machinery. This process aligns with Brass's argument that ethnic identities, even when they foreground primordial affiliations, are often mobilised for tangible socio-political gains. The movement challenges the homogenising discourse of the Gorkha identity and presents itself as an alternative mode of belonging one, that simultaneously draws from a deep historical past while leveraging contemporary political structures for empowerment. Thus, the thesis reaffirms that while identity based mobilisation in South Asia frequently operates through instrumentalist mechanisms, it remains inseparable from the primordial elements that lend it authenticity and emotive force. Rather than treating these frameworks as mutually exclusive, an integrated approach is necessary to fully grasp the fluid and dynamic nature of ethnic, linguistic, and tribal assertions in the region.

This study has engaged deeply with postcolonial theory, particularly in relation to postcolonial citizenship and the politics of recognition. Postcolonial theory highlights how patterns of migration and the local dynamics of cultural diversity are intimately connected to national colonial histories. This research makes significant contributions to the scholarship on postcolonial citizenship and recognition by examining key historical and contemporary issues of land, migration, and identity formation. Chapter two explores the colonial history of the Darjeeling tea industry and the subsequent formation of the region. It critically examines the factors that led to the appropriation of land for tea cultivation, focusing on legislation such as the Wasteland Regulation. This law allowed land to be classified as wasteland, thereby circumventing traditional landholding categories such as Zamindari Khas, self-cultivating holdings, or Raiyati. This designation enabled the sale of land to tea planters at extremely low prices while exempting them from government taxes. The chapter establishes a connection between these colonial land policies and contemporary political mobilisation surrounding land rights, particularly in relation to the concept of parjapatta.

Postcolonial citizenship, as discussed in this study, looks at new, inclusive ways of imagining the nation, one that integrates historically excluded communities. Drawing from Baruah and Wenner's arguments, as well as diverse alternative mobilizations, this research examines emerging visions of national culture that challenge dominant narratives. Chapter Four delves into the concept of othering, engaging with key theorists such as Derrida, Spivak, and Said. It demonstrates how the construction of the 'Other' is essential to the formation of the self. This idea is particularly relevant to the Indian Nepali population, where the 'Brave Gorkha Warrior' identity has been deeply ingrained in the popular imagination. This identity traces its origins to the martial race theory, which valorised Gorkha bravery while simultaneously relegating them to roles in security forces rather than governance or administration. The chapter critically examines the rationale behind this theory and its long-lasting implications.

The study further explores how colonial strategies reinforced Indian stereotypes to serve imperial interests. British officers, for instance, promoted the idea that they commanded 'ideal soldiers' with inherent warlike qualities tied to masculinity. However, they also preferred soldiers they deemed less intellectually capable, as this reinforced their own authority. This preference manifested in lower literacy rates among sepoys compared to the broader Indian population, as recruitment favoured isolated communities less influenced by Western education and political thought. Furthermore, the concept of 'worlding' which involves not just physical mapping but also the creation of knowledge systems that legitimise colonial rule is analysed to demonstrate how colonialism entrenched hierarchical relationships between colonisers and the colonised.

Beyond these historical analyses, this study incorporates micro-narratives from community members to explore how they perceive and navigate the experience of being othered. Their responses contribute to the production of new identities that challenge colonial legacies, ultimately adding to the scholarship on the politics of recognition. The discussion on the politics of recognition is informed by Charles Taylor's assertion that recognition is not merely a courtesy but a fundamental human need. Drawing on Hegelian philosophy, recognition theory posits that identity formation occurs through interactions within a broader community, establishing moral expectations and shaping notions of the good life. However, Frantz Fanon critiques the Hegelian model in the context of colonialism, arguing in Black Skin, White Masks that colonial relations of recognition reinforce the dominance of the coloniser while compelling the colonised to internalise oppressive structures.

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ANNEXURE I

Title of Dissertation: Culture and Identity: 'Indian Nepalis, the Indian Nation and State'.

Name: Sneha Manger

Department: International Relations, Jadavpur University.

Ph.D Registration Number: A00IR1502320

Questionnaire for Indian Nepali Origin Army Personnel

Section 1: Personal Background(* Not Mandatory)

1. **Can you please tell us a bit about your personal background?**
2. **Age:**
    - Place of birth:
    - Family background:
    - Duration of service in the army:
2. **What inspired you to join the Indian Army?**
3. **Can you describe your experience in the army so far?**

Section 2: Concept of Martial Races

4. **The term 'martial races' has been historically used to describe certain ethnic groups perceived as naturally warlike. What are your thoughts on this concept?**
5. **Do you think the concept of martial races still holds relevance in the modern Indian Army? Why or why not?**
6. **Have you ever felt that your Nepali origin has influenced your military career positively or negatively in any way?**
7. **How do you perceive the historical association of the Gorkha community with the Indian Army?**

Section 3: Identity and Nationalism

8. **How do you balance your Nepali cultural identity with your identity as an Indian Army personnel?**
9. **Have you ever faced any challenges or discrimination based on your ethnic background within the army or society at large?**

10. **What does patriotism mean to you, and how do you express it in your daily life and service?**

11. **Despite a large number of Indian Nepalis joining the Indian army historically and in contemporary times, why do you still think the community struggles with Identity in the contemporary Indian Nation state?**

Section 4: Perspectives on the Nation

12. **How do you think the Indian Nepali community is represented in the broader imagination of the Indian nation?**

13. **What contributions do you believe the Indian Nepali community has made to the nation, both within and outside the military?**

14. **How can the Indian Army and society better acknowledge and integrate the Indian Nepali community into the national narrative?**

15. **What are your views on the stereotypes imposed on Indian Nepalis , particularly associating the community with certain jobs or sectors which likewise view the qualities of martial races in a derogatory manner.**

Section 5: Agneepath Scheme

16. **What are your thoughts on the Agneepath scheme introduced for military recruitment?**

17. **How do you think the Agneepath scheme will impact Indian Nepali youth planning to join the army?**

18. **What implications do you foresee for the identity and long-term career prospects of those recruited under the Agneepath scheme?**

19. **Do you believe the Agneepath scheme adequately addresses the aspirations and needs of Indian Nepali youth? Why or why not?**

20. **How might the Agneepath scheme influence the perception of the Indian Nepali community within the army and broader society?**

ANNEXURE II

Questionnaire for Tea Plantation Workers – Darjeeling

Introduction:

Namaste! I am conducting academic research on the lives and experiences of tea plantation workers in Darjeeling. Your views on work, land, identity, and the future will help in understanding the realities of the tea industry. All responses are confidential and voluntary.

Section A: Personal & Family Information

1. Name (Optional):
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. Marital Status:
5. Number of family members:
6. Education level (Self and children, if any):
7. How long have you or your family worked in the tea plantation sector?

Section B: Work Life & Conditions

1. What specific work do you do in the plantation (plucking, factory, maintenance, etc.)?
2. How many hours a day do you typically work?
3. What is your monthly wage or payment structure?
4. Do you receive any additional benefits (ration, housing, medical, education)?
5. Are you satisfied with the current wages and benefits? Why or why not?
6. Have your working conditions improved, worsened, or stayed the same in recent years?
7. Do you face any challenges at work (workload, health problems, safety issues)?

Section C: Land & Housing Rights

1. Do you live in housing provided by the plantation?
2. Do you or your family own any land (inside or outside the plantation)?
3. Are you aware of any efforts or discussions around land rights for tea workers?

4. Do you think workers should have rights over the plantation land or be provided land ownership? Why?
5. How secure do you feel about your living arrangements (possibility of eviction, relocation, etc.)?

Section D: Identity & Community

1. What is your ethnic group/community (e.g., Nepali, Lepcha, Bhutia, Adivasi)?
2. Which language(s) do you primarily speak at home and work?
3. Do you feel proud and connected to your community's culture and traditions?
4. Do you think plantation work has affected your cultural practices or community life?
5. How do you think your identity influences your opportunities in the plantation and beyond?

Section E: Political Awareness & Participation

1. Are you aware of political parties or movements active in Darjeeling (like Gorkhaland, trade unions)?
2. Do you feel political leaders address the concerns of tea workers?
3. Have you participated in any political protests, strikes, or union activities?
4. Do you feel free to express your political opinions without fear of consequences?
5. What role do you think politics plays in improving working and living conditions?

Section F: Aspirations & Future Outlook

1. Do you wish to continue working in tea plantations, or would you prefer other types of work?
2. What are your main hopes for your children's education, employment, or future?
3. Have you considered migrating outside Darjeeling for better opportunities? Why or why not?
4. What kind of changes would improve your life as a tea plantation worker?
5. Do you feel hopeful about the future of the tea industry and its workers in Darjeeling?

ANNEXURE III

Questionnaire on Experiences of Othering in the Indian Nepali Community

Section A: Basic Information

1. Age: ___
2. Gender:
    - Male
    - Female
    - Other (Please specify) _____
3. Educational Qualification:
    - No formal education
    - Primary
    - Secondary
    - Higher Secondary
    - Graduate
    - Postgraduate and above
4. Occupation: _____
5. Place of Residence:
    - Rural
    - Semi-urban
    - Urban
6. Religion: _____
7. Caste/Ethnic Affiliation: _____

Section B: Perceptions of Identity

1. How would you primarily identify yourself?
    - Indian
    - Nepali
    - Indian Nepali
    - Ethnic identity (e.g., Rai, Limbu, Gurung, etc.)
    - Other (Please specify): _____

2. How strongly do you feel connected to the following identities?
    - Indian Identity
    - Nepali Ethnic Identity
    - Regional Identity (e.g., Gorkha, Darjeeling-based, Sikkimese, etc.)
    - Religious Identity

Section C: Experiences of Othering

1. Have you ever felt treated differently because of your Indian Nepali identity?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Can’t say
2. If yes, in what contexts have you experienced such treatment?
    - Workplace
    - Educational institutions
    - Government institutions
    - Public spaces (markets, transportation, etc.)
    - Media portrayal
    - Interpersonal relationships
    - Political representation
    - Other (Please specify): _____
3. What form did this ‘differential treatment ’or othering take?
    - Verbal remarks or slurs
    - Stereotyping (e.g., questioning nationality, loyalty)
    - Exclusion from opportunities
    - Denial of recognition or documentation
    - Cultural misrepresentation
    - Physical discrimination
    - Other (Please specify): _____

4. Have you noticed any of the following stereotypes being associated with Indian Nepalis?
    - “Foreigner” or “Outsider” tag
    - “Loyal but subservient” trope
    - Homogenisation of diverse ethnicities as ‘Gorkha’
    - Stereotypical association with militarism or security services
    - Exoticisation of cultural practices
    - Others (Please specify): _____

Section D: Coping, Resistance, and Negotiation

1. How do you usually respond to instances of othering?
    - Ignore
    - Confront directly
    - Seek institutional/legal remedy
    - Mobilise within community networks
    - Use social media to voice concerns
    - Other (Please specify): _____
2. Do you feel that Indian Nepali literature, cinema, or cultural organisations adequately address the issue of othering?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Partially
    - Don’t know
3. Have community movements (e.g., Gorkhaland movement, Janjati activism) helped in reducing the experience of othering?
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

Section E: Broader Reflection

1. In your opinion, what are the root causes of the Indian Nepali community's experience of othering in India?
   (Open-ended)
2. What measures, in your view, could help mitigate othering of the Indian Nepali community?
   (Open-ended)
3. Would you be interested in participating in further discussions or workshops on this topic?
   - Yes
   - No

Optional: Any personal experience or story related to othering you wish to share?

(Open-ended)

ANNEXURE IV

Registered No. WB/SC-247 **No. WB(Part-I)/2019/SAR-1160**

The Kolkata Gazette

सत्यमेव जयते

Extraordinary
Published by Authority

AGRAHAYANA 7] THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2019 [SAKA 1941

PART I—Orders and Notifications by the Governor of West Bengal, the High Court, Government Treasury, etc.

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL
Land & Land Reforms & Refugee Relief & Rehabilitation Department
Land Policy Branch
Nabanna (6th Floor)
325, Sarat Chatterjee Road, P.O-Shibpur, Howrah-711 102

Memorandum

No. 3816-LP/3T-14/15(Pt-I) Date: 28/11/2019

Subject - Tea Tourism and Allied Business Policy, 2019

A proposal to allow unutilized and fallow land in the tea gardens allowed to be retained under section 6(3) of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953, in the districts of Uttar Dinajpur, Alipurduar, Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Kalimpong to promote eco-friendly tea tourism and allied business activities has been under active consideration of the Government.

Now, the Governor, after careful consideration of the matter, is pleased to announce the Tea Tourism and Allied Business Policy, 2019 in modification of the Tea Tourism Policy notified vide No 3362-LP/5M-10/2012 dated 17/07/2013 and Notification No.665-LP/5M- 10/12 Dated 4th March 2015.The policy is aimed at generating enhanced investments and employment opportunities for sustainable and inclusive economic development by way of effective utilization of vacant/ surplus land in Tea Gardens without any curtailment/compromise in area under tea plantation. The salient provisions of the Policy are as follows:

1) Tea garden will be allowed to utilize 15% of the total grant area subject to a maximum of 150 acres for tea tourism and allied business activities.

   a. Out of this allowable area a maximum of 40% can be used for construction activities in conformity with extant Rules and Regulations and provided the proposed activity is in harmony with the ecology and the environment.

   b. The allowable business activities shall include Tea Tourism, Plantation, Animal Husbandry, Hydro Power, Non-Conventional Energy Resources, Social Infrastructure and Services. An illustrative list of activities under above broad categories may include tourism resorts, wellness centres, schools, colleges, universities, medical/nursing colleges, hospitals, cultural/recreational & exhibition centres, horticulture, floriculture, medicinal plants, food processing units, packaging units etc.

2) Each proposal shall be examined on case to case basis by a Screening Committee constituted as follows:

i. Chief Secretary to the Govt, of West Bengal- Chairman

ii. ACS/ Principal Secretary of ICE Department- Member

iii. Principal Secretary Labour Department- Member

iv. Principal Secretary L&LR and RRR Department - Member

v. Principal Secretary, Tourism Department - Member

vi. Principal Secretary, Agriculture Department - Member

vii. Principal Secretary, Environment Department - Member

viii. Representative, Tea Board- Member

ix. Two Representatives of Tea Associations- Members

x. Joint Secretary/ Special Secretary, ICE Department - Member-Convenor *Representation from Forest department, Public Works Department, Power & NES Department, Animal Resource Development Department or any such relevant department shall be co-opted in the Screening Committee as member on case to case basis as required in terms of the proposal.*

The department of Industry, Commerce and Enterprises will act as Nodal Department.

3) This is further subject to strict compliance of the following conditions/ guiding principles:

a. There shall be no reduction in the area under tea plantation and no retrenchment of existing labour force engaged in Tea Garden.

b. Implementing new project should no way harm the existing ecology of the area and shall have to be in strict compliance of environmental regulations.

c. Employment from new project must be generated in a manner that 80% of local people get opportunity and are absorbed. Preference shall be given to the wards of the workers of the concerned tea garden.

d. No alienation of land of local resident's especially tribal land without due process of law shall be allowed.

e. No land under forest cover or recorded as forest shall be used for any of the above activities except with due clearance of the competent authority.

4) Other allowable provisions that may facilitate in formulation of the project:

i) Amalgamation of adjoining area- Land required for any project may be amalgamated with adjoining outside area of tea estate.

ii) Shifting Labour quarter- For the purpose of project and to get contiguous land, existing labour quarter may be shifted, reconstructed with modern buildings as per extant building Rules and Regulations.

5) Lease Procedure

If the company owning tea garden by lease proposes to undertake alternate business activity or activities as prescribed, either by itself, or through or a joint venture company or SPV where the lessee has majority share no resumption under sub-section (3) of section 6 of the West Bengal Estates Act, 1953, will be required.

In the event of the lessee becoming a **minority** shareholder in any joint venture company or SPV, land shall be resumed and settled in favour of the entity on payment of salami and land revenue as prescribed under the Land Allotment Policy of the government.

The lessee or its SPV or the JV company can enter into a Development Agreement with any such other entity having expertise in implementation, execution, management of the project(s) provided the obligation for compliances in respect of lease and other land related conditions shall remain with the lessee.

Tea gardens can make use of existing guest houses/bungalows with necessary renovations, if required, for temporary accommodation with due approval of the Land & Land Reforms Refugee, Relief & Rehabilitation Department. This area under renovated existing guest house/bungalow will not be considered within prescribed limit of one or more business. However in case of such use the lessee shall be required to obtain requisite clearances including certificate of conversion of land from the competent authorities

6) The lessee either himself or as a Joint Venture Company or SPV as the case may be, shall apply before the Collector of the district with all details as per the application as annexed. Collector after required verification shall forward the proposal with specific views/ recommendations to the Member Convenor of the Screening Committee. The Screening Committee shall examine the proposal and place before the Standing Committee of the Cabinet on Industry, Infrastructure and Employment for consideration. The Industry, Commerce and Enterprises Department shall be the Nodal Department for processing, scrutiny and issuance of necessary approvals.

7) After approval an agreement will be signed by the applicant with the Collector of concerned district on behalf of the State Government.

8) After signing of agreement the applicant will have to start the project within 3 years from the date of agreement failing which the approval shall be cancelled.

9) This memorandum is issued in supersession of memorandum no- 3362-LP dated 17.7.2013.

By order of the Governor,

MANOJ PANT
Principal Secretary to the Government of West Bengal.

Application Form under Tea Tourism and Allied Business Policy- 2019

To

The Chief Secretary to the Govt. of West Bengal

Though: The Collector, _____ district

Sir,

I, being Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer/ ..... of ..... (company name) would like to inform you that the above noted company is the lessee of _____ tea garden. The lease is valid upto _____. I, on behalf of the company would like to inform you that the company itself/ as Joint Venture Company/ as SPV is interested to undertake following business in the said tea garden as per Tea Tourism and Allied Business Policy- 2019.

i) Basic information

Name of Tea Garden–

Name of Lessee Company–

Total area of Tea Garden–

Area under Tea Plantation–

Area under various structures (e.g.- labour qtr, bungalow, factory etc.)

Vacant area–

Area proposed for the project–

Whether project to be undertaken by the lessee company itself/J V/SPV–

If JV/SPV, percentage of share of the lessee company–

Existing facilities/infrastructure available in the area where the proposed project is to be developed–

Lease valid upto the date–

Rent paid upto the year–

Total number of labour engaged in the garden–

Total number of additional workers/ wards of Tea Garden workers to be engaged in the project–

Quantum of new employment opportunities specifying local and outsider–

	Local	Outsider
Skilled		
Semi-skilled		
Unskilled		

Annual Yield of last five years–

Year	Yield

ii) Project details

a) Project Background: Rationale and objective of the project.

b) Land details: Area of land required for project implementation along with detailed drawing of primary and ancillary facilities.

c) Technical details: Project's technical details including technology source, tie-ups, etc.

d) Environmental impact assessment report (if required).

e) Human resource: Manpower requirement and estimated employment generation. Part employment from local population.

f) Financials- Project cost, project financing structure, projected profitability, and project financial sustainability and stability.

g) Ownership: Ownership model, institutional framework of project.

h) Project phasing, planning, and project O&M framework.

i) Environmental and social aspects.

j) If the mode of operation is a joint venture, the name of joint venture partners with their financial status as per latest audited/unaudited statement and sharing pattern have to be submitted with the DPR.

k) Certificate has to be submitted that within the project area there shall be no existing plantation or labour colony or that the area does not fall under forest land.

l) Clearance from fire and environment department must be obtained and submitted with the report.

m) The DPR with detailed project implementation plan with timelines and roadmaps.

Document Enclosed

a) Copy of lease agreement;

b) Up to date rent payment receipt;

c) Copy of agreement in case of JV/SPV;

d) Detail schedule of land as per lease and schedule of land where project is proposed for;

e) Willingness to resume land, to pay salami & land revenue at commercial rate, in case of Company desires to run business in a new name/ JV or SPV where company has minority share;

f) Willingness to execute fresh lease, to pay salami & land revenue at commercial rate, in case of Company desires to run business in a new name, joint venture company, SPV;

g) Socio economic benefit for carrying out the business;

h) Tea plantation redeployment plan, if any;

i) Rehabilitation or resettlement plan of tea labours, if any.

Signature with Seal

Contact No-

Mail id-

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A Study of Indian Nepali Community

By: Sneha Manger

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Introduction I. Statement of research problem and its significance The Indian Nepali community in Darjeeling and the surrounding North-Eastern Himalayan region offers a case of identity formation shaped by historical, sociological and political challenges. The community's history, documented primarily through early colonial sources, has mostly been associated with migration from neighbouring Nepal, as labour, recruited for tea industry in Darjeeling . This has likely contributed to a pattern of "othering," where the Indian Nepali community is viewed as distinct from the larger Indian socio cultural milieu, impacting how it is represented in national discourses. This framing plausibly influence how the community asserts its collective agency and self-representation. The Nepali language has deep significane for the Indian Nepali community, serving not just as a means of communication but as a vital expression of cultural identity and unity between the different ethnic groups. Recognising

the language under the	Eighth	**Schedule of the Indian Constitution**	was seen by	**the**	29

community as essential for preserving their linguistic heritage, ensuring cultural cogency, and securing social and political rights. However, the role that Indian Nepali literature played in supporting these efforts remains insufficiently explored. This research seeks to understand how literature contributed to advocating for the standardisation and formal recognition of the language. The study will investigate the connections between language, literature, and identity to provide insights into how cultural production influences minority identities and their positioning in a postcolonial society. Such an analysis could illuminate the broader implications of cultural expressions in shaping socio-political realities and identity politics in India. The uncertainty over being granted land rights or parjapatta by the tea garden workers heightens anxieties of ownership and belonging to a land tilled by their ancestors and simultaneously of being recognised as Indian citizens. In addition poor working conditions, low wages, non payment or underpayment of bonuses faced by tea garden labourers reveal vulnerabilities and instances of economic exploitation, bringing out the community's socio-economic struggles. Concurrent mobilisation by the community, such as the regional movements for autonomy named Gorkhaland and demand to be recognised as tribes, Jan Jati movement calls attention to ongoing political challenges and the pursuit of recognition, indicating the urgency given to integration within the Indian state and constitutional machinery. This research aims to investigate how the Indian Nepali community asserts its identity within the Indian nation-state, examining the historical and contemporary factors that contribute to this process, including the role of "othering." It attempts to study how and what are the challenges (material and cultural) to the community's identity and the response by the community in negotiating and