

**CHALLENGES TO TRADITIONAL  
OCCUPATIONS: A STUDY ON KAMIS,  
DAMAIS AND SARKIS OF DARJEELING**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO DEPARTMENT OF  
SOCIOLOGY, JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY FOR THE PARTIAL  
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## **DECLARATION**

I, Samip Sinchuri do hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “Challenges to Traditional Occupations: a Study on Kamis, Damais and Sarkis of Darjeeling” submitted by me to the Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University, Kolkata West Bengal, towards the partial fulfillment of degree of Masters of Philosophy (Arts) in Sociology is a record of original research work carried out by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Dalia Chakrabarti, Professor, Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

This is also to certify that the work has not been submitted by me in part or in whole for the award of any other degree/diploma of the same Institution where the work is being carried out, or to any other Institution.

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# **CHAPTER- 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Kami, Damai and Sarki have been residing for centuries in the northern hilly region of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and other districts of West Bengal and Sikkim. These communities are found mainly in this region of India. They speak Nepali Language and the community forms 17.5 per cent of the 8.75 lakh total hill population. According to the conventional caste hierarchy these three castes are placed under the category of 'untouchables' (Hofer 2004). Kami, Damai and Sarki have played an important role in providing crafts services in the Nepali community and their occupational patterns are changing due to modernization, growing competition in the local and regional market, fashionable demand of the market, expansion of the tourism industry.

The term 'Caste' has been defined in different ways by different people in a diversity of situations. What people understand by caste in their daily life is different from the precise meaning it has in the traditional literatures, or from what people considers to be its traditional and orthodox meaning (Béteille 1965:45). The word 'caste' has its origin from Portuguese and was given to India in the middle of fifteenth century by the Portuguese. Caste may be defined as a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and usually associated

with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system (Béteille 1965:46). Sir Herbert Risley defines caste, “as a collection of families bears a common name, claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same hereditary calling, and (are) regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous community. The name is always associated with a specific occupation.” There are many types of discrimination that we can find in various part of the world but discrimination related to ritual purity and pollution is one of the most unique characters found in Indian society.

Caste is a close corporation, exclusive and in theory at any rate, rigorously hereditary; equipped with certain traditional and independent organizations including a chief and council; meeting on occasion in assemblies of more or less plenary authority, and joining in the celebration of certain festivals; bound together by a common occupation; observing certain usages which relate more particularly to marriage, to food and to questions of occasional pollution; and ruling its members by the exercise of jurisdictions, the extent of which varies, but which succeeds, by the sanction of certain penalties and, above all, the power of final or revocable exclusion from the group, in making the authority of the community effectively felt.”(Emile Senart).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The Darjeeling region is an example of social, cultural and religious diversity which creates interests for research. In the present study an effort has been made to account changes and continuity of occupational pattern of Kami, Damai and



Sarki over a period of time, through a field work conducted in the Hills of Darjeeling in West Bengal. The study helps to understand various challenges and threats faced by these the three communities. Migration of different communities in the hill over the period of time has contributed towards heterogeneity of occupational, social, economic and political aspects. Though there are other aspects like economic, social or political but study is focused on threat and challenges to the occupations of Kami, Damai and Sarki and its impact on continuity or discontinuity of occupation in Darjeeling.

There are a good number of studies on other people of Nepali communities but research studies on Kami, Damai and Sarki in India is very scanty and inadequate According to 2001 census the Nepal Scheduled Caste constituted 17.5 per cent of the 8.75 lakh total hill population. They are not only minority in numerical strength but also in terms of their socio-political status. They are a backward community in terms of their education and participation in political and public affairs. They inhabit in almost all the sub-divisions of Darjeeling. The Darjeeling district is divided into two parts on the basis of its topography - one is hill and plains. The hill part consists three sub-divisions namely Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong and Kalimpong. The plains consist only of Siliguri sub-division. Majority number of Kami, Damai and Sarki are found in the Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong and Kalimpong subdivision.

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The aim of the present study is to draw information in details about the research topic the study has been framed to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To understand the different occupations of Kami, Damai and Sarki.
2. To examine the various factors affecting their occupation.
3. To understand difficulties and challenges to their traditional occupation
4. To understand their new occupational choices/compulsion and why they have taken up new occupations, giving up the old one.

#### **1.4 Rationale of the Study**

Occupation for Kamis, Damais and Sarkis plays a very significant role as they have been stigmatized due to the type of the services that they provided to the society. As social system became so rigid that these occupation were ascribed by son from his father and grandfather as society did not allow them to take up any other occupation other than that of his father. Thus all the social stigma, untouchability, humiliation was attached to these service class due to the type of the occupation that they had chosen. Though the three upper castes got the benefits from the services of this working class, instead they were termed Sudras and low class. Such was the kind of the social system. The one who work hard day and night, these honest and sincere people were branded untouchable.

Scheduled Castes which has a population of 17.18 percent with the literacy rate of 64.14%, and the population of Kami, Damai, and Sarki is 2.7 percent (Census of India 2011). At present Kami, Damai and Sarki are three communities, enlisted in the Scheduled Castes category and are considered low in caste hierarchy in Darjeeling. Therefore, the study will try to understand the traditional occupations of Kami, Damai and Sarki and see if it resulted in continuity or discontinuity of traditional occupation in Darjeeling or not. It will also try to locate various threats and constrains to the occupation of these castes. Their new occupational choices/compulsion and why they have taken up new occupations, giving up the old one.

It was found during the review of related literature on the hill based three community viz., Kami, Damai and Sarki, that most of the articles and books have often written contradictory and controversial things, that which never existed among the three schedule caste communities of the hills. Inference can be drawn considering such works, to have been done either on observation or through someone else who do not belong to any of the three communities. The researcher has conducted intensive research to bring out the social fact present in the community such that truth is represented. Scientific approach has been maintained throughout the process proving the validity of the research work.

## **1.5 Research Methodology**

### ***1.5.1: The Locale of the Study***

The present study has conducted in Darjeeling. Darjeeling is the northern most district of the state West Bengal in India which has been divided into four subdivisions Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong and Siliguri. The data for the study was collected from Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kalimpong and Mirik. These areas were selected as it has significant percentage of scheduled castes populations and this will help in standardizing the variables of the study.

The district lies between 27° 3' north latitude and between 88° 16' east longitudes. Darjeeling stands at an elevation of 2,042.2m (6,700 ft), Comprising mainly of mountain terrain. Every year Darjeeling's temperature falls below 0°C during the winter season, from November to February. In summer, Darjeeling is delightfully cool and pleasant with the maximum temperature reaching about 19.7°C. Rain falls mostly during months from June to September. The average annual recorded rainfall in Darjeeling is 309.2 centimeters.

The authentic records of population and demography of Darjeeling is not available but however it was after the colonial visit records of population and migration have been found. It was after the visits of Arthur Campbell and Robert Napier Darjeeling was establishing as the hill station. The place was preferred due to its climatic condition which suited their requirement to build a sanatorium and health rehabilitation. British East India Company laid down tracks for Toy Train and planted tea bushes. Britishers effort to make it a hill station drew people from all places and of different

communities. And the population of Darjeeling grew in 1835 to 1849 from few hamlets to thousands.

### ***1.5.2: Research Design***

The design of the present research has been formulated on the basis of the nature of the topic. Tools and techniques of data collection have been decided on the basis of study area and the people of the study as per aims and objectives. The study is a primary research i.e. data has been collected from field yet in some cases data has been supplemented by secondary sources. Hence, the approach of the study is primarily structural-functional to understand the overall configuration of the Scheduled Caste society in Darjeeling Hill. The present thesis is the result of my intensive field work during the period between 2018 and 2019 at Darjeeling. The occupation of Kami, Damai and Sarki, recent changing pattern in their occupation and its impact on continuity or discontinuity of such occupation is the focal theme of this study.

### ***1.5.3: Selection of the Informant***

Empirical data has been collected exclusively from the Kamis, Damais and Sarkis living permanently in Darjeeling Hill at least of three generations for this present study to map out the households or families of the Scheduled Caste ethnic or social groups, kinship linkage has taken into consideration and persons living under the same roof have considered being a household. Basic socio-economic information has collected from the senior member of the households or the adult members. Data was collected from 60householdcensus living in Darjeeling (Darjeeling Sadar, Singmari and Ghoom),

Kalimpong (Dr. Graham's Home), Mirik (Soureni and Pheligaon) and Kurseong (Kurseong Town, Chimney-Dewrali and St. Mary's). 60 males and females belonging to Kami, Damai and Sarki were interviewed and necessary questions were asked to them in order to gather information and knowledge for the research. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select the households as well as the informants or respondents. The population was divided into subgroups and random samples were taken, in proportion to the population, from each of the strata created. Both male and female were my respondents which comprised of old and young. To collect an overview of Castes in the Hill some non Scheduled Caste individuals were also interviewed.

#### ***1.5.4: Sources of Data***

As the study is an exploratory or descriptive one, first hand primary data has been collected from the field. Secondary data from various sources has also been accommodated to furnish the dissertation. Standard tools and techniques were adopted for collecting data from the field. Data from relevant published books, journals and old census reports has used to furnish the present thesis.

##### ***1.5.4.1: Primary Sources***

The primary data for the study was collected through intensive field work among the select communities of Darjeeling. Standard tools and techniques were adopted for the same. A schedule was prepared for conducting household survey and basic socio-economic data was collected. Thereafter key informants were interviewed both in the form of structured and unstructured.

Case study method was adopted for collecting primary data regarding the occupation of the select groups. Finally observation was an important tool to uncover the social and material condition of these communities.

#### ***1.5.4.2: Secondary Sources***

Secondary data from various published works were consulted to write this dissertation. Published books, book chapters, journal articles, various census reports along with some statistical hand books were considered as secondary sources for the study.

#### ***1.5. 5: Tools and Techniques of Data Collection***

The study is based on data collected through intensive field investigation. Both primary and secondary data has been collected. The primary data has been collected through tools and techniques, viz. census survey, interview, case study, genealogy and observation. The census schedule was prepared for collecting basic demographic and socio-economic characteristic of the Kami, Damai and Sarkis of Darjeeling.

#### ***1.5.6: Data Processing and Data Analysis***

As the study is an explorative or descriptive type, majority of the collected data are qualitative though quantitative data are also present. The data has been analyzed on the basis of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative facts have analyzed on the basis of systematic description of the facts while the quantitative data have

mostly analyzed through tabulation and standard descriptive statistical techniques.

## **1.6 Organization of Chapters**

The dissertation contains six chapters and has been capterized as follows:

Chapter 1: is Introduction which deals with statement of problem, Objective of the study, Rationale of the Study, Research Methodology and Chapterization.

Chapter 2:contains Introduction, Review of related literatures which has been placed under three sub-categories as Indian Caste system: Concepts and Theories, Caste and Occupation, Caste System among Nepali communities of Himalayan Regionand Conclusion of the chapter.

Chapter 3: comprises of Introduction, Brief History of Kami, Damai and Sarki of Darjeeling, Impact of Nepali Immigrants on caste hierarchy in Darjeeling and Conclusion

Chapter 4: Contains the occupational profile of the select communities of Darjeeling where the major economic activities along with the economic status of Kami, Damai and Sarki is discussed.

Chapter 5: Analysis constrains, threat and challenges to the occupations of Kami, Damai and Sarki and its impact on continuity or discontinuity of occupation in Darjeeling, Facilitators for new occupations have been discussed.



Chapter 6: This is the last chapter and it contains concluding remarks and limitations of study.

References followed by appendix which contains household survey sheet and questionnaire schedule.

## **CHAPTER- 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The review of related literature involves the systematic identification, location and analysis of documents containing information related to research problem. The major purpose of reviewing the literature is to determine what has already been done that relates to the topic. The knowledge not only avoids unintentional duplication, but it also provides the understanding and insight necessary to develop a logical framework into which topic fits. In other words, the review tells the researcher what has been done and in so doing, also suggests what needs to be done. Earlier studies can provide the rationale for the research hypothesis, and indications of what needs to be done often form the basis for justifying the significance of the study.

### **2.2 Review of literatures**

#### ***2.2.1 Indian Caste system: Concepts and Theories***

Louis Dumont (1988) in his book 'Homo Hierarchicus' analyses the caste system in India, the principal, structures and the reasons for the division of Indian society into various castes. Dumont studies ancient religious texts and based on

such studies he puts forth his ideas on the caste system. For him the main feature of caste is the hierarchy based on purity and pollution prevalent among the various castes groups.

R.K. Pruthi (2004) in his book 'Indian Caste System' describes India's Social Customs and Systems portraying the changing concept of Caste in India. Pruthi also gives us the history and review of Indian society which is elaborated according to class, family and individual. There is also division of castes and expulsion from caste. He has given a glimpse of caste system in South India along with their various rules and regulations.

Dipankar Gupta (2000) in his work 'Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian' argues that any notion of a fixed hierarchy is arbitrary and valid from the perspective of the individual castes. The idea that one caste is different from the other keeps alive the distinct nature of each caste. The economic and political power plays a very important role in setting the ground for caste behavior. How some traditionally opposed caste groups find it difficult to fit in the present political scenario. He did a survey on Bihar, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh and says that the correlations between caste loyalties and voting patterns are invalid. He gives us an insight into socio, political and economic reality of the society.

Suvira Jaiswal (2000) in his work 'Caste: Origin, Function, and Dimensions of Change' critiques all the earlier theories of caste and says that patriarchy and state formation has played a very important role in the paving the way for the

caste system to evolve. Its ideology has made significant adjustments in the history. The present scenario of caste is the result of changes in the institutions undergone over centuries with its origin being the Vedic period. It points to the role of caste in providing unity in diversity and limiting the impact of social movements such as the Arya Samaj.

G.S. Ghurye (2014) in 'Caste and Race in India' deals with the problem of the caste. Ghurye states that caste is an endogamous group which has six main features segmental division of society, hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and restriction on marriage. He says there has been a tremendous growth of sub-castes on the bases of castes which he evaluates in detail.

Srinivas (2014) in 'Caste its Twentieth Century Avatar' says how the role of women is very important in caste and it plays a vital role in maintaining purity and pollution. Women through their participation in the household activities, occupational continuity, practices of food and ritual restriction, preservation of marriage and sexuality helps us to understand purity and pollution. Further he argues about the reservation policy in India and other backward movements happening in the country especially the Tamil Nadu movement.

Vani Kant Borooh, Nidhi S. Sabharwal, Dilip G. Diwakar, Vinod Kumar Mishra, Ajaya Kumar Naik (2015) in the book 'Caste, Discrimination, and Exclusion in Modern

India' posits the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) vis-à-vis their upper-caste Hindu peers and establishes how caste is a lived reality in everyday life in modern India. It explores areas where caste and religious exclusion are most visible, such as human development, inequality, poverty, educational attainments, child malnutrition, health, employment, wages, gender, and access to public goods. With an in-depth theoretical foundation and empirical analysis, it establishes that in each of these sectors, the performance of upper-caste Hindu households is far better compared to that from the SC, ST, and Muslim households.

Anand Teltumbde (2016) in his work 'Dalits: Past, present and future' gives comprehensive introduction to Dalits in India (who comprise over one-sixth of the country's population) from the origins of caste system to the present day. Despite affirmative action in the Indian Constitution, dalits are largely excluded from the mainstream section. Teltumbde traces the multifarious changes during the colonial period and their development thereafter under the leadership of Babasaheb Ambedkar in the centre of political arena. It looks at unexplored aspects of the degeneration of the Dalit movement during the post-Ambedkar period. It also addresses contemporary issues such as the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party, Dalit capitalism, the occupation of Dalit discourse by NGOs, neoliberalism and its impact, and the various implicit or explicit emancipation schemas thrown up by them. The work also discusses ideology, strategy and tactics of the Dalit movement; touches upon one of the most contentious issues of increasing divergence between the Dalit and Marxist

movements; and delineates the role of the state, both colonial and post-colonial, in shaping Dalit politics in particular ways.

Ursula Sharma (1999) in her work 'Caste' examines the concept of caste, noting its origin in Orientalists descriptions of Indian society, and how it lead to scientific discourse as a tool of social stratification. The author takes comparative issues with view of caste in contemporary India. The book represents a key text for students of comparative sociology and social anthropology, as well as those studying ethnicity, cultural difference and social and cultural change, religious studies, and others with an interest in Asian studies.

Surinder S. Jodhka (2017) in his work 'Caste in Contemporary India' is a contested terrain in India's society and polity. This book explores contemporary realities of caste in rural and urban India. Presenting rich empirical findings across north India, it presents an original perspective on the reasons for the persistence of caste in India today.

### ***2.2.2 Caste and Occupation***

Geir Heierstad (2017) in his work 'Caste, Entrepreneurship and the Illusions of Tradition: Branding the Potters of Kolkata' in Kolkata's traditional potter quarter of Kumartuli, there is a potters workshop which is caste based. It is a competitive market with a traditional orientation. To these potters caste is in their blood and caste is being independent artist foe them. They are competitive business castes who are to sell their artworks in the market. This study analyses the potter's lives and how their work is leading them to commoditization of their castes. An important aspect of

Kumurtuli consists of the artisans who are business minded, modern and are engaged in modern and economic development of the society, and is redefining the caste identity. This study suggests a new academic direction for the study of modern India and of caste in particular, through an empirically grounded synthesis of traditional categories and contemporary realities.

Assa Doron (2016) in his work 'Caste, Occupation and Politics on the Ganges: Passages of Resistance' investigates how the boatmen of Banaras have used their privileged position on the river to contest upper caste and domination. He analyses how the boatmen community is drawing on a variety of sources to illuminate the socio and economic inequality in contemporary India. Caste, occupation and politics on the Ganges offer a debate on the cultural and historical forms of social practice and resistance between traditional and global economy.

Dr. Rama Sharma Bhangi, (1995) in his work 'Scavenger in Indian Society: Marginality, Identity, and Politicization of the Community,' talks about the various aspects of socio-cultural and economic marginality of Bhangis, how they are stigmatized by the people. They are trying to escape from the marginal situation and to uplift their status. They are exploited and deprived of basic amenities which has lead them to unionize and politicalize in the process of democracy.

### ***2.2.3 Caste System among Nepali communities of Himalayan Region***

Atis Dasgupta (1999) in the article 'Ethnic Problem and Movement for Autonomy in Darjeeling' wrote about how the

people of Darjeeling fought for an autonomous state and are still fighting to get a separate state.

While T.B. Subba (2006) in his article 'Are you from Nepal? : Interrogating the Monolithic Identity of Nepalis in India' and A.C. Sinha with T.B. Subba (2003) in 'The Nepalis in Northeast India' deals with the issues of Nepali immigrants who are facing problems regarding their identity in India.

Tulshi Ram Pandey (2005) in 'Culture and Politics of Caste in the Himalayan Kingdom' highlights caste in the context of Nepal. He discusses about the rigid caste system which is prevalent among the Nepali culture in Nepal. It discusses about the rules that were led by Mulki Ain (Civil Code) that distorted the conservative categories of the Varna system into five broad caste categories, which incorporated all ethnic groups of Nepal into new structure of caste system.

D.S. Bomjan (2008) in 'Darjeeling-Doors People and place under Bengal's Neo-Colonial Rule' sheds light on the sufferings faced by the Nepali speaking Gorkha people of West Bengal. The different nationalists who participated in the freedom movement enjoyed some political privileges during the British period but the Nepali people who equally participated in the freedom movement were not given any privileges in spite of their full participation.

L.S.S. O'Malley (2012) "Darjeeling district gazetteer" book which was republished in 2012 in this book O'Malley writes about the Darjeeling hill station, different varieties of ethnic groups living together, flora and fauna, physical geographical features, education, history of

Darjeeling, its people, health, tea industry, forests, wages, occupations, communication and administration.

Mona Chettri (2013) in 'Choosing the Gorkha: at the crossroads of class and ethnicity in the Darjeeling hills' discusses about the search of ethnic identity of Nepalis in Darjeeling and the long fight and struggle to overcome the exploitation which they faced since ages.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

The review of literature is divided into three sections, Indian Caste system: Concepts and Theories, Caste and occupation and the literatures of caste system among Nepalese of Himalayan region. The available literature till date gives us idea about origin of caste, their ethnic identity, political crisis and many more. But the referred literature does not through adequate light on the three Scheduled castes of the Darjeeling, Kami, Damai and Sarki. The available literature on Darjeeling is mostly related to Geo-political History, Gorkhaland Movements, Tea gardens workers, etc.

After going through all the reviewing the literatures related to the study it is found that the studies on the Kami, Damai and Sarki of Darjeeling are very few and inadequate as less or no attention have been given on studying these castes and very little is known about them. Thus this present study presents an excellent opportunity to study and fill up the gaps in our knowledge about the Kami, Damai and Sarki and their traditional occupation.



## **CHAPTER - 3**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SELECT COMMUNITIES OF DARJEELING**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The chapter gives the description of the historical background of Kami, Damai and Sarki. It highlights about their origin, languages, physical description, religious practices, occupation, social position and their conditions. The chapter also highlights the reasons for their movement towards the hills of Darjeeling. The Impact of Nepali Immigrants on caste hierarchy in Darjeeling has also been described.

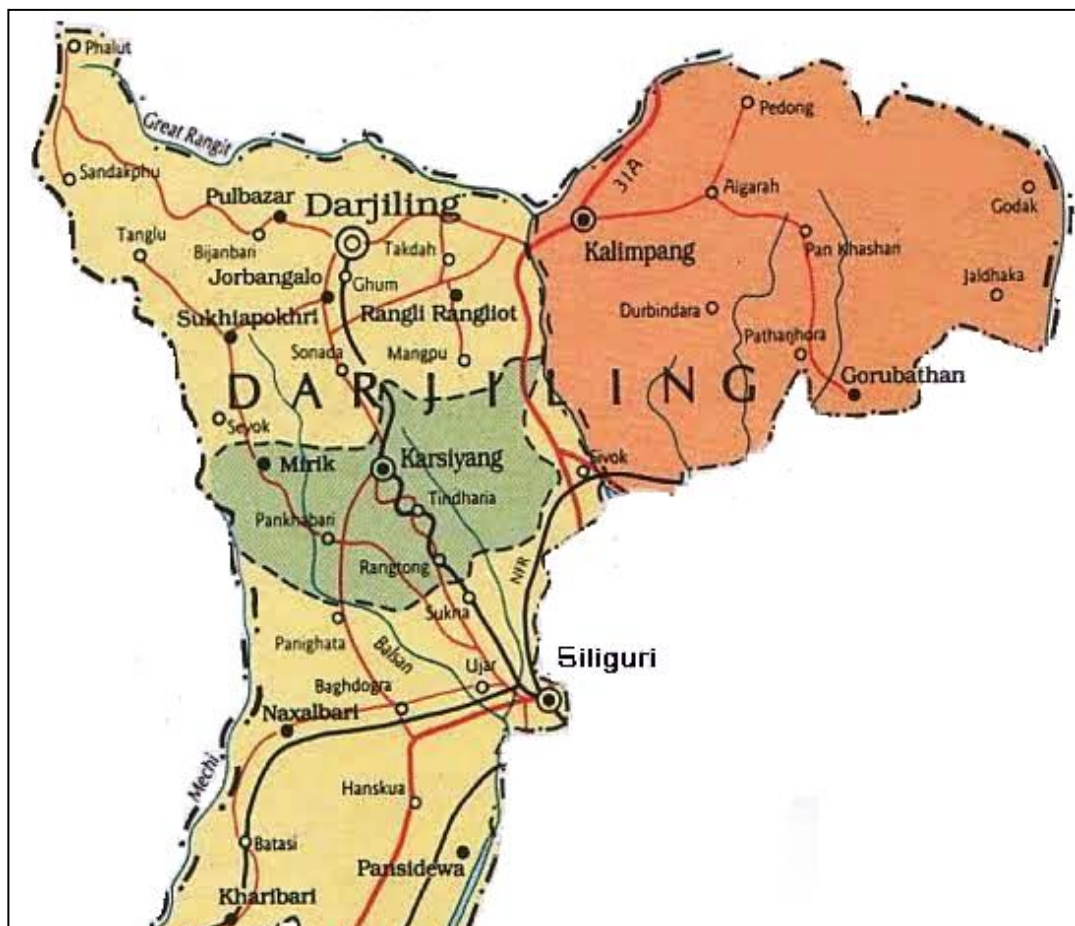
#### **3.2 Historical Background of Kami, Damai and Sarki of Darjeeling**

Kami, Damai and Sarki are the three Nepali communities who have been residing in Darjeeling. They speak Nepali language which has been derived from Sanskrit. It is written in Devanagari form. It is often known as Khas Kura or the language of Gorkhas. Some consider Nepalese as people who resided on the foot of the mountains in Nepal and have come from Gangatic plains of India. Nepali's are Hindus hence they

worships all the Hindu gods and goddesses. Nepali culture is a fusion of Hindu, Buddhist and other religious traditions.

Darjeeling is the northern most district of the state West Bengal in India which has been divided into four sub-divisions Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong and Siliguri. Though the proper record of the population is not available but however it was after the colonial visit records of population and migration have been found. It was after the visits of Arthur Campbell and Robert Napier Darjeeling was establishing as the hill station. The place was preferred due to its climatic condition which suited their requirement to build a sanatorium and health rehabilitation. People have immigrate to Darjeeling in large number after the Britisher. As British East India Company laid down tracks for Toy Train and planted tea bushes. British effort to make it a hill station drew people from all places and of different communities. And the population of Darjeeling grew in 1835 to 1849 from few hamlets to thousands.

**Fig. 3.1 Map of Darjeeling District**



Source: Internet

Since then Kami, Damai and Sarki have played a significant role in Darjeeling by providing their valuable services to the people of Darjeeling both during the time of East India Company and after them to the people who have resided here. At the time when other Nepalese like Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Tamang etc. came to Darjeeling Kami, Damai and Sarki also came along with them. The Brief summary on the origin of Kami, Damai and Sarki has been mentioned below.

### **Kami**

It is believed that Kami are also among the founder of Hindu religion. As Kami are considered to be the descendent of Brahmins. Brahmins wear sacred thread but Kami does not wear any sacred thread. Even the physical appearance of Kami and Brahmin are similar.

It is said that Brahmin and Kami were brothers. Due to some disagreement among them they fought against each other. They fought to the extent of breaking ties with each other. When Kami lost the fight they were severely punished. Since then Kamis were considered untouchables even the water was not permissible to them. Therefore, Kami though has association with high caste but are regarded low.

The Kami are the blacksmiths, who mainly manufacture and repair pots and pans and other household implements made out of iron, copper and brass. They also make and repair farm implements like spades, plough blades, sickles, etc. (Pokhrael and Chettri, 2006)

### **Damai**

Damai are the traditional musicians of Nepali community. They are very skilled and play traditional musical instruments *pancai Baja and Nawmati Baja*. They play these instruments during marriage ceremony and other religious occasions. Damai are believed to have come from Persia along with Persian king when the king had visited Nepal.

Damai are also considered as lower caste and any cook food and water are not accepted by higher caste from them

### **Sarki**

Sarki are traditional shoe makers who belong to Nepali community. They are also considered as untouchables and low caste as they deal with the skin of the dead animals which was considered filthy by the upper caste.

Other main reason why the Sarki were consider low caste was because they eat meat of cow and other dead animal which were regarded impure by the Brahmins.

Some consider the birth of these communities as the main reason for the social exclusion as Brahmins consider

themselves as pure and twice born whereas the Sudras are not regard as twice born and hence Sudras do not wear sacred thread. Brahmins read religious text and considered themselves as learned people in the society where as they did not let Kami, Damais and Sarkis to enter the temples and kept them away from all religious sacrifices and activities. They even chanted the hymn in a manner that cannot be heard by these people.

### **3.3 Impact of Nepali Immigrants on caste hierarchy in Darjeeling**

Many people have been migrating to Darjeeling since the time when East India Company planned to set up Darjeeling as a Health Sanitorium. People form the other parts of the district of West Bengal, Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Northeastern States and Sikkim have migrated to Darjeeling, not only that people fom Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh have also moved in recent times. In Darjeeling people of the different caste, creed and religion have come and settled. Nepali are majority in the hill of Darjeeling and they comprises of different communities.

When these people came from Nepal they also came with their social and religious, customs and practices. Caste system is one of the social practices which also came along with them and when Kami, Damai and Sarki became the part of the labour after coming to Darjeeling they were not very fortunate to skip the stigma attached to them from Nepal which was the Hindu caste hierarchy. The caste system in Darjeeling can be understood in context with that of Nepal's. Similar practices of untouchability and exclusion was practiced by the people belong to the high caste like Brahmins and other pure Caste (*Chokho jat*) or water acceptable caste (*Pani Chalne jat*) in

Darjeeling. No stone was left unturned to discriminate and exploit Kami, Damai and Sarki, the Impure or Water Unacceptable Caste (*Pani Nachalne jat*) by the high caste in Darjeeling. They were denied of their right and freedom. They were bitten and offer abused by Bahuans and Newars.

Over the period of time more number of Chettri, Bahum and other high caste began to migrate from Nepal to Darjeeling. When the number of this orthodox Brahmins grew the caste system began to be followed more rigidly. The caste discrimination became popular. The inhuman treatment of Kami, Damai and Sarki by higher caste became extreme even further.

Caste system in Darjeeling became more rigid, it is a ascribed status which is the same from the father to son and then to grandson. The high caste wanted that lower caste people should serve them.

In the year 1871-72 first systematic survey was conducted by British officials. Table 3.1 shows the Population Distribution of kami, Damai and Sarki. The 1871 survey shows the population of Darjeeling as 94,712 which then increased to 1, 55,179 in the Census of 1881 and in 1901 Census the population of Darjeeling grew to 2, 49,117. The population size of the Darjeeling continued to increase at a steady pace during nest ten year and by 1941 it reached 3, 90,899. As per the first Census after independence of 1951, the population of Darjeeling district was 4, 59,617, an increase of almost 73% during 50 years from 1901. After independence, the growth rate

of population gradually decreased (with an exception in the decade 1971-81) adding lesser people to the bounty

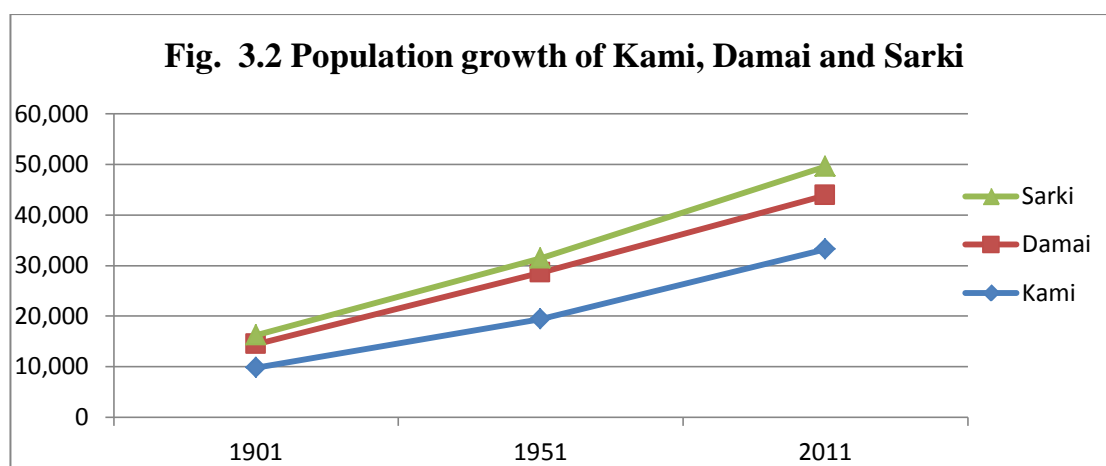
**Table no. 3.1**

**Population Distribution of kami, Damai and Sarki**

Sl.	Years	Kami	Damai	Sarki	Total
1.	1901	9,800	4,600	1,800	16,200
2.	1951	19,432	9,116	2,932	31,480
3.	2011	33,221	10,636	5,707	49,564

Source: Census of India, 2011

Fig. 3.1 graphically represents population growth of kami, Damai and Sarki of Darjeeling from 1901 to 2011. As per Census 2011, the population of Darjeeling was 18,46,823 with 9,37,259 males and 9,09,564 females. According to the 1901 Census the Kami, Damai and Sarki population of Nepali community in Darjeeling was 16,200 in total which was comprised of Kami 9800; Damai 4600; and Sarki 1800 (Malley, 1907). In the ethnic groupwise composition of population of Darjeeling district of 1951 the Kami were 19432; Damai 9116; and Sarki 2932 comprising a total of 31,480. According to the Census of 2011 the total population of Kami is 33,221; Damai is 10,636; and Sarki is 5,707 which combined makes the total of 49,564.



### **3.4 Conclusion**

The chapter tries to locate origins, languages, physical description, religious practices, occupation, social position and their conditions. The chapter provides us information about their past and present situation in Darjeeling. It presents the history of Kami, Damai and Sarki and how they are categorized in the social hierarchy among the Nepali community. The study is about the three caste groups of Darjeeling within the Nepali community. Thus, the caste system in Darjeeling has been tried to understand in context with that of Nepal's. The section also highlights the reasons for their movement towards the hills of Darjeeling. The Impact of Nepali Immigrants on caste hierarchy in Darjeeling has.



## **CHAPTER- 4**

### **OCCUPATIONS OF KAMI, DAMAI AND SARKIOF DARJEELING**

#### **4.1Introduction**

Kami, Damai and Sarkiis best known in Darjeeling due to the type of services that they have provided to the society. Gradually these services became their caste occupation which began to be associated with their identity. Meanwhile, social system became so rigid that these occupations were ascribed by son from his father and grandfather, as society did not allow them to take up any other occupation other than that of his father. Thus all the social stigma, untouchability, humiliation was attached to these service due to the type of the occupation done by them. Though the upper castes got the benefits from the services of this working class, instead they were called the low class. Such was the kind of the stigma attached to their occupation. The one who work hard day and night, were branded as untouchable. The caste system

developed more rigid and ruthless forms over the period of time.

## **4.2 Different occupational activities of Kami, Damai and Sarki**

Talking about the occupational activities of Kami, Damai and Sarki of Darjeeling, Kamis are involved in two types of occupation Blacksmith/Ironsmith and Gold Smith, Damais are involved in stitching and tailoring and Sarki are the one who have been involved in leather work.

### **4.2.1 Occupation of Kami**

The Kami are the blacksmiths, who mainly manufacture and repair pots and pans and other household implements made out of iron, copper and brass. They also make and repair farm implements like spades, plough blades, sickles, etc. (Pokhrael and Chettri, 2006)

Ironsmiths are the person who works with iron. They make various items which are used in day to day life like utensils, knives, swords, plough. They make item out of iron, copper and aluminum. Smithy (Aran) is a work place or a kind of workshop. Fire place along with blower (Bhati) can be seen in one corner which has a fixed setting and the smith sits on ride side of Bhati as it gives him appropriate position to work.

As blacksmiths they make most of the farm implements and also some domestic utensils.

What is the work of blacksmiths? On the on hand, he has to repair all the tools and containers for the bista: it usually

consists of reshaping and sharpening blunt edges or mending dented or holed copper jars. On the other hand, he makes new tools: blade for sickles, hoes and axes, ploughshares, frying pans, chulesi (knife made of a vertical blade standing on a metal base). Blacksmiths also forge iron.

#### **4.2.2 Occupation of Damai**

According to the traditional allocation of caste based occupations, the Damai stitch and repair clothes. They also play the traditional *pancaibaja* (traditional musical instruments) during important festivals and ceremonies including marriages and some religious rituals (Tingey 1994). Since long time Damais have been engaging themselves in stitching clothes. They have supported the need for clothes of the Nepali community. They mostly did patching works of the old torn clothes as the people came to them with the purpose. They made *Dawrasurwal* and Nepali topi (cap) which is the traditional attire of Nepali. They do all types of stitching like curtains, shirt, pant, and other items as desired by the people of the locality. Damais generally do not have too many customers from communities other than Nepal like Muslims, Bihari and Marwari as there are the three non-nepali communities who have been residing in the hills. As there are other Muslim tailors whose number have increased over time.

Almost all the clothes shops that deal with school uniforms are owned by Marwari and Muslims. These shops have acquired the authorization from the number of school and colleges to make the uniforms for the students and during the time of new academic sessions and admission in the schools, students go to these shops to purchase uniforms consisting

of shirt, pant/skirt and coat which are to be stitched and the items like tie, sweater and socks are machine made ready items which are handed to the customers at the time they come to the shop for the first time itself. Shirt, pant/skirt and coat which are measured according to the size of the student and later these shop dealers give it for stitching to the tailors but not to the Damai. When the question was asked to Damai regarding this then they answered that tailors of other community and the dealers have a close link and since the orders are in bulk the dealers pay these tailors a lump sum amount which is low as compared to the market price of stitching that particular item. Another reason for no link between Damai and dealers is that dealers prefer to hire tailors of other community is because they have 4 to 5 workers (karigars) under them and Damai works individually and have very few to assist them. Damais ask for the pay at the rate of market price for each item that he sews and the shop dealer does not want to pay the same price as claimed by the Damai, as by doing so dealer would reduce their profit cut that he wants to get from the other tailors. These dealers' also considers other tailors to be more efficient in work though Damais are also experienced workers

#### **4.2.3 Occupation of Sarki**

Sarkis are the leather workers who are involved in making item or products of leather like shoes, bags, jacket, gloves etc. they have a small work place and usually work at home and some have shops. They are visited by customers who are often old and the regular ones. Unlike the Kami and Damai, there are very few Sarkis who are doing the leather work and the rest have given up their traditional work due to

the caste base discrimination attached to the work. Sarkis who are still continuing with their occupation finds it hard to sustain them they are perusing it because they have no other means rather than to do the work. In fact among the three communities Sarki is the one who has been hit hard by the modern leather showrooms. The tradition leather workers who manufactured shoes, sandals and chapel are no longer in demand by their customers. The fascinating shows manufactured by MNCs which are displayed in Market and malls have drawn the attention of the customers.

### 4.3 Recent Occupations of the Select Communities

The data for the study was collected from Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kalimpong and Mirik. Information were collected from a total of 60 household and majority of these families resides in Darjeeling (Darjeeling Sadar, Singmari and Ghoom), Kalimpong (Dr. Grahms Home), Mirik (Soureni and Pheligaon) and Kurseong (Kurseong Town, Chimney-Dewrali and St. Marys).

Table 4.1: Distribution of Household of Kami, Damai and Sarki

Name of Village	Number of Households				Percentage of Total
	Kami	Damai	Sarki	Total	
Darjeeling	8	6	6	20	33.34
Kalimpong	6	4	5	15	25.00
Kurseong	4	5	4	13	21.66
Mirik	5	4	3	12	20.00
Total	23	19	18	60	100.00

Source: Field Survey

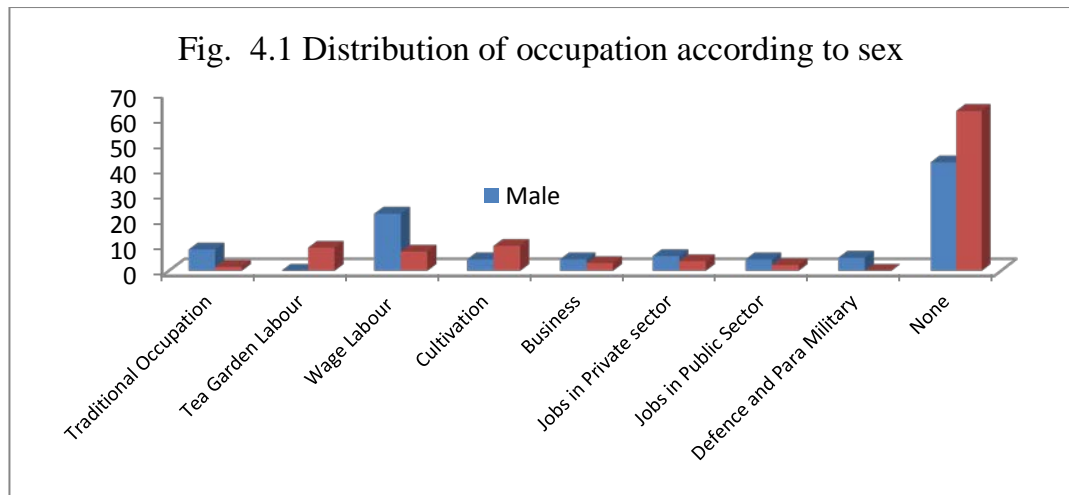
The Survey data which was collected during the field work shows that the Kami, Damai and Sarki have taken up various types of occupation (Fig. 4.2) there are altogether 287 individuals and the female population is 132. The percentage

of female population is 46% which are against the male percentage of 54%. Hence, there has been a less of 8 percent females against total male population.

Table 4.2: Distribution of occupation

Occupation	Sex				Total	Percentage
	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage		
Traditional Occupation	13	8.39%	2	1.52%	15	5.23%
Tea Garden Labour	2	1.29%	12	9.09%	14	4.88%
Wage Labour	35	22.58%	10	7.58%	45	15.68%
Cultivation / Farming	7	4.52%	13	9.85%	20	6.97%
Business	8	5.16%	4	3.03%	12	4.18%
Job in Private Sector	9	5.81%	5	3.79%	14	4.88%
Job in Public Sector	7	4.52%	3	2.27%	10	3.48%
Defense and Para Military	8	5.16%	0	0.00%	8	2.79%
None*	66	42.58%	83	62.88%	149	51.92%
Total	155	54.01%	132	45.99%	287	100.00%

Source: Field Survey \*Includes children, unemployed and elderly people (i.e. the economically dependent population)



Distribution of the occupation shows that only 5.23% are involved in traditional occupation of which 8.39% are male who have been continuing the work despite all challenge that they face and 1.52% female are also into the occupation that they have learnt by seeing their fathers and other male member of the family doing the work at home. Women belonging to Sarki community are following this occupation as this community involves themselves in sewing and stitching, the help their husband or father when the work is more and the demand of the customers are to be met and sometimes they work in the machine in the absence of their father or husband if the customers comes to their home with some urgency. The occupational situation of the community has been explained in detail in the next chapter.

It was seen that 4.18% are working as Tea Garden Labour of which 9.09% is female. As seen above wage labouring, is one of important source of livelihood among the kami, Damai and Sarki as 15.68% are wage labours as construction workers, Garage helper, Domestic workers etc. of which 22.58 are male and 7.58 are female. 3.83% are doing

business in which 4.52 are male and 3.03 are female. It was found that 51.92% of the Kami, Damai, and Sarki are the economically dependent population as they are children, youth and elderly people.

Only a few households belonging to these communities own agricultural land that too in very meager amount. Field surveys revealed that only 6.97% are involved in Agriculture and cultivation in which 5.52% is male and 9.85 is male. These cultivators locally grow seasonal vegetables but the produce in very small quantity fetching them little income when they selling in the market. They own land enough to make kitchen garden and produce of grains s not feasible due to severe cold climatic condition.

In the above table we see that 4.18% are doing jobs in private sectors like sales persons, security, cashiers in Big Bazzars and city centers, teaching in private Primary schools in which 5.81% was found to be male and 3.79% female.3.87% are doing jobs in public sector like holding certain executive post, peons, clerk, teacher etc. in which 4.52% was found to be male and 2.27% female. 2.79%, they have attained some level of education and have be successful in placing themselves is government services. They have some financial stability and due to which children of persons belonging to this category are going to ICSE schools, have pukka house and have maintained some position in the society. 2.79%are doing jobs in Defense and Para military forces in which 5.16% was found to be male and no female. This section includes jobs that pay fixed monthly salary. One important factor which deprived the local artisans from being employed in



government services and other forms of employment was the low level of their educational attainment. Unlike other Nepal community, most Kami, Damai and Sarki Community students of Darjeeling are drop outs when they attain age of 16 and studied somewhere class 8 and 9 due to their financial condition as they have no other option but are forced to work due to poor financial position. There are very few youths among the community who have completed their Bachelor's Degree and there are hand full who have attain post graduate studies. Although the number of school going children had increased over the years, But maximum of them are at primary level and not in higher education level.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

The occupations of Kami, Damai and Sarki have shown some changes in recent years. Due to various reasons these communities are opting for different occupations instead of continuing their traditional occupations. The ones who have been still doing the traditional occupation, among them none of these skills were obtained from formal schooling and training, but were learnt from parents through apprenticeship (Pokhrel and Chettri, 2006). However, there are very few people of this community today who still pursue these traditional occupations, Members of all three castes have started working as wage labourers. The wage of labour as increased these days if they are working as construction labour, drivers, domestic helpers then the wage they earn is higher than what they earn by indulging themselves in traditional occupations and data revealed that Kami, Damai

and Sarki are involved indifferent types of income earning activities (see Table 4.2), Farm and wage labouring, as Table 4.2 shows, are becoming principal source of livelihood for most of these people. More than 15 per cent of men and women are found to bearing a living by means of wage labouring.

## **CHAPTER – 5**

### **CHALLENGES AND NEGOTIATIONS: OCCUPATIONS OF KAMI, DAMAI AND SARKI**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The present chapter on “Challenge and Negotiations: Occupations of Kami, Damai and Sarki” is concerned with the various challenges and difficulties faced by occupations of Kami (Blacksmiths and Goldsmiths), Damai (Tailors and Musicians) and Sarki (Leather workers) of Darjeeling. Different factors directly and indirectly have immensely affected these people and their occupational choices in the recent times. Among the ones involved in these occupation most of them have opted to do other kind of jobs and some in spite of facing several constrains are still perusing the work. Thus the chapter tries to analyses the occupational choices of the community based on compulsion or choice and how do

they negotiate when they have to opting between traditional and new occupation.

## **5.2 Challenges to the Occupations of Kami, Damai and Sarki**

After the Britishers arrived in Darjeeling, the hill got transformed in such a manner that it became the hub for the people from all around the globe. Tea plantation, construction of railway line and road motivated transport and communication. Urbanization of the area started and migration lead to increase in the population of the hills. Nepalis who were mostly cultivators now began to work as tea garden labours. Considering this as an opportunity, business class like Marwaris and Biharis came to Darjeeling to set up their business in the hills. They bought land from the locals to start their businesses and similarly there was more influx of non-Nepali community to Darjeeling who came with and intension of trade and business. As a result, main centers of the town were occupied by non-Nepali people who came from the plains and as they began to set up market in such locations, Nepalis of the hills moved to tea gardens and busy areas.

In recent times the traditionally associated work with the Kami, Damai and Sarki, who are well known as Blacksmith, Tailors and leather workers respectively are now in serious threat of losing traditional occupation due to the growing competition in the local and regional market. The number of Muslims and Biharis migrant coming from plains to Darjeeling hills has increased tremendously and the shop belonging to Muslims and Biharis are growing in number. The Kami, Damai

and Sarki due to the poor economic condition could not expand their business due to lack of finance. They remained home-based and the little income which they make by sewing and repairing the old clothes now goes to Muslim Tailors. Similarly, Sarki, the leather workers are also replaced and Kamis has also faced the same fate. The rate of unemployment among the SC community is increasing at the faster rate than ever before. The challenges and threats faced by Kami, Damai and Sarki have been discussed in details below.

90% of the Kami, Damai and Sarki have shown concern about losing their traditional occupation of the total population from these communities in the hill (Table No. 4.2) only 5.23% of them are engaged in traditional occupation and out of which 12% are discontinuing their engagement in traditional occupation yearly.

### ***5.2.1 Traditionally manufactured goods and high prices***

The data collected from the field shows that the 65 percent of the respondents have stopped making tools that were once used for agricultural purpose like *hali*, *kodalo*, *faruwa*, *kata*, *hasiyya* and weapons like *bahchoro*, *bamfok*, *bhala* etc. as people of Darjeeling has left agriculture and the few who are still involved in agriculture can easily buy these tools in any other shop at cheap price from the market. Whereas the traditionally manufactured tools and weapons are comparatively higher in prices as they are handmade by Kamis. Therefore, it became very difficult for the traditional worker to sustain competition with the cheaper products that

are available in the market which have been brought from Siliguri.

The Khukri makers (Lohars) and the Goldsmith (Sunars) are also face the similar problems. The order of the Khukri are usually given out by calling tenders. Previously there used to be a large demand of Khukri from the Gorkha Rifles in Army. Now a days the Khukri is imported from the other suppliers who does not reside in Darjeeling hills. The cost of one Khukri carved by Kami is higher than the ones that are imported as the cost of the raw materials are higher therefore affects the price of the Khukri.

### ***5.2.2 Strategies of other caste***

Population of Biharismigrants coming from the plains have increased in Darjeeling. These people from the plains are bring cheap aluminum and plastic products and selling here. The Kami (Blacksmiths) who works in Smithy (Aran or furnace) has no shops or outlets. Kami therefore find it very difficult to sell the produced like utensils and tools in the market. Some respondents claim that the Bihari shopkeepers have also began to send some of their salesmen from door to door to sell their items in the hills and what they have been doing is instead of making totally new tools and utensils by giving it to Kami (Blacksmith) for making the new items. Salesmen take old utensils and scraps and instant exchange by taking the old utensils and giving the new ones by asking the customers to pay some more extra money for it. As it is very easy for the customers to get the utensils from these sellers it

is very easy for the villages to do. These strategies have hit hard on Blacksmiths, who takes normally a week to get the work done and on top of that if customers are to go personally to the blacksmith and place the order to make the new by giving them hesitate to do so. Not only this people find themselves in a more gainful situation to bargain with these non-Nepalis sellers and usually the customers get in a low price, though the durability of the product is the matter of concern.

This strategy of the businessmen from plain has become nail on the coffin of Kamis who are the village based traditional artisans. The Kami who were previously well known for the patron-Client (jajmani) relationship with the most of the neighboring community (Singh, 1993), is no longer seen with the encroachment of such Biharis and Muslims as Business class.

### ***5.2.3 Lack of Resources***

The decline of the popularity of the traditionally handmade products is due to the lack of resource and the raw materials. 21 percent of the respondents claim that, due to the lack of resources the caste base occupations were getting disappeared. The costs of the raw materials are very high. Since these raw materials are to be brought from Siliguri, many of the people get misguided by the shopkeepers in Siliguri by saying the product to be original duplicate materials are sold at a very high price and these people from the hill does not even get the price which he tries to claims from his customer in Darjeeling. Another problem is that the

vehicle fare from Siliguri to Darjeeling is even higher due to which coming to Siliguri and going back to Darjeeling becomes costly for the Kami, Damai and Sarki.

Damais are facing acute economic problems as '*Dawrasural*' which is the traditional dress of Nepalis is now being made by Muslim Karigars. Sewing is now taken up by hand full of Damais. The Damai lane at Golghar in Darjeeling which once used to be the working place of Damais in their small shops were the use to sew are now possessed by Muslims and Bihari cobblers.

Sarkis are not the exceptions in this regard in fact among the three community Sarki is the one who has been hit hard by the modern leather shops that has come up in Darjeeling. The tradition leather workers who manufactured shoes, sandles and chapel are no longer in demand by their customers. The fascinating shows manufactured by Bata and Shree Leathers which are displayed in Market and Mall in Darjeeling has drawn the attention of the customers.

#### ***5.2.4 Fashionable demands of the market***

5.6 percent responded that the demand of the traditionally handmade gold ornaments by Sunars (Goldsmiths) are now less in demand as fashionable and designer made gold ornaments are available in the market traditional ornaments like *Tilahari*, *Bulaki*, *Dhungri*, etc are getting disappear, more over traditional jewelers cannot compete with the massive advertisement and promotion of such new gold and Diamond jewelers like Senco, P.C. Jewelers etc., which has been

floated as big brand in the market. Thus there are hardly any customers demanding traditional jewelry.

Changing lifestyle of people belonging to the other Nepali community in Darjeeling has also affected their occupation as result of which they invested their money in various types of businesses such as retail shops, passenger vehicles, clothes shops, etc. They have turned down village way of life and agriculture and thus the services of the Kami, Damai and Sarki are less sought for.

Number of Jewelry shops that is owned by Sunar is decreasing and the ones by the non- Nepali are increasing in the hills. With the introduction of the designed jewelers by the designers the demand of the traditional *Mangalsuta*, *Naugari*, *Kantha*, *Jhumka*, *Dhungri*, *Bulakhi* is no longer used by the people. Instead people order gold chain, pendent and other customary products.

### ***5.2.5 Impact of Westernization***

Due to the Impact of westernization the traditional skills are getting outdated thus consumers taste and preference of the goods and commodities has change drastically. Due to which the tradition skills of Kami Damai and Sarki are unable to meet the standard. Readymade and cheaper clothes are available in marked which is easy for the customers to buy and use. The number to people wearing formal pant and shirt these days do not go to Damai (Darjee) to make the clothes.



During the marriages in village, the bride-groom invited local Damai to play the nine set of instrument which is played by nine Damais called '*Naumati Baja*' as it is a custom to have such instrument played during marriage as it is considered auspicious in such occasions. These days' people have started playing the recorded audio tracks of "Naumati Baja" instead of the inviting local Damai to play in such occasion. (Pokharel and Chettri, 2006)

### ***5.2.6 Expansion of the Tourism***

The expansion of the tourism industry in Darjeeling due to its scenic beauty, pleasant weather, tea plantation and Toy train have attracted tourist from all over the world. Thus it has created employment opportunities for many people in the hill of Darjeeling as well to people in plains of Siliguri. This has attracted young men and women to the town from the villages. Siliguri has become hub for the young people from the hills and a large number of educated and semi-educated men, who mainly belong to the high as well as the low castes goes down to plains to work in shopping malls, city centers, hotels, call centers as sales persons, accountants, managers, cooks, waiters, etc.

Driving is another such profession that the youth of Darjeeling have doing. When respondents were questioned about such change in the outlook of young people they consider such occupations as more lucrative than doing other petty works and cultivation. This shift of interest among the local people from cultivation to other forms of livelihood

affected not only the village but also the Kami, Damai and Sarki.

### ***5.2.7 Attractions towards city life***

As Siliguri is the gate way to Northeast states, Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan, people of Darjeeling are becoming increasingly interested towards the quality of services available in the Siliguri. They started going down to Siliguri for purchasing and stitching new clothes. Similarly, the availability of cheap readymade clothes imported from countries like China has been replacing the clothes stitched by the local tailors.

### ***5.2.8 Caste based discrimination***

Of all the reason for decline of the traditional occupation on of the important is the caste base discrimination attached to the occupation. People involved in such occupation feel their social status has not improved as compared to the ones who are involved in other jobs. Therefore youth are reluctant and hesitate to take up traditional occupation. They move to cities like Bangalore, Delhi etc., in search of new occupation, with the hope that would provide them good salary, higher social status and respectable position in the society.

### ***5.2.9 Impact of Gorkhaland Movement***

The number of graduate Kami, Damai and Sarki is less as compared to the higher secondary Qualified. Often they stop studying due to chronic financial problem. Over the decades due to the Gorkhaland Movement and under GTA, no door for the employment opportunity for hill people was offered. During the previous regime of DGHC handful of Kami, Damai and Sarki were recruited under group D post and Casual Workers. But now in the search of the job and other source of income Kami, Damai and Sarki been going out in the other states of India to make their living. Some have also gone to Middle East countries as a workers and helpers.

The Kami, Damai and Sarki workers in the tea plantation who are involved in plucking tea leaves are severely affected due to the strikes and bunds called for the Gorkhaland Movement agitators. All the home-based workers were affected by it. Most of them suffered severely as because daily wage earners could earn nothing. The price of the commodities went up triple times than the MRP of the commodities.

### **5.3 Negotiations for new occupations**

One of the prime reason to study the traditional occupation of the Kami, Damai and Sarki of the Darjeeling is because the Gorkhas have been residing in the hill since time immemorial and they have been the working in the hills since the first records of socio-economic profile of Darjeeling have been maintained by the British officials which was even

before India secured its independence from the British Empire. Later other communities like Bihari, Muslim and Marwari migrants from the plains came to Darjeeling with a motive of trade and business.

The communities that have come to Darjeeling have been born in other States of India and within the Indian State of West Bengal and most of them have their parents, family and relatives in their native places. They often go to visit this place regularly and few though may not visit regularly but they visit them occasionally or during the time of festival like Id, Muharram, Chat Puja, Holi, Dussera, Diwali etc. many of this people from the plains reside in rented house which is owned by Gorkhas. These days Bengali construction workers from the plains of Siliguri, Jalpaiguri, Coochbeher, Malda and Dinajpur have started to come Darjeeling. They find the climate suitable for work in the hills then in the plains due to the favorable climatic conditions and other reason like higher wage rate in the hills then in the plains they come to Darjeeling. It was also reported that these workers earn in Darjeeling but spend this earning in the plains and thus the income generated in the hills is flow out instead of it circulating in the hill. It was also found that Marwari, Biharis and Muslim prefer to buy household items of everyday use from the shops owned by their community members only.

For any community to involve themselves in any of the occupation for a long period of time and to continue doing it from generation after generation there has to be some reasons attached to it. And there is every possibility that all the members of the communities are not always attached to the same work. For any work for the community cannot become

traditional if they are involved in all sort of work to earn their livelihood. Traditional occupation has to be specific for a particular community. The community member has to do that work to sustain them. The occupation that they are involved into becomes the identity.

It's obvious that over the periods of time changes takes place, change is universal and cannot be avoided. Similarly individual or the community that is involved into a particular occupation take up other occupation to meet their financial needs. It was found that these days none of the young people are following their traditional work. They even lacked knowledge and skill towards their traditional occupation. These might be because of the lack of interest towards it, while on the other hand the Field survey report showed that 75 percent of the respondents preferred new occupation for the higher earning of the income. For which they were forced to go other cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Kolkata etc., in search of new job opportunities some even goes abroad to work. Another fact was that the rate of mechanization was very high. That was replacing the traditionally manufactured goods, as well as other caste people were also found of adopting the similar occupation, that is also leading the disappearance of traditional occupation.

## **Conclusion**

The traditionally manufactured goods were comparatively higher in prices, Caste based discrimination, Growing competition in the local and regional market, Fashionable demand of the market, Due to westernization, Attractions towards city life, Expansion of the tourism

industry, Strategies of other caste, lackof resources and Impact of Gorkhaland Movement pushed the traditional livelihood strategies of the local Kami, Damai and Sarki to the margins. This would be a great challenge for the survival of Kami, Damai and Sarki who had nothing except their traditional skills. It was unthinkable for Kami, Damai and Sarki to participate in the growing tourism industry and the process of urbanization as they lacked both wealth and formal education. Some of the easily available Sources of income for Kami, Damai and Sarki were, therefore. Wage labouring and working as drivers for local sightseeing. A few young men of Kami, Damai and Sarki worked as helpers in city centres and big bazaar.

## **CHAPTER – 6: CONCLUSION**

### **Key Findings**

Kami, Damai and Sarki is best known in Darjeeling due to the type of services that they have provided to the society. Gradually these services became their caste occupation which began to be associated with their identity. Meanwhile, social system became so rigid that these occupations were ascribed by son from his father and grandfather. The present study focuses on the challenges and difficulties faced by occupations of Kami (Blacksmiths and Goldsmiths), Damai (Tailors and Musicians) and Sarki (Leather workers) of Darjeeling. Different factors directly and indirectly have

immensely affected these people and their occupational choices in the recent times. Among the ones involved in these occupation most of them have opted to do other kind of jobs and some in spite of facing several constrains are still perusing the work.

The review of literature is divided into three sections, Indian Caste system: Concepts and Theories, Caste and occupation and the literatures of caste system among Nepalese of Himalayan region. The available literature till date gives us idea about origin of caste, their ethnic identity, political crisis and many more. But the referred literature does not through adequate light on the three Scheduled castes of the Darjeeling, Kami, Damai and Sarki. The available literatures on Darjeeling are mostly related to Geo-political History, Gorkhaland Movements, Tea gardens workers, etc.

After going through all the reviewing the literatures related to the study it is found that the studies on the Kami, Damai and Sarki of Darjeeling are very few and inadequate as less or no attention have been given on studying these castes and very little is known about them. Thus this present study presents an excellent opportunity to study and fill up the gaps in our knowledge about the Kami, Damai and Sarki and their traditional occupation.

The Third chapter tries to locate origins, languages, physical description, religious practices, occupation, social position and their conditions. The chapter provides us information about their past and present situation in Darjeeling. It presents the history of Kami. Damai and Sarki

and how they are categorized in the social hierarchy among the Nepali community. The study is about the three caste groups of Darjeeling within the Nepali community. Thus, the caste system in Darjeeling has been tried to understand in context with that of Nepal's. The section also highlights the reasons for their movement towards the hills of Darjeeling. The Impact of Nepali Immigrants on caste hierarchy in Darjeeling has.

Chapter four depicts the occupations of Kami, Damai and Sarki have shown some changes in recent years. Due to various reasons these communities are opting for different occupations instead of continuing their traditional occupations. The ones who have been still doing the traditional occupation, among them none of these skills were obtained from formal schooling and training, but were learnt from parents through apprenticeship (Pokhrel and Chettri, 2006). However, there are very few people of this community today who still pursue these traditional occupations, Members of all three castes have started working as wage labourers. The wage of labour as increased these days if they are working as construction labour, drivers, domestic helpers then the wage they earn is higher than what they earn by indulging themselves in traditional occupations and data revealed that Kami, Damai and Sarki are involved indifferent types of income earning activities (see Table 4.2), Farm and wage labouring, as Table 4.2 shows, are becoming principal source of livelihood for most of these people. More than 15 per cent of men and women are found to bearing a living by means of wage labouring.



The occupation of Kami, Damai and Sarki is facing various challenges and difficulties. Among the problems faced by Kami (Blacksmiths and Goldsmiths), Damai (Tailors and Musicians) and Sarki (Leather workers) of Darjeeling are: the traditionally manufactured goods were comparatively higher in prices, Caste based discrimination, Growing competition in the local and regional market, Fashionable demand of the market, Due to westernization, Attractions towards city life, Expansion of the tourism industry, Strategies of other caste, lackof resources and Impact of Gorkhaland Movement pushed the traditional livelihood strategies of the local Kami, Damai and Sarki to the margins. This would be a great challenge for the survival of Kami, Damai and Sarki who had nothing except their traditional skills.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are some limitations and problems in this present study and they are:

- Firstly due to lack of secondary sources on Kami, Damai and Sarki living in Darjeeling hills it was very difficult to collect appropriate information about the community under study.
- Due to lack of time the study was limited to only six villages of three sub-divisions in Darjeeling district.
- Only 60 samples cannot represent the whole population. If the large number of samples were included than the result could be more valid and reliable.

- The sample of the study did not cover all type of the occupational involved family.
- The study did not cover all dimensions of social and political aspects of Kami, Damai and Sarki and the study strictly focuses only of challenges to traditional Occupation.
- However, irrespective of all these limitations and problems, I have tried to spend more and more time with themselves during my field stay at Darjeeling.

### **Suggestions for Future Study**

This study indicate the needs for conducting the research on the following line to estimate a concrete generalization

1. As very few studies have been conducted on Kami, Damai and Sarki there are number of areas which can be studied in details about the community.
2. The three communities can all be studied individually in order to have in depth knowledge about them.
3. Studies can also be taken up in number of other such as their socio-economic life. Their role in politics, Impact of reservations etc.

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**Land Transfer in last ten Year**

Year	Amount of Land	Amount of Money	Name of Person
Sale			
Purchase			
Mortgaged			

**Agricultural/Tea Labour/other occupation of Household**

Cultivator/ Tea labour/ other	Wages or income earned per day /month	Nature of work and other reason for doing the work	Problems faced by them during the work

**LIVESTOCK CENSUS/Special observation if any:**

Name of Student:

Date of field visit:

Signature of Supervisor:

Date:

**Mortality in Last five years**

Year	Age & Sex	Reason

**LOAN**

Amount Cash/Kind	Source	Rate of Interest	Nature of Security/Mortgage	Purpose & Use	Repayment terms

Agricultural tools: (Both traditional & Modern) mention:

House (pukka/kachha) & Transport Equipment if any mention:

Use of modern Technical Gadgets and household equipments if any mention:

Financial/developmental schemes of government if availed mention:

## APPENDIX – II: QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Age:

Sex:

Religion:

Caste- Kami/ Damai/ Sarki:

1. Since when have you been residing in this place?
2. From when did your parents migrate?
3. What were your parents doing before coming here?
4. What did your parents do after coming here?
5. Is there any one in your family who has married outside your community? Yes/No
6. Is there anyone who has married within like-kami/ Dami/Sarki/
7. What was the occupation of your Grand Father?  
Blacksmith/Goldsmith/Tailor/ Cobbler/ Other
8. What is the occupation of your Father?  
Blacksmith/Goldsmith/Tailor/ Cobbler/ Other
9. What is your occupation? Blacksmith/Goldsmith/Tailor/  
Cobbler/ Other
10. Is there anyone who does the traditional occupation?
11. How much do you earn from the work?

12. Do you sell the produced item by yourself yes/no
13. How do you sell it- have a shop/ go to houses/ give it to shop keeper who is of your community/ of other community
14. Do you like the work of your community? Yes/No
15. Will suggest future generation to take up the traditional work? Yes/ No
16. If yes/No than why
17. Have you ever learnt the work?
18. Did your father ever teach the work?
19. Do you feel that your son should learn the traditional work?
20. What are the difficulties that you face in your occupation?
21. Do you consider that the machine made products that comes to Darjeeling from plains has hampered your occupation?
22. What kind of products does the customers prefer our (traditional) or the machine products from Siliguri?
23. Do you feel that the person of other communities coming from plains have taken the market or has an adverse impact on our business?
24. How to you see the growth/decline of your occupation in the near future, will it expand/ collapse/some outside community will take away the occupation?

25. Are you aware that the government has given your community certain privileges and reservation is one of them?
26. If you are not involved in traditional occupation and doing some other work than has your financial conditions improved?
27. If you are not doing traditional occupation and if your children are doing government/ or private jobs and getting good remuneration?