

Redefining Identity and Nation: The Discourse of Caste and Gender in Nepali Literature

by

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Thesis submitted to Jadavpur University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)

2023

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Redefining Identity and Nation: The Discourse of Caste and Gender in Nepali Literature 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 **Dr. Debashree Dattaray** and **Dr. Rafat Ali** 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:

Dated:

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Dated:

Candidate:

Dated:

Dedicated to

Aama and Baba

Acknowledgement

I must acknowledge that a power higher than me has guided and made this dream into a reality. This work would not have seen the light of the day, had I not received so much love and support from various people that I came across on my research journey.

This is a labour of love which I would have lost, had it not been for Dr. Debashree Dattaray and Dr. Rafat Ali's unrelenting support and unwavering faith in the research I had begun with huge hope. Dr. Dattaray has been kind enough to understand my multiple unfortunate stories related to health and yet has tenaciously supported me. Perhaps, I would have never completed this work had I not worked under the aegis of Dr. Ali and Dr. Dattaray. Dr. Ali's cordial nature and his unwavering smile made me believe that perhaps if I pushed a little harder, the ship would sail. Dr. Ali has offered excellent advice, asked deeply insightful questions, and made sure I kept sight of the big picture when I tended to get lost, along with providing me with books and newer approaches to my work. Dr. Dattaray's meticulousness and her constant prodding to make sure I finished my work on time have kept me going or I would have given up long back.

Coming to Jadavpur University was like coming back to a familiar place because of its people. Lt. Prof. Samantak Das's support is something I can never forget, he was the kindest to me at all times. I thank Dr. Sujit Kumar Mondal, who has been very kind and helped in my initial days with even things like finding a place to stay. Dr. Sucheta Bhattacharya's cordial nature during the coursework made things easier. All other departmental faculty Dr. Suchorita Chattopadhyay, Dr. Sayantan Dasgupta, Dr. Epsita Halder, Dr. Parthasarathi Bhaumik and Dr. Kavita Panjabi have always been very welcoming and supportive of my endeavours.

I would like to thank the authors Prajwal Parajuly, Chuden Kabimo and Bhupeen for agreeing to an interview.

My gratitude goes, to Bedana aunty and uncle along with Buru di and Mejo di, who opened their home to me and eased my problem of finding a place to stay, every time I reached Kolkata. I still marvel at how

welcoming, amiable and eager to help everybody was. I am so glad that we are family now and it is because of their love, that now I have a home in Kolkata.

Special thanks to Dr. Rindon Kundu and Dr. Saswati Saha for pushing me to come out of my lackadaisical state where I wanted to start a Ph.D. but I was not willing to push too hard. Rindon has been a brother figure who has helped me with all errands related to the university. Everybody deserves a friend like you. Dr. Parjanya Sen and his family have been equally supportive and helpful in the early days of my Ph.D. and have helped with the minutest details and directions of the city. Likewise, Amrita Middey, a dear friend and her family looked after my basic needs when I arrived in the city for my Ph.D. Dr. Abrona Lee Pandi Aden and Rinkila Bhutia who pushed me towards my academic ventures needs a special mention. I cannot forget to thank Dr. Shradanjali Tamang and Dr. Satyabrat Sinha who agreed to involve and engage me inside and outside of the university space. I am obligated in particular to Riti Agarwala for helping me make sense of the Bengali language I had no idea of and has helped with translations of notes during coursework, in her I have found a reliable sister and an academic friend. Gaurav Tamang has been there to meet and greet me every time I land in Kolkata. I would like to thank all my friends and batchmates with whom I have forged friendships over the years of my research at Jadavpur. Prabuddha Ghosh, Anuradha Ghosh, and Priyanka Halder, Debasmita Sarkar, Probir Mandal were always there to encourage. Prabuddha has been a great comrade throughout. Special shoutout to my dear friends Ishani Dutta, Ugyal Lama, Poulami Roy and who have been very kind during my initial days of research in Kolkata. The ever-helpful Bhootnath da, Nitai da, Sujit da, Gobindo da, Namita di, Piyush da and Biswajit da for giving me space in the departmental library to access books online and offline. Urmi Sengupta, a senior whom I barely spoke to has been of great help with guiding me during my pre-submission as well as when I had retinal tear. I am awed by her simplicity and dedication. The ever-helpful Meheli di, whom I have bothered at random hours to ask for help, who is ever so soft and polite with me, it means a lot to have such supportive people during the research. Before her, it was Lipi di who made me understand the nitty-gritty of administrative errands related to research. I am very grateful to be a part of a university which relies solely on good work ethics.

Other people outside of the university, Shital Vaidya and Sir in Kathmandu, who were always there to support my academic endeavours by helping me find books relevant to my research. Shraddha and Stuti must be given great acknowledgement as they have seen me at all times and have helped me endure the journey of research. Manisha Thakuri, for motivating me to not lose sight of the bigger picture that I have in mind. Dr. Saraswati Mishra, my sister and a colleague along with Mukti has helped me in ways more than one. From hosting me to buying books, and running all sorts of errands, Mukti is a rock-solid *jwain*. Prasansha Subba, a confidant, and a friend, is always there with her comforting food and takes care of me to make my life easier. Pranamya Rai and Asish Lepcha my colleagues at the Department, never once made me feel uncomfortable about my absence, because at times I was not available due to my ill-health and at times because of my research. Dr. Suchan Pradhan, Dinesh Adhikari, Gyalmit Lepcha and Sanjay Rai have helped me with books and Akash and Amrita nursed me when I fell sick in Kolkata. Angad Singh and Sayantan Kar a friend, a doctor and brothers always reached out with help. Dr. Kumar Chettri has been the biggest blessing as he helped me with proofreading and suggested different perspectives which were very helpful and encouraging when I had self-doubts. I am grateful for the companionship, intellectual and otherwise, I would thank Principal, Mr. Bidhan Subba for being understanding and flexible. Dr. Iyatta Upreti's encouragement and Dr. Lily Alley who sanctioned six months at the initial phase of my research.

My family have seen me and without their unflinching support, I could not have completed this research. My father, a man who believes in my work, and finds the best possible way to engage with my work, even when he is nearing seventy, is awe-inspiring. My mother's relentless reminder of how I must complete my Ph.D. despite my wanting to leave has finally come true. I owe more than I can ever express to my parents, for bearing up with my whimsical tantrums. My brother, Roshan pushed me to do better and my sister, Libni is a comfort in times of distress. My brothers Indramani, Dharmendra and Deepak along with their families have pushed me to make the best of resources and their promise to always support my endeavour. I must not forget the newly forged relationship with my in-laws and sisters-in-law who have been kind enough to understand and provide me the space for my work. You all stand as the epitome of how family support helps one grow and thrive.

Finally, my greatest debt of gratitude is to Tashi Wangdi Sherpa. He has stuck with me, at great personal cost and through difficult times. He has been there to support my academic pursuits, hospital visits, and every other whatnot. My knight in shining armour. He has been patient with me throughout, his sacrifices have made not only this thesis but my life in general far better than it ever would have been without him.

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Abbreviations

Indians of Nepali Origin(INO)

Nepalese of Indian Origin (NIO).

Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF)

Muluki Ain (MA)

Association of Old Settlers of Sikkim (AOSS)

Sikkim Sangram Congress (SSC)

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Introduction

The questions of identity and belonging were never an issue while growing up, and the Indian identity was a given identity after being identified as Sikkimese. Sikkim is the 22nd state of India Vide 36th Amendment Act, 1975. The language majorly used by the people in Sikkim was Nepali though Bhutia, Limboo, Sherpa and Lepcha were spoken as well as taught it was mostly limited to its usage by people belonging to that community in certain pockets of their settlement. Nepali was the lingua franca and subconsciously it was assumed as everyone's language. With that assumption, it was in the portals of the University of Delhi when I overheard two women interacting in Nepali, it made me ask, 'Are you Nepali?' to which the reply was, 'No, we are Sikkimese'. That day it made me uncomfortable about my identity and the need to introspect. The realization dawned on me after that incident about how I had been defining myself wrongly. I could be an Indian Nepali, Nepali-speaking person, but I am Sikkimese Indian as my identity was associated first with the state of Sikkim and thereafter with the larger nation-state. The sense of discomfort was not limited to identity alone but also comprised the supposed language homogeneity. The permutations and combinations of identity and language homogeneity as one's ethnicity that I had taken for granted for everyone, aroused a sense of consciousness that left me unsettled.

Instances of this kind often come up when one speaks in Nepali outside their homeland. The immediate association of people who share a similar language and culture is often found at ease in each other's company. The other aspect that is opposite to this is the way people have certain assumptions and presumptions about a place or a language. When one is heard speaking in Nepali, questions like "Are you from Nepal?" "Is Sikkim in Darjeeling?" "Is Sikkim is Nepal?" "Where is Sikkim?" "Which language do you speak?" Questions of these order were posed to me while studying in South India but I kept thinking it was geographical ignorance and never took it seriously in my early years as I was equally ignorant. Later when I moved to Delhi for my post-graduate studies, I realized people were aware of Sikkim but thought it was in Darjeeling and they associated Nepalis with Nepal, which made me uneasy. The sense of consistently having to state one's identity to Sikkim, India and not Nepal always kept one in a precarious position. Had there been exposure to readings of the likes of T.B Subba,

A.C Sinha, and Kumar Pradhan, I would have formulated a better discourse, for the lack of such, it kept me wondering. This is not just a personal experience but it is most likely an experience of many who live in the hills of Sikkim, Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Tanka Bahadur Subba in his autobiographical essay has stated the same. One of the questions I am often asked by the people I meet is “What is the country of your origin?” to which my routine answer is “India”. (Subba 214)

The need to constantly assert one’s identity and state that Sikkim and Darjeeling are not the same but the language spoken in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Nepal were all Nepali but not the same made me realize how people presume identities and places. It must be understood that the Indian Nepalis as argued by Subba state that “the Nepalis living in India do not intend to visit Nepal nor do they particularly wish to return to Nepal. They may be poor, starving, and living under inhuman conditions in India. Yet they cannot think of going back for they have nowhere to go.” (Subba 230-31) is an assertion of the fact that Indian Nepalis belong here and questioning their identity puts them in a vulnerable position. Having said that identity crisis is faced not just by people in the cityscapes but is also faced by various communities at various phases.

Another aspect that needs consideration in the case of Sikkim is, that it was an independent country and the people who were two to three decades ahead of us would identify themselves as Sikkimese and the people outside Sikkim as Indians even after the merger. This can be attributed to how nation-states have appropriated the notion of boundaries and the need for one to belong to one. It cannot be overlooked that Sikkim is a pluralistic state and besides the ethnic population, there is a large number of Bihari and Marwari population, who mostly belong to the business community along with many working-class Malayali. However, the social integration of the business communities remained limited to the city area and even social transactions like marriage and involvement in each other’s community were limited. It has been a multicultural space and very pluralistic in nature, but a sense of alienation towards the Hindi-speaking community who are identified as *Madise*¹ cannot be

¹ Madise and Bhaiya are terms used interchangeably to refer to people who had come from the plains, meaning inherently not from the hills. It is a derogatory term, but I have used it consciously despite being aware of the derogatory status attached to it, to refer to communities outside of the ethnic communities, as calling them business community alone would do away with the sense of othering that is practised. Kumar Chettri has also given a similar explanation in his reference to the word bhaiya. He states, that though the word ‘Bhaiya’ literally means ‘brother’ in the Hindi language, it is often derogatorily used by hill people to identify the people of Indo- Aryan origin of the plain such as Bihari, Marwari, Bengali, Punjabi and people from the other Indian states. A large number of Bihari and Marwari traders are found almost everywhere in the Darjeeling district and Sikkim Himalayas. (Chettri, 195-196)

denied. Having said that one shared the social life as much with everyone as with the people referred to as *Madise*, but a sense of boundary existed which was an unspoken boundary of them vs us which can be attributed to the different cultural practices and food habits. Even among these group of people who are casually referred to as *Madise*, there were government servants, teachers in private school, and army brethren who perhaps didn't receive the treatment but was limited mostly to certain business groups.

Therefore, the notion of identity is a multi-layered aspect of one's life and even I was mistakenly asserting my identity wrongly. Calling oneself Nepali, but tracing one's roots in Sikkim for as long as two hundred years would give a confused idea about one's identity to the person asking the question. But the identity of the larger Eastern Himalayas, a term used by Mona Chettri refers to a space which is contiguous and it shares a transcultural border meaning the cultures, the communities and the borders overlap leading to confusion and fluidity of identity.

Therefore, understanding the people living in the Eastern Himalayas becomes important. But that is a larger topic I do not intend to deal with, but for this research, I will look at one identity that is termed as Nepali identity. Who is Nepali and what does it entail when one identifies as Nepali? Thus, the first requirement of this work would be to draw a clear line between the Nepalese, people of Nepal and Indian Nepalis/Nepalis who are the Nepali-speaking people of India.

Identity confusion of the people of Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Nepal is something that cannot be overlooked as these three places are located on the borders of the modern nation-states of India, Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal. The major attribute of an identity crisis in the region can be pointed towards the fact that the borders were fuzzy in the past and post the Indian Independence political borderlands started controlling everything. The need to examine the reason behind these overlapping and changing boundaries is also studied in the research. Traditionally, the population of Sikkim, Darjeeling, and East Nepal had seen borders as being fluid and defined by pre-existing culture, livelihood, and geography argued Mona Chettri. (Chettri 14) This is because until India was colonised, and the British came to the hills they had their wars going on owing to which borders were constantly changing. Chettri further argues that as a result of the fuzzy borders, the eastern Himalayas always have been and remain a cultural crossroad with a multi-directional flow of goods, ideas, and peoples. (Chettri 14)

To begin with, the people of Nepal are called Nepalese whereas the Nepalis of Indian origin or belonging to any other sub-continent are termed as Nepalis as laid out by Ranju R. Dhamala and is a largely accepted classification. She cites an instance from the movement for Gorkhaland where the former Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi said 'If the Nepalis of Darjeeling wanted Indian citizenship, there was no harm if they write to their king. (Dhamala 173) Statements like these are a constant reminder of the fact that they have not been accepted as natural citizens like other people in the country. They are constantly under a sense of surveillance and if something untoward happens they would be identified as immigrants. Dhamala has furthered her argument by stating that there is no confusion over the identity of Indian Nepalis as a social and cultural group as it is primarily based on their shared history, their common cultural roots, and their collective memory. The struggle for their national identity pertains mainly to the recognition and acceptance of their national identity by other Indian communities and the desire of the community members to push aside the 'foreigner' label. (Dhamala 173) Therefore, instances like these force one to find out the similarities between the Nepalis living in different parts of the world and the need to understand the differences when we refer to someone as Nepali. It was not just at the theoretical level but even on a personal level, this sense of confused identity needed to be understood. The larger question that I began my research was to look at the caste and gender roles and their functionality in Nepali society. But Nepali is a term used to identify a large group of people. Nepali is a term used to define the language spoken in Nepal and in certain parts of the country like Sikkim, Darjeeling, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, etc. One common mistake we make is generalizing Nepali-speaking people as Nepalese. Tapasya Thapa argues that the insecurity posed by the notion of "belonging" brings into focus the Indian Nepalis residing in various parts of India. She further argues that Indian Nepalis constitute a minority group without any privileges of being a minority in Indian society such as the Anglo-Indians and Muslims in India. (Thapa 98) Therefore, they are under constant pressure to negotiate between a local identity of "being" Nepali and a global identity of "becoming" Indian. (Thapa 98) Indian Nepalis at the national-state level and simply "Nepalis" globally. But the common trend or the accepted argument that people hold on to when one says "I am Nepali" or when one speaks Nepali is its association with the 'Indian Nepalis within the sovereign country Nepal in the minds of the larger Indian population. Thapa argues that this perception, however false, is that the Indian Nepalis are a population who always have the option to return to their "land of origin". (Thapa

99) This in turn makes Indian Nepalis space invaders in a post-colonial world. One can see this in the present scenario as immigrants or refugees as Nepalis have been persecuted by the Bhutanese government and the exclusion of Lhotshampas from the state of Bhutan has made Nepalis insecure about their identity. Considering such incidents and taking into consideration the situation of Indian Nepalis, Thapa poses the big question can the Indian Nepalis ever “become” Indian or Nepalese for that matter? There is a conscious effort to detach themselves from the history of Nepal and assimilate themselves with the history of India. She drives the conclusion that the Indian Nepalis are endeavouring to make a “place” for themselves in the matrix of Indian history and therefore Indian society. Another opinion is offered by a renowned author Shri Indra Bahadur Rai who describes the “Indian Nepali Nation” as an ethnically and linguistically distinctive community of people who are of Nepali origin and are Indian citizens. However, one needs to keep in mind that the works of literature coming out of these Nepali-speaking population, no matter where they belong comes under the umbrella term of Nepali literature.

The next would be to place Nepalese in context. Nepal is a multicultural and multi-ethnic country. Nepalese are a multilinguistic group that speaks more than twenty languages. But the official language is Nepali and most people are “Sanskritized” to accept Nepali as a language, though they have their language. More so, they belong to the sovereign nation of Nepal despite their various linguistic and ethnic identities, they can be fairly categorized under the larger term Nepalese which is to show their belongingness to the state of Nepal argues Kumar Pradhan. (Pradhan 2)

When the people of Nepal were assimilated and sanskritized they not only spoke one language i.e. Nepali, but they were appropriated into the caste system. This brings me to the next topic that I would deal with in this work of research is to try and understand the caste system practised among the Nepalis both in India and Nepal. Youba Raj Luintel has deeply studied caste in his ethnographic studies and argues that the caste system is a principal structure of social inequality that has continued to exist and tries to understand whether the caste system has itself gone through any change, in principle, forms of hierarchy, expressions of inequality, and notions of purity and pollution. He concludes with the help of Mishra that an overall transformation of Nepali society from a predominantly feudal to a more open, liberal and market-driven society has substantially reshaped the macro-context of inter-caste social relations at the local level. Interestingly, Luintel argues that the debate on caste in

India has evolved mainly around the issue of whether the textual analysis of canon-like original Hindu texts depicts the true picture of contemporary forms of caste relations but rather demands a fresh and diverse understanding of inter-caste relations as it is practised in a diverse range of social life in everyday reality. (Luintel 4)

To conduct his research to understand the everydayness of the caste system, he has relied on ethnographic practices, whereas, this is exactly opposite to what Luintel did. The research here intends to understand the evolvement of caste and caste practices among the Nepali communities in Nepal and India through the literature written on caste. But, it must be stated at the outset, that the initial works only mentioned caste but did not discuss the caste functions in great detail. The early mentions were limited to just a mention of *thulo jaat*² and *sanu jaat*³. Luintel also emphasizes how the caste system has been a very side-lined subject in Nepal despite the fact that it is still a predominant system of social stratification and inequality. This pushes the research to understand the caste system through the work of Andras Hofer wherein he reads through the legal clauses of *Muluki Ain*⁴. *Muluki Ain* is a legal code which specifies the caste functions, gender roles, rules on commensality, rules on marriage, etc.

Madhusudan Subedi has traced the caste studies and has stated that Celestine Bouglé's theory on caste is considered a landmark theory where he laid out three defining principles of caste. They are laid out as hereditary specialization, hierarchy and repulsion. (Subedi 57) Bouglé has attributed the hierarchical aspects of castes to the religious dominance of the Brahmans. Likewise, Subedi has stated that Louis Dumont has proposed purity and pollution as the organizing principles of caste structure and hierarchy. (Subedi 58) But what Dumont has done is he has limited his work to inter-caste and not intra-caste as the way Dipankar Gupta has seen. Gupta proposes an alternative theorization of caste and says that these hierarchies are muddled. (Gupta 413) He says it is difficult to say according to one ideology who is regarded as an untouchable by whom. Thereafter, it brings me to interrogate the caste system prevalent among the Nepalis as it is equally multi-layered and not one-dimensional.

This brings me to a position where I can look at the caste system in Nepal as a variant from the way M.N. Srinivas has studied the caste system with the help of Amar Bahadur B.K who argues that Srinivas has proposed,

² *Thulo Jaat* is upper caste.

³ *Sanu Jaat* is lower caste.

⁴ *Muluki Ain* is Nepal's Civil Code.

Sanskritization as a process where a 'low' Hindu caste or tribal or other groups changes its customs, rituals and ideology and way of life in the direction of high and frequently 'twice-born' caste. (Biswakarma 5) This proposal seems to be a problem as the caste system in Nepal no doubt exists but there have been more than fair instances where it can be studied that the caste system has failed to assimilate the entire ethnic and religious groups in Nepal, no doubt it has tried to incorporate it. Kumar Pradhan states that the caste system in Nepal began with the Lichhavis. Pradhan also states the caste rules were not followed rigorously because Mongoloids and other non-Aryans formed the bulk of the population. Another reason he states for the loosely practised Hinduism is the impact of Buddhism had preceded Brahmanical norms. Prayag Raj Sharma argues that a powerful instrument of extending communications across the various cultural and linguistic barriers used by the Hindus in Nepal was their language Nepali. (Sharma 292) And adds to this argument that the process of Sanskritization can be judged from the adoption of the Nepali language, shedding of tribal dress and inculcation of wider Hindu beliefs in their public life. On the contrary, Amar Bahadur B.K with the help of Dor Bahadur Bista rejects the significance of Sanskritization since it ignores the oppression and exploitation of the lower castes, and thus provides a new concept of Brahminism (Bahunbad). (Biswakarma 7) He argues that 'Sanskritization is too broad to shed any light on the myriad kinds of dynamic changes that go on, and that the concept is too Brahmino-centric. (Biswakarma 7) In India, castes are generally divided into five major hierarchically ranked groupings. The top four of these are the four Varna or categories described by Manu, the Hindu lawgiver, comprising the three "twice-born" (Brahmins, Kshatriya and Vaishya) and the Shudra. At the bottom, outside the Varna system are the untouchables. But in Nepal, castes are generally divided into four major hierarchically ranked groupings, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya and Shudras at the bottom. Prayag Raj Sharma in *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal* has classified the caste groups as The *Tagadharis*⁵ or the twice-born caste, and all others under the name of *Matwalis*⁶. There are two groups of *Matwali*, those belonging to the unslaveable/ *Namasine* and those belonging to the enslavable/ *Masine*. Below *Matwali* are *Pani Chalne Chhoi Chhito Halnu Naparne* i.e. non-untouchable castes. Similarly, Biswakarma has used Prayag Raj Sharma to state that sanskritization in a traditional sense is unlikely to exert influence in Nepal in the future and its place will likely be taken by

⁵ The one who wears the sacred thread.

⁶ The alcohol drinking caste.

westernization of modernization. (Biswakarma 14). This fits the best argument, but it must also be considered that Nepal is a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic country. So, Biswakarma with the help of Dastider criticizes the state-sponsored sanskritization and states that each group whether small or large feels that the preservation and promotion of its language and culture is a fundamental right, referring to the multi-lingual and multi-cultural society of Nepal. (Biswakarma 15) Andras Hofer in *Muluki Ain* has tried to classify the pluralistic cultures and ethnic groups into a single scheme of the Hinduistic caste system. They are broadly classified as:

1. *Tagadhari*: Twice-born castes
2. *Matwali*: Drinking castes
3. *Pani na chalne chhoi chito halnu naparne*: Caste from whom water is accepted
4. *Pani nachalne chhoi chhito halnu parne*: Untouchable caste

Though this has been a very unfair classification, one can understand how the code has managed to stratify the entire caste under one group which can be called a very '*Bahunbad*' classification rather than a Hindu classification. Though there have been a lot of discrepancies, most castes in Nepali society have various sub-castes and their hierarchy because of which this classification stands as a shaky one. The code has placed all the groups in broad categories undermining the fact that caste exists among these categories and functions similarly. In *Muluki Ain* there is a reference to India where it states in India *jati* is generally used with the meaning of 'caste' whereas since 1947 for 'tribe' or 'ethnic group' the word *Adivasi* has taken root but in Nepal, *Jaat* is associated with one's caste. Therefore, it can be understood that the caste system in Nepal, is varied from the caste system in India, though one cannot deny that there is certain overlapping.

Another overlapping of caste is gender, which cannot be overlooked if one has to study caste as women are directly affected by the caste system. Since caste is closely associated with gender, the direct influence of caste was on women, as men did not lose their caste status even if they married outside the caste and maintained certain regulations whereas, on the other hand, women lost their caste status if they married outside the caste. This brings me to the next question that I will be looking into, the position of women in Nepali society. With reference to *Nepali Mahila Haruko Stithi*, it can be understood that a woman had double status. As a daughter/wife, she is in an upper status and as a daughter-in-law, she is in a lower position. But one cannot deny the fact that women in Hindu society have a lower status than that of a man. The book published by Mahila Tatha Vikas Kendra further

discusses that even the educated ones in the cities thought that giving equal rights to women and men would violate their traditional and religious values. This is in conjunction with the patriarchal values where a woman is considered or seen as a person of less value to a man. Nancy E. Levine argues that the majority of studies on South Asia which explicitly address gender focus on the ideal roles of Brahmin, Chettri, or ethnic women within Hindu ideology and society. (Levine 77) Taking cues from her work I would try and focus predominantly not only on women of upper caste but also women of lower caste and women belonging to various ethnic sub-groups. The Code of Nepal (1854) which is referred to as *Muluki Ain* seems to be a relatively progressive one as it states that no one will be discriminated against on the grounds of religion, colour, caste or sex. Angur Baba Joshi⁷ says since women were considered as weaker sex in society or by the law, the punishment awarded for the crime to a woman was half of what was awarded to the men. Though there are certain rules and articles like Article 14 protecting women's rights it is very unclear in terms of women's position. Everybody was allowed to do everything respecting the traditional values because of which the interpretation of law was very difficult. Therefore, these traditional values would be an obstruction to the independence of women as they were closely connected to traditional behaviour and manners which didn't allow them to act freely. Proverbs like '*chorri ko jaat hudaina*⁸', '*chori kutera buhari tarsawne*⁹', '*pothi baseko ramro haina*¹⁰' and the like constantly go to prove that the position of women hasn't evolved much. This aspect needs no comparison with the Indian society and would need to be studied on its own account as different cultures have different notions of gender.

It began as a very ambitious project not realising the problem areas this research aimed to address like caste issues, gender issues and class issues in Nepali society with the help of Nepali literature, which would end up being a difficult task as Nepali literature written from various places and accessibility of it was not easy. More so, the same issues are not found in literature coming from various places, so tracking the trajectory and linearity of issues was difficult because every place had its issues to deal with. After the initial readings and findings what I have realized over my course of reading is that there is very little accessible literature available on class issues which is mostly related to the literature related with the tea garden and that in my knowledge is a genre which needs to be dealt extensively and therefore I would not be able to foray on those grounds.

⁷ Angur Baba Joshi was a Nepali social activist and the first Nepalese woman principal.

⁸ A daughter does not have a caste.

⁹ Beating a daughter to scare the daughter-in-law.

¹⁰ A woman talking or talking back is not appreciated. *Basnu*'s literal meaning talking/shouting.

Research Problem

I would limit my focus here to studying the contested functionality of caste and gender along the lines of Nepali society through Nepali literature. I will begin by majorly discussing the various cultural understandings of caste and gender as very little research has been done with literature. The perceptions people hold of hill-cultures to be comparatively very open and liberal created an urge to delve further to understand the same. But, trying to read the literature and various essays it only became more complex and to simply classify as liberal would be ill-fitting. Therefore, it became a problem and though it can be categorically said that a common thread runs between both societies (Indian as well as Nepali¹¹) it has to be recognised the caste system functions differently in different societies. To understand the issues of caste, gender, and identity, I would use novels as it would allow for familiar settings and structure, which would make the analysis easier and tracing one genre makes it uniform.

The larger questions that this research aims to work on are- How are the Nepalis perceived? What is their identity position in the nation-state? Is ethnic plurality represented equally?

Do caste practices exist in Nepali society? Has there been any disintegration in the caste system followed by the Nepalis? What is the perception of gender in Nepali society and the influence exerted by socio-cultural practices on Nepali women? What is the relationship of Nepalis to Gorkhaland? Is the revolution for Gorkhaland viable?

Literature Review

To consider the work done on Nepali/Nepalese society the work previously carried out to understand the Nepali society was mostly limited to anthropological, ethnographical and sociological studies of the caste system and gender structures. The initial essay that led the way was an essay by Felix Hoeburger 'Folk Music in The Caste System of Nepal' which talks about the importance of preserving caste belonging to protect certain professions associated with it. This is a sociological perspective where everyone in society has been grouped according to their occupations and is a way of preserving the professions attached to that community. Likewise, Gaine's profession is studied and argued that *gaine*¹² is a profession which is taken up by the *Gandharvas*¹³ and they are seen as an oral newspaper. This is an ethnographic study of a caste or community as it exists without

¹¹ Nepali here means the global Nepali society rather than limiting to India and Nepal.

¹² A person from gandharva caste, who earns his livelihood by singing folk songs.

¹³ As stated above, it is a singer caste.

problematizing it, and it focusses on the need to preserve it as a culture. Pirkko Moisala discusses how it has become difficult for the Gandharva caste to transmit it to the next generation, and to claim its ownership owing to social status and economic conditions. (Moisala 12) But, at the same time, he cites an example of Khim Bahadur Gayak who was disappointed by the fact that somebody from the upper caste was playing sarangi. (Moisala 18) However there is a sense of regret concerning “the loss of access to music can mean the loss of groups’ sense of shared identity and, ultimately, group members’ sense of self” argued by Andrew Weintraub. (Moisala 25) This research in a way tries to understand and analyse their position in the social structure of Nepal and states how some *gaines* change their title to overcome the caste position but goes on to reinforce how changing their names and lack of economy in their profession has led to the loss of a culture associated with *gaine*. There is no sense of problematizing the caste position because people think certain castes are associated with certain professions and there is no questioning of the same.

Nancy E. Levine’s essay ‘Caste, State and Ethnic Boundaries in Nepal’ argues along similar lines where they state that people in Nepal used ethnic names for economic as well as caste advantage which seemed to be a long-standing practice. Levine argues ethnic groups are linked by a regional economic and social system, and changes in a group's ethnic affiliations are coincident with changes in their economy and style of life. Levine does a case study of the Humla district and reaffirms what other scholars have noted ethnic relations today are the outcome of a historical process of accommodation between regional ethnic systems and the policies of a centralizing state. Levine has argued how limiting the anthropological studies have been because of their focus on single village studies, because of which various ethnic issues were missed and interpreted differently. (Levine 75) This states the fact that anthropological studies and ethnographic studies have not been able to understand and analyse the issues in their entirety.

Another research paper by Mary M. Cameron titled ‘Transformations of Gender and Caste Divisions of Labor in Rural Nepal: Land, Hierarchy, and the Case of Untouchable Women’ argues that contemporary forms of lower-caste women's labour in Nepal are a historical consequence of both their gender and their caste positions in society, in the context of changing landholding relations. She talks about the *riti-bhagya*¹⁴ system which means the right to work for landowners in exchange for harvest shares and other material goods. (Cameron 23) It is a

¹⁴ Customary land holding system on sharing basis.

system where both the upper caste and the lower caste worked in unison to help each other but when their men started migrating to India that is when the women became bound by the system as they had to work for their lord and became bound labourers. Likewise, Ulrike Müller-Böker has studied Newar society in her essay, 'Spatial Organization of a Caste Society: The example of the Newar in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal'. It talks about the Newar caste system, the individual castes, and the types of interaction between them. Another article by Mary M. Cameron 'Considering Dalits and Political Identity in Imagining a New Nepal' talks about how the new Nepal is a space for hope and gives Dalits a space. Another essay which looks at the 'Changing Occupational Pattern among the Bishwakarmas: A Case Study of Hemja VDC' by Deb Bahadur Chetry talks about the current issues of changing patterns of traditional occupational skills and technologies and management of the traditional skills and technologies of Bishwakarmas of Hemja VDC from an anthropological perspective. Another work by Biswo Kallyan Parajuli on 'Gender Perspective in Traditional Occupation among Hill Dalit of Kaski' elaborates on gender perspective in traditional occupation among hill Dalit of Kaski based on a survey to explore the status of men and women and their perspectives concerning the traditional occupation among Dalit of Kaski district.

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf in his essay, 'The Inter-Relations of Castes and Ethnic Groups in Nepal' talks about the system of endogamous castes arranged in a hierarchic order is a form of social structure characteristic of India and certain neighbouring countries affected by the influence of Hinduism. He states that the recent anthropological research in various parts of India has also shown that even within the sphere of Hindu societies there is no complete uniformity in the inter-relations of castes and caste groups and that the classic division of society into four varnas is not always applicable to the local pattern.

Madhusudan Subedi's essay on 'Changes in Livelihood and Caste Relations in Udipur' talks about the relationship between caste and hereditary occupations and how it has become less significant and there has occurred a significant shift in the bases of power. There is an increase in class consciousness and a decrease in caste consciousness and wealth is replacing birth as the basis of social power and prestige. A paper titled "Caste Based Discrimination in Nepal" by Surinder S. Jodhka provides insights into several historical markers that have been responsible for the restructuring of the state including the practice of caste-based discrimination and untouchability against Dalits in Nepal. This study prominently draws attention to the diverse nature of the Dalit population which has to a greater extent revealed the in-depth nature of regional, linguistic, religious, cultural,

gender and class-based discrimination and exclusion. A few more works like 'Migration and Ethnic Relations in Darjeeling and Sikkim' by T. B Subba trace the migration history of various communities and how it has given rise to competition because of dwindling resources. Another prominent essay by Indra Bahadur Rai 'Indian Nepali Nationalism and Nepali Poetry' defines "Indian Nepali nation" as an ethnically and linguistically distinctive community of people who are of Nepali origin and are Indian citizens. Likewise, another article by Leonard Adam, 'The Social Organization and Customary Law of the Nepalese Tribes' talks about the syncretism of Tibetan, Indian and partly Chinese elements composing Nepalese culture. David. N Gellner in his essay, 'Caste, Ethnicity and Inequality in Nepal' talks about how Nepal faces an ethnic war between Parbatiyas and Madhesis. Rex. L. Jones in his essay 'Sanskritization in Eastern Nepal' talks about how the caste system of India has influenced the caste system in Nepal. Indian Social models continue to be used by Nepal in organising their own social and cultural life. It talks about the process of 'Sanskritization and discusses the interaction between a tribal group, the Limbu and high-caste Hindus, Brahmans and Chettris. Tanka B. Subba in his essay, 'Living the Nepali Diaspora in India: An Autobiographical Essay' talks about the diasporic Nepali Indians as individuals with identity, emotions and aspirations. A thesis on Newars titled, 'Sana Guthi and the Newars: Impacts of Modernization on Traditional Social Organization' tends to highlight the traditional social organization being practised by the Newar people of Kathmandu valley of Nepal since ancient times. Newar people are regarded as the indigenous population of Nepal inhabiting the Kathmandu valley since pre-historic times. Various dissertations have studied the issues from sociological, anthropological and ethnological perspectives. Visho Raj Khatiwada's dissertation titled 'Guru Prasad Mainalika Kathama Samajik Vastvikata' is a work which states there has been some work done on the literature but the access is limited to Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. Srijana Rai in her thesis titled 'Women in Development: Study of Women's Labour Force Participation in Mountain Farming Systems with Special Reference to the Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal' is again an analysis based on a field survey.

Many aspects of society have been studied in great detail but the lack of societal analysis through literature is found missing. Therefore, I would like to use literature as a medium to understand issues of caste, gender, identity and homeland in Nepali society through the literature that focuses on these issues though they share a disparate time frame.

Objective of Research

The objective of this research would be to problematise and understand the normalised/ accepted caste practices. My whole aim during this research is to try and understand how these ideas are formed and circulated in a society which is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural and where people live in unison. It is in the hope of understanding the socio-cultural values and practices which would perhaps enrich the experience if understood in a better light. Through this research, I intend to fill in the gaps in understanding and analysing the age-old Nepali culture as well as the identity issue around the Indian Nepalis and their need for a homeland.

Methodology

The methodology adopted to do this research would mostly be by focussing on the primary texts and the sociological theories that have come out from Nepal. I will focus on studying caste practices, gender discrepancies, identity issues, and the need for a state through the works of Andras Hofer, Youba Raj Luitel, Uma Bhandari, Seira Tamang, A.C Sinha, T.B Subba, Kumar Pradhan, Bidhan Golay, Pravesh Jung Golay and Mona Chettri.

The first methodology this research will rely on is critical analysis as that would allow reading and thinking widely about an issue to develop a deep understanding and a point of view concerning the issue. The second methodology adopted is historiography where issues of identity of Indian Nepalis would be read through the theories of Kumar Pradhan, A.C Sinha, T.B Subba, Kumar Pradhan, Bidhan Golay, Pravesh Jung Golay and Mona Chettri. The third methodology of analysis is caste and gender theories which are mostly catered to understanding Nepali society even if the theorists are Western theorists like Gellner, Levine and Cameron, Tamang, Luintel and Bista.

Chapterization

The thesis is divided into five chapters:

Introduction

Chapter 1: In Search of an Identity: Being and the Need for Belonging

This chapter will look into the question of identity and understand how identity is defined. Further, it will assess how one has a certain identity or does a person defines his identity. Within this chapter, it will assess if the question of identity is limited to what the nation-state defines for us. It will try and understand the need to identify cultural markers, which are equally defining of our identity by trying to understand the various identities one bears.

Chapter 2: History of Caste System in Nepali Society

This chapter will interrogate and understand how caste functions in Nepali/Nepalese society. Can the ethnic groups and various other communities be categorized under the broad category of caste? To do so, it will trace how caste practice started in Nepal and along with that the notions of purity and pollution. With the help of three texts, it will trace the caste practices and their evolvments if any. The examination of caste and its practices will be done through the literary works of Prajwal Parajuly's *Land Where I Flee*, Chuden Kabimo's *Song of the Soil*, and Bhupeen's *Maidaaro*. The chapter will focus on these three texts to try and understand how far we have come as a community and how relevant caste practices are in contemporary times.

Chapter 3: Socio-religious Practices, Patriarchy and Beyond¹⁵

This chapter will attempt to understand the position of women in Nepali society and try and draw a correlation, if any, among the Nepali women living in the Indian subcontinent. The inequalities faced by women in Nepal majorly stem from socio-cultural practices, economic dynamics, and religious factors as it defines the traditional roles and responsibilities between men and women differently. This research will draw upon the socio-cultural practices, analyse the traditional values and importance attached to them, and see how some of these practices remain a replica of the age-old cultural practice. How far has the Nepali society progressed in terms of women's treatment and position in society? The works of literature that will be analysed are *Rupmati* by Rudra Raj Pandey, *Swasnimanchhe* by Hridaya Chandra Singh and *Shanti* by Liladhwaj Thapa.

Chapter 4: Homeless at Home: A Continued Search for Home

The final chapter will understand the Indian Nepalis, it is imperative to recognise that they are a scattered group, mostly centred in Kalimpong and Darjeeling who have a sense of being under-recognised and feel the

¹⁵ This chapter can be found in the journal *Sāhitya* published by the author.

need for recognition. To have a sense of recognition, their demand for a home i.e. Gorkhaland needs to be studied. The repercussion of waging a revolution for a homeland is not always a homeland but manifold losses and reparations of a long-driven fight. This chapter is an attempt to trace the position of Indian Nepalis amidst the larger issues of being and wanting to belong to a nation-state.

Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the works of various Nepali writers to understand the prevalence of the caste system, the functionality of gender roles, issues of identity associated with the Nepali community of India and Nepal along with their fight for a homeland within the Indian nation-state. It might seem inconclusive in the way that it is not uniform or a linear area of research but what must be understood is that to understand this group of people who are largely identified as Nepali is to understand them as a multi-ethnic group. To classify everyone speaking Nepali under one ethnic identity is to do away with their pluralistic nature. Therefore, this research strives to understand how a particular community who are identified as Nepali have constantly struggled with issues of identity within the Indian nation-state. While trying to assess and understand the issues of Nepali identity, it has tried to define what one means when one identifies as a Nepali. Nepali literature as a genre has been written not only from Nepal but from various places of the Nepali population scattered with various histories, yet the common thread of caste and gender position remains unnegotiated in the literature. Trying to understand the caste practice and gender functionality of a Nepali society which has varied layers is complex despite being classified under the larger rubric of Nepali literature. Further, the caste practices prevalent among the Nepalis are equally convoluted in their practice and this is one of the aspects that has been opened up. Additionally, caste cannot be studied in isolation as caste and gender issues remain equally binding on one another, so gender functionality is studied along with analysis and understanding of socio-cultural and socio-religious practices largely prevalent in Nepali society. Lastly, the constant sense of ‘being’ but ‘not belonging’ within the Indian nation-state is studied. Through the explorations, I have realised that this shall remain inconclusive as there is no uniformity in how certain cultures and traditions are practised. Also, various aspects like class issues in tea plantations, Gorkhaland and its representation remain limited to a certain group, leaving

various areas open for future studies. Throughout the research process, I have tried my best to look into various aspects, but since it is a limited study through literature all these aspects could not be studied at great length. However, it can be concluded that the notion of Nepali identity must be challenged by the people who identify themselves as Nepalis as well as people who are grouped under the rubric of Nepali. Identity issues are very important to place one within the nation-state but they need to be addressed from the centre rather than the periphery. Another topic dealt with in the thesis is the issue regarding the caste system in Nepali literature and it is conclusively stated that it has gone beyond the mere mention and stressing of the fact, unlike the previous texts which have merely mentioned caste and the contemporary literature questioned it. Likewise, the research has looked into the gender roles and socio-cultural values which are practised among the Nepalis and have realised that they are tied to religious beliefs, so they remain unwaveringly relevant and are not questioned. Lastly, the final chapter reveals that Gorkhaland remains a rhetoric of the leaders and it must be interrogated to understand if one needs a Gorkhaland or if Darjeeling would suffice as a homeland for the Indian Nepalis.

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Chapter 1

In Search of an Identity: Being and the Need for Belonging

How are identities formed and what importance identity holds remains a pertinent question, to understanding the people and in this case to understand the people living in the Eastern Himalayas.¹⁶ The multifarious presence of identities in Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Sikkim makes it difficult to classify and define the identity of the people living in the Eastern Himalayas. So, what becomes pertinent to understand is that does the question of identity remains limited to what the nation-state defines for us or do we use cultural markers, which are equally defining of our identity. Or does ethnicity define one's identity? These are the significant questions which need consideration while trying to assess and understand the identity of Indian Nepali or Nepalese and the people falling under the umbrella term Nepali. While trying to understand the identity crisis faced by the Indian Nepalis, one must stop and draw out the differences between the Nepalese of Nepal and the Nepalis of Indian origin. The sense of lurking uncertainty among the Indian Nepalis cannot be denied nor overlooked. But, it would be very limiting to categorize people by certain definitions of identity though the modern nation-state pushes for one. As much as there is a need for identity, the fear among the ethnic sub-groups being bulldozed in the process of preserving the larger identity, cannot be denied. It must be taken into consideration that plurality is the key to the Indian Nepali community. The Indian Nepali community is not a homogenous community like the Bengali or the Marathi community, as the only binding factor for the heterogeneous Indian Nepalis is their language and culture to a certain extent. As argued by Kumar Pradhan, the language then not just becomes a language of the Chettri, Bahun, Kami, Damai, and Sarki, as it had originally been but *jatiya bhasa*/ethnic language, which connects all the communities. (Pradhan 2) However, while reinstating their identity, it would be helpful to accept the various identity assertions within the

¹⁶ Eastern Himalaya is the term used by Dr. Mona Chettri in her works to refer to the varied groups of people living in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Sikkim, eastern Nepal who share a certain commonality.

community called Indian Nepalis as that would do justice to the issue of identity crisis. What is meant by different identity assertions is that the Nepali community unlike other communities is not very uniform, as people identifying as Nepali belong to different ethnic communities, who share a common love for language, cultural values and traditions. Rajendra P. Dhakal argues that the pan-Nepali identity can be understood with the help of Stuart Hall's definition of cultural identity in terms of shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. (Dhakal 101) Stuart has stated in relation to the Caribbean identity and states our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This 'oneness', underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of the 'Caribbean-ness', of the black experience. (Hall 223)¹⁷ This definition of Hall, would mostly do justice in understanding the Nepali identity, they would perhaps be seen as one, but all the sub-groups cannot be classified as one. To stretch this argument forward, Nepalis of India and Nepalese of Nepal could also be seen as the same because of shared language and culture but cannot be classified as one without understanding their uniqueness and the fact that not all Nepalis can be seen as migrant or diasporic settlement. However, the nation-state plays a great role in defining one's identity or accepting one's identity. In doing so, it worked as a deterrent to the many ethnic sub-groups as well as tribal communities because their sense of identity got overlooked by the dominant identities in the nation-state¹⁸. A similar situation can be assessed among the Indian Nepalis demanding a separate state on the lines of language, culture, development issues, etc. Though regions of Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Sikkim are multicultural spaces which led to cultural contact of various communities, the fear of assimilation and cultural appropriation by one group, backed by political agents evoke ethnic revivalism of all sub-groups. It is well understood that Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Sikkim and Nepal have contiguous geographies leading to shared identities but what could not be averted was the evocation of ethnic claims on the state pushing the political border to finally come to play an

¹⁷ Stuart Hall. *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*.

¹⁸ The model of the nation-state implies that its population constitutes a nation, united by a common descent, a common language, and many forms of shared culture. When the implied unity was absent, the nation-state often tried to create it.

important role in the defining parameters of ethnic activism argues Chettri. (Chettri 14) This can be understood in relation to the need for rigid political borders as well as a fixed identity within the frame of the nation-state. However, the search for a fixed identity for the Indian Nepalis created confusion as the Nepali ethnic group is a trans-border, ethnolinguistic group with many ethnic sub-groups. So, claiming an identity through language and culture within the nation-state has brought many difficulties. Also, the key function of the Nepali ethnic identity through the demand of the state of Gorkhaland has been to ensure a better social, economic, and political position for at least a substantial sub-section of the group. (Chettri 15)

Another issue that needs consideration while understanding the Nepali-Indians is that, though different ethnic groups speak Nepali and associate with the identity of Indian Nepalis, it must not be mistaken as a unanimous group as Kumar Pradhan has classified the people of Darjeeling hills based on shared language and culture. Rather, it can be understood using the theories of Mary Louis Pratt, which suggests that a place like Darjeeling or Kalimpong can be seen as a transcultural space where different cultures come together in a contact zone. To push this argument forward, Markus Viehbeck states that cultural production is not tied to an enclosed group, but is seen as a dynamic and creative process that in itself produces and transforms notions of cultural boundaries. Pratt has termed this as a “contact perspective” meaning that these notions or identities are constituted by their relations to each other,” and in “terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices” (Pratt 7). Viehbeck cites Afef Benessaïeh to explain transculturality which “refers to an embodied situation of cultural plurality lived by many individuals and communities of mixed heritage and/or experience” (Viehbeck 10) Brox and Zeitzen have discussed Kalimpong to show how various cultures and festivals thrived in Kalimpong stating that it is a “city of the seven new years,” because here “practically all peoples living in the Himalayas and adjacent territories” congregated and each group celebrated their new year according to their own calendar (Viehbeck 253) Therefore, pushing one identity over another and demanding a separate state would rather imply that some cultures and communities hold lesser importance over the others. Brox and Zeitzen’s arguments are a testament to the presence of plurality and multiculturalism in the eastern Himalayas. Brox and Zeitzen see Kalimpong as not only a cultural juncture, but a frontier, a borderland, and a political edge which is wedged between Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, and Tibet, where regional and national interests often converge and at times clash in Kalimpong. (Viehbeck 254) The space where various

cultures clash must rather be celebrated than branding the state as suggested by leaders such as Gorkhaland or branding the people as Gorkha because that would help debunk various theories of the West which ascribes strictly to the notions of nation-state and identity. This perhaps should initiate a new concept of nation-state not based on similarities alone but a nation-state where all diversities are equally recognised and appreciated. Brox and Zeitzen have argued “that traditional indigenous cultures would collapse in unequal struggles with superior Western culture and global capitalism” meaning that various indigenous cultures and sub-groups would lose their importance in the face of larger identities. The very fact that the Indian Nepalis are fighting for an identity can be associated with the fact that their ethnic identity and culture are not identified and understood among the larger Indian identity. As a result, it becomes requisite for the people living in the Eastern Himalayas to celebrate all the ethnic sub-groups marked under the umbrella term, Nepali. Even though Indian-Nepali, is a much-needed marker of identity, it does overlook various other identities. Like Chuden Kabimo in his interview states, identities are not single. In this manner, the Eastern Himalayas could open up a larger notion of nation and identity as against the fixed notions propagated by the West as the concept of nation-state is said to be a Western influence. Likewise, Prem Poddar and Cheralyn Mealor attribute the formation or the need for a nomenclature for identification to various movements in colonial India, where the civil society was uneven, monopolised by elites, and paternalistic in its pedagogical objective. Therefore, it can be understood that eastern Himalaya (Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and parts of Nepal) is a contiguous space, which holds the existence of various ethnic communities and respects its diversity but the civil society organisations in the region contributed actively to the forging of a new self-identity that relied on notions of kinship (or *jati*) a standardised Nepali language as a vehicle for uniting different groups seen as constituting the Gorkha *jati*¹⁹. (Viehbeck 325) The terminology of Gorkha therefore can be seen as a necessity of the modern world, and also a slogan to demand a certain sense of social security but not inclusive of all ethnic sub-groups. But, what often remains overlooked is Nepalis are seen as a homogenous group, which then pushes away the identity of many ethnic sub-communities who use the Nepali language as a “contact”²⁰ language. To explain this, the arguments used by Markus Viehbeck, that the cultural history of Kalimpong and the Eastern Himalayas as a whole is not a

¹⁹ *Jati* here is community.

²⁰ Contact language can be related to what Mary Louis Pratt used as “contact zone”.

history that can be tied to a homogeneous group of people rather, it is significantly shaped by encounters between people of different geographical, cultural, national, or ethnic environments. (Viehbeck 6) Which can be understood as spaces where Indian Nepalis live, in a multicultural space with various ethnic sub-groups residing together. Likewise, if we consider the opinion of Mona Chettri, she has argued that the eastern Himalayas is a politically dynamic space and identity-based politics has emerged as a regional norm with all groups engaging in public articulations of their ethnicity. (Chettri 14) This opens up the issue of the nomenclature of Gorkha bears while denoting the Indian Nepalis. Another argument made by Chettri on how being a Nepali in India or Nepal is not value-neutral (Chettri 15) remains one of the core ideas which leads us to understand that the identity associated with being/calling one Nepali is a complex one. One's ethnic identification carries various advantages as well as impediments resulting in its presence in various aspects of their life. Chettri uses an argument by Barth to argue how no single identity fully represents an individual. (Chettri 15) This perhaps is the main attribute of the people who identify or are identified as Nepalis. Even Kabimo explains how one person can bear multiple identities. There are various layers of identity associated with the Nepali-speaking population. The reason behind the complexity of Nepali identity can be attributed to the fact that the eastern Himalayan region where the Nepali-speaking people live is a contiguous piece of geographical land owing to the dispersal of people of similar ethnicity, language, food habits, throughout the eastern Himalayas. To add to that, it is a conglomeration of various national and international borders. Though the borders, of course, arbitrarily drawn have divided the people it cannot be overlooked that a sense of familiarity and continuation persists argues Chettri. (Chettri 18) Chettri argues concerning the physical bridges that act as symbolic demarcations between these areas, but even as one crosses these bridges, the continuation persists because of the presence of the Nepalis and the Nepali language, on either side of the international border. (Chettri 18) Another relevant account that Chettri brings to light is that perhaps the continuation of familiarity is because of the physical landscape which remains unaltered at the political borders along with common language, shared culture, and similar group identity creating an illusion of an uninterrupted, seamless borderland that is disturbed only at times by political agitations. (Chettri 18) This then opens up a very important notion that borders are often forced and notions of Nation are limiting to people who share culture, language and food habits. Chettri cites Willem Van Schendel to argue how borders not only join that which is

different but also separate that which is similar (Schendel 39). Taking cues from Chettri, studying Schendel further, brings to light how borders run along local administrative boundaries, through rivers, and along railway lines which never had much political significance. In Schendel's understanding of borders it is seen that the borders did not change their lives immediately, but gradually came up as a barrier to their work, he discusses how people moved seamlessly across the borders for work and livelihood (in the case of Assam and Bengal). This can be seen with the eastern Himalayas, which were affected by partition and borders without having an awareness of a partition or formation of new borders to a common man. Likewise, Chettri argues that the eastern Himalayan borderland has come to represent a complex socio-political space with multiple layers of cross-cutting identities and urges us to re-frame our perspective and acknowledge the social, cultural, and political contiguity of the eastern Himalayas. (Chettri 18) Concerning the need for re-framing our notion of identities and borders another important concept which was used by Mary Louis Pratt is "contact zone" which refers to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (Pratt 34) as a "space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 6). The concept of the contact zone and contact spaces as used by Pratt is not directly inferential to what is termed as the eastern Himalayas but can be understood in the light of asymmetrical relations of power in terms of the Nepali-speaking community as a minority community living among the larger Indian populace. Further extending in the same vein, the various sub-ethnic groups within the so-called Nepali community have been rendered a sense of identity and significance by using the umbrella term, Nepalis/Indian Nepalis but it must be rather used cautiously to not bulldoze the existence of the sub-groups by imposing one larger identity. Various places in the eastern Himalayas do not have the presence of a single community, but rather a confluence of multiple communities that use a certain language for communication and market purposes, but have various unique identities, cultures and languages. So, most of these spaces could be perceived as contact zones /spaces where different cultures come in contact with one another not necessarily in a hierarchical manner but, if one language or one terminology starts to define all, it would perhaps lead to conflicts. Another point of relation with the concept of the contact zone is that many Indian Nepalis like every other migrated community came to

India because borders were porous, but post-Indian independence the sense of borders started becoming rigid and Darjeeling and other Eastern Himalayas became a space where they could come in contact with one another and maintain their relationship and preserve their culture, wherever they settled. In addition to this, Trine Brox and Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen discuss contact zones with the help of Pratt, stating that Kalimpong can be seen as a contact zone where encounters and exchanges between the local and the global, the national and the transnational, and between identity and diversity, that took place during Prince Peter's sojourn in Kalimpong—a sojourn which in many and varied ways embodies the West's encounter with “the rest.” (Viehbeck 247) The essay above refers to one particular place in the eastern Himalayas, but what must be understood is that Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Sikkim and Eastern Nepal are multicultural spaces and various identities and cultures thrive at the same time. It must be understood that there has been a multi-directional flow of goods, culture and people in what can be largely called the eastern Himalaya, a term used by Chettri. To push the idea forward is an argument made by Saul Mullard, who states that Sikkim is an extremely diverse state in the Indian Union, home to numerous different Himalayan peoples with different cultures and religions. (Mullard 2) What this draws is that there have been multiple cultures and communities that exist in the eastern Himalayas like Sikkim so putting one identity above the other would give a very lopsided representation of certain communities. Mullard also takes note of the fact that the current ethnic demographics of Sikkim remain complex, but is safe to say that Sikkim has always been a multi-ethnic region. (Mullard 2)

Having said that there are deeper issues like the state not being able to register their identity as Indians, because of their ethnicity. Chettri argues that this became a catalyst as people had been experiencing regional alienation by the state whereby the people who share a remoteness from the centres of economic and political power developed a common bond. In this way, identity-based politics became a pervasive feature of the eastern Himalayas which was influenced deeply by the presence of borders- real as well as symbolic argued Chettri. (Chettri 19) Further, it must be understood that the need to belong and have a concrete sense of identity, pushed the demand for a separate state. However, the nation-state as argued by Sanjay Seth, “is not an empty container into which anything can be poured as it already has its content. The nation-state presupposes certain relations between authority and the people, between custom and law, knowledge and practice; it presupposes certain forms of selfhood and community. This means that the nation-state cannot serve as a vehicle for expressing

those aspirations which do not already accord with or ‘fit’ the frame of nation, state and modernity; and indeed may ill serve as the vehicle for recovering and expressing what is autochthonous...”(Seth 4) As Seth argues the nation-state as a concept is very Western and it is derivative of a Western society rather than community and culture, which is similar to Kumar Pradhan’s reading of nation, which shall be discussed further in the chapter. This argument can be seen concerning the various communities and various ethnicities within the Nepali society which gets overlooked when we refer to them as a homogenous group. Therefore, it has to be understood that the world cannot be defined by a single logic, that the differences cannot be surpassed, and thus the nation-state as Seth states must work its way ‘through’ difference. But what cannot be denied at the same time is nation-state has become a source of identity for modern individuals via citizenship or national belonging as stated by Taylor when he argues that personal identity becomes political identity. Gellner has referred to Chamisso, an immigrant Frenchman in Germany during the Napoleonic period, who had written a powerful novel about a man who had lost his shadow and stated that the “man without a shadow was the man without a nation.” (Gellner 6) In the same light if we consider the constant need for the Indian Nepalis especially from the Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills who have to assert their identity although they belong to the Indian nation-state, then one can very well compare the situation to a shadowless man. It rather becomes an issue of neither belonging here nor belonging there, as they have no claims to the rights given by Nepal, and their Indian identity is always questioned at various levels.

This now brings us to the issues associated with the identity of Indian Nepalis living in India. They are referred to using various terminologies like Gorkhas/Gurkhas/Indian Nepalis/Sakhaa/Nepamul Bharatiya/Indian Nepalis, etc. The lexicons used to describe the Nepali-speaking population are varied. The plainsmen/the larger Indian population continuously grapple with the identity of an Indian Nepali and becomes difficult to distinguish and locate them as Indians as questions like “Are you from Nepal?” become a constant reminder to the population that they have never been fully accepted by the Indian nation-state. Dhakal further argues that the above question could directly mean, ‘You are not an Indian’ which has politically dangerous implications and could lead to the ousting of Nepali Nepali-speaking population, like it did in North East. (Dhakal 100) Consequently, the acceptance of the citizens by the nation-state has become very important.

Nation, as defined by Partha Chatterjee, is very arbitrary and argues with the help of Vincent Smith, Smith had published a rejoinder to the Montagu-Chelmsford constitutional proposals seeking to placate nationalist demands by conceding a certain measure of “responsible government” to Indians. The proposal was based on propositions 1) that a policy, assumed to have been successful in Western communities, *can* be applied to India and 2) that such a policy *ought* to be applied to India, even at the request of an admittedly small body of Indians, because Englishmen believe it to be intrinsically the best. (Chatterjee 16) However, Chatterjee states that these cannot be applied to Indian society as social organization in India was caste-based, which was incompatible with any form of democratic government. Chatterjee rejects the universality of this proposition which states that it must apply in principle to all societies irrespective of historical or cultural specificities and states that Smith had argued that this concept is tied to the specific history and culture of Western societies and cannot be exported elsewhere. The third is that the historical and cultural differences, although an impediment in the beginning, can be eventually overcome by a suitable process of training and education. (Chatterjee 19) But, as it can be understood the concept of the nation-state as argued by Smith did not remain applicable. When considered under the light of the definition of the nation-state as stated by Benedict Anderson, the nation-state is an idea as nations are emotional and cultural phenomena, not concrete ones. In *Imagined Communities* Anderson argues that the nation is an imagined political community which is inherently limited in scope and sovereign in nature. He furthers his argument by stating that it is imagined because the actuality of even the smallest nation exceeds what it is possible for a single person to know—one cannot know every person in a nation, just as one cannot know every aspect of its economy, geography, history, and so forth. (Anderson 46) No doubt, Anderson proposes an idea of a nation, as an imagined political community, but Partha Chatterjee poses the question as to whose imagined community means that nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain “modular” forms already made available to them by Europe and America, what do they have left to imagine? Chatterjee steers away from Anderson and states that we have a very provincialized idea of nation and cannot apply to Asia and Africa as they are governed by factors that are alien to the West. Chatterjee argues that the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa, are posited not on identity but rather on a *difference* with the “modular” forms of the national society propagated by the modern West. (Chatterjee 5) He states that the East has been swamped by the history of the

postcolonial state and surrendering to the old forms of the modern state and even if they think creatively it is influenced by it. If the nation is an imagined community and if nations must also take the form of states, then our theoretical language must allow us to talk about community and state at the same time. (Chatterjee 11) This argument perhaps helps us understand that the notion of nation would not justify the various communities and sub-communities living in the East by sharing a contiguous border. It perhaps brings out the implications the East has to bear by accepting the notions of state as offered by the West. This then helps us to understand that the Nepali community like every other community living in the East has been forcefully co-opted by the concept of a nation, which has failed to be inclusive of trans-border shared identities. Nepalis as a nation transgress the borders because they share certain cultural values, festivals, religious beliefs and practices as well as food habits across the border. As stated by the definition of the nation-state, people form a nation based on shared values. But, in the case of Nepalis, we can see that they do not entirely live in one nation-state, their territory of the nation is spread across Nepal, Bhutan and India, therefore the sense of insecurity that comes in the modern nation-state could perhaps be pointed towards the fact that they remain a minuscule minority within the larger nation-state and the loss of concrete cultural boundary as Nepalis live across various nation-states. The largest Nepali population is found in Nepal and the fact that there is a scattered Nepali population in India across the North Eastern states, Northern India, Sikkim and West Bengal and along the eastern Himalayas. When the countries share borders, there is a tendency for the population of both the Indian side as well as the Nepali side to fall across the other boundary and because of this, the settlements are bound to happen. Also, it has to be recognized that the concepts of boundaries and nationalities were not fixed in the past. Adding to this the open border that India shares with Nepal, the language used in Nepal and parts of West Bengal, Assam, Bhutan and Sikkim, made it easier for people on both sides to settle in the neighbouring areas. It has further been argued by Sinha, that with the coming of the British to Darjeeling and transforming it into a sanatorium²¹ and tea plantation they started recruiting Nepalese on a large scale as cheap labourers. With this there was an organised colonization and extensive presence of Nepalese in certain pockets of the Northeast argues Sinha. He has also listed how the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-15 and the Segowli Treaty led to extensive migration. Therefore, the issue of identity started surfacing not just in India but in Nepal as well as they have been treated as

²¹ Darjeeling was granted to the East India Company by Sikkimputtee Rajah, out of friendship to the said Governor-General in 1835.

a peripheral community. In the case of Nepal, people whose ancestry is traced to India, are questioned. T.B. Subba argues that the struggles of Nepamul Bharatiya are similar to those of other Indians as he states ‘the political aspirations of the Nepalis in Northeast India are therefore woven around the struggle for equal economic and political rights as other Indian citizens. This perhaps is true but it would also fail to encompass the issue of identity along with their rights. Subba argues that these aspirations have often taken very long to be fulfilled or have remained unfulfilled even today and he suggests this is because there is a lack of strong ethnic solidarity among the people.²² The reason behind weak solidarity is that when we say Nepali, we often overlook the ethnic differences and cultural differences even within the community, in terms of food habits, language, cultural practices, etc. as each is culturally distinct from the other which is seldom discussed. So, wanting ethnic solidarity based on their lingua franca would be diluting the ethnic diversity that Nepali society has. Subba has brought out how the entire northeast region is very diverse and because of this more and more indigenous people are fighting for the limited resources and an added burden of Nepalis only adds to the hostile environment. But, what is often overlooked is ethnic solidarity can be maintained if only ethnic differences are acknowledged. Another related issue concerning this is that in Nepal, the Nepalese of Indian Origin, like Marwaris and Biharis, who are born and settled in Kathmandu with no other place to call their home but are identified as Indian. Subba has argued that it would be wrong to think that the problem of identity is confined to Indian Nepalis and does not touch the population of Nepal. Subba states that the Tibeto-Burman hill communities have challenged the notion of 'one nation, one dress, one language, one religion propagated by Kathmandu officialdom which is to state that the question of national identity has rapidly become one of the most contentious issues in the Nepal. (Subba 129) Ethnic assertion among the sub-ethnic groups has caused waves of tension in association with identity.

Another situation that can be considered in the case of Sikkim is the Association of Old Settlers of Sikkim mostly comprising of the business community of Marwaris and Biharis, who have claimed Sikkimese rights (exemption from income tax) on the pretext of being more Indian than the Nepali immigrants, meaning the Indian Nepalis. The said group had filed a case, with facts which are not fully accurate and the supreme

²² As cited by A.C Sinha. T.B Subba ‘Being a Nepali in Northeast India: Predicament of a ‘Privileged Nation.’

court's verdict claimed that all Nepalis of Indian origin as foreigners in Sikkim, which created a lot of unsettlement and a sense of animosity among the local people against the Association of Old Settlers, who have claimed their origin to India more than the Nepali communities²³. So, these issues keep cropping up and causing unrest among the people. But, what cannot be overlooked is that borders can be very arbitrary and must be studied along with people. Dhakal argues that the borders were drawn above the people and the linkages developed through ages of social interactions in a geographically contiguous area, do not make the Indian Nepalis non-Indian, anti-Indian as the present borders were drawn only at the end of the 19th century. (Dhakal 103) Furthermore, if we take into account the territory of Kalimpong, Darjeeling Sikkim and Eastern Nepal, the borders constantly shifting under the British regime. The geographical territories belonging to these states kept changing as many battles were waged between Sikkim and Nepal in 1774. There is a record which states that in 1788 under the regime of Purna Alley, Sikkim was attacked by Gorkhas and likewise Darjeeling which was initially a part of Sikkim, was captured by Nepal. (Pradhan 7) The Gorkhas spread far and wide in Sikkim and because of this their settlement began outside of Nepal but it can never be asserted that they remain, immigrants as they immigrated much before the country gained independence from colonial rule and the borders became rigid. However, owing to this the identity of an Indian Nepali is always at stake and is constantly questioned. The need for a constant need to be associated with a state and form a fixed identity has put Indian Nepalis in a state of unrest. The demand for a separate state by the people of Darjeeling and Kalimpong named Gorkhaland stems from this insecurity and wanting to belong. There has been an involvement of various leaders and equally more theories behind the demand for a separate state. It was as early as 1907, that the Hill people of Darjeeling submitted a memorandum to the British India Government demanding a separate administrative setup for the Darjeeling Hills. Various instances have been chronicled where the people in power like the state head have asked Nepali-speaking settlers in the Darjeeling hills to return to Nepal. (Bagchi XX) But, what cannot be left out while understanding the issue of identity crisis among the Nepali Indians is the repercussions of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1950 which defines the gamut of the bilateral relationship between the two neighbouring countries. The Friendship treaty and its ramifications need discussion but before that the

²³ <https://www.thequint.com/explainers/supreme-court-order-sparks-debate-identity-sikkimese-nepalis>

terminology chosen by the Nepalis needs divulgence. It is important to understand the terminologies used to define the Indian Nepalis themselves to assert their identity are many. The first term that needs a greater understanding is the most commonly used, Gorkha. Gorkha as a term can be read as a colonial construct given by the British, which meant brave, loyal and obedient but it served as an essence of the community argues Bidhan Golay. (Golay 26) He also argues that this essentialising of the colonial construct has resulted in the transformation of the construct into an essential prescription for group membership. The term Gorkha is problematic in itself, as the entire population defined as Nepalis would not entirely subscribe to the term as it denotes a certain characteristic when held under a colonial construct. More so the term Gorkha is also associated with the place named Gorkha in Nepal, and not all Nepali-speaking population is comfortable with the said term as calling oneself Gorkha, would somewhere imply forging an association with the province of Gorkha, which falls in Nepal. Likewise, another point Jung makes is that there is a need to challenge the historically constructed idea of a Gorkha because only then the people will be able to understand the heterogeneity of the self, homeland and ethnic differences outside of the colonial construct. This is very strongly and rightly argued cause the entire hill population of Sikkim and partly of Darjeeling hills are aware ethnically and asking them to subscribe to a colonial construct and demanding a separate state on an identity entrusted to us from above seems unreasonable to a great extent.

As Mona Chettri argues ethnic identification carries with it numerous advantages as well as impediments, which have percolated to different aspects of people's lives. As much as a common man's understanding of the need for identity is recognition of the self and his ethnic community, the political leaders have banked on this idea to fulfil their political agenda in a bid to ensure better social, economic, and political position for at least a substantial sub-section of the group. (Chettri 15) However, the homogenous Nepali ethnic identity which was sought by the early elites of Darjeeling and Benares of classifying all Nepali speaking as Gorkha has substantially had fissures due to the emphasis on culture revivalism and offshoots of various ethnic associations and ethnic revivalism. Chettri has argued this kind of ethnic politics is now sustained as a political movement through the upsurge in cultural revivalism, the proliferation of ethnic associations, and the success of ethnic political parties. (Chettri 15) Unlike the early days of homogenizing the entire Nepali-speaking community as Gorkhas, where there was a sense of blind acceptance and adherence to the term

Gorkha, with very little questioning of the meaning the term Gorkha bore. Chettri has associated the reasoning behind the fissure in the Gorkha term with ethnic revivalism, which perhaps cannot be overlooked but Gorkha as a term that fails to acknowledge the various ethnic sub-groups, needs to be acknowledged. The demand for a separate state among the Nepali-speaking Indians of Darjeeling Hill is something that is not intended to be contested but naming it as Gorkhaland may perhaps not necessarily be acceptable to the ethnic sub-groups as their plurality would be diluted like how unification in Nepal overlooked the position of the various minority groups. The Gorkha term in some instances is very loosely used and in cities like Delhi and Punjab, which are in close quarters from the borders of Nepal, where many Nepalese have migrated to earn a livelihood, are called Gorkha/Bahadur. This then constantly becomes unsettling to the Indian Nepalis, as the entire community is viewed with the same lens. Prajwal Parajuly, a renowned Indian Nepali author, constantly harps on the fact that not all Nepalis are tantamount to bahadurs, drivers and cooks and he maintains that there is a sense of wonder among people when he asserts his Indian Nepali identity in most of his interviews. He mentions how Indian Nepalis are viewed as somebody occupying a very lowly position and are limited to menial jobs. But, if one tries to understand the perspective of Indian Nepalis, it would be understood that Indian Nepalis are not emotionally attached to the happenings of Nepal unlike how they are constantly associated by the larger Indian populace with Nepal. They are as much a part of India, as any other person and this recognition of plurality is failed by the nation-state.

The second important terminology is the one used by the sociologist Awadesh Coomar Sinha, who has used two terminologies to describe this group of people who speak Nepali as Indians of Nepali Origin(INO) and Nepalese of Indian Origin (NIO). He has justified this classification by stating that these categories of people are often claimed in Nepal as the NIO or Madheshis, often termed as land-hungry emigrants from the Indian plains, who went to Nepal after the Sepoy Mutiny to clear the forest and claim the fertile agricultural fields and similarly, in India that the INOs were invited by the British to develop Darjeeling and to mine copper and mint coins in Sikkim, who are also seen as immigrants, claiming the land rights. However, it cannot be overlooked that ancestors of Madheshis in Nepal and Kirati in Sikkim existed before that as it can be gauged from Risley's Gazetteer. One cannot outrightly state that all Madheshis/Tarai people and likewise all Nepalis in Sikkim and Darjeeling hills, as well as other parts of India, were migrants as some of them have a better claim

to be the “sons of soil” than many others in their respective places. (Sinha 368) Likewise, Dhakal reiterates that many Gorkhas of Darjeeling claim that they came here ‘with the land’ when the Darjeeling district was ceded by Nepal to the East India Company and cites Roger Brubaker who states that it was ‘migration of borders over people’ not migration of people over borders.’ (Dhakal 95) This perhaps is a valid argument, considering that Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and East India Company were constantly in strife and there had been a cessation of land, back and forth. A very important factor that cannot be overlooked is the argument made by Kumar Pradhan, where he states that major works like that of Hamilton and Risley remain limited as they have surveyed only certain pockets while talking about the indigenous population of Darjeeling and the same can be said of Sikkim, as the census remains limited because of the access to the language and interpretation. Likewise, The Gazetteer of Darjeeling compiled by L.S.S.S. O’Malley states that the first census carried out in cold weather of 1971-72 records 94,712 people but in another three decades the census of 1901 records 2,49,117 people. This growth has been attributed to the development of the tea industry as well as the influx of people to cultivate the wasteland. (O’Malley 35-36) It clearly states that the population of Darjeeling is heterogeneous mostly comprised of people of Mongolian origin belonging chiefly to Nepalese races along with Lepchas, Bhutias and Tibetans along with the plainsmen (Madhesias). (O’Malley 40)

The third important terminology is the one used by Tanka B. Subba, a renowned anthropologist, who has been engaging with the issues of ethnicity as well as the issue of Indian Nepal. Subba asserts that at this point in our history it would be easier to endorse the hyphenated “Indian-Nepali” in English and “Bharatiya-Nepali” in Nepali for the community and “Nepali” for the language because while nationality and citizenship make sense only within nation-state boundaries, languages have no such boundaries. (Subba and Sinha 386) It cannot be disregarded that Indian-Nepali as a term would benefit the Nepali-speaking population of India, but one must not undermine the aspect that when a simple question like “What language do you speak?” concerning language and ethnicity is made, the person is found responding as “we are Nepalis and we speak Nepali,” which perhaps would imply to a common man’s understanding that the individual has roots in Nepal if the ethnic identity alone is addressed. The failure to emphasize the Indianness of Indian Nepal would hold the assumption true by the person questioning his identity. Though the question wouldn’t have any malice attached to it, it puts the person in question in a vulnerable spot, having to explain his identity. In the search for a

suitable nomenclature for ourselves, T.B Subba suggests that Indian Nepalis must call themselves, “*Sakhaa*” meaning a friend, which would negate the boundaries of a nation-state and question it but looking at its feasibility under the nation-state it becomes difficult. Subba argues that *Sakhaa* is free from any geographical, cultural and territorial identities like Pahadi, Madhesi, Nepali, Gorkha, Manipuri, etc. and that according to him is its biggest strength. Referring to Bidhan Golay, Subba argues how Indian Nepalis need to be de-territorialised and de-ethnicized identity for they are not only themselves de-territorialised in India but also have frequently experienced ethnic anger of the locally dominant communities. But, one has to critically understand that taking the position of *Sakhaa*, would not only dilute one’s identity but would also mean fearing to accept one’s reality and belongingness to the nation-state as it has become normative to the modern world. It would only be appropriate to constantly address the issues and create awareness among fellow citizens that Nepali, like Bengali and Punjabi, is just another language and does not necessarily mean the language and the people, who are often mistaken for immigrants. If we take the case of Bengali as well as the Punjabi language, these languages are spoken across the border as well as in India, and the people speaking the said language have never been referred to as immigrants or a threat to the Indian nation-state. A.C Sinha has used the nomenclature Nepamul Bharatiya for Indians of Nepalese Origin and he argues that this group of people are associated with the sovereign state of Nepal. But, if we put Bharatiya Nepali or Nepalis of Indian Origin then they are also seen with the same lens. It is very difficult for the other citizens of the country to understand the difference. Therefore, the onus lies in the government of the Indian nation-state to acknowledge the citizenship of Nepamul Bharatiya, who is otherwise known as Indian Nepalis. It also becomes the duty of the Indian Nepalis to not have too many nomenclatures for the self, as it would tend to dilute their identity and create confusion about their identity.

After the issue of nomenclature, the other important issue that various researchers have dealt with is the issue related to home. There are various works which discuss the idea of home for Indian Nepalis, how the home of the Nepalis has panned based on the shared culture, and how the Indian Nepalis have to try to belong to the nation-state constantly. Defining the borders of the home has become difficult for the Indian Nepalis, as they pan beyond the geographical borders, but demanding statehood by classifying all Nepali speaking as one, would be equally erroneous. Though ethnically different, Pradhan has argued that all the Nepali-speaking

people as ethnically Nepali, and this is not to be argued against as that is a larger identity. In a sense, when we classify people, it must be kept in mind, that in the process of increasing the number count required for the identification of ourselves as homogenous Indian Nepalis as well as for the demand of a separate state, we willy-nilly must not put all the Nepali speaking population under one category. Conforming to a nation-state also pushes people to accept certain homogenizing as well as dilution of specific community identity. Sanjay Seth in his essay titled, “The Nation-State as Guardian of Difference and Globalisation as the End of Difference?” argues that globalisation levels out the heterogeneity followed by failure to represent the cultural particularity or difference that renders people distinct from others and subjects them to the same social logics and because of which it diminishes the capacity of the nation-state to represent cultural plurality. This particularly speaks for the reason behind the homogeneity associated with the Nepali-speaking people. They are not seen any differently, they are judged by the language they speak, and their facial and physical features, whereas if one were to understand the ethnicity behind the Nepali-speaking community, it is varied. No doubt the essay mentioned speaks of globalisation as a greater good to the world, but it does not overlook the fact that heterogeneity gets diluted in the process of the formation of the nation-state. What peculiarly stands out is an argument put forward by Lowell W. Barrington that “nations are not just unified by culture; they are unified by a sense of purpose: controlling the territory that the members of the group believe to be theirs.”²⁴ This then helps us to open up another aspect of understanding Nepali people. Kumar Pradhan in his book *Pahilo Pahar* is seen as one of the first proponents who spoke on the identity of Nepalis. He states, that ‘Nepali’ as a term is used in three different ways. i) it represents the language, ii) a person who is a citizen of Nepal, although he/she speaks any other language, but is bound by the political boundaries of the country of Nepal. iii) He uses Nepali as a cultural symbol of a distinctive nation whose members are not confined by the geographical boundaries of the country called Nepal. (Pradhan 4)

The arguments made ahead in this chapter with the categorization of Nepali-speaking people, state that not every person speaking the Nepali language can be termed as ethnically Nepali. To push this argument

²⁴ “Nation” and “Nationalism”: The Misuse of Key Concepts in Political Science. LW, Barrington.

forward, Kumar Pradhan argues that they can be understood as culturally Nepali as they share a similar culture, and language, and are bound to be called by the same register. In *Pahilo Pahar*, Pradhan has spoken about the classification of people in Nepal, according to their region as cold region, Himalayan region and the plains. The people living in the upper area which lies closer to the borders of Tibet are highly influenced by the Tibetan language, food habits, and culture, and this group is called '*Bhotey*.' Likewise, the people living closer to the Ganges in the plains of Nepal, are referred to as '*Madhisey*.' The middle area that lies between the cold area and plains, which is usually hilly is called *Pahad* and people residing in this area are called '*Pahadey*'. By drawing on this simplistic classification, Pradhan is trying to draw out the essentialist connotation that people though belonging to different ethnic communities are still equally Nepali by virtue of culture, and language and bound by the territory of the nation-state. Similarly, he has analysed the multi-ethnic Nepali community settlement of Darjeeling. However, a very important aspect that needs consideration is post-unification of Nepal under Prithvi Narayan Shah, the society slowly got divided into two groups, i.e. *Tagadhari* and *Matwali*. In the process of classifying people within the bounds of the caste system, even the indigenous population fell into the caste classification, diluting their ethnic identity in a larger sense and consequently being termed with a singular terminology 'Nepali'. This goes on to state that a larger identity would in some way affect the smaller identities. It has to be understood that the need for a separate state for the Nepalis arose because of their identity being overlooked and their being constantly associated with Nepal. The hillmen settlement of Darjeeling functioned differently because they lived in a nation-state which was diverse and their settlement remained limited to the tea plantation area and the town of Darjeeling, so instead of limiting to one community and using their primary language, they used secondary language which is Nepali and this primarily led to the widespread use as well as popularity of Nepali as a language argued Pradhan. Pradhan boldly states that equating themes like nation or nationality which may have its epistemic value in the West, is insufficient to unearth the intricacies of nation formation in the East. He steers away from those estimations which framed the nationality of Nepalis in the Indian situation as a case of 'sub-nation', who speak the Nepali language and are Indian citizens. He was of the view that the political connotation of the term Nepali had a reference to the citizenship identity, while the cultural import of the term meant a linguistically unified community not amenable to the political boundary of any nation-state. (Pradhan 12) This could perhaps be a fitting argument in understanding

the Nepali nation but what Pradhan does in the process of describing the Nepali-speaking population, limits them to the population of Darjeeling and reduces them to a Marxist understanding of the proletariat group and the Bourgeoisie group. This stance cannot be denied in the case of Darjeeling, but he overlooks the other areas like Sikkim, Bhutan, North-eastern states and the Eastern Himalayas where the Nepalis lived. It must be considered that while calling people culturally Nepali, there is a fear or tendency to overlook the various ethnic communities, and their cultural practices and homogenise the entire population as Nepali. Dhakal has cited Valentine Chirol where he argues that India had no sense of the nation before the colonial rule but with internal fissures to contain, the Indian National Congress had adopted a policy in 1920 of organising the provinces on a linguistic basis once the independence was achieved but Gorkhas were excluded. Their longest association with the East India Company, where they had served as plantation workers, where borders were moved due to the policies of the Chogyal, East India Company and Bhutan, went through strife leaving them without any state to associate with. Very often in the writings of Indra Bahadur Rai, it can be read that he speaks about how the Nepalis are rooted in Darjeeling. However, the consciousness of not belonging and the need for a separate state was fuelled by the apathy shown by the Indian government under Morarji Desai's prime ministership. When the language movement started in 1970, the Indian Nepalis demanded the inclusion of Nepali in the eighth schedule, believing it would give them a chance to reinstate their identity, but the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai in 1979 told that Nepali was a foreign language and that the Gorkha regiment could be thrown into the Bay of Bengal, which hurt the sentiments of the Gorkhas. (Dhakal 99) The implication of this can be seen even today as Indian Nepalis constantly fear being called an immigrant or a foreigner. Dhakal refers to Ayten Glindodu and states that to tag citizens as foreigners is to make these people citizenship-less and right-less people and says how the word 'foreigner' reduces the citizens to 'bare bodies' without any rights. (Dhakal 100)

It must be pointed out that Pradhan as cited by Swatahsiddha Sarkar has argued that Nepali nationalism in Nepal grew up out of a pluralist (*anekata*) social fabric whereas syncretic unity (*samanyaik ekibhaban*) served as the basis of forging the Nepali nation in Darjeeling. Pradhan has argued that nation formation in Nepal has undergone a process that may be called *Kamila Prakriya* (a process in which people forage in groups much like the ants) while *Mauri Prakriya* (swarming of bees) was the actual process that explains Nepali nation

formation in Darjeeling.²⁵ Pradhan has harped on the fact that, unlike Nepal, the origin and evolution of Nepali national identity in Darjeeling was not because of the state unification process rather the feeling of national consciousness was because of the common interest of the working class Nepalis as he states that they were subjugated under the British. The sense of divide that prevailed between them and us in relation to the British, plainsmen and Nepalis, helped them bond which is a very akin to the argument used by Pratt. He stresses the fact that blood (*khoon/ragat*), dress (*besb bhusa*) and religion (*dharma*) were unimportant but the Nepalis had formed a nation out of a bond of common experience, shared mentalities, and a single language. Swatahsiddha Sarkar who has read Pradhan extensively mentions that Pradhan must be understood in the context of his time and also be understood in the way he used class in the sense that gave his historical account theoretical precision. (Sarkar 191) Though there have been references to diaspora, Sarkar mentions that it cannot be clearly argued. Despite the fact that statehood is a cry of the hills, it must be understood that ethnic cleansing is a fear harboured by sub-ethnic communities who are in the minority and demanding a protectorate based entirely on shared language and experience would destroy the notion of plurality among the ethnic sub-groups. Another reason for considering statehood on shared experience and a single language would perhaps lead to the extinction of indigenous languages. Pradhan's *Pahilo Pahar* opens up various connotations attached to Nepal and Indian Nepalis. While referring to the people of Nepal, he also mentions that people of Nepal were first referred to as Nepalese by the British and since they were recruited by the British army, they started to be referred to as Gorkhas or Gorkhalis and the same term was used for all the people living in the hills. (Pradhan 8) Somewhere we cannot forget how the Nepalis living outside of Nepal, were not united by citizenship or association with Nepal, but rather by shared cultural values and language. The word 'Nepali' continues to be a political term in Nepal, meaning Nepalese citizenship or nationality, whereas it took an ethnic meaning in India argues Rajendra P. Dhakal. The reason behind this was their rootedness in their shared history, landscape and common life experience. (Subba and Sinha 94) Pradhan has further argued that Nepali as a language was a mother tongue in Nepal to some groups but since Darjeeling was a place where there was a culmination of

²⁵ Swatahsiddha Sarkar, "Kumar Pradhan and his Quest for Indian Nepali Nation in Darjeeling" *The Echo Of India*. Siliguri. *Saturday December 20, 2014*.

people from various ethnic communities like Chettri, Bahun, Kami, Damai, Sarki, Rai, Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Newar, Limbu, Thami, Sunuwar, etc so Nepali as a language can be appropriately termed as an ethnic/jatiya language. (Pradhan 28) The reason behind Nepali gaining prominence in Darjeeling hills can be attributed to Macfarlane who started a school to train local teachers in Kalimpong. The contribution of sowing the seeds of education would rest upon Macfarlane in the hills of Darjeeling. He first used education as a means of reaching out to people, even if there was a fear of losing labourers for the tea gardens. As Dewan has observed: ‘... ever since the advent of the missionaries, they had chosen the pen rather than the sword in proselytizing and in disseminating education’ (Dewan 105-6). Nepali as a language was not referred to as Nepali even in Nepal until that point, it was only after J. A Ayton and Hodgson have been said to have used their divisive politics among the various ethnic groups and overlooking the diversity, they had referred to Nepali as the language of Nepal. With the growing prominence of the Nepali language and an increasing Nepali population in the hills, even the Lepchas and Bhutias were beginning to learn and speak Nepali.²⁶ On the other hand, there are not any work which explicitly discusses the presence and settlement of Nepalis in Sikkim on a similar length as Pradhan’s work, and this could be attributed to exclusion and less exposure of the Himalayan kingdom to other states and countries. The early records which chronicle the presence of various Nepali communities in Sikkim can be traced back to *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*. It can be clearly gauged from the strong presence of caste system and caste hierarchy even in the present day as opposed to the Darjeeling hills that Nepalis living in Sikkim were not bound to each other in the way it happened in Darjeeling. The presence of various Nepali-speaking populations is tabled based on the census taken in 1891 as follows as recorded in the Gazetteer. (Risley 27)

Race or caste	Total
Lepcha	5,762
Bhutea	4894
Limbu	3356

²⁶ Charisma K. Lepcha “The Scottish Mission in Kalimpong and the Changing Dynamics of Lepcha Society”

Gurung	2921
Murmi	2867
Rai, Jimdar &c	2020
Khambu	1963
Kami	1670
Brahman	1414
Mangar	901
Chetri	829
Newar	727
Slaves	326
Dirzi	287
Miscellaneous, including troops	521

Table.1. Classification of people according to caste in Sikkim.

There have been varying records of the population. In 1840, Dr Campbell had estimated the Lepchas and Bhotiyas of Sikkim at 3000 and 2000 respectively, but Mr White in his census of Sikkim in March 1891 gave the population roughly as 5800 Lepchas, 4700 Bhotiyas and 19,500 Nepalese. (Gazetteer 259) The Gazetteer also records that Mr Ashley Eden in 1864 had mentioned that “Sikkim though a very petty state then, was formerly a fair-sized country, reaching from the Arun river on the north to Kissengunge in Purneah on the south.” (Gazetteer 2) Therefore, these data go on to substantiate that there had been a thriving population of Nepalis living in Sikkim. As stated earlier in the chapter the boundaries were continuously shifting due to political strife, the same can be read in the Gazetteer too. However, what can be understood is that the Nepalis living in Sikkim were not unified by language or culture alone even though Nepali as a language holds great recognition in the Sikkimese society and remains a lingua franca of the state. It must be understood that cultural diversity, linguistic diversity, and food diversity have always existed and preserved in Sikkim. Sikkim was a dynasty until 1975, and the Chogyals were ruling the Kingdom, it cannot be rejected that the Nepalis didn’t

enjoy an equal position. There has been a mention of how a political party took shape: the Sikkim State Congress (SSC), designed to be more representative of the real ethnic make-up of Sikkim – Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas before it acceded to India. (Duff 75) But, unlike the Darjeeling hills, where there was a class hierarchy, nothing on similar lines can be traced in Sikkim. Likewise, it cannot be concluded that the caste system, religion, and food habits were similar to the Darjeeling hills. Therefore, this is to point towards the fact that Nepalis were spread outside the state of Nepal and had formed sub-nations within other nations. The presence has been traced before the Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950.

Regardless of all this, the major deterrent to the citizenship issue which adds to the woes of Indian Nepalis within the nation-state is the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1950 which was signed at Kathmandu on 31st July 1950 between the Government of India and the Government of Nepal. The friendship treaty stated that Indians and Nepalese would be permitted to travel, work and settle in each other's country in an unrestricted manner. The Government of India and the Government of Nepal, recognizing the ancient ties which have existed between the two countries and wanting to strengthen and develop these ties and to perpetuate peace between the two countries resolved to sign a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with each other. The Government of India appointed his excellency Chandreshwar Prasad Narain Singh, Ambassador of India in Nepal as its representative, whereas The Government of Nepal appointed Maharaja Mohan Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, Prime Minister and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of Nepal as its plenipotentiary. There were ten articles under this treaty mostly focussing on the everlasting peace and friendship between the two governments. The two Governments agreed mutually to acknowledge and respect the complete sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of each other. They signed to inform each other of any serious friction or misunderstanding with any neighbouring state likely to cause any breach in the friendly relations subsisting between the two Governments. The most important one is Article 7 which safeguarded the Governments of India and Nepal, the privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature. (Bagchi 387-389) Although it seemed like a good way of maintaining a bilateral relationship, it did more damage than good to the Indian Nepalis as they were seen as an immigrant who had settled in India under the provisions of the Friendship Treaty and taking away the rights of Indians. If we take the case of Assam, the Yandaboo treaty of 24th February 1826 (Subba 352) signed between the East

India Company and the Burmese king spurred the migration of the Nepalis to Northeast India. Initially, it was under British rule, but with the availability of a vast expanse of land, many illegally migrated and settled there and this could be attributed to the porous borders. Under the British, people living in Assam were termed Assamese in the presidential address of the Mongoldai session of Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1979. However, the All Assam Students' Union Movement sought to drive away 'foreigners' and thereafter the Indian Nepalis residing in Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram faced a similar issue. They began to be labelled as encroachers and foreigners everywhere in Northeast India. (Dhamala 171) The xenophobic attitude towards the Indian Nepalese continues even today. Subba very nonchalantly points out the fact that the protest towards the Indian Nepalis started when the indigenous people started realising the lack of resources with time. This could well be true, but it is not a valid reason to call anyone a foreigner and deprive them of their social and political rights, considering they belonged to the same land for more than a century. The friendship treaty caused more damage than repair of the relationship. It created a sense of insecurity among the Indians as well as Nepalese citizens by giving access to their resources to people from another country and depriving its citizens of the same, often leading to growing hatred. This is not to deny that migration of the Nepalese population in the past, namely under the official sponsorship of the British hasn't happened but as stated Nepalese had served in foreign armies and it was British policy to try and take care of its retired soldiers who had given years of loyal service, which took the form of ex-servicemen's resettlement colonies which could serve a dual purpose; to reward ex-soldiers and to play a strategic role. Following such policy, Nepalese settlement of ex-servicemen in northeast India was actively encouraged. Srikant Dutt has argued that the British recognised early that the Nepalese, as hardy hill cultivators, could constitute an ideal group, with which to penetrate and form strategic buffers in the northeast and, even more than this, demographically change the composition of the local indigenous population. (Dutt 1054)

Therefore, there is a need for the Indian Nepalis to assert their identity as Indians under the nation-state instead of adopting various nomenclatures as suggested above. It must be understood that the concept of nation-state as suggested by Chatterjee and Pradhan is a Western concept which when applied directly to the pluralistic community like Nepalis wouldn't justify their habitation and classification. In addition to this, the ongoing process of formulating a nomenclature even after thirty years and the questioning of the self is adding to more

complexities and more differences of opinion. Rather, identity crisis can be resolved in two ways in a nation-state, one is the top-bottom approach, where the government of the state recognizes its citizens as one. Identity issues are very important but these need to be addressed from the centre and not always from the periphery. Two, when the self is aware of its position in the nation-state and must not allow it to be fluid, it would be easier to identify. The notion of Nepali identity must be challenged by the people who identify themselves as Nepalis as well as people who are grouped under the same. The Indianness of the self must be asserted first instead of harping on one's ethnicity, which would help one get rid of the tag of the foreigner or immigrant. In addition to this, the Friendship Treaty must be revised to suit the citizens and government of both the country and the porous borders that have existed for centuries must be manned to maintain a healthy relationship with an increasing need to associate with a certain nation-state. Lastly, the plurality of the East cannot be overlooked using the rigid lens of the West even though it is a necessity of the modern world one must consider the contiguous and open borders of the Eastern Himalayas.

Further, no aspect that is studied in the Eastern Himalayas has a single facet to it. Caste issues are equally multi-layered so they have to be studied with cautiousness to avoid overriding the plurality. In the following chapter, the aspect of caste will be studied, in Nepali society.

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Chapter 2

History of Caste System in Nepali Society

"Kshettriko Choro Yo Pāu Chuncha Ghinale Chudaina / Mānis Thulo Dilale Huncha Jātle Hudaina"²⁷

क्षेत्रीको छोरो यो पाउँ छुन्छ घिनले छुँदैन, मानिस ठुलो दिलले हुन्छ जातले हुँदैन

- Lakshmi Prasad Dewkota

The Nepalese caste system was the traditional system of social stratification among the Hindus of Nepal until the Rana regime came to its place. Until then the social order was maintained on the dictates of classical Hindu law books or through the announcement of periodical royal decrees which were mostly based on customary Hindu laws. Initially, it was known as *thitibandej*²⁸, which was a compilation of decrees laid out by various kings. But, these *thitibandej* were mostly sourced from Hindu *Dharmasastra*²⁹ and *lokadharma* or customary law. Before the law came into place, it was entrusted to the Brahmins to interpret the *Dharmasastra*. But, after 1854, early in the period of Rana rule, a National Legal Code *Muluki Ain*³⁰ was proclaimed to lay out detailed codes for inter-caste behaviour and specified punishments for their infringement. All the Rana prime ministers succeeding Jung Bahadur Rana have made certain additions and amendments with regard to the laws. The Nepalese caste system broadly borrows the classical Hindu *Chaturvarnashram* model, consisting of four broad social classes or varna i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra.

The caste system defines Hindu social classes by a number of hierarchical endogamous groups often termed *jaat*³¹. This custom was traditionally prevalent mostly in the Indo-Aryan societies of the Khas, Madhesi and Newars. But, since King Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha launched an aggressive annexation campaign seeking

²⁷ I as a son of Chettri, who is a Kshatriya, touch your feet, with humility as humans become big by heart, not by their caste.

²⁸ Derived from Sanskrit word *Stithi*: referring to an established order in the state.

²⁹ *Dharmasastras* are Hindu religious texts.

³⁰ *Muluki Ain* derived from the Arabic word Country's Laws.

³¹ *Jaat* here means caste along with various sub-castes.

to broaden his own kingdom's border in the 18th century, Nepal's various non-Hindu ethnic nationalities and tribes, previously called “*Matwalis*” and now termed “*Janajati*” (indigenous nationalities), were incorporated within the caste hierarchy to varying degrees of success. Despite the forceful integration by the state into the pan-Hindu social structure, the traditionally non-Hindu groups and tribes did not necessarily adhere to the customs and practices of the caste system but studies have found that there is a certain degree of caste practised even among the *janajatis* but not the similar stratification.

As the succeeding Shah rulers conquered more territories and people and spread their area of rule, the concept of caste hierarchy was more firmly applied as an organizing principle to consolidate diverse people under their authority. The idea of *ek desh, ek bhasa, ek raja* was prioritized. In Kumar Pradhan’s book *A History of Nepali Literature*, he has traced the origins of the Nepali-speaking people who had migrated from western India for lebensraum, in the southeasterly direction along the southern face of the Himalayas. (Pradhan 3) It is further stated that the new habitats which they were trying to occupy were inhabited by mongoloids for ages. By a process of acculturation, these tribes who were settled there are said to have adopted the Indo-Aryan speech of the Khasas, which also led them to practice their cultures and use their language, because of which they were appropriated under the caste hierarchy. Pradhan further states that the Indo-Aryan Khasa speech came into contact with other speeches of the same family more intensively when high-caste Brahmans and Rajputs from India found refuge in western Nepal after the Muslim invasion. (Pradhan 3) Thereafter, the speakers of the Khasa language moved eastwards between 1255 and 1533 A.D. Around the same period the advent of Rajputs led to the disintegration of the Khasa empire. At this point, Drabya Shah, who is believed to be of Rajput descent, dislodged the tribal chief of Gorkha in 1559 and slowly the new principality expanded. His successor, Prithivi Narayan Shah, the ruler of Gorkha, whose conquest led to the formation of a single kingdom of Nepal in 1768-69 and changed the capital from the small township of Gorkha to the valley, which came to be known as Nepal. (Pradhan 3) His descendants seized more and more land and, in this land, *Khasa* was spoken which is why the *Khasa* language later got its name Gorkhali. But he also asserts the fact that it would be wrong to wholly believe that the *Khas-Kura* spread as a result of the conquest of Gorkha. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, the language called *Khas-Kura/Parbate/Gorkhali* began to be described as ‘Nepalese’ by

Europeans. (Pradhan 9) Pradhan has extensively traced the roots of the formation of Nepal and how it has assimilated people living in Nepal under the larger caste-system.

Caste grouping and the influence of caste on the mongoloid people have been discussed by Pradhan but not in great detail, but Youba Raj Luintel, has studied caste and argues that the caste system is a principal structure of social inequality that has continued to exist and tries to understand whether the caste system has itself gone through any change, in principle, forms of hierarchy, expressions of inequality, and notions of purity and pollution. (Luintel 1) He argues with the help of Chaitanya Mishra, Mark Leitchy and K.N Rankin that an overall transformation of Nepali society from a predominantly feudal to a more open, liberal and market-driven society has substantially reshaped the macro-context of inter-caste social relations at the local level. (Luintel 3) Interestingly, Luintel argues that the debate on caste in India has evolved mainly around the issue of whether the textual analysis of canon-like original Hindu texts depicts the true picture of contemporary forms of caste relations and demands a fresh and diverse understanding of inter-caste relations as it is practised in a diverse range of social life in everyday reality. (Luintel 4) Therefore, with this research, it intends to try and understand the evolvement of caste and caste practices among the Nepali communities in Nepal and India through the literature over the ages. Though Luintel has harked on a field view of research this research intends to understand the caste and its practices through texts trying to trace the presence of caste in literature that runs back as early as 1935, though in the earlier texts it was limited to just a mention of *thulo jaat*³² and *sanu jaat*³³. Criticising the Dumontian caste system, Luintel has pointed out how Dirks looked at caste hierarchy, which is not a fixed hierarchy and is fluid and context-specific containing seeds of contestation among various castes (Luintel 5) which is mostly how the Nepali society functions. How Dumontian outlook has been called a “book view” and does not give adequate representations of social reality, for people actually live differently, very differently from the ways in which they might be normatively described. (Luintel 5) So, the ‘field view’ proposed by Srinivas was what Luintel has emphasized. Luintel also emphasizes how the caste system has been a very side lined subject in Nepal despite the fact that it is still a predominant system of social stratification and inequality. (Luintel 6) This then pushes the research to understand the caste system not just through one

³² Thulo Jaat is upper caste.

³³ Sanu Jaat is lower caste.

approach but multiple approaches like book-view, field-view, and assessment of caste practices as it is presented in the form of literature. The early book-view offered in Nepal is through the work of Andras Hofer where he tries to read the caste-system through the legal clauses of *Muluki Ain*³⁴.

Hofer presents the caste hierarchy through four major categories, namely: *tagadhari*³⁵, *Matawali*³⁶, *pani nachalne choi-chtto halnunaparne*³⁷ are those castes from whom water is not accepted but whose touch does not require sprinkling of holy water and *pani nachalne chhoi-chtto halnu parne*³⁸ are those castes from whom water is not accepted and whose touch requires sprinkling of holy water, these are also called the untouchable castes. (Luitel 9) Luitel traces how caste functioned in the past and states that the caste system was taken as a social ladder originating from hereditary and hierarchically ordered occupational categories, Brahmin at the top, followed by Thakuri and Chettri and menial workers making up the bottom layer. (Luitel 12) Unlike the Indian caste system which is endogamous in its classification of caste groups, the Nepali caste system has sub-castes or *jatis*. One of the aspects, of the way the occupations are divided based on caste is hereditary in the Indian caste practice, was rather different in the Nepali caste system as the *Muluki Ain*, which is the constitution followed in Nepal and it states that it had not enforced the occupation based on one's caste affiliation. The *Muluki Ain* states,

“ilam bhanyako jāt jātko chaina. Cār warna chattasai jāt sawaile. Pāin

hālnu juttā kapadā syuna khāni khamna sun dhuna awālmā āgo launu kumhālko kām garna mādalhārūma khari lagāunu gairha sawai kāmko ilam garna wec wikhan gari jiwikā garna humcha. Jāt jādaina...”.

(Hofer 92)

इलम भनेको जात जातको छैन, चार वर्ण छत्तिसै जात सबैले पाइन हाल्नु, जुत्ता कपडा सिउनु, खानी खाम्न, सुन धुन, अवालमा आगो लाउन, कुमालको काम गर्न, मादलहरुमा खरी लगाउनु, गहिरा सबै कामको इलम गर्न, बेच-बिखन गरी जीविका गर्न हुन्छ, जात

जाँदैन..।³⁹

³⁴ *Muluki Ain* is Nepal's Civil Code.

³⁵ Tagadhari are those castes wearing sacred thread.

³⁶ Matawalis are alcohol-drinking communities.

³⁷ *Pani nachalne choi-chtto halnunaparne*: these are the castes from whom water is not accepted.

³⁸ *Pani nachalne chhoi-chtto halnu parne* are castes from whom water is not accepted and whose touch requires sprinkling of holy water/untouchable castes.

³⁹ Translated into Nepali by the author.

Which is translated as occupation is not governed by caste status wholly. The work of a person is not based on your caste status, all four castes and 36 varnas are allowed to practice whatever they like. Anybody with the skill can sew clothes or repair shoes and also do leather work for musical instruments. The caste of a person is not held by the work he performs and it is acceptable to earn a living by doing any work of one's choice. But on the other hand, if we see according to Manu, a Brahmin may plough only in case of an emergency and even if he does, he is temporarily seen as Vaishya. This brings us to understand that the caste system followed in Nepal varies considerably in its practice as against the Indian Caste system. Having stated that the caste system on a theoretical level would allow all the caste people some leverage, but in practice it can be seen that people stayed away from jobs that belonged to a lower caste.

Another aspect of caste is endogamy, which pushes people to marry within the same caste, as caste is inextricably linked with kinship and function of marriage is to create kinship. Therefore, marriage is a strong social mechanism to maintain one's own social position including caste. Kansakar and Ghimire argue that caste hierarchy is maintained through endogamous marriage or marriage within the sub-caste. (Luitel 34) So, therefore, it is seen primarily as caste is maintained not just by birth but also by sticking to endogamous marriages. Kansakar and Ghimire also argue that Nepali society has more or less accepted inter-caste marriage between those at the top of the hierarchy and other intermediate caste groups and created a way to accept the offspring from such marriage. (Luitel 34) It is also argued that except for Upadhyaya⁴⁰ Brahmin families, children born out of hypergamous marriages were adjusted in their father's castes. Likewise, Andras Hofer has argued that hypergamy is allowed and is considered a legal form of marriage as long as there is no transgression between the pure and the impure castes. MA holds all hypogamous marriages in total abhorrence, but is tolerant towards hypergamy, if it is done within the "clean" castes. (Hofer xxv)

On the same issue, Luitel with the help of Caplan has argued that there was a high incidence of inter-caste unions between intermediate castes, provided they do not link groups across the "pollution barrier". (Luitel 35) Various research studies carried out in Nepal have mentioned the flexibility in caste endogamy with the occurrence of inter-caste marriage between intermediate castes in the hierarchy and the easy accommodation of

⁴⁰ Among the Brahmins there are two categories, one is upadhyaya, which is considered the purest and second one jaisi, which is considered impure and cannot perform the rights or puja like a pandit.

offspring from such marriage. Inter-caste marriage or marrying outside one's caste boundary, although not a common occurrence in the rural population of Nepali society, does occur. It also has caste implications on the caste status of the children.

The caste status of a child born out of different combination of inter-caste marriage are as follows:

Man's caste	Woman's caste	Caste of the offspring
Shudra	Brahmin	Chandal
Shudra	Vaishya	Ayogav
Brahmin	Shudra	Nishad or
Brahmin	Vaishya	Parashav
Vaishya	Shudra	Ambastha
Kshatriya	Vaishya	Apasad Shudra
Brahmin	Kshatriya	Apasad

Table.2: Caste status of a child born out of different combinations of inter-caste marriage, as cited in Luintel, p.32

The society that is divided by caste, ethnicity, and other forms of identity, social distinctions survive when social boundaries continue to be reinforced across generations. Caste, ethnic, racial or other identity category is defined by descent-based attributes as it places endogamy or the practice of marrying within one's own group, at the centre of the reproduction of these attributes. Ahuja and Ostermann argue in their article "Crossing Caste Boundaries in the Modern Indian Marriage Market" that a strong preference for endogamy is associated with policing, which is common to all caste groups, which in turn guarantees the reproduction of caste from one generation to another. This practice of endogamy is not limited to one caste but it is practiced among all caste groups equally enforcing the notions of purity and pollution. Even if some prefer to cross caste boundaries in terms of marriage, it becomes very difficult because of endogamy. It is also argued that the socio-economic status determines the boundary crossing among the people. (Ahuja and Ostermann 2)

Ahuja and Ostermann argue that this is not to state the demise of the caste hierarchy. Furthermore, relations in the public sphere are not necessarily indicative of caste relations in the private sphere. Caste often still governs

relations in the private sphere (Ahuja and Ostermann 3) Caste columns on the matrimonial pages in newspapers and matrimonial websites are a strong reminder of the relevance of caste in the private sphere.

Among the lower castes, they cross boundaries if they can benefit by having high caste or socio-economic status otherwise the in-caste marriage is the norm. This argument might seem slightly biased but it is also seen that the people with access to higher education and economic independence are relatively open to these decisions, having stated that it can also be seen that people dependent on family for education and livelihood are less likely to transgress caste boundaries. The dependency of the family on the child for upward mobility through education is equally binding for the child and vice-versa, therefore marrying on his/her terms would sever family relationships, as marriage is seen as a family affair and not a personal choice. (Luitel 38)

Though the caste system is believed or assumed to be fading slowly in contemporary Nepal as well as India, one can see that caste remains relevant when it comes to marriage and of the many social practices that involve the caste system, marriage is arguably the most central, as argued by Luitel. (Luitel 41) So, it can be fairly argued that inter-caste marriage poses a challenge to the orthodox caste values as it pushes caste boundaries, creates a kinship with people from lower caste groups and gives them a comparable social position. This comparable social position is perhaps one of the strong adversaries of the high caste people as it pushes them off their caste status and breaks the self-created pedestal. The so-called caste values of the upper caste run against the idea of mixing their pure blood with people of the lower caste.

Textual representations of the caste system in Nepali Literature

Nepali Literature transcending all borders has a limited exploration of caste as a subject in their stories. Various novels like *Ko Achut?* by Muktinath Timsena, *Naya Ghar* by Bishowbhakta Dulal, *Itihasko Ek Paika* by Ranendra Barali and *Likhe* by Sarad Paudel. And if we focus on contemporary times, we have Prajwal Parajuly's *Land Where I Flee* from Sikkim, Bhupin's *Maidaro* from Nepal and Chuden Kabimo's *Song of the Soil* from West Bengal, which talk about caste issues blatantly and extensively. Therefore, this chapter will focus on these three texts to try and understand how far we have come as a community and how relevant the caste practices are in contemporary times. The first text of analysis would be *Land Where I Flee*. In this novel,

Prajwal Parajuly, an author from Sikkim, draws out the story of an egalitarian society of Gangtok, only to microscopically open up a Neopaney household. Neopaney Niwas hosts a very progressive family, where in the grandmother Chitrlekha runs a garment factory in Kalimpong. Along with that, the story reveals that she as a woman, held a very important position in society, as her house was filled with photos of male ex-chief ministers, with whom she shared a good rapport. The grandchildren of the family were all settled abroad or were studying abroad, but the character of Bhagwati, who can be casually termed as the black sheep of the family, because she decided to run away from the hawk-eyed scrutiny of the people of the small town for not passing in an examination. She elopes with a *Damaai* man named Ram from Bhutan, leading her to sever her family ties. Chitrlekha along with her grandchildren, without questioning her decisions, stayed away from Bhagwati and never kept in touch with Bhagwati as she has brought a taint to the family's name. She is worried about the fall she would face from her so-called reputation. This self-created pedestal as it is termed by Luitel, is a very relevant motif, in *Land Where I Flee*, wherein Chitrlekha refuses to meet the eyes of Bhagwati, when she comes back to Sikkim after eighteen years of eloping with *Damaai*⁴¹. Bhagwati had married Ram to run away from the fear of not passing the examination, as she came from a reputed family in Sikkim and to avoid that disrepute in her small town where they are known by all people, she chose to run away, but it was a matter of *ijjat*⁴² for the family immediately. Even her siblings who were educated in America would mock her in a conformist manner and would throw a jibe every now and then. To recall one incident from the novel, "He'd (Ruthwa) probably ask Bhagwati if the secret of her beauty lay in a healthy sex life. He'd throw in a joke about sex with the untouchables being good for your skin." (Parajuly 85) This could be pushed under the carpet by overlooking it as a joke, but if one were to understand such derogatory jokes, it can be seen as one stemming from a deeply caste-rooted upbringing especially if you are born a Brahmin. The tendency to equate one's outlook, and one's behaviour according to their caste is very rampant among Nepalis, be it India or Nepal. Citing one such example is a proverb which is read as *Kaami Dharra, Damaai Swang*⁴³. Likewise, there is a casual reference to somebody who behaves badly in any situation as "*kaami beura nadekha*⁴⁴" which also stresses the fact that people of lower caste are mostly badly behaved. Referring back to the novel by Parajuly,

⁴¹ *Damaai*: is a one of the scheduled caste communities present in Nepali community.

⁴² *Ijjat*: it could be roughly translated as honour of losing caste status, though *ijjat* literally means respect in the everyday usage.

⁴³ Which translates as unwanted behaviour.

⁴⁴ Which refers to lower caste people being ill-behaved.

where he has explicitly discussed the caste-reeking behaviour of *bahuns*,⁴⁵ even within their own family, it is seen that even the maid Prasanti, who is a eunuch has the privilege of saying, "...your marriage with the *ajaat*.⁴⁶ How are your children? Are they more Brahmin or *Damaai*?" (Parajuly 85)

The grandmother, Chitrlekha picked on Bhagwati by saying:

"How can I be happy when my granddaughter is Damaai? Aamaa replied. 'I need to go. All this wealth I've earned, but for what? A grandson who's married, God only knows why, a granddaughter who's married to a Damaai, and another granddaughter who treats me worse than she treats Prasanti. Why did I even work hard after your parents died?' (Parajuly 90) Another incident of throwing away the family *ijjat* because of marrying a lower caste is when Chitrlekha states,

"Eighteen years after doing what she did to the family, Bhagwati, the girl who ran away, who threw away everything for the Damaai, had the courage to face her granddaughter...perhaps in some other place in the same era-Bhagwati's mere presence at the table would have driven everyone away...The grandmother even goes on to consider herself a failure for not being able to teach the granddaughter to live within her limits. She feels that Bhagwati was a fool. She may have built an empire, but she thought she was a failure. Her granddaughter was a fool in love." (Parajuly 94-95)

The above abstract from the text correlates to the fact that love should not overshadow the caste boundaries which would create tensions and rift within the families. The reason of love is not a valid reason to bring a bad name to the family, by dropping the caste status. But, at the same time Prajwal states had it been some other place, the grandmother would not even share the same space, which in a way is trying to state that there has been a considerable amount of change within the family boundaries, but not socially. As we can see from the above references of *Muluki Ain* regarding the change of caste, a woman's caste would not remain the same, or settle in between when she marries an untouchable, rather she would immediately be termed as a shudra. Likewise, Yuval-Davis and Stetzler argue that inter-caste or inter-ethnic marriages break the imagined boundaries (Yuval-Davis and Stetzler 329) which can be seen in the text, *Land Where I Flee*. The fact that Bhagwati chose to elope with *Damaai*, well aware of the consequences, as any *bahun* would be, but there are

⁴⁵ Upper caste brahmins.

⁴⁶ Person outside the same caste.

no incidents of her treating him with less respect because of his caste, goes on to prove that these imagined boundaries remain as long as caste practices are stressed upon and within the peripheries of same community settlement. Bhagwati and Ram lived in Bhutan for a while, before they were exiled to the USA, where her constant struggle was to hold on to a job to meet her ends with no instances of caste issues arising within the family. Various researchers like L. Caplan, Furer-Haimendorf, Nancy Levine and others have studied inter-caste marriages and have come to conclude that the offspring born out of inter-caste marriages are more or less easily accommodated within the caste structure but there has been little to no study on the inter-caste marriages between the Dalits and non-Dalits except Kansakar and Ghimire as quoted by Luintel. Kansakar and Ghimire have observed that most of these marriages face ostracism and there is very little acceptance from the society. (Luintel 37) The above ideas run true in Bhagwati's case, her children are inadvertently referred to as Damaai kids and even their characteristic behaviour is defined as less *Damaai* or *Bahun*. She is ostracized by the family, and nobody dares to keep in touch with her until the *Chaurasi*⁴⁷ of the grandmother is planned. There is no mention of *pani čatnu*⁴⁸ in the novel, but it is a practice that continues to date within the upper caste settlements. This practice involves that a person of any caste marrying an untouchable, is considered dead to the society and therefore water touched by that person is impure. Following the *paani čatne chalan*, they also perform *suddhi karya*⁴⁹ which means purification of that house, so that the house does not face ostracism, only the person does.

If one has to look at inter-caste marriages, it is divided into two types: *anulom* and *pratilom*. (Luintel 34) *Anulom* or hypergamous marriage involves a non-Dalit man marrying a Dalit woman whereas *pratilom*/hypogamous involves a Dalit man marrying a non-Dalit woman. Though Nepali society has, to some extent accepted inter-caste marriage between those at the top of the hierarchy and other intermediate caste groups and created a way to accept the offspring from that marriage argues Luintel with the help of Kansakar and Ghimire, we find that except for Upadhyaya brahmin's children if born out of hypergamous (marrying up) relationship would be adjusted within the father's caste. (Luintel 34) Children of *Upadhyaya Brahmin* or *Jaisi*

⁴⁷ Chaurasi literally means 84, chaurasi is celebrated to commemorate long life expectancy in a time when life expectancy was very short. $84 \times 12 = 1008$ moons are seen in a life time of a person, and it means chaurasi juni katnu. After this a person is considered to have sacrificed the worldly life.

⁴⁸ Pani čatnu here refers to not accept water and other offerings, to ostracize and to consider the person dead.

⁴⁹ Suddhi Karya refers to purification after the person is dead and when a girl marries an untouchable, she is considered dead to the family.

father and Chettri mother are called Khatri Chettri. Children from the hypogamous (marrying down) union between Tamang men and Brahmin or Chettri women and between Gurung or Tamang men and Chepong women are called Gharti. (Luitel 35) Brahmin, Thakuri and Chettri are allowed to marry women from ethnic groups without losing their caste status. Though they are not given the full status of a Chettri, but with time they can get married into proper Chettri families. When there is union of a Rajput (Thakuri) man and *Jaisi* woman or vice-versa their offspring is known as Hamal. (Hofer 2004) Furer Haimendorf has observed that the caste status of a Brahmin man is unimpaired as long as he refrains from consuming the food cooked by the hands of a non-Brahmin wife or his children. (Haimendorf 249) In *Muluki Ain* it is stated that the sexual intercourse between a man of pure castes and an untouchable woman can be quashed if the man is not aware of the woman's caste, which clearly shows the biases and favourable position given to a man. Having stated that the man can be unaware of a woman's caste, leading to the annulment of his *bhor*,⁵⁰ however, it is very unlikely that a Brahmin man, who does not even consume water served by a random stranger, would have physical contact with a woman, without being aware of her caste. This by-clause is a leeway made to accept the faults of a man, whereas for a woman if she commits *bhor*, she would be penalized by society. If a man commits a sin, he will be given *dand*⁵¹, and has to go for a pilgrimage and he will obtain *prayascit*⁵², and will be deemed as *suddha*⁵³.

If one reads Chuden Kabimo's *Song of the Soil*, which is set in the foothill town of Kalimpong in the Himalayas, it brings alive the story of the revolution for a separate state of Gorkhaland in the 1980s. It mostly deals with the loss of life and properties during the revolution, but in the initial phases of the novel, Kabimo pulls out the threads of the caste system. Through the character of Ripden, the protagonist it can be clearly understood that the Lepchas were ill-treated at a Chettri wedding because they were comparatively poorer than others. "The only things that were cooked at home were either millet porridge or tasteless bulgur. We have not seen white rice for a long time. It was then the chance of eating at a wedding reception had presented itself. All of our faces brightened." (Kabimo 10) This goes on to show the class position largely related to caste status as Lepchas who were classified as *Matawalis* and later *Janajatis* were positioned low on a social ladder owing to

⁵⁰ mistakes

⁵¹ punishment

⁵² Forgiveness.

⁵³ Purification.

which they were not affluent and backward at the same time. Lepchas here are ideally tribals/*janajati* as it would be classified, but they inadvertently face the wrath of the caste system, by virtue of speaking the same language as a medium of exchange as well as sharing similar food habits and cultural practices. Mostly Lepchas are animists in nature, but the concept of the worshipping river, and stone, revering *chullah*⁵⁴, and offering of *bali*⁵⁵ among the Chettri, Bahuns, Rai, and Subba who form the Nepali community is similar to that of Lepchas and all the communities are inextricably linked by virtue of the societal and cultural norms. In the novel, the concept of purity and pollution is explored through the idea of a ‘pollution barrier’ as Chettris or upper caste people do not share the same place for eating along with the lower caste. This is a common practice in rural areas even today, where a Bahun *bhansa*⁵⁶ is set up if it is a wedding of the Chettri and people from the upper caste are hired for cooking. This can be found in the novel *The Song of the Soil*, which says, “Our Lepcha Brothers, please proceed to the lower field. The shehnai party, you too please go there. The Chettri group, please come to the upper field.” (Kabimo 14) This is done to maintain the pollution barrier because people from the upper caste cannot or will not share the same place for eating with people from lower castes. The reference to the *shehnai* group is for people who played the *Damaai baaja*⁵⁷ and now a more culturally appropriate word has replaced it with *Panchai baaja*⁵⁸ or *naumati baaja*⁵⁹. These instruments are mostly played by the *Damaai* caste and not any other caste even among the lower caste people. There is also a common practice among certain villages which are more legally and culturally aware to not offend people from lower castes, avoid consumption of *bhaat* and *daal* which is considered *jhutho*⁶⁰. There is a common way of bypassing it by the Bahun by consuming only fruits and water, to avoid any trouble of rubbing shoulders with people of lower caste and eating with them or calling it a day of fast. In the same novel, if we read a little further it is found that the president of Kyong Sejum, the Lepcha association is enraged. He questions, “Why should we go to the lower field? You did the same thing to us last time, saying we are beef eaters. We will boycott the weddings of Chettri and Bahun from now on. Let’s go back.” (Kabimo 14) This goes on to show that the people from the

⁵⁴ Fireplace.

⁵⁵ Offering of blood.

⁵⁶ Bahun Bhansa refers to a place in a wedding ceremony where food is cooked by bahuns for bahuns.

⁵⁷ Damaai Baaja is a colloquial term used for the panchai baaja and naumati as it was mostly played by the Damaai caste.

⁵⁸ Panchai Baaja is a band set of five varieties of nepali instruments played during the weddings and special occasions like bratabandh.

⁵⁹ Naumati Baaja is a band set of nine varieties of nepali instruments mostly played during the wedding.

⁶⁰ Polluted.

lower caste have started revolting against the exclusion associated with the pollution barrier, which people from the upper caste have self-created to maintain social exclusivity. The “pollution barrier” referred to, here is associated with *jutho*⁶¹, which is to do with food and water. The food touched by the lower caste is seen as polluted or *jutho* or contaminated and wouldn’t be consumed by people of upper castes. This concept of purity and pollution has been explicitly discussed by Chuden Kabimo in his novel *Song of the Soil*. Another instance of a self-created pedestal can be explored in the passage from the novel, “...Purohit ba scolded me, saying I must not go near his granddaughter. Am I not allowed to go near my friend? She is younger than me. Still, they say I have to address her as ‘*Timi*’ while she should address me as ‘*Tan*’. (Kabimo 27) This extract is an example of how low-caste people had to live in a social hierarchy where the people of upper caste had the right to disrespect them, whereas they had to revere even young kids. Even the kids are expected to maintain the barrier and not touch each other and maintain standards set by society.

Even in the case of marriage, though the incidence of inter-caste marriage is prevalent, it cannot be concluded that inter-caste marriages or exogamy helps in breaking caste hierarchy or caste orthodoxy or that inter-caste marriages lessens the gap between different caste groups or widens the gap. Luitel has quoted Caplan to state that there are high incidences of inter-caste union among the intermediate caste as long as they do not cross the “pollution barrier.” (Luitel 35) Further, if we try and see *janaajati*/tribal marriages they too equally practice caste hierarchy, though not in the rigid sense. In an interview with Balbir Rai of Pakribas, Luitel has stated that he mentioned that if anyone marries outside the caste, our *deutas*⁶² become angry, which is to say that their *kul*/dead ancestors won’t accept it. (Luitel 32) Many instances of upper caste marrying a Dalit are seen, but since they are accepted in their community, they leave the village because of social ostracization and settle in a different village with a different surname. Even if we consider a Dalit marriage that is between the two scheduled castes like *Kami* and *Damaai*, they also face ostracization as *Kami* is considered of a higher status than *Damaai*. Inter-caste marriages have never been arranged and mostly there have been cases of parents objecting to it but with time one can see certain families accepting it. But there is a common observation that in inter-caste marriage, it is often the side of the high-caste that the marriage gets the objection.

⁶¹ *Jutho* here is pollution of caste.

⁶² *Deutas* are gods worshipped by the particular community.

A case study conducted by Luitel suggests that every caste wants to establish endogamous marital relationships within their own caste because of the complications that lower caste families may undergo after bringing someone from a higher caste. (Luitel 43) Social distress and humiliation at the hands of the upper caste are also seen as one of the reasons behind endogamous marriage. In the past, inter-caste marriage led to a drop in the caste status. Although there is a lack of de jure discrimination in inter-caste marriage, de facto discrimination continues to prevail says Luitel. (Luitel 45) Inter-caste marriage is not legally and socially punished but is still objected to by the families leading to unwanted harassment and criticisms. It is also understood that in the case of inter-caste marriages, the family does not accept it initially but within a year or two things become better. There is certain saying among Achham people:

“Rāni chai bhete pāp

Bāmni chai chuye pāp”

रानी चाहिँ भेटे पाप

बाहुनी चाहिँ छेए पाप। (as qtd. in Luitel 48)

Which roughly translates as it is sinful to meet a Thakuri woman, it is sinful to touch a Brahmin woman. The above lines reek not just of caste discrimination but also of the way society has made certain proverbs to keep a check on the transgressors. Therefore, eventually, even if the family accepts these inter-caste marriages society plays a huge part in ostracizing the family as well as the couple from social events which makes acceptance of these marriages difficult. It has been fairly concluded by Luitel that caste/ethnicity-endogamy is still the dictum of mate preference, which very effectively manages to uphold the caste system in place. It is also seen that an inter-caste marriage within the village causes more problems and strains the relationship between the two communities more whereas inter-caste marriages outside the village are left to their fate, though the parents cut off ties with their children. Another instance of how society manages to push one's boundaries for the sake of caste can be read in *Maidaaro* by Bhupeen. *Maidaaro* is a novel, set in Nepal, where the protagonist Smaran Gurung, a young man who has come to Nepal to spend time in Pokhara, walks into an art gallery and sees the paintings hanging upside down. As he examines further, he realizes that the paintings were not the works of Georg Baselitz, the famous German painter known for such paintings. The artist Nadin practices this form of art and to understand his work, Smaran decides to visit the artist's hometown, only to be

revealed that the artist had faced social ostracization, which forced him to commit suicide. The novel is set in Andheri Gaon, which of course would be a reference to the fact that people in that village were still practicing the caste system and lived in the dark ages.

The novel's dedication page writes, "*chuwachut ka karan, sadiyoon dekhi andheri gaon ma dhakeliyekaa ra ujeli gaon ko pratiksha garirahaka samastha manishharulai.*"

छुवाछुतको कारण सदियोदेखि अँधेरी गाउँमा धकेलिएका र उजेली गाउँको प्रतिक्षा गरिरहेका समस्त मानिसहरूलाई। (Maidaaro Dedication page)

Which can be translated as that this book is dedicated to people forced to live in *andheri gaon*⁶³, observing the caste practices and for people waiting for *ujeli gaon*.⁶⁴ The artist had been victimized by caste-based discrimination to such an extent that he was forced to choose death rather than the harsh realities of life. Nadin's story unfolds in a non-linear way and shows us the way he has been affected by caste and its caste practices. When Smaran Gurung reaches Amrit's home, the mother refuses or fears offering him water. As a means of introduction, which is a very common practice to this day to introduce each other by the means of their caste. The novel states, "*babu kun jaat parnu bhayo kunni?*" which is roughly understood as which caste you fall into. Smaran says he is Gurung to which the mother replies, "*Hamle choko paani kasari dinu babu? Hami talla jaat ka parim. Paap laucha babu hamilai.*" (Bhupeen 19)

हामीले छोको पानी कसरी दिउँ बाबु? हामी तल्ला जातका परिम्, पाप लाउँछ हामीलाई।

Which can be translated as how can I offer you the water touched by us, we are from the lower caste. We will be doomed with sin, if we do that. Such caste practices were openly practiced in Andheri Gaon and Nadin was aware of such happenings and as an artist he was dissatisfied because of it, so to question such beliefs and practices he used his art form. The art he used were hung upside down to portray, "*Samaj ma dherrai kura ulta chan ra ulta kura harulai avivyakta garna lai ulto shailiko prayog Sarthak huncha. Chitrakala ma yo unko navin prayog thiyo.*" (Bhupeen 22)

⁶³ Metaphorically referring to a dark village, because of the age-old caste practices.

⁶⁴ Metaphorically it means village aware of the evils of caste and class practices.

समाजमा धेरै कुरा उल्टा छन् र उल्टा कुराहरूलाई अभिव्यक्त गर्नलाई उल्टा शैलाको प्रयोग सार्थक हुन्छ, चित्रकलामा यो उनको नवीन प्रयोग थियो।

This could be read as there are lot of things which are wrong in the society and to portray such events, he thought that it was best to show things upside down. This is a novel use of technique in his art form. So, when Smaran was trying to understand his art form, he figured that Nadin, the protagonist, had fallen in love with an upper-caste girl named Kala, and how trying to marry her had made him a social outcast as he was born to a lower caste and it would never be accepted. He oscillated between life and death as he tried to commit suicide because of the ostracism he faced from society. He tries to commit suicide and leaves a suicide note that reads, “*Ay Zindagi! Malai maaf gara. Maile aatma hatya ko baato rojey*” (Bhupeen 37)

ए जिन्दगी मलाई माफ गर, मैले आत्महत्याको बाटो रोजे।

Which can be read as forgive me life, for I have chosen to kill myself. But as a matter of fact, he survives his fall from Sillerybhir, and he moves to Pokhara to escape the social trauma. In Pokhara, he could meet Kala easily, which holds the argument Luitel makes that most marriages are not accepted in the rural set-up, so they change the city or name, to avoid social ostracism. Therefore, Nadin through his paintings shows the dark underbelly of social stratification and mocks the existing rift between the higher and lower castes. When he finally marries Kala, she also faces social ostracism and is deeply disappointed with her family, society, and the deep-seated social injustice within. Through this, we see the double-faced Janus of the Nepali society blaring in through the novel as he talks both about caste and class. He draws an analogy of a bat, which hangs upside down and states that our society functions on the same thread.

Another important factor that Luitel highlights is that in inter-caste marriages, these couples, if they get accepted by the natal families at some point, hardly get any dowry, dowry though called out as a social evil, is practised in many forms. In Nepal, dowry is mostly accepted and is given as per the family's capacity, whereas in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong, the concept of dowry does not exist, but a lot of gifts are given in the form of gold, cash as well as landed property.

Another surprising fact that Luitel highlights is no matter what Dalit families always support their children even if they do not like them being married to the non-Dalit. But, if there is an issue of ostracization in the same village, they are suggested to move to cities. Though there have been cases of legally winning the case, and becoming husband-wife, non-Dalit families do not socially accept their relationship. There has been a case of unacceptance even in today's time which can be seen from a recent case in Dalapchand in Sikkim, where a Baraily man and a Rai woman, got ostracized from the society. These incidents of recent years are to demonstrate how these caste practices are ingrained within us. Jiwan Rai, a reputed columnist states that when people are questioned about such practices, they say that they were merely conducting a ritual, obligatory under their custom. In this case, Divya Rai, had married a Baraily, low caste member of the society and the individuals of the locality convened a meeting to announce the death of Divya Rai and her social ostracization on being questioned about it, he mentioned 'if such an (evil) practice has to be banished, the entire Rai community across Sikkim, Darjeeling and beyond must be spoken to' indicating how rampant and deep-seated the issue is.⁶⁵ With changing times and criminalization of caste and its practices, the idea of "integration" is assumed with these marriages, but it does not happen rather there is a "social closure" which is to say that the relationship between these various castes becomes strained which also brings us to the other point, that the fear of straining relationships, cultural differences, difference of food habits and social conditioning of a child to marry within the caste to avoid difficulties, eventually forces people to stay within the boundaries of their caste, no matter the development and the claim to obliteration of caste practices. Likewise, Andras Hofer has argued that hypergamy is permitted as long as there is no transgression of lines between the pure and the impure caste or between the touchable and the untouchable castes.

Therefore, it can be fairly concluded that though there has been certain upward mobility of lower caste people, in the caste ladder and caste is a vanishing practice, it must be used with caution as it is mostly in an urban setting and very rarely in the rural setting.

"Ragat calcha / sip calcha / sram calcha /

Tara pani kina hāmro pāni caldaina /."

⁶⁵ Friday, Jan 24, 2020: <https://www.sikkimexpress.com/news-details/did-we-not-know-our-social-construct-before-the-dalapchand-incident>

रगत चल्छ/ सिप चल्छ/ श्रम चल्छ/ तरपनि किन हाम्रो पानी चल्दैन।

Which is translated as our blood is acceptable, labour acceptable, skill acceptable but why is the water touched by us unacceptable?

Though to a certain extent this has been relaxed in government institutions people do practice caste and its practices within the peripheries of villages and walls of their home, although not blaring enough to be noticed but so subtle that it cannot be undone. These practices remain so ingrained that a person from the lower class consciously avoids participating and sharing the same space with a person from the upper caste. Likewise, a person from the upper caste dodges a person from the lower caste in a way, that looks like a norm.

To conclude, it must be asserted that the caste practices of Nepali people inhabiting the Eastern Himalayas might not be as rigid as the caste practices of the Indian sub-continent, but it cannot be overlooked that caste is practised. It might not function in a linear manner as all the communities which fall under the umbrella term of Nepali or who speak Nepali, have their own caste hierarchy including the various ethnic sub-groups, though not akin to the traditional caste system. As stated earlier by Hofer various ethnic sub-groups came together to form the country Nepal, but the assimilation of people also led to appropriation of the people in the caste system because of which different community internalised these practices according to their suitability. Hofer has concluded *Muluki Ain*, stating that caste “interferes” in marriage, inheritance, occupation; in the relationship between servant and master, between patient and healer, and between the individual and the State. There seems to be only one sphere of social life which is permanently “caste-free”, namely trade and commerce as the material value of goods and services counts, and not the caste of the persons involved in the transaction. (Hofer 196) One cannot deny or contest beyond a certain point that caste is effectively maintained within private spaces and much less in public spaces. The readings of the three texts could not state otherwise, except for a minuscule change that Chitralekha portrays, but one must never lose sight of the fact that Chitralekha held a powerful position in society. Also, it must be noted as Hofer states that members of one and the same caste (*jaat*) can possess varying amounts of purity and can be separated from each other by the refusal of commensality. (Hofer 197) Likewise, Kabimo’s novel clearly depicts that commensal spaces are still caste-marked and the notion of purity and pollution is associated with people’s food habits. Further, the notion of

purity does not remain limited to caste hierarchy but various socio-cultural practices among the upper caste who observe *Jhutho*⁶⁶/*Sutak* etc. which is a state of temporary personal state of impurity which are independent of caste hierarchy but is relevant in the present-day society. However, from the multiple overlapping notions of purity and pollution, it may be concluded, that defilements/impurities are varied and are individualised by different communities at different level owing to which the caste as a practice cannot be done away with it easily.

⁶⁶ *Jhuto* has various connotations. 1. Clean/undefiled. 2. Leftover food. 3. In case of some death it is considered *jhuto* for a year. 4. In case of child birth, *Jhuto/Sutak* is observed for thirteen days by the upper castes, but *Sutak* is observed by all communities including the Tibeto Burman but the term *Jhuto* is not used and *Nuwaran*/Naming ceremony is held according to their own community rules.

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Chapter 3

Socio-religious Practices, Patriarchy and Beyond⁶⁷

Koi pani swasni mancche randi huna wa banna chahadina. (Pradhan, ii)

कोही पनि स्वास्नीमान्छे रन्डी हुन वा बन्न चाहँदैन।

This chapter will attempt to understand the position of women in Nepali society and try and draw a correlation, if any, among the Nepali women living in the Indian subcontinent. It would be a very essentialist definition if one defines who this Nepali woman is, which has dawned upon me in the process of this research. To understand who this Nepali woman is in the context of Nepal would be right to start with 1854, as Hofer claims that Nepal's society has undergone considerably less change than India's society in the wake of urbanisation and industrialisation. (XXXV Hofer) It must be taken into account that post 1854, after the drafting and publishing of Muluki Ain, (henceforth MA), it has classified everybody living in Nepal, according to the Hindu standards laid by Prithvi Narayan Shah. Hofer states that the MA demarcated the country's society against foreign societies and cultures by defining it as a specifically Nepalese “national” caste hierarchy. He further states that its homogeneous legislation (even in fields which had nothing to do with caste) aimed at creating a homogeneously constituted society as it was done as a means for strengthening Rana rule. (Höfer 2) This by definition has erased the differences outwardly and has classified people with all ethnicities and identities as a singular entity of being called “Nepali” which needs to be exercised with caution. For the lack of a better terminology, I would be using ‘Nepali women’ while referring to women from Nepal or the Nepali-speaking Indian population. But, that is not to override their ethnic identity, or their gender roles assigned to them through their position in their community. It would begin by drawing a brief outline of the evolution of the legal structures which acted as a governing body of Nepal. However, there is no documentation of the laws

⁶⁷ This chapter can be found in the journal *Sāhitya* published by the author.

with regard to Nepali women residing in the Indian subcontinent, other than the migration and reference to the Nepali population living in the hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim. It cannot be denied that the Nepalis living outside of Nepal more or less adhere to the traditions, customs and festivals followed by the Nepalese of Nepal but it must also be understood that the enforcement of cultural practices or social practices varies according to the altitude as it affects the food ecosystem. However, it must be understood that very little changes can be found in a geographically contiguous space, that is referred to as the Eastern Himalayas. Richard Brughart has argued on the same lines stating that Nepali as a group is an expression of the will or character of a culturally unique people and whose political boundaries are delimited with reference to the territorial distribution of the people. (Brughart 101) From the signing of the Treaty of Sagauli in 1815, the Nepalese rulers began to accommodate themselves to the presence of a powerful and alien southern neighbour and post that the Nepalese government faced the East India Company, and later the governments of British India and the Republic of India, which held different ideas about the boundary and structure of the polity. (Brughart 101) This argument makes it simple to understand how the communities of Sikkim, Darjeeling and other parts of India, have accepted the idea of calling oneself a Nepali, despite having a unique identity of belonging to that particular nation-state and also sharing a similar cultural practice because of the contiguous borders and culturally connected people.

To begin with, understanding the legal initiatives of MA of 1854 would be important along with the amendments made in MA of 1963, which is considered to be a landmark amendment with regard to rules and regulations and the implication they hold for women and the structuring of gender roles in Nepal. Along with this, another area, which will be analysed is the age-old socio-religious and socio-cultural practices which are performed by mostly Chettri-Bahun, Newar women, or upper caste women, as they comprise the influential population. The socio-religious provisions have contributed to nurturing a universal “hetero-patriarchal”⁶⁸ culture. Bhandari has cited various feminist critics like Weedon, Khan and Bhasin to state that the nature of patriarchy or the rule of males is inherently an oppressive system towards a woman (Bhandari 2) Bhandari has

⁶⁸ The term “hetero-patriarchy” was coined by Wilkinson as stated by Bhandari, where she has used hetero-patriarchy to criticize hetero-normative sexual behaviour as a fundamental feature of patriarchal society.

argued how the feminist critics advocate that patriarchal system is comprised with unequal power relations between a man and woman where a man by virtue of his dominant power controls every aspect of a woman's life.⁶⁹ (Bhandari 5)

The inequalities faced by women in Nepal majorly stem from socio-cultural practices, economic dynamics, and religious factors as it defines the traditional roles and responsibilities between men and women differently. This research will draw upon the socio-cultural practices, analyse the traditional values and importance attached to them, and see how some of these practices remain a replica of the age-old cultural practice. The socio-cultural norms are unwritten scripts of social functioning. These social norms function as codes of operation and are a major determinant for behaviour and interactions between people, especially among women. This exercise then would enable us to understand how women's sexuality is ritualized through these socio-cultural and religious practices and ultimately used to control men and women. This research will also attempt to identify if women's interests confront each other in a hetero-patriarchal society mostly practised by upper-caste women. The sentimental values associated with cultural practices sometimes might act as a hindrance to women who question these practices, as they have religious values attached to them.

Lastly, with the help of the literature, this research will situate the struggle faced by Nepali women and contextualize their position in society vis-à-vis patriarchy and gender positions. It will endeavour to understand, if there has been any influence on understanding of gender among Nepali women and analyse the cultural practices deep set within patriarchy. Having said that, this would be a limited understanding as my primary sources would be literature and their representations in the literary works along with analysing the socio-religious practices followed by the Hindus alone, which is not to say that other religious practices or people of other religions are bereft of patriarchal values and mindsets.

As stated above, the first segment will trace the legal documents of the MA of 1854 with regard to the position of women and the amendments associated with the MA of 1963 along with the help of Siera Tamang's

⁶⁹ Uma Bhandari. *Beyond Patriarchy: An Interface Of Eastern And Western Women's Schooling*.

work, where she has managed to understand the caste system of Nepal, as being arbitrary towards the inclusion of all ethnicities within the caste fold. When the civil code was framed and established in 1854, referred to as the MA under the Hindu king Jung Bahadur Rana, who ruled Nepal following the appropriation of power from the royal family. As no codification of law had taken place before this time, the creation of the MA as a national legal system had great importance in terms of structuring the chief agents of state intervention. The MA was a comprehensive legal code which divided and ranked the entire population under a caste hierarchy with Bahun and Chettri castes who were earlier known as Brahman and Kshatriya, of Indic origin being referred to as Bahun and Chettri on the top, Tibeto-Burman tribes in the middle as *matwalis* and untouchable castes or *pani nachalne* at the bottom in Nepali society. (Höfer 7,22). In contrast to caste systems in India, the MA placed non-Hindu populations into the middle ranks above the low castes. The creation of a caste system, ranked Hindus, Tibeto-Burman and ethnically Tibetan people in a single caste hierarchy, thereby exercising the cultural dominance of Hindu norms. Having said that it must be understood that Nepal does not have a rigorous caste system as is believed argues D.B Bista. (Bista 3) Additionally, religion has always been a central feature of Nepali life argues Bista, the position of women within the family, ideas of purity and pollution, notions of gender, and sexual purity are governed and implemented by law as laid down by MA. In Hofer's terms, the MA represented a significant advance towards integration and is the "chief factor determining an individual juridical status and the relation between individuals is to a large extent determined by purity conditioned status." (Hofer 179) In so far as the status of women is concerned the stringent laws are constructed around the notion of purity and pollution but Bista states this is mostly limited to upper-caste women. A woman's sexuality becomes a major driving factor in deciding her position within society. Siera Tamang has argued that the women of Nepal are daughters of Sita whose minds are ruined by old beliefs and superstitions. Tamang states that this socio-cultural belief that a woman is treated as a devi remains fully unexplored. Various possible explanations offered by Gautam and Verma which are explored by Bhandari state that it could be an effect of Muslim rule in India filtering into Nepal or the prohibitions laid by the Rana rulers which kept women bound in their roles as housewives. (Bhandari 23) This notion of purity remained a notion purely applicable to women mostly of the upper caste whereas, women from lower castes are seen with condescending eyes and often times abhorred as can be read from MA too.

Gellner has argued that the culture of the dominant Parbatiya group has influenced in various significant ways that of the tribes so that the tribes have come increasingly to resemble castes and are far from being bounded homogeneous units. (Gellner 106-107) Tamang argues that Höfer saw with “conspicuous indifference” (Höfer 194) towards most ethnic groups in the 1854 MA by readily accepting the notion of Nepali women even if it was mostly used by upper-caste Nepali women.

To take an example with regard to marriage, women of upper caste are given *Kanyadaan*⁷⁰ or the gift of a virgin by the father of a girl in marriage to a man, which is seen as married. Whereas terms like *lyaita*⁷¹ and *rakheko*⁷² (Höfer 41) were used for women married without full rites as prescribed by the Hindu marriage standards. This pushed women from other communities and castes to accept the norms at a larger level, laid down by the Hindu code among the lower castes and tribes. Among the tribes, a prospective groom, stayed with the bride’s family for some years, without any official ceremony. Nothing to this effect is seen among the upper-caste men as stated by Höfer. He states that the number of women with whom a man has had non-polluting and legal intercourse will not affect his caste status (Höfer 41). On the other hand, a woman becomes polluted, irrespective of her male partner’s caste if she indulges in sexual intercourse outside of marriage. This then further asserts the belief that a woman’s body and her decisions are controlled by a man in a patriarchal set-up. Höfer points out that the *feme*⁷³ status and caste status are interlinked in the dominant upper-caste society. This is not to say that the patriarchal system does not exist in non-Hindu communities but to point out that in some communities in Nepal, women’s roles have not been restricted to childbearing and rearing within the private home as a norm with men primarily defined as participating in the political and economic spheres of the public, in contradiction to this “Hindu template” (Tamang 136) a term used by Kate Gilbert as cited by Tamang. It is understood from MA, with marriage/*Bibaha bare* that when the feme’s status fell, the notion of purity and pollution affected commensality and the woman’s caste status. The upper caste man will not accept *bhat*⁷⁴ from a woman indulging in pre-marital intercourse or adultery as stated in MA (Höfer 23,85) This

⁷⁰ Kanyadaan where a daughter is offered by a father to the prospective son in law by washing her feet and drinking the water. It is a belief that the father earns punya by this act.

⁷¹ Lyaita meant brought.

⁷² Rakhita means kept without any social sanctioned wedding.

⁷³ Woman’s status.

⁷⁴ Cooked rice, which will be consider *jhuto*, if cooked by lower caste or anyone below one’s own caste, which as a concept remains limited to upper caste alone.

further controls the woman's sexuality as well as her right to marry outside the caste fold. It can be gauged that because of these women were pushed to practice endogamy, or rather the society endorsed endogamy alone. The MA categorizes a woman's caste status as per the man's caste. She will no longer have access to the caste rights, she is born with, if she marries a man of lower caste, and her offspring would have a further lower status. Whereas when a man marries a woman of lower caste, he will not lose his caste rights, but his children will have a lower caste status. As mentioned in MA, the higher the woman's caste status, the more she is exposed to pollution. (Höfer 43) Other areas of concern of the patriarchal society are the relationship of husband and wife/ *logne svasni ko*, ancestral property/*amsa banda*, adoption/*dharmaputra ko*, heirship/*aputali ko* and the payment of fines for adultery/*jaari ko* which is to state that the state-controlled a great exercise on the rights and decision-making capacity of the people. (Tamang 138)

Tamang argues that women are not recognized as full rights-bearing persons by law and have unconvincing claims to family property only as daughters and wives. (Tamang 139) Tamang makes a passing reference to Bennett who has mentioned women's right to property, but this can be exercised only if she remained married, or she remained with the family, even after the husband is dead. Another clause, for acquiring *amsa*/property by an unmarried woman is if she remains unmarried up to thirty-five years of age. Tamang has brought to light how men were entitled to family property by birth whereas women acquired rights through marriage to their husband's property. (Tamang 140) However, Tamang has stated that women are not recognized as full rights-bearing persons by law and have tenuous claims to family property only as daughters and wives with the help of Sangraula. (Tamang 139) But it must be noted that amendments to MA with regards to laws relating to the family, especially property, reveal changing conceptions of women as individuals however it cannot be denied that this is a relative change and no drastic amendments can be found. This establishes the fact that by establishing a law, the state not only regulates women's sexuality, and her decisions on marriage but also maintains and reproduces gender hierarchy. Further, Tamang stresses that the state seeks to appropriate traditional patriarchy, and adopts and perpetuates male power. (Tamang 143)

There was an amendment in the constitution in 1963, put in place by King Mahendra which characterized Nepal as a Hindu state for the first time and Nepali as a language was promoted in spite of the

awareness of ethnic presence, it managed to overlook an entire group of people. Furthermore, the legacy of MA of 1854 which categorized the entire nation in a caste hierarchy continued to be given social and cultural legitimacy. Even after the amendment, the changes weren't favourable and women-friendly. It stated no conjugal relation can be dissolved except in certain circumstances and even in such cases, the relation has to be dissolved on account of the petition filed and after a judgment therein by the court, the conjugal relation may then be dissolved only according to that judgment. There are certain clauses which existed in the old MA, which were continued after the amendment. Clauses like if the wife stayed away from her husband for three years or so without any consent, or carried a conspiracy, or mental torture or the woman commits adultery, the man will be allowed to dissolve the marriage. Likewise, if a man has brought another wife in the presence of his wife, not provided for her, and left her without information for three years, or tried to harm her or the man becomes disabled, the wife may dissolve her relation with such a husband. (Höfer 235-238) The amendment did allow for some amount of equality among men and women with regard to marriage and divorce as it can be read from MA, but the application of this law is not explored in the literature. With regards to her property, an unmarried woman, a woman having a husband or a widow may use and dispose of the movable or immovable property which they have earned at their discretion. From the time of the old MA, the amended MA allowed for greater freedom concerning her property as it mentions that she can dispose of all the movable or immovable property of their share at their discretion. She had control over her property like the *daijo*⁷⁵ she received *pewa*/ her share of the property. However, the whole of MA does not segregate its discussions around women's rights and property rights of ethnic diversities, despite acknowledging their presence in Nepal. This despite its amendment, had a very homogenizing effect on the women of Nepal, who were forced to be categorized under one banner as Nepali women. As argued by Tamang this has led to the effacement of ethnic and religious differences. She further spells out that Nepal's heterogeneous population has structured gender relations in various ways like how high-caste women are limited to childbearing and household work, Thakali women are renowned for their business acumen, and how ethnic groups like Limbu women, women of Bhotey origin are free to divorce and remarry as widows, got structured under one legal system of MA. (Tamang 136) The official erasure of these gendered differences among heterogeneous communities legitimized the creation of a

⁷⁵ *Daijo* is equivalent to dowry, but it mostly consists of household items and not cash.

single national culture based on Hindu norms extolled by MA. It can also be seen that in the name of *Bikas*/development, the yardstick to judge Nepali women was framed by foreign NGOs. One clear instance can be seen in an argument made by an American anthropologist Lynn Bennett, who states “Great improvements have been made in the formal legal status of women,” (Bennett xi) which tends to undermine the local operating systems and make a stock formulation concerning the status of Nepali women. On the contrary, it was different in Darjeeling even though the mention of Sikkimese Nepali is few. Nilamber Chettri’s study on the caste structure of the Nepali community in Darjeeling classifies them under three categories: the *Tagadharis or Thulo jaat*⁷⁶, the *Matwali jaat, or pani chalne jaat*⁷⁷ and the *pani na chal ne jaat*⁷⁸ or *Sano jaat* by taking help from Tanka Subba’s work. Here, Chettri has spoken about *jat danda* which is a form of punishment, which a man of upper caste is entitled to bear if he marries a woman from the second category. Subba has argued that this remained limited to *ajat biha* and not *kujat biha*. This goes to assert that unlike in Nepal where a man of upper caste exercised rights to endogamy, in Darjeeling, it came down to the middle category. (Chettri 80)

Chettri has argued that the caste structure in Darjeeling was defined by its regional dynamics and was weaker as compared to the plains of India and states that since upper caste Nepalis migrated late to the Indian Hills of Darjeeling. (Chettri 79) But this argument cannot be considered with certainty as no documental references have been found. Studies related to Darjeeling and Sikkim, with regards to the Nepali population, have limited themselves to the figures and not the classification of Nepalis according to their caste. An overarching fact that cannot be overlooked while considering the caste diversifications in the hills of Sikkim and Darjeeling could very well be associated with the larger issue of identity which has afflicted the Nepalis of the hills. Atis Dasgupta has argued on the same lines stating the low-caste Nepali migrants like Limbus, Pradhans, Gurungs, and Tamangs who spoke Tibeto-Burman dialects, picked up ‘*Khaskura*’⁷⁹ or Nepali of the upper-caste Brahmins in general, and in Darjeeling, in particular to forge a bond of cultural unity among various ethnic groups who had migrated. (Dasgupta 56)

⁷⁶ upper caste

⁷⁷ water acceptable castes

⁷⁸ water unacceptable castes

⁷⁹ Khaskura is a dialect spoken by the upper caste Brahmins.

Further, considering MA it can be understood that despite the amendments made to the constitution, women benefitted very little, as something as simple as citizenship, which should be granted at birth is denied to women without the authentication done by a male family. Mona Lazo has pointed out that citizenship is awarded on blood rights where fathers pass citizenship to their sons and daughters. In the case of a man, he can apply for citizenship directly, whereas it is not the same for a woman, as her application must be supported by either her father or her husband. (Lazo 77) This then helps us to understand that citizenship in Nepal is gendered and women do not have an individual identity within the state. Citizenship remains gendered in Nepal as it favours men, leaving women vulnerable and without an individual identity. Likewise, if we consider the situation of Sikkim, citizenship remains in the hands of a male body as the woman must submit an unmarried certificate and a domicile of the father to acquire citizenship. A married woman needs to produce the domicile of her husband to acquire her citizenship which reiterates the fact that women have no control over their citizenship in Sikkim either. Rosden Tshering Bhutia has argued that Sikkimese women do not enjoy inheritance rights even if she is the only child of her parents. Taking cues from Bothe and Sachdeva, Bhutia argues that a Sikkimese woman is given gifts of movable assets rather than immovable assets like property⁸⁰. Similar to the case of Nepali women or women from Nepal, there were no laws to legally safeguard Sikkimese women's right to inherit their ancestral property but among the tribal communities, they are given *pewa*.⁸¹ As against what Bhutia states that there is *pewa* system among the tribal communities but it is very limiting to state that it is prevalent among the tribal communities alone as it is equally prevalent among non-tribal communities too. After analysing MA as well as the regulatory laws of Sikkim and Darjeeling, it can be fairly concluded that women in Sikkim and Darjeeling are partially bereft of gender discrimination, but if the property rights are analysed then, tribal communities are comparatively liberal as compared to the Nepali women as they are bound by caste and gender practices.

⁸⁰ Married Women's Property Regulation, 1962. Whereas it is expedient to provide for the rights of Sikkimese women married to persons other than Sikkim Subjects to acquire, hold and dispose of immovable property in Sikkim and to, provide for rules of succession to property held by such Sikkimese women.

⁸¹ *Pewa* meant giving the daughters gifts and assets including livestock, utensils, ornaments, land (household if wealthy) and other goods" if they married within their own community. (Bhutia, 111)

The second segment of this chapter will focus on the interrogation of old socio-religious and socio-cultural practices which are performed by mostly Chettri-Bahun, newar women, or upper caste women, as they comprise the influential population. McGee has argued that the Hindu philosophy has accorded a very high position to a hetero-patriarchal relationship, where a man and woman are bound by marriage. Marriage as a ceremony has been understood to be unbreakable. The concept of *saat phera*⁸² practiced in a Hindu wedding is associated to being tied to each other for seven lives. A woman is believed to gain cultural status only after her marriage, whereas a man is believed to gain through the *upanayanam*⁸³ ceremony. This reiterates the fact that women's identity is gendered in Nepali society which can be understood as a woman assuming a sense of wholeness only by being married to a man. In the olden times, Baral quotes that all religious texts stated early marriage of a woman, which is indicative of the fact, that a woman's identity only thrives through a man. Bhandari has cited that the age stated by the various religious texts like *Manusmriti* is twelve years old, *Nirnyasindu* is eight years old, *Satyarthaprakash* is sixteen years old etc. Likewise, there is a certain preference in terms of attributes of boys and girls for marriage. As quoted by Bhandari, it is seen that *Manusmriti* states that a girl must be beautiful, have long hair, short teeth and movements like that of a swan or an elephant. Accordingly, *Satyarthaprakash* has mentioned the girl must be beautiful, named after happiness and with a soft body and Kamasutra lays out that the girl must be born in a respected family and with a good disposition. Various attributes like talkative, grey hair, grey eyes, names of nakshatra, girls without brothers and fathers, diseased, taller than men, with greater strength etc., were not preferred in case of marriage. Whereas, the attributes stated for men for marriage are education, knowledge of Vedas, prestigious family and same caste. No physical qualities are taken into consideration for a man while looking for marriage⁸⁴. The above argument exposes the disparities taken into consideration while assessing the suitable qualities required of a man and a woman to be married. The attributes associated with men do not consider physical beauty whereas women are assessed on things beyond their control like having a brother or father, complexion, eye colour etc. Bhandari thus argued that the distinction made between the qualities of men and women further goes to prove that men are meant for the intellectual domain whereas women are limited for the domestic domain in

⁸² *Saat phera* is translated as seven rounds around the holy fire with a promise to be together for seven lives, in Hindu tradition.

⁸³ Sacred thread ceremony.

⁸⁴ These texts are referred by Uma Bhandari to study the Hindu patriarchal system.

a way that has suppressed women's intellectual capacity which further pushed them to become dependent on men fully. These practices though very rampant in the past, have lowered considerably in the case of Nepalese or Indian Nepali women.

Various other socio-religious systems like Patibrata dharma, sati system, niyog system, lineage system, remarriage system for men, *Swasthani Barta*, *Teej*, *Nachune hunu*,⁸⁵ *Shrad*, *Kul Devta Pujnu*, *Jhuto/Sutak* have pushed women to remain subservient to the male counterpart in a Nepalese society whereas some other traditions like *Beli Bibaha*, *Miteri Saino*, has uplifted women. According to the *Patibrata Dharma*, as defined by Poddhar and Goswami⁸⁶, a woman must remain loyal to one's husband. In this system, a woman must bestow her *tan*, *bachan* and *karma*.⁸⁷ Poddhar and Goswami have taken this argument forward by stating that a woman need not perform any fire sacrifice or religious fasting as she can achieve salvation through her loyalty towards her husband. (as qtd. Bhandari 109) Bhandari also states that socially situated and culturally mediated subjectivity that Hindu women have inherited has been serving as a fundamental institution in ritualising her sexuality. (Bhandari 81)

Secondly, the despised sati system was in practice in Nepal. Bhandari cites Poddhar, who has argued that the sati system was named after Sati after she sacrificed her body in the sacred fire after being unable to tolerate verbal abuse from her father against her husband. Baral argues that before 1920, the sati system was highly effective in the Brahmin family, the king's family, and to some degree in the families of the common people. He argued that in the Lichhavi period, there was no compulsion for women to go as sati, but in the Malla period, this system was effective. Baral also stated that there was a certain influence on the medieval Indian sati system. Baral further stated that in 1520 AD, ten wives of King Ratna Malla became sati. Likewise, nine wives of King Bhupalendra Malla, nine wives of King Srinivas Malla, thirty-three wives of King Yog Narendra Malla, and eight wives of King Jagat Prakash Malla burnt themselves in the funeral pyre of their husbands. Incidentally, this system also continued in the modern period and after the death of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, eight wives died as sati. But, Rana Prime Minister, Janga Bahadur administered serious

⁸⁵ Monthly period. i.e., menstruation.

⁸⁶ Cited by Uma Bhandari in *Women in Patriarchy*.

⁸⁷ Tan meaning body, bachan meaning word and karma meaning activities.

measures to eliminate this cruel system. He had put forward a bill in 1910 that proposed various provisions against the sati system. However, this system was totally abolished in the period of Rana Prime Minister Chandra Samsher in 1929, much later than it was abolished in the neighbouring counterpart, India.

Similarly, another system that existed in Nepali society is the *niyog* system. The *niyog* system is a system of bearing children by a woman from another man, in case of her husband's inability to reproduce children or his death before having any children. This was practised to continue the lineage system. The demand for a son is related to the notion of salvation from this world. A widow or a woman with a husband can bear children from the *niyog* system from her *dewar*⁸⁸, or a man of the same family, in case of an inability to produce the children. The stress of having a son is to carry the pure family lineage as well as to perform the final rites. It is believed among the Nepalese that a son would be able to help him cross the *samsara* and to perform his final rites and offer *pinda*⁸⁹ after their death. The performance of *Shradh*⁹⁰ can only be done by a son, and to do so he must have a wife from the same caste, as a wife from another caste wouldn't be entitled to the position of being accepted in the *Kul*.⁹¹ Worshipping the form of divinity, the *kul devta*, is specific to each lineage. The *kul devtas* are mostly ancestors who are worshipped by the next generation. (Luintel 32) It is a belief that if they are not worshipped, they will affect the present life. These cultural and social notions were strongly based on the patriarchal values. Though not fully, the importance of having a son is still not done away with as the society as a whole still functions on patriarchal principles.

A very important practice seen among the Nepali-speaking upper-caste people present to this day is the importance associated with texts like *Garudpuran* which is read during the death ceremony for ten days. *Garudpuran* prescribes do's and don'ts to be followed by the wife, the husband and the offspring after the death in the family. *Garudpuran* amplifies that once a relationship between a husband and wife is established, it continues for many rebirths and states the importance of various practices and stresses these issues as a part of the mourning ceremony practised by the Hindu Nepalese community. *Garudpuran*, though a very old text, is still a very well-accepted text and is used during the thirteen days of mourning in a Hindu society among the

⁸⁸ Husband's younger brother.

⁸⁹ Pinda is a rice offering made to the dead on the *shradh*.

⁹⁰ *Shradh* is a yearly ritual of commemorating the death of a family member.

⁹¹ Kul is the reference to the dead ancestors who protect the family lineage.

Nepali-speaking population. There has been no instance found with regards to the questioning of *Garudpuran* even among the educated as well as the affluent. It is seen as a religious text, which is to be followed without questioning. After any death in the family, a pundit is immediately appointed to read the *Garudpuran* to the wives, daughters and sons of the deceased in the presence of the guests, which invariably acts as a reinforcement of traditional cultural values through the *Garudpuran*.

Another important religious and social ritual performed by the Nepalese women is *Swasthani Brata*. *Swasthani Pooja and Brata*, the aim is to influence the social conditioning of a woman, in a hetero-patriarchal set-up through the story of Brinda in the text *Swasthani*, who burnt herself in the pyre of her husband after his death. (Darshan 124) This story is circulated to reinforce the *Patibrata Dharma*. This story recollects that, a *patibrata* woman is spiritually powerful than any God or Goddesses. Poddhar and Goswami have argued that the final aim of a woman is to achieve salvation through self-sacrifice. *Swasthani* text is a popular text among the Hindu women, which is read from *Paush Purnima*⁹² to *Maagh Purnima*.⁹³ Women fast for an entire month and listen to *Swasthani Brata katha* every evening for an entire month. This is a continued cultural practice among older Hindu women and has been practised inter-generationally and is taken up by younger women after coming of age.

A very discriminative practice among the Nepalese people is that of the remarriage system, which is mostly entitled to males alone and a female could not remarry at any cost even if the provisions were laid out. As cited by Bhandari from sources like *Manusmriti*, *Swasthani*, *Nirayasinidhu*, *Satyarthaprakash*, a man and a woman both can marry, if the first wife shows misdemeanour, if the husband/wife succumbs to death, if the wife is barren up to eight years of marriage, if children die during ten years of marriage, and if there is only a girl child up to eleven years of the married life. This method is adopted to ensure lineage continuity among the people and though not practised in the same manner, males are often seen getting married after their wife's death under the premise of not having anyone to take care of them. This proves that women are mostly assumed to be the care-takers in a male-dominated set-up and there is no provision for widow remarriage, which has

⁹² Full moon night in the month of December.

⁹³ Full moon night in the month of January.

pushed women to accept widowhood as a punishment for their sin against the men and to remain *patibrata*, even to the ill-behaved husband.

Another social practice common among Nepalis is observing *jhutho* and *sutak*. *Jutho* and *sutak* are observed in a similar manner. During a *sutak*⁹⁴, a family is considered *jutho* meaning defiled so prayers are not offered to god and festivals are not celebrated during that period. *Sutak* is generally offered for a very short period of time. When there is a death in the family, it is also considered *jutho* which is observed for a longer period and is considered graver. During this phase, no festivals are celebrated. In addition to this social practice is a *jogi daan* in the month of Kartik/October-November, where a *jogi* goes house to house performing *pheris* and blowing a horn-like instrument to ward off the evils. Then the *Jogi* comes the next day to collect *daan*. The myths of origin and history exist among the *Pheriwala* *Jogi* people mostly in oral form. Krishna Yogee argues that the meaning, origin and evolution of the term “*Jogi*” is not very clear. It is most commonly used as an adjective word describing the state of a person who either has nothing or has lost all belongings. The term “*Jogi*” refers to the status of an empty hand or a person who has given up family relations or is far from social responsibilities. Nevertheless, the *Pheriwala* *Jogi* people are very far away from the above definition and meaning.⁹⁵ The identity of “*Pheriwala*” is derived from the “*Pheri*” culture. “*Pheri* culture” is socially recognized as the social protection system from the evil spirits in Nepalese society.

Another important attribute of socio-religious practice among the Nepalese as well as Indian Nepalis is *Hartalika Teej*⁹⁶. It is considered a very important festival among Nepali women and has growing relevance even in the present day. Quoting Bhandari, the *teej* ritual is symbolized to manifest two functions. The first is to become *saubhagyabati*⁹⁷, to remain/ be married. The second is to wash the sin, a woman might have committed during her menstruation. The first day of *Teej* is called *Dar Khane Din*⁹⁸. The second day is the day of fasting where the fasting is observed by married and unmarried women. Married women abstain from food and drinks with a belief that their devotion to the gods will be blessed with longevity, peace and prosperity of their

⁹⁴ *Sutak* is observed when there is a birth of a child in the family, the family is considered to be under *jutho*.

⁹⁵ http://krishnayogee.com.blogspot.com/2012/08/ethnic-identity-of-pheriwala-jogi_8.html

⁹⁶ It is a day when unmarried women fast for a husband and married women fast for the longevity of their spouse.

⁹⁷ *Saubhagyawati* referring to the gift of remaining or being married.

⁹⁸ Delicacies are prepared and relished.

husband whereas the unmarried women observe the fast with a hope of being blessed with a good husband. Then, on the third day of the festival, is *Rishi Panchami*, where women pay homage to saints, offer prayers to deities, and bathe with red mud found on the roots of the *datiyun*⁹⁹ along with its leaves. The third day of *teej* is the time when women cleanse themselves of the possible “sin of touching a man during menstruation.”

Lastly, a common socio-religious practice continued among the Nepalese people is *nachhuni hunu*. During this phase of menstruation, women are not allowed to cook, or touch pickles and plants. (Joshi 47) Bhandari cites an example from her personal experience and states that sometimes she used to imitate her mother and pretended she menstruated and would not touch this and that like her mother used to do in the house. She remembers that her way of constructing knowledge of gendered menstruation was through the acculturation process. Bhandari remembers that when she revisited her past, she remembered that, till nine or ten years ago, her mother's menstruation was attached to the notion of *chhuna nahune*¹⁰⁰ culture. The terminology ‘*nachhuni*’ itself tells its meaning of recollecting the stage of untouchability, popular in a public space with the culture of forbidden practices for touching kitchen and puja items. During the four days of menstruation, a woman is considered impure, and is forbidden from touching and partaking in household activities, provided she misses it, it would cause defilement, pushing women to practice *Rishi Panchami* along with *teej*. There has however been a turn towards questioning the political position of women in recent literature in Nepal, with a focus on resistance and subversion of meanings in the songs of *teej*. The songs sung at the *teej* festival as part of rituals which reaffirm patrilineal principles, and provide critical commentaries on gender relations, domestic relations, and political and social conditions in general. However, it cannot be overlooked that the socio-religious practices of Nepalis living anywhere are more or less akin to one another and are culturally different from the Indian Hindu caste practices.

The entire socio-religious culture proves that a woman is viewed with a gendered lens situated in a domestic space in a Hindu Nepalese society. Bhandari argues that a pure-virgin girl, a non-virgin un-married girl, an unmarried older woman, a barren married woman, a woman who has only daughters, a mother, a

⁹⁹ Apamarga, a plant believed to mitigate doshas.

¹⁰⁰ untouchable

widow, and a prostitute, are valued differently. They are treated differently by their perceived social status. Bhandari stresses the fact that women are socialised in such a way that they do not tend to live for themselves wherein they are trained to be social, cultural, emotional, tolerant and habituated to please others. These socio-religious cultural practices have been shaped in such a way that women cannot fully put behind these practices despite their education and social mobility. This can be read in a contemporary novel like that of Prajwal Parajuly too, where one can see that not much has changed despite acquiring education by women. Various practices have religious connotations attached to them, making it impossible to question and stop practising the same. Questioning these socio-religious practices would stem as being anti-religious, even if these practices seem irrational further pushing women to accept the societal standards set by the hetero-patriarchal society. Unlike the practices stated above, a very strong socio-cultural practice whose practice has enabled women of the Newari community is the *beli-bibah/ihī*. In this practice, a girl is married to a *bael*¹⁰¹, before attaining her menstruation. This marriage would give her a social sanction that she wouldn't be considered a widow, even if her husband died as long as the *bael* remained intact. Popularly it is said that she is marrying the *bael* fruit itself and it is argued by Gellner that say that the ritual of *ihī* means that a Newar woman will never be a widow, even if her human husband dies. (Gellner 112)

This practice can be read as questioning the patriarchal standards, where a woman becomes a widow and her marital status still remains intact. It also allows more mobility for women as she does not have to be clad in white dress and mourn the loss of their husband. Another traditional practice which is very empowering is *Miteri saino*¹⁰². This *miteri saino* is forged by both men and women through certain rituals and is not bound by caste, class or community. This relationship is forged with people of any community, which has led to the weakening of the rigid caste structure in the hills. This is a fictive relationship, where the person who becomes the *mith* bears a familial relationship. Therefore, it can be concluded that the socio-cultural practices are binding towards the upper-caste women practising it, whereas, towards the other caste groups, it is more flexible.

¹⁰¹ Bael is a wooden apple, which has strong shell and does not break easily.

¹⁰² Miteri saino is a relationship forged through a certain function.

Finally, the last section of this chapter will examine the position of a woman in Nepalese society and understand the gender position from the works of literature written in Nepal, as no literature focussing on gender issues could be traced from the Indian region from early periods like Nepal. Tracing back the literature written in English or Nepali, with gender as a focal point would be Rudra Raj Pandey's *Rupmati*, a Nepali text, written in B.S.¹⁰³ 1991, which falls in 1934 of the British calendar and would qualify itself as one of the first works written on the social positioning of a woman in a patriarchal setup. The text opened up a deep set of patriarchal values which *Rupmati* imbibed. It does not question these values, but it becomes glaringly evident that the torture *Rupmati* faced at the hands of her mother-in-law and her endurance seemed like an ideal quality of a daughter-in-law, but no doubt, it did open up a space for questioning such traditional values and conventions. Rudra Raj Pandey has been given the title of modern writer in Nepali society and his work *Rupmati* centred around the issues of a Nepali woman. With the help of two extremely opposite characters *Rupmati* and *Baralputri*, he has shown their nature and the repercussions of being good and bad in Nepali society. Through his characters, he has exemplified a true feudal society wherein, the wife is expected to serve her husband, and the man invariably acts as a master. Not just that, the *sasu-buhari* relationship, which is a complex hierarchical relationship is explored in the novel. The protagonist *Rupmati* has been portrayed as an extremely beautiful woman, which can be gauged from the title of the novel. The protagonist is not just good-looking but somebody who imbibes the patriarchal standards which according to the author is a sought-after quality among Nepali women. *Rupmati*'s good character and behaviour are considered a very important aspect. During that period, the patriarchal society had great control over women's bodies and the need to produce offspring. If one sees the codes and sections laid down by various religious texts as well as *Muluki Ain*, it is stated that if the wife is barren during the first eight years of marriage, if there is only a girl child born up to eleven years after marriage, the man can exercise his rights to remarry another woman. Since *Rupmati* could not give birth to an offspring in the stipulated time after the marriage, her mother-in-law asked her son Havilal to bring a *sauta*¹⁰⁴. Havilal on the other hand, consulted a doctor who helped *Rupmati* give birth to a child.

¹⁰³ The abbreviation B.S. indicates the Bikram Sambat (Vikram Samvat) era. Hofer states that he follows the rule of thumb according to which one obtains the year of our era by deducting 57 from the number indicated in the Bikram Sambat calendar. The month, fortnight, solar and lunar days are neglected. (Hofer xxxvii)

¹⁰⁴ *Sauta* meaning co-wife.

Sudha Tripathi has argued that though the novel reflects a patriarchal mindset, at the same time it reflects the Western influence Havilal has had in his life up to a certain degree. (Tripathi 53) His willingness to be examined by a doctor for not being able to produce offspring, going to a movie while he was away studying in Benares and eating foods like biscuits reflects that man in Nepali society was influenced by Western civilization. Rupmati, the only child of Luitel Bajey and his family, was pushed by the ills of the patriarchy to get married as early as six years old. But, since she was married at a very young age, she returned to her *maitaghar*¹⁰⁵ and had to come back to her husband's home when she experienced *rajaswala*¹⁰⁶ as it was considered ill to menstruate in her mother's house. Bennet has argued that among high caste *parbate communities* the cause of early marriage is associated with maintaining a girl's sexual purity. (Bennet ix) A girl is given in *Kanya dan*¹⁰⁷ by her father. *Kanya Dan* is described by Bennett as having "patrilineal ideology" (Bennett 222) which means that a girl is given as a gift, which is understood as a "gift of a virgin" by Hofer. The *kanya dan* is also believed to help the bride's father acquire *punya*¹⁰⁸ as he is the one who helps to ensure the continuity of the groom's descent. And the reason behind sexual purity is that the man can inherit a generation of pure patriarchal lineage. Rupmati was forced to take up the responsibilities of her family at a very young age, which eventually affected her mental and physical health, straining her relationship with her husband Havilal. But, she strove to be a good wife thinking,

"Barha barsa ma kholo ta pharkancha bhandachan, patiko sudrishti pani jarur pharkala, kina pharkidaina?" (Pandey 28)

बाह्र वर्षमा खोला त फर्खन्छ भन्छन्, पतिको सुदृष्टि पनि जरुर फर्कला, किन फर्किदैन?

which is translated as, "In twelve years, even the dried river comes back to life, why wouldn't my husband's ill behaviour change?" This shows us how women have an undying faith in the system of marriage, and how in the hope of transformation, they never question the ills inflicted by their husbands. Likewise, women were

¹⁰⁵ *Maitaghar* meaning her mother's house.

¹⁰⁶ *Rajaswala* meaning menstruation.

¹⁰⁷ *Kanya dan* is defined as a 'gift of virgin.'

¹⁰⁸ *Punya* meaning religious merit.

uneducated, leading to a *malik-dasi*¹⁰⁹ relationship, where she was incapacitated into making her own decisions. Even Rupmati was given to Havilal in marriage only because he had started his education and would be in a better position to understand things than her. She had always remained a dutiful wife, in spite of the differences she had with Havilal. This goes on to show how she has internalised the standards set by the society wherein women are expected to worship their husbands despite of the ill treatment meted out to them through their husbands and mother-in-law. Feminist critics like Bhasin and Khan have argued that a patriarchal system has been primarily supporting calls for the oppression of a woman in every sphere of her social as well as her private life. In addition, they argue that in a patriarchal set-up, a man controls a woman's sexuality, mobility, production and reproduction. The “hetero-patriarchal” rules which are blended and manifested in cultural traditions have pushed to contribute towards a stereotypical gender culture which has been socially accepted. Women are pushed to become subservient to men by observing *Patibrata Dharma*¹¹⁰ which loosely reads as loyalty to one's husband, as it was seen as a spiritual path, where a woman is supposed to worship her husband to attain salvation. Bhandari argues that *patibrata* dharma has restricted woman to associate freely with other males who might be regarded as compatible partner. (Bhandari 28) In the novel, when Rupmati could not produce an offspring, Havilal chose to remain silent on Rupmati's barrenness, rather the mother-in-law suggested that he bring a *sauta*¹¹¹. *Sauta janu*¹¹² could be seen as a sin for a woman but *sauta halnu*¹¹³ for men is acceptable and the first wife is expected to remain cordial in such a situation. Not just that, an older woman of the family never comes in rescue of younger woman, i.e. her *Buhari*¹¹⁴. She rather finds faults and loopholes to make her life uncomfortable. Bhandari has described the *sasu-buhari*'s¹¹⁵ relationship with the help of Levy and states it from a socio-cultural viewpoint and states that every person is expected to fulfil, his or her own cultural demands (Bhandari, 101) If we try and understand the *sasu-buhari* relationship, it is a culturally hierarchical position and is often considered a natural state of affairs. In a value-based contextual understanding, it is often seen as a duty of a *sasu*, who is an older member of the family, to train and mould her

¹⁰⁹ *Malik-dasi*, where in it is told that a woman must serve her husband selfless to attain salvation.

¹¹⁰ *Patibrata* means being dutiful, faithful and loyal to the husband irrespective of the behaviour.

¹¹¹ *Sauta* as in second wife in presence of first wife/Co-wife.

¹¹² *Sauta janu*, when a woman marries a married woman.

¹¹³ *Sauta halnu*, when a married man brings another woman as legal wife.

¹¹⁴ *Buhari* is a register used for daughter-in-law

¹¹⁵ Mother and daughter-in-law.

Buhari, who is a younger person in the family the certain behaviours and patterns so as to ensure the continuity of the cultural values shared by the family. The stress on the cultural values and the need to perform in a certain fashion can be well understood not simply as family values but as a way of conditioning and pushing women to carry on the patriarchal dictums. Bhandari has further claimed that *sasu* being a member of the older generation endeavours to maintain hetero-patriarchal values as much as possible. (Bhandari 102) Having showcased these in the novel *Rupmati*, Pandey has managed to expose the underbelly of Nepali society. Pandey has managed to open up the claim that the nature of patriarchy or the rule of males is inherently an oppressive system towards women. A man by virtue of his dominant power 'social, cultural, religious, economic' controls every aspect of a woman's life. (Bhandari 102)

Another writer who was vocal about gender issues and wrote in his works is Hridaya Chandra Singh Pradhan. Hridaya Chandra Singh Pradhan's work *Swasnimannche*, had a very progressive bent of mind. He wrote *Swasnimannche* in 2011 B.S. which is the 1954 of the British calendar. In this novel, he takes the issue of a prostitute and discusses how prostitutes are made under societal pressure. He reasons that the economic condition pushes a woman to become a prostitute along with rape and sexual violation of women. The text, *Swasnimannche*, opens up the story of Motimaya and her son Binod. Motimaya is a prostitute, who her son Binod thinks has been pushed by society to become a prostitute. Binod is aware of the fact, that Motimaya has become a prostitute, but doubly assured by the fact that Motimaya did not take up prostitution on her own accord. Binod is worried that Motimaya, his mother was pushed to become a prostitute by his father Pramod, and the society at large. He is not ashamed of the fact that his mother has turned to prostitution but is trying to analyse and understand the reasons behind such a drastic step. He continues to see her as a pious woman and the need to question the society that is responsible for pushing women into prostitution. The fact that Binod has gained a degree of consciousness regarding women's position and the need to question the hierarchical rules of patriarchy opens up the fact that the society is slowly changing and is open to change. Pramod, husband of Motimaya has brought home a *sauta*¹¹⁶, Kamala, and she is constantly trying to win Pramod on her side, by persistently complaining about Motimaya. In one such incident, she brought a letter addressed to Motimaya

¹¹⁶ Co-wife

from under her pillow and stated that Motimaya had been meeting a man outside of Pramod. This incident sparks the flames of anger and allows Pramod to favour Kamala over Motimaya. At this juncture, the issue of *sauta-sautan* can be explored. When two women are married to a single man, at the same time, it is mostly the second one, who is favoured and in doing so would create unnecessary tensions within the family for the sake of her needs. The patriarchal society which is largely favourable to men accepts men marrying and bringing a co-wife, without undergoing a divorce or any liability from his first wife as no provisions and laws are made for divorce. Even if it states that a man/woman is allowed to leave their partner for a certain reason, it is very unlikely that a woman would exercise this right. This points out the gender differences in a patriarchal society, where a woman cannot choose to leave her husband, in spite of having to share the space with a co-wife. It questions her *satitwa* and *pratibarata* dharma if she does not maintain cordial behaviour. Whereas Pramod does not even think twice before believing the false complaints put by his second wife. Citing an instance from the novel, which says,

“*laaj chaina bessay talai bolnu? (Takiya munibata chitti jhiki dekhayera) kasle lekheko yo chitthi lau bhan, lau bhan (chultho samatera bhakabhak latyaudai) kasle lekheko yo chitthi?*” (Pradhan 26)

लाज छैन बेस्से तलाई बोल्नु (तकिया मुनिबाट चिट्ठी झिकी देखाएर) कसले लेखेको यो चिट्ठी लौ भन्, लौ भन् (चुल्थो समातेर भकाभक लत्याउँदै) कसले लेखेको यो चिट्ठी?

Translated as, Are you not ashamed to speak like that prostitute, said removing a letter from under the pillow. You whore, tell me who wrote this letter to you, said he pulling her by her hair and kicking her. Tell me who wrote this letter to you?

This shows that Pramod remains unmindful of the fact that he has failed in fulfilling the duties of a husband and has brought a second wife, without the consent of Motimaya. Rather he thinks, he has ownership rights over Motimaya and her decision. He abuses her by calling her *randi*¹¹⁷ and questions her for going to the neighbour's house. He says, “*mero ijjat bikawna gayeki ho, gharko kura pokhna gayeki ho.*” (Pradhan 36) मेरो

¹¹⁷ prostitute

इज्जत बिकाउन गएकी हो, घरको कुरा पोख्न गएकी हो Which can be translated as, she had gone to her neighbour's house to talk ill about him and expose his position. His insecurities are deep seated because of which he wants to control her movement, and disrespect the fact that she has equal rights as a wife to question his behaviour. Motimaya is a *patibrata* woman because of which she cannot imagine leaving him or questioning Pramod's behaviour, she rather thinks of committing suicide, so as to avoid facing the troubles of her life. When she could not face the torture anymore, she left her child Binod and her husband Pramod, to commit suicide. Motimaya instead was seeking forgiveness even in death, as she was going to commit suicide,

“Ma gaye, Binod timro pani ho, aba usko aadhar yo sansar ma phagat matai cha, mero kunai bhool bhaye chyama gara.” (Pradhan 65)

म गएँ, बिनोद तिम्रो पनि हो, अब उसको आधार यो संसारमा फगत मात्रै छ, मेरो कुनै भूल भए क्षमा गर

Translated as “I am leaving now; Binod is yours too. Now you are the only one left in this world, for him. Forgive me if I have wronged you.”

Instances like these are a testimony to the acculturation of women to suit the patriarchal standards of society because of which women deem it right to accept such treatment at the hands of male counterparts. In another incident which records Mohan Bahadur finds her in the jungle as she is attempting to commit suicide, and asks her to go back home or go with him to his house. Initially, her previous experience with Pramod pushes her away from it, but on his constant insistence, she finally agrees to go with him on the condition that he would treat her like a sister. Mohan Bahadur says,

“Timi murkha rahichau Motimaya, aatma hatya maha paap ho.aatma hatya garera marnu paap matra haina, chitaunu samma pani paap ho.” (Pradhan 126)

तिमी मुर्ख रहिछौँ मोतीमाया, आत्महत्या महापाप हो, आत्महत्या गरेर मर्नु पाप मात्रै होइन, चिताउनु सम्म पनि पाप हो

Translated as, You are stupid Motimaya, it is a sin to commit suicide. To die by committing suicide is not only sin, but the thought in itself is a sin. But, looking at her vulnerable situation Mohan Bahadur did not

hesitate to use the opportunity to claim his rights over her. During this period women had no access to the outside world and her exploration remained within the domestic realms alone so she believed Mohan Bahadur despite her traumatic past experience. Motimaya was bereft and helpless so she thought Mohan Bahadur would support her, Tripathi has argued that in the time when *Swasnimannche* was written, women did not have the freedom to work, rather they remained as mere guards to the ancestral property and take care of their husband and children, so she saw it as an opportunity to seek shelter from a man. Women were prohibited from keeping a relationship outside the family and going out freely. When Motimaya had no choice but to leave Mohan Bahadur's house too, she was compared to *Maiyanani*, who was a prostitute. Because Motimaya left her house, even when her husband was alive, risking her chastity, she was called a prostitute. Motimaya's *sauta*, Kamala who had little morals, kept complaining about her to Pramod with the motive of gaining a favourable position argued Tripathi. (Tripathi 121) Tripathi further argued that instead of helping and supporting one another, the women are constantly fighting to secure a better position in the husband's eye, which has further problematized the situation of the women. Further, if we see the relationship of one woman with another, it can be easily understood that every woman is only trying to benefit herself at the cost of another woman's problems. Hariyajan, the neighbour is aware of the constant bickering in Pramod's house, and instead of helping Motimaya, she relentlessly prods about the situation and talks ill of Motimaya to Pramod, which in turn goes to stress that women remain constantly at the mercy of the men in the society and cannot support and enable one another. Mohan Bahadur has ruined the lives of three women, yet he is never called a *beshya*, whereas Motimaya who fled her home fearing her husband's torturous behaviour is called a prostitute not just by her husband but the co-wife too. The standards laid out by the patriarchal society are reinforced in various ways throughout the novel. This asserts the fact women's sexuality is ritualized and controlled through women-centric hetero-patriarchal culture.

Nevertheless, towards the end of the novel Motimaya is left with no choice but to leave behind Mohan Bahadur's house, and she lands in the brothel run by Mishri. She could not stay in that brothel, so to escape the snares of the brothel, she goes and stays with Maiyanani, on the grounds that she would only provide the service of singing and entertaining. Tripathi argues that the Nepali society which highly values feudalistic attitudes, pushed women towards prostitution and later questioned the same. (Tripathi 125) To add to this,

Binod has gone to push the idea that women are pushed to prostitution because of the questionable behaviour and attitude borne by men of the patriarchal society. Binod brought his mother, Motimaya back from the brothel and tried to reclaim and reinstate her position in the family, but Pramod thought that he overstepped the standards of society and decided to shoot him on his feet. Tripathi brought to light that in spite of her devout relationship towards her husband, Motimaya was pushed to become a prostitute. (Tripathi 125) Finally, when Binod took charge of the situation and stood his ground, that his mother was pushed by patriarchs to become a prostitute, he ended up killing his father and step-mother. The novel ended in a revolutionary manner, beckoning new thoughts and ideas among the younger generation. It brings to light a sense of awareness and a critical approach to observing patriarchal values steadfastly. Motimaya's house is renamed after Maiya nani as Maiya Mandir, which again is a watermark decision to rename a house after a prostitute, who has vowed to bring change in the society. This novel like the previous novel *Rupmati* can be considered a revolutionary novel not because Binod decided to kill his father who ill-treated his mother but because a novel written as early as 1954 in Nepal could create a sense of awareness and stand against the grain to question the traditional mindset which is not always easy considering the Nepali society.

Another text that was written around 2015 B.S. is *Shanti* by Liladhwaj Thapa. It is a coming-of-age novel, which questions the position of women in society. Written from a male-centric viewpoint, Thapa does not stop from problematizing the issues faced by women at the hands of patriarchy. He strongly critiques the fact that in the name of culture and tradition, society first pushed innocent women to the funeral pyre, making them *Sati* and today they are forced to commit suicide. If a woman decides to go against the standards set by the male-dominated society, she is either seen as a characterless woman or a prostitute, but these same men gratify their sexual hunger with those women. In the name of honour/*ijjat* of the society, chastity of the women, purity of womanhood etc., these women are forced to give up on their lives. The protagonist Shanti is impregnated by her teacher and left at her own mercy, so when she decides to take her life through suicide, Kamal, a coming-of-age character, comes by chance to save her. Though Shanti wanted to give up on her life, when Kamal took a stance for her, she decided that she would give birth and the child must be a girl, so that she could bring a revolution through her. Indra Bahadur Rai argues that *Shanti* has a very feminist approach to the social problems faced by women and she intended to bring a new change, a new experience and give a new

definition to women's existence. (Rai 5) Though she is seen as a hapless woman after her husband dies, she decides to become a sign of revolution, when she is supported by Kamal. She decided to push women from all classes of society to become independent and earn their livelihood, which is something women before Shanti had or could not experience. Shanti has decided to take the burden of patriarchy from her shoulders and has decided to work not just at a personal level but at a societal level. Shanti has decided to enter into politics to fight for the cause of the women with Kamal's support. Ghanashyam Babu who raped her and impregnated her, when she was weak had to come down and bow to the new position she had taken up in the society. Shanti has managed to overcome the misfortunes of her personal life and has managed to take up a social cause. Shanti can be seen as an able woman who has broken the shackles of patriarchy and has fought for a society where men and women are equally represented. This goes to show that there was a great sense of awareness among the Nepali people with regard to the positioning of women vis-à-vis patriarchy, but it remained limited to that as most women wouldn't transgress boundaries laid by the hetero-patriarchal society like Satitwa, Pratibhata dharma, etc. Shanti is definitely a pathbreaker as she rose after the mishaps and misfortunes in her personal life and fought for the cause of the women. Shanti is somewhere symbolically representing the women's involvement in the democratic process, as we can see Mangala Devi Singh being involved in politics around the same time, in the history of Nepal, who chose to fight for education, employment and voting rights for women. In the same vein, Tripathi has argued that Shanti could have chosen to be married and looked after her personal well-being, but she strove to break the stereotype that single/unmarried/widows are weak and rather fought for the well-being of society. (Tripathi 173) Another important aspect highlighted in this novel is, that if one intends to bring change in society, one needs to hold the reins of politics and Shanti being a woman is given a representation in a seemingly highly conservative Nepali society. Finally, a breakthrough realization is that religion has remained a prime governing factor among the Nepalese people and they have remained subservient to men as well as women. Shanti chose to fight the unfought battle alone even after becoming a widow and leading a hapless life. She said,

"Unka aakhama aanshu thiyenan, laaj thiyena, dar thiyena. Unle tauko uthayera dridhsankapla garin, 'huncha januhos ma pratiksha garera baschu. Chadai aaunuhos ma pani tapai satha lagera bidroha garchu-anyaya ko, atyachar ko, paap ko." (Thapa 101)

उनका आँखामा आँशु थिएनन्, लाज थिएन, डर थिएन, उनले टाउको उठाएर दृढसङ्कल्प गरिन्, हुन्छ जानुहोस् म प्रतिक्षा गरेर बस्छु, चाडै आउनुहोस्, म पनि तपाईँ साथ लागेर विद्रोह गर्छु अन्यायको, अत्याचारको, पापको

Translated as, She didn't have tears in her eyes, no shame, no fear. She raised her head and promised to herself, 'you can go now, I will wait here.' Come soon, I will join you to fight against injustice, atrocities and all evils. Therefore, analysing these texts and trying to understand women's position and the influence of Western feminist thought, what can be understood is that the research on women in Nepal limits themselves to descriptions that do not extend beyond highlighting the position of women in a domestic and cultural space. Another important aspect which has been argued by Bhandari and yet very little has changed is that women are recognized by birth as social entities rather than individual or independent selves (Bhandari 128) as women are placed within categories with no relation to the state, government and its functioning rather women are empirically described mostly within the contours of the family. A very important aspect of the Western feminist theorists is that women are seen as individual bodies with certain rights whereas the concept of the individual remains novel to Eastern societies as they function as a family and a society.

Having said that, the theorization of the West cannot be applied blindly to the East as these concepts and thoughts remain unquestioned and more so many hierarchical relations are maintained and stopped from questioning. Most socio-cultural values are seen as stemming from religion therefore questioning them holds a negative connotation attached to it. Due to this, if we continue to read the roles of women, it is limited to understanding them from an ethnographical, anthropological and caste position, without any specifications on their rights and duties outside the family. Likewise, Tamang has argued, that the discipline of anthropology in Nepal has paid attention to gendered dynamics within society and has mapped out communities and their norms of interaction and relations in great detail. However, these studies leave out questions of political and economic power as they focus on the symbolic aspects of gender and ethnicity. There is no doubt, if we study the socio-cultural aspects, it is mostly the upper caste women, who are affected or limited within the frame of these practices because when we consider the ethnic groups, one cannot deny, that they are comparatively liberal.

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Chapter 4

Homeless at Home: A Continued Search for Home

“What’s in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

-William Shakespeare

India being a pluralistic country is considered a home to many languages, religions and communities. Likewise, Nepali is one of the languages recognized under the eighth schedule and people who speak Nepali as a language are considered Nepalese/Nepalis. However, Indian Nepali as a community has felt itself sidelined for many years despite the existence of many other regional and linguistic groups. Kavita Lama argues that despite holding the same identity card as other Indians, Nepalis as a group find themselves sidelined. (Pokhrel 2) Lama states that the Sugauli Sandhi of 1815-16, which had declared many people as Indian citizens does not seem very effective. Sugauli Sandhi was signed between the British government and the Nepali government after the Anglo-Nepalese war from 1814-1816. Nepal was spreading its domains to certain Indian land and many Nepalis had moved and settled in these regions when they had to surrender land to British India, the residents were left behind.

Lama argues that though the treaty has been signed, which stands as a testimony to the existence of Nepalis prior to Indian independence, it has constantly tried to erase and twist this fact. The Nepalis living throughout the country are constantly made to dodge the tag of a foreigner in their own country and are faced with great humiliation. Therefore, the search for an identity and the fight for a home within their own country to establish their identity is done through various ways, one being literature written by these authors. Lama has stressed the fact that the literature arising from the places where Nepalis live has in many ways dealt with the issue of an identity, the need to state their identity, the need to tackle the identity of a foreigner and the questions associated with their citizenship. Therefore, the issue associated with the identity of Nepalis living in India has become a very sensitive and pertinent issue. The Nepali writers have constantly tried to deal with these issues at a larger level.

Lama has argued that literature coming out from these writers then is not limited to Nepali literature as a representation of Nepali language but as a source of identity which speaks for Nepalis and goes to reinstate the identity of millions of Nepali Indians trying to find their diluted identity within the Indian state. Then Nepali literature not only becomes limited to literature written in Nepali but a literature that represents the Nepali community and gives them an identity. Lama further argues that for the Indian Nepalis, the Nepali language is the representative of their community and their self. It is also to be understood that all the communities speak their own language but Nepali acts as a binder of all communities as all Nepali communities outside of Nepal are bound by the thread of Nepali language. The common language or the lingua franca of the people living in the hills of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Sikkim is Nepali language.

Prior to Sugauli Sandhi, the written records of the Nepali language in India could not be traced as most of them had no access to education but there was a wide usage of spoken Nepali among the people. After the treaty, the missionaries had arrived which pushed the Nepali language to its written form. Lama notes that it was with the missionaries the written form of the Nepali language gained space and language started getting built in the written form. (Pokhrel, 15) Nepali as a written language got more prominence post-J. A. Ayton's *A Grammar of the Nepali Language* in 1820, likewise the Bible published by Sreerampore Missionary pushed the Nepali language to a written form and spread it among the common mass.

Despite the early records of the existence of Nepalis, the Nepalis of India still suffer from various tags like that of a foreigner, or immigrant in their own country. There could be various reasons behind the association of Indian Nepalis as a foreigner, but why are they still considered a foreigner or an immigrant is a matter of greater introspection. Therefore, the identity of Nepalis in the Indian sub-continent needs to be understood. Norbert Wiley, a professor argues that identities individuate and allow us to recognize individuals, categories, groups and types of individuals. He further states that identities are nested within and express the qualities of selves and collection of selves.¹¹⁸ But, identities do not limit itself to people but to culture, traditions, cultural markers, cultural figurines, beliefs and practices within the framework of social and cultural boundaries. Ranju R. Dhamala argues that in spite of differences of opinion regarding how ethnic or national

¹¹⁸ Norbert, Wiley. "The Politics of Identity in American History" in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell. 1994.

communities are created consciously or grow organically out of pre-existing cultural communities, it cannot be denied that identities are a way of uniting disparate individuals and groups to achieve goals of common interest. (Dhamala, 169) Therefore, what has to be understood is identity is a way of asserting the distinctiveness of a certain group but what must not be overlooked is that this asserting of identity without a well-thought-out strategy would only end up in multiple revolutions and revolutionaries losing their lives.

The chapter will then understand the issues around the need for a home, the nomenclature associated with the home, how Gorkhaland and the need for a home has brought and made so many revolutionaries and lost so many lives, yet the home remains a faraway dream.

Do the Indian Nepalis need a home to call their own? It is a self-effacing question because of the treatments meted out to Indian Nepalis. The identity of the Indian Nepalis in India within the framework of Indian nationality has remained in a questionable position. Dhamala argues that despite the multiculturalism and plurality of the Indian society and despite the fact the Nepalis have been living in India for almost two centuries along with contributing to the society, the country, in general, fails to recognize the community as an integral part of the Indian cultural milieu. (Dhamala, 69) The Indian Nepalis are battling the issue of identity every now and then, the latest being the tag of an 'immigrant' used by the Association of Old Settlers. On January 13, while delivering its verdict on the petition filed by the Association of Old Settlers of Sikkim (AOSS), demanding exemption of income tax for the old settlers who had settled in Sikkim before its merger with India on April 26 1975, the supreme court had observed that Sikkimese Nepalis were people of foreign origin. The verdict exempted old settlers of Indian origin from paying income tax. The Indian Income Tax Act 1961 was applicable in Sikkim with effect from April 1, 2008 vide section 10 of 26 A, wherein majority of Sikkimese population were exempted from paying Income Tax and the term Sikkimese was defined.

The AOSS of Indian origin residing in Sikkim before the merger was left out of the said definition.¹¹⁹ The AOSS in 2013 had filed a petition in the Supreme Court seeking exemption from paying income tax and the judgement came in their favour on the 13th January 2023. This is a very crucial incident as the Supreme Court the highest deciding body of India, which has the reputation of being knowledgeable and unbiased,

¹¹⁹ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/protests-in-sikkim-against-sc-verdict-describing-sikkimese-as-nepali-immigrants-101675221070329.html>

remains unaware of the citizens of the country or rather gets manipulated by a group of powerful influential people. So, instances like these are a constant reminder to the Indian Nepalis that they are seen as a foreigner in their own homeland. Though the Sikkimese Nepali do not wholly associate with the notion of Gorkha the way Nepalis living elsewhere in India do, it does spark a sentiment and pushes for an association with the Gorkha community as it has become symbolic of the Indian Nepalis. Gorkha identity remains a dominant nomenclature of the Nepalis though not always a sought-after identity.

The factor that needs consideration is that Nepali Gorkha identity like any other identity is a complex identity. There are various process involved in it like disintegration, integration and reintegration. Dhamala has argued that Nepalis who migrated to India ignored the primacy of caste identity and integrated themselves to form a larger Nepali identity subsuming Newari, Rai, Limbu, Tamang and other such identities but since the 1990s one finds a revivalism of ethnic identities. In the identity formation process of Indian Nepalis, Dhamala has argued that in Sikkim and Darjeeling there is an integration of disparate ethnic groups and the emergence of a unified identity as a community despite the variation in language, customs and cultural practices. But people have now become wary of their ethnic identity and the ethnic awakening has perhaps led them to understand that subscribing to a larger nomenclature like Gorkha would be a sweeping generalisation in the case of Sikkim and partially in Darjeeling hills. Another important factor, that the Nepalis in Sikkim would not accept is that they have migrated because portions of Sikkim, were earlier part of Nepal so various people have come with the land. As much as Sikkim remains an ally to the idea of Gorkhaland and its formation, the ethnic associations of Sikkim would wish otherwise and the tag of a Sikkimese holds very dear to the people of Sikkim, as Sikkim became a part of India only post 1975. After the Supreme Court verdict of calling Nepalis of Sikkim as foreigners, the entire populace of Sikkim was shaken to the core and was out on the streets protesting against the same. It is a recorded fact that Sikkim had thirty thousand Nepali population as early as 1890 and it is to be understood that there has been a great population explosion. So the policy of the British to encourage the Nepali settlements could be read as one of the reasons behind the Nepali settlement in the Northeast. Likewise, generalising can lead to grave disharmony among the people, for the fear of being overridden and loss of one's ethnicity. It is to be considered that the Mongoldai session of Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1979, which had marked all Nepalis as Ahomiyas caused more damage than it was perceived. This further led to the All

Assam Students' Union Movement to drive away 'foreigners' and affected the fellow-feeling between the Assamese and the Nepalis. Thus, it becomes important to recognise people and their identities as a chosen one and not a forced one. Dhamala somewhere suggests that Nepalis living in India are consolidated for political mobilisation, which cannot be denied in entirety. But, what must also be acknowledged is that India being a pluralistic country, should not find it difficult to accept Indian Nepalis as their citizens. In 1917, the Hillmen Association came into being and petitioned for the administrative separation of Darjeeling, a demand which was repeated in 1928 and 1942. In 1928 the Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League was formed in Dehradun. The formation of these organisations spread political awareness along with identity and cultural exploration. But, what one must understand is that creating a nomenclature outside of one's identity to be heard or recognised hasn't sufficed or rather created a sense of insecurity among fellow citizens. On the other hand, Swatahsiddha Sarkar argues that the demand of the Gorkhaland lies in different factors like language, citizenship issues, tribal status, sixth schedule status, abrogation of Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty, etc., but Gorkhas have strayed away from the West Bengal state and its power because of ethnic diversity and Sarkar holds British for creating this sense of difference. Sarkar argues the British had left Darjeeling by successfully invoking the idea into the minds of the hill people that Darjeeling has been a segregated tract from the mainstream of Bengal. (Sarkar 7- 8) Various arguments like the ones stated above need to be examined while studying the demand for a home, called Gorkhaland.

The demand for the inclusion of the Nepali language in the 8th schedule of the constitution of India was one of the most prominent issues raised by the Indian Nepali community. When the Nepali language was recognised in the 8th schedule of the Indian constitution, it would automatically imply that Nepalis are bona-fide Indian citizens. But, somewhere the onus lies on the government as well as the Indian Nepali community in failing to be identified as Indians. One of the primary reasons for the Nepalis demanding a state based on their identity can perhaps be linked to the frequent reference made to Nepal while referring to Indian Nepalis. Dhamala pushes this argument further by stating that calling someone an encroacher, immigrant, or foreigner dampens the psyche of the community, which cannot be denied. However, what must not be overlooked is creating a nomenclature like Gorkha and Gorkhaland, though a necessity for recognition would further create confusion and dilute the larger issue of identity. The language of Indian Nepalis is recognised by the

constitution as 'Nepali' and people are identified as Nepalis/Nepalese, the problem is not able to identify their geographical location and their nationality. Dhamala has argued that it is quite common to see that other Indians are living with multiple identities without any visible problem, but in the case of Indian Nepali, this confusion exists because there are Nepalis in Nepal and Nepalese in India. (Dhamala 172) Dhamala furthers her argument by stating that it is so ingrained in the minds of both policymakers and the rest of the population that one wonders if even the former is aware of the ethnic composition and history of Nepal. Whereas he tends to overlook the fact that necessitating the need to use a term like Gorkha and identifying with it garners fear among the ethnic minorities. The home for the hillmen/Gorkhas/ethnic communities speaking Nepali cannot be denied and remains a pertinent demand but the nomenclature has always been a matter of contestation. A.C Sinha has mentioned that efforts are made for a nomenclature which is more adequate, precise and unambiguous for the understanding of the Nepali community. Subba states that terms like Bhargoli and Bharpali were suggested but it failed to capture the imagination of the Indian Nepali community. (Subba 62) Sinha cites how there was a 'crisis of nomenclature' among the academic community on April 21 2006, at Chintan Bhawan, Gangtok (Sinha 14) during a conference which was addressing these issues. It is mentioned that the community is emotionally and politically divided on the issue. The sentiments associated with Gorkha or Nepali are very strong and Sinha furthers it by saying that there are strong exponents of the term 'Nepali' across India and elsewhere and there are equally strong supporters of 'Gorkha' especially in the Darjeeling hills. (Sinha 14) He mentions that the issue regarding the nomenclature is a sensitive issue, that during the conference a senior academician became emotive and left the panel discussion after signing an affidavit stating that he was neither a Nepali nor a Gorkha. Further, it has to be understood Gorkha is a term initially referred to or was used for the Gorkha regiment deployed under the British and it becomes difficult for the progenies of Indian Nepalis to develop a consensus on the nomenclature. Gorkha is also associated with the Gorkha Kingdom of the Shah Dynasty, subjects of the Gorkha Kingdom, followers of Baba Gorakhnath and lastly the watchmen in the Indian metropolis are called Gorkhas. What must be taken into consideration is that these nomenclatures have polarized the community into two opposite and even somewhat hostile camps argues Sinha. (Sinha 15) There is no denying by the scholars of repute among Indian Nepalis that the term 'Nepali' has problems on account of the similarity between the Nepalis in India, Bhutan and Nepal. But, what we fail to

consider owing to issues with the similarity of language is that like Nepali, there are Bengali and Punjabi spoken across the border and there has been no need to enter into a compromising situation. The Bengalis of both East and West Bengal use the same language but the identity and nationality of the people aren't compromised. There could be political distancing but what must be understood is that the cultural bond cannot be severed. Many Indian Nepalis believe that they must stress their separation from Nepali to be accepted as a part of the Indian nation.

The nomenclature to include everyone under the umbrella term of Gorkha is sought after by the politicians. But, is the nomenclature justified and uniform if all the Indian Nepalis do not associate with it? Is the terminology Gorkha misunderstood or does it represent something more than the sought meaning? Sinha argues that 'Gorkha' is strongly projected by the people of Darjeeling and a regional party called Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). (Sinha 15) However, Gorkha as a terminology fails to address the issue of identity therefore, there have been many disagreements on the usage of the term. Pravesh Jung Golay argues that identities are needed by an individual so that he can be made sense of by other individuals. (Golay 49) A very complex form of argument Golay uses to understand the issue of identity and argues that identity categories are not merely needed by some individuals to make sense of some other individuals or the other but the individual himself needs them to make sense of himself in his situatedness, as happens in the quest of one's being. (Golay 53) He has used the concepts of 'category' and 'class' and thereby deduces how humans form their identity. He furthers his argument by stating that this sense of belonging to or the sense of being 'identifiable with' is of fundamental importance, since as a 'being of the world' and therefore, due to its sense of 'being-with' it is forced to abhor alienation from the world where it co-exists with the awareness of its existence in its situatedness. (Golay 53) This implies that the ethnic affiliation of an individual when distanced by using the larger category of Gorkha affiliation tends to dilute the status of 'being in the world.' It is an implied understanding that Gorkha as a term perhaps erases the historicity of an ethnic community and somewhere of the self too and misplaces them. As a '*being of the world*' an individual is already placed in a context. Thus, the awareness of an individual towards his *situatedness* is regulated by the individual's ability to be aware of the two fundamental epistemic categories, namely space and time, of prime importance being the category of 'time' which is to say that as 'being of the world', the individual is 'historical' by its very nature.

(Golay 54) The reference to time here Golay states is the sense of phenomenological time, that is the experience in terms of facts and events where the individual relates himself to his own situatedness and the 'given'. Thus, the larger Gorkha identity would perhaps hinder the ethnic identity and this would further lead to the loss of an anchor to situate himself. Golay weaves his argument with ingenuity and states that the Nepali youth of Darjeeling will find himself belonging to neither this nor that 'category' and 'class' in his authenticity and thereby totally lacking sense which leads to feelings of alienation and a crisis. Likewise, this feeling of alienation applies to the Nepali youth as well because they neither belong to the class of Nepalis from Nepal nor are they grounded in categories like Bengalis and therefore to make sense, they try to carve out their identity. A very interesting statement Golay makes in his argument is that identity cannot be established by incessant claiming and persistently hooking onto a 'category' or a 'class' by an individual until and unless the claim to 'belong to' is legitimately agreed upon a) by other beings of the world, in this case, the other Indian citizens and b) by others or other subjects in whose spectra of experiences the individual appears as an object. (Golay 55)

The larger Nepali identity also suffers from not being recognised because the individual's sense of 'belonging to' has to be recognised from without, that is by others outside of him. The very notion of searching for an identity by a Nepali youth is attached to alienation, a better economy, an identity of the self, etc. But, if the identity is asserted and if it is not given any due importance, then the point of assertion becomes futile. Another facet of this argument is that though the individual's situatedness and historicity give him meaning, it is important to recognise that the given is not constant and unchanging as the world is constantly changing and the individual's identity remains in flux. This argument by Golay could perhaps be read as identities being fluid but the Indian Nepalis are perhaps aspiring for a fixed sense of identity in the Indian nation-state. Golay mentions how the need to associate with a certain identity pushes people to look out for narrower and microscopic categories which are well-defined and less hazy and vaguer to serve as a well-defined '*given*' *prima facie* so that the individuals can be made sense of. Golay further adds that this approach would not be able to solve the crisis and would further create a new brand of problem for small ethnic groups (Golay 57) which cannot be undermined, and asserting a nomenclature, which various groups do not associate is equally worrisome. Golay adds that the individuals are anchoring their situatedness in small ethnic classes like Tamang,

Rai, Limbu, Newar, etc and this according to Golay is a desperate move for authenticating one's being and thereby opening up the possibility of being made sense of. To derive some sense of relief, which Golay has termed as 'pseudo-relief' to the crisis they are too small to be notified by others and do not solve the problem of wanting to belong to a certain category. This further makes it a miniscule identity and as Golay has stated earlier it would be difficult to identify the 'given' and 'historicity' and the 'belonging to' to be recognised from outside becomes difficult. However, his arguments still leave room for interpretation as to what could perhaps be a larger identity their 'belonging to' which can be asserted by other beings of the world. Another scholar Bidhan Golay who has tried to open up the issue of Gorkha identity states that identity issue is a by-product of newer forms of micro politics which have secured moral legitimation, marking a distinctive shift towards the fragmentation of the cultural landscape as argued with the help of Stuart Hall. It is understandable that the world at large is moving towards greater integration post-globalisation, and as Golay argues stoked by the continual movement of people and their cultural baggage across the boundaries of nation-states, and breaking the need to conform to the demands and logic of the nation-state. But, this sense of non-belongingness cannot be achieved as long as the need to associate with a nation and nationality continues. Therefore, the 'crisis of identity' increasingly affects the common individual with little to no exercise of power, cause that is the only factor that gives the 'individual a stable anchorage in the social world'. (Golay 24) Golay has discussed the emergence and formation of the Gorkha¹²⁰/Nepali identity in India spanning a period of over two hundred years and its continuing crisis. He has argued that the Gorkha identity is inscribed on the body of the individual Gorkha by a colonial discourse. At a larger level, he argues that this identity needs to be deconstructed and questioned, which then brings us to the relevant question pertaining to the chapter. Has the Gorkha identity therefore served the notion of Gorkha *jati* in relation to the nation-state? Have we consciously chosen the terminology Gorkha to situate our 'given' or a sense of belonging in order to be identified as a community, or are we pushed to choose one nomenclature, in order to understand our identity? There is no denying the fact

¹²⁰ The word 'Gorkha' comes from the small principality (now a district) in Nepal by the same name. The kingdom of Gorkha was established by Drabya Shah in 1559. It is located 40 miles west of Kathmandu. The names `

'Gorkha' and 'Nepali' are used interchangeably in India although political movements at different times have favoured the use of the word Gorkha over Nepali in order to differentiate between the citizens of Nepal and India. T B Subba has devised an ingenious way of differentiating them. He spells the citizens of Nepal as "Nepalese", and the Nepali-speaking Indians as "Nepalis".

that Indian Nepalis have time and again faced inadvertent treatment at the hands of fellow citizens giving rise to sub-regionalism as the government has also failed to treat the minority communities on an equal basis with other majority communities. (Golay 25) The fact that Indian Nepalis are tagged as immigrants and foreigners constantly puts them at the helm of being landless and homeless.

Various pieces of literature depicting a search for a home as mentioned earlier by Lama have been written about the need to associate and to call a place, home. Likewise, *Phoolange* by Lekhnath Chhetri translated as *Fruits of the Barren Tree* by Anurag Basnet and *Faatsung* by Chuden Kabimo translated as *Song of the Soil* by Ajit Baral are some very recent novels which deal with the issue of home, issue of Gorkhaland and the effects of the revolution on the common people in the search of a home, which has ended as a political gizmo multiple times failing the common masses, who believed in the rhetoric of Gorkhaland.

Fruits of the Barren Tree is a story set in Relling, a small village near Darjeeling. The story revolves around Basnet, his wife and their son Jhuppay who is involved in politics and deeply in love with Nimma. The initial chapters trace the trajectory of Basnet's struggle to farm a piece of land, the everydayness of a common man living in a village. The light-hearted tone of the novel suddenly shifts as the agitation spreads through the villages, and how every villager gets affected by it. The movement/revolution divides them into two parties leaving them with more hatred and enmity between each other. The quest for statehood remains as elusive as it was at the beginning of the novel. The story of a common man being pawned at the hands of political leaders and their quest ending in nothingness is described in the novel. How the revolution throws the lives of common people into disarray, how deaths of a common man remain limited to mere statistics, and the loss of property, and bandhs and shut-downs further spiralling down the little progress the hills make over the years.

Likewise, Chuden Kabimo's novel *Song of the Soil* opens up in Kalimpong with the jarring news of Ripden's death caused by a landslide. As the story unfolds it also opens up the assertion of an identity of a minority ethnic group who feel have been alienated by the upper caste for the longest time. Education is seen as a means to bring about change, but in the meantime, the agitation takes place and the lives of little boys like Norden, and Nasim are derailed pushing them to form a generation without a direction. It opens up the story of revolution and how a common man like Norden, dives headlong into it hoping for a better tomorrow. Told

through flashbacks, *Song of the Soil* explores what it means to be deeply in love with one's homeland alongside chronicling friendships sealed through shared experiences of deprivation at multiple levels but filled with youthful adventures and explorations. The novel ends with the revolution losing its steam and Gorkhaland remaining an elusive dream, derailing their life.

At the outset, it must be stated that this research tries to examine the idea of Gorkhaland but in no way intends to speak against the need for a home to associate, but is trying to situate the notion of Gorkha with the help of various researchers. The need to have a pronounced identity for the Indian Nepalis arose mainly because a) The Indian nation and its leaders have confused their identity at multiple points causing them insecurity and homelessness at home. b) As Bidhan Golay has argued taking cues from Dipesh Chakrabarty the problem of identity is the problem of modernity because it necessitates the modern subjects to organise themselves around the normative idea of nation. So, not having something to identify as home/ nation-state, the Indian Nepalis have tried to thrust their identity in every possible way.

Therefore, the sense of marginalisation, the sense of being pushed to an image of an outsider and living in the margins of the nation has also made them feel oppressed and dispossessed, and the need to fight for a home, that they would like to imagine as Gorkhaland. But, what the people have missed out on is that identities are as much self-constructed as it is constructed by the other. In that sense there appears a fundamental difference in the manner in which the Gorkha identity or the Gorkha '*jati*' is imagined by the 'self', and the way the Gorkha identity is conceptualised in the metropolitan as well as in the 'mainstream' Indian academic discourses. (Golay 75) For the longest time, the Gorkha *jati*, as they want to be identified, have had no access to education, so most of their history remains in oral form and equally based on hearsay myths and anecdotes for the lack of record. To cite from the novel, *Phoolange*, translated as *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, there is a constant reference to the need for acquiring education. Basnet says, "Learn the alphabet and become someone who tells his own story." (Chhetri 25) This is indicative of the fact that the voices of Indian Nepalis who identify themselves as Gorkhas have never existed. Education here is seen as a weapon for asserting their identity, therefore, the assertion or wanting to assert their identity can be equated with acquiring a voice. This has a sense of awakening which can be seen from the point of subaltern. As Gayatri Spivak has argued in the

context of colonial production if the subaltern has no history and cannot speak...” (Spivak 28) A similar instance can be found when the grandfather suggests that he acquire an education, meaning that Indian Nepalis must use the education to tell their story themselves. If the Indian Nepalis who identify as Gorkhas trace their history it would perhaps bring to light that the Gorkhas were historically subjected to the orientalist gaze. Their narratives revolve around the idea of the Gorkhas as an exclusive ethnic group juxtaposed with the liberal nationalist imagination of the Indian nation. (Golay 75) As Golay would put it Gorkhas are colonial constructs and have never been questioned.

Though oral histories are as important, what one must realise is that it is based on memory and memories are selective as well as elusive. Another reason, for the Indian Nepalis’ sense of weakened access to history is because of the constant reference to Nepal as the unfailing home by various authors from India. There is no denying the fact that Nepalis have migrated but migration was encouraged by feeding the oppressed and brutalized people with stories like, *chiya ko bot maa paisa falchha*, meaning money grows on tea bushes argues Golay. (Golay 37) What must be also taken into consideration is that migration is a painful experience, a tragic event in the lives of most people though it is not comparable to what partition did, but something close, because people migrated in search or hope of a better life only to reach a point of no return and nothing to call a home. Golay furthers this argument by saying that the Nepalese did migrate to Munger (the land of the Mughals), and their numbers kept increasing with the possibilities of starting tea and cinchona plantations in Darjeeling and they are constantly targeted based on that. (Golay 37) The historians have failed to take cognisance of the fact that the porous borders and fluid borders before 1947, i.e. the Indian independence all these countries like Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sikkim were constantly changing. Golay however rightly argues that the research about understanding the geopolitics and population was limited to the reports prepared by Dr. Campbell, who was the Superintendent of Darjeeling who records that most people had settled there chiefly by immigration from the neighbouring states of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. What this report did was, stressed immigration as a main cause for the population explosion in Darjeeling, but what gets overlooked is that there has been a history of human migration everywhere around this period. The arguments based on these reports create a sense of vacuum and void in the lives of Indian Nepalis, forever wanting to call a place their home and need for belongingness.

In the novel *Phoolange*, it can be seen that because of the lack of a home for Indian Nepalis within the Indian nation, they felt the need to associate with someplace. This vulnerability of innocent masses is taken as an opportunity by the political leaders to fulfil their political desires. Innocent people like Basnet are easily moved by speeches like “This country does not belong only to the rich. Your hard work and labour run the country. Your sweat runs it. You are the wheels and cogs of this country.” (Chhetri 57) Slogans like “Bengal is our graveyard.” (Chhetri 57) This could mean that association with Bengal would bring no fruition, and riding on such rhetoric, the common mass formed their opinion. To cite an instance from *Faatsung* influential people like Raju sir who was involved with Gorkha Rashtriya Mukti Morcha (GORAMUMO), the Gorkha Liberation Front motivated his students with words like, “To die for Gorkhaland is a matter of great fortune.” (Kabimo 45) Slogans like these got passed from generation to generation without really questioning the leaders at the helm of various parties. These influential catchphrases instilled a sense of responsibility in the minds of young kids like Norden. He blurts, “We are ready to give up our lives for our land.” (Kabimo 46) The above line is a testament to the fact that every person in Darjeeling Hills is raised and formed their notions around their elusive home. These slogans dictated the politics of the region for generations. Succeeding generations cast their vote on the influence of its revolutionary sentiment. The hollow rhetoric used by the political leaders did not ever fructify into statehood but as Chhetri put it, “was used as a currency to build bungalows on picturesque mountainsides.” (Chhetri 58)

The people of the hills got fragmented because of their affiliation to parties of their choice, which in the process further diluted the idea of home. Many people joined the revolution, hoping for Gorkhaland, a home they always aspired to have but too many lost their lives. To quote, “Houses belonging to the communists were identified and burned down. The ones who were opposing the movement. Basnetni reported this to her husband early in the morning.” (Chhetri 61) instances like these further go to reinstate that revolution was a forced one rather than a chosen one. “You are with us for the sake of our *jaati*. And if you are not with us, then you are with those trying to derail our uprising.” (Chhetri 63) People were ready to kill each other even if he was a Nepali Indian, if he/she did not identify with the cause of Gorkhaland. There was no space for rethinking and questioning the idea of Gorkhaland as a home. A narrative from *Phoolange* where Chhyatar makes a speech stating, “If anyone does anything against the Gorkha *jaati*, this is what will happen to them” (Chhetri 63) with

reference to beheading a person who went against and questioned the movement. Likewise in *Faatsung*, it can be seen from one such incident, “GORAMUMO was getting stronger in the hills GORAMUMO, the party which was demanding Gorkhaland. Therefore, whoever was not part of GORAMUMO was someone who did not want Gorkhaland...and to be a leftist was to be someone who was actively opposed to Gorkhaland. Because the CPI(M) was the ruling party in government.” (Kabimo 50) The above lines are a testimony to the fact that the revolutionaries were swayed by the rhetoric of home, without understanding their political leader’s agendas. The revolutionaries are believed to go from villages to villages threatening people and creating a sense of fear. The thought of dissenting revolted the revolutionaries, therefore it can be understood that the fight for a home was based on the fear mechanism exercised by the leaders among the people. A sense of hatred was spread among the people who dared to dissent. Instances like,

“ After he tasted his own blood, RC swore never to do anything that would go against the wishes of jaati-the Gorkha community to which he belonged. ‘Even if we get a separate state of Gorkhaland, the poor in our society will not become rich and the rich will not become poor. The problem of class, caste and oppression will not vanish.’ This is what Matrika would constantly say. ... ‘Once we get a separate state, we will do whatever needs doing. But this one from our own jaati, is becoming an enemy of the movement. We have no choice but to take six inches off him.’ ” (Chhetri 65)

This excerpt from the novel is a reminder of how disillusioned a common man is concerning Gorkhaland. A home or a territory to associate with is very important, but not realising what it takes to form one and getting swayed by the larger rhetoric of Gorkha identity stands problematic. The fight for home was a fight without any strategy or plan, because statements like “*Gorkhaland ma sungur le pani nuniya chamal khanu paucha*”¹²¹ (Kabimo 131) by leaders like Subash Ghissing is a stark reminder of how disillusioned the leaders were who led the mechanism of state formation. Remarks like “Revolutionaries must be like matchsticks. Always walking with gunpowder inside their heads, always ready to explode.” (Kabimo 63) Words like these were used to give impetus to push people to participate in the revolution. NB-Sir’s words, “You should not hesitate even if it means sacrificing your life...Jai Gorkha.” (Kabimo 62) is a reminder used in

¹²¹ This is a referential statement with regard to how prosperous the state of Gorkhaland would be.

the camps during the revolution to create a sense of patriotism and oneness for Gorkhaland. The dream of a separate homeland which is self-sufficient and prosperous is fed to the common man, who is constantly living in fear because there is a history of how the Nepalis settled in the Northeast have been chased. It serves as a warning bell, which constantly makes them apprehensive. Another factor which works in the favour of the leader is the poverty and uneducated masses in the hills. There are various issues like water crisis, unemployment, poor health services, and accessibility which have plagued the hills for many decades, but this is never used as a driving force to motivate people to join the revolution, instead, they state that everything will come once the state is formed, not even considering the prerequisites for the state formation. As Kabimo has mentioned in his interview taken for this research, leaders have overlooked various issues associated with the people, that they claim to have launched a fight for. He says,

“हामीले जुन पहिचानको निम्ति लडाई गरिरहेका छौं। त्यसमा आक्रोश छ। आवेग छ। भावना छ। तर, विचार एकदमै शून्य जस्तै छ। हामी गोर्खाको कुरा त गछौं, तर, यसको जराको कुरा गर्न बिसिन्छौं। गोर्खा भनेको के हो ? के गोर्खा भन्नसाथ हामीले यसभित्र रहेका साना साना जात गोष्ठीहरूको अनुहार बिसिदिए हुने हो ? त्यसभित्र रहेका जनजाति, दलित, महीला सबैले आफ्नो पहिचान चै बिसिदिनुपर्ने हो ? कि ती सबैले आफ्नो अनुहार बोकेर आउनुपर्ने हो ? यो प्रश्न सबै भन्दा ठुलो छ। सांस्कृतिक रूपमा हेर्नु हो भने गोर्खाले हरेक जात गोष्ठीलाई जोडेर मजबुत बनाइनुपर्ने हो। तर, हामीलाई राजनीतिले गोर्खा भनेर नारा त दियो। तर, त्यो नारा कसरी मजबुत बनाइनुपर्ने हो, त्यो सिकाइएन। राजनीतिको प्रभावदेखि बाहिर रहन नसकेको हाम्रो समाज र साहित्यले पनि उही बाटो हिंडिदियो। जसले गर्दा हामीले आफ्नो जरा होइन, हाँगाको नारा लगाउनुमा नै समय खर्चिरह्यौं। हाँगालाई हरियो देख्न चाहनेले जरा बलियो बनाउनुपर्ने होइन र ? यसमाथि खासै काम हुन सकेन। अब यस्तो स्थितिबीच हुर्किएको समाजले जातीय विभेदको सवाल, लिङ्गीय पहिचान र वर्ग समस्यालाई सधैं ढाकछोप नै त गरिरहने हो। यसबारे बहस हुन अबको जरूरत हो कि ?”

(Kabimo 7)

Which is translated as, “Yes! There is anger in the fight that we are waging, there is influence, and emotional attachment but very little thought process. We talk about Gorkha but forget its roots and origins. What is Gorkha? Does calling oneself Gorkha mean that smaller identities within the group can be overlooked? Does it mean the tribal people, Dalits and women must forget their identity in the face of being called a Gorkha? Or

should all of these groups carry their own identity of their own? This is the biggest question which needs to be answered. If you have to perceive Gorkha culturally it should be able to encompass everybody and make them stronger, but it remains limited to political sloganeering, we have not learnt how to make it stronger. Because our society is not bereft of political influence, our society as well as literature also chose a similar pathway. Due to that, we forgot our roots but stuck only to our branches and wasted our time. If one wants to see the branches green, then the root must be watered and made stronger, is it not? No work has been done to focus on this. Therefore, the society which grew amidst these scenarios cannot focus on caste and community discrimination, gender identity and class issues but constantly sweeps them under the carpet. Maybe it is time now we start discussing these?¹²² (Sharma, 8)

Therefore, the movement suffers from numerous ailments and must be addressed accordingly. Likewise, Golay states that the recent engagements of the Gorkhas for statehood tend to explain that the fight for home stems from economic causes like relative deprivation within the state, internal colonialism within Bengal, their ethnic exclusivism and “separatism.” (Golay 27) But, what is not understood is that the nomenclature of Gorkha and Gorkhaland has certain political implications. Golay argues that the British Indian Army and the tea gardens while competing with each other completed the process of colonisation of the body of the “Gorkha”. Golay argues that Gorkha as an identity must be first questioned as it is the continuation of the discursive colonisation. (Golay 74) Therefore the need to understand the connotation attached to Gorkha must be thought and questioned or it becomes a matter of fight within the community that wants Gorkhaland. “The fight with an enemy will come to an end, you will either win or lose. But can a war against your own people ever end? You neither win nor lose. (Kabimo 101) This brings to light that the community termed as the Gorkha community is perhaps divided within themselves. As much as the demand for a separate state for the reasons cited above seems relevant, what is a more pressing issue is the fixation attached to the terms Gorkha and Gorkhaland. In *Faatsung* a character named Latshering says,

“It was about nomenclature. We all want a separate state. Where’s the harm in asking for a separate state called Darjeeling? After all, the name of every place in Darjeeling comes from the Lepcha language. The

¹²² This is a translation of the interview by Chuden Kabimo done by the author.

history of this place too is linked with the Lepchas...The Tibetans came and destroyed the written stories of the Lepchas. The Bhutanese came and killed the Lepcha king. The British came and wiped out our language. How many times do we Lepchas have to die? This is all we talked about. Kill me if you want.” (Kabimo 100)

Therefore, this is a stark reminder of the fact that the political leaders leading the cause of Gorkhaland are blinded and biased in their fight for the home. As Latshering suggested the problem of nomenclature has divided the movement into segments. Associating with the emotion of Gorkha and swearing by slogans like *“Sindoor ko tika ke tika? Mato ko tika raja tika, maato ko tika rani tika.”* (Chhetri 72) which is translated as the vermillion mark on the head, woman, that’s no good. What’s good, then? The mark of the land, that’s king; the call of the land that’s queen as translated by Anurag Basnett. These go on to state that the common mass was involved not just physically but emotionally as that was the only way of marking or demanding a separate home. Though the common man was involved deeply in the revolution, the common man was angry, their everydayness was different from that of their leader Subash Ghising. A character named Khatri, who was mad would stand on the road and give angry speeches like, *“Gorkhaland is inside Jyoti Basu’s asshole...”* which is a testimony to the fact that their leaders who marched for Gorkhaland had selfish desires to be fulfilled. A flurry of civil society organisations like the Nepali Sahitya Sammelan (1924), Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sammelan (1932), Sri Hitkari Sammelan (1945), Himalaya Kala Mandir (1950) and many others emerged which were actively involved in redefining and creating a new self-identity based on the idea of kinship - Nepali *daju bhai* argues Golay. (Golay 84) Therefore, uniting them based on kinship and brotherhood had always been a factor in influencing and motivating the people to fight for the Gorkha homeland, not knowing what exactly it entailed. The destruction the revolution brought was unsought for. A scene that describes the felling of trees in the novel,

“ ‘Please don’t cut down these trees, they are the village’s property. This destruction will harm us, not the government. We support the movement but not vandalism. Whatever harm you want to, do it in your village,’ Said Prem sir.”(Chhetri 80)

The response to this was,

“Why are those bastards of Bhirgaon acting smart? Chhyatar paused for a long long time and thundered. ‘These rivers are ours; these trees are ours. Who is the owner of all this greenery? Shouldn’t we show the government who is the boss? This is our place; this is our property; and we don’t get to use what’s ours? The trees will grow back. What we need is a land we can call our own.’”(Chhetri 80)

This sense of aggressiveness and blind approach towards achieving a homeland, an identity, for a common man is a dangerous sign. It can be understood that the common man here has been used as an object to fulfil the political desires of the leaders. Time and again the reference to how education was inaccessible to the poor populace of Darjeeling stands as an indication of the fact that the idea of home/Gorkha identity was an imposed identity. This is not to state that the fight for a homeland/Gorkha identity is a trivial issue but a construct of colonialism was followed blindly, maybe for the lack or want of a better nomenclature. Shrijana Rai in her dissertation titled *Dynamics Of Gorkha Identity In The Selected Fictions Of Indra Bahadur Rai And Manohar Thapa* argues that after the independence of India when the State Reorganization Act came in 1956, many states were formed on the basis of language and some minority linguistic communities were ignored and states that the Gorkhas were one such community. The need to protect the identity of the Gorkhas in India pushed them to propose Gorkhaland for Gorkhas, as they argued it would provide the basic form of identity. But, what most researchers fail to recognise is Nepali as a language was recognised by the constitution and twisting it and asking for a home called Gorkhaland and calling oneself Gorkha is a failure on the part of our leaders and how our perception of the self has been twisted to suit the design of the political leaders.

C.K. Shrestha in his book *Gorkhas’ Quest for an Indian Identity* states that “A Gorkha state in India is absolutely necessary to establish the Indian National Identity of more than 12.5 million Gorkhas spread all over India. Without having a state in India our national identity is always misconceived and mis-constructed. Because of this aberration in perception, Gorkhas in India are constantly put under the scanner and humiliated as outsiders, immigrants, infiltrators and even foreigners. This humiliation is nothing less than carrying a millstone around the neck which obviously reduces the pace of our overall progress. (Shrestha 19) There is no denying the consequences and humiliation that attach to a huge populace and a sense of never belonging to a nation while being identified as a foreigner. But, the notion of a state being home, also entails that an Indian

Nepali from anywhere would be allowed to own a property or claim his roots in Gorkhaland, further opening up issues which the political leaders seemingly have overlooked. Golay adds that the problem of the Gorkha identity arises from everyday experiences and the necessity to carve out a political space for its cultural identity in India. It must also be acknowledged that the everyday experience of Indian Nepalis/Sikkimese/Manipuris or Nagas/Mizos and anyone from the northeast is somewhere at the helm of being overlooked around the larger identity of the Indian nation. But, what one must be wary of, while asserting these identities is the sense of awareness and implication a certain nomenclature would bear. Somewhere the identity of Indian Nepalis while associating with the Gorkha terminology would mean an acceptance to the colonial inscription of a term. Golay has argued that the Gorkha identity has claimed its legitimacy by citing its contribution to the anti-colonial struggles and how the brave Gorkha played an invincible role in protecting the nation's frontiers. But, what must be understood is that Gorkha as an identity is a colonial construct inscribed on their body. No doubt it speaks about the valour and indomitable spirit of the Gorkhas but it would only serve well if the people associating with the Gorkha identity would understand the context it was used. As Golay argues the decision to recruit the "Gurkhas" in the political requirements of the colonial state was that it would be cheaper to dominate the world if the natives could be induced to shoulder much of the Whiteman's military burden. (Golay 29) The notion of bravery was appropriated by the colonialists and thus the narrative of the *Bir*¹²³ Gorkha's discourse of "martial race" was created. Golay furthers his argument by stating that colonialism violently disrupted the social-conceptual world of the Gorkhas, taking away his freedom by permanently colonising his body. And in 1864 when the British government issued a charter providing for the Gorkha Regiment to buy land for settlement stations at Dharamsala, Dehradun, Almora, Gorakhpur, Shillong, etc they started settling in these places. But, Darjeeling's association with Gorkha wouldn't remain limited to the army recruits but rather the cultural identity, language, and distinct food of the Indian Nepalis or much rather the hill community bound by the Nepali language. This sense of awareness of self and the need to be identified as different from the rest of the population of Bengal states that the process of Gorkha identity formation was the product of the cultural renaissance in Darjeeling as argued by Golay. However, this process of formation of a strong cultural identity in the shape of Nepali identity was again unsettled as it was relocated within the matrix

¹²³ Bir means brave in Nepali.

of the national culture and identity of the Indian nation argues Golay. Therefore, while the assertion of identity is a required norm of the modern state and the need to associate is important, what becomes problematic is the nomenclature of Gorkha. As discussed earlier the Gorkha title is very closely linked to the Gurkhas who were first appointed from Nepal, but the Indian-Nepalis identifying as Gorkhas wouldn't associate with the same, or should not associate in totality, thereby severing any historical link with Nepal other than a part of population who migrated to *Munglan*¹²⁴ in search of better opportunities. People migrated in the hope of '*suna ko lingo, chandi ko ping, ek jieu khana launa lai thikai chha Darjeeling*', (Golay 82) meaning Darjeeling will take care of me and my body and Darjeeling is enough for a man's survival but there are uncertainties involved in migration which has been overlooked. It can also be read through *Phoolange* that the people remained unaffected by things like independence of the country. It states, "Though news about the country's independence had reached the village one way or another, many still didn't know which country they were citizens of. People looked at one another to guess their respective citizenships. Hardship had turned all of their faces a uniform shade of sunburnt brown. (Chhetri 114) This speaks of the inability of a common man to master the happenings of a nation cause the porous borders had no regulations with regard to people. The Indian independence had very little influence on the common mass of Darjeeling and it refers to how after three decades of Indian politics Ghissing had launched himself as a political figure. Remarks like, "You are either with your *jaati* or you are with them. It is up to you to choose between the two." (Chhetri 118) Statements like, "This place belongs to the Gorkhas. Only the party that fights for the Gorkhas should be allowed here. And those who stand against us, we will not allow space even to dig their graveyard." (Chhetri 118) This sense of Gorkha identity, fighting for the *jaati* somewhere trivialises the idea of democracy and makes enemies of your own people. Moreover, demanding a Gorkhaland would be like demanding a Bodoland, it would be limiting in the sense it would represent only a particular community and cause the same sense of homelessness among the minority communities which Indian Nepalis are claiming. The novel at the very end records, "The unfortunate thing was that the movement had divided the tea garden and the village into two opposing camps. The Communist Party of India [(Marxist) CPI(M)] or the Red Party controlled the tea garden, while the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) or the Green Party controlled the village. (Chhetri 163) This shows how the

¹²⁴ Reference to India being the Land of Mughals.

revolution or movement to fight for home, and identity with the Indian nation-state led by the GNLF supremo Subash Ghising catered to limited areas like education, health and agriculture by agreeing to the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. The hopes and aspirations given to a common man were truncated at the bottom. It created more rivalry and the divisive politics divided the people further. More than twelve hundred lost lives are recorded with no answers from the leaders they believed would deliver the promise of Gorkhaland, a home they fought without a thought because they believed it would be possible. The leaders of Gorkhaland have time and again betrayed the people who have given their blood for the revolution, therefore, what needs to be understood is the larger strategy of the leader. This destructive politics of destroying governmental buildings is also a reminder that the leaders are doing a disservice by instigating people to wage a war, where people are losing their personal as well as public property. The very little history that the place holds would be erased if the revolutions were not waged in the right manner. To cite an instance from the novel, which sums up the entire revolution in two lines by an old man, "Only that creature which does not possess a stomach can be honest in politics...The sacrifices you are making for the revolution; these leaders are using those for their own political gains. Do you understand what I mean?" (Kabimo 180) The above lines resonate with the failure of so many revolutions in the name of Gorkhaland. Gorkhaland, perhaps remains indefinable because it remains limited to what the leader agrees to settle for, rather than a futuristic plan, where a common man's aspirations are not truncated. The people who lost their lives in the revolution are called martyrs, but what good has the martyrdom done? A common man possessed nothing but a desire. "A desire to see his own state being created before he died." (Kabimo 159)

Finally, there is a need to analyse the failure of the revolution so long drawn with no results and a need for awareness among the common people. The need to be objective rather than being swayed by the emotion of Gorkha, which if seen closely is a hollow dream. As Golay argues academic intellectuals must engage with the concept of Gorkha and the need to associate and dissociate with the terminology of Gorkha. What is important now is to engage with the canonical texts, reading them against their grain and unsettling the discourse states Golay. Fighting for a home called Darjeeling would rather be a viable option as that wouldn't distort the identity of Indian Nepalis and as Pravesh J. Golay has argued identity is not just self-assertion but also an acknowledgement of the self by the others. Lastly, a sense of consensus among the people residing in the hills

concerning the nomenclature is indisputable way in the demand for a state as no identity must sense a fear of being homeless and underrepresented in the search for a home. Subba has also been very pessimistic about the nomenclature and states that the replacement of the name from Nepali to Gorkha would not resolve the identity issue. (Subba 56) Therefore, the diversity within the Indian Nepalis must be acknowledged despite a fight for a state or these movements will be *phoolange* which is a rustic usage to mean trees that put out flowers which do not transform into fruit and seeds but waste away and fall off are '*phoolange*'. (Chhetri 188)

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Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the works of various Nepali writers to understand the prevalence of the caste system, the functionality of gender roles, issues of identity associated with the Nepali community of India and Nepal along with their fight for a homeland within the Indian nation-state. It might seem inconclusive in the way that it is not uniform or a linear area of research but what must be understood is that to understand this group of people who are largely identified as Nepali, it must be understood as a multi-ethnic group. To classify everyone speaking Nepali under one ethnic identity is to do away with their pluralistic nature. Therefore, this research strives to understand how a particular community who are identified as Nepali have constantly struggled with issues of identity within the Indian nation-state, their fight for a homeland, along with understanding their position of caste and gender roles.

The prejudiced attitude towards the Indian Nepalese continues even today. There could be various reasons behind this prejudice and one perhaps is as pointed out by T.B Subba that the protest towards the Indian Nepalis started when the indigenous people started realising the lack of resources with time. The other reason behind the same could be associated with the friendship treaty. The friendship treaty caused more damage than repaired the relationship between the people of the two countries. It created a sense of insecurity among the Indians as well as Nepalese citizens by giving access to their resources to people from another country and depriving its citizens of the same, often leading to growing hatred. However, migration as a phenomenon is very peculiar to the countries in the East which can be attributed to various factors like lebensraum, lack of production, or under the official sponsorship of the British. Following such policies, migration cannot be denied, however, people with a migration history of centuries cannot forever be termed as immigrants.

The need for a place to associate and to be identified as citizens of a country cannot be underestimated in the modern world. It is conclusively stated that there is a need for the Indian Nepalis to assert their identity as Indians under the nation-state instead of adopting various nomenclatures. It must be understood that the concept of nation-state as a Western concept which when applied directly to the pluralistic community like Nepalis

wouldn't justify their habitation and classification. In addition to this, the ongoing process of formulating a nomenclature even after thirty years and the questioning of the self is adding to more complexities and more differences of opinion. Rather, identity crisis can be resolved in two ways in a nation-state, one is the top-bottom approach, where the government of the state recognizes its citizens as one. Identity issues are very important but these need to be addressed from the centre and not always from the periphery. Two, when the self is aware of its position in the nation-state and must not allow it to be fluid, it would be easier to identify. The notion of Nepali identity must be challenged by the people who identify themselves as Nepalis as well as people who are grouped under the same. The Indianness of the self must be asserted first instead of harping on one's ethnicity, which would help one get rid of the tag of the foreigner or immigrant. In addition to this, the Friendship Treaty must be revised to suit the citizens and government of both the country and the porous borders that have existed for centuries must be manned to maintain a healthy relationship with an increasing need to associate with a certain nation-state. Lastly, the plurality of the East cannot be overlooked using the rigid lens of the West even though it is a necessity of the modern world one must consider the contiguous and open borders of the Eastern Himalayas.

Likewise, to deduce the issues around caste, it must be asserted that the caste practices of Nepali people inhabiting the Eastern Himalayas might not be as rigid as the caste practices of the Indian sub-continent, but it cannot be overlooked that caste is practised. It might not function linearly as all the communities which fall under the umbrella term of Nepali or who speak Nepali, have their caste hierarchy including the various ethnic sub-groups, though not akin to the traditional caste system. As discussed with the help of Höfer various ethnic sub-groups came together to form the country Nepal, but the assimilation of people also led to the appropriation of the people in the caste system because of which different communities internalised these practices according to their suitability. Höfer has concluded *Muluki Ain*, stating that caste "interferes" in marriage, inheritance, occupation; in the relationship between servant and master, between patient and healer, and between the individual and the State. There seems to be only one sphere of social life which is permanently "caste-free", namely trade and commerce as the material value of goods and services counts, and not the caste of the persons involved in the transaction. (Hofer 196) Likewise, one cannot deny or contest beyond a certain point that caste is effectively maintained within private spaces and much less in public spaces. South East Asian countries and

within that Indian as well as Nepali societies are fraught with the notion of purity and pollution, so unless the notion of purity and pollution are viewed without religious appendage, caste as a practice wouldn't change. The readings of the three texts could not state otherwise, except for a minuscule change that Chitrlekha portrays, but one must never lose sight of the fact that Chitrlekha held a powerful position in society. Also, it must be noted as Höfer states that members of the same caste (*jaat*) can possess varying amounts of purity and can be separated from each other by the refusal of commensality. (Hofer 197) Likewise, Kabimo's novel depicts that commensal spaces are still caste-marked and the notion of purity and pollution is associated with people's food habits. Further, the notion of purity does not remain limited to caste hierarchy but various socio-cultural practices among the upper caste who observe *Jhutho*¹²⁵/*Sutak* etc. which is a state of temporary personal state of impurity which are independent of caste hierarchy but is relevant in the present-day society. However, from the multiple overlapping notions of purity and pollution, it may be concluded, that defilements/impurities are varied and are individualised by different communities at different levels owing to which the caste as a practice cannot be done away with easily.

About gender issues, it must be considered that the theorization of the West cannot be applied blindly to the East as these concepts and notions of gender remain unquestioned and more so many hierarchical relations like that of *sasu-buhari* are maintained and stopped from questioning. Also, most socio-cultural values are seen as stemming from religion therefore questioning them holds a negative connotation attached to it. It can be stated that though the gendered dynamics within society have been mapped out these studies leave out questions of political and economic power as they focus on the symbolic aspects of gender. The entire socio-religious culture proves that a woman is viewed with a gendered lens in a domestic space in a Hindu Nepalese society. As Uma Bhandari has argued that a pure-virgin girl, a non-virgin un-married girl, an unmarried older woman, a barren married woman, a woman who has only daughters, a mother, a widow, and a prostitute, are valued differently. It must also be understood that the notion of individuality as practiced in the west varies from the way women are socialised in the East. Bhandari has stressed on the fact that women are trained to be

¹²⁵ *Jhuto* has various connotations. 1. Clean/undefiled. 2. Leftover food. 3. In case of some death it is considered *jhuto* for a year. 4. In case of child birth, *Jhuto/Sutak* is observed for thirteen days by the upper castes, but *Sutak* is observed by all communities including the Tibeto Burman but the term *Jhuto* is not used and *Nuwaran*/Naming ceremony is held according to their own community rules.

social, cultural, emotional, tolerant and habituated to please others. Further, the socio-religious and cultural practices have been shaped in such a way that women cannot fully put behind these practices despite their education and social mobility. This can be read in a contemporary novel like that of Prajwal Parajuly too, where one can see that not much has changed despite acquiring education by women. Various practices have religious connotations attached to them, making it impossible to question and stop practising the same. Also, taking into consideration the socio-cultural aspects, it is mostly the upper caste women, who are affected or limited within the frame of these practices because when we consider the ethnic groups, one cannot deny, that they are comparatively liberal.

The final chapter concludes that there is a need to analyse the failure of the revolution started in the name of Gorkhaland, as a revolution so long drawn with no results. Along with it, there is a need for awareness among the common people regarding their position and their struggle for a homeland. The need to be objective rather than being swayed by the emotion of Gorkha, which if seen closely is a hollow dream. This is not to deny that a state must be granted but to question if Gorkhaland would suffice or some other name would do justice. As Golay argues academic intellectuals must engage with the concept of Gorkha and the need to associate and dissociate with the terminology of Gorkha. What is important now is to engage with the canonical texts, reading them against their grain and unsettling the discourse states Golay. Fighting for a home called Darjeeling would rather be a viable option as that wouldn't distort the identity of Indian Nepalis and as Pravesh J. Golay has argued identity is not just self-assertion but also an acknowledgement of the self by others. Lastly, a sense of consensus among the people residing in the hills concerning the nomenclature is indisputable in the demand for a state as no identity must sense a fear of being underrepresented and homeless in the search for a home. Subba has also been very pessimistic about the nomenclature and states that the replacement of the name from Nepali to Gorkha would not resolve the identity issue. (Subba 56) Therefore, the diversity within the Indian Nepalis must be acknowledged despite a fight for a state or these movements will be *phoolange* which is a rustic usage to mean trees that put out flowers which do not transform into fruit and seeds but waste away and fall off are '*phoolange*'. (Chhetri 188)

Further, this research opens up new possibilities and areas of research within the Nepali literature by baring up threads of various aspects that can be studied in the future course of research. Caste as a practice has been studied as a whole in Nepali society but caste practices of different sub-ethnic groups if studied by dividing the sub-ethnic groups, would open a bigger dimension of research. Another area this research could not touch upon is the class issues of Nepali society. The class issues in Nepali society were limitedly tied to caste issues and not linked with class issues while looking at the larger Nepali population. But if one looks at the tea garden population (*Kamaan*) of Darjeeling it has various tales of economic deprivation which overlook the boundaries of caste, and it would be very interesting to examine. Likewise, this research could only look at gender position as a whole in Nepali society but Nepali society is a scattered society and if literature from a particular society is taken transgressing the genres it would open up various perspectives related to gender position present in Nepali society. Another area that this research could not touch is the comparative study of the representation in the literature as against the field view of the same, which would open and give a better perspective on caste practices and gender positions.

Lastly, it has been realised in the process of research that Nepali as a community is a transborder community and it must be understood that the existence of various cultures and traditions is highly influenced by the co-existence of various sub-ethnic communities. It cannot be denied that there is a sense of shared culture, values and traditions, but it does away with the ethos of their location, and its influence if the Nepali community is studied together. If the literature from Sikkim is analysed it could be limited to Sikkim alone and not clubbed with Darjeeling or Nepal as it then becomes very diverse and inconsistent to study considering various factors at the same time. It would be enriching to study the hill cultures and their literature in a limited space as various socio-cultural practices and socio-religious practices which might seem the same, when analysed in a particular location do not hold the same relevance.

The Eastern Himalaya has a highly varied topography and the people and the culture are affected by the same, which in turn would affect the literatures, so it has been revealed during the process of research that cross-referential study can happen but all the literature classified as Nepali literature do not have the uniformity to be studied as one.

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Annexure 1

Interview: Chuden Kabimo

Date: 12.02.2023

(Interview over email)

Chuden Kabimo, is an Indian Nepali language writer and journalist based in Kalimpong, India. His debut novel *1986*, a collection of short stories, won the Yuwa Puraskar¹²⁶ in 2018. His novel *Faatsung* was written in 2019 and was later translated into English as *Song of the Soil* by Ajit Baral. *Faatsung* was shortlisted for Madan Puraskar¹²⁷ and its translation *Song of the Soil* for the JCB¹²⁸ prize. His works are mostly centred around the issues of the Gorkhaland movement and also discuss caste issues parallelly.

Among the contemporary writers writing on Gorkhaland as well as the prevalence of the caste system in the Gorkha community/ Nepali community, Chuden has been very vocal about these issues and has garnered a lot of attention through his work. He has been very blunt in addressing issues pertaining to the hills and has not shied away from showing the real face of the movement. It was a pleasure to get in touch and he agreed to the interview within a very short period. It was under the suggestion of my supervisor, that I requested an interview to enrich the thesis which deals with the translation of his work, 'The Song of the Soil'. The translation of the interview was given for approval to the author and he has accepted it.

I will be using the following abbreviations. RS for Rachana Sharma and CK for Chuden Kabimo.

RS: George Bernard Shaw says, "If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then we

¹²⁶ Yuwa Puraskar (युवा पुरस्कार) relates to books published by an author of the age of 35 and below as of January 1st of the year of the award given by Sahitya Akademi.

¹²⁷ The Madan Puraskar (मदन पुरस्कार) is a literary honour in Nepal which Madan Puraskar Guthi confers annually for an outstanding book written in the Nepali Language published within the calendar year. It is considered the most prestigious literature award in Nepal.

¹²⁸ JCB Prize for Literature is an Indian literary award established in 2018.

will have two ideas.” And you constantly harp about this in your exchanges and interviews. Who are the authors who have influenced you and in what ways?

CK: निर्मल वर्माको एउटा भनाइ छ, ‘किताब त्यो रेलगाडी हो। जहाँ यात्री बनेर हजारौं पाठकहरु आउँछन्। लेखकको क्षमता यति हुनु जरुरी छ कि, कुनै पनि यात्रीले जक्सन पुग्न अघि नै चेन खिचेर उत्रिनु नपरोस्।’

हो। जुन किताबको यात्रा गर्दा बिचैमा छोडेर जानुपर्दैन, ती हरेक किताबका लेखक मेरा निम्ति प्रभावकारी हुन्। एन्टोन चेखवदेखि मेक्सिम गोर्कीसम्म, तेहेमिना दुरानीदेखि अमृता प्रितमसम्म, राजनारायण प्रधानदेखि रुपनारायण सिंहसम्म, वेन्यामिनदेखि पर्ल एस बर्गसम्म मलाई प्रभाव पार्ने लेखकहरु हुन्। आम मान्छेको कुरा होस् वा समाजले ढाकछोप गरेका मुद्दाहरुलाई होस्, सामान्य तरिकाले साहित्यमा उजागर गर्ने लेखकहरु मलाई धेरै मनपर्छन्।

Trans: There is a saying by Nirmal Verma, “Books are like a train, where many travellers come in the form of a reader. The author must have the ability to hold the author till the end of the journey without having to pull the chain to get down.”

Therefore, any book which does not push the reader to leave it halfway is an influencing author to me. From Anton Chekov to Maxim Gorky, from Tehmina Durrani to Amrita Pritam, from Raj Narayan Pradhan to Rup Narayan Sinha, from Benjamin to Pearl S. Buck, everyone has influenced my writing. I like the common man’s stories or things pushed under the carpet by society presented in the form of literature.

RS: What is your position on the caste issue in Nepali society, do you think we have progressed and has there been any reflection in the literature coming out of the hills, in your opinion?

CK: महाश्वेता देवीले भनेकी छिन्, ‘माथिबाट हेर्दा समाजको हरेक रूप ठिकठाक देखिन्छ। तर, जब नजिकबाट हेरिन्छ, त्यसपछि मात्रै हामी समाजको असली रूप देख्न सक्छौं। विभेद देख्न सक्छौं। असमानताहरु छुट्याउन सक्छौं।’ हो, यही कुरा भारतेली नेपाली समाजसँग पनि लागु हुन्छ। हामीबिच आज पनि जातीय विभेदका घटनाहरु झलाकझुलुक देखा परिरहेको छ। तथाकथित सानो जात भनिएकाहरुसँग अर्को जातकोले बिहे गरे, घेवा नै गरेर खाइदिने जस्ता घटनाहरु पनि घटिरहेका छन्। अन्तरजातीय बिहे गर्दा लाश छुट्टुन नदिएको, आफ्नै बाबा-आमा खस्दा किरियासम्म बस्न नदिएको घटनाहरु आज पनि हाम्रै वरिपरि भइरहेकै छ। तर, विडम्बना नेपाली साहित्यमा यी सब कुरा ठुलो मुद्दा बनेर आउन सकेको छैन। साहित्यमा यस्तो कुरा लेखे, मान्छे रिसाउने पो हुन् कि ?

यस्ता कुराहरु डिस्कोर्स नै बनिहाल्न जरूरी छैन, भन्ने लाइन समाएर साहित्य लेखिने कार्य भएकोले गर्दा पनि होला, नेपाली साहित्यमा छुटपुट बाहेक प्रभावकारी बनेर यस्ता कुराहरु अघि आउन सकिरहेको छैन।

Trans: Mahasweta Devi has said, “When seen from above, everything looks fine in the society but when seen closely, it is then we see the reality of our societies. The differences start to show up and inequalities can be differentiated.”

So, the same things can be applied to the Indian Nepali society. There are caste differences among us even today in passing. If people marry in the lowest caste, the funerals are conducted for their children, even today. Inter-caste marriage wouldn't allow the son/daughter/daughter-in-law are not allowed to participate in the funeral rites of their parents. These practices are relevant even today in our society but sadly Nepali literature has not been able to highlight these prominently. There is a feeling of fear of offending people's sentiments if one speaks about this in literature. The belief of not needing to start a caste discourse through literature among the writers perhaps is the reason behind no strong representation of caste issues in Nepali literature.

RS: You constantly talk about the identity issue of Nepalis in your novel, but we have all realised that the Gorkhaland issue has somehow not been able to do justice to the cause behind the movement. Can you talk about where we have faltered?

CK: फातसुङ पहिचानको मुद्दासँग जोडिएको आन्दोलनमाथि केन्द्रित रहेको उपन्यास भएकाले गर्दा मैले घरि घरि यो कुरा उठाउनु परेको हो। भारत जस्तो बृहत गणतान्त्रिक देशमा रहेको हरेक सानो समुदायको समस्या यो छ कि, उसले आफ्नो अस्तित्व बचाउँनकै निम्ति पनि अर्को शक्तिशाली जमातसँग सङ्घर्ष गर्नु परिरहेको छ। दार्जिलिङमा चर्किएको गोर्खाल्यान्डको आन्दोलन पनि त्यही सङ्घर्षको एउटा उदहारण हो। जो सफल हुन सकेन। यसको कारण धेरैवटा हुनसक्छ। जसमा पहिलो कारण एकल नेतृत्वको राजनीति हावी हुनु पनि हो। जसलाई सरकारले पहिले दबाउने कोशिस गर्छ। नसके सहजै किनीहाल्छ। अर्को कारण हामी अझै पनि आवेगमा नै धेरै दगुरिरहेका हुन्छौं। आवेगमा कोही दगुर्न त सक्छन्, तर कहीं पुग्न भने सक्दैनन्। जुन आन्दोलनको नेतृत्वमा इमान्दारिता छैन, सङ्घर्षलाई कहाँ पुऱ्याउने ? रणनीति छैन। त्यो आन्दोलनलाई सत्ताले यसरी नै कमजोर बनाइदिने हो।

Trans: *Faatsung* is a novel that opens up issues of identity and focuses on the Gorkhaland movement, so I have repeatedly raised this issue. In a democratic country like India, the smaller communities have faced the issue of associating with the larger community to save their identity. The movement which started in the name of Gorkhaland is an example of a similar problem and because of this, it has not been successful. There are many reasons behind the failure of the Gorkhaland movement but one of the reasons is single leadership, meaning one leader influencing the movement which is easily dominated by the ruling government or sometimes bought by the government. Next, we are still running behind these movements because of emotions. These emotions can push people to run, but will never be able to reach the destination. That movement which lacks an honest leader without a strategy, where will he lead the people? Therefore, the government can easily dismiss these movements.

RS: In all your interviews, including JLF, you mention that since you are writing to open up identity issues about Darjeeling, you are constantly talking about the movement of 1986, which cannot be overlooked, but do you also believe that we are divided on further deeper issues like caste and gender which are equally important. What is your position on that?

CK: तपाईंले सही कुराको उठान गर्नु भयो। पहिचानको मुद्दा हाम्रो निम्ति धेरै महत्वपूर्ण छ। तर, यो मुद्दालाई लिएर जुन राजनैतिक चलखेल यहाँ हुन्छ, यसले अन्य हरेक मुद्दालाई सामान्य बनाइदिएको छ। चिया श्रमिकहरूको दैनिक हाजिराको कुरा उठोस्, नेतासँग एउटै जवाफ हुन्छ, पहिले आफ्नै राज्य बनिहालोस्। पर्चापट्टाको कुरा उठोस्, यही जवाफ आउँछ, राज्य बनेपछि हामी नै पट्टा दिन्छौं। श्रमिकहरूको हितको कुरा होस् वा लिङ्गीय समानताको मुद्दा होस्, जनजातिको अधिकारको सवाल होस् वा दलितहरूको न्यायको कुरा होस्, हामीले पाउने एउटै जवाफ हुन्छ, 'गोर्खाल्यान्ड नभएसम्म यस्ता सानो सानो कुरामा भुलिनु हुँदैन।' तर, हामीले कहिले सोच्न सकेका छैनौं कि, जबसम्म जनजातिले अलग राज्यसँगै जनजातिकै हितका निम्ति, दलितहरूले अलगराज्यसँगै दलितहरूकै भविष्यका निम्ति, श्रमिकहरूले अलग राज्यसँगै श्रमिकहरूकै पसिनाका निम्ति, महीलाहरूले अलग राज्यसँगै महीलाहरूकै समानताको मुद्दाका निम्ति पनि लड्ने सोच तयार गर्दैनन्, तबसम्म हामी घरि घरि यसरी नै चुकिरहनेछौं।

Trans: You have raised a very important issue. Issues of identity are very important to us. But, the way this issue gets attention politically, other issues lose prominence. If speaking about the wages of tea plantation

labourers, the leaders have a single reply, “First let’s focus on having our state.” If land issues are raised, the same response comes, after the state is formed, we will issue the land papers. Whether it is an issue of labourers, gender equality, equality of the tribals or Dalit rights, we get one response that is until Gorkhaland is formed, we must not focus on these smaller issues. But, we have never been able to realise that until tribal people are allowed to fight for tribal rights along with the fight for a separate state(Gorkhaland) likewise Dalits along with fighting for a separate state must be allowed to fight for their future, labourers must be allowed to fight for their labour rights along with the fight for a separate state, women must be allowed to fight for their rights along with fighting for women’s rights, and unless such attitude comes within us, we will continue to fail in this fight for Gorkhaland.

RS: Also, are you aware and believe that when we say Nepalis we encompass everybody starting from Chettri, Bahun, Magar, Rai, Limboo, Tamang, Sherpa, Lepcha and Bhutia, but do you think this is a justified classification?

CK: नेपाली केवल जातिमात्रै होइन, त्यो भाषा पनि हो, जसले हाम्रो निम्ति एउटा फुलको मालालाई जोड्ने धागोको काम गरेको छ। यही भाषाले यहाँका हरेक साना साना जात गोष्ठीलाई जोडिदिएका छन्। छेत्री, बाहुन, मगर, राई, लिम्बु, लेप्चा भोटे हरेकलाई कुनै कुराले जोडेर राखेको छ भने त्यो यही भाषाकै कारण जोडिएका छन्। तर, यसो भन्दैमा नेपाली भन्नसाथ जात गोष्ठी हुनैहुन भन्ने होइन। पहिचान भनेको बहुआयमिक कुरा हो। तपाईं आफैलाई हेर्नुहोस्। घरमा रचना शर्मा हुनुहुन्छ। यो तपाईंको घरको पहिचान हो। कलेजमा प्रोफेसर हुनुहुन्छ, त्यो तपाईंको अर्को पहिचान हो। महीला हुनुहुन्छ, यो समाजमा सधैं देखिने तपाईंको अर्को रूप हो। अनि त तपाईंको नेपाली पहिचानको कुरा माथिबाट आउने हो नि, होइन र ?

Trans: Nepali is not just a community, but also a language which acts as a thread to sew flowers of different types. This language has helped smaller communities connect. Chettri, Bahun, Magar, Rai, Limbu, Lepcha, and Bhutia are bound by one thing and that is the Nepali language. Having said that, this does not mean the Nepali community must not form a group. Identity is multi-faceted. Take yourself for example, at home you are Rachana Sharma and that is your identity of home. At college, you are a professor and that is your other

identity. You are a woman, and that is a constant image of yours in society which cannot be overlooked. Only after that your Nepali identity comes, is it not?

RS: Another related question, the novel touches on the Lepcha people, who are marginalized and discriminated against for being ‘beef-eating illiterates’, forced to eat separately from Bahuns and Chettris during communal gatherings. This reflects the *chuwachuth pratha*¹²⁹, but somewhere we forget that *janjaatis*¹³⁰ fall outside of the caste system, and food habits are influenced by the region we come from, but the concept of caste pushes it so much so that it becomes a caste narrative. Can you throw light on this?

CK: यो समाजको बुनौटमाथि निर्भर गर्ने थोक रहेछ। जात प्रथालाई कुनै थोकले हटाउँदै लैजान सक्छ भने त्यो वैचारिक सोचले मात्रै हो। र त्यो सोच शिक्षाले मात्रै तयार गर्न सक्छ। तथापि जहाँ शिक्षा छैन, त्यो समाजमा आज पनि यो समस्या घरिघरि दोहोरिरहेको देखिन्छ। अब जनजाति समाजको कुरा गरौं। हामी यसै चाहिँ, जनजाति समाजमा छुवाछुत नहुनुपर्ने भनेर सोच्छौं। तर, कहिलेकाहीँ जनजाति परिवारका सदस्यले नै पनि दलितसँग बिहे हुँदा लामा पढाएर घेवा गरिदिन्छन्। खासमा जुन समाजको आर्थिक अवस्था कमजोर छ, जहाँ शिक्षाको अभाव छ, त्यहीँ नै सबै भन्दा धेरै यस्ता प्रथाहरू दोहोरिने रहेछ। मैले हुर्किएको समाज र कथामा भएको परिवेश एक त शैक्षिक रूपमा पछाडिएको छ र अर्को आर्थिक रूपमा कमजोर छ। त्यही भएर पनि होला, यस्ता घटना देख्दै देख्दै हुर्किएकाले नै मैले उपन्यास मार्फत यसलाई देखाउने चुनौति लिनुपर्थ्यो।

Trans: This depends entirely on the way the society is formed. If there is anything that can remove the caste system, it is only ideological thinking which can be formed through education. Therefore, wherever there is no education in society, these problems keep recurring. Let’s talk about the tribal society where we normally assume there is no caste practice. But, sometimes even tribal families when they marry a Dalit, call their monk and perform the final rites of their family members. In reality, in a society whose economy is weak, and where education is scarce, it is there these evil practices continue. The place where I lived and was raised was very backward in terms of education and economy so maybe because of that, I kept seeing those things happening as I grew up, and I chose to portray it through my novels.

¹²⁹ Practice of untouchability.

¹³⁰ Tribal people.

RS: Chitra Ahanthem in her article written for Scroll has also argued it as a story of a community fighting a battle for identity even as external majoritarian forces are at play, a community that remains fractured on caste and ethnic lines which shows that identity issue then becomes a larger issue which encompasses other issues within itself. Would you want to believe that the people of Darjeeling and Kalimpong have learnt to look at identity issues as a pressing issue over caste and gender issues or class issues for that matter?

CK: हो। हामीले जुन पहिचानको निम्ति लडाई गरिरहेका छौं। त्यसमा आक्रोश छ। आवेग छ। भावना छ। तर, विचार एकदमै शून्य जस्तै छ। हामी गोर्खाको कुरा त गछौं, तर, यसको जराको कुरा गर्न बिसिन्छौं। गोर्खा भनेको के हो ? के गोर्खा भन्नसाथ हामीले यसभित्र रहेका साना साना जात गोष्ठीहरूको अनुहार बिसिदिए हुने हो ? त्यसभित्र रहेका जनजाति, दलित, महीला सबैले आफ्नो पहिचान चै बिसिदिनुपर्ने हो ? कि ती सबैले आफ्नो अनुहार बोकेर आउनुपर्ने हो ? यो प्रश्न सबै भन्दा ठुलो छ। सांस्कृतिक रूपमा हेर्नु हो भने गोर्खाले हरेक जात गोष्ठीलाई जोडेर मजबुत बनाइनुपर्ने हो। तर, हामीलाई राजनीतिले गोर्खा भनेर नारा त दियो। तर, त्यो नारा कसरी मजबुत बनाइनुपर्ने हो, त्यो सिकाइएन। राजनीतिको प्रभावदेखि बाहिर रहन नसकेको हाम्रो समाज र साहित्यले पनि उही बाटो हिँडिदियो। जसले गर्दा हामीले आफ्नो जरा होइन, हाँगाको नारा लगाउनुमा नै समय खर्चिरह्यौं। हाँगालाई हरियो देख्न चाहनेले जरा बलियो बनाउनुपर्ने होइन र ? यसमाथि खासै काम हुन सकेन। अब यस्तो स्थितिबीच हुर्किएको समाजले जातीय विभेदको सवाल, लिङ्गीय पहिचान र वर्ग समस्यालाई सधैं ढाकछोप नै त गरिरहने हो। यसबारे बहस हुन अबको जरूरत हो कि ?

Trans: Yes! There is anger in the fight that we are waging, there is influence, and emotional attachment but very little thought process. We talk about Gorkha but forget its roots and origins. What is Gorkha? Does calling oneself Gorkha mean that smaller identities within the group can be overlooked? Does it mean the tribal people, Dalits and women must forget their identity in the face of being called a Gorkha? Or should all of these groups carry their own identity of their own? This is the biggest question which needs to be answered. If you have to perceive Gorkha culturally it should be able to encompass everybody and make them stronger, but it remains limited to political sloganeering, we have not learnt how to make it stronger. Because our society is not bereft of political influence, our society as well as literature also chose a similar pathway. Due to that, we forgot our roots but stuck only to our branches and wasted our time. If one wants to see the branches green, then the root must be watered and made stronger, is it not? No work has been done to focus on this. Therefore, the society

which grew amidst these scenarios cannot focus on caste and community discrimination, gender identity and class issues but constantly sweeps them under the carpet. Maybe it is time now we start discussing these?

RS: Do you believe that Gorkha as a term justifies itself when associated with the Nepalis or Nepali-speaking community or would it encompass everybody living in the Darjeeling district? Also, there are various narratives, where Lepchas wouldn't want to identify as a Gorkha, likewise, people of Siliguri wouldn't associate with it, could you throw some light on this or is my understanding wrong?

CK: दार्जीलिङको राजनैतिक चेतना नै लाप्चे, भोटे नेपाली-को हिलम्यान एसोसिएसनबाट सुरु भएको हो। पछि यहीबाट नारा बन्यो, लाप्चे भोटे नेपाली, हामी सबै गोर्खाली। पछि यसमा नेपाली कि गोर्खाली ? भने अर्को विमर्श थपियो। जो अहिले पनि यथावत छ।

तथापि यति हुँदा हुँदै पनि दार्जीलिङमा कुनै राजनैतिक मुद्दा उठाउनुपरे, हरेक जात गोष्ठी गोर्खाको मञ्चमा उभिएकै छ।

उसो त, तपाईंले भने जस्तै लेप्चाको आफ्नै अलग इतिहास छ। दार्जीलिङ सिक्किमको इतिहास केलाउनु परे लेप्चाको पहिचानलाई कतैबाट पनि ढाकछोप गर्न मिल्दैन। तर, यति हुँदा हुँदै पनि सानो समुदाय रहेकाले गर्दा उक्त जनजाति समुदायले कहिलेकाहीँ

आफैलाई थप असुरक्षित अनुभव गरेको हुनसक्छ। त्यसमा अझै हाम्रो राजनीति कहिलेकाहीँ अलि बडी असमावेशी भइदिन्छ। जहाँ

आदिवासी जनजातिले आफ्नै भाषा बँचाउनुको निम्ति सङ्घर्ष गर्नुपर्छ। अनुसूचित जातिहरूले क्षेत्रीय व्यावस्थामा आरक्षणको माग

गर्दै पोस्टर टास्नुपर्छ। यस्तो नहुनुपर्ने हो।

तथापि भाषा र साहित्यले जहिले जोड्ने काम गर्ने हो। मलाई चाहिँ लाग्छ, साहित्यले पनि यस्ता कमजोर वर्गहरूलाई सम्बोधनमा

राख्न जरुरी छ। राजनीति पनि अझ धेरै समावेशी हुन जरुरी छ।

The political consciousness of Darjeeling started with the Himalayan association of Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali.

Later, they made a slogan "*lapchay Bhotey, Nepali, hami sabai Gorkhali.*" Later another discussion came up, Nepali or Gorkhali which is relevant even today.

However, even if this is happening any political issue needs to be raised, and all the communities come together as a Gorkha.

Likewise, as you mention Lepchas have their history. If one has to analyse the history of Sikkim and

Darjeeling, you cannot overlook the history of Lepchas. Despite this, the Lepcha community is small and feels unsafe sometimes. To add to this, the political situation sometimes becomes biased and the tribal people have to

struggle to save their language. Scheduled caste communities have to stick posters to demand their rights but this should not happen. However, language and literature must connect people. Personally, I think, literature must be considerate towards these communities and must address their issues. There is a need for our politics to be more inclusive.

RS: Do you believe that the caste system of Nepal is replicated among the Indian Nepalis or are we culturally far removed from Nepal and its ethos? How are we different or are we different at all?

CK: नेपालका नेपाली र भारतीय नेपालीहरूको अवस्था अलग छ। परिवेश अलग छ। यसैले जातीय व्यवस्था वा जात प्रथामा पनि भिन्नता त पक्कै छ। किनकि, नेपाल नेपालीहरूको देश भइदियो। यहाँका नेपालीहरू अलग राज्यको मागमा आज पनि सङ्घर्षत छन्। त्यही सङ्घर्षले यहाँका जात-जातहरूलाई एक पनि बनाइदिएको छ। तथापि, यति हुँदा हुँदै पनि जातीय विभेद बिनाको समाज बनेको छ, भनेर किटान गरिहाल्न चै पक्कै मिल्दैन कि ?

Trans: The situation of the Nepalese of Nepal and the Nepalis of India is different, their environment is different. So, ethnic issues and caste practices are surely different because Nepal is entirely for Nepalese but the Nepalis living in India are still struggling for a separate state. This struggle has brought different castes and communities together. However, one can never say with certainty that caste discrimination does not exist in our society.

RS: When someone hears us speaking in Nepali and asks us if we are from Nepal, we feel that our identity is at stake, but when asked, “*Timi ko hau?*” more often than not we end up saying, I am Nepali, instead of stating that I am Indian (Nepali). Don’t you feel we are equally responsible for reinstating our own identity wrongly?

CK: नेपाली भन्नसाथ नेपालको भनेर बुझ्नु भनेको अज्ञानताको उदहरण मात्रै हो। कसैको अज्ञानतालाई लिएर हामीले राजनीति नै गर्नुपर्छ भन्ने मलाई चै लाग्दैन। अथवा कविता लेखेर धरधरि रूनुपर्छ, भन्ने पनि होइन। साहित्य अकादमीकै कार्यक्रमतिर नेपालको भनिदियो भनेर धेरै कविहरू विरक्तिएको मैले पनि देखेको छु। तर, त्यो त एउटा मान्छेको अज्ञानताको कुरा हो। अनि यस्तो कुरालाई गलत साबित गराउने सहज माध्यम नै साहित्य पनि हो। हामी त्यो भाषामा साहित्य लेखिरहेका छौं, जो संविधानको आठौँ अनुसूचीमा अन्तर्भुक्त छ। तर, विडम्बना हाम्रो साहित्य एउटा घेरादेखि माथि उठ्न सकिरहेको छैन, जसले गर्दा भाषाले दिने पहिचान दिलाउन

हामी आफैं पनि चुकिरहेका छौं। सम्झिनुहोस्, ‘दार्जीलिङको एउटा नेपाली पुस्तकले बुकर जित्यो रे!’ अब हामीले कसैलाई भनिरहनै पर्दैन कि, ‘हामी भारतेली नेपाली हौं’। देशले नै भोली सुनाउँदै हिँड्नेछ, ‘भारतको संविधानमा समावेश रहेको नेपाली भाषाले बुकर जित्यो। भारतले बुकर जित्यो।’

हामीले आफ्नै कम्जोरीहरूको पनि आलोचना गर्ने कि?

Trans: Calling oneself Nepali does not mean you are from Nepal and if one understands it that way, it would mean ignorance. In my opinion, owing to that foolishness, one does not have to do politics. Neither does a poet have to write a poem and cry. Even in the programs organised by Sahitya Akademi, if people mistakenly address them as Nepalese of Nepal, people cry. However, one should realise that is due to the ignorance of a single person and to correct this narrative, literature is the best platform. It must be understood that we are writing in that language which is included by the constitution under the eight schedule. But, the irony is that our literature has not been able to go beyond a certain point and because of that the identity that comes with language is compromised. For example, if a book from Darjeeling wins a Booker prize, we do not have to tell anyone that we are Indian Nepalis. The country on its account will announce, that the Nepali language which is included in the eighth schedule of our constitution has won a Booker. India has won a Booker. Should we then not talk about our weaknesses too?

Annexure 2

Interview: Bhupeen

Date: 03.07.2023

(Interview over email)

Bhupeen, the poet known primarily for his powerful performances, is a university lecturer by profession. He has published three collections—*Kshatigrasta Prithvi ra Mool Sadak*, *Hajar Barshako Nidra*, and *Suplako Hawaii Jahaj*.

Bhupeen has won the Uttam Shanti Puraskar¹³¹ and the International Nepali Literature Society Award for his poetry. *Maidaaro* is his first novel.

This interview was taken on the suggestion of my supervisor, Dr. Debashree Dattaray, but since I had no access to the author, a senior faculty, Dr. Suchan Pradhan helped me initiate the conversation and Bhupeen agreed to do the interview. This is a written interview and I will use RS for the interviewer and Bhupeen for the author.

Bhupeen:

Rachana jyu namaste.

Here are my answers to your questions. All the best for your academic excellence.

Rachana: Could you please situate yourself and your writings in society? How does Nepali samaj perceive your writings, especially *Maidaaro*?

Bhupeen: तिब्रताका साथ सामाजिक मुद्दाहरू पक्रिरहेको समकालीन नेपाली साहित्यमा दलितहरूले भोगिरहेका विभेद, उत्पीडन र संघर्षका कथाहरू पनि मात्रात्मक रूपमा बढ्दै लेखिन थालिएका छन् । तर सत्य हो, यति मात्र पर्याप्त छैन । समग्र भारतीय उपमहाद्विपमा जात व्यवस्थाको महामारी यति सघन रूपमा फैलिएको छ कि यसबाट मुक्त समाजको निर्माण ससानो उपचारले सम्भव देखिन्न । कला साहित्य सङ्गीत र सिनेमामा दलित विषय हस्तक्षेपकारी रूपमा उठिरहनु पर्छ । निश्चित रूपमा दलित लेखकहरूले यसको नेतृत्व गर्नु पर्छ र गैह्र दलितहरूले समताको तहमा पुगेर यस महामारीको अन्त्य नहुने समयसम्म निरन्तर लेखिरहनु पर्छ ।

¹³¹ A literary foundation called Uttam Kunwar Memorial Award Trust was founded in his honour by his wife, Shanti Kunwar. The trust presents an award known as Uttam Shanti Puraskar every year for a non-fiction book in the Nepali language.

नेपाली उपन्यासको कुरा गर्दा सन् १९५४ मुक्तिनाथ तिमिल्सिना को अछुत ? बाट सुरु भएको दलित अधिकार र मुक्तिको लेखन यात्रा खगेन्द्र सङ्ग्रौलाको जूनकिरीको सङ्गीत, आहूतीको नयाँ घर र स्खलन अनि शरद् पौडेलको लिखे हुँदै मैदारोसम्म आइपुगेको छ । यस विषय र विधामा मैदारो अझसम्मको कान्छो उपन्यास नै होला । म कान्छो उपन्यासकार ।

मैदारो अघि जति पनि उपन्यासहरू लेखिए, ती यथार्थवादी वा सामाजिक यथार्थवादी शैलीमा लेखिए । सबैको कथा वाचन शैलीरैखि क छ, लिनियर । म शैलीगत नविनताको पक्षपाती । तसर्थ सामाजिक यथार्थलाई पस्किन मैले पश्चिम नेपाली समाजको एकमीथकलाई आधार मानेर स्वैर कल्पनाको प्रयोग गरें र कथा वाचनमा वर्तुल शैली अपनाएँ । मलाई लाग्छ, यही शैलीगत नविनताकाकारण नेपाली पाठकहरूले मैदारोलाई रुचाए । नेपाली समाजको बहुल हिस्साले मैदारोलाई प्रेम दियो ।

Trans: Contemporary Nepali literature has been writing about the struggles and harassment faced by Dalits continuously but that alone is not enough. In the Indian continent, the caste situation is spread so widely that to build a better nation, small initiatives are not enough. Cultural and literary groups and films must be able to continuously talk about Dalit issues. Under the leadership of Dalit authors, these issues must be brought out continuously and likewise, non-Dalits must equally write about these issues until this epidemic ends.

To talk about the early records of caste in Nepali literature, it can be traced to the writings of Muktinath Timalsena in 1954 as *Ko Achut?*, Khagendra Sangraula's *Junkeri ko Sangeet*, Aahuti's *Naya Ghar*, Sharad Poudyal's *Likhe* and now *Maidaaro*. *Maidaaro* must be the youngest novel to talk about these issues and I am the youngest novelist to do so.

The novels ahead of *Maidaaro* were all written in a realistic or socio-realistic style. All the writing techniques have been similar, which is linear writing. My writings are stylistically biased towards newness. Therefore, to talk about social reality, I used a fictitious village of West Nepal to talk about these issues circularly. I feel because of this new technique Nepali readers have accepted *Maidaaro*. A large section of Nepali society has given their love to *Maidaaro*.

2. RS: Do you think caste as a topic has been discussed for a long time and can be overlooked and understood as something we have consciously overcome?

Bhupeen:

कुनै पनि मुद्दाको चर्चा त्यतिबेलासम्म असान्दर्भिक हुन्न, जतिबेलासम्म त्यसको अस्तित्व रहन्छ । हाम्रो वर्तमान बताउँछ किसमाजमा

अझै जात व्यवस्था टङ्गारो रुपमा विद्यमान छ । उही उस्तै रुपमा नहोला तर अनेक छद्म स्वरुपमा बदलिएर यसको अस्तित्वले अझै हा
म्रो समाजलाई सभ्य, करुण, सहिष्णु र मानवीय बन्नबाट वञ्चित गरिदिएको छ । जनावरको अधिकारको चर्कोचर्को वकालत गर्ने बौ
द्धिकहरु (जुन अत्यन्त जायज छ) अझै पनि दलित मुक्तिका कुरामा उदासिन छन् । मुक्तिका कुरा गर्ने कथित सवर्णहरुको अवचेतन
मा अझै पनि अश्वपृथताको मनोविज्ञान छ । विभेद गर्नु हुन्न भन्ने ज्ञान प्राप्त कथित उपल्लो जातीका कैयन मानिसहरुमा अझै पनि न
धारणाको तहमा भरपर्दो परिवर्तन आएको छ, न अनुभवको तहमा । ज्ञानको तहमा मात्रै सिमित सिकाई अत्यन्त अपूर्ण हुन्छ ।
मेरो ज्ञान र अनुभव दुवै ठान्छु, जात व्यवस्था अझै पनि जब्बर रुपमा भारत र नेपालमा अस्तित्वमा छ । खबरहरुमा छाइरहने विभेदका
शृङ्खलाबद्ध घटनाहरु यसका प्रमाण छन् । कथित उपल्लो जातको केटा वा केटीसँग प्रेम गरेको अपराधमा भइरहेका दलित हत्याका
कथाहरु यही भन्छन् । नदीमा बगाइएका, घरमा जलाइएका, पानीको धारामा बहिष्कृत गरिएका, अनुहारमा पिसाबथापिरहन अभिश
प्त दलितका भाइरल भिडियो फुटेजहरु यही भन्छन् । मलाई त यही कुराले सोचमग्न बनाइरहन्छ, आखिर कविलेखकहरुले यस्ता क
थाहरु लेख्नु नपर्ने दिन कति टाढा छन् ?

Trans: No issues will become irrelevant till the time that issue will hold its identity. Our present shows us that the caste system still holds great relevance in our society. It might not be in the same manner as it was in the past, but it has changed itself into various shapes and its identity has stopped our society from being civilized, sympathetic, tolerant and humane. People talk about animal rights in a loud voice which is relevant but fail to recognise the need to speak on Dalit issues. Upper-caste people talking about freedom from caste still practise untouchability unconsciously. Many educated people from the upper caste who are aware of the caste practices have still not changed their thoughts or their experiences of caste. Anything that is limited to knowledge alone is not enough.

I feel that in my experience and knowledge, that caste practices are still very strong in India and Nepal. The news which keeps reporting caste violence is a testimony to this kind of practice. Allegedly the sin committed by falling in love with high-caste boys and girls is represented in these stories. Viral videos depict the cursed stage where, Dalit people are pushed into the river, and burnt in their houses, and intolerant behaviour is shown towards them at the water tank area, made to drink urine, etc. These kinds of videos make me wonder and think, how far are those days where authors and poets have to stop writing on these?

3. Rachana: Your novel *Maidaaro* is an excellent depiction of caste practices in Nepal. Would you believe that these practices remain limited to Nepal or anywhere where Nepalis reside?

Bhupeen:

यता नेपालतिर बाबुराम भट्टराई लगायत केही बाम वा अन्य बुद्धिजीवीहरू दलित समस्यालाई जाती प्रथा मान्छन्, आहूतीहरूसलाई जात व्यवस्था मान्छन् । मेरो अध्ययनले पनि यस समस्यालाई जात व्यवस्था भनिनु उपयुक्त ठान्छ । जब कानुनमा नैजातका आधार मा उही अपराधका लागि कसैलाई कम र कसैलाई बढी सजायको व्यवस्था हुन्छ, त्यसबाट निर्देशित समाज जातीप्रथामा मात्र सिमित हुन्छ, त्यहाँ जब्वर जात व्यवस्थाको कन्सन्ट्रिसन क्याम्प निर्माण भएको हुन्छ ।

निश्चयः जात व्यवस्था नेपालमा मात्र सिमित छैन, यसको उद्गम स्थल भारतीय उपमहाद्विप हो । मनुस्मृतिलाई प्रत्यक्ष परोक्ष भारतीय सभ्यताको खजाना स्वीकारेर आएको भारतीय समाजको जात व्यवस्था उस्तै जब्वर देख्छु । कैयन् प्रसङ्गमा नेपालमा भन्दा पनिजब्वर र लाग्छ । दुनियालाई जात व्यवस्था र अस्पृश्यताको घिनलाग्दो तर लुकाइएको कर्तुत सुनाउनका लागि भीम राव अम्बेडकर त्यसै त भारतबाट सांस्कृतिक बिम्बका रूपमा उदाएका होइनन् । समस्या भएकै ठाउँमा समाधानको खोजी गर्ने व्यक्ति उदाउछन् ।

पूँजावादी युगमा दलितप्रति भेदभाव कम गर्ने एक उपाय उनीहरूको आर्थिक उन्नतिसँग सम्बन्धित छ । गाउँमा चर्को विभेद सहन बाध्य कुनै दलित आर्थिक प्रगतिका कारण सहरमा कथित उपल्लो जातका ती मानिससँग घुलमिल गर्न सक्छ, जो दलित समस्यालाईसमा जको खराबीका रूपमा बुझ्छन् । मैले यस्ता केही उदाहरण भेटेको छु । तर पुरातन चिन्तनबाट प्रेरित पुरानो पुस्ता गाउँमा जतिकैसहर मा पनि कट्टर नै छ ।

कति युवाहरू समेत अनेक कुतर्कका जालोभित्र फसेर भेरी नदीमा नवराज बिकको लाश बग्दा समेत यससामाजिक रोगको उपचारको पक्षमा नउभिएर रोगकै पक्षमा देख्दा म अचम्भित भएँ । त्यत्रो अमानविय काण्ड घट्दा विदेशमा बस्नेकैयन् नेपालीहरूले पनि उल्टै नवराज बिक र दलितहरूप्रति नै विष बमन गरे । यसले बताउँछ कि दलित समता र समानताका मुद्दाहरूकुल्चिन सिकाउने समाज वा समुदायमा जन्मे हुर्केका र मानविय ज्ञान पाएर पनि धारणा परिवर्तन गर्न असक्षम व्यक्तिहरू जहाँ गएपनि यही संक्रामक रोग बोकेर जाने रहेछन् ।

तर यति चाहिँ सत्य हो कि तुलनात्मक रुपमा विदेशमा बस्दा दलितप्रति कम भेदभाव गरेको अभिनय चाहिँ कुशलतापूर्वक गर्न सक्छ न्मानिसहरु । किनभने त्यहाँ उनीहरूको हरपल निगरानी गर्ने समाज हुँदैन । हामीले चाहेझैँ रिभोल्युसनद्वारा जात व्यवस्था छिटो निर्मुल होला नहोला, तर इभोलुसनको कारण एकदिन त यो रोग अवश्य निर्मुल हुने छ ।

Trans: Here in Nepal, Baburam Bhattarai and other leftists think that Dalit issues are related to the caste system. My research also states that this is related to the caste system. According to law, the relief is based on caste and punishment is not uniform the society guided by such discretion does not limit itself to forming a caste-based society but rather a concentration camp. Undoubtedly, the caste system is not limited to Nepal, the origin of the caste system is traced to the Indian subcontinent. The Indian society has accepted and abided by Manusmriti and because of it, the caste system is very strong in India. In many ways, it is way stricter than in Nepal. Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar stood up to speak against the horrible acts of the caste system and untouchability in front of the world. Where there is a problem, it is there we seek solutions.

In capitalist society, the differences meted out towards the Dalits can be lessened by improving their economic status. Any Dalit who cannot tolerate discrimination in the village moves to cities for economic mobility and can mingle easily with people from the upper caste and understand that this is a wicked practice. I have people from the older generation who even after moving to cities remain as rigid as they are in the village.

Even some youths have entangled themselves in wrong arguments so when Navraj Bik's dead body was flowing they kept saying it was the Zika virus and that surprised me. Even when such an inhuman thing happened people around the world blamed it on the virus and were inconsiderate towards the Dalits. This shows that people who are conditioned in an unequal society and do not believe in equal rights despite acquiring knowledge will not change, no matter where they go, they will carry a diseased mind.

However, this is true that people feign a sense of equality towards the Dalit community when they live abroad because they do not live in a society which is constantly surveillant. It might not end with the revolution we have started against it, but one day like everything this will go through an evolutionary process and die.

4. RS: Has your book been received in the same light the way you as an author had perceived or you have received criticism?

Bhupeen:

सबै समालोचक वा पाठकबाट मैदारो उही रुपमा स्वीकृत वा प्रसंसित छ भनेर भनै भने म झुटा हुन्छु । यसको विमोचनकै दिनमैदारोले नेपाली दलित विमर्शका बहुप्रसंसित र निर्मम समालोचक आहूतीबाट २२ मिनेट कडा आलोचनात्मक प्रहार खेपेको थियो । २४ मिनेट को उहाँको मन्तव्यमा आहूतीले दुई मिनेट मात्र यसको प्रसंसामा शब्द खर्चिनु भएको थियो, विशेषतः यसको कलापक्षलाई लिएर । माओवादी सशस्त्र युद्धमा होमिएका र आवश्यक पर्दा हिंसा जरूरी हुन्छ भन्ने मान्यता राख्ने आहूतीलाई मैदारोको प्रोटागनिष्ट नदीनले अहिंसात्मक आन्दोलनबाट परिवर्तन ल्याउन गरेको एडभोकेसी मन नपर्नु स्वभाविक थियो । तर मैदारोमा युद्धको पक्षमा वकालत गर्ने मात्र होइन, तीन महिनाको बच्चा छोडेर युद्धमा होमिने कला पनि थिइन् । उहाँले नजरअन्दाज गरिदिनु भयो । उपन्यासमा पात्र रघटना हरूले तनाव सिर्जना गरिरहेका हुन्छन्, त्यसैले पाठकहरू उपन्यासका पानाबाट भाग्न सक्दैनन् । तनाव नै नभएका कथाहरूनिरसिला हुन्छन् । उपन्यासकारले त्यस्ता पात्रहरू कि समाजबाट लिन्छ कि सिर्जना गर्छ । यथार्थवादी चस्माले मात्र हेरेर सधैंकलामूल्य पर्गेल सकिन्न । यस पक्षबाट मैदारोको विवेचना उहाँजस्तो कुशल बक्ताबाट हुन्छ भन्ने मेरो आशा थियो, भएन । यावतसन्दर्भलाई मैले स्वभाविक रुपमा नै लिएको छु । सरोनरको आलोचनामा मोटामोटी आहूतीकै मन्तव्यको कपी पेस्ट छ । उनी युवाछन्, अध्ययनशिल छन् र समालोचना सिक्दै छन् ।

अन्य सबै समालोचकबाट र दलित आन्दोलनमा लागि रहेका बुद्धिजीविहरूबाट मैदारोले सितल स्नेह र प्रेम नै पाएको छ । मैले अपेक्षा गरेको तर नआएका केही समालोचनात्मक पाटाहरू आएनन् । जस्तै: मैदारोलाई सर्वाङ्ग टेक्निकका आधारमा विवेचना गरिएको पढ्ने इच्छा थियो । त्यत्रो वर्ष भीरमा अडकिएर बाँचेको नदीनको वैचारिक मेटामर्फोसिसबारे केही आए हुन्थ्यो जस्तो लागिरहन्छ । मूल पात्र कलाकार भएकाले कला सिर्जनाका आधारमा पनि मैदारोको विशद चर्चा गर्न सकिन्छ भन्ने लागिरहन्छ ।

Trans: Not all readers or critics received and praised *Maidaro*, if I say that, it would be a lie. The day the book was launched, Dalit author, AAhuti made a twenty-two minute-long criticism. In twenty-four long minutes of his criticism, he just spared two minutes in praise of the work.

Aahuti who believes in Maoist ideology and the need to use violence as per requirement would of course not like a non-violent protest that Nadin advocated for. It just does not advocate violence in *Maidaro* but Kala left her three-month-old baby to get involved in a war that AAhuti has overlooked. In the novel, characters and events create tension and therefore the reader cannot escape the pages. If there is no tension then the stories fall flat. The writer takes these characters from society or uses his creativity to bring them. Art cannot only be seen

from a realistic viewpoint. I had expected him to criticize from this viewpoint, but he didn't. For example, Saronar's criticism is a copy-paste of Aahuti. He is young and trying to do research and is learning to critique. Rest, all the Dalit activists and learned people have appreciated *Maidaaro*. I had expected a few more to critique this, but I did not receive it. I wanted *Maidaaro* to be read from a survivor's technique, but I did not get it. I still feel that Nadin's survival and metamorphosis could have been studied. Since the protagonist was an artist, his art could also have been studied.

5. RS: As an upper caste, talking against caste practices is not always easy, so has there been a backlash because of speaking about caste issues?

मेरो उपस्थितिमा खुलेरै विरोध त कसैले गरेको छैन । तर मैले मैदारो लेखेबापत कथित उच्च जातीय केही लेखकबाट अप्रत्यक्षविरोध र असन्तुष्टि व्यक्त भएको सुनेको छु । हृदयमा जातिय विभेदलाई सही ठहर्याउने उनीहरू घुमाउरो शैली अपनाउँछन् र भन्छन्- भूपिनले उपन्यासमा बासी विषय लेख्यो । अरु विषयमा लेखेको भए हुन्थ्यो । मलाई थाहा हुन्छ उनीहरूको मनमा अझै दलितलाईहेनै दृष्टिकोण विभेदयुक्त छ तर उनीहरू सिधै भन्न हिचकिचाइरहेका हुन्छन् । फेरी, मैदारोलाई सबैभन्दा बढी प्रशंसा गरेर समालोचनागर्ने प्राज्ञिक समालोचकहरू पनि यही समुदायका नै छन् ।

मैदारोको खरो आलोचना चाहीं एकाध दलित समुदायकै लेखकबाट भएको पाएर चाहीं पहिलेपहिले दुःख लाग्थ्यो, अचेल त्यसलाईपनि सामान्य रूपमा लिन थालेको छु । सोच्छु- सिर्जनात्मक आलोचनालाई लेखकले स्वीकारेर अघि बढ्नु पर्छ ।

मैदारो प्रकाशन पछि रुकुममा भएको नवराज बिकको नृशंस हत्या र त्यसपछि आएका बहसका तरङ्गपछि एक गैह्र दलित लेखकका रूपमा मैले केही टुक्काटाक्री बुँदाहरू लेखेको थिएँ । यी बुँदाहरूमा नै यस प्रश्नको उत्तर भएको विश्वासमा यहाँ राखेको छु ।

कथित दलित लेखकहरूले त आफ्ना दुख, संघर्ष र उत्पीडन लेख्नै पर्छ, किनभने उनीहरूबाट नै यो अमानवीय जात व्यवस्थालेदिएको पीडा बढी विश्वसनिय ढङ्गले सबैभन्दा गहिरोसँग आउने सम्भावना रहन्छ । तर गैह्र दलितले पनि दलित उत्पीडनकाकुरा लेखिरहनु पर्छ/ अझ बढी लेखिनु पर्छ । उनीहरूले भोगेको कुरूप उत्पीडन समाप्त गरी उनीहरूको मुक्तिका लागि सबैलेसक्दो बल मिसाउनु पर्छ । भारतीय उपमहाद्विपमा अस्तित्वमा रहेको यो सामाजिक महामारी समाप्त पार्न सक्दो सिर्जनात्मकबल मिसाउनु सबै लेखकको कर्तव्य हो ।

चलिरहेका कुनै आन्दोलन/ या अभियानमा जोडिनु नजोडिनु तपाईंको छनौटको कुरा हो, प्राथमिक कुरा होइन । प्राथमिक कुरालेखन मार्फत दलित मुक्ति आन्दोलनसँग जोडिनु नै हो । तर चलिरहेका अभियान/आन्दोलनबारे गम्भीर अध्ययन महत्वपूर्णकुरा हो । अध्ययनले तपाईंका अनुभवलाई बलियो टेको दिन्छ । प्रष्ट हुनुपर्छ, लेखकका लागि सिर्जना ठूलो आन्दोलन हो ।

गैह्र दलित भएर दलित मुद्दामा लेख्दा तपाईं दुई अतिवादी धारको सिकार बन्नुहुन्छ । यसलाई म 'सिमाना अतिवाद' भन्न मनपराउँछु । ब्रम्हाणवादी धारले तपाईंलाई उपभोग गर्दै आएको सुविधाको सिमाना सुरक्षा नगरेर उल्टै समाज भाँड्न 'सिमानाबाहिर' गएर लेखेको अभियोग लगाउँछ र तपाईंलाई ठाडै अस्वीकार गर्छ । (मैदारोको प्रकाशनपछि कविमित्र प्रकाशथाम्सुहाडले भन्नु भएको थियो, 'मैदारोमा तपाईंले दिननाथ पण्डितलाई बगाइदिनु भयो, पुरस्कारमा पण्डितहरूले मैदारोबगाइदिए ।' यद्यपी पुरस्कारको लागि लेखिदैन, तर कविको कुरा सुनेर म गम्भीर भएको थिएँ ।)। अर्को अतिवादी दलित धार, जो तपाईंलाई आफ्नो 'सिमानाभित्र प्रवेश' गरे को मन पराउँदैन । मैले त्यस्ता दुई चार कविलेखकहरूलाई पढेको छु । उनीहरूतपाईंलाई दलित पीडा समानुभूतिको तहमा पुगेर लेख्न नसक्ने झुर लेखक मान्छ । (सत्य हो, समानुभूतिमा पुगेर लेख्न गाह्रोछ, तर तपाईंले असल नियतले लेख्न खोज्नु भएको हो भने यी आलोचना अत्यन्त गौण कुरा हुन् ।) यो अतिवादी धार दलितमुद्दालाई गैह्र दलितले लेखेको मन पराउँदैन । मन पराएको अभिनय चाहिँ गर्छ ।

तपाईं मानवियताप्रति प्रतिबद्ध लेखक हो भने तपाईंले यी सिमानाहरू भत्काएर लेख्ने साहस गर्नेपर्छ । चुनौती स्वीकार्ने पर्छ । निरास र हतोत्साहित बन्नुहुन्न । असल नियतले यो दुनियाँमा भएका हर मुद्दामा लेख्न तपाईंलाई दुनियाँको कुनै ताकतले रोक्नसक्दैन । सिमाना जनावरले बनाउँछ, मानिसले सकेसम्म सिमाना खुल्ला पार्छ ।

दलित मुद्दामा लेख्नुपूर्व तपाईंले यसको समाजशास्त्रबारे गहिरो अध्ययन गर्नु जरुरी छ । ओशोले मनुस्मृतिलाई किनअझसम्मकै खराब किताब मानेका होलान् ? यसबारे एक प्रष्ट धारणा तपाईंसँग हुनै पर्छ । कम्तीमा मनुस्मृतिको दशम अध्यायपढ्नु जरुरी छ । अम्बेडकर दलित उत्पीडनलाई विश्वव्यापी बनाउने महात्मा हुन् । उनलाई पढ्नु भएन भने दलित मुक्ति आन्दोलनबारे खासैकेही बुझिदैन । उनका किताब, प्रवचन र उनको जीवनमा आधारित फिल्म साइबर संसारमा उपलब्ध छन् ।

अम्बेडकर पढ्दा उनले किन हजारौँ समर्थक सहित बुद्ध धर्म स्वीकार गरे ? यस पक्षलाई ध्यान दिइएन भने उत्पीडनकोविष्फोटन बुझ्न गाह्रो हुनेछ । यसलाई हिन्दु बहुल समाजले गम्भीरतापूर्वक मनन गर्नु आवश्यक छ ।

नेपालमा दलित आन्दोलनबारे बुझ्न भगत सर्वजित विश्वकर्माले स्थापना गरेको विश्व सर्वजन संघको स्थापनादेखि आहुतीकापुस्तक हरू राम्रा खुराकहरू हुन् । यद्यपी दलित उत्पीडनबाट मुक्तिका उपायबारे कतिपय विचारसँग तपाईंका फरक मत पनि हुनसक्छन् । य सलाई स्वभाविक रुपमा लिनुहोस् । स्थापित विचारसँग कुनै फरक मत नै भएन भने बुझ्नुस् कि तपाईंकोसिर्जनाशक्ति निसन्देह कम जोर छ ।

सिनेमामा दलित उत्पीडनका कथाहरू निकै कम आएका छन् । जसरी हलिउडमा अश्वेतका उत्पीडनबारे टुभेल इयर्स अ स्लेभजस्ता सिनेमा बन्छन्, जसरी भारतमा सुजाता, मसान वा पार जस्ता सिनेमा बन्छन्, नेपालमा पनि बन्नुपर्छ । यस्ता सिनेमानिर्माणमा सरकारी लगानी पनि हुनुपर्छ । किनभने सिनेमा समाजमा परिवर्तनको पर्यावरण निर्माण गर्ने महत्वपूर्ण माध्ययम पनि हो । कला र सङ्गीतमा पनि दलित उत्पीडन र मुक्तिका आवाजहरू लगभग नसुनिने तहमा छन् । सिर्जनाका ती क्षेत्रले पनि अबयतातिर ग म्भीर ध्यान दिन अबेला गर्नु हुन्न । दलित उत्पीडनबाट मुक्तिका हर आन्दोलनमा मेरो ऐक्यवद्धता छ/रहनेछ ।

Trans: Nobody has spoken against me for raising caste issues openly. But, post *Maidaaro*, I have heard some upper-caste writers have shown certain disagreements and dissatisfaction. Somewhere I feel they still believe in it and they have said, “I have raised an old issue. He could have written on something else.” I am aware that these people hold a certain sense of difference towards the lower caste but cannot state it openly. And people who have praised *Maidaaro* are also from this band of people.

One Dalit writer has critiqued the text in a very blunt manner and I felt very bad about it earlier but now I have started seeing it normally. I think creative analysis must be accepted and one must move ahead.

After the publication of *Maidaaro*, the brutal killing of Navraj Bik in Rukum and thereafter the waves of discussion followed to which I had also contributed as a non-Dalit author. I feel these opinions have the answer to your question.

Dalits must write about their struggles, pain, and torture as their lived experience will be able to give great depth to these inhumane practices. But, non-Dalits must also write in large numbers about these issues.

Everybody must come together and end this torture and work towards their upliftment. Every writer writing must use his creative energy to end this epidemic-like situation in the Indian sub-continent.

Whether you want to be associated with the movement or not is your personal choice, but the first thing is your belief. To be associated with the Dalit movement is to write about it. But, whatever is happening and what is being written must be studied as that is very important. The research will make your experience stronger. It must be clear that writing is a huge activism for a writer. When a non-Dalit writes about Dalit issues he is judged with a two-sided sword. I would like to refer to this as an extremism. People from Brahmin society will question your position and the need to cross boundaries and they will disapprove of your work. After the publication of *Maidaaro*, a dear friend Thamsu Hang said, “You washed away Pandit Dinanath in the novel and in return, the Pandit washed away your book.” Though books are not written with the intent of award I was moved to thinking.

Another extremist thinking is that Dalits do not like it being written by an upper caste. I have read about these writers too and they think that one cannot empathise with the Dalit sentiments and upper-caste people writing about Dalits are considered extremely shallow writers. (It is a known truth that it is very difficult to empathise but if you have written with a well-meaning intent then these are secondary.) These extremists do not like non-Dalits talking about them but they pretend to like you.

But, if you believe in humanity then you must be able to break these boundaries and write, if your intentions are right no force can stop you from writing on it. Animals mark their boundaries but people must leave their boundaries open.

To start writing about the Dalit issue, it is imperative to read about the society. Why did Osho consider Manusmriti as one of the worst books ever written in history? But to have an opinion on that you must have read at least read ten parts of Manusmriti.

Ambedkar made the world aware of the caste system. If you do not read him then you would not be able to understand the movement. His books, movies and speeches are found all over the internet.

Why did Ambedkar accept Buddhism along with his followers? If this point is not understood then it is difficult to understand the torture. The larger Hindu society must think about this.

To understand the Dalit movement of Nepal, the organisation established by Sarvajit Bishwakarma and AAhuti's books play a great role. You might have a different opinion about certain proposals for Dalit upliftment. This must be accepted as natural and if you find no problem with anything then know you cannot

think creatively. There is very little representation of Dalit issues in the movies. Like how Hollywood has made *Twelve Years A Slave*, Indian movies like *Sujata*, *Masaan*, and *Paar*, we must have something similar in Nepal. The government must also invest in these kinds of movies as they can be seen as a great medium to bring about change. Singing and other arts have also not been involved greatly with these issues. The creative field must also pay attention towards that. I believe and continue to believe that the Dalit movement and its upliftment must be done in all possible ways.

6. RS: You have used an image of an inverted bat in your book and there is no denying the fact that it is a depiction of the society we live in. What are we as a society doing to change that?

Bhupeen:

The roots of Dalit harassment are deeply rooted in the consciousness of the people. There are many myths and false stories to preserve this. People are trying to break these myths and stories from their perspective. Writers are doing the same using their creativity. The challenges are manifold. People move from the fold of knowledge to the fold of perception and stay there. If by chance he changes his perception in his unconsciousness then his toxic consciousness would not allow him to be committed to equal rights for the Dalits. The personal unconscious as mentioned by Freud and the collective unconscious as a modified model used by Carl Jung have been given which states that poisonous perceptions are handed to us from previous generations.

Some people choose revolution to fight social evils. In my opinion, one must not wait for evolution to fight for Dalit rights but rather choose a revolutionary method and it must be in their leadership. Every person who believes in a civilized society must fight for this cause, this can be rebellious and violent as well as non-violent. If given a personal choice, I would believe in non-violent revolution and I feel non-violent revolution can bring about any change.

दलित उत्पीडनको मूल जरा धेरै गहिरोसँग गडेको छ मानिसको चेतनामा । र यसलाई जोगाउने अनेकौँ झुटा कथा र मीथकहरु छन् माजमा । मानिसहरु ती कथा र मीथकहरु भत्काउने कोसिस गरिरहेका छन् आफ्नो क्षेत्रबाट । लेखकहरु कलाको माध्यमबाटै कोसिस गरिरहेका छन् । चुनौतीहरुका तहहरु छन् । ज्ञानको तहमा परिवर्तित मानिस धारणाको तहसम्म आउँछ र त्यहीँ सिमितभैदिन्छ । कथमकदाचित उसको धारणा बदलियो भने पनि उसको अचेतनमा बाँचिरहेको विशाक्त चेतनाले उसलाई दलितअधिकारप्रति प्र

तिबद्ध हुन छेकथुन गरिदिन्छ । फ्रायडले भनेको पर्सनल अन्कन्सस् र जुडले परिमार्जन गरेको कलेक्टिभ अन्कन्सस् मादलितप्रतिका विखालु धारणाहरु छन् र ती पछिल्लो पुस्तामा हस्तान्तरण हुँदै आएको छ ।

केही मानिसहरुले यो सामाजिक रोगबाट मुक्तिका लागि विद्रोह रोजिरहेका छन् । मेरो विचारमा दलित अधिकारका लागि इभोलुसन पर्खेर बस्नु पनि हुँदैन, रिभोलुशन नै जरुरी पनि छ । त्यो पनि दलितहरुकै नेतृत्वमा । सभ्य समाज निर्माण गर्न चाहने हर मानिसले यसलाई साथ दिनु पर्छ । तर विद्रोह त हिंसात्मक पनि हुन सक्छ, अहिंसात्मक पनि । व्यक्तिगत रुपमा म अहिंसात्मक विद्रोहकोपक्षपाती हुँ, र मलाई लाग्छ- अहिंसात्मक विद्रोहबाट हर परिवर्तनहरु सम्भव छन् ।

7. RS: Have the caste practices evolved over the years or do they remain the same? Has education brought about a change or does it limit the change to social spaces?

Bhupeen:

जातिप्रथाको अभ्यास वा जातीय समस्या समय सँगै परिवर्तन हुँदै आइरहेको छ? या यो सधैंभरी उस्तै नै छ? के शिक्षाले यसमा केहिप परिवर्तन ल्याएको छ? वा यसले परिवर्तनलाई केही सामाजिक परिधिहरु भित्र मात्र राखेको छ?

जात व्यवस्थाले आफ्नो अस्तित्व बचाउन अनेक रुप धारण गरिरहन्छ । परिवर्तन भएको जस्तो भान पनि दिन्छ तर अस्तित्वमा पनि रहिरहन्छ । यो टिकिरहन चाहन्छ । यो सधैं उस्तै त रहन्छ तर कुनै न कुनै रुपमा बाँचिरहने कोसिसमा हुन्छ । मानिसका सिद्धान्तमामेटिए पनि भावनामा हुन्छ । भावनामा मेटिए पनि व्यवहारमा हुन्छ । मनोविज्ञानमा हुन्छ ।

शिक्षाले व्यापक परिवर्तन ल्याउँछ, ल्याउन सक्छ । तर शिक्षाको प्रभावकारी हस्तान्तरणका लागि कुशल शिक्षक चाहिन्छ । समस्या यहीँनेर छ । हृदयमा ब्रम्हाणवादी चिन्तनले सुसज्जित शिक्षकबाट दलित मुक्तिका प्रवचन प्रभावकारी रुपमा अभिव्यक्त हुन सक्दैनन् । जसरी दिमागले मात्रै साँचो र पूर्ण प्रेम हुन्छ, त्यसरी नै ज्ञानले मात्रै साँचो र पूर्ण सिकाई असम्भव हुन्छ । हृदय र मस्तिष्क दुवैमादलित तमाथिको विभेद निमित्त्यान हुनुपर्छ भन्ने मान्यता नभएका नीति निर्माता, पाठ्यक्रम निर्माता र शिक्षक नभएसम्म व्यापक र द्रुतपरिवर्तन सम्भव छैन ।

Trans: The caste system changes its form continuously to thrive in different ways. It gives an image of change but does not leave its identity. It has learned to thrive. It is not the same always but it has stayed in various

forms. Even if people have removed it from their ideologies, it has not changed much in their spirit. Even if it leaves their emotions, it remains in their practices, it stays in their subconscious mind.

Education can bring great change. But for the education's outcome to be effective, good teachers are required. And there is a problem there. If a teacher holds *Bahunbaad* notion in his heart, there is no way he can effectively communicate and stand up for Dalit upliftment. You cannot love with the head alone, likewise, education alone cannot teach. Unless a teacher fully believes in his head and his heart that Dalit oppression must end, this will not be possible.

8. RS: What pushed you to write this novel? Is it the people of Baglung, or is it the people in general?

Bhupeen:

दलितहरूले भोगिरहेको समस्या दलितहरूका लागि त नर्क समान नै हो, तर यो समाजका हरेक मानिसहरूको समस्या हो । कथित उच्च जातका मानिसहरूको पनि समस्या हो । जुन समाजमा मानिसले मानिसको दर्जा पाउँदैन, त्यो समाज उज्यालो समाज हुनैसक्दैन । त्यो अँध्यारो समाज हो । मैदारोमा जुन समाजको सेटिङ छ, त्यसको प्रतिकात्मक अर्थ पनि यही हो कि जहाँजहाँ अँधेरीगाउँहरू हुन्छन्, ती समाज उल्टो समाज हुन् । केराको बोटमा झुण्डिएको चमेराजस्तो उल्टो समाज । त्यहाँ चित्रकारहरू उल्टो चित्रबनाउन अभिशप्त हुन्छन् । त्यहाँ बाँच्न चाहनेहरू मानवीय जीवन बाँच्न असमर्थ हुन्छन्, वास्तविक परिवर्तन चाहनेहरू आत्महत्या गर्न बाध्य पारिन्छन् । अँधेरी गाउँमा त दलितहरूका लागि भीरै भीर छन्, जहाँ उनीहरू सदियौँदेखि समाजको ठूलो हिस्साबाट अलगथलग पारिएका छन् । सजिलो भूभाग निश्चित जातका लागि उपलब्ध छ, भीर दलितका लागि ।

जातीय दलन मैले गाउँमा देखेँ, अनुभव गरें । म पनि कथित उच्च जातीय दम्भबाट निर्देशित भएर बाल्यकालमा यही खेलमा समावेश भएँ । तर जब मैले साहित्यिक र राजनीतिक चेतना मार्फत समाजलाई चिनेँ, म यो घृणित खेलबाट अलग हुने कोसिस गर्न थालें । नदीहरू मान्छेजस्ता हुँदैनन् जस्ता कविता लेखेँ, पूजारी जस्ता निबन्ध लेखेँ । चित्त बुझेन । मलाई लाग्यो, मैले यस मुद्दामा निरन्तर लेखिरहनु पर्छ । कोसिस जारी छ । मैदारो यसैको प्रतिफल पनि हो ।

मेरो विचारमा मैदारो लेखने प्रेरणामा ती सबै उत्पीडितहरूको भूमिका छ, जो अँधेरी गाउँमा बस्न अभिशप्त छन् । मैदारोको अँधेरी गाउँ एक प्रतिकात्मक गाउँ हो, जो मेरो जिल्लामा मात्रै होइन, नेपालभरि अस्तित्वमा छ । जो नेपालको मात्रै पनि होइन, विशाल भारतभरि अस्तित्वमा छ ।

तसर्थ म मैदारोलाई भारतीय उपमहाद्वीपमा विद्यमान एक सामाजिक समस्याको प्रतिनिधि कथा भन्न रुचाउँछु ।

Trans: The issues faced by Dalits are like hell, not just that, but it is a matter of concern for people living in this society, a society where humans are not respected equally can never be considered a good society. It is a dark society. The setting of *Maidaro* is also a reflection of societies that are in darkness, these are opposite societies. It is like a bat hanging upside down from a banana tree. People are not able to live a good life there and are forced to commit suicide. In such darkness, the Dalits face constant hardship, and for the longest time, they have been struggling and are kept away from the social order. The flat land remains limited to the upper caste, whereas difficult terrain belongs to them.

I have seen caste practices in my village and have experienced them. I also belong to this upper caste and because of this, I was a part of the oppressors. But, when I became aware of these ill-practices through literature and political awareness, I started distancing myself. I wrote poems describing how rivers are not like people, I wrote on priests, but I was not satisfied. I felt I must write on this issue continuously. I have been trying and *Maidaro* is an outcome of that.

In my belief, I was pushed to write *Maidaro* because of the sufferings of many people, who are forced to live in darkness. The Andheri village depicted in *Maidaro* is a metaphorical village, which is not just in my district but all over Nepal. This is not just limited to Nepal but to the entire India as well. Therefore, I think *Maidaro* is representative of the whole of the Indian sub-continent.

9. RS: What are your thoughts on inter-caste marriage? Does it make the life of people easy or difficult? Do you think inter-caste/inter-community marriages must be encouraged to dismantle the caste system?

Bhupeen:

प्रेम नै मानिसको यस्तो सिर्जना हो जुन हर समाज र कानुनभन्दा पनि माथि हुन्छ । प्रेमको फूल जहाँ जसरी पनि फुल्न सक्छ । प्रेमज

स्तो प्रभावकारी क्रान्ति अर्को हुँदैन । अन्तर जातीय प्रेम र प्रेमपछिको विवाहले जात व्यवस्थालाई कमजोर बनाउन सहयोग नैगर्छ भन्ने लाग्छ । तर कट्टर समाजको त अन्तरजातिय मात्रै होइन, हरेक प्रेमसँग दुस्मनी हुन्छ । यो घृणित चलन भत्किनु जरुरी छ ।

कट्टर समाजले प्रेमलाई स्वीकृति नदिएर यसलाई असफल पार्न गरिएका हजारौं लाखौं अपराधका कथाले समाजमा सदियौंदेखिआँ सुका अँधेरी खोलाहरु बगिरहेछन् । यसको न्युनिकरणका लागि उदार कानूनको जरुरी हुन्छ । कानूनमा प्रसस्त सुधारहरु पनिभएका छन् । बाउआमाले आफ्ना सन्तानको खुसीलाई जस्तै कठिन परिस्थितीमा पनि स्वीकार्न सक्छन् भन्ने मलाई पनि लागिरहन्छ ।

विवाहले दिने खुसी छनौटको व्यापकतामा निहित हुन्छ, न कि छनौटको सिमिततामा । बाहुनले बाहुनमात्रै, क्षेत्रीले क्षेत्रीमात्रै वा अन्य जातीले आफ्नो जाती मात्रै विवाह गर्नु पर्छ भन्ने नश्लिय मान्यताले छनौटको अवसरलाई पूर्णतः खारेज गरिदिन्छ । त्यसकारण पनि म अन्तरजातीय, अन्तर धार्मिक वा अन्तर सामुदायीक प्रेम र विवाहलाई प्रोत्साहित गर्नु पर्छ भन्ने मान्यता राख्छु ।

विज्ञान भन्छ- यसबाट स्वस्थ सन्तानको जन्म हुन्छ र यसले जातीय अतिवाद कम गर्न मद्दत गर्छ ।

तर प्रेम कोसिस गरेर हुने कुरा होइन । आन्दोलन वा विद्रोह गरेर अरु सत्ता प्राप्त गर्न सकिएला, प्रेम सत्ता प्राप्त गर्न सकिन्न । प्रेम हुने कुरा हो, कोसिस गर्ने कुरा होइन । यस सत्यप्रति भने मानिसहरु सचेत हुनु आवश्यक हुन्छ ।

Love is a creation of humans that stays above society and law. Love can bloom anywhere. There is no bigger revolution than that of love. I feel inter-caste marriage and love marriages help to weaken the caste system. But, orthodox society is not just against inter-caste marriage but is an enemy to all forms of love marriage. This disgusting practice must be done away with.

Orthodox society's disapproval of love and protest has given rise to millions of stories of crime which has pushed the society to shed tears. To mitigate this stringent laws are necessary. There have been great improvements in the law too. I feel parents will be able to accept these things at any condition for the sake of their child's happiness.

The happiness that is obtained from marriage is dependent on choice rather than choice on limitation. If one has to marry people from the same caste this reflects the narrow-mindedness and the whole idea of choosing a partner becomes irrelevant. Therefore, I believe that inter-caste, inter-religion, and inter-community marriages must be encouraged.

Even science says that children born out of these marriages are healthier and lessen the caste gap. But, love cannot be done with an effort. Revolution or opposing these can perhaps form a government, but love cannot form a government. Love happens, it is not something you try. Therefore, people must become aware towards this truth.

10. RS: Is this novel entirely a work of fiction or has it been influenced by personal or real-life experience?

Bhupeen:

मैदारो मेरो काल्पनिकी र समाजिक यथार्थको कलात्मक मिश्रण हो । शैलीगत रूपमा कविताको काल्पनिक दुनियामा पाइलट बनेरउ
इन मन पराउने मैले समाजका प्रायः वास्तविक पात्रहरूलाई नै उपन्यासमा उभ्याउने प्रयत्न गरेको छु । तर म स्वीकार गर्छु, तीपात्रहरू
धेरै पात्रका योगबाट बनेका हुन सक्छन् । जस्तै: मैदारोको प्रोटागनिस्ट नदीन मेरो प्रिय विद्यार्थी मनिष हरिजनको आधीअवतार हो ।
ऊ गम्भीर चित्रकार हो र चित्रकारीताकै कारण हिन्दु अतिवादी संगठनका कार्यकर्ताबाट हत्याको धम्की पाएको पात्रपनि हो । नेपाली
कलाको इतिहासमा मनिष हरिजनले भोगेको दुर्दसा बिरलकोटीमै पर्छ ।

तर नदीन मनिष हरिजन मात्रै होइन । नदीनको कला नामक युवतीसँगको प्रेमकथा, उल्टो चित्र, आत्महत्याको प्रयास, पाटेभीरमा पाँच
वर्षसम्मको संघर्ष र मेटामर्फोसिस मेरा कल्पनाहरू हुन् । मलाई लाग्छ, अँधेरी गाउँमा यस्ता पात्रहरूको कहीं कतै अस्तित्व छ । मानि
सका उत्पीडन, चरम दुख र संघर्षहरूलाई कवि पनि हुनुका कारण मैले मेटाफरमा भन्ने कोसिस गरेको छु । अन्य पात्रहरूकोविकाशमा
पनि वास्तविकता र कल्पनाको ब्लेन्ड गर्ने जमर्को गरेको छु । मैदारोमा म न त हाम्रो जीवन, समय र समाजबाट पूरै बेखबरभएर कल्प
नाको बतासमा उड्न चाहेको छु, न कोरा यथार्थ लेख्ने उत्तेजनामा कलामूल्यलाई नारा बनाउन इच्छुक छु ।

प्रश्नको माग अनुसार एक महत्वपूर्ण घटनाको उल्लेख गरेर म यस वार्ता टुङ्ग्याउन चाहन्छु ।

मेरी प्यारी भतिजी सुजाताले अन्तरजातीय विवाह गरेकै कारण ऊ मेरै परिवार र समाजबाट बहिष्कृत भइ । यो घटना मेरो परिवारमानै
घटेकाले मैले दलित उत्पीडनलाई धेरै नजिकबाट बुझ्न पाएँ । विशेष अर्थमा मैदारो मेरी भतिजी सुजाताको अन्तर जातीय विवाह रत्य
सले सिर्जना गरेको सामाजिक कम्पनको आख्यानानामक दस्तावेज हो, जसमा मैले सुजातालाई नायीका कलाको रूपमा उभ्याउनेको

सिस गरेको छु । तर कला सुजाता मात्रै होइन, कथित तल्लो जातको केटासँग प्रेम गरे वापत दण्डित भएका हजारौं दुखीप्रेमिकाहरु को इतिहास पनि हो ।

Trans: *Maidaaro* is not just a work of fiction but also a social reality. I have managed to use all the characters, a fiction requires in my novel. But, I accept that these characters are made with the help of many other characters. For example, the protagonist of *Maidaaro*, Nadin is a reflection of my dear student Manish Harijan, who is a Dalit. He is a very thoughtful artist and because of his work, he has received death threats from Hindu organisations. In Nepali cultural society, the pains Manish Harijan has faced are of extreme order. But, Nadin is not just Manish Harijan. Nadin's relationship with Kala, upside-down paintings, attempt to commit suicide, struggle to live in Patey bhir and metamorphosis is all my imagination. I feel there are many characters like this in *Andheri gaon*, without any identity. People's struggles, extreme sadness, and struggles are my metaphorical creations. I have tried to blend reality and imagination with other characters. *Maidaaro* is not distanced entirely from reality nor is it entirely fiction.

According to the demand of your question, I would like to cite an important event that influenced my writing and end it.

My very dear niece was excluded from her family because of inter-caste marriage. This incident has affected my own family and I have experienced Dalit oppression from very close quarters. *Maidaaro* is specially created to report the oppression my niece Sujata's inter-caste marriage brought into her life. Through the character of Kala, I have tried to portray Sujata's life. Having said that, Kala is not just Sujata but many girls from the upper caste who have been affected by caste oppression because of their love relationship with a man from a lower caste.

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