

Chapter II

Darjeeling Hills: Land and its People

2.1 Introduction

A social movement cannot be studied in isolation without referring to the history and culture of a society in which it emerges. The hill region of Darjeeling has witnessed the emergence of several movements based on nationalism, language, underdevelopment and other important socio-political and cultural issues. It maintains a long heritage of people's protests for social change in the region. The interpretation of regional history and its people plays an important role in the movement and counter movement mobilization. It has been witnessed from the past experiences of social movements that the supporters of a movement often make a claim over the territory and the opponent may contradict. It is because the people have their ways of objective and subject understanding of the history, region and its people. This is a common phenomenon in social movements around the world where a sense of belonging towards a region occupies a significant position (Subba 1992). The present chapter is a brief overview of the regional history, community and identity formation and gender dimensions of the hill society of Darjeeling Hills which helps us to understand the background of social movements and women's participation.

2.2. Darjeeling Hills: History and Society

It is very difficult to trace the early history of Darjeeling Hills because there is no clear, concise and documented history on the region before the advent of the British. The early history of the region has not been written by trained historians but it is either written or documented by British administrators, missionaries, botanists or travellers and others. Many scholars expressed reservation on the authenticity on these writings particularly on some aspects of demographic history (Shneiderman and Middleton 2018: 01-13, Subba 1992). They argued that before the advent of the British, the region was sparsely populated hillocks of few households of Lepchas, Mangars, Limboos and Rais (Pradhan 1982,

Bhattacharyya-Panda 2005). However, the development of Darjeeling from sparsely populated hillock to a famous hill station is the contribution of the Raj (Chettri 2013: 02) with the immense contribution of the hard working Lepchas, Nepalis and Bhutias. Their contribution to the making of Darjeeling has developed a sense of belonging towards the region in the present generation hill communities.

Darjeeling as a Himalayan frontier evolved through the different stages with the then kingdom of Sikkim and two sovereign nations- Nepal and Bhutan. Pre-colonial Darjeeling belonged to the then Royal Kingdom of Sikkim but it was conquered by the Gorkhas of Nepal in 1780 (Shneiderman and Middleton 2018: 01-13). It became the root cause of the Anglo-Gorkha war nearly after two decades. Troublesome situations emerged between the kingdom of Nepal and the British East India Company from 1804 to 1812 and frequent war broke out between them. The troop of Shah Dynasty was defeated by the British East India Company in the battle of Nalapani at Kangara in 1815. As a result of which the treaty of Sugauli was signed between them. Nepal had to cede its Terai region which included the present day Darjeeling district to the British East India Company. They returned Darjeeling to the Maharaja of Sikkim through the treaty of Titlaya in 1817 to establish a relationship of friendship and non-alliance. Townsend Middleton and Sara Shneiderman explained the early history of Darjeeling as:

“Throughout much of the eighteenth century, the territory between the Mechi and Teesta river was claimed by the Chogyal of Sikkim. Nepal’s military expansion eastward in the final decades of that century brought the tract under the control of Nepal’s Gorkha Empire. The area east of Teesta river meanwhile remained part of Bhutan. Nepal’s rule over Darjeeling came to an end in 1815, when the British mandated Nepal return the tract to Sikkim at the conclusion of the Anglo-Nepalese war (1814-16) by the treaty of Segowlee or Sugauli (1815) and subsequent treaty of Titalia (1817)” (2018: 05).

The hill stations in India have been inherited from the British colonizers. They considered summer as inhospitable and threat to a good health. All hill stations were

established by the British as early as 1815. They had already discovered the nearest hill station for metropolitan cities like Nilgiri-Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu, Mahabaleswar in the Western Ghats near Bombay and Simla-Mussoorie-Nainital near Delhi. However, till then they were in search of a proximate hill station from the then British capital- Calcutta. Darjeeling was discovered by the two British officers, Captain Lloyd and Mr. Grant who were sent by the Governor-General of Bengal to settle down the disputes that arose in Nepal-Sikkim frontier between Sikkim and Nepal in the year 1826. The two representatives discovered the entire region as favorable for a sanatorium to the British soldiers and they expressed their desire to the Viceroy. The Deputy Surveyor general Captain Herbert was sent to the area for examination. The court of Directors of the East India Company approved the project and General Lloyd was given the responsibility to negotiate a lease of the area to the Chogyal of Sikkim. The lease was granted on 1st February 1835 following the Deed of Grant. Kalimpong on the other hand belonged to the then Royal Kingdom of Sikkim but it was conquered by the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan in the year 1706. This was annexed to British India following the treaty of Sinchula on November 11, 1865, as a result of the Anglo-Bhutan war and after three years it was annexed to Darjeeling district (O'Malley 1907). Subhas Ranjan Chakrabarty summarises the formation of Darjeeling district in his article "Silence Under freedom: The Strange Story of Democracy in the Darjeeling Hills" as:

"The district of Darjeeling evolved through different stages. In 1835, Darjeeling was ceded to the English East India Company by the Raja of Sikkim. Darjeeling meant all land "south of the great Rungeet river, east of Balasun, Kahail and Little Rungeet rivers, and the west of the Rungnoo and Mahanadi rivers". Relations with Sikkim did not always remain peaceful thereafter and two further expeditions were led by the British in 1850 and 1861. A treaty concluded with the prince of Sikkim at Tumlung confirmed the British possession of Darjeeling. The war with Bhutan in 1861 led to the acquisition of Kalimpong and territories to the east of the Teesta. Thus the contours of the district of Darjeeling were formed" (2005: 173-174).

The British East India Company after acquiring Deeds of Grants from Raja of Sikkim wanted to develop a hill station and a sanatorium for the British soldiers, European and Eurasian elites and their families. On the other hand, its strategic location attracted the British as it was surrounded by Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. They were very much interested to establish trans-Himalayan trade with Tibet through Sikkim (O'Malley 1907: 24, Chakrabarty 2005: 172-178). Perhaps, it was not an easy task because the entire region was covered by dense forest with scare helmets of habitants. The British acquisition of Darjeeling from Sikkim gave opportunities to the people of neighbouring areas i.e. Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim and Hindustanis from the plains below. The British did not find much difficulty in acquiring cheap laborers from east of Mechi due to the prevalence of slavery and caste based discrimination and economic hardship in their native places. The arrangements for the permanent settlement of the laborers were made by the British. Initially, large numbers of coolies were needed to transport goods from one place to another and to carry out the development works like construction of roads, hotels, school buildings, etc. (Pinn 1987, Pradhan 1982, Chakrabarty 2018).

The growth of population further increased after the successful experimentation of tea seeds and the establishment of the tea industry in Darjeeling particularly after 1856. The establishment of the plantation industry led to the huge flow of European capital in Darjeeling and later on in Terai and Dooars. The shortage of labour was a major problem faced by British entrepreneurs. The planters employed large numbers of *Sardars* to bring the hard working labourer from east of *Mechi* river for which the *Sardars* were highly paid. It provided great opportunities to the economically and socially oppressed Nepalese from Eastern Nepal. The enforcement of *Muluki-Aien* (the national legal code introduced by Janj Bahadur Rana after his visit to Europe) and domination of the Brahmanical religion was absolute over the lower castes. So, the majority of people who came to Darjeeling were from lower castes. It has been evident that there were multiple forces of push factors responsible for their migration to Darjeeling. Apart from the abolition of the *Kipat* (communal ownership of land particularly among the Kiratis), there were many factors of Nepali migration particularly to Darjeeling-Sikkim and North-east India. It has been evident that the British encouraged Nepali migration and their settlements through

‘official sponsorship’ particularly in North-East India, Sikkim-Darjeeling, Bhutan and Burma. Several scholars acknowledge their ‘contribution in economic development of the region’ (Dutt 1981; Devi 2007). The British encouraged Nepali settlements to have easy access to cheap labour from their descendants. However, some scholars believed that the Kiratas of Nepali groups to be the earliest inhabitants of North-East India (Devi 2007: 3005). The Nepalis came to the various tracts of North-East India and Darjeeling Hills as the grazers and cultivators (Nath 2006; Sapkota 2009). In the successive years to come, the number of tea gardens went on increasing and the population too. It further increased due to the establishment of the Gorkha recruitment depot in Darjeeling in the year 1890. It continues to draw recruitment from India and Nepal. British wanted to recruit a large number of Gorkhas in the British Army because they were free from traditional bondage of both Hinduism and Islam. The British had already witnessed the great revolt of 1857 and they were facing turbulent years in other colonies too. They wanted Gorkhas to fight battles around the world for them (Shneiderman and Middleton 2018: 01-13). However, many Gorkha war prisoners in Singapore joined Indian National Army (INA) under the aegis of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose and actively participated in the nationalist movement and sacrificed their lives (Bagchi: 2009, Muktan 2015).

It is also a fact that since time immemorial the present day India and Nepal which was then divided into different principalities shared socio-cultural and religious proximity and migration between these principalities were vice-a-versa (Viehbeck 2017: 01-15). In pre-colonial India, the Nepalese had migrated to Munger (land of Mughals) and *Lahure* (Lahore) for their recruitment in the army of King Ranjit Singh (Golay 2009), although it became a significant phenomenon after the treaty of Sugauli of 1815-16 in the British army. In contemporary India, the Nepalis are found almost throughout India but they are generally concentrated in clusters of villages in different parts of North-East, Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Dehradun, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and much smaller numbers in metropolises like Kolkata, New Delhi and Mumbai (Subba 2003; Kumari 1999). There are three categories of Nepalis found in India. The first category comprises those Indian Nepali/Gorkhas who are Indian citizens and are living in this land for many generations. The second category comprises Nepali citizens

and seasonal migrant workers from Nepal in search of their livelihood. The third category comprises a minute section that illegally holds the citizenship of both countries (Subba 2014). The second and third categories of Nepalis in India are the result of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Friendship and Peace (1950)'. Many Nepali/Gorkha raised their voice against this treaty because Article 7 of this treaty allows the 'reciprocal ties between India-Nepal and vice versa in terms of same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.' This treaty does not talk about the earlier treaties that were signed between British Indian and Nepal. Since the treaty allows reciprocal ties in terms of residence and works the identity of the Indian Nepalis/Gorkhas who are living since generation in India often get confused with the citizens of Nepal. This was a major reason that most of the regional parties in Darjeeling are demanding the abrogation or modification of Article 7 of the India-Nepal treaty of friendship and peace. Such demand was raised by the GNLF and GJMM along with the statehood movement.

The colonial administrative policies have been largely responsible for the establishment of Darjeeling Hills as a colonial hinterland. The hill region was excluded from mainstream Bengal due to the vested interests of the British Raj. As a summer capital, the region was administered with special administrative policies. The district of Darjeeling was excluded from some of the general Regulations and Acts of Bengal in the name of the Non-regulation District. It was formerly a part of the Rajshahi Division but at the time of partition of Bengal in 1905, it was transferred to Bhagalpur Division. It was classified into a Non-Regulated Area for the preservation of the indigenous systems of natives from 1870-1874. It was a Scheduled District from 1874 to 1919. According to which it was kept outside the purview of general laws operating throughout the country. Again it was considered as a Backward Tract from 1919 to 1935 under which the Governor of a province had the sole responsibility of its administration. Darjeeling remained a Partially Excluded Area from 1935 to 1947 for which the Governor was to consult the Council of Ministers for its administration (O'Malley 1907: 156). Many argued that such policies along with the demand of 'separate administrative set up' in 1907 were supported by the

planters in order to have more control over labour recruitment policies in the plantation sector.

The contemporary tea garden workers have been forced to live in servitude even after the seven decades of independence. The plantation workers even after working in the same garden for many generations are deprived of land rights. Even they do not have homestead land in their name. Technically they are deprived of many schemes of the Panchayati Raj Institution due to lack of land documents. Ganguly (2012) locates the Gorkhaland movement in the light of 'poverty, malgovernance and ethnopolitical mobilization' and considered communities like Gorkhas as 'entrapped minorities'. He argued that most of such ethnic groups are subordinated by the majoritarian group who are culturally different and politically and economically powerful. Their deprivation, endemic poverty and underdevelopment status manifested in the statehood demands to establish a direct relationship with the central government (Ganguly 2012: 470-475).

2.3. Darjeeling Hills: Demographic Features and Social Structure

2.3.1. Communities and Demographic Features

The demographic features of Darjeeling Hills have been multi-ethnic constituted by the large numbers of communities belonging to different ethnic and caste backgrounds. The community and ethnic background vary with the landscape of the region itself. The urban center or hill town is multi ethnic and a type of mosaic culture can be witnessed among the communities living there like Bengalis, Nepalis, Marwaris, Biharis, Bengalis, Tibetans, Bhutias, and Lepchas etc. The Nepalis/Gorkhas constituted the numerically dominant community in Darjeeling Hills. Apart from towns and urban hamlets particularly in tea gardens, agriculture village and forest villages etc. Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas occupied the dominant position in the region. The Nepali language is lingua-franca of the region.

2.3.2. Nepalis/Gorkhas of Darjeeling Hills and their Social Structure

The Nepalis/Gorkhas can be defined as 'a group of people who share a common language i.e., Nepali'. The word Nepali signifies multiple connotations like language, community, and nationality (Pradhan 1987: 01-03). The Indian Nepalis also popularly call themselves

as the Indian Gorkhas to differentiate them from the citizens of Nepal. They are synonymously known as the hill community in West Bengal and their ethnographic boundaries have been extended up to Siliguri, Terai, Dooars and clusters of urban hamlets almost throughout North Bengal.

The Nepali/Gorkhas of Darjeeling Hills are heterogeneous and divided into several castes and sub-castes. The word Nepali or Gorkha is an umbrella term for several endogamous groups and castes or *jatis* that constitute a linguistic community. This community can be broadly categorized into *Tagadhary* and *Matawali*. Tagadhary literary means the “sacred thread wearer” and traditionally they do not drink or use alcohol in their rituals. They are regarded as the clean caste in the Nepali caste hierarchy. The Bahuns (Brahmins) occupy the topmost position followed by the Kshatriyas like Chhetris (warriors) and Thakuris (aristocrats). Bahuns are further divided into *Jharra Bahun* who traditionally perform rituals and *Jaisey Bahuns*, the astrologers. Among them also there are certain restrictions in terms of caste occupation and marriage etc. The Jharra Bahuns consider themselves as superior to the Jaishis. The Matwali are those endogamous groups who traditionally use locally prepared alcohol called *Rakshi* or *Jaandr* in their ceremonies and rituals. It literary means “alcohol users” or “alcohol consumer”. Traditionally the Newar (businessman), Gurung (Shepherds), Tamang (horse traders/cavaliers), *Rai*, *Limboo*, *Yakkha*, *Mukhia*, *Mangar*, *Thami* (agriculturists), *Sherpa* (potters and potato growers), *Bhujel* (beaten rice makers/ palanquin bearers), *Jogi* (ascetics) and others belong to *Matawali* group.

The lower strata of the Nepali caste hierarchy are occupied by the Indo-Aryan origin/stock scheduled castes or Dalits like *Sunar* (goldsmith) *Kami* (ironsmith), *Damai* (tailor and musician) and *Sarki* (cobbler) and they are commonly referred as *Kalo Matwali* (Singh 2010; Subba 1989; Subedi 2010). Most of the high and low caste Nepalis had migrated from India to Nepal during the Muslim invasion. All these endogamous groups or *jatis* are further divided into different clans and sub-clans, for instance, *Karki* is one of the sub-castes of the Chhetris who are further divided into *Mudula Karki*, *Sutar Karki* and *Lama Karki* and each of these sub-castes have further divisions.

One can notice differences among the Nepali speaking population in terms of their religious affiliations. The Tagadharis and scheduled castes are basically Hindu while the Tamangs, Sherpas, a section of Newars and Gurungs follow Buddhism. A large section of the Nepalis in Darjeeling and Sikkim are Christian. All other endogamous Nepalis are basically Hindu and some of them also follow their traditional religious beliefs and practices like shamanism, naturalism, animism and ancestor worship. All endogamous groups and castes possess their own way of life relating to birth and death ceremonies, marriage practices, folk songs and dance, myths and folklores, food habits and attires. Each and every group has its own dialect but the Nepali language has been the lingua-franca of all ethnic groups.

There are numerous festivals, big or small, celebrated by the Nepalis like *Dashain* (Durga Puja), *Tihar* (Dipawali), *Pahilo Baisakh* (Nepali New Year), *Chaita Dashain* (celebrated in the month of *Chait*), *Maghey Sankriti* (which is commonly known as *Makkar Sankriti*), *Guru Puja* (worshipping of the guru or teacher), *Sansari Puja* (worshipping of nature), *Lho-char* (new year of Lepchas, Bhutias, Tamangs, Gurungs and Sherpas). *Khukuri* is the most important religious and traditional weapon of the Nepalis. The traditional food of the Nepalis are *Salroti* (a ring shaped, spongy, pretzel-like bread), *Gundruk* (non-salted, fermented and sun-dried leaves), *Kinema* (a traditional fermented soybean food), *Senki* (non-salted fermented radish taproot), *Makai-ko-bhat* (an edible dish prepared from the flour of maize), *Chhurpi* (prepared from milk), *Mohi* (buttermilk), *Dahi* (traditional curd), *Dhero* (porridge-like Nepali food), *Masu* (meat), *Rakshi* (locally prepared beverage), *Jaanr* (alcohol made of grains) etc. Culturally these food have great significance and are traditionally important in different festivals and ceremonies (Liwang 2006; Tamang 2009).

In Darjeeling Hills, many of the characteristic features of the traditional Nepali/Gorkha society have been blurred. It is because of the impact of colonialism, modern education and the impact of tribal cultural traits among them. At present some of the elements of Hindu culture have been discarded by many Nepali/Gorkha sub-groups like

Rai, Mangar, Gurung and others due to the tribalization movement which has been pertinent in the region particularly after the 2000s.

2.3.3. Community and Identity Formation

Despite heterogeneity, the Nepalis/Gorkhas appear as a unified whole based on common language i.e. Nepali. The formation of Nepali identity in Darjeeling Hills in particular and Nepali diaspora outside Nepal in general has been based on a common language i.c. Nepali (Hutt 1997: 101-102). For Pradhan (1987), Nepali society of Darjeeling particularly emerged out from the *Sarvahara Varga* (proletariat basis) because they entirely constituted of *coolies* in contrast to the *Gora Sahib* (owners) and *Babus* (clerical staff from mainland India) in the colonial setting. The expression of proletariat basis of Nepalis in Darjeeling found in *Nepali Sawai* written by Hajariman Rai in 1900: '*Daju sardar, boini kulli, tupisamma wrin*' ('elder brother is Sardar, the sister is coolie- both are indebted up to the tip of their hair') (cited in, Chakrabarty 2018: 154). In the context of community formation of Nepalis in colonial Darjeeling, Pradhan (1982: 11) observed that:

“Those who had left Nepal encountering the feudal atrocities, soon realized that the feudal exploitation of Nepal was usurped by the force of British colonial exploitation in Darjeeling and became aware of the very fact that *Ramrajya* did not prevail in the then Darjeeling. Nationality question of the Nepalis was not the brainchild of the rising middle class nor did it even reflect the interests of the capitalist class as the Nepali society of Darjeeling was then entirely composed of sipahis (corps), laborers, agriculturalists, and plantation (tea, chinchona) workers.”(Translated and cited in, Sarkar and Khawas 2018: 183).

He further argued in his essay '*Darjeelingma Nepali Jati*' (1982) that the Nepali language developed as a lingua-franca among the diverse group in the colonial setting. There was a need for a common language among the coolies, sahibs and babus. In the course of time, Nepali emerged as a lingua-franca not only among the diverse groups within the Nepalis but also among the Lepchas, Bhutias and people of plains origin living in Hills. This language was also prioritised by the colonial agency because it was close to

Hindi and easier than the other dialects/languages. Secondly, the move for the development of the Nepali language was taken up by the Christian missionaries. They may have had vested interests behind such activities but it contributed much to the development of Nepali language and literature in India. The contribution of Col. Krikpatrik has been significant in publishing a Parbate (Nepali) vocabulary of 550 words with its English translation as early as 1811. J.A Ayton published “A Grammar of the Nepalese Language” as early as 1820 with Devnagri script. In the year 1869, the translation of the Holy Bible into Nepali was started by Rev. William Macfarlane and Ganga Prasad Pradhan. The publication of ‘*Gorkha Khabar Kagat*’- a Nepali monthly magazine from Kurseong in 1901 was very important in the history of Nepali language and literature. He made a notable contribution by establishing print culture among the locals by setting up the ‘Gorkha Press’ in Kurseong in 1901. William Carey identified this language as one of the major 33 languages of India during the decades of the 1920s. However, it is to be remembered that the earliest contributions made by the Christian missionaries reflected more concern with the zeal of conversion than truly educating the natives but it inadvertently sowed the seed of modern education among the hill people (Sundas 1993: 09-10, Sarkar 2008: 89-91). The Nepali language has always been the driving force behind many social movements in the region due to these historical reasons. It has a long historical significance of its growth, development and community and ethnic identity formation based on language.

The formation of two most important literary and cultural institutions of Darjeeling, namely, Gorkha Jana Pustakalaya (1919) and Nepali Sahitya Sammelan (1924) were the most significant events in the history of Darjeeling which shaped the society and community at large. The trio legends of Nepali Sahitya Sammelan; namely, Suryabikram Gnawali, Dharnidhar Sharma and Parasmani Pradhan who are commonly known as *Su-Dha-Pa* immensely contributed in publication of Nepali text books and other literary activities. Parasmani Pradhan in his early age established the *Gorkha Sahitya Samaj* in 1916 and demanded for the Nepali language to be medium of instruction at school level by discarding Hindi. It was recognised as a medium of instruction at the primary level in 1935 and at the intermediary level it was recognised in 1953 (Sundas 1993: 109). The recognition of Nepali language as medium of instruction at intermediary level by the

Calcutta University in 1911 and its recognition by Allahabad University in 1918 brought enthusiasm among the Nepalis in India. The development of print culture was another significant event. Since early days there have been publication of literary magazines; such as, Gorkha Khabar Kagat (1901), Upanayas Tarangeni (1902), Sundari (1906), Gorkha Sathi (1907), Madhawi (1908), Chandra (1914), Chandrika (1918), Tarun Gorkha (1928), Gorkha Sewak (1935) and many others. These magazines advertently or inadvertently were successful in producing a long term effect in the development of Nepali literature and society not only in Darjeeling but throughout India and outside as well. The socio-political consciousness among the Nepalis had developed through these literary activities. Their sense of belonging had been expressed through these literary journals (Sarkar 2008: 89-91, Rai 2012).

Since the early decades of the twentieth century, there was the growth of consciousness among them which resulted in the formation of vibrant civil societies and political organizations not only in Darjeeling and Banaras but throughout India. This resulted in the formation of various non-political organizations like the All India Gorkha League (1919) by Thakur Chandan Singh as the purely non-political organization in Dehradun which later on became the dominant political organization, particularly in Darjeeling. The Gorkha Dukha Niwaran Sammelan (1929) was another vibrant organization whose aim was to collect the unclaimed dead bodies and perform the funeral rites. A flurry of social organizations like Sri Hitkari Sammelan (1942), Himalaya Kala Mandir (1950), and others emerged which were objectively involved in redefining and creating a new Self-identity on the kinship of *Nepali Daju-Bhai* (Golay 2008: 09-11). All these organizations and Associations played a very crucial role in the social formation of the Nepali/Gorkhas in India. So, in the early twentieth century Darjeeling emerged as the centre of learning and development of Nepali literature, culture and society.

2.4. Darjeeling Hills: Women, Culture and Society

The gender dimension of any movement cannot be understood without understanding the ‘institutionalized gender relationship’ of a patriarchal social order. Gender is one of the bases of social inequality in Nepali/Gorkha society; however, there is a spatial-temporal, class and caste variation. It is normally understood as the ‘parallel and socially unequal

division of femininity and masculinity'. This distinction operates at the various levels of family, caste, class, economy, religion, politics and culture etc. It has been argued by most of the sociologist, feminist and the post-feminist that there exists gender inequality in every society.

The women in every society some way or the other have a low social position than the men. The development of feminism saw the subordinate position of women in society. There are various theoretical paradigms that deal with the whole issue of gender inequality in society. It is a hot and debatable issue among the scholars themselves who deal with the gender discourses. There are various groups of scholars such as Marxists who believe that the mode of production is the root cause of gender inequality but for the liberal, it is unpaid work of women for men by carrying out household work.

The two most important factors that determine the position of women in society are tangible and intangible resource control. Tangible factors are the material resources controlled by the women for instance bank balance, land, gold ornaments, and any other forms of material wealth. The intangible include non-tangible things such as educational qualification, technical know-how, rational mentality and so on. Many scholars argue that without knowing the gender dimension of a particular society it is not possible to understand the gender dimension of a social movement. As argued by Kuumba:

“Gender, on both objective and subjective levels, significantly impacts social movement recruitment and mobilization, roles played and activities performed within movements, resistance strategies and organizational structure, and the relevance and impact of movement outcome” (Kuumba 2003: 15).

2.4.1. Social Structure and Women

The position of women in the hill society of Darjeeling has been highly contested. This is because of the complex Nepali social structure on the one hand and its exposure to the colonial economy, modernity, and Christianity on the other. It is not possible to draw a firm understanding of society before knowing the society and its social structure. The norms, values, beliefs and practices, culture, tradition, customs differ from society to

society. To know the position of women in Nepali society one has to understand the Nepali culture, Nepali caste system, customs, beliefs and practices, social structure, etc in a unified complex whole.

It is a common notion among the masses that the Nepali society of Darjeeling Hills is a modern and gender neutral society; however in reality it is not, although it is relatively more liberal than its counterpart in the plains. The everyday life practices of gender construction among them have been deeply inculcated in the Nepali culture itself. The influences of caste, Brahmanical religion and new religions particularly among the Matwalis have been the important factors that tightened the ideologies of patriarchal norms. This society is not as patriarchal as the pan Indian society where violence against women, dowry death, female infanticide and male preference, etc are found. The Brahmanical patriarchal attributes are more acute among the high caste Nepalis, particularly the *Bahun*s, *Chhetris*, *Thakuris* and *Jaishis*. They are locally leveled as the *Tagadhary* or twice born caste because they are a class of people who traditionally wore sacred threads and do not drink alcohol. The Matwalis such as *Rai*, *Limboo*, *Yakha*, *Tamang*, *Sherpa*, *Mangar*, *Gurung*, *Thami*, *Mukhia*, *Bhujel*, *Newar*, *Yalmo*, *Kami*, *Damai*, *Sarki* and others are much more liberal in their beliefs and practices. This is because the twice born castes are more inclined towards Hinduism and Brahmanical form of religious beliefs and practices; although one cannot deny the influence of Hinduism and new religion among the Matwalis.

‘Kinship structure and family structure account for some critical differences among societies in which it operate.’ Nepalis belong to patrilineal descent systems which organize marital, inheritance, and ritual behaviour in varying degrees (Dube 2009: 03). Like the rest India it is also a patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal society with the male domination in all spheres of domestic, social, economic and political life. The Patriarchal attributes and male hegemony is less visible among the Nepalis but its norms, values, culture, tradition and social structure supports male hegemony and subordination of women. Women have the inferior role and position in the family. Father is the head of the family or in case of his absence the eldest son has to take the responsibility of the whole family. The matter of

sexual hegemony is often controlled by the male not by the female. The inheritance of property is patrilineal. The father's property is usually distributed equally among the sons although there is legal provision as for daughters to inherit parental property. The birth of a son is considered auspicious in as much as it enables the parents to receive a birth in heaven. A son has to perform funeral rites of the parents. However; the female has no such rights traditionally (Shrestha 1997: 184-185). The Nepali women of Darjeeling Hills enjoy considerable freedom in terms of match-making, sex, divorce, dress and being economically independent still the forces of patriarchy plays a dominant role in terms of property right, decision making and politics.

On the other hand, traditionally women are regarded as the portrayal of *Mata Lakshmi* (Lord of wealth) and touching of feet of parents by the daughter is a taboo among the Nepalis/Gorkhas. No religious ceremony is completed without the presence of unmarried girls but in reality, the situation is something different; even the great poet like Adhikavi Bhanubhakta Acharya compares women with the prostitute in his poem- *Badhu Siksha*. The modern fiction like 'Gurkha's Daughter' also reveals the same thing, which shows how the Nepali/Gorkha women are bound by the structure of patriarchy and how they are treated as unwanted in their own society (Parajuly 2013; Chhetri 2015). A recently published anthology of contemporary Nepali poems "*Ucchwas*" by Urmila Ghishing from Mirik (Darjeeling) expressed the sorrowful life led by the Nepali/Gorkha women. In her poem *Nariprati* (towards women) where she has narrated the subjugation and domination faced by them and urged for the revolution to get justice (Ghishing 2011-17-19).

2.4.2. Colonial Economy, Education and Modernity

The tea plantation provided employment in a different social set-up which had produced far reaching impact on the Nepalis. The traditional dependency of women decreased because of their shift from home production to wage employment in which they had a direct control over the income. They were strong and capable of doing work at par with their male counterparts; however their projection in the eyes of the European planters was weak and feeble because the British planters were only interested in acquiring cheap labour which came to them in the form of women and children. There was the feminization

of wages as well and women and children were paid lower salary than the men (Lama 2012: 202). Even now women are not promoted to higher ranks in plantation. Majority of the tea pluckers are women and all the official posts have been occupied by men.

The British wanted to preserve Darjeeling like all other hill stations of India which reminded them of the ‘second home away from home (Britain)’. They enforced western oriented superior construct upon the non-western indigenous hill people because they always wanted to maintain their supremacy upon the native. It does not mean that the natives were not having their traditional forms of knowledge in various fields. They constructed the traditional knowledge of natives as inferior and western modernity as the superior; that was how they maintained a distance between rulers and subjects/ruled. On the other hand, the Christian missionaries entered into the region with their civilization mission idolizing the ‘white man’s burden’ for evangelical purpose but they soon realized that without literacy it was impossible to preach the gospel (Chatterjee 1997). So, the primary work of Christian missionaries in the field of education was inspired by religion rather than the socio-political upliftment of the general masses. They opened many schools for the common people in order to carry out their evangelical mission and they encouraged education for all (Dewan, 1991: 312-315). Though initially there was resistance from the part of the hill people, particularly by the high caste Nepalis against Christianity, Christian education and conversion, it sowed the seed of western English education in the region. In due time, many people received education and accepted Christianity and western ideals partly, if not fully. This had a far-reaching impact on the life of the hill people in general and women in particular. Modern English education and Christianity brought empowerment to the life of hill people in general and women in particular but it also sowed the seeds of Victorian patriarchy. In the long run, the liberal tribal groups imitated the sharp division of ‘public-private role for men and women’ of the English society. Prof. Partha Chatterjee argued that the reforms brought by the colonial government were defined by the benevolent male patriarchs and women participated little in deciding the course of their own progress to modernity (Sinha Roy 2015: 31). The colonial modernity brought empowerment with new patriarchies (Chatterjee 1997).

2.4.3 Women in Oral Tradition

The oral Nepali tradition serves as the evidence for the historic role ascribed to women in their society. It shows the broad spectrum of marginalization of women in the past. There is a famous proverb in Nepali; *chhuraa paaye khasi khauli chhori paaye pharsi* (beget a son to get mutton, beget a daughter to get pumpkin). The present proverb reflects the element of patriarchy in Nepali society and also shows the differences in treatment received by the mother if she fails to give birth to a male child. The Nepali proverb says *dhilo hos chhoro hos* (let there be a son, no matter how late). It does not directly discriminate the girl child but preference of male child is directly proportional to the marginalization of women in due time. It identifies women as the *parayadhan* (others wealth) like *cheli paali kutumblaai, kukur paali chituwaalaai* (a daughter is reared up for the son-in-laws as a dog is for the leopard) and makes a shameful comparison of a daughter with a dog.

There has been a separation of public and private roles between the male and female like *ghar khaanu chhorile, desh khaanu chhoroale* (the daughter is for managing the household; the son is for the world) and *baabu churaa hisaapkitap, amma chhori aincho-paincho* (father son doing audit; mother daughter swapping things). It restricts the women stereotypically within the four walls of domesticity and associate male with the public and political domain. The Nepali oral tradition does not allow female to take the decision in the public sphere by saying *pothi baseko suhaudaina* (The crowing of hen is rather unbecoming) and considered daughter as infamy like *Chhori cheli gaalko gund* (a daughter is the nest of shame), *chhori mari gaal tari* (the daughter is dead and so is infamy) (Translated and cited, Uprety 2008, Sharma 2010: 44-54).

These proverbs may not be traditionally used in everyday life in the context of Darjeeling Hills but at the ideological level it is highly relevant. Such gender ideologies highly relevant both at public and private domain of the hill society.

2.5. History of Social Movements in Darjeeling Hills

The hill region of Darjeeling district is known as the historical site of social movement emergence due to the long standing demand for autonomy of the region. It is one of the

known movements in India particularly after 1980s in the name of Gorkhaland. However, the region witnessed several important movements based on anti-colonial activities, class, and language since first half of the twentieth century. There were several instances of protest of the plantation labourers against plantation owners and colonial agencies but the organized form of movement was started after the formation of the Indian National Congress of Darjeeling district in 1921 by Dalbahadur Giri (Chaudhuri 1988: 24-26, Bhandari 1996, Bhattacharyya 1986, Bagchi 2009). Their participation in the non-cooperation movement of 1921-22 was the first political movement of the hill people in an organized movement (Dash 1947: 37). The region was kept under the strict surveillance of the British government but it was unable to restrict the hill people from participating in the freedom movement of the country. The emergence of the class base movement of tea plantation workers during the decades of the 1940s under the leadership of CPI(M) occupies another important event in the history of social movements of the region. As a result of which an organized movement was launched in the year 1955 against the neo-colonial forms of exploitation (Sharma 2003). Such movement of the plantation workers continues even today for basic rights like minimum wage, land rights and several principles laid down in the Plantation Labour Act (1951). The Nepali language movement has been another important movement initially launched by the Nepali Bhasa Samiti in 1961 for the recognition of Nepali as the official language of the three sub-divisions in the Hills. Later on, a movement for the inclusion of Nepali in the eighth schedule of Indian constitution was launched through various organizations that got its recognition in the year 1992.

Gorkhaland movement is a widely known and studied ethnic movement in India. It is a demand for the separation of Darjeeling Hills, Terai and Dooars from the domain of West Bengal under Article 3 of the Indian constitution. The demand for a separation of Darjeeling Hills, Terai and Dooars from the domain of West Bengal under the Indian union was 'first placed before the government by the hill people/Gorkhas in the year 1907' (Subba 1992: 76, Chakraborty 2005: 171-195, Chakrabarti 1988). The Hillmen's Association, one of the earliest formed organizations of the hill people of Darjeeling district continuously placed its petitions one after another to the British government till

1942 for the creation of a separate administrative set-up but it could not achieve its objective (Dasgupta: 1999). On 15th may 1943, a branch of All India Gorkha League (AIGL) was formed in Darjeeling which was established by Thakur Chandan Singh in the year 1929 in Dehradun to look after the Socio-cultural and literary upliftment of the Gorkhas in India. The foremost objectives of the AIGL was to integrate the Gorkha Society into mainstream India but soon it emerged as the only dominant political organization of the Gorkhas in northern part of West Bengal. Mr. Damber Singh Gurung, 1st president of AIGL (Darjeeling) initially came out with the idea of merger of Darjeeling Hills, Terai and Dooars with Assam but later on raised the demand of 'Uttarakhand' (Chakraborty 2005:179, Subba 1992:90). The decades of 1940s in the history of autonomy movement in the region was marked by the demand of 'Gorkha Sthaan' comprising Darjeeling, Terai and some parts of Assam by the communist activists of Darjeeling district like Ratanlal Brahamin, Charu Mujumdar and others (Bomzon 2008). Like all other political parties it also could not achieved its goal.

The most important and crucial phase of the identity movement could be considered as that of the post 1980s because for the first time the autonomy movement witnessed a massive participation of the Gorkhas with the clear vision of a separate state i.e, Gorkhaland under the banner of Gorkha National liberation Front (GNLF). This movement was much stronger than the earlier in terms of demands and articulation. It was the brainchild of Prantha Prashid formed by the intellectuals of Darjeeling. The GNLF supremo Subash Ghising organized the Gorkhaland movement in the light of regional history, Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan treaties, Gorkha recruitment in military and most importantly projected Agham Sing Giri as the *jatia kabi*. This movement emerged as the 'jati, asmita ra matoko larai' (movement for Gorkha identity and ethnicity) and took a violent shape caused hundreds of deaths, demolition of government properties etc. The GNLF dropped Gorkhaland movement as a result of the 'Gorkha Accord' and the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) came into being in 1988. The demand for Gorkhaland again resurrected in North Bengal under the leadership of Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha (GJMM) since 2007 and it is still going on even after the formation the

Gorkhaland Territorial Administration 2011 (GTA), it resurrected in the year 2013 and 2017.

The available works on Gorkhaland movement such as, 'Migration and Scarcity of Land and Employment' (Sur 1983-84:157-177), 'Economic Stagnation' (Dasgupta 1988), 'Colonial Administrative Policy' (Chakraborty 1988), 'Transferring Anger Which Emerged from the Eviction of Gorkha from Meghalaya and Assam' (Mishra 1987:15-20), 'Internal Colonialism' (Bomzon: 2008), 'Poverty, Malgovernance and Ethnopolitical Mobilization' (Gangualy 2005), 'Gorkhaland: Crisis of Statehood' (Bagchi 2012), 'Challenging the State by Reproducing its Principles' (Wenner 2013), 'Choosing the Gorkha: at the Crossroads of Class and Ethnicity in the Darjeeling Hills' (Chettri 2013) 'Gorkhaland Movement: Ethnic Conflict and State Response' (Sarkar 2013) 'Anxious Belongings: Anxiety and the politics of Belonging in Subnationalist Darjeeling' (2013), and others how that the Gorkhaland movement have been widely studied from different dimensions and perspectives. These works represented the identity movement in relation to nationalism, language, identity etc. The independence movement, trade union movement and language movement in Darjeeling Hills also got attention of the scholars (See, Karkidoli 1993, Sotang 2017, Rai 1992, Sharma 2003, Rai 2006, Muktan 2015, Bhattacharya 1986). A critical review on these works shows that the contributions of women in social movements in Darjeeling Hills have been largely neglected. In the following chapters we will discuss the contributions of women activists in the making of social movements in the Darjeeling Hills.

2.6 Summing up

The present chapter traced out the regional history of Darjeeling Hills with special reference to the community and identity formation and gender dimension. There has been a cultural exchange between the Lepchas, Bhutias, Tibetans, Nepalis and other communities which makes Darjeeling a distinct region in the Eastern Himalayas. The flow of colonial capital and the cultural encounter with Christianity and Christian missionaries, modern and western education brought far reaching impact in the region (Viehbeck 2017 01-15). The socio-cultural, gender and educational developments of the region have been largely shaped by these factors. Darjeeling emerged as the centre of Nepali/Gorkha culture and

society in India. The formation of various socio-cultural and literary institutions largely shaped the formation of Nepali/Gorkha identity and society in Darjeeling Hills. The region became the epicentre of various movements in both pre and post colonial India.

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