

CHAPTER – I

1.1 Introduction

Post colonial societies are structured in such a way that state intervention through the colonial mechanisms like classification of people, census operations, anthropological surveys and official recognition of certain communities appears to be the new normal condition. Such processes have served both the purposes of redressing as also of encouraging identity movements raised by communities. A community popularly known as Kirati Khambu Rais (also known as Kirati Rais, Khambu Rais, or as Khambus or Rais) of Darjeeling hills is engaged in a similar movement for ascertaining their identity as Scheduled Tribe by the Indian State. The complexities of the issue lies in the fact that these communities, like the Khambu Rais, are placed within the contemporary realities of the modern life but are seen to have been waging a struggle to ascertain their tribal roots. These articulations of difference by the community signals an attempt to secure an autonomy and respectable position because identities never emerge automatically rather are mobilized for achieving certain material objectives. Likewise this study presumes that the articulation of this difference did not happen overnight. What we experience in contemporary Darjeeling hills is not all about instrumentality alone, though to a considerable extent the whole question of growing tribalism in the hills can be framed through instrumentalist reasoning. We believe that the desire to identify oneself as ‘tribe’ is not primarily a case of shifting identities from caste to tribe. The moot point is that the question of the tribal identity and the issue of growing tribalism—a phenomena in which many communities besides the Khambu Rais of Darjeeling Hills are demanding Scheduled Tribe status—needs to be examined beyond the limits of popular representations of the issue and the surface level interpretations of the incidents that have engulfed much of our understanding of such events. The present study attempts to arrive at such an understanding by considering the Kirati Rai community’s claim of tribal status as a social fact, much in a Durkheimian sense (Durkheim 1997), involving values, cultural norms, practices, social status – issues that transcend the individual and exert certain kind of control over them.

1.2 Communities and community identity in Darjeeling Hills: Brief Historical Background

The Nepali speaking population comprises of Caucasoid racial groups like the Bahuns (Brahmans), Chhetris, Thakuris (speaking Indo-Aryan languages) and Mongoloid racial groups like Rai, Limbu, Yakha, Mangar, Gurung, Tamang, Yolmo, Thami, Bhujels and others (speaking Tibeto-Burman languages). All these communities of various racial stocks generally fall under one umbrella community known as Indian Nepali / Gorkha. Besides these broad racial classification the Indian Nepalis are also divided into two groups popularly known as *Tagadharis* (representing higher caste groups like Bahun, Chhetri, Thakuris among others) and *Matwalis* (communities who practice teetotalism and are fond of drinking liquor like Rai, Limbu, Mangar, Gurung, Tamang and others). Despite having these internal divisions the communities have sustained their integrity as a single unified community for many long years. 'Nepali' is an Indo Aryan language whereas the languages of the Mongoloid groups belonged to Tibeto-Burman language family. Similarly festivals like *Dasain* (Dushera), *Tihar* (Diwali) etc. also known as Hindu festivals which however, everyone including the Mongoloid groups in Darjeeling celebrates, besides having their own elaborate system of rites and rituals and languages. On the contrary, the Nepal situation is different where throughout the history the Nepali language as well as Hindu Nepali culture and *tagadhari* (upper caste) dominance have been patronised by the ruling regimes throughout the history. Compared to this Hindu/ Brahminic dominance in Nepal the Nepalis of Darjeeling were placed in a much liberal and apparently secular social order since the middle of nineteenth century (Sarkar 2014).

Excepting the Newars all other communities belonging to Mongoloid race, generically referred to as *matwalis*, did not have any elaborate system of caste. The absence of upper caste hegemony on the one hand and the predominant numerical presence of the *matwalis* and their significant role playing in all possible spheres of social life on the other enabled Darjeeling maintain a social system which was relatively free from the strict observance of caste principles (Sarkar: 2014). Findings of several foreign scholars have also endorsed this fact. Besides this, instances of inter caste and inter-community marriages did receive social sanction from the very beginning in Darjeeling, which were hardly approved in the then Nepal. The laxity of

caste system in early Darjeeling was noted in one of the earliest Gazetteers (1907) by O'Malley in the following words: "The caste system is however, by no means strict among the Nepalese domiciled in Darjeeling, where the Brahman (*Bahun*) may be found working as a cultivator, a labourer (. . .) There is an extra ordinary laxity in ceremonial observance; they will eat and drink things which are an abomination to the orthodox Hindu of the plains, and many of them are great flesh eaters, relishing even beef and pork" (O'Malley 1999: 43).

1.3 Emergence of Community based organization in Darjeeling: Search for a tribal identity

Unlike Nepal the caste-system, its rigidity, hierarchy and the degree of exploitation associated with it hardly had taken roots in Darjeeling. History suggests that the Mongoloids (*matwalis*) were more active and played dominant role in different cultural and political movements taken place in Darjeeling like the *Bhasa-Ando lan* (Nepali language movement) or the Gorkhaland movement. The 'Nepali/ Gorkha community' of Darjeeling never got segregated either in caste, language or in ethnic terms. Nepali as a whole included everyone – be they the *tagadhari* (twice born) castes or *matwali* (alcohol drinkers) communities or *sano jaats* (lower castes like Kami, Damai and Sarki). However, this does not mean that caste dynamics was absent in Darjeeling or for that matter community identity issues were altogether absent. The point is that there were issues relating to any caste or community but that hardly had taken the shape of a group phenomenon. We can even trace the existence of caste/community organisations much before the emergence of tribalism phenomena in recent time. This scenario started changing particularly since the early 1990s when the community based organizations started flourishing by popularizing the claim of 'tribal' (*janajati*) status. The decade of 1990's was of particular significance not only in Darjeeling hills but also in neighbouring states of Sikkim, if not for the whole of India. We will elaborate this particular point in detail in the course of study.

These processes have encouraged different Nepali communities to revive their respective traditional culture and the dormant community differences started cropping up in a manner that they seem to have endangered the unity of the Indian Nepali/ Gorkha community itself. Recognition of Tamangs and Limbus as Scheduled Tribe first in Sikkim (in 2001) and followed by West Bengal (in 2003) has added fuel to this burning cauldron of tribalism in Darjeeling hills. Among the various hill communities,

a strong movement for tribal-status was carried out by the Khambu Rais since the 1990s. However, it needs to be qualified as to whether the processes in which these various hill communities including the Khambu Rais are engaged may be termed as ‘re-tribalisation’ or the way they are simultaneously shedding off their linkages from the mainstream Hindu practices in Darjeeling can be labelled as ‘de-sanskritisation’ in any meaningful sense. Such claims have been made by scholars like A.C Sinha (2006), and R.S Mukhopadhyay (2014) in their respective studies. Since the 1990s Darjeeling hills has been experiencing the mushrooming of community associations raising the demand for tribal status. Almost all the hill communities are inclined to plead their own culture, beliefs and practices either by reviving or by building up their own respective community organizations. All these have created a situation of what we propose to term as ‘tribalism’ in Darjeeling hills.

1.4 Khambu Rais as a Community: The Kirati Connection

Possibly claiming to be under the umbrella group Kirat makes Khambu Rais a part of one of the oldest civilization of the Eastern Himalaya or probably the first inhabitant of Nepal. Khambus and the Kiratas variously called as Kirats, Kiratis or Kirantis are sometimes used interchangeably. Precisely the term Khambu is the derivative of the words *Khambek* meaning land, *Khambungwa* meaning the first man and *Khamwapu* meaning sons of the soil. The Khambus are believed to have originated from the *Kham* (province) in Tibet while a few Sanskrit sources tend to describe their derivation from the ancient name *Kamboja* (Chatterjee 1951). Unlike the term Khambu, the term Rai is not by origin an ethnonym but a title conferred upon the Khambu chiefs by Shah rulers in recognition of their semi-autonomous status in the already conquered territory of *Khambuan* (Schlemmer: 2003). Suniti Kumar Chatterji was of the view that these Indo-mongoloid groups of people were once regarded as the aborigines of the Nepal valley who were later pushed towards the east. Although their migration to the present habitat is known through legends but the direction from where they came is still a debatable issue. Considerable amount of Rai population is found in the part of Kirat Pradesh which is known as *Khambuan Majh Kirat* region in particular covering the districts of Eastern Nepal such as Solu-khumbu, Okhaldunga, Khotang, Bhojpur, and Udaipur. The concentration of the Khambu Rai population is spread along the valley slopes of the Dudh Kosi and Arun rivers and their tributaries. Besides in Darjeeling district the Khambu Rais are found in significant numbers. Their presence in no insignificant

number is also available in Jalpaiguri Dooars, in Sikkim and in many other states of North East India.

1.5 Organisational Initiatives of the Khambu Rais in Darjeeling Hills

So far as the issue of ethnic consciousness of particular communities in Darjeeling hills is concerned it seems that the Mongoloid groups like the Tamangs were perhaps the first to have raised such aspirations during the second decade of twentieth century and formed a community organization known as *Nepali Tamang Buddhist Association* in 1922. The emergence of community organizations for others was just a matter of time. While considering the Khambu Rais we find that the Khambus in 1976 formed a larger platform known as *Sarva Kirat Chumlung* shared commonly by the other Kirata communities like Limbu, Yakkha, among others. This organization however, failed to survive as a common platform for all the Kirata communities of Darjeeling hills. Factionalism arose and all the major three constituting communities of the *Sarva Kirat* platform tear apart and formed their respective community organizations.

Khambus reversal to the ‘past’ and their constant emphasis on the ‘tribal nature’ apprehensively is a byproduct of the social forces which encouraged them to transform themselves into politicized groups. Like many other hill communities, the Khambus too, particularly the rising educated middle class segment of them have played a great deal of role in articulating the community voice which in many cases are reflective of their own economic interests and political expectations. Again, the perception of these mongoloid communities in general and the Khambu Rais in particular seem to have moulded with a strong sense of self as representing one of the primitive people (tribe) of the region especially in the light of the activities undertaken by the community organizations like Kirati Khambu Rai Sanskritik Sansthan (KKRSS). A gradual shift from being a community-in-itself to community-for-itself might be the handiwork of educated few but it turned out to be the aspiration of every Khambu individual who seeks to acknowledge their ‘tribal-identity’. Since the inception of KKRSS¹ in the Darjeeling hills its mandate covered such issues like the protection of culture, religion and language and simultaneously the issues of economic inequalities and educational backwardness of the Khambus. Hence the problem concerning the Khambu tribal identity which links social structure with individual behavior needs to be analyzed further on the basis of the relationship between self and social structure. This becomes

¹ Kirati Khambu Rai Sanskritik Sansthan (KKRSS) was established on 29th October, 1994.

significant when we find that the KKRSS has been spreading the intensity of its activities through its fifty three regional branches spread all over the hills and plains region of the district while the demand for Scheduled Tribe status for the Rais hardly figures in the list of major objectives mentioned in the charter of the KKRSS itself (Please vide chapter IV for details).

1.6 Khambu Rai's Demand for Tribal Status

Khambus claim as a 'natural' tribe started gaining ground since 1995 and the KKRSS hard pressed the demand of tribal status before the state authorities. The Khambus as a community had marched a long way aspiring for the tribal (*janajati*) status and their movement revived with a new vigour since 2003 when the communities like Tamangs and Limbus (resembling the Khambu Rais in almost all fronts) were declared as Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal. The Khambu community's effort to 'return to their origin' was and is a conscious choice particularly of some educated middle class Khambus who to a great extent became successful in mobilizing the Khambus for a mass movement popularly known as "Khambu's Rights Movement" at present. The change and transformation in the agenda and ideology of the Khambu organization from being a socio-cultural platform to the one of pressurizing the political authorities with the same cultural attributes for a reclaimed identity has been a significant departure and these issues are detailed out in Chapter IV.

1.7 Literatures Consulted

Though Darjeeling has been in academic focus for some time now, we still lack authoritative accounts on particular hill communities like the Khambu Rais. However, some local literatures on the Rais of Darjeeling are available. Most of them were written in Nepali language by the local Rai people and they revolve around the description of the various rites and rituals related to birth, death, marriage and ancestor worshipping. However, in some early British accounts we find references regarding the Rais [like Hunter's *Statistical Account of Bengal*(1876), Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* (1909) and the District Gazetteers by O'Malley (1907), Frowde (1908) and Dash (1947)]. Needless to mention that these early texts are not sufficient to capture the changing worldviews of the Rais or any other hill communities at present for obvious reasons, nevertheless they can provide us a "Book View" of what may be termed as the official expression of

'past' cultures shared by these communities. Nor even the volume of community studies made by both the native and foreign anthropologists in the context of Nepal could enable us comprehend the *janajati* aspirations in Darjeeling although they can provide us a comparative perspective while examining the Darjeeling situation. However, we have few studies at our disposal which directly or indirectly emphasize on the growing politicization of community identity issues in Darjeeling hills and Sikkim. Let us briefly examine some such studies.

Victor Barnouw's *Eastern Nepalese Marriage Customs and Kinship Organization* (1955) was perhaps the first ethnographic account on the marriage practices and kinship organization of the 'Jimidars', a title received by the Rais from the Gurkha king, in Nepal. He held the view that ancestor worshipping, which was similar to Chinese tradition, had contributed towards the perpetuation of patrilineage among the Rais/ Jimidars. The importance of 'Hearth-stones' (*Chula-dhunga*) which is actually traced through father line and a kind of exclusion for the other communities to enter the hearth room, traces some kind of exclusivity on their part. But his views seem confusing as on the one hand he documents the Rais/ Jimidars as followers of bilateral descent and on the other hand he shows the low status of women among the Rais.

Charles Mc Dougal, in one of his articles *The Kulunge Rai: A Study in Kinship and Marriage Exchange* (1979) held the view that the descendants of Rais exhibit their unique local and linguistic differentiation compared to other Tibeto-Burman speaking people of Nepal. These Rais are among itself divided into numerous, discrete local groups having their own languages. The different tribe of the Rais though similar in social structure shared certain distinctiveness which according to Dougal was the consequence of the gradual process of differentiation over time. From his study of the Kulunge Rai of the Hongu valley of Solukhumbu district of eastern Nepal one gets a descriptive account on the Kulunge Rai. His analysis of the various terms such as '*hadphora*' (breaking the bones), '*duri*' (payment made by the husband to the wife 'sub-clan'), '*mauks paisa*' (a presentation of four paisa), '*sibalo paisa*' (given by the married women to her descendant, to her natal group when male members die), '*dudh-phora*' (to break the milk) are important as through them local Rai social structural arrangements received an anthropological treatment. His description of the various marriage customs of the Kulunge Rai seems to be helpful in understanding the social structure of the Rais of the Darjeeling hills to some extent.

Andre Beteille in his article *The Concept of Tribe with special reference to India* (1986) points out that the definition of tribe in India lacks precision both in terms of an anthropological concept and also as a policy category. In other words there is no correspondence between the anthropologists and the administrators so far as the question of tribe is concerned in Indian context. Consequently, tribal discourse in India appears to be more political and less anthropological in both content and form. Beteille in his another article '*The Idea of Indigenous People*' (1998) argued that, finding the exact mechanism of tribal recognition in India is next to impossible as the complexity remains with determining tribes in practical ways. Indigenous tag Beteille regards is something that transcends the boundary of time, place, identity irrespective of one's engagement and attainment.

In a detailed study on the three Kirata communities (Rai, Limbu, Dewan) located in places like Eastern Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim anthropologist T.B Subba in his *Politics of Culture A Study of three Kirata communities of the Eastern Himalaya* (2001) came out with the finding that the basis/ foundation of the Kirata nationalism in this region is rather weak. The commonality and fusion that exist between the *Tagadhari* and many Mongoloid groups today will face imminent danger if their 'syncretic life' is renounced at present. Thus he opines building a Kirata nationalism demands internal homogenization and external differentiation at nation-state level which however, is far from the reality.

Much like Subba sociologist A. C. Sinha (2006) has also highlighted the ongoing process of larger Kirata identity formation in Darjeeling-Sikkim region. This he viewed as having an ideological root realization of which is based on a feeling that would have told them the fact that their greater and continued emphasis on 'Nepali identity' would strengthen the Bahun-Chhetri-Newar dominance in the local society. Further these would lead them towards Sanskritizing their rituals and customs in tune with the classical Hindu practices and thereby opening up scope for further marginalization of their languages and cultures in favour of the Indo-Aryan Nepali language and culture. This realization followed along with the very acts of reversing the history (past). He thinks that Kirata identity politics has altogether descended down from a collectivist stand towards the recognition politics of individual communities for 'Scheduled Tribe' status.

Social Historian Kumar Pradhan in his, *Darjeeling Ma Nepali Jati Ra Janjatia Chinari Ka Naya Udanharu* (2005) writes that the syncretic unity that characterizes the Nepali society in Darjeeling was the product of same class composition, hardships and similar livelihood. He was of the view that though the simultaneous presence of sub-ethnic identity (like tribal identity), which corresponds to their emotional aspect can act as a threat to the Nepali identity. Nevertheless he reasoned that this emergence of the sub-ethnic identities would be of limited efficacy and the unity of the Indian Nepalis would remain intact as long as Nepali language will continue to serve the purpose of *lingua franca*.

Anthropologist Townsend Middleton (2013) discussed the plight of the people living in the border regions of Darjeeling. He has further examined in his book *The Demands of Recognition* (2015) the demonstrations and engagement around indigenous identity in contemporary Darjeeling and considers it more as a resultant effect of the failure of Gorkhaland movement. In the absence of strong statehood movement the communities there have found their possible hopes to belong to the nation through the demand of ST status for themselves. For the tribal status aspiring communities of Darjeeling it is not possible to deny the historical acculturation, where their untainted purity as a tribe is often found corrupted by the Hindu practices which though was their consensual adoption. Besides, he thinks the whole tribal recognition process is entangled with bureaucratic hassles and complexities surrounding political and intellectual tensions.

Anthropologists Sara Shneiderman and Mark Turin in their article '*Seeking the Tribe*' (2006) highlights the issue of tribal identity of Sikkim and Darjeeling having some relationships as the community organizations of both the places shared binding ties. They hypothesized that the growing tribalism phenomenon has the potentiality to unfurl inter community clashes in Darjeeling Sikkim region. Shneiderman in another of her article co-authored with Townsend Middleton (*Reservations, Federalism and the Politics of Recognition in Nepal*, 2008) has pointed out that reservation policy till date has been applied as the instrument of cultural protection/preservation. The raised a pertinent question regarding the proper basis of measuring marginality, economy or culture. If culture remains to be the basis for determining backwardness then religion should not be the mark of identification process in a secular country like India. Further in a joint contribution with Alpa Shah, Shneiderman (guest editorial Introduction of the

journal FOCAAL, 2013) raised critique against the inbuilt incapacity of the affirmative action policy to fulfill its objective of bringing socio-economic equality. Since the claimant communities/ groups are not homogeneous (they vary in terms of their class, status positions) the effects of the policy in transforming the society in the real sense of the term may not be possible.

Vibha Arora (2007) discussed the interests of the hill communities of Sikkim vis-à-vis the politics of being and becoming tribe in India. She explains how the context-specific emergence of the new tribes is opposed to disciplinary origins of social anthropology. She argues that contrary to the popular belief of 'vanishing tribes' tribes are not vanishing but are emerging with strong community consciousness. Arora was of the view that the demand of a community as a tribe no longer seems to be a sign of subalternity rather an act of political consciousness. She observed that the phenomena of assertive tribal identity would not be limited to Sikkim alone as the situation in Darjeeling reveals similar state of affairs where ethnic groups including the Khambu Rais are increasingly becoming aware of what it means to be a tribe.

Alina Pradhan in her doctoral theses *Politics of Inter Ethnic Relations in Darjeeling District in West Bengal* (2007) studied the inter-ethnic relations among the three prominent communities of Lepcha, Bhutia and the Nepalis and examined the emergence of *Janajati* consciousness among the various hill communities constituting the larger Nepali community. She was of the view that the emergence of *janajati* aspiration has the possibility to shake the homogenization of Nepali/Gorkha in Darjeeling hills.

Mona Chhetri, in her Doctoral thesis *Ethnic Politics in the Nepali Public Sphere: Three cases from the Eastern Himalaya* (2013) writes about the role of the ethnic associations in acting as a bridge between state and ethnic politics at the grass roots. In case of Sikkim, she pinpointed the inter-dependency and negotiations of the state and ethnic associations for the fulfillment of each other's interest and concerns. She was of the view that both the state and ethnic associations work cooperatively and plays out ethnicity as a tool and political resource and such processes ultimately converts ethnic associations into political bodies.

Besides these a handful of scholarly articles and commentaries on the tribal identity politics of Darjeeling were published by scholars like Mukhapadhyay (2014),

Sarkar (2014), Chhetri (2016, 2018), Tamang (2018). All these journal articles have discussed the nuances of tribal identity claim raised by the different hill communities and the processes through which they were politicized. All of them however, have emphasized on the role of the state in the process and the implications thereof. The large body of literature reviewed here are indicative of the fact that the issue of tribal identity politics in Darjeeling hills and in the neighboring regions of Sikkim and Eastern Nepal have been academically well attended. It is impossible to establish any argument without drawing insights from the existing body of research on the subject. However, the uniqueness of the present study lies in the fact that it deals with a particular community – the Khambu Rais – and examines the rather general problem of the Darjeeling hills in relation to a particular case of a community who have been demanding for the recognition of ST status.

1.8 Significance of the Present Study

Culture is the active creation of people and soon it serves to build an identity of a group of population it often assumes political colour. This process of validation and consolidation of the Khambu's group identity got strengthened with its myths, legends, common origin and a shared cultural heritage. The self awareness regarding one's own community was furthered through the contribution of community organization and its publications, pamphlets and mobilisational programmes. Though community associations in Darjeeling hills had existed since colonial days² none of these were dominant in the way they have become increasingly visible and overriding in Darjeeling hills since the 1990s³. It is interesting to note that such an unforeseen development took place at that juncture when two of the major – political and cultural– demands⁴ of the Indian Nepalis got settled. Such mushrooming of community associations and the search for distinctive micro identities by almost every community (mainly the *matwalis*) in Darjeeling is a matter of grave social concern. It seems Nepali

² By 1924 three community associations did emerge in Darjeeling viz. *Biswakarma Samaj* (1919), *Tamang Buddhist Association* (1922), and *Newar Samaj* (1924). Followed by them *Bharatiya Gorkha Khas Hitkari Sammelan* was established in 1934 and *All India Nepali Scheduled Caste Association* (AINSCA) was formed in 1947.

³ Since 1990s several new associations have emerged while some older ones were revived. *Akhil Bharatiya Tamang Buddha Sangathan* (All India Tamang Buddhist Association), *Kirata Yakthung Chumlung* (Association of the Kiratas), *Kirati (Khambu) Rai Sanskritik Sansthan* (Kirati Khambu Rai Cultural Association), *Yakha (Dewan) Association*, *Gurung Tomu Chonj Dhi* (Association of the Gurungs), *Magar Lafa Sangh* (Association of the Magars), *Kiratbansi Sunuwar (Mukhia) Koinchbu* (Association of the Kirati Sunuwar-Mukhias) are some such examples.

⁴ Among the two demands of our reference the first was a political one that involved the political urge of a separate state for the Indian Nepalis, which somehow got settled in the year 1988 with the formation of a sub-state level administrative arrangement known as Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). The second demand was cultural in nature as it concerned with the claim of Constitutional recognition of Nepali language. In 1992 Nepali language was included in the Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution as one of the India's scheduled national languages.

community in Darjeeling is in transition, perhaps in the process of convulsion. It is not insignificant, therefore, to examine and to reach out a reasoned analysis of the question: as to whether the search for tribal identity (*janajati chinari*) or for that matter the current hype of ethnic revivalism in Darjeeling hills will break up the identity of the Nepali nation in India?

1.9 Tribalism and Identity Politics: Conceptual Framework

Our working definition for the notion of tribalism stands for a strong feeling of identity with and loyalty to one's tribe or group. The idea of tribalism therefore cannot be properly understood or even explored without an involvement with such related concepts like identity, culture and community. Conceptually all these three sociological concepts are welded into what we proposed as tribalism. Growing tribalism phenomena in the context of Eastern Himalaya in general and Darjeeling hills in particular needs to be understood with reference to the complex interplay of relationships between identity, culture and community at the level of both reality and reasoning.

Of late the concept of identity which is intrinsically linked with the concepts of culture and community has received adequate intellectual attention in sociological literature. Present day sociological scholarship has not only pointed out the individual and collective dimensions of it but also harped on the multilayered and multidimensional processes of identity and identification as well. Emphasis has been made on the cognitive, affective and volitional aspects as well as upon the changing social situations which have a bearing upon the way we identify ourselves and/ or get identified by others. Identities are the narratives or are stories which people tell themselves and others about who they are or who they are not. Following Giddens we argue that individuals create, maintain, and revise a story of who they are. This however, does not mean that the stories are entirely fictional. Instead, they must have coherence through a past, present and projected future. In his own words: "The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the on-going 'story' about the self" (Giddens 1991: 54). This biography is a person's identity, his/her sense of self. Giddens argues that identity under late modernity has become a 'project'. Every day events and life changing moments need to be continuously integrated and sorted into the story of the self. In that sense, one's identity is never finished or complete, hence the idea of a

project. It is in this sense that identity narratives involves a particular positioning whose essence quite often is drawn from culture and is directed towards projecting the distinctiveness of the community. Manuel Castells calls this as 'project identity'. Castells' notion of 'project identity' perhaps fits aptly with the Khambu Rais case. Castells argues 'project identity' implies those moments when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure (Castells 1997: 8). Identities cannot be constructed or understood in a vacuum. This also implies that identities derive their meaning in relation to the social, political and economic contexts making a specific identity relevant only under specific circumstances or in a particular environment (Campbell and Rew 1999: 10).

Much like identity the concept of culture has gone through a succession of paradigm shifts in sociology and social anthropology. In the past culture appeared to be hegemonic in the sense it implied a determination of behavior through its coherent, systematic, consensual, object like appearance beyond human agency. The attempt now is to define culture more as a verb than a noun. From this perspective culture is viewed as an active process of meaning making and contestation (Street 1993: 2). We conceptualise culture more in tune with Anthony P. Cohen. Instead of considering individuals as a replica in miniature of the larger cultural entity Cohen treated culture more loosely – as that which aggregates people and processes, rather than integrates them. It is significant to note that culture in Cohen's view implies difference rather than similarity among people (Cohen 1993: 196). Thus to talk about a Nepali culture is not to postulate a large number of people, all of whom are merely clones of each other and of some organizing principle like say the system of caste or for that matter Hinduism. This caveat is necessary, for in non-Nepali perception the term "Nepali culture" is used all too frequently to imply this.

Conceptualizing culture in this manner is to deny its *sui generis* qualification, a legacy that stems from the classical renditions of culture. Cohen holds, if culture is not *sui generis*, if it can no longer be viewed as exercising a determining power over people, then it must be regarded as the product of something else: if not relations of production then obviously the social interaction itself (Cohen *ibid.*). In this perspective, culture can be seen as the outcome of the product of interaction; or to put it differently, to see people as active agent in the creation of culture, rather than the passive recipient

of it. If individuals are the agents of culture's creation, then it follows that they can shape it to their will, depending on how ingenious and powerful they are. This is how it acquires significance in the process of politicization of cultural identity, an issue that constitutes the crux of the present study. Hence the notion of culture, the way it will figure in the present study, is conceptualized as a means by which people make meaning and with which they make the world meaningful to themselves and themselves meaningful to the world.

The sociological bearing of the concept of identity is often expressed, mediated and even contested in collectivist term. This is precisely how, N. Jayaram in a recent review essay on community and identity holds that the concept of 'identity' gets linked with the concepts of 'community' and even 'conflict' (Jayram 2012). Community and identity as sociological percepts has both positive and negative connotations. The positive dimension of community identity implies that it helps individuals associate themselves with a community reinforcing thereby community solidarity. The negative connotation of community identity suggests that it is not a given qualification rather identity is constructed and the forging of community is contingent upon politico-historical and socio-cultural conditions. The proposition that community identities are socially constructed implies the conscious mobilization of people in defense of their community's interests and the invoking and reinforcement of identities in the process. Associations are formed and mass media are used in an attempt to give it a shape of collective action.

Highlighting community identities as 'constructed' and 'politically mobilized' some⁵ even followed the highly influential 'invention of tradition' arguments popularized by Hobsbawm and Ranger (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). As per the theoretical position the 'invention of tradition' literature demonstrates, it is no longer possible to presume that a social identity or tradition linked to a particular community has an authentic existence, and that it has been simply appropriated for political ends by an identitarian movement. It needs to be pointed out that we differ in our conceptualization of community identity from the 'invention of tradition' propositions. We endorse Daniel Rosenblatt's critique that when people 'invent' traditions as

⁵ Frequently cited works of this genre includes writings of Handler, Richard. 1988. *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press; Hanson, Allan. 1989. "The Making of Maori: Cultural Invention and its Logic", *American Anthropologist*, 91(4): 890-902; Linnekin, Jocelyn. 1991. "Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authenticity", *American Anthropologist*, 93 (2): 446-449.

interested political actors, they do so in ways that are meaningful to themselves and others, out of existing practices, and with purposes that were shaped by a particular historical experience (Rosenblatt 1997). Rather traditions and identities are seen, for the present study, to be constructed in complex ways in an on-going process of cultural production, which involves politically informed view of culture, embodied in emblems of identity representing the distinctiveness of the community. To understand the ways through which such inventions mobilize or transform existing systems of meaning among the Khambu Rais of Darjeeling hills is what we feel as one of the primary tasks of the present study.

1.10 Research Objectives and Research Questions

Though the present study intends to examine identity politics in contemporary Darjeeling hills, it has a different focus than what is common to a rich body of literature⁶ that emphasizes on the hill politics of Darjeeling in relation to Gorkhaland movement. Unlike the available studies on hills politics, which have reflected on identity politics by linking ethnicity with ethnic conflict, the present study is aimed at understanding the emergence of micro identity questions raised by hill communities vis-à-vis the demand of tribal status raised by the Khambu Rais and the cultural and political implications of these issues outside of the conflictual nexus.

To be specific the proposed study has two broad objectives. Firstly, to provide a detailed description of the Khambu Rais with adequate ethnographic insight, on account of the very fact that such a study in the context of Darjeeling hills is yet to be available. The second objective is to arrive at an understanding of shifting community identity of the Khambu Rais. The two objectives are related to each other in the sense that the ethnographic content of the present study (the first objective) will inform our understanding as to why and how the Khambu Rais were articulating their community identity as a tribe. We were not concerned either towards authentication or nullification of the tribal identity claim raised by the Khambu Rais in contemporary Darjeeling hills. Instead we were interested in examining the issues and processes involved in such a

⁶ Gorkhaland movement has been on academic purchase for some time now. Among the number studies on ethnic politics in the Darjeeling hills the most significant contributions were made by scholars like Subba, T. B. 1992. *Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling Hills*, New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications in association with Vikash Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.; Samanta, Amiya K. 2000. *Gorkhaland Movement: A Study in Ethnic Separatism*, New Delhi: A P H Publishing Corporation; Bagchi, Romit. 2012. *Gorkhaland: Crisis of Statehood*. New Delhi: Sage; Sarkar, S. 2013. *Gorkhaland Movement: Ethnic Conflict and State Response*. New Delhi: Concept.

claim whose ascendancy has been on rise since the last two decades throughout the Darjeeling hills.

Besides the two broad objectives the present study has also examined the following research questions, which actually contributed towards the exploration of the two broad objectives earmarked above. The research questions revolved around the Khambu Rai community organization and its role, intercommunity relations and the tribal identity question, role of the state, impact of identity politics elsewhere (Nepal and Sikkim), and the implication of tribal identity politics for the larger society of Darjeeling hills. The research questions of the present study are thus follows:

- i) To examine the history of community identity formation in Darjeeling hills and the distinctiveness of the Khambu Rais, if any.
- ii) To examine the history of migration and associated socio-political and economic changes that might have impacted community relations in the Darjeeling hills.
- iii) To examine the origin, evolution, organizational structure, activities of the KKRSS, the community organization of the Khambu Rais.
- iv) To examine the encounter of the general Khambus with the leadership and the mobilisational programmes of the KKRSS.
- v) To examine whether the *Janaajati* movement in Nepal and the identity politics in Sikkim have impacted the tribal identity politics in Darjeeling hills.
- vi) To examine the role of the state in the tribal identity politics of Darjeeling hills.
- vii) To examine the tribal traits claimed by the Khambus with empirical data.
- viii) To examine the continuity and changes in the Khambu social structure.
- ix) To examine the various manifestation of tribal identity politics in the Darjeeling hills.
- x) To examine the impact of tribal identity politics for the larger society of Darjeeling hills.

Based on these ten research questions, which basically accrued from the two broad research objectives, we designed the four major chapters of the present study. Besides Introduction (chapter one) and Conclusion (Chapter six) the study incorporates the following four chapters: Situating the Khambu Rais in Darjeeling Hills: Social History of Migration and Intercommunity Relation (Chapter two), Social Structure of the Khambus Rais in Darjeeling: Continuity and Change (Chapter three), Cultural Revivalism among the Khambu Rais: Context, Issues and Processes (Chapter four), and Growing Tribalism in Darjeeling Hills and the Role of the State: Concerns and Consequences (Chapter five).

1.11 Methodology

Given the general clarifications of community identity how is one to study it? Our conceptual frame is not served by merely questioning ‘others’ regarding the broad social categories or attributes of the community. Nor is it served through asking the respondents to answer the question ‘Who or what is he?’ The point is that we are not interested in the personal or ego identity of an individual. What is more relevant from a sociological perspective of community identity is to consider the different kinds and levels of subjectivity in relation to the social cultural factors that condition the identity of a group (Munshi & Lama 1978: 152). The consciousness of being a Khambu Rai was having a face value for the researcher since such a consciousness can hardly lead one appreciate their social existence. On the contrary, the researcher examined their social existence, reflected through their participation in different social processes and relationships, which helped in understanding the crux of Khambu consciousnesses. This implies that the researcher has followed a bottom up approach towards exploring the research problem.

The research objectives and research questions demand that the present study should aim at achieving an understanding based on the deep engagement with everyday actors. The researcher thus attempted to explore much about the actors themselves, than about the actors way in which the researcher wanted to collect data that worked with her pre-existing notions of how categories function. Hence it was thought that ethnography to be useful for this purpose. Doing ethnography by talking to people and living with them has helped the researcher to understand how the different categories of

identification (ethnic, civic, linguistic, cultural etc.) work in everyday life. The richness of qualitative data so collected allowed the researcher to comprehend how these categories were assembled, for example whether they were seen as constructed and voluntaristic or whether they were primordialised and therefore seen as natural.

Methodologically speaking the present study is analytical and exploratory in nature. Collection of relevant data were made on the basis of theoretically informed intensive fieldwork keeping in mind the native's statement and interpretations. For the first hand observation of the phenomena, the researcher has lived with the community stayed in the villages she studied. Field work was conducted in rural belts of Kalimpong subdivision known as Paiyong, Newahang, and Dalep. First round of field work was done in 2014, second during 2016 and third round was done in 2019. Total ninety days were spent in the field in three phases. The researcher was also from the region and belonging to the same community that she is studying. Hence it was also not very difficult for her to be in touch with the major events that have taken place during her absence from the field. While studying the processes and relationships through which the Khambus maintained their social existence the researcher was careful about her pre-conceptions (being an insider) regarding the problem under study.

1.11.1 Studying One's own Society: Studying the Khambu Rais in Darjeeling

It was indeed a challenging task for me to study my own community and society as at every step there were provocations of getting persuaded by my own subjective position. While researchers studying communities generally attempt to build up rapport in order get into the shoes of the 'other' in my case it was sometimes just the opposite. I had to struggle in finding out the 'other' in my own self. M. N. Srinivas' writings on methods ("Studying One's Own Culture" and the likes) helped me in restricting the obvious subjective 'push' (that I inhere as an individual member of the same society) and to act on the lines of 'objective pools' involved in the research problem I was examining. I am not sure whether my study qualifies the 'standards' of objectivity/ subjectivity questions involved in sociological research but I do know I made sincere attempts to tally the understandings of the same problem with different viewpoints gathered from different stakeholders of the same society. In other words, methodologically I have dealt with various subjective positions in relation to the same objective question and tried to show the factors, forces, consequences, and considerations people employed in the way they did follow a particular course of behavior or responded differently to a

particular call, howsoever hegemonic it might have been in reality. I felt relieved by reading M. N Srinivas, particularly in this context who maintained, “The clash of multiple subjectivities would be better than a single subjectivity, whether that of the insider or outsider” (Srinivas 2004: 555).

Following the footsteps of social anthropological tradition of field based study I tried to conduct field work by staying with the people and living with them. It was in total contrast to the feeling of strangeness and bewilderment, which usually a social anthropologist/ sociologist experiences when s/he lands amongst ‘his/ her’ people, I had encountered ‘a sudden enlightenment’ that Srinivas has aptly labeled as ‘twice-bornness’ (Srinivas 2004: 585). I had to distance myself from my own understanding of the problem from the understanding of the ‘people’ who for all practical purposes were my brethren, though not relatives. What I mean by this is that I was neither an alien to the people whom I studied nor even I did suffer from strangeness whenever I was in the field. This was both facilitating as also problematic; facilitating in the logistical sense of the term and problematic from methodological standpoint that we have already discussed.

1.11.2 Data Collection

Total enumeration of all the Khambu Rais of the three villages was made through household census. Semi-structured interviews were mainly used, as it was helpful to develop an engaging discussion with the interviewee who got the option to divert, which thereby opened up the scope for new ideas to come up as a result of what the interviewees said. The interview guide was prepared well in advance, involving grouping of issues/ themes/ topics and questions that could be asked in different situations to different participants. However, structured interview, involving a rigorous set of questions, was also used for interviewing the leaders and office bearers of the KKRSS and its branches located within and outside the field sites.

Secondary data were gleaned out from available research works done by other scholars on the research theme. Continuous updating regarding the contemporary eventualities took place in Darjeeling hills on community identity issues was made on the basis of regular review of newspapers reports (local and national). Besides these, publications available in vernacular language were also considered and the copies of memoranda, pamphlets, periodicals, leaflets etc. (grey literature) circulated by the

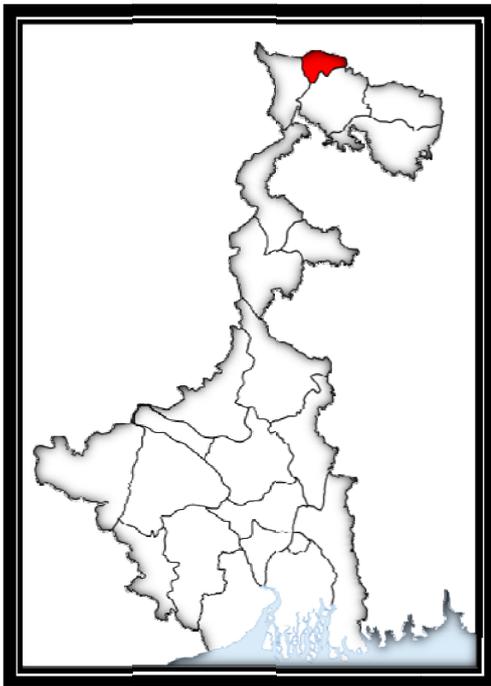
KKRSS were also be taken care of. Moreover, the researcher became a participant of the occasional sakewa and sakela festivals and conferences organized by different branches of the KKRSS (whether it be in Mirik held on 15th December 2013, Bagdaogra held on 17th December 2013, or ISKCON Temple and Milan more ground in Siliguri held on 21st and 22nd of February 2015).

Map No.1 & 2 : SPATIAL MAP OF STUDY AREAS PAIYONG KHASMAHAL, DALEP AND NEWAHANG

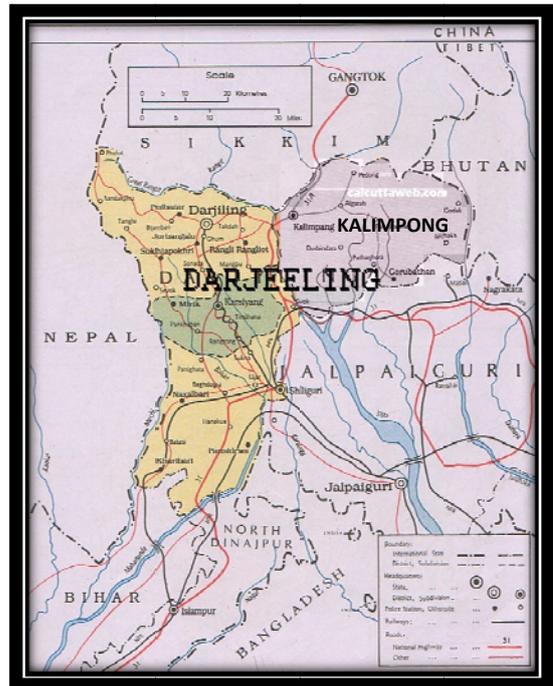


Source: Google Earth (Date: 26.7.2020) Maps are not to scale

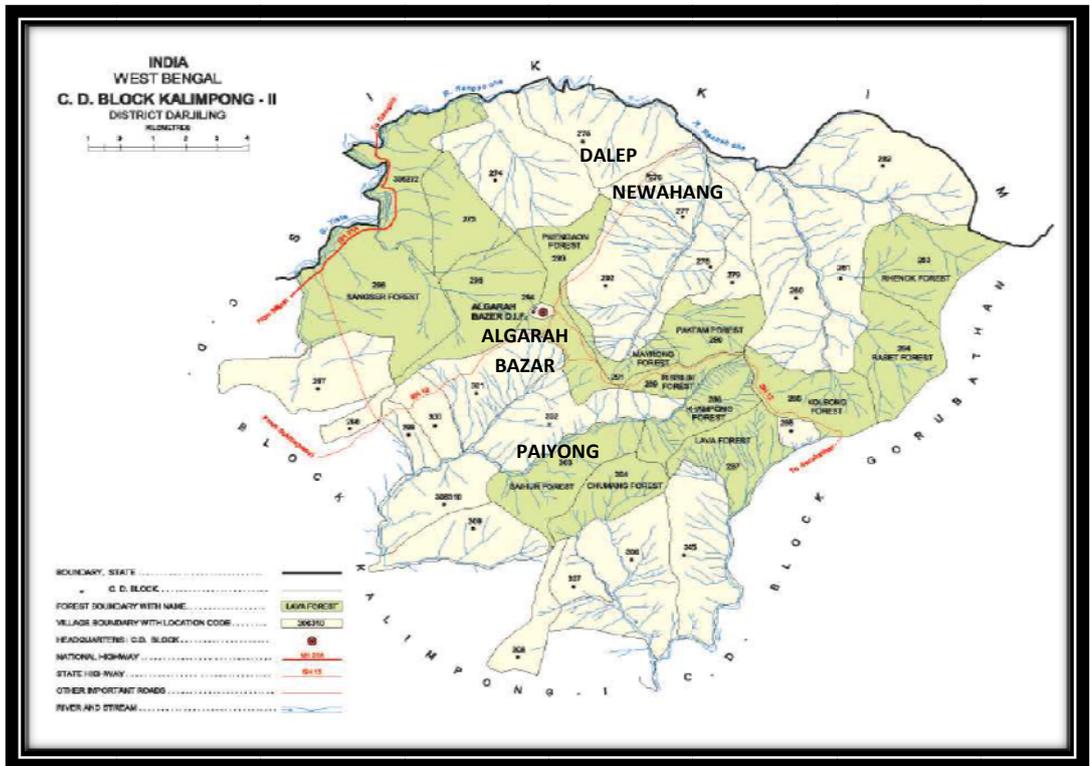
Map No.3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 : LOCATION MAP OF STUDY AREAS



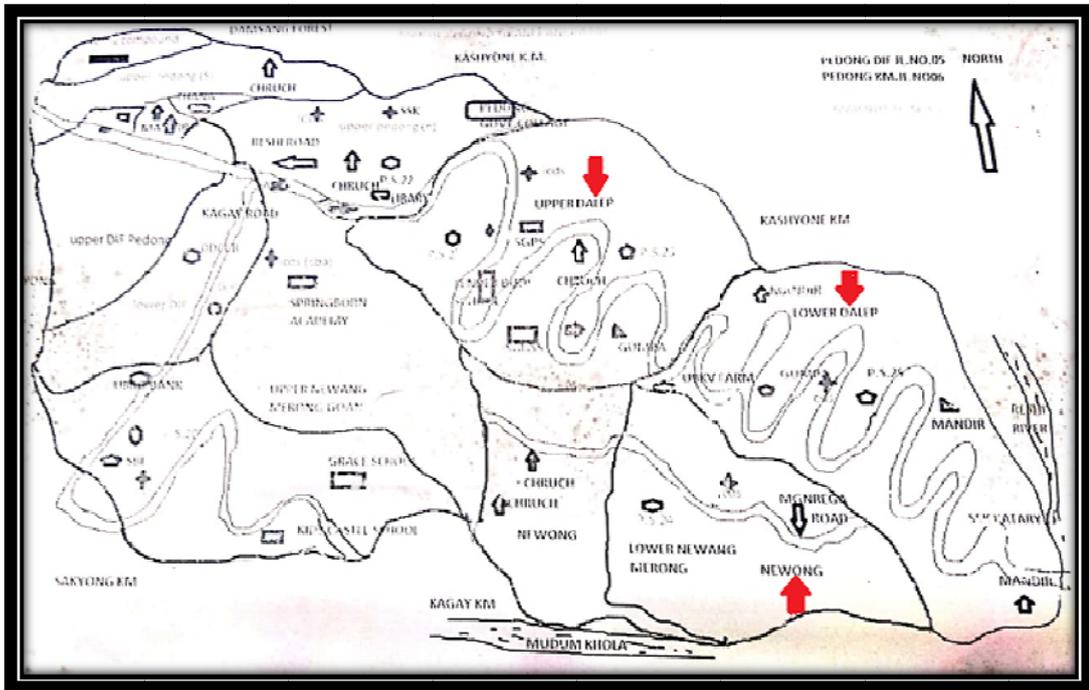
Red area shows Kalimpong in W. Bengal



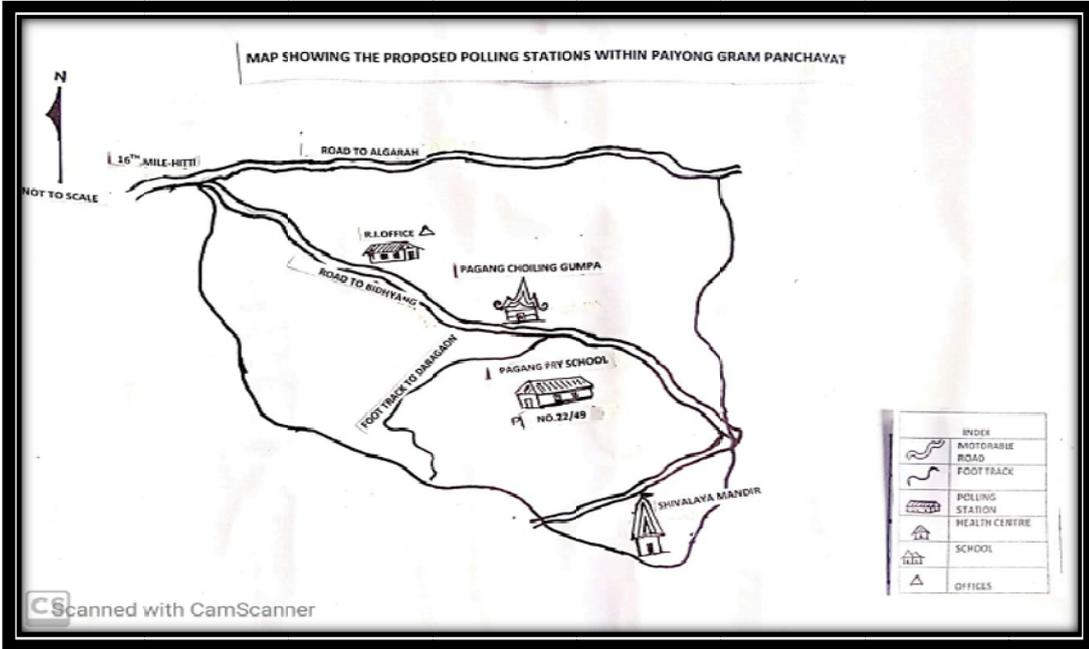
Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts



CD Block Kalimpong II (all the three field sites are within this Kalimpong II Block)



Red arrows show the location of Dalep (Upper & Lower) and Newahang (Newong) villages



Site map of Paiyong Village (Not to scale, maps were collected from respective G.P. Offices)

1.11.3 Field work

Although the Khambu Rais are visible in most of the pockets of Darjeeling district but for the requirement of the present study we chose to concentrate on rural belt of Kalimpong district instead of urban areas, assuming that in urban areas people would be more concerned with the tribal identity issue than the rural ones. Intensive field study was conducted in three hamlets/villages known as Paiyong, Newahang gaon and Dalep. Paiyong village administratively falls under the jurisdiction of Kalimpong-II Block and is located at a distance of 7 km. from the main Kalimpong town. Like any other villages of the hills, only upper-half of the villages could be reached through vehicles but the lower parts of the village needed to be explored by feet. Paiyong village includes a number of small hamlets with different names like Dungmali gaon, Sadhu gaon, Rai gaon, Dara gaon, etc. Paiyong is an agricultural village where terrace cultivation is practiced. Beside rice cultivation, which engages the field for nearly six months (June/July-December), the other cultivated items include potatoes, ginger, and vegetables. This village was having sizeable population (estimated total population according to 2011 census is 6423). Considering the large extension and coverage over a wide area and the scattered nature of the households we selected one particular region (i.e. Rai Gaon) for the proposed study. Rai Gaon is an area covering the tract from Janta Primary School down towards the Janta Higher Secondary School, having a population of about 200-300. Although of a mixed-kind Rai Gaon, as the name suggests, was having the concentration of Rai households. One of the office bearers of the local KKRSS branch Jog Chamling also resided at Rai Gaon. Newahang and Dalep were the two other villages having good number of Rai households. The two villages were also under Kalimpong-II block falling within Kalimpong district. Both the villages were adjacent to each other and separated by one small hilly stream. All the three villages were primarily agricultural villages and were having not only sizeable section of Rai population but also the local branches of the Khambu Rai organization (KKRSS). Complete enumeration of all the Rai households of these three villages were made and the total number households were 80 (Paiyong 50, Newahang 12, and Dalep 18) having 394 heads in total (Paiyong 252, Newahang 63, and Dalep 79). Chapter five deals with the socio-economic data gathered out of the three villages.

1.12 Limitations

The present study, like other research studies, is incomplete in terms of its coverage. The study would have benefited much from a comparative analysis of urban areas as also of situations in Sikkim. Even in the village context complete enumeration of the entire village would have enriched the data sources. Long term field visits could not be held due to the researcher's professional obligations. Infrequent field visits, often with long intervals (field work was done mainly during vacations), was a handicap that has resulted into missing the opportunity to have firsthand experience of traditions being performed at households. Skill in the Khambu Rai language would have been a bonus for the present researcher. In many ways participating in their life have unfurled the opportunity to see the reality from close counters but this also influenced the researcher's mind quite often and it became really a challenge to dissociate completely from what was seen and what was recorded and represented. Perhaps due to this perspective the present study failed to acknowledge the unmaking of the Khambu Rais while examining the processes of making of a tribe out of them.

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