

CHAPTER – V

5.1 Growing Tribalism in Darjeeling Hills and the Role of the State: Concerns and Consequences

Let us begin with the position of Amartya Sen in relation to the question of identity. Sen in his famous Romanes Lecture delivered at the University of Oxford in 1998 (later published in 1999) argued that there are different maps and different procedures of identifying oneself. In fact, modern men/ women are prone to have multiple identities and such a possibility is obvious but what is crucial is their context (Sen 1999 Sen,). It is their context dependent relevance that tells us which identity at what context gets superimposed upon other courses of identities and thereby we come to know about a dominant identity at a particular space and time. This logically follows that the emergence of one particular course of identity as dominant does not necessarily mute the courses of identity from becoming vocal. Given the contextual contingencies they may erupt as relevant and thus dominant in future by making irrelevant the existing dominant identity. These possibilities thus imply that identity discourse is essentially political in nature as its efficacy gets realized not in what it projects but in the context that makes the projection meaningful in expressing, what may be paraphrased in popular terms as, the aspiration of people. The point is that the ‘context’ which makes the project of identity and identification as meaningful in sociological terms, is reflective of the discursive practices of power that emphasizes on the hierarchically arranged sociations (i.e. the forms in individuals – realizable in different ways – grow together into a unity and within which their interests are realized). Identity is but a strategy of such various sociations organized through the productive punctuations of power relations (Sarkar 2017: 59).

5.2 Identity Politics: Context Varying Significance

Approaching Darjeeling situation as such one could comprehend why community identities remained dormant for years and how they became salient particularly since the new millennium. In a certain sense, identity issues constitute the core of hill politics in Darjeeling. However, the course of identity politics did differ. If Gorkhaland movement or for that matter the political aspiration of a separate state of Gorkhaland

(comprising of the hill subdivisions and contiguous Nepali dominated areas) within Indian union has united the various caste and communities (speaking Nepali language) under a politically constituted umbrella identity 'Gorkha' then the diminishing significance of the movement since the 1990s has created a differential context in which the course of identity politics took a different route. The notion that shifting from an Indian Nepali/ Gorkha identity to group by group community identities would be a productive avenue for gaining resources from the state began to gain currency since 1990s. The decade of 1990 was preceded by three significant experiences. First, the near failure of Gorkhaland movement that was increasingly becoming prominent; Second, the official declaration of the Mandal Commission Recommendations in the 1993 securing special benefits for SCs, STs, and OBCs; Third, the rise of *Janjati* movement and politics in Nepal since the 1990s (Pradhan 2004). These three events played instrumental role in securing a process what may be termed by following Adam Kuper (2003) as the 'return of the native' in the Darjeeling hills.

The establishment of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988 was a governmental attempt to settle down the Gorkhaland imbroglio that took violent turn during 1985-87 but the same administrative measure had created disillusionment in the minds of the hill people who sacrificed their life, property and suffered severe hardship and police/ para military atrocities. When viewed in the light of benefits accrued from the state the 1980s movement appears to be a failure. Whereas the system of protective discrimination particularly after post-Mandal period has been assessed as a matter of double endowment that can possibly be achieved only when inter ethnic differences are reworked. The measures of protective discrimination or for that matter the status of being a Scheduled Tribe are considered as double endowment. Firstly because it has a ready assurance of entitlements and welfare benefits from the part of state. Secondly, by becoming tribe one is not only accorded a 'privileged category' status but also a juridical and administrative recognition of being an Indian citizen, since protective discrimination measures are meant for the citizens alone. Hence, the rejoice for 'the return of native' quickly gained populism and became a fad indeed that energised the *Bahun*s and *Chhetri*s (the so-called *tagadharis* – men of sacred thread – the higher castes) even to join the race of 'enlistment movement'. The notion of tribe appeared as a doubly binding package whose achievement demanded group by group identification

that can well run parallel with the so-called movement of Gorkhaland, an issue that would be discussed a little later.

5.3 State, Reservation Policies, and the Roots of aspirational politics

Reservation policies as such were incorporated into the Constitution in order to modernize the social structure, combat inequality, and eradicate caste divisions (Zwart 2000: 5), which seems to have been defeated by political interests. Government in the modern state relies on rigid categories and simplifications. These simplifications serve the purposes of central control and coordination, but they do not 'represent the actual activity of the society' (Scott 1998:3). Reservation as an issue today is more linked with political affair of the state and this lens fits well to examine the Darjeeling situation. It is also interesting to note that the issue of reservation has not only appeared as meaningful in popular imagination but the state as well encouraged the growing tribalism phenomena since it appeared as a very effective strategy that can fragment Gorkha identity and thereby destabilise the Gorkhaland movement. Reservations and its smaller manifestation like 'development boards' and welfare packages have become the center of attraction for the hill communities in Darjeeling.

The concern for Gorkha cause is getting gradually fragmented by multiple different sub-identities with their respective claims for recognition as STs. Now the communities are solely concerned with addressing their individual community issues and interests. On the other hand, encouragement to this sort of activities by the state might have long term repercussions on both the sides. Like the many other communities of the Darjeeling hills, Khambu Rai community had been into this aspirational race based on their claim of ascribed status (like culture, language and socio-structural traits, etc) since the 1990s. The Left Front government was not supportive to the 'caste/ community based movements' as they would dilute the class differences on which their party ideology worked. With the shift in the Government in 2011, Khambu Rais movement got intensified with the assurances of their being included in the ST category. On the eve of Parliamentary election (February 28, 2014) the chief minister of West Bengal had signed the file recommending the ST status for ten hill communities like Rai, Yakkha, Gurung, Bhujel, Newar, Jogi, Sunwar-Mukhia, Mangar, Khas and Thami communities (Telegraph 12.06.2014). Although Khambu Rais were working hard at their personal level to make their demand fulfilled but this

whole issue of state's proposal for granting ST status to ten hill communities (including Khambu Rai) has gained significance as particular political stunt from the ruling party of the state Trinamool Congress (TMC). Thus, reservation has become a mechanism of garnering votes/supports and such instances can be found in the politics of every state today. The latest being the case of the agitation of the Patidars (Patels) in Gujarat for reservation that has questioned the very basis of reservation policy itself.

The case of Patidars in Gujarat who held public demonstrations across the state seeking Other Backward Class (OBC) status is a case in point that needs to be considered. The Patidars, due to their sheer number and influence in the economy and politics of the state were confident in raising the demand for reservation despite the fact they are one of the prosperous (economically and politically) communities of Gujarat. The question that arises: who should therefore be the beneficiaries of reservation policies? In every community some degree of polarization is evident. In other words, every individual, be they Patidars or for that matter Khambu Rais, within their respective communities cannot not be placed in the same level in terms of their socio-economic conditions. Then how should one prove one's candidature for the benefits of protective discrimination? Is it merely by the sheer number (that actually determines their capacity as a vote bank) of a community that should be taken as a legitimate basis for raising or even agitating (like the Patidars) for reservation benefits? If the implications of the reservation policy show that it did not reach its proposed goal (which often is the case) of uplifting the real needy then the justification of granting reservation benefits to SCs, STs or OBCs appears to be suffering from inherent flaws. As a matter of fact, reservation benefits over the years have been cornered by the 'well-off' sections from among the backward communities themselves. Simply put reservation policies in India in contemporary times, appeared more as a 'political-device' to garner political support by uplifting 'those selected ones' from the aspiring communities who enjoy the full privilege of the same provided the community in reference can fulfill the political calculations. Initiated with a welfare motive, reservation programme thus, no longer desires a real transformation of the deprived ones rather a political strategy determines whether to address the concerns of a particular community. The rationality of choosing the 'selected few' from within a host of aspiring communities (as was the case in Darjeeling hills) for inclusion in the list of beneficiaries either as STs (in Darjeeling hills) has in fact, induced communities

towards mobilization. This got reflected in the very decision of granting ST status by the Government (in 2003) to only two hill communities namely Tamang and Limbu, while several others were demanding the same and were sharing similar socio-economic conditions like that of the 'chosen' two communities. As pointed out in the last chapter that the movement for tribal identity by the hill communities could be traced since the 1990s and after the identification of Tamngs and Limbus as Scheduled Tribes all other aspiring communities started believing that the grant of ST status is possible to achieve since they do not see themselves as less competent than the Tamangs and Limbus so far as the issue of tribal status is concerned. Moreover, in a system that favours either the rich or the politically connected, it is ethnicity that has become one of the essential means to ensure the socio-economic aspirations of the common people, to whom the benefits of the welfare state do not trickle down. Once again, this highlights the increasing association of ethnicity with material benefits but within the framework approved by the state (Chhetri 2013: 192). In this regard a boost which is necessary to arouse one's emotions for developing 'self-identity' is provided through community leaders (Shah 1987: 158). The process of segregation and fragmentation starts with the evolving feeling of 'self' as different from 'other' at all levels. This got reflected with another development that has taken place in the Darjeeling hills with the Government's decision of forming community development boards for almost all the hill communities including the Khambu Rais.

5.4 Khambu Rai's Development Board: Lollipop Politics

Ever since the new millennium the hill politics has experienced constant claims and demands for development by even those communities who have already attained ST status. This has resulted in the formation of community development boards for the communities. The community development board, a new kind of an experience, began first with the Lepchas and the *Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board* came into existence on 5th August, 2013 like Lepcha in the first instance. Community development boards were formed with the avowed goal of protecting, promoting, and safeguarding the language, tradition and culture of the respective communities. The community development boards were also allowed to undertake activities for the overall development of the respective communities and anything incidental and conducive for attending such goals. As a matter of fact, the development boards promise monetary support and extend their hands in promoting the cultural attributes.

The Lepcha experience was further followed by other communities like Tamang, Limbu, Bhutia, Sherpa, Magars and so on. The establishment of development board for one after the other and motivating the others for the same was one of the policies that was implemented only for communities of Darjeeling. This exclusivity of governance by promoting community development in Darjeeling sets it apart from other regions in West Bengal. Since the community development boards were directly funded and controlled by the state government, they opened up the possibility of creating a power base for the ruling party of the state in the hills.

Whether it was the main body like the KKRSS or an ad-hoc organization AIKKRA (All India Kirati Khambu Rai Association) or for that matter, the youth body KRM (Khambu Rights Movement) all stood together with the demand for ST status for the Khambu Rais, until the issue of development board for the Khambus did crop up. With the announcement of development board by the chief minister Mamata Banerjee for the Khambu community on 23rd Jan 2016, it became a matter of contention. While the newly formed Rai organization like AIKKRA pointed out that ‘how can Khambu Rais be given a development board without being declared a tribe first?’ As prior to them the communities receiving a board were all STs (like the Lepchas, Tamangs, Limbus, Bhutias, and Sherpas). Disfavouring the decision of development board for the Khambus the AIKKRA stood for the demand of tribal status. But KKRSS which was initially seen not favoring the board issue, later worked for the same and it was under their banner the development board was sanctioned. This led the other branches like the KRM much to their surprise as they were kept outside of the whole issue, while the KKRSS did accept the government decision and started working with the execution of a board for the Khambus (The Telegraph 14th October and 19th October 2020). The West Bengal Khambu Rai Development Board with its head office in Darjeeling, West Bengal was formed in accordance with the provision laid down under section 24 and 27 of the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961 (West Bengal Act XXVI of 1961) and a prior Gazette Notification was made on February 10, 2016 (vide Appendix for the copy of the Gazette Notification). Khambu organizations started considering the board and the funds to be allocated for running its activities as a temporary solution, while their objective of attaining the ST status remained intact. Although many sensed a motif of diverting the community’s interests out of the tribal track through playing out the ‘board politics’, but since the board was accepted by the mother organization of the

Khambus (the KKRSS), the organizational activities like distribution of money to the homeless and poor Khambus have started operationalising soon after the Board was formally established in 2016. As the demand of statehood of the Gorkhas has always been understood/ misunderstood in the light of development and recognition questions and thereby the compulsion to kneel and settle down the agitation with councils compromising the cause of statehood, in a similar manner the Khambus knelt for the board arrangement, which was deemed by the KKRSS leadership as “it’s better to have something than to have nothing”. This kind of settlement obviously has its long term repercussion while the short term effects of it were expressed in the forms of splits, fractions, interpersonal animosities, and even aversion towards the organization itself.

5.5 Practical Knowledge and Institutional Design: Implications of the Process of Reservation

The assertion of communities for reservation in Darjeeling at present can be viewed as a result of the possible stimulus provided from above. Sub-national identities are becoming more and more assertive and all those who are in the business of politics recognise and cultivate them. Assertion of group identities with the organizational (association) initiative is more a response to modernization than a sign of backwardness and parochialism. The emergence of ethnic association or the shift of demand from cultural to political rights highlights the unabated revival of ethnic culture. However, whether it was initiated by the state or ethnic associations themselves, access and control over resources is seen as fundamental to the continued existence of culture (Chhetri 2013: 199). Politicalization of caste and culture is an illustration of that (Puri 1990: 2352-2353). Aspects of social structure which used to be seen as givens of social life are now being viewed as constructions made and sustained by discourse. Examining the mobilization of the Khambu Rais and other communities in the Darjeeling hills in this manner represents a multi-faceted reality at each level where ‘politics for power’ acts as the determining factor behind all moves. These issues can be analysed by following James Scott’s causation who talked about the sharp distinction between two types of knowledge: state knowledge and local knowledge (Scott 1998).

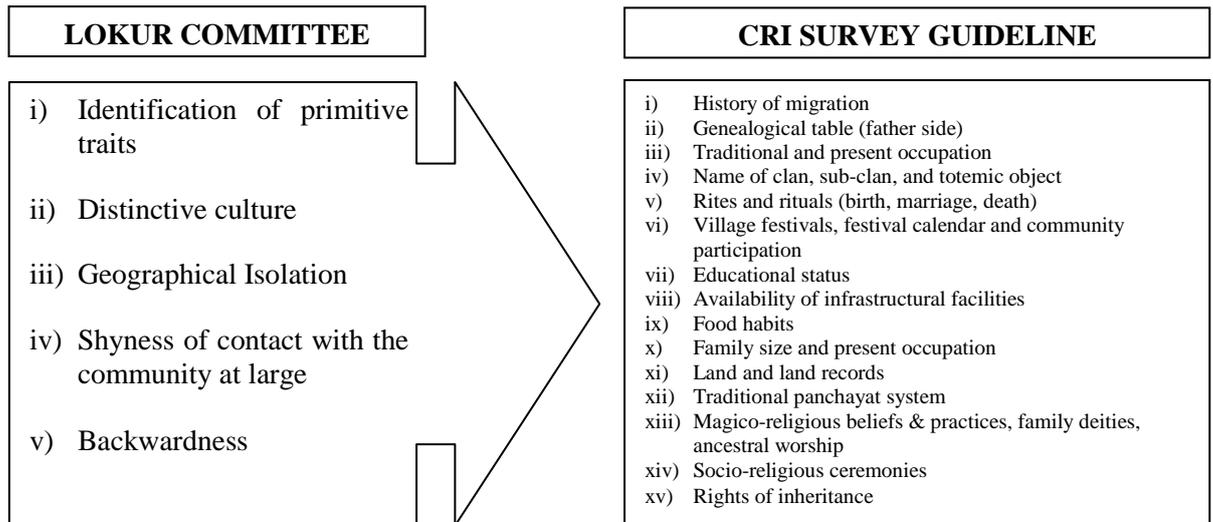
Scott however, did not consider India’s affirmative action policies or reservation issue while arguing that we need to be mindful not only about the capacity

of state simplifications to transform the world but also about the capacity of the society to modify, subvert, block, and even overturn the categories imposed upon it (Scott 1998: 49). He actually was insisting on the need of considering local knowledge and know-how, practical knowledge or its Greek derivation *metis* rather seriously as this helps us understand why well-intended modernization projects do fail to improve the conditions of human condition and produce disaster instead. According to Scott modernizations projects do fail because modern state disparages the *metis* in the hegemonic imperium of scientific knowledge that largely defines its modernization projects. While Scott located a sharp distinction between local and official knowledge and discussed at length about the *metis* unfriendly quality of the modernization projects, some scholars have extended his analytical framework in understanding the implications of affirmative action policies in Indian context (Zwart 2000). Taking cue from both (Scott and Zwart) an attempt is made in the following to analyse the situation in Darjeeling hills.

While Scott maintained that modernization projects are *metis* unfriendly (implying local knowledge having no space in the way official knowledge is implemented) Zwart showed that affirmative action policies in India are to great extent *metis* friendly. A crucial aspect of the reservation policy, the list of beneficiaries, is made up on the basis of information obtained from a great number of local informants who are invited or allowed to contact, inform, and pressure Backward Classes Commission. Zwart thus maintained “through the Backward Classes Commission there comes a massive infusion of Indian *metis* into affirmative action policy” (Zwart 2000: 6). This seems to be significant insight to deal with the issue of tribal identity and identification question in India. As a matter of fact in India the process of designating or ‘scheduling’ the tribes began during British rule and acquired a systematic character from the time of 1931 census. The criteria of scheduling some communities as tribes to the exclusion of others got further refinement in the reports of first Backward Class Commission 1955, the Advisory Committee on Revision of SC/ST lists (Lokur Commission) 1965, and the Joint Committee of the Parliament on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Bill 1967 (Chanda Committee 1969). Even though the question is still very nebulous as to how the tribes in India are to be identified, the Lokur Committee’s five-fold recommendations are still considered as the official basis of determining a group as a Scheduled Tribe. The typical classificatory

arrangement as endorsed by five-fold criteria of Lokur Commission was further extended into fifteen by the Cultural Research Institute (CRI), Kolkata. CRI officials, whom Middleton (2016) referred to as ‘state anthropologists’, prepared their ‘ethnographic survey guideline’ out of these fifteen criteria and used them while assessing, on behalf of the state government, the ‘authenticity’ and ‘appropriateness’ of the claim to be a tribe (vide Fig. 1).

FIG. 1: HOW TO BE A TRIBE



SOURCE: Adapted from Middleton 2011: 253.

Townsend Middleton in his detailed ethnographic account (especially Chapter 4, Middleton 2016) has detailed out the encounters between the ‘state anthropologists’ and their ‘ethnographic guideline’ (official knowledge) and people’s understanding of the same and the organizational representation of the enacted cultural qualification (*metis*). The interface between the official knowledge and the practical knowledge in the way tribal identification process was staged in Darjeeling hills opens up scope not only view the situation as a *metis* friendly one but also to comment that these encounters have created a peculiar condition that may be labeled as ‘classificatory moment’ in which the *metis* cannot be simply considered as the product of some mythical, egalitarian state of nature but more as a response to the formal scheme of classification which cannot be attained unless the *metis* in its raw is sacrificed. What is argued here is that the *metis* acquires a derivative qualification and is contingent upon the official knowledge itself irrespective of the fact that the institutional design of India’s affirmative action policies is largely *metis* friendly. This has resulted into

tribalism or a growing consciousness among the hill communities whose *metis* allows them to consider themselves as eligible for ST status. As we have shown in case of the Khambu Rais that they do still practice much of the traditional beliefs and practices, which are reflective of distinctive culture and primitive traits (Lokur Commission criteria), even though assimilation with the mainstream cosmopolitan culture of the hills on the one hand and Hinduism on the other bears the imprint in almost every walks of their life. Except the caste Hindus (like the Bahun, Chhetris, Kami, Damai, Sarkis) all other hill communities constituting the larger Indian Nepali / Gorkha identity fall within the Mongoloid racial group and their languages / dialects fall within the Tibeto-Burman language family (as opposed to Nepali that falls within Indo-Aryan language family). As a matter of fact the Tamangs, Limbus, Rais, Magars, Gurungs, Newars, Yakhas, Bhujels, Sunwars, Thamis, Thakalis and others are of Mongoloid origin and traditionally maintained their own language / dialects / *Kuras* belonging to Tibeto-Burman language family. Their presence in the Darjeeling hills not only has demographic implications but cultural significance as well. Darjeeling hills has acquired a prominence since the colonial time as hill station and later on the hills imbued cosmopolitan culture instead of typifying typical Bengali culture or the culture of a Hindu pilgrimage centre (like other hill spaces) as such, although both Bengalis and Hinduism was not alien to Darjeeling hills. Within such a historical pretext it is quite obvious that the communities in the hills would respond to the ongoing cultural currents and appropriate it as per their ability and necessity. Hence, change is obvious to all communities in the way they lived their life within this dynamic social realities of the Darjeeling hills. And within such a context if the Tamangs and Limbus could be considered as eligible for Scheduled Tribe status by the government (they were granted the ST status in 2003), then it is quite obvious that the rest of the communities who share the same Mongoloid root and Tibeto-Burman linguistic background and were placed in similar socio-economic reality, would raise the claim of tribal status. The designation of Tamangs and Limbus as ST has created a popular belief that the rest of the hill communities, belonging to Mongoloid race, are the 'natural' claimants of ST status.

5.6 *Metis* Friendly Recognition Process: Implications for the Community

The tribal identification process in the Darjeeling hills context has opened up the field where 'official knowledge' literally encountered 'local knowledge', although the local

knowledge reflected much of what the official knowledge actually wanted to see/document as 'objective reality'. In the process that ensued, everyday life of the communities was demonstrated in a staged manner however, that does not mean that everything so displayed were 'cooked'. Besides the peculiarities involved in such encounters what is crucial is to note that such processes and particularly the role of community organizations in them have galvanized a sense of self identity in all the aspiring communities of the Darjeeling hills, including the Khambus. It is commonly held that community identities are socially constructed. Through conscious mobilization of its members for defending their interests, communities actually invoke and reinforce their identities. The community organizations have successfully infused this view that the community's development and upliftment were conditioned by the position they might secure in the reservation policy frameworks maintained by the state. In this context Mancur Olson (1965: 117) rightly remarks, 'that people spontaneously organize groups to promote their interests or that people would form such groups if they possessed the necessary organizational skill and understood their own interests properly'. Rational choice theory, which allows us to understand how aspects of a social situation can influence the choices and actions of individuals, also justifies the Khambu's position. The widespread activism in the Khambu community therefore can be understood as the resultant effect of the impetus provided by the state by emphasizing primitiveness and distinctive culture as major bases of tribal identity whereby different hill communities started considering these as 'bright prospects' in fulfilling their long cherished demand of 'tribal status'. Thus reservation serves more as a means for the expression of community interest. All the manifestation of 'tribalism' thus includes excavation of buried traditions of the past necessitated by the requirement of creating a primitive look in the present. Nevertheless, mobilization for their 'self-identity' has positively contributed towards the solidarity of these communities at different parts and the delay in meeting their demands may lead to an outburst of an anti-establishment frustration in the long run, as was the case with the Gujjars in Rajasthan during 2008.

The state plays a dominant role in the lives of its citizens. Besides securing rights and entitlements for individuals the state plays a crucial role in establishing political norms and expectations. The political assertion of community identities are needed to be understood in the light of rights and entitlements questions on the one

hand and political expectations on the other. Community identities are therefore intrinsically related to the ways through which communities engage with or become a part of larger political processes, which is often based on the politics of re-distribution (Chhetri:2015: 13). The kind of meaning state attaches to the redistributive justice mechanism has transformed the recognition process as a device to deliver socio-economic and political protection thereby shaping the subjectivities of the tribal actors (Chhetri 2016: 2). While 'exclusivity' guarantees some rewards and protection from the state, the uniqueness that is being portrayed by the community through its organizational set up and mostly in the form of cultural revival serves the dual interest of give and take for both (the state as well as the community). Thus by encouraging the ethnic assertion of the communities for 'reservation-benefits', the ruling parties of the state create a political base in areas where they had no political grip earlier and the communities while galvanizing cultural revivalism see hope in reservation politics and also become politically viable in the local acrobatics of political power. The demand of tribal identity of the Khambu Rais or other communities in contemporary Darjeeling hills therefore forms a part of the larger political process in which politics of re-distribution is being viewed as the surest way to acquire more political or economic benefits and privileges (Chhetri 2013: 206). This has become a common practice in the state politics of Sikkim where the state encourages and promotes the active participation of some of the ethnic communities in matters of cultural preservation and identity assertion. Situation in Darjeeling hills gradually taking a similar shape like that of Sikkim where the communities and their identities are getting fashioned as per the norms set by the state. Thus the indirect control that the state exerts upon the communities, as Chhetri puts it, constantly refurbishes the community (as is the case of the Khambus too) to search for new strategies and mechanisms to invite the attention of the state (Chhetri 2013: 21). This interaction between the communities and the state is crucial because it has resulted in shaping almost everything, from the goals and agenda to the strategies of action to be followed by the members of different cultural groups and organisations.

5.7 Lokur Commission Criteria and tribal Identification

In case of Darjeeling hills such negotiations between the community and the state or the representatives of the state department that deals with tribal status have given birth to a complete dependence on the community organizations. Community organizations

not only acted as mouthpiece of the community in front of the state officials but it is the organizations which have fomented the aspiration and gave it a shape of a political and democratic movement. Let us briefly examine the condition of the Khambu Rais so far as the question of officially designated criteria is concerned. As noted earlier Lokur Commission (1965) criteria are still considered as the 'official' knowledge regarding the idea of a tribe in India. The fulfillment of the five criteria as set out by the Lokur Commission is the only way through which a community can be designated as Scheduled Tribe in India. Fieldwork conducted for the present study has emphasized on this and tried neither to legitimize nor even to refute but to examine their claim in terms of empirical data. The official fivefold criteria includes: i) identification of primitive traits, ii) distinctive culture, iii) geographical isolation, iv) shyness of contact with the community at large, and v) backwardness. We have taken into consideration 80 households (constituting a universe of 394 heads) of three hill villages (namely, Paiyong, Dalep and Newahang) under Kalimpong-II Block having adequate representation of the Khambu Rais.

5.7.1 Identification of Primitive Traits among the Khambus

So far as the question of primitive traits is concerned we have examined in detail about the rites and rituals, festivals, and the various aspects of Khambu social structure in Chapter three. Where we have discussed with adequate detail about their traditional practices and the manner in which they were practiced even today. Among the major identifiable primitive traits among the Khambus were the practice of *Pitri Puja* (ancestor worshipping), significance of *Mankheem* (Khambu Temple), *Mundhum* (versical prayers), *Mangpas* (shamans), *Chula Dhunga* (ancestral hearth stone) in the execution of their everyday life. Besides there were traditional festivities like *Sakela*, *Sakewa*, which are now-a-days observed with elaborate public celebration. What is important is to note that the very idea of preserving the primitive traits is maintained under the guidance of community organizations but community organizations have not invented something which was completely absent. Nonetheless community organisations' involvement obviously made the common Khambu aware that the primitive practices, which they otherwise maintained as their private affair often without elaborate celebratory manifestations and as part of their tradition having only symbolic value for them only, can now fetch material rewards and pecuniary benefits. It is that is why one can observe that the rate of participation of the common Khambus

in the activities of the organization and becoming members of it were significantly high and such propensities are certainly increasing. In other words their involvement with the organizations bears testimony to the fact that the Khambus though maintained their primitive traits in a mundanely manner but now they are being made increasingly aware of the strategic essentialism of those traits. In the following table we thus considered the involvement of common Khambus in the three field sites and also the preservation of one primitive trait that could at least be measured numerically. Some photographs (as shown below) from the field could also be significant in representing the reality besides the following table.

Table No.5.1 Distribution of households according to their involvement in activities of the organization and possession of primitive trait (*Chula Dhunga*)

Name of the Village	Aware of KKRSS led movement	Membership to KKRSS	Attending Meetings of KKRSS	Possession of hearth stone (<i>Chula Dhunga</i>)
Paiyong (N= 50)	48	50	48	47
Dalep (N= 18)	18	18	18	18
Newahang (N= 12)	12	12	12	12
Total (N= 80)	78 (97.50%)	80 (100%)	78 (97.50%)	77 (96.25%)

Source: Fieldwork data

The above table delineates clearly that all the households in the three hill villages were members of the organization (KKRSS) irrespective of their awareness regarding the activities of the organization. As we have noted earlier that becoming a member of the KKRSS operates as a kind of social responsibility to live comfortably in the *samaj*. Further if being part of the organization is the way to become aware of the primitive traits (particularly for the younger generation) then almost everyone (97% for sure) from among these 80 households were aware of the significance of preserving the primitive traits. With the particular case of ancestral hearth stone (*Chula Dhunga*) 77 households (out of 80 households) were found to be possessing ancestral hearth stone except the three Christian households of Paiyong village. During fieldwork visits to each of the households yielded the realization that maintaining *Chula Dhunga* is perhaps the atypical Khambu trait and that is why every household maintained it with due admiration.

PRIMITIVISM IN PRACTICE



Plate 1: *Chula Dhunga* inside the household

PRIMITIVISM AT DISPLAY



Plate 2: *Chula Dhunga* in public display



Plate 3: *Mangpa* in action at household



Plate 4: *Mangpa* in action at public display

5.7.2 Distinctive Culture of the Khambus

As noted earlier that the Khambus have not isolated themselves from the ongoing changes taken place in the Darjeeling hills. Consequently, it is obvious that their culture has responded to the changing realities and adapted itself in tune with the challenges it encountered. Hence change in the culture of the Khambus, or in any other community for that matter, is but an expected outcome. However, distinctiveness of Khambu culture still could be traced out through their religious background and practice of some deities which are peculiarly their own. The religious background of the Khambus in the field situation was found to be mostly confined into one group, while there were others as well.

Table No.5.2 Distribution of households according to their religious background

Name of the Village	Hindu	Animists	Mixed (Hinduised+ Animists)	Sadhu Rai	Christians	Buddhists	Total
Paiyong	--	1	44	2	3	--	50
Dalep	--	1	17	--	--	--	18
Newahang	--	--	12	--	--	--	12
Total	--	2 (2.5%)	73 (91.25%)	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.75%)	--	80

Source: Fieldwork data

Interestingly enough during census enumeration none of the households did identify themselves as Hindus or even Hinduised though detailed interviews and observation revealed the presence of Hindu influence in some of their religious practices and even the celebration of selected Hindu rituals and festivities were also observed. As we have argued in chapter three that absorbing these selected and chosen few Hindu practices in the sphere of Khambu religion, rituals, and festivities did not result in Hinduisation or for that matter Sanskritization in any meaningful sense. They have absorbed them following a Khambuan way. In each case of such absorptions the distinctiveness of Khambu culture was kept intact and some additional traits were included, as is common in situations where communities are living together for generation having different religious background come to share cultural traits on a reciprocal basis. Anthropologists have categories at their disposal to frame these situations analytically but instead of labeling such encounters, which did happen in a mundane way in the past, we preferred to emphasize on the agentiality of the Khambus and instead of agreeing with the established conceptual frames like Hinduisation, Sanskritization or for that matter Hindu mode of tribal absorption we have even attempted to articulate (if we are really very curious to label them as such) the present case more as an instance of 'Khambu mode of Hindu absorption' and not the other way round. The point can be better explained with the example of Hindu-Muslim cultural syncretism. As we are aware that due to historical reasons and regional specificities Hindus and Muslims lived together and this has resulted in reciprocal exchange of cultural traits between two different religions, which however did not affect the distinctiveness of any of the communities. We have also emphasized that this relationship was reciprocal in case of the Khambus and their Hindu neighbours. If the

Khambus have received Hindu traits and assimilated them in their culture then there were instances that did show that their Hindu neighbors have also received from them as well (allowing the *shamans* in Hindu household is just an instance of such cultural reception). As a result in the field we have observed 91% of the households represented this mixed character where Hindu practices were not completely unknown to the ways through which the Khambus have maintained their animistic paths in dealing with the sacred. Moreover, there were at least 2 households (2.5%) who showed no inclination towards Hindu practices and were completely oriented with their animistic beliefs and practices. While some others were found to be following Christianity (3.75%) and two households were found to have followed mendicant (*Sadhu Rai*¹) way of religiosity (2.5%). The point is if religious beliefs and practices are to be considered as a marker of distinctive culture, then the field reality suggests that the Khambu Rais have maintained their distinctiveness notwithstanding the fact that processes of change and blending of cultures were reflected in their everyday life.



Plate 5: *Mankhim* from outside



Plate 6: The inside of *Mankhim*



Plate 7: *Mankhim*

¹ *Sadhu Rais* have their particular gurus who organize *chawaka/ bhandrara* during *Purnima* (full moon). Besides, they abstain from eating any non-vegetarian foods and drinking alcohol. They were a *kanthi* in neck (made of holy basil). They refrain from animal sacrifice. As *Kabir panthi* (followers of mendicant *Kabir*) they would not even accept and eat coconut except the one given by their gurus.



Plate 8: Khambu Rais Cultural Distinctiveness (on Display)

The distinctiveness of the Khambu culture further gets expressed through their clan structure (detailed description is made in chapter three). Every household maintain their *thar* specifications while performing ancestor worshipping or indulging into

matrimonial alliances. Khambus are generally considered to be agriculturalists hence besides animal sacrifice the use of paddy (*dhan*), millet (*kodo*), ginger (*aduaa*) is widely prevalent in performances of ancestor worshipping or for other rituals even in the urban spaces too. Another domain that constitutes the distinctive culture of the Khambus is constituted of their language. It has already been pointed out that each *thar* of the Khambus has a different *boli* (dialect) but in the field it was found that they mostly use the language of the *Bantawa thar*. It was also observed that very few of them were actually capable of conversing in their own language while all are conversant in Nepali and Hindi. Nepali is actually the lingua franca in the three villages

Table No.5.3 Distribution of respondents according to their competence in Khambu Language

Name of the Village	Can speak Khambu Language/ Dialect of any variety			Cannot speak Khambu language/ dialect			Total
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	
Paiyong	24	14	38	95	116	211	249
Dalep	6	9	15	31	30	61	76
Newahang	5	5	10	25	26	51	61
Total	35	28	63 (16.32%)	151	172	323 (83.68%)	386

Source: Fieldwork data (toddlers were excluded)

as also in the Darjeeling hills as well. The better educated ones in particular, were conversant in English too but none were capable of speaking Bengali. Earlier (before the emergence of the KKRSS) the Khambus used to consider *Sirijanga* script, which basically the script of the Limbus, as their own. In fact, the emergence of KKRSS and dissociation from the Kirat *Chumlung* (association of all Kirat communities) was centred mostly on the need of having a separate script for the Khambus. Under the stewardship of the KKRSS Khambus now have a separate script of the own known as *sumhang* script. Although very few (16.32%) of the Khambus could actually speak their own language but everyone was aware that they have a distinctive language and script of their own and even regretted their incapacity during the interviews. The handful few those who can speak their language also shared that they cannot use it rather freely unless they find a competent one with whom conversation could be

maintained. Although the most of the Khambus were lagging in language competence but everyone in the field situation were aware of the symbolic value of the language as a distinctive cultural marker of the Khambus. Needless to mention that the KKRSS has taken sincere initiatives in popularizing the linguistic concern among the general Khambus by publishing language primers and disseminating the *sumhang* script as part of its mobilizing programmes.

5.7.3 Geographical isolation of the Khambus and shyness of contact with the community at large

Geographical isolation and shyness of contact – the two criteria mentioned in Lokur Commission – were taken together because of their complementarities. It is presumed that shyness of contact with the larger society for an isolated community is quite probable. But the question is where to get such a community? In post liberalized countries like India it is rather impossible to find out a village or a locality which is completely isolated from the larger society. Within the omni presence of Market forces, wide spread of mass-media, all round infrastructural development (mainly roads and electricity) how could isolation and shyness to contact larger society of a community be expected? Interestingly enough these are still considered to be ‘tribal criteria’ in the eyes of the government. In a certain sense, the government policies are aimed at achieving a self defeating goal by branding the tribes as ‘isolated communities’ and further considering them as those who have inertia to contact larger society. In other words, if the tribes are to be identified by these criteria then each of the tribal communities could be considered as those who epitomize the failure of the Indian state at large. As a matter of fact, the field sites though were selected out of isolated villages (due to topography hill villages are not well communicable) from the Kalimpong-II Block but it would be fallacious to consider them as isolated spaces. Though road connectivity was not up to the mark and it was hectic to reach out every nook and cranny of the villages under study, the Khambus and for that matter all other communities in these villages were well connected not only to Kalimpong (the nearby urban space) but to the world (through mass media) as well. Infrastructural development (like roads and communication, electricity, education, health, mass media etc.) howsoever scanty it may be, has made the Khambus forward looking like all other communities living in these villages. The point is that the Khambus have not shunned themselves from the ways through which their local society in relation to the outside

world was evolving. Instead of leading their life in a retrogressive manner they have positively responded to whatever opportunities were there at their disposal. Even the people of forest villages of the hills are not isolated in any meaningful sense of the term. The KKRSS seemed to have been unbothered about these two criteria but whenever the CRI inspection team (including anthropologists) visited the hills the KKRSS took the team members to remote villages where tribalism was displayed to convince the government team.



Plate 9: Agriculture in hill village (Paiyong)



Plate 10: Dispersed Households (Dalep)



Plate 11: Path to households (Newahang)

5.7.4 Backwardness of the Khambu Rais

The final criterion of Lokur Commission is backwardness, which in itself is a normative idea. Backwardness can be defined and measured in various ways. For precision we have attempted to examine backwardness of the Khambus in socio-economic terms and considered their income, landownership, occupational background, and level of education. So far as the monthly income of the 80 households in the three hill villages of Darjeeling are concerned, it is revealed through the following table that majority of the Khambu households were relatively poor. Only 8.75% (7 households) households could be considered as having moderate income level. However, it needs to be pointed

Table No. 5.4 Distribution of households according to their monthly income

Village	Below 3000	3000-5000	5000-10000	10000-20000	20000-30000	30000 +	Total
Paiyong	13 26%	10 20%	6 12%	14 28%	3 6%	4 8%	50
Dalep	3 16.66%	9 50%	1 5.55%	5 27.77%	--	--	18
Newahang	4 33.33%	--	6 50%	2 16.66%	--	--	12
Total	20 (25%)	19 (23.75%)	13 (16.25 %)	21 (26.25%)	3 (3.7%)	4 (3.2%)	80

Source: Fieldwork data

out that data collection in field situations on such private issues like income is always very problematic as respondents do not share their actual income for various reasons. This was experienced during the time of enumerating census data for the present study. However, when we tally their income with the next table it becomes clear that their monthly income does not include the income (either in cash or kind) generated from agriculture, as most of the households were possessing arable lands, though in varying degrees.

The following Table shows that all the three villages were primarily based on agriculture and this required that the households should own sizable amount of arable land. Moreover, due to topographic reasons expecting individual possession of large amount of arable land is indeed a difficult proposition. All these get reflected in the

following table. As a matter of fact, the agricultural base of the three villages gets reflected and interestingly except one village there were no landless Khambus. Landless Khambus who maintain their livelihood mainly as an agricultural labourer (*Pakhuryes*) were insignificant (3.75%) when compared to those who owned land.

Table No.5.5 Distribution of households according to (agricultural) Land Holding Pattern

Village	3 to 10 Decimal	10 to 30 Decimal	30 to 50 Decimal	50 to 100 Decimal	1 to 5 acre	Landless/ <i>Pakhurey</i>	Total Household
Paiyong	6 (12%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	4 (8%)	31 (62%)	3 (6%)	50
Dalep	3 (16.66%)	1 (5.55%)	1 (5.55%)	---	13 (72.22%)	---	18
Newahang	2 (16.66%)	---	1 (8.33%)	---	9 (75%)	---	12
Total	11 (13.75%)	05 (6.25%)	4 (5%)	4 (5%)	53 (66.25%)	03 (3.75%)	80

Source: Fieldwork data

Another significant aspect of the landholding pattern in these three villages was that the highest proportions of households were having sizeable amount of land (1-5 acre) in their possession (66.25%). Owning lands in between 1-5 acre is obviously a significant marker of their economic strength although the income table did not reflect that. It was also observed that centering their economic life primarily on agriculture the Khambus of these three hill villages were found to be tradition bound and community oriented, nevertheless craving for city life among the younger generation was also noticed.

Occupational engagements of the Khambus of these three villages were classified into four major categories. Besides we have also identified those who are not engaged in any occupation but were practically the dependents. We classified the dependents into two groups one was represented by the students and the other included the unemployed, housewife, aged and minors. As a matter of fact, there more dependents than there were earning members in each of the households. As the following table shows more than 60% (61.68%) of the Khambus in these three villages were dependents while only 3.81% were engaged in government services (mostly serving in army and police service, and as ICDS worker) and 6.35% of the Khambus were engaged in different types of private sector jobs (driving, teaching in private school, electrician, nursing in private hospitals, contractors). Out of 394 individuals 79

(20%) were directly involved with agriculture while 32 individuals (8.12%) have recorded themselves as self employed (like shop owner, carpentry, running parlours, selling vegetables). Quite expectedly most of the unemployed and the housewives were also found to be engaged with family farms and in different capacities they are contributing towards their family farm as parts of family labour whose services were

Table No.5.6 Distribution of respondents according to their occupational background

Villages	Agriculture			Govt. Service			Private Service			Self Employed			Students			Unemployed, Housewife, Aged, Minor	Total Population
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T		
Paiyong	44	9	53	12	--	--	9	6	15	15	2	17	28	32	60	95	252
Dalep	10	2	12	--	-	--	4	2	6	9	1	10	17	10	27	24	79
Newahang	10	4	14	2	1	3	3	1	4	5	0	5	10	6	16	21	63
Total	64	15	79 (20.05%)	14	1	15 (3.81%)	16	9	25 (6.35%)	29	3	32 (8.12%)	55	48	103 (26.14%)	140 (35.53%)	394

Source: Fieldwork data

neither paid nor even counted. It was also interesting to note that while the engagement of the Khambus in formal jobs (either government or private) was abysmally low the number of students were relatively high. This is significant in the sense that the growth social capital among the Khambus was satisfactory but their engagements in white collar jobs were negligible. For example in villages like Dalep and Newahang more than 33% of the Khambus were studying at different levels while none in Dalep was engaged in government service and in Newahang only 4.76% Khambus were having government job of some kind. In situations like this rising expectation is thus probable.

So far as the educational background of the Khambus in the field situation is concerned, it can be said that the value of education has been well realized by the Khambus. Out of a total of 394

Table No.5.7 Distribution of respondents according to their educational background

Villages	Minor			Uneducated / LWS			PRIMARY			CLASS V TO CLASS X			CLASS X TO CLASS XII			COLLEGE			Total
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Paiyong	2	2	4	13	29	42	21	21	42	64	50	114	14	18	32	10	8	18	252
Dalep	1	-	1	1	9	10	10	9	19	22	14	36	4	2	6	2	5	7	79
Newahang	-	-	-	2	10	12	10	9	19	15	9	24	4	2	6	2	-	2	63
Total	3	2	5 (1.27%)	16	48	64 (16.24%)	41	39	80 (20.31%)	101	73	174 (44.16%)	22	22	44 (11.17%)	14	13	27 (6.85%)	394

Source: Fieldwork data

Total Households -80 (Paiyong 50, Newang 12, Dalep 18)

Khambus 16% were found to be uneducated or were merely literates but without any standard (Literate Without Standard). Good number youngsters were found to be school goers and that has resulted in the improved picture in case of those who have recorded their educational background falling between classes V to X (44.16%). However, only 50 students were actually continuing their studies (between classes V-X). Among the graduates (6.85%) 8 were found to be actual college goers, 1 has dropped out while the rest 18 have completed their college education already and were mostly engaged in non-government services. None was there in any of these three villages who would have studied beyond the college level or had earned any professional, vocational or any skill oriented education or training. It was peculiar that there was a clear aversion towards higher education found among the Khambus of the three hill villages. That might be because of the increasing competition in the

government sector jobs in which the success rate of the Khambus were practically negligible.

Based on the analysis of empirical data in relation to the five-fold criteria of tribal identification, it is observed that regarding 'primitive traits' and 'distinctive culture' the Khambus have many favourable facts and figures in relation to their claim of being a tribe, although considerable amount of change and intermixing was also noticed in their everyday life which however, did not wipe out neither their distinctiveness nor even the primitive traits of their culture. So far as 'shyness' of meeting other cultures or the larger society the Khambus, much like others, were not found to be suffering from this sort of peculiar insularity nor even the Khambu villages were completely isolated' from the larger society though they were living in dispersed households and were interconnected through difficult routes within the hill village set up. With regard to their 'backwardness' it may be said that the Khambus of these three hill villages at least, were neither economically very affluent nor even were they the wretched of the earth. Placed in an agricultural economic set up with all the hardships of unpredictable nature, poor communication, absence of irrigation etc. the Khambus were moderately successful in appropriating the benefits of both education and market and thereby in leading a modest life. In all likelihood the three villages in the field situation represent an ideal situation where mobilization based on the notion of relative deprivation could easily flow through community line. And that is what practically is happening, not only in these three villages alone but throughout the Darjeeling hills in general.

5.8 Demand of Tribal Status and the Emerging Khambu Worldview

While engaging themselves with the demand of tribal status the Khambus have been shaping their worldviews accordingly but the non-recognition of their demand did result in multiple dissatisfactions. One such effect was of frustration with the leadership of Khambu organizations who have failed repeatedly to secure the much coveted status of Scheduled Tribe for the Khambus. This was probably the basis for the emergence of another (other than KKRSS) organization like the AIKKRA (All India Kirati Khambu Rai Association) for the Khambus themselves. It was observed that the general Khambus were conscious of their 'being a tribe' but all of them believed that it is only through government recognition they would get their tribal identity validated.

However, it would be rather impracticable to find out a Khambu, or for that matter any other community belonging to mongoloid race (who are also aspiring for ST status), who is ‘culturally pure, socially inept, and anachronistic – as though perfectly sealed off from the modern life’ (Middleton 2016: 120).

On behalf of the Khambus, the KKRSS has dealt with the multiple Government offices and departments and submitted memoranda to Registrar General of India (RGI), Tribal Welfare Ministry, Tribal Welfare Commission, Parliamentary Affairs Committee and conducted personal meetings with Tribal Ministers like Rani Narah (in 2011), Jial Oram (in 2015) but with no outcome. Visiting RGI office has become a regular affair for the KKRSS office bearers. The government departments have not responded to their demand concretely except the reply from the RGI that they received in 2011. In 2011 the KKRSS was in receipt of a response in which the RGI had rejected their application and also the application of the Gurungs. Earlier these two communities i.e. the Gurungs and the Khambus, were favourably recommended twice for the grant of ST status by the Cultural Research Institute in 2003 and again in 2007. However, their proposals were rejected by the RGI – Social Science Wing. With such rejections, ethnic groups further strengthened their demand and renewed their tactics to attain the coveted ST status (Chhetri 2017: 82). Their memorandum was rejected on the ground that they were exposed to various forces of modernity and hence they no longer possess the ‘pristine tribe like characteristics’ and had assimilated to a great extent with the mainstream cultures. The document reads like this: “Though the community (Khambu Rais) had a tribal origin, with the passage of time and due to their contact with the exogenous people and their contacts with the Hindu tradition, they are gradually assimilating into the great tradition, It will be then a retrograde step if they are included into the list of Scheduled tribe” (as quoted in Middleton 2016: 150).

This particular incident is reflective of what we labeled earlier as derivative *metis* (implying how local knowledge gets constructed out of official knowledge). The rejection of their plea by the RGI led the community leaders realize that the most important factor, which have adulterated their ‘purity’ as a tribe was their association with Hinduism. Accordingly the community organization did instruct its members to shed off the Hindu practices most important among such instructions was the stricture of boycotting *Dussehra/ Dasain* (which was regarded as a quintessentially Hindu festival). This has been discussed earlier as to how animosities grew between

leadership and common Khambus as they did not actually follow the organizational decrees. But the point is that this stricture and the associated polarization that did take place during October 2013 in Darjeeling was neither having a deep seeded historical or ideological background like that of Nepal where ‘politics of *Dasain*’ churned the *Janajati* cause to a great extent. In case of Darjeeling hills such a ‘knowledge’ that was floated for sometimes to show that the Khambus were not Hindus was actually necessitated by the ‘official knowledge’ of the state. It was a peculiar kind of a *metis*, which was local in appearance but not in content.

As mentioned earlier, the growing tribalism phenomena cannot be understood without examining the involvement of the state or the engagements of different departments of the state, which is central to the growth and proliferation of the demand for tribal status. Anthropologists from the CRI conducted ethnographic studies on these groups (including the Khambus) and verified their claims, and based on their study the state departments recommend groups for recognition as ST. In the wake of such studies and surveys, the groups tried to showcase their tribal traits through performances that incorporated the idea of tribe as visualized by the state (Chhetri 2016: 7). Both the aspiring communities and the state are equally aware of the conundrums that ‘tribal phenomena’ involves and in a certain sense all these have in fact questioned the relevance of such outdated methods of detecting one’s tribal status. It is interesting to note that in the recent past (in 2017) an entire village called ‘Suntuk Village’ was prepared as the ‘model village’ for outperforming the tribal arts, rituals, festivals of Khambus where the anthropologists from CRI and similar other tribal bodies of Government could come to document the ‘performative tribal self’ of the Khambus. Looking at all these Middleton aptly argued that there indeed seems to be a dire need to reformulate the anthropological knowledge with regard to the ethnics of Darjeeling who in fact is playing an active part being a participant of a ‘performative anthropology’ (Middleton 2016: 139).

5.9 ST demand in Darjeeling mooted with political flavor

The situation in Darjeeling hills can be viewed as a resultant effect of the intersection between politics, policy and practice, which has created an atmosphere where cultural differences are getting continuously produced and reproduced often by undermining the identities shaped by the modern forces and resulted in the transformation of sociality

(Gregory 2003: 4). According to Morton Fried tribes are the product of specific political and economic pressures emanating from already existing state-organized societies (Fried 1975: 44). As the emanation of any force does have its roots somewhere, the political insecurity crept in with the Indian Nepalis / Gorkhas and the economic instability in terms of unemployment led the educated ones among them to use the 'tribal card' to its best. The outbursts of the politico-economic pressure did find its minimum outlet through these state sponsored policies of positive discrimination. Viewing Darjeeling situation as such it seems appropriate to label the growing tribalism phenomena in Darjeeling by following Morton Fried as 'secondary tribalism'. Fried argues that 'secondary tribalism is a political phenomenon bearing little resemblance to conventional notions of tribal behaviour. It occurs as already indicated, largely as a reaction to the presence of one or more states' (Fried 1975: 103). Thus, what Appadurai (1997: 141) has argued and what the Khambu Rais have been doing by engraving their historical roots of distant past which are not easily changeable but are potentially available to ignition by new historical and political contingencies. Taken together, these positions suggest that tribal identity politics is a culmination of interaction between the state and the aspiring communities, centering primarily on the issues of control and access to economic and political resources (Chhetri 2013: 1). All said and done, demand of tribal identity by the Khambu Rais in Darjeeling hills cannot be viewed as an isolated phenomenon. It is neither thoroughly about primordial identity nor even is it the typical case of elite manipulation. However, given the mediation of the state it is both.

While reflecting on the ethnic politics of the Eastern Himalaya scholars have discussed how ethnic identity has been used as the prime basis of accessing socio-economic rewards following political routes. Chhetri (2013) in her research made two contentions: First, the choice of ethnicity as a political identity might be driven primarily by instrumental motives but non-instrumental, emotive motives may also be an important factor in the choice of a political identity. Second, these choices are rather a combination of numerous instrumental and impulsive factors, the boundaries of which are liminal and therefore intersecting. Viewed as such tribal identity question in Darjeeling hills appears to be a complex phenomenon. Such complexities increases further when we see that while the 'tribal resurrection' or the demand for tribal status in other parts of India can be analysed as a demand for reservation and privileges but for

communities in Darjeeling it means more than that. It means a security, an assurance and a belonging. We need also to understand that the emergence of tribal identity politics is emerging as a potential political force at that point of time when the statehood movement of the Gorkhas has been on the wane. Tribal identity politics therefore can also be viewed as an important route to rise in prominence at the local level politics.

5.10 Tribalism, State and Community Relations in Darjeeling Hills: Consequences and Concerns

What merits attention is the issue that through their acts of reviving the ‘tribalist’ cultural traditions the aspiring Khambus of the Darjeeling hills are trying to depict their search to be known as ‘something’ and clarifies their relationships with the positions of power and privilege and thereby opening up the scope for inter-community conflicts based on differential political affiliations. This is how tribal identity issue has taken an ‘ethnic detour’ in contemporary Darjeeling hills and trying to get its justification realized within the circumstantial situation where the state itself is seen to encourage such activities (Sarkar 2014: 26). In fact, the encouragement of the state towards tribalism in Darjeeling hills can be realised through the favorable policies like say recommending tribal status for hill communities or for that matter establishing community development boards for almost all the communities of Darjeeling hills. No doubt the ruling regime of the state has gained a political leverage in the hills through these steps but what was more significant is that these courses of action has encouraged the consciousness of micro community identities among the various hill communities. This has been viewed by many as detrimental to the larger Gorkha identity and the state encouragements were increasingly being posed as attempts to destabilize the statehood movement running for more than a century. Schoalrs like Shneiderman (2009) has argued that tribal identity politics in Darjeeling hills would result into inter-community animosities and ultimately wane down the scale and magnitude of the Gorkhaland movement in the long run. Even Middleton (2016) was of the view that Darjeeling’s tribal identity politics received huge acceptance and enticement largely because Gorkhaland movement has become a failure.

It is not enough to pinpoint that the growing tribalism in the Darjeeling hills in a certain sense is a response encouraged by the state policies related to protective

discrimination. What becomes important is also to understand what consequences these responses create for the entire society and politics of the Darjeeling hills. As mentioned above that some scholars have registered grave concern in terms of community clash and gradual weakening of Gorkha identity and if the growing tribalism is ultimately leading the hill society and politics towards this end then the phenomena of tribalism appears to be a 'self defeating' project. However, a quick review of the situations of the Darjeeling hills during the last decade (2010-2020) when the tribal identity issue was at its peak, we hardly experience the incidents of community clashes in the Darjeeling hills although animosity between the Lepchas and the present leadership of GJM did certainly grow. It should also be noted that the Lepcha aggrandizement was more against the GJM leadership and the GTA which appeared to have created administrative bottlenecks in the way Lepcha Development Board functioned.

So far as the question of weakening of the Gorkha identity is concerned, it needs to be pointed out that there exists no fundamental difference between tribal identity and Gorkha identity. The Gorkha identity and Tribal identity has been often misunderstood by pitting the one against the other. In fact, it would be a fundamental mistake to pose the issue as Gorkha vs. Tribal identity. Gorkha identity is not a cultural identity it has its own historicity and it is essentially a political identity constituted of Nepali speaking population mainly of Darjeeling hills and surrounding areas having a particular reference to their Indian root. It is in this sense an identity of the Indian Nepalis who claim to differ from the Nepalis of Nepal. As a matter of fact, Gorkha identity as such is constituted of the Nepali speaking population irrespective of the fact whether they belong to Hindu caste categories or Mongoloid racial stock. One can therefore very much be a tribe and at the same time a Gorkha. This fact became prominent in the recent revival of the Gorkhaland movement that happened in 2017. During the strike that went on for more than 3 months and various agitational programmes ensued in the wake of the renewed call of Gorkhaland, all the tribal status aspiring communities and their organizations suspended their mobilizational activities and took part in the renewed call of Gorkhaland. The point is that there is no likelihood that aspiration of tribal status would result in the demeaning of Gorkhaland. At least the empirical realities during the last few years did not yield such possibilities. This thus suggest that the communities in Darjeeling hills like the Khambu Rais, who have been leading their movement for tribal status, are not leading a separate and isolated

movement shading off all their connections from the existing socio- political currents of the Darjeeling hills. Moreover, it is also observed that the tribal status aspirant communities were capable of switch positioning their demands and mobilizations. In other words, based on the circumstantial requirement they have been shifting their position either on the issue of tribal identity or on Gorkhaland, without jettisoning any one of them.

Last but not the least is the question of language and linguistic identity that has also become an issue of concern and needs to be discussed in some detail. As we have already noted that distinctive language constitutes an important component of what is labeled as 'tribal traits' and in Darjeeling hills all the tribal status aspiring communities, including the Khambus, have been busy in developing their language primers, scripts and disseminating them in published form. This process is going on for more than a decade but none of these languages or rather dialects have not questioned the relevance of Nepali as a *lingua franca*. The point is that the emphases on micro community languages have more symbolic value than practical use. It is not very uncommon even to experience that the leaflets those circulated the urge of one's own community language were printed in Nepali. The linguistic cleavage between Tibeto-Burman languages (all community languages/ dialects are falling within this) and Indo-Aryan language (Nepali falls within Indo-Aryan language family) that gets emphasized in the movement of tribal status is probably not going to affect the linguistic bond of the Gorkha identity that is premised on Nepali language (an Indo-Aryan language). Reality suggests there is less likelihood that the relevance of Nepali language in the Darjeeling hills is going to be questioned by the symbolic value of the community languages/ dialects. It is therefore pertinent to comment here that tribal identity movement in the Darjeeling hills will continue to inflict the hill politics and in this process the claim of the Khambu Rais would remain central because of their numerical strength compared to others.

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