

CHAPTER – VI

6.1 Conclusion

It is indeed a challenging task to write down the conclusion of a phenomenon that is still very much alive. Hence, the attempt here is not to write down the epitaph of the problem under study. Rather, an attempt is made to summarize the major findings of the present study, congregate its arguments and to place some remarks (based on the present study) on the situations which have unfurled in the Darjeeling hills. Let us start with the chapter wise summary of the present study.

6.2 Chapter-wise Summary

Throughout its four chapters, flanked by an introduction and conclusion, the present study mapped out the roots and routes of tribalism in the Darjeeling hills with the help of a case study of a particular hill community known as Kirati Khambu Rai or simply as the Rais. The introductory chapter outlined the nature and scope of the present study by addressing the problem of the study besides discussing its relevance. A detailed review of literature revealed the state of existing research on the subject and also the scope and uniqueness of the present study, if any. Objectives and research questions gave coherence to the present study while the conceptual frame helped in developing the methodology that was followed in the completion of the present research journey. This exploratory and analytical study is also not free from limitations and therefore some such problem areas were discussed which the present researcher failed to engage with.

In the second chapter a social history approach was followed to situate the origin of the Khambu Rais in Eastern Nepal and their subsequent migration to Darjeeling. With the help of folk narratives and local sources gathered from the field and also on the basis of secondary materials a historical account was prepared to account for their migratory history and the relevant changes that have occurred in the social imagination of the Khambu Rais by virtue of being placed in a new socio-economic-political situation. The chapter discussed in detail how all these have

impacted greatly the intercommunity relations between the Khambus and other hill communities in the Darjeeling hills.

Ethnographic research has enriched the third chapter where the social structure of the Khambu Rais was discussed. We have followed the structural functional approach in building up this chapter and tried to show how the various elements of the social structure like the family, kinship, clan system, marriage rules, religious beliefs and practices, and festivities have created a network that made up the Khambu lifeworld. The chapter also analysed the continuity and changes that have occurred in the social structural arrangement of the Khambu life processes. This chapter pinpointed that much of the Khambu cultural distinctiveness are still maintained like the clan system and its significance in marriage, descent, and even in familial piety. Besides some distinctive cultural attribute like ancestor worshipping (*Pitri puja*), maintenance of *Chula Dhunga* (ancestral hearth), importance of the shamans (*mangpa/ mangma*) were strictly followed by the Khambu Rais. There are changes that have taken place in other spheres due to their contact with the contemporary changes that have taken place in the Darjeeling hills and intermixing with other communities mainly the caste Hindus. As a result much of Hindu religious festivities including the *Brahmins* were allowed to make entry in the everyday life processes of the Khambu Rais.

Chapter four emphasizes on the community organization of the Khambu Rais known as Kirati Khambu Rai Sanaskritik Sangstha (KKRSS). It discusses in details the growth, evolution, structure, and activities of the KKRSS. Based on both ethnographic material and conversational method the chapter attempted to discuss the context, issues and processes involved in the organizational mobilization and how such mobilizations became successful in igniting the Khambu commoners to aspire for tribal status. The chapter further examined the discrepancy between the mass-leader relationships primarily by following a 'bottom up' approach. In other words, by analyzing the ethnographic encounters in the field relating to the ways through which Khambus in general maintained the lived-in practices of tradition and the way the organization attempted to create an authoritative version of the past to be followed by them the chapter showed the difference between leaders and commoners. The finding of this chapter suggests that the leaders became successful in mobilizing the masses only because of the fact that the issues which were undertaken as resources for mobilization for a staged demonstration of their tribal hood, were already in practice as a lived-in

reality. The point is that the Khambu elites did not ‘invent’ anything which was completely absent in the mundane life of the Khambus.

Chapter five is perhaps the crux of the study and it discusses the entanglements between the ways of ‘being a tribe’ and ‘becoming a tribe’. As such, the chapter deals with the encounters between the ‘official knowledge’ of a tribe and the ‘local knowledge’ (*metis*) of being a tribe. It also talks about the encounters between these forms of knowledges and their implications for the Khambu life processes. The chapter discussed critically the Lokur Commission criteria, which are still being considered as the ‘official’ criteria of identifying a tribe in India. Also an attempt was made to weigh up the empirical situation that might help one understand how far the Khambu Rais meet those ‘criteria’ and field data were used for arriving at such an understanding. The findings of the present chapter made it clear that though the demand of tribal identity and the increasing consciousness of the Khambus in relation to tribal status might have developed a sense of ‘self’ in them, their demand in no way could be attributed to as a case of subalternity.

6.3 Major findings

So far as the roots of growing tribalism phenomena in Darjeeling hills is considered the present study maintains that the beginning of Khambu consciousness regarding tribal identity or more particularly about Scheduled Tribe identity is traceable from the 1990s. There were several factors, which were highlighted in the chapters of the present study, that have contributed to this phenomena like the political implication of post Mandal politics that made reservation politics a national issue, the UN’s declaration of the decade of 1995-2005 as ‘A Decade for the Indigenous People’, and the upsurge of *Janajati andolan* in Nepal all have prepared the ground for the tribalism phenomena to emerge in Darjeeling. What is also interesting to note that during this decade the Gorkhaland movement did scale down and was settled in the form of a hill council (DGHC in 1988) and that Nepali language was incorporated in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution (in 1992). These had created a period of political stagnation in the Darjeeling hills where war fatigue Gorkhas were disillusioned and at that juncture the campaign for Sixth Schedule status (Constitutional framework for the tribal belts of North East India) for Darjeeling hills instead of Gorkhaland was encouraged by the GNLF and its leader the late Sri Subhas Ghising.

Besides these socio-political factors and forces the study has also pinpointed that there existed a racial classification in the larger Nepali society that has been reproduced in the demand of ST status raised by the different hill communities, including the Khambu Rais. Communities like Bahuns, Chhetris, Thakuris, Kami, Damai and Sarkis (considered as the followers of Hinduism and caste system) fall within the Caucasoid racial groups while the communities like Rai, Magar, Limbu, Tamang, Gurung, Bhujel, Newar, Sunwar, Thakali, Thami (considered as *matwali* communities practicing ancestor worshipping or nature worshipping) belong to Mongoloid racial group. Moreover, traditionally the Caucasoid communities speak mainly Nepali language of Indo-Aryan language family while the Mongoloid *Matwalis* used to have their own language (*kura*) belonging to Tibeto-Burman language family. Needless to mention that coming together of both these categories of population create the idea of Nepali/ Gorkha in Darjeeling hills or elsewhere in India, although the idea of Nepali/ Gorkha in Indian context usually known as a single community. In fact, the coming together of different communities, speaking different languages and belonging to different racial groups, into one was a situational necessity and was the result of a gradual historical process. We have merely touched upon the issue but to do justice to the question as to how Nepali nationalism grew out of a differential stock of population in Darjeeling hills or in India, is in fact to initiate a fresh research proposal in itself. To cut the long story short, it is out of the nineteenth and early twentieth century historical contingencies the differential stock of population thought of unification and this unification happened through linguistic plane. Nepali language (Indo-Aryan) has been considered as the language of all the communities irrespective of the fact that the majority of the population spoke different languages/ dialects belonging to Tibeto-Burman language family. The unification that has happened historically for more than a century since Darjeeling's emergence in 1835 got expressed in political terms in the form of a demand of a separate arrangement and finally in the demand of Gorkhaland in the 1980s. All these necessitated a single ethnic identity and that was well served by the term Gorkha which was more political than a cultural identity. After 1990s when the efficacy of Gorkha identity and for that matter the expectations of Gorkhaland appeared to be dim, communities of Darjeeling hills found it convenient to move back to their individual identities which was premised on a racial foundation. As a matter of fact we experience majority of the communities who are demanding tribal status today

were all belonging to Mongoloid communities. However, while passing through this more than a century long history of social and political change they have lost much of their traditional practices and most importantly their own languages, but reproducing them is not at all an impossible task, especially when the communities find themselves placed in such a situation where community cards are considered to be a politically viable resource by all the major stakeholders of politics at the local, regional, state and even at the national level politics. The point is the roots of the claim of a tribe as raised by the Mongoloid communities, including the Khambu Rais is neither *ahistorical* nor *asociological* but certainly it is political.

While dealing with the roots of tribalism and the involvement of Khambu Rais besides other communities in the Darjeeling hills we have further observed that there has been a presumed shift in hill politics from the fierce battle of statehood in the 1980s towards a more accommodative politics of recognition and affirmative action in the new millennium. Till date, as the history of both the movements suggest, Gorkha identity politics was more assertive and aggressive often escalated into violence whether in the 1980s or in its recent revival in 2017, the demand of tribal identity politics on the other hand seemed to be more placid that followed constitutional means to persuade both the common people and the state. If movements are considered as courses of mobility then it can fairly be said that while the Gorkha identity politics followed a course of mobility for assertion while tribal identity politics followed the course of mobility for consolidation¹. By following the course of mobility for assertion Gorkha identity politics found its roots in exploitation and grievances which were partly economic, partly social-cultural, and partly political as well. Gorkha mobilization favoured any association as long as they stood by the position of the GNLF and were antagonistic to the state and wanted to transform the existing provincial arrangement (in which Darjeeling hills was placed) by creating a separate province for Darjeeling hills. On the contrary by following the course of mobility for consolidation tribal identity politics (including the Khambu Rai's demand) in Darjeeling hills dwelled upon the strategies to gain access to the privileges that protective discrimination measures guarantee. Substantiating a plausible genealogy of tribalhood through various means of mobilizations, the community organizations submitted petitions and appealed to the

¹ Pradip Kumar Bose has analysed mobility in the context of conflict where he used these notions of 'mobility for assertion' and 'mobility for consolidation' as expressed in the social roots of caste conflict in Bihar. For details vide Bose., 1998..

state for changing their status from OBCs to STs. Peaceful processions, public celebration of festivities (like *sakewa* and *sakela*), organization of conferences and fairs were parts of their mobilization programmes and unlike Gorkha aspiration such mobilizations were always preceded by the feeling as ‘doing something that is deserving the state patronage’.

So far as the routes of tribalism in Darjeeling hills are concerned it was observed that the state plays a central role in it. Scholars like Xaxa (2008) reminded us that the articulation of a tribal identity is related primarily to the state and its resources or to the benefits that it may make available. Moreover, the Darjeeling situation revealed that the intervention of the state is not only crucial in the determination of tribal identity but also in the degree of success of a particular community in achieving its goals. The study has shown that attempts of the Khambu Rais in mobilizing a movement for tribal status was both directed towards the state and also directed by the state. Communities like Khambu Rais have traveled with time and assimilated themselves in the present social order but still feels threatened about their cultural loss and are engaging themselves in recasting indigeneity. What is theoretically innovative and politically crucial is the need to think beyond the narratives of indigeneity and initial subjectivities as propagated by the activists and to focus on those moments and processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These processes often involved the innovative sites of collaboration and contestation that help the act of realizing the idea of self-in-society itself.

The idea of a self-in-society in case of the Khambu Rais, inasmuch as it was the case with the other tribal status aspirant communities in the Darjeeling hills, got reflected in the presumed shift from Gorkha to micro community identities. The move away from the singularities of ‘Nepali’ or ‘Gorkha’ as primary conceptual and political category for the Indian Nepalis, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – in case of the Khambu Rais such subject positions imply the notions like belonging to a Mongoloid race, being a Kirata or a *matwali*, having a rich heritage of ancestor worshipping, a Tibeto-Burman language etc. – that inhabit the claim of Scheduled Tribe status raised by different communities including the Khambu Rais in the contemporary Darjeeling hills. This issue of shifting identities among the hill communities of Darjeeling thus determines the urge of the people to get rights, recognition and autonomy with the different categories like ‘Gorkha’ or ‘tribal’. Reality

suggests that the subjective meaning of being a Khambu in the present context has been in many ways influenced by the organizational concerns and directions of the KKRSS. However, it is also significant to note that the Khambu self might not necessarily be a handmade product of the KKRSS in its entirety, notwithstanding the fact that the KKRSS did sharpen their attitude and aspiration to that extent where they started identifying 'Khambu' and 'tribe' as synonymous.

Such possibilities were reflected in two particular domains. Firstly in the very act of switch positioning, which was involved in the way the organization and the general Khambus shifted continuously their position from Gorkha to tribal identity. The point is that both Gorkha and tribal identity are complementary to each other. That is to say in other words, a community can at the same time be a Gorkha and a part and parcel of the tribal identity recognition movement. This possibilities were revealed in situations whenever political outbursts of Gorkha identity – in an attempt to revive the Gorkhaland movement after Ghising – have taken place during 2007 (that showed the emergence of Bimal Gurung as the new leader of Gorkhaland movement), 2011 (when the renewed call for Gorkhaland was settled by scrapping the DGHC and forming the new administrative body called Gorkhaland Territorial Administration), 2014 (from July 30, a final battle *antim ladai* for Gorkhaland began to take shape and was repressed in no time by the state), 2017 (third phase of movement for Gorkhaland continued for 104 days with large scale violence and counter-violence, mass imprisonment and lengthiest strikes), and during 2009 and 2014 Parliamentary election (in which BJP won both the times from Darjeeling only because the Gorkhas secured an ethnic block voting pattern for the party). In all these instances the Gorkhas registered oneness in terms of a community whose political image was not affected by the cause of tribal identity movement in which the respective hill communities were involved since the 1990s. All these show rather distinctively that a community like Khambu Rai and their aspiration to achieve tribal status has never appeared to be a hindrance in the path of Gorkha assertion. As and when it was so required, the tribal aspirant communities switched over to larger Gorkha identity suspending their micro identities, otherwise each of them mobilized themselves in their own way to consolidate their tribal identity claim. This study argues that tribalism phenomenon is not going to curb down the political valence of Gorkha identity/movement and the hill politics is not heading towards Gorkha vs. Tribe like situation.

The second domain of such multiple positionalities was reflected by the issue of Hindu identity. As discussed earlier, cohabiting with the Hindu neighbours for years in Darjeeling hills, made it obvious that the Khambus or for that matter any other community belonging to Mongoloid race would appropriate Hindu customs and rituals. In fact, in chapters four and five we have discussed in detail such reciprocal relationships between the caste Hindus and the Khambu Rais. Such interactions however, did not yield into Hinduisation of the Khambus. In fact, the Khambus made selective appropriation of Hindu traits and moulded them to suit the Khambu life processes. It is that is why we argued that the conceptual categories like Hinduisation, Sanskritization or Hindu Method of tribal absorption could not explain the situation in Darjeeling hills. It is undoubtedly true that the *tagadharis* are still today highly respected in overall Nepali society in Darjeeling hills but that did not result into the subjugation of those who do not fit within the caste categories. Historically the routes of social mobility in Darjeeling, unlike Nepal was premised on secular grounds where one's economic condition, educational background and professional engagement were deemed to be more important than one's religious or caste affiliation. This has led communities to live a life following their own customs and rituals along with the veneer of Hinduism. In fact, the Khambus were neither known as Hindus or even as anti Hindus. It was only in the recent past, an attempt was made by the Khambu organizations to stress on their anti Hindu identity (we have discussed it in detail in Chapter four). The authoritative courses of actions of the organizations in popularizing the anti-Hindu identity among the Khambu Rais, especially by boycotting Hindu festivals like *Dasain-Tihar*, have miserably failed in Darjeeling hills. Unlike Nepal, the politics of *Dasain* have failed to gain ground in Darjeeling and communities like Khambu Rais went on claiming the tribal status along with the veneer of Hinduism, circumventing the hesitations of community organizations on the issue.

The routes of tribalism in Darjeeling hills have also made it clear that the aspiration of tribal identity registered by the communities like the Khambu Rais is not to be confused as a 'subaltern' assertion. The Khambus or for that matter the *matwali* communities in Darjeeling hills were far from being subjugated by the social ostracism of Nepali caste system or Hinduism. So far as the questions of subordination, exploitation, subjugation or for that matter crisis of identity are concerned the largely accepted view is that the entire Nepali/ Gorkha community has been suffering from

such a feeling which actually fuelled the urge for a separate statehood. The crisis that is there in the tribal identity claim as raised by the Khambu Rais and others is not in their identity as such but in the processes of identification that has created a feeling of crisis as the repetitious attempts made by the Khambus were turned down by the state.

Similarly, some scholars (like Sara Shneiderman 2015 and Mona Chhetri 2016) have used ethnicity as a lens to examine the micro identity politics in Darjeeling besides other places in the Eastern Himalaya. It is true that tribal identity claims as raised by the communities in Darjeeling hills share many similarities with ethnic identity (especially when the cultural components of it are considered), but equating the tribal identity claims as ethnic claims would be misleading. One of the core elements of ethnicity or for that matter of ethnic identity is the presence of an 'other'. It is in relation to the 'other' that ethnicity builds itself up as a process. Conspicuously, in the present case the 'other' component is missing. To put it in other words, the Khambus have not been raising their voice favouring tribal identity as a response to an 'other'. There are others who have also joined the Khambus in raising similar claims and thereby following similar trajectories. The claim of tribal identity came as handy to the Khambus, as also to others, as a strategic choice in moments of political stagnancy to secure their future by virtue of their past and present. The cultural contents of it were germinated in and through the social and often expressed in a language parallel to politics, which received further refinement with the patronization of community identities by the state as the potential political resource while dealing with the Darjeeling hills in political terms. Hence, there is less likelihood of inter-community clash, and above all the capacity of the communities, including the Khambu Rais, to switch position their multiple selves made the whole issue far more complex and intriguing from a sociological point of view.

The routes of tribal becoming have manifested tribal incarnation in diverse layers, where, while some found a 'new self' in it, others practised it as a makeover which was highly oriented towards tribal recognition. Whatsoever the case may be, the subject/agent discourse was affected through the way recognition processes gradually entered the personal space of the subject population where preference, choice and tastes in terms of clothing, celebrations of private events, and inclination towards tribal distinctiveness were all prioritized. However, these were more prominent among those who found more pride in their 'new tribal self'. Intertwined were the questions of class,

expertise (skill/ knowledge) and one's status in the society which basically determined the traits of promoting some individuals/ sections of the Khambus as the face of the community in matters of negotiation with the state. In turn, they modified the ways the members of the community thought, felt and experienced the world, in a manner that Khambu commoners perceived tribal elements as ingrained in their 'life-world'.

In order to establish their claim of tribal identity and its continuance at present (as tribalism), communities like Khambu Rais, no doubt, have added some superficial elements to their cultural construction/performance for outward display. However, they happen to be the mere puppets at the face of larger processes, which has been at work for more than two decades in the name of recognition policy, leaving them with no choice, but to fall prey to these processual contingencies, without challenging or quitting, but partaking. The route towards tribalism, thus, has shaped the lives of communities like Khambu Rais and others in an altogether different fashion, where spontaneity seems to be part of systematically strategised operations. This, indeed, is a grim reality today which has transferred the onus of recognition from the state to the one who are entangled in multiple complexities. However, it is only by thinking beyond the given purview and approaching the phenomena from an interrogating subjective standpoint that newer turns to tribal happenings in Darjeeling might evolve, and communities like Khambu Rais are no doubt waiting for such eventful futures.

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