

## THESIS ABSTRACT

The thesis argues that tribalism as a phenomenon in Darjeeling hills is entangled with multiple realms of realities and cannot be understood as an isolated event. The study therefore examined the issue of tribalism in the light of local, national and global events. It examined the complexities involved in the recognition process of Scheduled Tribe (ST), its intricacies and probably a 'systemic error' that yielded a misunderstanding of considering the tribes merely as a policy category susceptible to political manipulation.

The thesis holds that the demand of tribal identity as raised by the Khambu Rais in the Darjeeling hills is to be examined within the nation state framework, although identity politics elsewhere (like in Nepal) might have impacted the Darjeeling situation. The present study showed that the idea of 'being a tribe' is sociological and anthropological in content while the proposition of 'becoming a tribe' is administrative and political in form. The case study of the Khambu Rais made it clear that sociological and anthropological imagination of a tribe and the policy requirement for enlisting a Tribe are not complementary to each other. While the sociological aspects emphasized on the lived-in practices and reinforced the past traditions as mundane (imbibing flexibility, reciprocity, adaptation, syncretism, and change), the policy treatment required authoritative versions of the past traditions (as unchanging, inflexible, insular, exclusive, and unique) no matter howsoever 'raw' or 'cooked' they may be. Besides this there have been steady encouragements on community identities as measures of politicking. Consequently the problem of tribalism enlivens and the tribal identity project assumes new forms by entangling with new realities and new requirements.

The point is that the relationship between the social and cultural and the political and instrumental is not contradictory to each other and when both are welded together the strength of identity discourse increases manifold. This practically has happened in the Darjeeling hills where Khambu commoners and the KKRSS organizers after having realized these intricacies, responded accordingly to the situations in an effort to triumph over their situatedness. There is possibly no easy way out as these processes are at the disposal of both the community leaders in the locality and the political leaders at the regional, state, and national level politics. The thesis deals with these instances of how and what are the sequences involved in tribal becoming of the Khambu Rais and assesses the consequences of such encounters and experiences for the community life of the Darjeeling hills at large.