Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Modernity emerged in the West at the crucial juncture of history with the Enlightenment philosophers laying the foundation of a universal, liberal, rational, secular order. While its core values have a liberating potential, its concrete practices have also led to dislocation and fractured identities. The dominant ideology of modernity has marginalised and silenced all alternative voices. Western modernity is inseparable from the history of colonialism. It is due to this intertwined relation between modernity and colonialism that led the political theorist Partha Chatterjee to argue that we have never quite been able to believe that there exists a universal domain of free discourse, unfettered by differences of race and nationality. He goes on to argue that we must remember that in the world arena of modernity, we are outcastes, untouchables. Modernity for us is like a supermarket of foreign goods, displayed on the selves: pay up and take away what you like. No one there believes that we could be producers of modernity. The bitter truth about our present is our subjection, our inability to be subjects in our own right.[1] The coming of modernity along with colonialism has created traumatic experiences among the various receiving community. It is this complex working of modernity outside the boundaries of Europe that provides a fertile field for studies in the persistence of ethnicity or the emergence of ethno- consciousness among various cultural groups.

Ethnicity and ethnic consciousness are inextricably connected with the notion of identity. The problem of identity is the problem of modernity. An important feature of modernity is the notion of organising oneself around the idea of a nation. However, modern societies are undergoing a distinctive type of structural change i.e., fragmenting or breaking up of identities. Instead of firm location as social individual, as an integrated being, we are seeing fragmenting of our identities into class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nation. This loss of the stable sense of the self, also

[1] Partha Chatterjee, Our Modernity, in Partha Chatterjee, Empire and Nation: Essential Writings 1985-2005, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, pp. 146-151

called ‘dislocation’ or ‘decentering of the subject’ constitutes a crisis of identity.[2] To understand the problem of Lepcha identity, one needs to understand the entire strategies of the colonial state and the post-colonial state.

The colonial state started controlling and dominating the natives through the production of knowledge about their ways and living. This strategy of the colonial state to dominate through knowledge led to a veritable explosion of Gazetteers and Manuals on the manners and customs of the castes, tribes and religion of the specific regions being studied. L.S.S.O.’ Malley who was entrusted with the task of preparation of Bengal District Gazetteers has described the Lepchas as ‘simple, timid, placid and indolent and unenterprising and could therefore make excellent servants.[3] This systematic production of stereotypes and other ethnographic details were undertaken primarily for administrative purposes, to dominate and to rule over the natives. Thus, knowledge about India was produced in terms of the logic of colonial rule. This phenomenon has also been characterised by scholars as the emergence of the ‘ethnographic state’.[4] Classification of castes and tribes were undertaken to locate and fix the identity of the colonial subject. Due to the operations of colonialism, all forms of collectivities and communities were given a fixed and determinate form. The discursive domain of modern politics changed the earlier sense of ‘fuzziness’ of communities into ‘enumerable’ form. Thus, in the second half of the 19th century, the colonial state sought to fashion the instruments of its control over an alien population, by enumerating the diverse communities which in the colonial imagination, constituted the society over which it has been destined to rule by history.[5] The basis of Indian politics has also been characterised by this extension of this colonial sociology. The post-colonial, post- independent Indian state with its technical rationality continues to use the terms of majority and minority, dominant and subordinated groups. Politics of number games have determined the fate of all communities.

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2 Stuart Hall, The Question of Cultural Identity, in Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew, (ed.) Modernity and its Futures, Polity Press, in association with the Open University, 1992, p. 275

3 L. S. S. O’. Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling Logos Press, New Delhi, 1989, p.44

4 Nicholas B. Dirks, The Ethnographic State, in Saurabh Dube (ed.), Postcolonial Passages: Contemporary History Writings on India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004

5 Partha Chatterjee, Communities and the Nation, in Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995, p.224, Also see, Bernard Cohn, The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia, in Bernard Cohn, An Anthropologist among Historians and Other Essays, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001

It is in this situation that the study of the development of ethno- consciousness and identity of the Lepchas becomes imperative. Here the study of Lepcha ethnicity has been undertaken from a historic perspective, by looking at the history of the Lepchas in Sikkim and Darjeeling district with the advent of colonialism. The study attempts to look at the divergence between the Lepchas of Sikkim and Darjeeling in their movement for cultural revivalism. It also takes into account the entire legal, constitutional and administrative structure and tries to locate the subjects of the study within that structure. Lepchas consider themselves as the autochthones of Darjeeling and Sikkim. They are also known as *Mutanchi Rong Kup* or *Rongs* i.e., sons of the snowy peak. They call their land *Mayal Lyang* i.e., Land of Hidden Paradise.[6] From all existing literature, it can be discerned that in the north of the present-day Sikkim, Lepchas lost Chumbi Valley to Tibet and Thang La to Bhutan. In the east, they lost the entire border areas to Bhutan. In the west the Lepcha land was spread up to Arun River.[7]At present, Lepchas reside in the State of Sikkim and in the district of Darjeeling. As a result of rearrangement of political boundaries – and the subsequent overlapping boundaries - Lepchas are also found in the eastern part of Nepal particularly in the district of Ilam, Dharan and in the western part of Bhutan. Spread of Lepchas over three countries are not due to their migratory character but due to political shuffling of the old Lepcha kingdom by the colonial powers.

Until 1778, Darjeeling was a part of Sikkim. However, in the war in 1788 between Sikkim and Nepal, Sikkim lost its prized possession to Nepal. In 1814, war broke out between British East India Company and Nepal. Under the Treaty of Sugaulee (1816),[8] Nepal was forced to secede Darjeeling to the Company. The Company on its part handed it back to Sikkim through the Treaty of Titaliya in 1817 [9]. The heat and dust of the plains being unbearable to the Englishmen, the virgin hills beckoned as an ideal retreat for the Company officers. In the year 1835, the Company managed to take Darjeeling or ‘’British Sikkim’’ as it came to be later known, from the Maharaja of Sikkim. The then ruling dynasty of Sikkim i.e., the Namgyal dynasty which belonged to a minority Bhutia community attempted to establish their

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6 According to ancient Lepcha lore, Mayal Lyang corresponds to Dorje Lyang i.e., land of thunder bolt or Darjeeling and Sikkim, land of Kanchanjunga.

7 D.C. Roy, ‘Lepchas Then and Now’, (available online) http://:aachulay.blogspot.com/2010/06/lepchas-then-and-now.html (retrieved on 13.06.2021)

8 See Annexure 1

9 See Annexure 2

legitimacy by invoking the 'blood-brotherhood treaty'. The Lepchas were accommodated as minor partners in the ruling coalition.

With the coming of the Britishers the condition of the Lepchas turned to worse. Darjeeling was not a densely populated region. However, things changed drastically with the coming of Britishers. Immigration was encouraged by the colonial state as it required cheap labour for building infrastructure for its hill station and more importantly to sustain colonial capitalism. The Britishers encouraged Nepali migration as they required cheap labour for the flourishing tea industry. A large number of people from the plains particularly Biharis, Marwaris, Bengalis also migrated to Darjeeling on the pretext of carrying business. This led to land grabbing from the helpless Lepchas resulting in their eviction from their settlement. The Lepchas were reduced to a minority and presently comprise a very negligible proportion of the total population of the area.

Along with these policies the colonial state adopted specific theories and administrative practices while dealing with various and margins. It's approach towards the natives was mainly ameliorative, intended to protect them from outside exploitation by isolating them as can be discerned from the creation of "scheduled district", "backward tract" and finally "excluded and partially excluded area" by the Government of India Act of 1935. Production of knowledge about the ways of living of the natives led to domination and control of the natives in the hands of colonial state. In order to discipline and control the natives, knowledge of language of the native people became necessary. This knowledge enabled the colonizers to classify the vast social world so that it could be controlled.[10] Thus, we come across accounts of Lepcha dictionary title '*The Dictionary of the Rongs*' by General Mainwairing. Extensive surveys were carried out to enumerate the population inhabiting the area. Botanist and Naturalists like Hooker conducted studies on the flora and fauna of the region. Voluminous treaties were written about them highlighting the superiority and civilising mission of the white race and inferiority of the savages. Examples of such works include 'On the Tribes around Darjeeling', and '*On the Lepchas*' by A. Campbell. When Dr Campbell took charge of administration in Darjeeling, Lepcha language received was marginalised and began to be considered as the language of the

[10] Bernard Cohn, Colonialism and Forms of Knowledge: The British in India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 4-5

aboriginals. The government language report gave unfavourable findings. This was the result of politically motivated action on part of British government. Socio-political domination of Nepali language exerted pressure on this minority language. The continual migration of Nepali population encouraged by British government influenced every aspect of social life in the hills of Darjeeling. Both in urban and rural areas, the Nepali language virtually became the *lingua franca* of the people of different ethnic groups in the region.[11] Development of Nepali language and literature under the aegis of towering Nepali literary figures no doubt led to the popularisation of the language, but an important factor that mattered was the government patronage given to the majority group. It was the report of the Griffith Commission appointed by the government in 1927 that recommended for the introduction of Nepali in school curriculum. The report effectively sounded the death knell of Lepcha language.

Although, Lepchas are considered to be nature worshippers, but owing to colonial control over their land and resources, first by the Tibetans, followed by the British during the early 19th century, Lepchas were converted into Buddhism and Christianity respectively. Conversion into Buddhism with the advent of Tibetan rulers in Sikkim from the 17th century was undertaken primarily to dilute the Lepcha race. For the smooth functioning of their rule, Britishers converted all subjects under the same religious faith. Taking advantage of mass poverty, illiteracy, ignorance poor health, the Christian missionaries converted a large number of Lepchas into Christianity. The earliest attempt to introduce modern secular education was made around 1850 by Rev. W. Start, a private missionary. In 1875, a member of a Scottish Mission Rev. Macfarlane started schools, hospitals, dispensaries 'to tame the Lepchas, the carefree children of nature'. Lepcha Primer was prepared, Christian prayers started to be said in Lepcha language. In other words, Lepcha became synonymous with Christianity. But the result was short lived for the Lepchas. Growth of Nepali population due to the policy of migration initiated by the colonial rulers, coupled with the emergence of Nepali literary figures like Rev. Ganga Prasad Pradhan, Nepali language received the attention of the Christian missionaries. Government patronage and support given to Nepali became more evident when the language was introduced as a vernacular language at Calcutta University in 1918 vides Notification No. I dt. 24.7.1918

[11] A.R. Foning, Lepcha, My Vanishing Tribe, Chyu- Pandi Farm, Kalimpong, 1987, p. 151

The post- independent Indian state that emerged from the vestiges of British colonial state has functioned on the basis of scientific and technical rationality. All the basic structures of the colonial state have been retained by the post-colonial state. The state has sought to legitimise itself through a welfarist model.[12] Major issues and problems faced by the people came to be addressed by a bunch of experts and technocrats without understanding the ground realities of life. For the promotion and development of the nation, planning became an exercise embodying a single, universal and rational consciousness of the state, operating outside the political process. This strategy is what Partha Chatterjee calls 'passive revolution' borrowed from Gramsci. Continuing with the colonial mappings of the land and people, the state sought to civilize and tame the so called "wild tribes" by nationalizing and patronizing them as the "scheduled tribes".[13] In the post- independence scenario the state's policies towards them were no longer isolationist but combined the twin elements of protection and development.[14] The government's policy has been towards integration not assimilation. However, various gaps exist between the constitutional provisions and existing practices. Lepchas of Darjeeling Hills were recognised as Scheduled Tribes by the Constitutional (Scheduled Tribes) Order 1950. In Sikkim, after the post-merger period, the gains have been more in the direction of bringing them closer to the state through measures such as reservation in legislature, following the Scheduled Tribe Order of 1978 that recognised the Lepchas and Bhutias as Scheduled Tribe of Sikkim, subsequently made provisions for them in matters of education and government employment. However, lack of achievement has been most striking in the attempt by the Government in protecting tribal culture and tradition.[15] As part of the integrating process into the larger Indian society, they have been conferred citizenship rights. The Indian Constitution contains various provisions that aim at preservation and protection of their distinct status. According to Article 29 of the Constitution, a cultural or linguistic minority has the right to conserve its language and culture. Article 350 (A) further provides for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education.

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[12] Partha Chatterjee, The National State, in Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995, pp.200-219

[13] A. Bimol Akoijam, Ghosts of Colonial Modernity: Identity and conflict in the Eastern Frontier of South Asia', in Biswas, Prasenjit and Thomas C. Joshua, Peace in North East: Meaning, Metaphor and Method, Essays of Concern and Commitment, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p. 121

[14] Rudolf C Heredia, Interrogating Integration, Economic and Political Weekly, Dec 28, 2002, pp. 5174-5178

[15] Virginius Xaxa, Politics of Language, Religion and Identity: Tribes in India, in Economic & Political Weekly, March 26, 2005, p. 1367

Moreover, Lepcha community in the state of Sikkim were conferred Primitive Tribal status in 2006. In Sikkim the language is taught up to the post-graduate level. In Darjeeling, Lepchas are still struggling to get the language introduced even at the primary level of education. However, what is stated in the Constitution and laws is one thing and what actually happens in the ground is quite another. Various gaps exist between what is promised and what actually happens on the ground reality. There is a disjuncture between rhetoric and reality.

To understand this aspect, one needs to look into the administrative structure and locate the subject of study in that structure. One of the administrative differences is that Darjeeling is a district within the state of West Bengal and Sikkim is a federal state. Lepchas of West Bengal constitute a minority within a minority, whereas Lepchas of Sikkim are a minority within a state. In multicultural society ethnic conflicts or tensions generally occur due to the feeling of marginalisation, alienation or deprivation of cultural identity of one group by others. Multiethnic societies are characterised by presence of dependent and dominant cultures, minority and majority cultures. State and its administrative structures also shape ethnicity and group identity. The political institution like the State may precipitate formation of identities among various categories through policies like 'affirmative actions' or 'protective discrimination'. State may be controlled by a class or ethnic group or by some combination of classes or ethnic groups, whose members the state chooses to favour.[16] The state tends to shape policy on the advice of leaders or elites from such group. Sometimes a particular group may gain control over an entire area of government policy and the institutions associated with it and use them for consolidating one's own group. The domination of particular group/groups in state affairs may result in disproportionate distribution of state resources and cause resentment among others who have been denied benefits. Thus, due to its own political compulsions, the state is unlikely to be an agency pursuing equality and distributive justice. Its policies may benefit some groups and communities but it may also be a potential threat to others. It is this perceived threat or denial which strengthens community consciousness and ultimately manifests in the form of organizations articulating community interests.

[16] Paul Brass, Ethnicity and Nationalism- Theory and Comparison, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 25-26

It is in this background that the study of ethno- consciousness and identity of the Lepchas of Sikkim and Darjeeling becomes pertinent. Tribal identities have their roots in the colonial policies which classified communities and ethnic groups, privileged some while discriminated against others. In Sikkim the colonial policies protected the Lepchas and the Bhutias. The ruling Namgyal dynasty belonging to Bhutia community acquired a predominant position in the monarchical administration although members of other community also occupied important position in the monarchical system. In spite of being a ruling coalition of Sikkim, Lepcha commoners were subjected to discriminatory treatment of various kinds during the Bhutia rule. They were confined to geographically isolated area of Dzongu, denied modern education and political representation, which affected their social, economic and political condition.

Since 1940 Lepchas of Sikkim have started to assert their claims organizationally and this process has gained more momentum after its merger with India in 1975. Political parties and organisations in Sikkim, e.g., Sikkim National Party (SNP), Sikkim Congress (SC) at various points of time have become quite vocal for protection and promotion of social, economic, educational and cultural demands of Lepchas, purely for electoral gains. Despite this, dominance of Nepali and Bhutia community, their strong presence in the decision making and implementing institutions has resulted in exploitation of the Lepchas by virtue of their social and economic backwardness. Feeling of deprivation has led to community consciousness and articulation of community-oriented demands. Various non-political organisations like the Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Ong Shejum (Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association), Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarzum (Sikkim Lepcha Association) have also been formed by the Lepchas to fight against injustice of various kinds perpetrated against Lepcha community and to protect socio economic, cultural rights guaranteed to them by Constitution of India. After incorporation of Sikkim into India in 1975, the Scheduled Tribe Order of 1978 recognised the Lepchas as Scheduled Tribe in Sikkim. Cultural politics transform a group into a tribe and Scheduled Tribe indicates its political strength and power to influence decision making process and appropriate entitlements and resources. The 36th Constitutional Amendment Act 1975 inserted Article 371F to preserve and protect political, socio-cultural distinctiveness of Sikkim. Accordingly, the Lepchas were accorded special status. Their rights and privileges

were protected and that Government of Sikkim made provisions for reservation of seats (for Lepcha community) in the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim. Subsequently, 12 seats were reserved for BL i.e., Bhutias and Lepchas in the Legislative Assembly. In 1977 Lepcha language was recognised as state language of Sikkim. Sikkim Lepcha Literary Association (SLLA) was formed in 1978. Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association is still vocal in their demand for 50% reservation in State Assembly, education and employment. Total ban on the sale and purchase of their land by non-Lepchas, including Bhutias, and compulsory use of Lepcha title by members of the community reflects the level of ethnic consciousness and identity among the younger generations.

However, the case of the Lepchas of the district of Darjeeling is somewhat different. Lepchas in Darjeeling became a minority due the then British policy of encouraging Nepali migration from Nepal for its fledgling tea plantation. Operation of colonial capitalism led to encroachment of cultural and ecological habitations of the Lepcha community who were considered the original settlers of the region. Establishment of plantation industries like tea, cinchona and commercialisation of forest resources had far reaching consequences on the livelihood of the tribal and pastoral community in Darjeeling Hills. One of the primary objectives of colonialism was to secure economic gains by utilising the raw material potential of the subject nations. The process of extraction of forest resources and the introduction of tea plantations impinged on the livelihood resources of the Lepchas. They were forced to move from their original inhabitations in Darjeeling into peripheral areas like Kalimpong.[17] With the growth of townships and proposals to develop Kalimpong as a hill station, the Lepcha subjects were forced to move towards more remote areas and were subsequently marginalised within primitive forms of existence. This has been echoed much forcefully by the celebrated Lepcha author A. R. Foning in his book, Lepcha: My Vanishing Tribe.

For a long time, the post- independent Indian state has been quite indifferent to the Lepchas of Darjeeling Hills. The government in its attempt to appease the majority community seems to be indifferent to the plight of the Lepchas. In the

[17] K.J. Joseph, Colonialisation as Globalisation and the Colonial Designs of Cultural Ecological Transformations: British Forest Policy and its Displacement of the Lepcha Eco-cultural Habitations in Darjeeling Hills, in M.P. Lama et. al. (ed.) Globalisation and Cultural Practices in Mountain Areas: Dynamics, Dimensions and Implications, Sikkim University Press in Association with Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2012, p.339

centre- periphery relationship, the Lepchas have never been at the centre of attention, power and position; deplorably they have always been in the periphery.[18] Lepchas of the district of Darjeeling do not have experience in political participation as compared to their counterparts in Sikkim. Nonetheless the Lepchas in Darjeeling have been vocal in their claims for the introduction of Lepcha language in the school curriculum at the primary level. Despite constitutional provisions for the protection of minority cultures and languages, no effort has been made by the state government towards safeguarding Lepcha language. In a stark contrast, the state of Sikkim has introduced Lepcha language as the medium of instruction in schools, colleges, up to the university level. The Lepchas of Darjeeling have not had the joy of claiming such agency of teaching and learning in their mother tongue. The dominant regional language has been actively supported and promoted by the state government. This differential treatment meted to the Lepchas of Darjeeling has further disillusioned them. Perhaps as a reaction there is an increasing consciousness and assertion in recent years among the Lepchas of their distinct cultural and linguistic identity. As mentioned earlier, the assertion of identity is borne out of a complex political process. It is marked by demand for recognition of distinctness of the Lepcha cultural and linguistic identity, control over land and resources and demand for a share in the benefits of modernity have become an integral part of identity articulation.

It is important to note that the cultural revivalist movement among Lepchas is taking place at a particular social and political juncture. We are also by now familiar about the fragmentary tendencies within the broader Nepali identity. We have seen how the various constituent groups can seamlessly merge together as Nepalis and also at the same time split into distinct groups. But the case of the Lepchas is quite different. There is already an acceptance that the Lepchas are a distinct cultural group. Even at the height of Gorkhaland movement in the 1980s the slogan was *Bhote, Lapche, Nepali hami sabai Gorkhali*, meaning Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalis, we all are Gorkhalis. This already accepted distinctiveness has been brought into sharp relief by the emerging middle class from the Lepcha community. This middle class is generally the more articulate sections. They are actively involved in the politics of cultural production and also in the politics of cultural revivalism.

[18] Sailen Debnath, The Lepchas in Struggle for Cultural Identity, in Sailen Debnath, Essays on Cultural History of North Bengal, N.L. Publishers, Siliguri, 2008, p. 144

To take one more case, the Anthropological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, Vide No. 13-229/2000/ Date Sept 10, 2004 categorised the Lepchas of Darjeeling Hills as "Sikkimese". Although both have the same ancestors but there are fine distinctions between the two. The Lepchas in Darjeeling are challenged by the fact of carving out a distinct cultural identity outside the dominant Nepali nationalist discourse. Perhaps that is why Lepchas have been staging *dharnas* and indefinite hunger strikes demanding recognition for their distinct status. They are also protesting against all forms of state sponsored displacement projects. More recently, the Lepchas have been demanding recruitment of Lepchas in the Indian armed forces, who up till now were joining the armed forces on the production of 'Gorkha Certificate'.

In recent years, the Lepchas of Darjeeling District have been articulating their demand for protection and recognition of their distinct cultural and linguistic identity. The activities of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA), headquartered at Kalimpong have been very commendable. The Association was formed in 1925 to demand for the introduction of Lepcha language in schools in the Darjeeling Hills. Lepcha language is recognised as a tribal language. It was introduced in Sikkim since 1975. As mentioned earlier, the Lepcha language has not been introduced in the District of Darjeeling yet. Only through their mother tongue and quality education can Lepcha children be integrated into the national mainstream. The ILTA has been working consistently for the preservation, maintenance and development of Lepcha language, literature and culture and bringing awareness on quality education among the Lepchas. The association has published Lepcha text books and Lepcha-English dictionary for primary to higher secondary level. It has also established Lepcha Language and Literary Award for conservation of Lepcha language, literature and culture. About seventy Lepcha night schools have been running successfully by the Association. However, the Lepchas are still struggling to introduce Lepcha language in schools.

The Association also organises seminars, conferences, workshops, training for the upgradation of Lepcha Language, customs and culture. It also publishes *Aachuley*, a quarterly bilingual news magazine and an annual magazine *King Gaeboo Aachyok*. Besides these, it also organises a number of competition and festivals like '*Aathing Sangdo Tshering Tamsang Traditional Lepcha Archery Contest*', '*Renyoo Azem*

Rebecca Namchyoo Songs and Dance Competition', '*Tendong- Lho- Rum- Faat'*, '*Chu- Rum- Faat*' etc. Lepcha Customary Law is another publication which aims at making common Lepchas aware about Lepcha culture and thereby safeguarding the traditional customs of the Lepchas.

With the formation of Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA), the Lepchas of Darjeeling district under the Lepcha Rights Movement (LRM) have been demanding a separate Development Council within the GTA. Being the original inhabitants of the district, this, they claim would protect their distinct linguistic and cultural identity. The council, it is argued, will act as a coordinating agency to undertake various projects for the welfare of Lepchas. As stated earlier the Lepchas of both Sikkim and Darjeeling district belong to the same ethnic group. However, the experiences of Lepchas in Darjeeling have been very different as compared to their counterparts in Sikkim. Being located at different levels of the political-administrative structure i.e., the former being a state and the latter being a district, Lepchas of Darjeeling have been denied opportunities in political participation, and hence have not been able to act as a pressure group to influence the decision-making processes. On the other hand, the Lepchas of Sikkim have enjoyed a fair measure of state patronage and have been able to act as a major political force within the political process in influencing the government policies in their favour.

Political parties are modern institutions expected to convert segmented interest into public interest within a democratic setup. Political parties in a multiethnic democratic society tend to be ethnic oriented. A political party may conceal its ethnic interest and present its interest with that of the national interest. In Sikkim, the Sikkim National Party (SNP) had always regarded the Bhutias and Lepchas as indigenous groups. Therefore, it is through political parties that aspirations and demands of cultural-linguistic groups are expressed and legitimized. In multicultural and multiethnic societies, ethnic conflicts and tensions occurs due to feeling of marginalisation and alienation of cultural identity of one group by others. By raising community-oriented issues political parties have facilitated the articulation of demands of these cultural groups. In liberal democratic polity actions of resistance towards dominant majority community often appeal to the preservation of ethno-

cultural symbols like dress, language, religion, customs, historical antecedents, legendry heroes, geographical sites and related beliefs.[19]

The movement for Lepcha cultural revivalism is taking place at a time when the hitherto subjugated cultural groups are countering the dominant colonial historiography. Attempts are being made by some Lepcha intellectuals to rescue and rehabilitate the alternative, subaltern history of the Lepchas from the dominant socio-political narratives of the region. Assertion by this movement mainly by the emerging educated middle classes to go back to their culture, to preserve traditional values and heritage have been projected and incorporated within the modern political ideas of 'right to culture'. In the logic of cultural politics, culture, tradition, values, idea of sacred landscapes and sacred groves becomes one's instrument to raise one's political consciousness, to politically affirm one's identity and challenge the domination of others. The mainstream narrative of the nation which operates on the narrative of capital seeks to exclude all forms of minority history and identities.[20]

1.2 Theoretical Framework

A number of literatures are available on the theoretical and conceptual aspects of the concept of ethnicity, ethnic consciousness and identity. This section mainly deals with the review of those conventional theoretical works on ethnicity and identity. Indian publications on state, ethnic cultural movements and state politics are also discussed here. A review of early nineteenth century accounts by British civil servants and travellers on the Lepcha community including gazetteers and manuals are reviewed here. The post-independence writings on the Lepchas by Indian scholars are also discussed here. Writings on the Lepchas by the Indian scholars are entirely not free from the colonial mindset. The section also takes into account those writings by the more articulate sections from the Lepcha community.

Ethnicity is often referred to as tradition, resistant to modernisation and cosmopolitan values. It was generally assumed that the spread of modern, liberal-democratic values would dilute ethnic distinctiveness. However, the late twentieth century has seen the emergence of nationalist politics on ethnic grounds in the west

[19] Suresh Kumar Gurung, Sikkim Ethnicity and Political Dynamics: A Triadic Perspective, Kunal Books, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 103-104

[20] Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments Colonial and Post Colonial Histories, (1995) op. cit. pp. 235-236

leading to violence and bloody wars. The rise of ethnic consciousness has by no means occurred in the West alone. Ethnic tensions often portrayed as 'tribalism' is also seen as an endemic feature of Asian and African societies. It is better understood as a phenomenon linked to colonialism. The struggle against colonial rule has helped to heighten ethnic consciousness and ethnic conflict. It is to be borne in mind that ethnic conflict does not necessarily mean violence and bloody wars. Since conflict is a constitutive aspect of all societies, including democratic, ethnic conflicts can also be of a non-violent nature[21]. The present study about the resurgence of ethnicity among the Lepchas is of a nonviolent nature. Before we delve into these issues it would be pertinent to have a theoretical understanding about the concept of ethnicity.

There are conflicting theoretical explanations about the phenomena of ethnicity. The word ethnicity is derived from the Greek word "*ethnikos*" meaning heathen or pagan. The Encyclopaedia of Nationalism defines ethnic group as a collectivity within a larger society which has a real or imagined common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, a cultural focus upon one or more of the following: area of origin, language, religion, nationality, kinship patterns, physical appearances such as skin colour[22]. Ethnicity can thus be defined as an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction. It is also defined as phenomenon of an ethnic group coming to self-awareness that enables it to affirm its identity and pursue its interests. A distinction should also be made between ethnic groups and races. Race is conceived in biological terms. It is also used as an ideology. However, ethnic groups are defined in terms of common customs, culture and also a subjective perception about these characteristics. A point which is sometimes made is that the term 'ethnic group' may be used only to classify minorities and inferiors, whereas majority and dominant groups do not see themselves as ethnic at all. A problem for the theory of ethnicity is posed by the use of the term 'ethnic identity'. Identity is both a psychological and a sociological term. It provides a definition of the self and establishes what and where a person is in both social and

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[21] Dr. Gujko Vockovic, Ethnic Cleavages and Disintegration: The Sources of National Cohesion and Disintegration. The case of Yugoslavia, Centre for Multi-ethnic and Transnational Studies, University of Southern California, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Los Angeles, 1997, p.28

[22] Athena S. Leoussi, Encyclopaedia of Nationalism, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 2001, pp. 69-70

psychological terms. It helps to place an individual within a group and helps to provide identification with a collectivity.[23]

Max Weber calls ethnic groups 'those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonisation or migration'[24]. Thus, according to Weber, it is not just biological difference but shared history i.e., memories of a common past, attachment to a clearly demarcated territory, certain traditions and ways of life are involved in the nationalism of subordinate and minority groups which act as a counterweight to the incorporative rationalizing process of the modern state. Ethnic consciousness has a political meaning and is formed by common political experiences and not by common descent alone. Anthony D. Smith defines ethnic communities or 'ethnie' as human population with a myth of a common ancestry, shared memories, and a link with a historic territory or a homeland and a measure of solidarity.[25] In his, Structure and Persistence of Ethnie, Smith argues that such 'communities have been widespread in all eras of history. They have emerged and re-emerged at different periods in several continents and culture- area right up to modern era; and that ethnicity has remained as a socio- cultural model for human organization and communication from the early third millennium BC until today. Therefore, there is widespread, chronic and intermittent appearance of this phenomenon.[26]

There are various theories and contending approaches to the concept of ethnicity. According to the primordialist approach ethnicity is ascribed i.e., it is something given. It is a property of a group and everyone is born into it. Emphasis is given to ties of blood, race language, locality, religion and tradition. This can be discerned from the writings of Clifford Geertz and Edward Shils. Shils lays great emphasis on the idea of "bounded territory". Nations based on biological primordiality existed before the onset of modernity. However, once societies grew in size, they turned more to territory as the basis for unity. He lays importance on tradition also. Nation for him is a collectively in which the past and the present exist

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[23] Montserrat Guibernau et. al. (ed.), The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration, Polity Press, 2001, pp. 3-4

[24] Max Weber, The Concept of Ethnicity, in Montserrat Guibernau et.al. (ed.) The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration, Polity Press, 2001, p.18

[25] Anthony D. Smith, The Ethnic Origins of Nations, Oxford Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 24

[26] Anthony D. Smith, Structure and Persistence of Ethnie, in Montserrat Guibernau et.al. (ed.), The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration, Polity Press, 2001, p. 27

simultaneously. Nation exists because of the sensitivity of the human beings to the primordial facts of descent and territorial location.[27]

Clifford Geertz traces the reasons for the resurgence of nationalism and ethnicity in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-racial states, which are moving in the path of modernisation. People of the new states are animated by two powerful motives- the desire to be recognized as responsible agents, whose opinion matter and the desire to build an efficient, dynamic and modern state.[28] In the new states the project of social reform and material progress which formed the basis of anti-colonial nationalism, presupposes the establishment of an alien and over-arching civil order through the absorption of diverse ethnic groups into culturally undifferentiated mass. This leads to subordination of identifications based on blood, race, language, religion and traditions. He points out the fundamental problem of the new states is that they are susceptible to serious disaffections based on primordial sentiments. By primordial he means a set of "givens" that which stems from being born into a particular community, speaking a particular language and following a particular social custom. These congruities of blood, speech and custom and so on are seen to have an ineffable and at times overpowering coerciveness creating ties among certain groups.[29] This leads to tensions between primordial sentiments and civil politics, which can only be moderated but cannot be entirely dissolved.

Instrumentalist or modernist theories portray ethnicity as part of the modernisation process. Ethnicity is a remnant of pre- industrial order. Modernity will, according to the modernist, erode ethnicity as a principle. Ethnicity is the product of political myths, created and manipulated by the elites in pursuit of their advantages and power. This is evident from the writings of Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner etc. Gellner argues that nationalism is a product of industrial society. It is a principle of organisation of human groups into large, centrally educated, culturally homogenous units. Nationalism does not have roots in human nature but in

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[27] Edward Shils, Nation, nationality, nationalism and civil society, in Nation and Nationalism, Vol.1, Part 1, March 1995, p. 94

[28] Clifford Geertz, The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in New States, in John Hutchison et. al. (ed.) Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science, Vol. 1, Routledge, London, 2000, p.119

[29] Ibid, pp. 120-122

certain kind of pervasive social order.[30] While pre modern societies were structured by network of feudal bonds and loyalties, modern industrial society promoted social mobility, competition and therefore required a new source of cohesion which was provided by nationalism. Hobsbawm, a well-known Marxist historian holds that 'nation is a product of industrial revolution'. Nations are 'artificial constructs or inventions deliberately engineered in a historically unique way by the ruling classes to serve their needs to compete for the loyalty of the lower classes'.[31]According to Karl Deutsh, ethnic identities will wither away as a result of social mobilisation, urbanisation, industrialisation, transportation and communication leading to assimilation.[32] Walter O' Conner in his article, Nation-building and Nation-destroying, rejects Deutsch's doctrine that modernisation will lead to lessening of ethnic consciousness. He says that an increase in communication and mobilisation tends to increase cultural awareness among the minorities by making their members more aware of the distinctions between themselves and others.[33] Benedict Anderson defines the nation as 'imagined political community' and argues that the most important factor evoking national consciousness of the people has been development of print as a commodity and primacy of capitalism. The convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.[34]

Paul Brass in his work, Ethnicity and Nationalism argues that elite conflicts for resources are a major cause behind ethnic mobilization. He argues that conditions for identity formation among various groups or emergence of self-consciousness among communities can be linked with the alliance, strategy and policies that the groups dominating the state structure follow in relation to other ethnic, cultural groups. Thus, gaining control over the state becomes elite's first priority and one who is successful must either suppress the rival elites or establish collaborative alliances

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30 Ernest Gellner, Nationalism as a product of industrial society, in Montserrat Guibernau et.al. (ed.) The Ethnicity Reader, Polity Press, 2001, p.66

31 See, Eric Hobsbawm and T. Rangers (ed.) The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge University Press, 1984

32 Karl W. Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality, MIT, 1966, p. 164

33 Walter O' Connor, Nation Building and Nation Destroying? World Politics, Vol. XXIV, Princeton University Press, pp.329

34 Benedict Anderson, The nation and the origins of national consciousness, in Montserrat Guibernau et.al. (ed.) The Ethnicity Reader, Polity Press, 2001, p.51

with other elites to maintain dominance.[35] A combined argument of instrumentalism and primordiality is presented by Myron Weiner's in his book, Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India. To him cultural nationalism is the result of conflicts between the migrants and the natives over the resources. Weiner argues that cultural nationalism or nativism in Assam, which attempts to legitimise the claim of the '*Bhumiputras'* and exclusion of the migrants is an ethnic movement which demands resource distribution on the basis of cultural identity.[36]

A similar argument has been advanced by D.L. Sheth in an essay, State, Nation and Ethnicity: Experience of Third World Countries. He argues that superimposition of western model of nation state on ethnically plural third world countries has undermined the legitimacy of many of these states leading to internal problems of political and cultural fragmentation. Modern nation state based on the principles of equality, democracy, secularism, pluralism and republican values sought to homogenise ethnic pluralities through the creation of civil society, extension of markets and granting of citizenship rights. It sought to integrate the ethnic minorities into a national society characterised by interest and ethos of the ethnic majority. He argues that state has been quite vocal in producing majority ethnicism in the name of nationalism. The nation state cannot survive as a mere political arrangement for managing ethnic pluralities. Sooner or later, it has to give primacy to economic development over considerations of maintaining ethnic harmony. The economic disparities which grow inevitably in the process of development begin to be seen along ethnic lines. In the process of development, the cultural bases of ethnicity get eroded and ethnic groups begin to assume political identities to seek redressal. Thus, ethnic claims get rooted in secular economic interest, usually for a share in the expanding national cake. In third world countries the state does not act as an agency for maintaining law and order but also becomes a vehicle to fulfil ethnic aspirations. Offering an alternative model of governance, he argues that these third world countries cannot wish away from these forces and have to remain wedded to this text

[35] See, Paul R. Brass, op. cit. (1991)

[36] Myron Weiner, Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1978, p.16

book model of nation state. They can avert the problems of political and cultural fragmentation through genuine federalism and decentralisation.[37]

The constructivist approach stands opposed to both the primordialist and instrumentalist. It puts emphasis on the ways in which people socially construct their ethnicity in a situational way. It explains the phenomena of identity through the working of social and political processes within the temporal world. From this standpoint membership in an ethnic group is a matter of social definition, interplay of the self-definition of the members and the definition of other groups. Most groups change their boundaries slowly and imperceptibly, while some change quickly, deliberately and noticeably. Though ascription is the key characteristic of ethnicity, and it is something acquired at birth, there are possibilities of changing group boundaries through amalgamation and differentiation.[38]

Ethnicity as an extended form of kinship is based on certain key elements like shared historical past, area of origin, language, religion, nationality, kinship pattern and physical appearances such as skin colour. But ethnicity in its formation and continuation does not require all the above elements. It is in the nature of ethnicity to emphasize on either one or a combination of some of the elements mentioned above. It is also a fact that the focus of ethnicity on any of the elements is not permanent- it keeps shifting its basis. This shift in the basis of ethnicity results in changes in identity.[39] This change in identity is usually accompanied by a cultural change. Though cultural change is the inevitable result of identity change, it however differs from one group to another. If a fairly homogenous group undergoes an identity change the change in culture may be a limited one. But if the group in question is a conglomeration of diverse groups, then identity change leads to marked cultural deviations by the sub-groups.

Dipankar Gupta in his, Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective argues in the same vein that identity is permanently inscribed in our

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[37] D.L. Sheth, State, Nation and Ethnicity: Experience of Third World Countries, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXIV, No. 12, March 25, 1989, pp. 615 - 626

[38] Donald L. Horowitz, Ethnic Identity, in Nathan and Glazer, (ed.) Ethnicity: Theory and Experience, Harvard University Press, 1975, pp.113-115

[39] Ibid., p. 124

psyche but also undergoes context related change.[40] He points out that Sikh identity was developed in relation to its opposition to Hindu identity. But since the actions of the government were seen as pro- Hindu by the Sikhs it transformed into a separatist movement. Therefore, the Sikh identity developed in relation to its perception of a government which discriminated the Sikhs. Speaking from a multicultural perspective, Andreas Wimmer argues that ethnic politics are not just a by-product of modern state formation but the very institutions of the modern state and its policy of inclusion and exclusion accelerates demand for ethnic identity.[41] In the same vein Rita Manchanda argues that nation state produces minorities as an essential part of their construction process; since the majority, in producing the state also produces the 'others' or the minorities.[42]

1.3 Literature Review

Vibha Arora in her article, Assertive Identities, Indigenity and the Politics of Recognition as a Tribe: The Bhutias, the Lepchas and the Limbus of Sikkim (2007), discusses identity politics of becoming tribal in India. The cultural politics of transferring a group into a 'tribe' and into an officially recognized 'Scheduled Tribe' reflects its political strength and the power to influence the regime of representation so as to appropriate entitlements and resources. In the state of Sikkim, being tribal does not indicate indigeneity, oppression or subaltern status but it signifies political assertiveness and empowerment.[43]

Dipesh Chakrabarty in his, Modernity and Ethnicity in India: A History for the Present (1995)[44] explores the link between ethnic conflict and the modern governing practices that the British introduced into India as the historical bearers of 'Enlightenment rationalism'. In their attempt to give India a standardised legal system, the British also tried to fix, enumerate, measure and quantify existing 'fuzzy'

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40 Dipankar Gupta, The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996, pp.1

41 Andreas Wimmer, Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflicts: Shadows of Modernity, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 4-5

42 Rita Manchanda, Introduction, in Rita Manchanda (ed.), States in Conflict with Their Minorities: Challenges to Minority Rights in South Asia, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 1-30.

43 Vibha Arora, Assertive Identities, Indigenity, and the Politics of Recognition as a Tribe: The Bhutias, the Lepchas and the Limbus of Sikkim, Sociological Bulletin, Vol 56, (2007), pp.195-220

44 Dipesh Chakrabarty, Modernity and Ethnicity in India: A History for the Present, Economic and Political Weekly, December 30, 1995, Vol.30. No.52, pp.3373-3380, Also see his, Governmental Roots of Modern Ethnicity, in Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2002

identities and produce knowledge about them. In the late 19th century census and other similar institution reconstituted the meaning of community or ethnicity and gave Indians three important political messages: (a) that communities could be enumerated, and that in numbers lay one's political clout; (b) that the social and economic progress of a community was a measurable entity, measured in the case of Indian censuses by their share in public life (education, professions, employment, etc) and (c) that this enabled governments and communities to devise objective tests for relative backwardness of a community. Thus, problems of ethnicity cannot be separated from modern means of government and communication. The very structure of modern governmentality carries with it the seeds of ethnic bloodbath.

Satya P. Mohanty in his, The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity (2001)[45], gives a post positivist realist account of identity. Rejecting the foundationalism of essentialist theory and scepticism of post modernism, post- positivism maintains that through experience one comes to know one's identity. However, these experiences should not serve as foundations; it should not be considered as self-evident and authentic. These experiences need to be interpreted; because experiences can be true or false, illegitimate or spurious because experience refers to the ways in which humans process information. Only through interpretation of one's experience, one can construct a realist theory of social and cultural identity in which experience would not serve as foundations but would provide raw materials through which we construct identities. Identity is real because it refers outside to the social world i.e., one's social location and interest.

In fine, it can be said that there are contending theoretical perspectives on ethnicity and ethnicity related identity movements. In the large body of literature reviewed above there seems to be no consensus on what ethnicity is. Since all ethnic identities are rooted in history, they are often regarded as intransigent. However, for our present purpose, the constructivist concept of ethnic identity would be more suitable. Thus, identities expressed in terms of community or ethnic groups are often the outcome of consultation and confabulation, especially in situations where multiple communities or ethnic groups exist. That community identities are socially

[45] Satya P. Mohanty, The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity, in Paula M.L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-Garcia (ed.), Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism, Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd. India, 2001, pp. 29 - 66

constructed implies the conscious mobilization of the people in defence of their community's interest and the invoking and reinforcing of identities in the process.[46]

Turning to the studies dealing specifically with the region and Lepchas, Geoffrey Gorer's, Himalayan Village: An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim (2005)[47] is a pioneering work on the Lepcha community of Sikkim. This book is an account of the culture and traditions of the Lepchas in the Dzongu reserve area. From the time of the establishment of the Sikkimese Kingdom, the Lepchas have been an inferior subject race under the domination of the Sikkimese Tibetans or Bhutias. Without the preservation of their homeland in Dzongu, the Lepchas would have been ousted from the little and poor land which remains to them. He further believes that confinement of the Lepchas in the Dzongu area had far reaching consequences on the religious, educational and economic backwardness of the community. Lepchas of the Dzongu have been unable to compete with the more industrious and competent Nepalis and other Sikkimese. They have developed a life suitable for isolation. This growing isolation will increase even more the Lepchas natural timidity in the face of unknown person.

H. H. Risley's, Gazetteer of Sikkim (1989), is one of the earliest publications on the history and population of Sikkim. Apart from discussions the nature of governance under the various Namgyal rulers, the book also provides interesting details on the purpose of British involvement in Sikkim and adoption of ways and means, particularly racial and religious, to maintain its political control over the affairs of Sikkim. He describes the Lepchas as 'peace loving people, deeply religious and shy, but at the same time a rapidly dying race due to the influx of industrious Newars and Gorkhas for the purpose of clearing and cultivating the large areas of uninhabited land on which the European tea- planters of Darjeeling have already cast longing eyes.[48]

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[46] N. Jayaram, Identity, Community, and Conflict: A Survey of Issues and Analyses, Economic and Political Weekly, September 27, 2012, Vol. XLVII No. 38, pp. 44-61

[47] Geoffrey Gorer, Himalayan Village: An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim, Pilgrims Publishing, Varanasi, 2005, p. 37

[48] H. H. Risley, The Gazetteer of Sikkim. Delhi, Sikkim Nature Conservation Foundation, Gangtok, Sikkim, 1989, pp. xx-xxii

L.S.S.O' Malley in his, Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling (1989)[49] makes interesting observation on the Lepchas. He describes the Lepchas as 'kind, placid, somewhat indolent people who are being largely supplanted by the self-assertive Nepalis. Before the coming of Tibetans, they possessed the entire regions of Sikkim and Darjeeling. After being overthrown by the Tibetan invaders, they lost Kalimpong to Bhutan and later with the coming of Nepalis, they lost the best land in the district. Their old nomadic way of life and jungle craft was lost due to the introduction of settled agriculture and reservation of forests. They are a dying race and are disappearing along with the forests.

A. Campbell, having been appointed as Superintendent of the District of Darjeeling came across Lepchas whom he described as 'wild tribes'. In his piece, 'On the Lepchas', he gives an account of the physical features, history, tradition, culture and religion of the Lepchas while at the same time highlighting the patronising and benevolent attitude of the Britishers towards them. He characterises the Lepchas as 'savages, grass feeders, eating all kinds of animal food, unhygienic, dirty, carefree and indolent'. Therefore, 'these savages need to be civilized'. Introduction of money economy and tea plantation in the region have made these tribes steady workers and hardworking. He also admires their honesty and their sense of duty has made them favourites among the European masters. This would help the Britishers in the long run to maintain their hold, control and domination in the region'.[50]

M. Corneille Jest, on the basis of his field research, gives an account of the religious beliefs of the Lepchas of Tanyang, Kalimpong[51] and highlights how their traditions are rapidly changing under the influence of Tibetans, Bhutanese and Nepalis. He says that since the 17th century, the indigenous beliefs of the Lepchas have been influenced by a form of Tibetan Buddhism. Lepcha indigenous traditions and Lamaism coexist side by side in major events like man's birth, death, and marriage ceremonies. The author ends with a very distressing note that due to intermingling of Lepcha customs of Bongthism and Munism with Lamaism, expenses of the Lepcha family have increased leading to a series of economic misfortunes. He

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[49] L S. S. O Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, Logos Press, New Delhi, 1989, p. 44

[50] A Campbell, On the Lepchas, The Journal of the Ethnological Society of London (1869 – 1870) Vol. I, No. 2, (1869), pp. 143 - 157

[51] M. Corneille Jest, Religious Beliefs of the Lepchas in the Kalimpong District (West Bengal,) Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, No. ¾ (Oct. 1960), pp. 124 - 134

therefore argues that the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries will end all misfortunes and would further change their cultural and religious traditions.

Hooker's Himalayan Journals appeared as the first scientific account about Sikkim and a valuable ethnographic source. He came across the Lepchas in course of his scientific explorations in Sikkim. Owing to the vast knowledge possessed by the Lepchas on the flora and fauna of the region, Hooker appointed them as collectors of local plants and trees of the region. In the course of his expedition, Lepchas became his chief companion and account keepers which developed his close association with the Lepchas. He described them as cheerful, kind, patient, timid and peaceful without the warlike and brave Gorkhas nor like the cruel and quarrelsome nature of the Bhutias. They are amiable, frank, humorous and polite without the servility of the Hindoos. In diet they are gross feeders, when travelling they live on whatever they can find, whether animals or vegetables.[52]

J. Claude White, who was appointed as the first political officer of Sikkim and remained in office from 1889 till 1908, introduced sweeping changes in the land revenue policy, infrastructure development, forest laws, and introduced a system of monetary economy in Sikkim on modern lines. During his stay for 20 years, he left accounts on the origin, nature and disposition of the Lepchas. According to him, Lepchas had migrated from Assam and upper Burma. They resembled very little with the Tibetans, were smaller in size and bore similarities with the British. He described the Lepchas as improvident and wasteful; they were great nature lovers, good entomologists, botanists and excellent collectors. Thus, they made the most excellent and trustworthy servants and it was a great pleasure to live with them. [53]

G.B. Mainwaring was the only British to truly admire the Lepchas, their culture, tradition, and manners. In contrast to all writings produced by British administrators and ethnographers, his work was different, since it did not contain any of the colonial stereotypes about the Lepchas. He regarded them as the original inhabitants of Sikkim and Darjeeling. They were in his own words 'the free sons of the forests, the hearty yeoman of the land became the servants of servants, the very

[52] Joseph Dalton Hooker, Himalayan Journals; on Notes of a Naturalist In Bengal, the Sikkim and Nepal Himalayas, The Khasia Mountains, London, 1864, pp. 127-138

[53] J. Claude White, Sikhim and Bhutan Twenty- One Years on the North- East Frontier, Gyan Publishing House, 2020, pp. 7-8

slaves of slaves". The British after acquiring Darjeeling became their masters and teachers. The British rule destroyed their nationality. Their language, which was at one point of time the language of the whole country of Sikkim; spoken by the Tibetans and the Bhutias. It was the language in which business was carried on and justice in the English courts was administered. This language was set aside by the British and Hindustani was imposed as the official language of Darjeeling.[54] He solely blamed the British for the downfall of Lepcha race. His admiration for the Lepchas and their language led him to write a book on Lepcha grammar titled *A Grammar of the Rong* in 1876 and the first Lepcha- English Dictionary in 1898.

A.K. Das in his book, The Lepchas of Darjeeling District (1978), argues that the Lepchas are intelligent, amiable and always cheerful. They are modest and social and a pleasant smile is always visible on their lips... great lovers of all sorts of sports which involve physical exercise. They are honest, theft is rare among them and they do not quarrel amongst themselves and outsiders. They are the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim. Prior to the coming of Tibetans during the 13th century, they led a nomadic life and subsisted on fishing, hunting and collection of roots and tubers. Coming of Tibetans led to their conversion into Buddhism. Contact with the British led to far reaching changes in their ways of life. Owing to the colonial British policy of encouraging migration Lepchas were outnumbered by the more dominant Nepalis.[55].

Indira Awasty, in her work, Between Sikkim and Bhutan (1978), has described as hunters who practiced a primitive form of agriculture. Coming of Tibetans in Sikkim led to conversion of Lepchas into Buddhism/ Lamaism. Though some Lepchas were initiated into Lamaism, the supremacy of the Bhutias always prevailed and many forms of discrimination were perpetrated by the Bhutias towards the Lepchas in Sikkim. She argues that the Lepchas readily accepted Christianity, because it gave a lot of material advantages. Expensive and back breaking rituals of Lamaism added to the burden of already non – frugal habits of the Lepchas. Christian missionaries gave the Lepchas modern education, modern medical facilities, health

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[54] Colonel G. B. Mainwaring, Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) Language, As It Exists in the Dorjelling and Sikim Hills, Calcutta, 1875, pp. xiii- xix

[55] A.K. Das, The Lepchas of West Bengal, Calcutta Editions India, 1978, pp. 14-16

and hygiene, better farming methods and provided leadership to fight land disputes. Due to this some Lepchas are able to achieve good positions in government jobs. [56]

A.R. Foning in his book Lepcha: My Vanishing Tribe (1987)[57], gives an inside view of the community. Tracing the cultural history of the Lepchas the author provides valuable information on the Christian and Buddhist influence on the tribe. With the coming of the Britishers began the process of mass conversion of the community into Christianity. Proselytizing activities of the Britishers and continual migration of Nepalis to sustain colonial capitalism have influenced every aspect of the social life in the hills of Darjeeling. Both in urban and rural areas, the Nepali language have virtually become the lingua franca of the region. Nepali was used by the missionaries as a medium for the spreading of the Gospels. In this way the language of the Lepchas receded into the background. The author, therefore, says that Lepchas are a declining race and are doomed to extinction.

K.P. Tamsang in his, The Unknown and Untold Reality about the Lepchas gives a different version. He begins by asserting the distinctiveness of the Lepcha culture and history. He also explains how the writings on the cultural history of the Lepchas have been perverted in the hands of both foreign and Indian writers. Contradicting the various migration theories propounded by these writers, the author argues that Lepchas are the indigenous race of Sikkim and Darjeeling District. By critiquing the versions given by colonial anthropologists on migration of Lepcha, he asserts that Lepchas had migrated from Sikkim to the north and from there to the east and south east countries. By going back to the history of Lepchas, when owing to the atrocities inflicted by Lasomoong Pano, the demon king, forced the Lepchas to run away from their country to northeast India, to the south and east Asian countries. [58]

D.C. Roy, in his book, Dynamics of Social Formation among the Lepchas (2005)[59], argues that in the study of Lepcha social formation both the economic mode of production and social embeddedness i.e., social aspects of production need to be

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[56] Indira Awasty, Between Sikkim and Bhutan: the Lepchas of Pedong, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 36-40

[57] A.R. Foning, Lepchas: My Vanishing Tribe, Chyu- Pandi Farm, Kalimpong, 1987, pp. 162-164

[58] K.P. Tamsang, The Unknown and Untold Reality about the Lepchas, Mani Printing Press, Kalimpong, 1998, pp. 5-6

[59] D.C. Roy, Dynamics of Social Formation the Lepchas, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 3-12

taken into account. Lepcha economic organisation is underdeveloped characterised by simple tools and techniques, community ownership etc. Their economic organisation and productive activities are related with their social structure. They follow strong kinship obligations in social and economic spheres. Due to all these aspects Lepchas can be identified as 'tribal peasants. Lepchas are peasants looked at from their economic behaviour and practices but they are tribes as well from their social attitude and interaction. In addition to tribal peasantry some rudimentary elements of capitalism have also been observed with the introduction of capitalist farming. Therefore, a sort of dualistic economy has characterised Lepcha society "[and] imported western capitalism has penetrated into the pre-capitalist agrarian community". In his other writing, 'Demography and Social Unrest among the Lepchas'[60], he presents the nature and causes of social unrest among the Lepchas. With the help of census data, he deals with the trends of change in Lepcha population of West Bengal and Sikkim. The percentage of Lepcha population to total population of the district of Darjeeling has remained very negligible from the beginning of the last century. Due to immigration, marriage and many other factors, the proportion of Lepcha population has been decreasing over the decades. Sikkim has also witnessed a negative growth in Lepcha population. This declining growth rate should be a cause of concern to the anthropologists and scholars and would pose a big question on the future of Lepcha identity in their own homeland. Roy concludes that government should take immediate steps in increasing their growth rate so as to save the community from vanishing. He also highlights the reliability of census data and has blamed the census department for showing such a deflated figure on Lepcha population.

1.4 Objectives and Research Questions

Ethnic cultural assertion of the various subjugated communities is on the rise, challenging the forces of Eurocentric modernisation, homogenisation, globalisation and cosmopolitan values seeking to create a distinct cultural space of their own. Ethnicity and ethnic resurgence have a bearing on identity formation. It is through articulation and expression of their identity that people can make sense of their

[60] D.C. Roy, Demography and Social Unrest Among the Lepchas, in Pankaj Debnath (ed.) Economy and Society of North Bengal, Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 2008, pp. 321-326

collective existence and identity. The work has been undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To understand the political and social processes of the rise or revival of ethno-consciousness and identity among the Lepchas in Sikkim and the District of Darjeeling. The *Rongs* or the Lepchas as they are better known have been increasingly declaring themselves as the original inhabitants of Sikkim and District of Darjeeling. The claim along with other similar claims has turned the whole geographical space and its history into a contested terrain. The study has tried to unravel the historical construction of Lepcha identity through colonial narratives. It has also tried to look into the historical making of a geographical space and also tried to see the relation between history and identity.

2. Ethnic differences among the various communities i.e., the distinction between 'we' and 'they' is neither primordial nor instrumental but is socially constructed. The work has taken into account the various processes through which the construction of identities takes place and how they emerge from any given political structures. Individuals do not themselves identify but are always identified by others. When we say that one's ethnicity and identity are constructed it also implies that such construction is a conscious mobilisation of people in defence of their community's interest. Construction of identity is strongly influenced by politico-historical and socio-cultural conditions. This work has tried to show how the Lepcha identity is the result of their situation at a particular historical point and also due to certain experiences that the community has encountered i.e., with the conditions of colonialism, both internal as well as external.

3. In its attempt to study the emergence of Lepcha ethnic identity, the work has made some attempt to study the history and politics of the community and the region. It has argued that the Lepcha ethnic identity is a product of colonial governmental administrative practices. And the post-colonial Indian state's engagement with the Lepchas is, in many ways, a continuation of the practices of the colonial state. The study has argued that consciousness about a distinct and separate identity is entirely a modern consciousness brought being by the colonial state which has been carried over by the post-colonial state. In fact,

the construction of the term "Scheduled Tribe" was necessitated to subsume the enormous heterogeneous communities into neat categories for classificatory and administrative purposes.

4. The study has tried to explain the ways in which the post-colonial Indian state, its constitution, legal institutions and administrative structures deals with this ethnic minority community. It has compared the protection, privileges offered by the state, its entire distributional structure and processes vis- a- vis the position of the community in the administrative structure. Due to the operation of political process and party politics, mobilisation and politicization of the community occurs. However, this process of political mobilization would depend upon the strength of the community and the position of the community within a particular administrative structure. Here, the Lepcha community of Sikkim are placed administratively in an advantageous position than their counterparts in the District of Darjeeling.
5. Finally, the study has argued that the Lepcha community particularly the educated middle class, in the process of trying to assert and articulate their distinct identity has been quite active and vocal in writing and producing alternative histories from below countering the dominant historiography.

For fulfilling the above given objectives, the present study has posed certain questions. They are follows:

1. To what extent is 'ethnic identity' a creation of colonialism and modernity? To put in other words, how has modernisation and development undertaken at the behest of colonial system constituted the Lepcha community as subjects?
2. Does ethnicity alone seeks to provide subjective identification to a particular group or community or does one's experience, position in the state structure and situation also matter?
3. Is the feeling of 'ethnicity' expressed generally in violent and conflictual tone? To what extent are the institutions of state, its apparatus and administrative structures responsible for ethnic consciousness and mobilization?
4. Has conversion of Lepchas into Buddhism and Christianity resulted in the disjuncture in their culture and identity? What has been their post-proselytization experience?

1.5 Methodology

The study has primarily relied on qualitative techniques of research. It's engagement with the history of Sikkim since the foundation of Namgyal dynasty and the history of colonial development in Sikkim and Darjeeling has made the work partly historical. It has used certain techniques of discourse analysis both in the form of anthropological writings, census data and government records in order to unravel the processes through which the Lepcha identity has been constructed in colonial writings. This engagement is then taken forward to see if there are any continuities and discontinuities in the writings of authors in the post- independent era. For this the study has thickly engaged some of the representative writings by anthropologists as well as census reports. The study has argued that the colonial encounter of the Lepchas with the British represented a violent rupture of their traditional forms of life. The study has engaged with Lepcha writings and narratives primarily in translations, in order to reconstruct a most authentic Lepcha identity. In this respect the work has also undertaken study of the activities of different Lepcha Associations actively involved in the cultural revivalist movement. Further, the study has tried to understand the spatial imagination of the Lepchas, most notably the idea of *Mayel Lyang*.

It has been the argument of the study that assertion of identity takes place at a particular juncture of the rise of a middle class to provide a certain leadership to the processes of revivalism and also at the same time become new agents of a democratic political process leading to the eventual engagements with the political and administrative apparatuses of the state. The present work has closely studied the activities of the major Lepcha organization both in Sikkim and Darjeeling. To achieve this, the study has interviewed some of the key functionaries of the organization both in Sikkim and Darjeeling to find out whether state patronage or the absence of it have a bearing on the socio- economic and political status of the Lepchas.

1.6 Chapterisation

Chapter I: Introduction

With a brief introduction, the first chapter has discussed the problem of the study. With a brief theoretical framework on the contending theories and ideas on ethnicity and ethnic identity, it has undertaken a brief review of all existing literature on ethnicity, ethnic-cultural movements, identity and state response to all these movements. The chapter has also discussed the objectives and methodology of the research. In order to attain the objectives of research, certain questions have been proposed in this chapter, which has been answered in the concluding part of this work.

Chapter II: Lepchas: Their Social and Cultural Profile

With a focusing on the social and cultural profile of the Lepchas, the chapter has made forays into the origin, history and landscape of the community. No written and authentic Lepcha historical records exist. The information that is available on the origin and history of the community is derived from oral histories and Lepcha mythology. Discarding the migration thesis put forward by certain writers, Lepchas proclaim themselves as the original inhabitants of the land of Darjeeling and Sikkim (Darjeeling also includes the present day Kalimpong district) The chapter has made a study of their nature worshipping religious belief system. It has attempted to give an account of the origin of Lepcha language and script. The impact made by Buddhism and Christianity on the development of Lepcha language and literature has also been discussed along with the contribution made by G.B. Mainwaring in enriching Lepcha language. It has also attempted to highlight the developments made in the language front in Sikkim and Darjeeling. In the last portion a brief account of the material culture of the Lepchas has been discussed in order to understand the intrinsic connection between Lepchas and their environment.

Chapter III: Lepchas in Sikkim: Experience under Namgyal Rule till the British Period and After

The chapter has given an account of the Lepchas of Sikkim by taking into their experiences and the conditions of their subjection with the establishment of Namgyal dynasty, that is regarded as the first phase of colonisation of the Lepchas. Beginning with the Namgyal rule, experience of the Lepchas till the post-independence period is divided into four distinct phases. The rule of the Namgyal dynasty for the first-time

divided Lepchas into two classes: Lepcha aristocrats and the commoners. However, their conditions became worse with the colonial policy of the British. Their marginalisation commenced with the policy of migration initiated by the British to bring in more labour force for the development of townships and settlement in the region. With independence and departure of British, Lepchas came under the paternalistic care of the Indian government, whose interests the government could hardly ignore. But the real threat to Lepcha existence came about with the demographic imbalance shifting in favour of Bhutias and Nepalis. Added to this fact was the role played by ethnic based political parties in furthering the interests of its members. These factors and the emergence of ethno-consciousness have been discussed in this chapter.

Chapter IV: Colonial Encounter and Experiences of the Lepchas of Darjeeling Since 1835

Darjeeling was a part of Sikkim until 1835. With 1835 i.e., with the Grant of Darjeeling, colonisation of the Lepchas of Darjeeling began. The region of Kalimpong was annexed from Bhutan in 1865. By this British assumed full control over the land of Darjeeling, which culminated in the colonisation of the geographical space of the Lepchas? The developmental initiatives that followed were undertaken under the logic of colonialism. The chapter has discussed the process that followed with the initiation of British rule in Darjeeling. In view of its commercial trade interests, taking possession of Darjeeling became a priority. By the application of scientific knowledge, and the mapping of land and resources, British could foresee the potential that Darjeeling stood for them. Introduction of colonial capitalism and the development of infrastructure posed a threat not only to the pastoral economy of the Lepchas but impacted their demographic profile. Owing to the numerical preponderance of the Nepalis in terms of work force, and the administrative policies undertaken to develop Darjeeling Lepchas were forced to retreat into the interiors and the margins. The chapter has also discussed the activities of the Christian missionaries and their impact upon the religion, culture and identity of the Lepchas. Demographic growth of the Nepali population and the flowering of Nepali literary activism led to the standardisation of Nepali language. Government patronage over Nepali language led to its introduction in the school curriculum. These developments severely hampered the growth of Lepcha language, and subsequently culture and identity.

Chapter V: Ethnic Political Mobilisation of the Lepchas: Towards a Movement for Cultural Identity

This chapter has shown how the Lepchas of Darjeeling and Sikkim are discarding all dominant stereotypes and state constructed definition and representation of them. In the process of constituting Lepchas as an ethnic group, the chapter has delved into the issue of boundary maintenance, since ethnic identity is closely linked with the issue of boundary. As part of this process of boundary maintenance, Lepchas have become vocal and assertive in reclaiming and trying to reconnect with their mythological homeland i.e., *Mayel Lyang*. Along with this, cultural artefacts like language, customs, religion, morals, dress have heightened their ethnic consciousness. Ethnic consciousness becomes manifested in different forms of political mobilization, leading to the regeneration and revivalist movements, that lays emphasis on going back to their past. This movement for cultural revivalism is seen as a distinct period when their social, cultural and political identity is at stake. Revival of culture, festival and language is aimed at uniting Lepchas who are divided by religion, class and region. In this process the Lepchas have been able to create a distinct identity of their own. The chapter has also argued at length on how the state as an external force shapes ethnic boundary and identity. Policies of the state and its institutions tend to support and act in favour of a particular group, causing resentment among others who are denied benefits. This perceived denial strengthens community consciousness. In this respect, the chapter has also focussed into the activities of different Lepcha associations, organisations and the activities of prominent Lepcha intellectuals in the cultural revivalist movement.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This is the last and the concluding part of the study; it has made a brief summary of all the chapters of the present work. The chapter has also provided answers to all the questions that were put forward in the first introductory chapter. These answers have uncovered the major findings of this research. Since it has been the argument of this research that ethnicity or ethnic identity is a result of legal and administrative structures and the position of the community within the administrative structure; the chapter has also made a study of the Lepchas of both Sikkim and Darjeeling (including Kalimpong) in terms of their access to state institutions and political patronage received by the ethnic group. In doing so the chapter has argued that the

Lepchas in Sikkim are situated in an advantageous position than that of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. The last portion has briefly indicated those areas of research which had emerged in the course of this study; and which can be taken up and explored by future researchers.

There has been very little research on the Lepchas of Sikkim and Darjeeling. All existing available scholarships on Lepchas are merely narrative in nature. The work has used a theoretical framework to explain the rise or revival of ethno-consciousness and identity among the Lepchas. It has also thrown light on how Lepcha ethnicity and identity has evolved as a result of historical process. The paper emphasizes on the constructed nature of ethnicity, on how boundaries, identities and cultures are constantly defined, produced and negotiated through social interactions both inside and outside the group. In the construction of ethnicity, language, religion, culture, customs and ancestral origin becomes relevant because these elements are effectively utilised in the boundary maintenance process. Ethnic identities are also shaped by external forces which include political policies and processes. State and its institutions also perpetuate ethnicity and shape ethnic boundaries. Thus, ethnicity is politically constructed i.e., ethnic identities and boundaries are produced by the policies of the state. Competition for resources among different groups also accentuates group formation. Political recognition and preferential and protective treatment given to a particular ethnic group creates self-awareness among them and activates them towards ethnic political mobilization. Ethnic identity is thus a dialectical process involving both internal and external opinions and processes i.e., an individual's self- identification and outsiders' ethnic designations.[61] The present work seeks to apply this theoretical framework in the study of the development of ethno-consciousness and identity among the Lepchas of Sikkim and Darjeeling in the coming chapters.

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[61] Joane Nagel, Contructing Ethnicity: Creatring and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture, Social Problems, February, Vol. 41, No.1, Special Issue on Migration, Race and Ethnicity in America (Febraury 1994), p. 154.