

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Sherpas and Tamangs are important tribal communities in the Himalayan region. They have been living there for a long past. The Sherpas were nomadic people who first migrated from Tibet and settled in the Solukhumbu (Khumbu) district of Nepal and later migrated to other places like Sikkim, and Darjeeling district of West Bengal mainly in Darjeeling Sadar, Kalimpong (presently the subdivision has been converted into a district) and Kurseong hill subdivisions.¹ According to the 1901 census, there were 3450 Sherpas in the Darjeeling district followed by 5295 in 1931 and 6929 in 1941 (Sarkar, 2017:12). Like many other ethnic groups in the Darjeeling district, Sherpas had their traditional system of agriculture, livestock breeding etc. Initially, Darjeeling had a large Sherpa population and was found working in tea gardens or as porters or rickshaw coolies. On the other hand, Tamangs are one of the largest ethnic groups among Tibeto-Burman-speaking people of the Himalayan region. They are found in almost every mountainous region of South Asia. They are concentrated more in Nepal, Sikkim, Darjeeling district, the newly carved Kalimpong district of North Bengal, and Assam and Meghalaya. According to the 1901 census, there were 24,465 Tamangs in the Darjeeling district followed by 33,481 in 1931 and 43,114 in 1941 (Bhattacharyya, 2014:34). The population of Darjeeling district is exceedingly heterogeneous consisting of Lepchas, Bhutias, Nepalis, plains people comprising of Bengalis, Biharis, Marwaris, and many other ethnic communities. Darjeeling has been regarded as the „Babel of tribes and nations“ and as an „Ethnological Museum“ (Malley, 1907:40-41). Several tribal communities reside in this region. Lepcha, Bhutia, and Sherpa are prominent among them. Tamangs also got the Scheduled Tribe status in 2003 along with the Limbu community. The present study deals with the role and status of Sherpa and Tamang women residing in forest villages of Darjeeling hills who belongs to scheduled tribe communities. Every community has a distinctive story about its settlement in a region. So, it is necessary to make a discussion of these two tribal communities about their location, and concentration along with a brief discussion of tribal people in India.

¹<https://www.shaalaa.com> accessed on 26th Sep. 2023

The tribal people of India generally live in hills, forests, and isolated regions. The 1921 census categorically used “Hill and Forest tribes” to differentiate tribes from caste in terms of location and occupational civilizations (Tamang, 2018:64). Tribals are known by different names such as *Vanyajati* (forest communities), *Vanavasi* (inhabitants of forests), *Pahari* (hill dwellers), *Adimjati* (primitive communities), *Adivasi* (first settlers), *Janjati* (folk people), *Anusuchit Janjati* (Scheduled tribes) and so on (Vidyarthi and Rai, 1976:25). Similarly, the present study highlights the role of Sherpa and Tamang women as a forest villager in the protection of forest environment situated in the Eastern Himalayas. Since several research studies have found out that they are the most backward and isolated people, it has long been realized that various measures are required to tackle their problems and to bring them to the forefront so that they can lead their lives on par with the mainstream people.

The establishment of the *Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1774) led to the commencement of Tribal research in India. Various British administrators, missionaries, travellers, and a few anthropologically oriented persons started collecting information on tribal and rural groups and wrote about their life and culture in various journals like the *Journal of Asiatic Society* (1784), *Indian Antiquary* (1872), and later in the *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society* (1915) and *Man in India* (1921), etc (Vidyarthi and Rai, 1976:12). But Tribal studies in India gained importance or it started during the late British period, particularly after the 1930s. British scholars undertook such studies from 1930 to 1950. From 1950 to the early 1970s Indian anthropologists and sociologists were influenced by British scholars. Various scholars like G.S. Ghurye, D.N. Majumdar, Surojit Sinha, Nirmal Kumar Bose, S.C. Dube, L.P. Vidyarthi, A.R. Desai, and many other scholars contributed significantly to the field of tribal study in India. But still, there is the absence of a standard definition of the term “tribe”.

The meaning of the term „tribe“ according to The Imperial Gazetteer of India (1911) is “*a tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so*” (Digal, 2016:46). The Constitution of India (1950) neither defines nor lays down any specific criteria for specifying the tribes. As per Article 366 (25) of the Constitution, Scheduled Tribe means such tribes or tribal communities or parts or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for this constitution

(Roy, 2009:17). According to D.N. Majumdar (1958) “*a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditarily or otherwise united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes without any social obloquy attaching to them, as it does in the caste structure, following tribal traditions, beliefs, and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from aliens sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration*” (Vidyarthi and Rai,1976:167). F.G. Bailey (1960) views tribes and castes are a continuum. He seeks to make a distinction not in terms of the totality of behaviour but in a more limited way to the political and economic system. He stated that a caste society is hierarchal while a tribal society is segmentary and egalitarian (Purkayastha, 2016:4). According to the ILO Convention (1989) No.169, indigenous and tribal people are those whose social, economic, and cultural conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations (Chhetri, 2013:9).

The Lokur Committee pointed out various characteristics to be identified as Scheduled Tribes:

- a) Indication of primitive traits
- b) Distinctive culture
- c) Shyness of contact with the community at large
- d) Geographical isolation
- e) Backwardness (Ezhilarasu, 2014: 176)

From the above discussion, it can be said that it is not easy to define a tribe or a tribal society conclusively, particularly in the Indian context. In this context, Andre Beteille (1973) rightly remarks that Bailey is probably the only anthropologist working in the Indian field who has tried to characterize tribes in terms of segmentary principles. However, the majority of Indian anthropologists are not serious about providing a definition of tribal society that is appropriate to the Indian context.

The tribal populations of India are spread almost all over the country. According to the 1991 census, India had almost 68 million tribal populations which increased to 84 million in 2001 and to 104 million in 2011. Although they are found in almost every state of India they are mostly concentrated in the hilly and forest areas of Central India in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, and to a lesser extent in Andhra Pradesh. Another concentration of the

tribes is found in the belt along the Himalayas stretching through Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand in the Western Himalayas to Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland in the North-eastern Himalayas. Other major tribal concentrations are found in Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Maharashtra whereas in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Gujarat, and Rajasthan smaller number of tribals are found.

The vast majority of the tribals are poor and backward. One of the major reasons for the backwardness is that the rate of social change is very slow in the tribal society in comparison to other people like the general population, scheduled castes, and other backward social groups. Various measures have been taken by the government for their development and also to protect them from exploitation. The upliftment of tribals has gained importance with the implementation of the Five-Year Planning Programme in India.

1.2. Status and Role of Tribal Women

In tribal societies, women are an essential component and enjoy equality with men. Their role in the tribal society is even more important than in any other social group in India and are seen as a valuable human resource who are engaged not only in domestic activities but also in many other activities contributing towards the general well-being of their families. Different tribal communities in India have patriarchal, matriarchal/matrilineal, and polyandrous forms of society. According to the *Dhebar Commission Report* (1961), tribal women unlike non-tribal women in most cases are not dredge or beasts of burden but exercise a firm hand in family matters (Thakur, 2009:4). They are employed in various economic activities.

The Government of India formed a committee on the Status of Women by a resolution of the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare on 22nd Sep. 1971 (Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974). Various provisions were formulated to understand women's situation in India. The status of any social group is determined by the level of income, employment, education, health, and political awareness as well as the roles played by its members within the family, community, and society. Different surveys were undertaken and women from different walks of life were interviewed. Generally, women's status is high when they contribute substantially to primary subsistence activities, and their status is considered low when the arrangement of food is entirely men's job. The social status of tribal women is heterogeneous and it differs regionally and among tribes but their contribution to society and

family is immense. Several studies have found that the position of women in tribal society is much better in matriarchal, matrilineal, and polyandrous societies. The status of tribal women is much better than their counterparts (Oraon, 2015:74). They enjoy more freedom than their counterparts they roam freely, cut jokes with men, and are usually free to select their life partners. There is a presence of bride-price in tribal society. Even tribal women can divorce and remarry without any social obligations. Marx (1963) stated that the position of women will vary from society to society and from time to time according to a prevailing economic and political relationship (Swami, 2006:2). Majumdar (1973) has reported a higher status of tribal women on some indicators while lower on others. Scholars have different viewpoints regarding the status of tribal women. Apart from enjoying high social status, there is also the presence of low status in the case of property rights. In North-Eastern India especially in matrilineal society some tribal communities have given property rights to women. In patriarchal tribal communities, women are not allowed to participate in any religious rituals, cannot make important decisions and so on. Certain taboos restrict women from attending ceremonies and sacred duties. Even the tribal women are paid less for the same type of work than their male counterparts. Shashi (1978) has said that the status of tribal women varies from one tribal group to another.

In Darjeeling Hills, different types of tribal groups are unique in the sense that they include different social and linguistic groups. They are known for their warm, hospitable, social, and fun-loving nature along with strong community bonds (Bhutia, 2011). The tribal women of Darjeeling Hills have a better position along with the male members. As stated, above tribals are known as Vanyajati (forest communities) or Vanavasi (inhabitants of forests) similarly some of the tribal groups of Darjeeling Hills reside in the forest areas. Sherpa and Tamang are two of those tribal groups that signify their bonding with forests. At present 38.27 percent of the Darjeeling district is covered with forest (Giri & Murugesan, 2019:1052). Lepchas are the indigenous inhabitants of Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills but are now being swamped by the coming of Nepalese to the Darjeeling district to work in the tea gardens or as agriculturists. They were the original inhabitants of the forest and brought some forest produce such as yams, cardamoms, honey, and orchids to the market to barter for salt and other items (Waddell, 1899: 43). Waddell even pointed out their disappearance from their native residence. The main reason for their disappearance is the conservational method adopted by the forest department which not only curtailed their sources of food but also forced them to migrate to other places.

Hari Singh Committee (1967) stated that 60% of the tribals were living in the forests and some 30% were in the vicinity of forests (Joshi, 1998: 107). Tribal women are engaged in various economic activities but they are mostly dependent on minor forest products for their livelihood. Apart from the collection of minor forest products the other occupations that most of the tribals follow in and around forests are agriculture, cattle rearing, pig rearing, charcoal making, collection of grass, providing labour for the felling of trees, and transport of logs and timber. Agriculture is mostly done by tribal on hillsides or on land temporarily leased to them by the Forest Department. So, their dependence on the forest should not be treated as an encroachment on the forest.

According to Roy Burman (1982), “Directly or indirectly in the tribal mind, forest symbolizes life in its manifold manifestations i.e., home, worship, food, employment, income, and entire gamut. Tribals can be regarded as children of the forest” (Burman, 1982:4). With the establishment of the Forest Department in 1861, several restrictions were imposed on those who used to live in and around the forest. Before the establishment of the Forest Department, the condition of the tribals along with the forest was far better than it is today. But now it has severely affected tribal lives particularly that of women and also the development projects have adversely affected the tribal women. The Panchsheel Principle formulated by Jawaharlal Nehru for tribal development in India recommends tribal rights on land and forest. Women are more heavily dependent on natural resources than men as they have fewer options in terms of livelihood. Since it is well known that natural resources are fast disappearing, it is directly affecting the tribal women as male members are migrating to urban areas in search of jobs and the entire responsibility is towards women. The girl child of the family becomes a victim of degradation as she has to take care of her younger ones and has to discontinue her education. The girl child not only looks after their younger ones but also does all the domestic chores. The mother of the girl child is mostly involved in the collection of fuelwoods which has become more difficult and time-consuming. Women are the chief resource managers for their families and communities all over the world and spend the maximum amount of time collecting water, fuel, food, fodder, and managing land. They are more vulnerable to environmental changes or threats and can be both cause and consequence of violent conflict. Environmental degradation is in itself a severe threat to human security (Roy, et al., 2013:224). Traditionally, the matter of security directly corresponded with the issue of military engagements but now the concept of

security is changing and the focus is more on non-traditional security. Non-traditional security issues have emerged as critical challenges in present times posing various threats to everyone's life. The traditional concepts of security are changing and replaced by new concepts like environmental security, economic security, food security, health security, energy security, cyber security and human security. The term environmental security denotes the relative resilience of the public to ecological hazards caused by natural or human actions (Batricevic & Paunovic, 2019:126). At present the protection of natural resources and sustainability have become essential elements of national security and foreign policy. The role of women in environmental protection/management is creditable and often it is stated by the Former U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that women all over the world are the key to sustainable development, peace, and security. Women in the study area play an important role in the protection of the environment at the local level.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Tribal women constitute half of the tribal population like any other community. In tribal society, women play an important role from dawn to dusk like cleaning of house and utensils, collecting fuelwood, cooking, nurturing children, looking after animals and so on. In comparison to non-tribal communities, the status of tribal women is considered much better and has a say in the decision-making process. Like other tribal women, Sherpa and Tamang women are also very hard-working and are seen doing various types of activities. There are different factors which demonstrate the high social status of tribal women like bride price, freedom to decide about her marriage, divorce, remarriage, no child marriage, etc. On the other hand, the low status of tribal women is reflected in their lower educational status, lower literacy rate, higher dropout rates in school, property rights, and being prohibited from participating in religious rituals and decision-making. Sherpa and Tamang women living in the forest villages of Darjeeling hills are not very educated as they are busy with their daily activities which barred them from attending schools. There are higher cases of dropouts from school in the case of a girl child as she has to look after her siblings and domestic chores. A similar type of case was reported by the respondents in the study area. Nowadays with the process of assimilation tribals are losing their identity. Tribal women are more influenced by the great religious traditions with their rigid practices. More importantly, Tamang women are more influenced by the process of Hinduization whereas Sherpas are stricter in terms of religion. Apart from these problems, tribals who are considered

Vanyajati (forest communities) or Vanavasi (inhabitants of forests) are now isolated from the forests with the establishment of Forest Departments. Tribals who were considered as the custodians of the forest were defamed for the destruction of the forest. Before this, there were no restrictions on the use of forest products by tribal people. Even there occurred a dramatic change that attracted other castes along with tribals to become occupants of forest lands. It further deteriorated the condition of tribals living in the forest disturbed the tribal economy and contact with other castes and affected the socio-cultural life of tribes living in the area.

1.4. Review of Literature

Tribal study in India started during the late British period, particularly after the 1930s. Anthropologists and sociologists have produced a volume of literature on tribals by studying their socio-cultural systems, taboos, and many other aspects. The literature has been classified into various themes. The studies/literature is arranged accordingly with a discussion of the general tribal population. Literature relating to discussion on tribal women is done and even literature related to the general description of Sherpas and Tamangs is done. Literature dealing with tribals and their relation with the forests is discussed below.

1.4.1. Literature on General Tribal Population

Vidyarthi and Rai (1976) in their book *The Tribal Culture of India* have done a detailed study of different tribes on various dimensions. Covering the genesis of Tribal study in India this book covers various spectrums like the economic, social, political, and religious system of the tribals. They highlighted the importance of a Tribal village which acts as a compact and active social unit next only to family. Different features of a tribal village and its structures are discussed. Even they have made an argument on matriliney and polyandry forms of marriage. Lastly, they have discussed various programmes and plans for tribal development in India.

Bisht and Banskoti (2004) in their edited volume *Encyclopedic Ethnography of the Himalayan Tribes* highlighted the descriptive summaries of 279 Himalayan tribes. The Himalayan region is the meeting place of the international borders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, China, India, Nepal, and Tibet. Despite rich potentialities, very few research works have been conducted regarding the tribes and communities inhabiting the different parts of the Himalayan belt. This

book has four volumes and, in each volume, we will find the physical, historical, social, political, economic, religious, and cultural life of the Himalayan tribes.

Bhattacharya (2006) in her article *Tribal Demography of West Bengal in 2001: Some Observation* has classified tribal communities of West Bengal into seven categories- insignificant, very minor, minor, low, important, major, and dominant. Santhal occupies the dominant position followed by Bhutia, Lodha which occupies an important position, Lepcha and Mech, etc. which occupy a low position. She has highlighted various aspects of tribes based on their location, work participation rate, literacy rate, etc. She has made a comparative study of districts of West Bengal with the highest value of tribal concentration with the lowest concentration. She has found that in areas of a higher concentration, female literacy level is low and the work participation rate is high and vice-versa.

Dixit (2006) in his book *Tribes and Tribals; Struggle for Survival* highlights the various problems faced by the tribal population. Various problems that affect the tribal people are land and their alienation from it, forest and their access to it, large-scale displacement due to development projects, the status of women and social oppression, lack of educational facilities, language and culture, autonomy, and constitutional safeguards. From the colonial period, tribals were exploited in one way or the other. Even the central government adopted several programmes and policies for the development of tribals but the state failed to reach the goal due to a flawed approach.

1.4.2. Literature on Tribal Women

Upadhyay (1991) in his book *Status of Women in India* attempts to study the various patterns of women's struggle against age-old discrimination. Indian constitution guarantees equality of the sexes, there is much legislation relating to female employment including equal pay provisions and maternity benefits and there is legislation reforming Hindu Law so that women have equal inheritance rights. Unfortunately, the Government-sponsored developmental programmes have benefitted only a small section of women in our society. So, the author has critically examined all the issues in areas of women and development.

Pande (1996) in his book entitled *Drudgery of the Hill Women* has shown that women who play a very important role in the socio-economic setup of the hill society are discriminated against in

many ways. Since women play an important role in the economic and other activities, they have hardly any time for their personal development or recreation. This book highlights the social, economic, and political status, contribution, and quality of life of women in the rural areas of the Himalayan region.

Mondal and Begum (1997) in their article *Tribal Women in West Bengal: Some Aspects of their Status and Role* highlighted a socio-cultural profile of the tribal women living in West Bengal. They have made a detailed study of the status and role of the tribal women of West Bengal. They have found that the status of women is much better along with their male members but is not uniform among all the tribal communities. They have also mentioned that tribal women enjoy some degree of autonomy in the sphere of their ascribed roles but in the sphere of achieved roles, they are still in a disadvantageous and peripheral position.

Rao (2003) in his book *Tribal Women in India* provides an in-depth study covering various socio-economic scopes of women in Arunachal Pradesh. He has studied the role of the cooperative movement and self-help groups in the development of these women. He states a variety of reasons like historical, cultural, topography, and climate which is also contributing to keeping the tribal women aloof from the mainstream.

Thakur and Thakur (2009) in their book *Tribal Women* tried to show that tribal women are carrying out traditional, domestic, and agricultural operations for many generations. Apart from that they are engaged in craft making and a forest-based economy. The tribal women have status equal to that of men but also, but they are not benefitted from the women's welfare programme or benefits have not yet reached the tribal women. The study was mainly conducted in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Jaunsar Bawar. So, this book highlighted the role of various government and non-governmental welfare schemes in improving the status of tribal women.

Pandey (2011) in his article *Socio-economic status of Tribal women: A study of a transhumant Gaddi population of Bharmour, Himachal Pradesh, India* highlighted that the transhumant way of life has given Gaddi women a special economic power, an elevated social status and authority almost equal to men. Though men continue to dominate in certain spheres but also women enjoy greater freedom. Gaddi women are engaged in agriculture, sheep rearing, weaving, and spinning of wool and also share equal responsibility with their men during the transhumant condition.

Employment-oriented schemes like Mahila Mandal, Self Help Groups, NAURAD, etc. are also helping women improve their status.

Sengupta and Saha (2012) in their article *Tribal Women and Forest Resources: A Micro Level Study of Jaypur Forest, Bankura District, West Bengal* shows the organic linkages between women and forest resources. The Santhal tribe living in Adhaka village located in Jaypur forest has been selected for their work. They found out that Santhal women as collectors, producers, processors, managers, etc. and despite all these activities the Santhal women because of their illiteracy, poverty, lack of technical knowledge, control over land, and decision-making process are in underprivileged positions.

1.4.3. Literature on General Description of Sherpa and Tamang

Lama (1993) in his article *Identifying a tribe of Sub-Himalaya: A Socio-cultural Aspects of Tamang* has highlighted various aspects like caste structure (Barha Tamang and Athara jaat), lifestyle, dresses and ornamentation, food habits, folk dances, musical instruments, etc of Tamang society. He tried to show how Tamangs despite the wave of modernization and assimilation are successful in preserving their social values and norms.

Coomar and Raha (1997) in their article *Family among the Sherpas of West Bengal* highlighted the role of family among the Sherpas. They conducted their survey in two villages namely Upper Echchy and Sherpatar in the Kalimpong Police Station and Garubathan Police Station respectively. In the Sherpa society family is the basic unit in all socio-economic and socio-religious affairs. They found that Sherpas reside in the patrilocal family. They also have worked on the various aspects of the Sherpa family including the size, type, and age group of the head of the Sherpa family, etc.

Raha and Coomar (2001) in their article *Some Aspects of the Sherpa Religion* which has been published in Sarthak Sengupta's book *Tribes of the Eastern Himalayas* highlighted the religious beliefs and practices of the Sherpas. They are Buddhist and belong to the Nyingmapa sect. The study was conducted in Kalimpong and Garubathan police stations of Darjeeling district and the South district of Sikkim. Sherpas perform various rituals, religious festivals, worship, etc. besides meditation and prayer. Sherpas consider Lord Buddha as their supreme god who saves them from sin. The Sherpas of both Darjeeling and Sikkim celebrate several festivals.

Zemach (2005) in her article *Change in Motion; Tradition, Modernity, and a Shifting Tamang Identity* highlights the drastic transformation occurring among the Tamangs. The problem is that the Traditional Tamang village culture is slowly diminishing. Tamangs are leaving villages and migrating to urban areas mostly to Kathmandu. Younger generations are migrating not only for work but also for higher education. Younger women are more vulnerable when they migrate to other areas. Now the traditional village life is lost, Tamangs are uprooted, marginalized, and exploited but women are breaking free from male dominations.

Lama (2011) in his article *A Review of Tamang Marriage System* highlighted different types of marriage, the role of Tamba and Lama, and the property rights of women in Tamang society. He stated that the earlier form of Tamang marriage is now influenced by the Hindu marriage system. Such uniqueness of the Tamang people is at a stage of decline because of globalization and cross-cultural relations.

Ghimire (2014) in his thesis *Socio-cultural and Economic Condition of Tamang, a case study of Angsarang, Nepal* highlighted the socio-cultural and economic conditions of Tamangs. He found that in the case of socio-cultural and economic conditions, there were so many changes. Since Tamang is one of the major ethnic groups of Nepal they have their tradition, social values, and norms. But the new generations of Tamangs are influenced by modern sophisticated lifestyles. He found that the Tamang community in the study area is not receiving proper support from the government to improve their social, cultural, and economic situations. Apart from these, they have preserved some of their values which will contribute to the social solidarity and identity of Tamangs and still, there are certain issues where various kinds of reforms need to be made.

Sherpa (2016) in his article titled *A Study of the Sherpa Tribe of Darjeeling Hills: Changes and Adoptions* did a thorough study of Sherpas residing in Darjeeling Hills based on his personal experience, observation, and by using secondary sources. He studied their physical features, occupations, costumes and dress, housing patterns, ornaments, food habits, linguistic status, and social status of the tribe in general and women in particular. He discussed the various challenges faced by the Sherpa population and how they are adopting new things in their lifestyle.

1.4.4. Literature on Tribal's Relationship with Forest

Childyal (1982) in his article *Tribe and Forest* which has been published in K.S. Singh (Ed.) *Economies of the Tribes and their Transformation* highlighted the symbiotic relationship between the tribals and with forest. Since tribals are the original human settlers in the forests there was no restriction on the use of the forest by them. With the establishment of the Forest Department, some restrictions were imposed on them which ultimately led to the confrontation between the tribals and the forest staff. Tribals need to be rehabilitated by making them active partners in social forestry along with forest-based small and cottage industries.

Sonowal (1997) in his article *Forest Villages in Assam Continued Ghettoisation* highlighted the pathetic condition of forest villagers of Assam in terms of the forced labour system, village administration, education, health care facilities, and welfare measures schemes. Since both the central and state governments provide many developmental activities the forest department always acts as a hurdle. The author pointed out the negligence on the part of the Forest Department in the conversion of the forest village into a revenue village.

Chhetri (2001) in his article *A Social and Cultural Perspective of Women and Community Forestry in Nepal* highlighted the women's participation in forest management activities in the context of social, cultural, and economic realities of Nepali society. He found that women belonging to Bahun–Chettri village have low status compared to their Tamang counterparts in the study area. In Nepali society women's workload is believed to be heavier than their men's. Their status remains low despite various global efforts. He stated that women will raise their status if they receive support and motivation from male members of their community. In the case of the Tamang community male members are very supportive and also support from the male members will help the women in playing a vital role in forest management.

Sonowal (2007) in his article *Demographic Transition of Tribal People in Forest Villages of Assam* highlighted how the term forest village in India came into being and for what purpose. He also tried to show how the tribal people living in the forest villages of Assam have been numerically outnumbered by the other communities. He has worked on the demography of the population residing in the forest villages of Assam.

Rahman (2007) in his thesis *Impact of Forest Economy on the Socio-Economic Development of Tribes- A Case Study of Chhattisgarh State* showed the dependency of tribal population on forests and their changing economy. His work is based on primary data collected through field surveys and different sections of the tribal groups of the state were selected for the study namely Most Primitive Tribal Groups, Forested Cluster Tribal Groups, and Non-Forested Cluster Groups. He focused on how the forest economy has impacted the socioeconomic development of the tribal population.

Mukhopadhyay (2010) in his article *Formation of North Bengal Villages in the Colonial Period* studied the formation of Indian villages and categorized villages of North Bengal into different types. He said that the villages of North Bengal during the colonial period were of diverse types and not of the same character. Apart from the ordinary village settlements, there were other two major types of settlements namely plantation and forest settlements. He also talked about the social structure of North Bengal villages of colonial times as there was a considerable degree of social homogeneity and caste was not a factor of social stratification or differentiation. But this structure changed in the late nineteenth century with the coming of people from other parts of the country.

Paul and Bhumali (2011) in their book *Forest Resources and the Poor* highlighted the impact of forest resource management on the forest poor including women. They conducted their studies in two forest villages located in the Dooars of Jalpaiguri district namely Magurmari and Bichabbhanga on a comparative basis. They tried to show how the forest resources especially Non-Timber Forest Products are helping the poor derive the benefit from the forest.

Sarma (2012) in her thesis titled *Issues of Conservation and Livelihood among the forest villagers in the Nameri Area of Assam* studied the complex dynamics of the man-forest relationship in terms of the conflict between the conservation initiatives of the state and the livelihood imperatives of the forest-dwelling communities in Assam. Her study is based on data collected from two forest villages in Assam located in Nameri National Park. She also highlighted the various reasons that led to the formation of the forest villages in the area during the colonial period.

Shangpliang (2013) in her book *Socio-economic Dimensions of Forest among the Khasis* highlighted the role of forest in Khasi livelihood and the emerging transition that has taken place in the Khasi socio-economic scenario concerning the forest. Her work is based on the comparative study of the socio-economic dynamics of the two sample villages i.e., Lawbyrwa and Madan Ing Syiem. She throws light on how various National Forest Policies and forest legislation passed by the Government of India have an impact on those people whose livelihood depends on the forest.

Saikia (2012) in her M. Phil Thesis *A Sociological Study of the Forest Villages in Assam* has shown the socio-economic conditions of the communities residing in the forest villages of Assam and the role played by the Forest Department and villagers in maintaining the forest in the areas. Her work is based on the field survey conducted in two forest villages namely Gamani village and Chattai village of Assam under Balipara Reserved Forest. She highlighted the major issues as to how the tribals inhabiting the forest for centuries have been outnumbered by other communities.

Mukherjee (2013) in her article *Eco-feminism: Role of Women in Environmental Governance and Management* has pointed out the role of women in the conservation and management of sustainable eco-system and since time immemorial women have traditionally been involved in protecting and conserving their natural resources. Since men dominate women and also the roles of men and women in environmental governance are distinguishable. She also stated that the objectives of economic policies and planning can never be achieved without uplifting society and especially women to the environment. She focuses on women's participation as women are the untapped resources and if utilized properly can build a sustainable future for the coming generation.

Saha and Sengupta (2014) in their article *Symbiotic Relationship between Forest and Tribes: A Case Study of Santhal Tribe of Jaypur forest, Bankura district, West Bengal, India* try to show the symbiotic relationship between the Santhal tribe with Jaypur forest in Bankura district, and illustrate how their livelihood, cultural practices, revolve around the forest. They have selected the study area depending on their economic backwardness and a majority of the tribal population is dependent on the forest resources. They also highlighted how the traditional knowledge of the Santhal tribes plays an important role in the preservation of the forest.

Behera (2015) in his article *An Analysis of Symbiotic Relationship between Forest Dwellers and Ecological Stability (In Special Reference to Jharkhand State)* shows the relationship between the forest and the Adivasis residing in the Jharkhand State. He tries to reflect upon the various challenges faced by the forest dwellers and the growing alienation of tribals from their environment has affected the age-old practice of the forest dwellers.

Aditya (2016) in his article *Role of Women in Environmental Conservation* highlighted the role of women in the conservation of the environment. He has provided various examples like the Chipko Movement, and the Green Belt Movement to show how women are concerned about the environment. He focuses on how women have participated in various environmental protection and natural resource management programmes to ensure sustainable use of environmental resources. This article throws general insight into how women are concerned about the environment and his work is entirely based on secondary sources.

Gurung and Koirala (2019) in their article *Environment Conservation of Nepali Women: In Socio-Cultural Standpoint* examine the role of Nepali women in environment conservation highlighting their involvement beyond traditional gender roles. Women play an important role in natural resource management, agricultural activities, and biodiversity preservation by using their traditional knowledge. This article provides insight into Nepali women's socio-cultural knowledge and practices and also their religious beliefs in terms of environment conservation.

1.5. Research Gap

There are many research works that deal with the role and status of tribal women. However, it is evident from the above review of literature that there are some works on Sherpas and Tamangs but no particular research work has been done relating to Sherpa and Tamang women of forest villages and their relationship with the environment. The Sherpa and Tamang tribes are not completely unknown. Various anthropologists and sociologists have made a thorough study of this particular tribe on multiple issues. Few articles have been published on these tribes in different magazines, newspapers, journals, etc. but the information available is ad-hoc and inadequate while existing literature on them is neither systematic nor sufficient. On the other hand, no research work on the comparative study between the Sherpa and Tamang women of

forest villages in Darjeeling hills has been conducted till now. So, the proposed research work is aimed to fill that vacuum by doing an empirical and comparative study on these tribal women.

Apart from the above-mentioned shortcomings, this study being the first of its kind may not cover all the dimensions of the communities being studied however the issues discussed in this study may help in enhancing further research in this field of investigation.

1.6. Research Objectives

- 1) To study the historical background of Sherpa and Tamang communities in Darjeeling Hills.
- 2) To explore the reasons behind their migration to forest villages of Darjeeling Hills.
- 3) To know the socio-economic conditions of these ethnic communities in general and women in particular in forest villages of Darjeeling hills.
- 4) To compare the role and status played by the Sherpa and Tamang women for their family and community in the forest villages of Darjeeling hills.
- 5) To study the relationship of Sherpa and Tamang women with the forest environment/ecology.
- 6) To highlight the role of various governmental and non-governmental agencies in improving the status of women in forest villages.

1.7. Research Questions

- 1) What are the different roles played by the Sherpa and Tamang women in their respective societies?
- 2) What are the reasons that led to the migration of these tribal communities particularly the Sherpas from higher altitudinal places to forest villages of Darjeeling hills?
- 3) What are the major social and economic activities of these tribal communities particularly tribal women in the selected forest villages?
- 4) Do these women have decision-making power in the family?
- 5) What are the roles played by these tribal women for the protection of the forest environment?
- 6) What are the roles played by the forest department to protect the tribal interest in forests?

- 7) What are the various governmental and non-governmental welfare measures implemented to improve the status of women?

1.8. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Women are biologically different from men. Though there is a disagreement about the exact nature and consequences of this difference - some sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists argue that it is sufficient to explain the basic sexual division of labour in all societies. The study of women by various anthropologists and sociologists has been made from various perspectives.

1.8.1. Structural Functionalism

Structural Functionalism is a specific version of functionalism and gives attention to how social structures and institutions work together to maintain stability and promote solidarity and order in society. Radcliffe-Brown said that social structures are made up of relationships between people and these relationships are controlled by cultural norms and values.² Functionalists view society as a system which is a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole. The central unit of analysis is society and its various parts are understood primarily in terms of their relationship to the whole (Haralambos, 1980:521-523). Functionalism often makes a comparison between society and the human body. The understanding of any part of society requires an analysis of its relationship to other parts and mostly its contribution to the maintenance of society. Jonathan H. Turner and Maryanski (1988) define functionalism as an approach that is based on seeing society as analogous to a biological organism and attempts to explain particular social structures in terms of the needs of society as a whole (Ritzer, 2011:107).

The functionalists believe that women should be studied in terms of their roles, functions, and attributes and they should be placed in a social category. The functionalists try to analyze the interrelations between women's status and the nature of the social system and view women's activities in the home as essentially cultural. The present study deals with the role and status of Sherpa and Tamang women and how their specific roles contribute to the functioning of their respective societies as well as the greater society of the forest villages of Darjeeling Hills.

²<https://www.tutorialspoint.com> accessed on 23rd Sep.2023

1.8.2. Feminist Perspective

The feminist approach is mostly concerned with female subjugation and liberation. According to Maggie Humm, the primary goal of the feminist perspective is to understand women's oppression in terms of race, gender, class, and sexual preference and how to change it. Feminists consider that men and women should be equal politically, economically, and socially. The primary concern of feminists is to end patriarchal domination and insist on the eradication of exploitation and oppression in the family context and all other intimate relationships. According to Barbara Berg „feminism gives the freedom to decide her destiny, freedom from society's oppressive restrictions, and freedom from sex-determined roles. It is more concerned with asserting equal rights for both sexes. Webster's Dictionary defines Feminism as the principle that women should have political rights equal to those of men (Raina, 2017: 3372).

According to Simone De Beauvoir, feminity is not inherent but a social construct developed through the process of socialization. Women are not born but made into women through the process of socialization which is predominately male-centric and that has reduced women to the second sex and the inferior and subordinate state (Raina, 2017:3374). The present research study deals with Sherpa and Tamang women so it is necessary to study their issues through feminist perspectives and try to find out the various challenges and inequalities they face in their lives in the forest villages of Darjeeling Hills.

1.8.3. Women in Development (WID)

Women in Development have the primary motive to improve the status of women by giving attention to their roles and integrating them into the economy. The essence is also to enhance the productive roles and capacity of women. WID refused to accept the restrictive and narrow view of women's role (as mothers and wives) surrounding most of the development policies about women. Rather than referring to women as mere needy beneficiaries. The origin of the women's subordination was linked to their exclusion from the marketplace. If women are allowed to be actively involved in the productive sphere, they will no doubt contribute meaningfully to the development. They will surely make positive development contributions and advance their status to the status of men. No longer, therefore, should women be considered inactive recipients of welfare-oriented programmes but rather active participants and contributors to the enhancement of society economically (Olalekan et.al, 2019:6). The tribal women residing in the forest villages

of Darjeeling Hills are very hard-working so it is very important to integrate them into the economy and should focus on their productive roles as women contribute in the family and society. The WID approach will be helpful to them to enhance their status and understand their roles.

1.8.4. Gender and Development (GAD)

Gender and Development is emerging as a progressive approach to development from women's perspectives and experiences. The GAD approach was developed in the late 1980s as a way of acknowledging the contribution women make to society and targeting women's empowerment at all levels. The GAD approach explores the potential of development initiatives for transforming social and gender relationships and giving more power to women. The GAD approach should help developmental programs and projects to meet women's practical needs and respond to their strategic interests. Practical needs are connected to women's living conditions and strategic interest implies long-term interest which helps in improving women's status. It considers women to be the agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries of development assistance.³ Both Sherpa and Tamang women in the study area are very much involved in development programs provided by the Forest Department and other agencies. It helps in improving the overall condition of these women and they are to be included in decision-making as they contribute equally along with male members.

1.8.5. Eco-feminism

The Oxford Dictionary defines Eco-feminism as “a philosophical and political theory and movement which combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male domination of society” (Mukherjee, 2013:2). In 1974, the term eco-feminism was coined by Francois d Eaubonne. Eco-feminism is a theory based on the basic principle that patriarchal ways are harmful to women, children, and other living things. Eco-feminism emerges from the idea that a woman's ethics are closer to nature and have a nurturing and caring attitude towards Mother Earth whereas men have a hierarchical relationship with nature in which their actions try to dominate it. Eco-feminism suggests that an end to the oppression of women is bound up with ecological values and that women should be centrally concerned with ending the

³Project on Gender and Development by Quebec Committee on Women and Development, 2004:22-23.

exploitation of the ecosystem. Vandana Shiva the leading advocate of ecofeminism in India argued that women through their daily interactions have maintained a special relationship with the environment but this relationship has been ignored. She says that women in subsistence economies who produce "wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes." (Beena, 2016:152). In the study area, women have a special relationship with the forest and spend the maximum amount of time in the forest environment. They collect different forest products such as roots, tubers, fruits, vegetables, medicinal plants, etc. Women are active agents of the environment and play an important role in the protection of the environment. So, this approach will guide the present study.

1.8.6. Women, Environment, and Development (WED)

The WED's position accepts the socially constructed nature of women's role in resource use but assumes that women in their current roles are more informed and interested in environmental issues and are therefore a natural constituency for conservation interventions. Thus, WED provides ideological support for environmental policies that support the given division of labour.

Though WED and eco-feminism both claim women have a special and close connection with nature, so, the two approaches have strong similarities. Thus, the theoretical viewpoint of WED and eco-feminism recognizes a special relationship between women and the environment or women's „closeness“ to nature based on the material role of women, and the natural and spiritual content of women's „closeness“ with nature (Sarker and Das, 2002:4408). So, this approach can check how much the Sherpa and Tamang women in the forest villages of Darjeeling Hills are interested in the environmental issues and adopt various means to protect the forest village environment.

The above-discussed approaches are found suitable to understand and carry out the present research work. As discussed, the functionalists believe that society is held together by social consensus in which members of the society agree upon and work together to achieve what is best for society as a whole. In general, feminism is the ideology of women's liberation and it could be described partly as an ongoing struggle over how to define the word „woman.“ Its primary concern is to end patriarchal domination and other forms of oppression.

1.8.7. Conceptual Framework

Clarifications of some concepts which have been used in this study are done as follows:

1.8.7. Status

It is believed that the American anthropologist Ralph Linton was one of the pioneers in using the concept of Status and Role in 1936 in his book *Study of Man*. The term “status” signifies the total of the various culturally ascribed roles one has to play and the rights and duties inherent in a social position. By „status“ Linton (1936) means a position in a social system occupied by designated individuals and by the role of the behavioural enacting of the patterned expectations attributed to that position. The term „status“ includes not only personal and proprietary rights but also duties, liabilities, and disabilities (Bal, 2015:4). According to the United Nations (1995), “the autonomy, empowerment of women and improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself. Improving the status of women also enhances the decision-making capacity at all levels and spheres of life (ibid., p.7). Linton classified status into two types - ascribed and achieved. Ascribed status is obtained without any individual’s inherent abilities. It is assigned during birth or due to one’s family position in society. Gender and caste are examples of ascribed status. Whereas achieved status is opposite to ascribed status. It is obtained through one’s efforts and is acquired during one’s lifetime. Example of such status includes teacher, the army, students, the police, doctors, etc.

The status of women can be measured in terms of the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by them. The contribution of women in decision-making at par with men, participation in community life, free expression of their views, and financial independence make a woman capable of asserting her voice in the community as well as in the family.

1.8.8. Role

Rodney Stark (2007) defines a role as a set of connected behaviours, rights, obligations, beliefs, and norms as conceptualized by people in a social situation. The role may be achieved or ascribed- An achieved role is a position that a person assumes voluntarily which reflects personal skills, abilities, and efforts whereas an ascribed role is a position assigned to individuals or groups without regard for merit but because of certain traits beyond their control and is usually forced upon a people/person. A role is something that an individual plays in the status they occupy. Turner, Ralph H (2006) describes a role as a cluster of behaviour and attitudes and

argues that roles help in organizing social behaviour both at an individual and collective level. Giddens and Sutton (2014) identify roles as socially defined expectations that a person in a given status follows.⁴

Status and role are two sides of a single coin and both are closely related and one cannot be alienated from the other. Both status and role are basic building blocks of social structure or social system. According to Young and Mack, “A role is the function of a status”. A person in a social set-up is bound to play multiple roles and according to his role, he gets status.⁵

1.8.9. Forest Village

The origin of Forest Village begins from the days of British rule. The creation of forest villages was a part of forest management in the early part of the 20th century. Forest village does not mean a village located in the forest but means such village or colony of colliers or labourers established by the Forest Department for maintenance of an assured supply of labour required in forest works done departmentally (Sonowal, 1997:2441). The report of the committee of the Forestry Programme for Alleviation of Poverty, GOI, 1984, illustrates that there are five thousand forest villages where two lakh tribal families reside who are still in the category of inaccessible from the planning process (Das, 2020:21). Earlier the forest labourers were treated as serfs by the British government as they were forced to provide free service for forest work for several days as allocated by them. Later the situation changed slightly as the migrant labourers were provided homesteads and hectares of land in place of services rendered by them to the Forest Department. These settlements came to be known as forest villages. The definition of forestland, forest rights, forest-dwelling Schedule Tribes, and Forest villages have been included in Section 2(f) of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (IISWBM, 2022:32). According to Section 2(f) of the said act-Forest villages are those settlements which have been established inside the forests by the forest department of any State Government for forestry operations or which were converted into forest villages through the forest reservation process and include forest settlement villages, fixed demand holdings, all types of taungya settlements, by whatever name called, for such villages

⁴<http://egyankosh.ac.in:133>, accessed on 12th February 2019

⁵<https://www.sociologylens.in> accessed on 18th September, 2023

and includes lands for cultivation and other uses permitted by the Government (FRA. 2006,2014:2).

1.8.10. Revenue Village

A Revenue Village is a small administrative region having a definite surveyed boundary and comprises several settlements/hamlets.

1.8.11. Gender

According to Ann Oakley, Sex means the biological division into male and female whereas gender to the parallel and socially unequal division into femininity and masculinity (Marshall, 2004:250). Gender is socially constructed roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women in a given culture and the societal structure that supports them (Limbu, 2019:243). Gender is not something we are born with and something we have but something we do and something we execute.

1.8.12. Tribal Economy

The economy is an important element of community life and plays an important role in the formation of the cultural and social structure of society. The tribal economy is closely connected with the forest and obtains various requirements from the forest with the help of most simple implements. Sophisticated technological aid is absent. The tribal economy mostly relies on the collection of minor forest produce, hunting, fishing, and agriculture. Tribal people considered forest as a resource not merely in terms of accomplishment of basic needs but also regarding livelihood.

1.8.13. Quality of Life

Quality of life is a concept that aims to capture the well-being, whether of a population or individual, regarding both positive and negative elements within the entirety of their existence at a specific point in time. Quality of life includes education status, social status, wealth, work environment, personal health, freedom, autonomy in decision making and physical surroundings.⁶

⁶<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov> accessed on 11th September 2023

1.9. Methodology

Research methodology is the combination of methods, techniques, and tools employed in one's study. In this section, the researcher has highlighted the methodological part of this research, and the methods that the researcher has used in carrying out this particular research operation. The main objective of this work is to study the „role“ and „status“ of Sherpa and Tamang women, residing in the forest villages of Darjeeling hills. The study has followed both synchronic and diachronic types of comparative research methods. Empirical data have been collected by undertaking intensive fieldwork from different forest villages located in Darjeeling Hills. The present study is exploratory and provides detailed information based on empirical studies. A stratified random sampling technique has been used to select samples (respondents) to collect the needed data from them. Both primary and secondary sources as well as qualitative and quantitative data have been utilized for this study. Thus, the study is both qualitative as well as quantitative.

1.9.1. Area of Research Study

Darjeeling Hills (consists of both Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts) is located in the northern part of the State of West Bengal and is mostly run by a semi-autonomous administrative body i.e., Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). Darjeeling Hills covers an area of 3149 sq. km (Project by IISWBM, 2022: 38). The present study has been carried out in the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling Hills namely Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong subdivisions of Darjeeling district, and Kalimpong subdivision (presently converted into district). It is also to be noted that during the research period, Kalimpong was a subdivision under the Darjeeling district however, at present Kalimpong subdivision has been bifurcated from the Darjeeling district and made a new district in 2017. Many administrative setups have been changed for the convenience of the common people. At present, there are 220 forest villages in North Bengal (The Telegraph, Calcutta, India, Aug. 24, 2011). The forest villages in Darjeeling Hills are demanding the conversion into Revenue Villages. The State government has issued a statement converting 79 forest villages of the Darjeeling district into revenue villages.⁷ If this notification is implemented in Darjeeling Hills the age-old demand for land rights gets fulfilled. 86 Forest villages have been

⁷<https://www.telegraphindia.com>, published 11.11.21 accessed on 5th January 22

converted into Revenue Villages in West Bengal.⁸ In 2014, the forest villages in Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri districts were converted into revenue villages. The forest villages in West Bengal are mostly concentrated in the three districts of North Bengal namely Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri (including Alipurduar district), and Cooch Behar. The forest villages under the present study were selected purposefully depending on the availability of the Sherpa and Tamang women populations. The below-mentioned Table 1.1 demonstrates the number of forest villages situated in Darjeeling Hills. It is to be noted that the table below is from the Annual Administration Report published in 2012, therefore there may be variation in the present figure.

Table 1.1: Number of Forest Villages in Darjeeling Hills (Block wise)

	Sub-Divisions and Blocks	Number of Forest Villages
(A)	Darjeeling sub-division	
	Bijanbari Block	17
	Sukhiapokhari Block	27
	Rangli-Rangliot Block	10
	Total	54
(B)	Kurseong sub-division	
	Kurseong Block	17
	Mirik Block	4
	Total	21
(C)	Kalimpong sub-division	
	Kalimpong I Block	23
	Kalimpong II Block	13
	Gorubathan Block	23
	Total	59
	Grand Total (A+B+C): (4 Forest Villages increased in Garubathan Block)	134

Source: Annual Administration Report, 31.01.2012

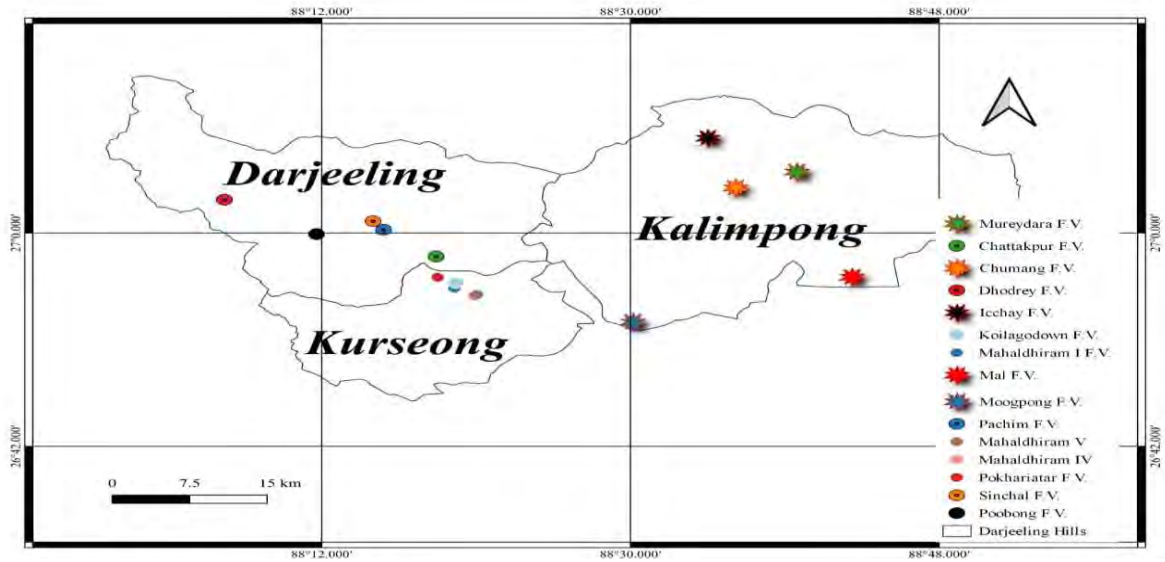
Table 1.2: Names of Forest Villages Selected for the Present Study

Darjeeling subdivision	Kurseong subdivision	Kalimpong subdivision
Poobong Forest Village	Koilagodown Forest Village	Icchey Forest Village
Senchal Forest Village	Pokhritar Forest Village	Chumang Forest Village
Dhodrey Forest Village	Mahaldhiram I Forest Village	Mal 8 Forest Village
Chattakpur Forest Village	Mahaldhiram IV Forest Village	Mongpong Forest Village
Paschim Forest Village	Mahaldhiram V Forest Village	Manedarah Forest Village

Source: Field Survey

⁸<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=1514479> accessed on 6th January 22

Figure 1: Map showing the Forest Villages selected for the Study



Source: DIVA-GIS and QGIS 3.18

Note: Kalimpong was created into a separate district, with effect from 14th February 2017.

Fifteen forest villages have been selected from three subdivisions and are located in different geographical settings. The selected forest village from three subdivisions is a part of the Eastern Himalayan region bearing its uniqueness. The forest villages selected from Darjeeling and Kurseong are located in the hilly area whereas the forest villages which the researcher has selected from the Kalimpong subdivision (now converted into Kalimpong District) are situated in the Himalayan foothills. Most of the parts of Mongpong and Mal 8 forest villages are located in the foothills. The above map shows the location of forest villages in each sub-division. The forest villages chosen from the Kurseong subdivision are of clustered type. Whereas forest villages selected from the Kalimpong subdivision are of scattered type located in different settings. All the forest villages of the Kurseong sub-division which is opted for the present study come under Bagora Range. The forest villages of the Kalimpong sub-division fall under different ranges like Lava, Lolegaon, Chel, Neora, and Pankasari. The forest villages of Darjeeling Sub-division cover Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary, Ghoom Khasmal and Lodoma range. Forest villages of the Kalimpong subdivision experience much warmer temperatures than the forest villages of the Kurseong and Darjeeling subdivisions. Because of that, there is a variation in terms of agricultural activities. Mostly in hilly areas similar kinds of vegetation are done. Among all these forest villages, Chattakpur and Paschim forest villages come under the Eco-Development Committee (EDC) whereas the rest are under the Forest Protection Committee (FPC). The main

function of EDC is the protection of wildlife and other biodiversity and to carry out eco-development activities in the villages. The function of FPC includes the prevention of fire and thefts of forest produce, protection against grazing, and the development of the forest.

1.9.2. Selection of Respondents

The major portion of the population inhabiting these forest villages of Darjeeling Hills belongs to tribal communities followed by some non-tribal communities. Tribal communities such as Sherpas, Tamangs, Lepchas, and Bhutias are found in the study area. However, the tribal communities selected for the study are in larger proportion than the other tribal communities. Sherpa and Tamang women residing in different forest villages in the study area were selected as respondents for this study. The respondents were selected appropriately to fulfill the objectives of this study. Mostly women in households in the age group between 20-60 years and above were selected and interviewed. Sherpa and Tamang populations are scattered all over these three sub-divisions of Darjeeling Hills namely Kurseong, Kalimpong and Darjeeling. These social groups have been living there for many years and have developed a strong connection with the forest environment. It is estimated that nearly 1.5 lakh people reside in forest villages of Darjeeling Hills. A stratified random sampling technique has been used to select respondents from the area under study. While selecting the samples, at first the women of the area were stratified primarily based on their tribal category and then they were randomly selected for the study. 300 respondents, 150 each from Tamang and Sherpa tribal groups were selected as samples for interview. From each subdivision, 100 respondents including both Sherpa and Tamang women in the same proportions were selected. Some knowledgeable senior persons along with forest officials, panchayat officials, and some intermittent helpers were approached to collect information regarding the establishment of forest villages and forest village-related issues in Darjeeling Hills.

Table 1.3: Selection of Respondents from Different Forest Villages

Kurseong Subdivision	Darjeeling Subdivision	Kalimpong Subdivision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Koilagodown-Tamang ● MahaldiramI- Tamang ● MahaldiramIV - Sherpa/Tamang ● Pokhritar - Sherpa/Tamang ● MahaldiramV–Sherpa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Senchel– Tamang ● Paschim Forest Village-Sherpa ● Chattakpur- Sherpa ● Poobong-Tamang ● Dhodrey–Sherpa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Icchey- Sherpa ● Chumang-Sherpa ● Manedarah- Sherpa ● Mongpong -Tamang ● Mal 8- Tamang

Source: Field Survey

Kurseong Subdivision: 100 (50Sherpa +50Tamang)

Kalimpong Subdivision: 100 (60Sherpa +40Tamang)

Darjeeling Subdivision: 100 (40Sherpa +60Tamang)

1.9.3. Collection of Data

Before conducting the fieldwork, a pilot survey was undertaken in the study area for rapport building among the tribal respondents and governmental and non-governmental bodies. This pilot survey apart from developing communication with the stakeholders was also undertaken to familiarize them with the forest villages, their location, and their composition. During the pilot survey, the interview schedule was tested in an attempt to check its suitability to generate information on the history, society, economy, culture, and so forth of the research universe. Then, the actual field survey was carried out to investigate a comparative analysis of the Sherpa and Tamang women about their role and status inhabiting the forest areas of Darjeeling hills. The data were collected with the help of an interview schedule. To understand the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental background of the concerned communities both primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data were collected from the respondents through face-to-face situations/interactions by using the above-mentioned semi-structured interview schedule. Secondary data were gathered from secondary sources such as published and unpublished books, journals, articles, census reports, newspapers, and also from internet sources. Secondary data were also collected from reports and information provided by the forest departments, block offices, village panchayats, and so forth.

The interview schedule comprises both open-ended and close-ended questions for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Already mentioned above a pilot survey was conducted with a tentative interview schedule among five respondents to check the appropriateness of the

interview schedule and some corresponding minor changes were made to collect appropriate data to fulfill the objectives of the present study.

1.9.4. Data Processing and Analysis

The data collected through field surveys were processed by using qualitative and quantitative techniques. The quantitative data were analyzed using various statistical tools i.e., averages, percentages, etc., and presented through tables, charts, graphs, and diagrams. Many tables are prepared where comparisons are made between the Sherpa and Tamang women by analyzing the related data. The qualitative data collected through oral history, observation, and Focus Group Discussion (FDG) has been presented through case studies. For computation and calculation of data, M.S. Word and Excel have been used. Photographs, voice recordings, and videos captured during the field survey have also been used in data analysis.

1.10. Chapterisation of the Study

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter deals with the introduction, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, literature review, theoretical and conceptual framework, research methodology, etc. This chapter focuses on the definition of the tribe with special reference to the tribes residing in the forest areas. Here a general discussion of the status and role of women has been made.

Chapter 2: Linkages between Environment, Forest and Tribes

The second chapter deals with the tribal relationship with the forest and their distribution in India. Special attention has been given to the forest and tribal economy, their socio-cultural practices, and tribal women's relationship with the forest environment.

Chapter 3: Historical Background of Sherpa and Tamang Women Relating to Their Present Role and Status

The third chapter throws light on the historical background of the Sherpa and Tamang ethnic groups. Their occupation and the recent changes have been discussed. The role and status of Sherpa and Tamang women in different sectors have been thoroughly discussed.

Chapter 4: Forest Policies and Tribals in India

The fourth chapter highlights the colonial and post-colonial forest policies, the formation of forest villages, and the establishment of a forest department. The Forest Rights Act 2006 is explained in detail as forest villagers in Darjeeling Hills are fighting for the above rights.

Chapter 5: Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

The fifth chapter is based on empirical studies of the Sherpa and Tamang women on their socio-economic Status. The data collected from 300 Sherpa and Tamang women have been analyzed. Tables and graphical representations of different criteria have been presented in this chapter.

Chapter 6: Environmental Status and Role of Sherpa and Tamang Women in the Forest Village

The sixth chapter deals with the Sherpa and Tamang women's relationship with the forest and the different roles played by them in terms of environmental conservation. Also, the role of different governmental and non-governmental agencies has been highlighted. This chapter is also based on the data collected from the field.

Chapter 7: Summary, Major Findings and Recommendations

The last chapter is based on the summary of the major findings, discussion, and concluding remarks for the study. Some recommendations are provided based on research findings to uplift the status of tribal women and also the condition of the forest villages in the Darjeeling hills

1.11. Significance of the Study

The study attempts to provide detailed information about the selected forest villages of Darjeeling Hills as not many systematic research studies on this topic have been done so far. Going through the different literatures it is found that no research studies have been conducted in the forest villages of Darjeeling hills and their relationship with the tribal women. Various works on forest villages have been published so far but the work published is from different perspectives. So, the present study would be beneficial for the students, academicians, and policymakers to carry out further social investigation in this field. It will further enhance their work as the present study will provide information on various issues related to the forest villages.

1.12. Ethical Considerations for the Present Study

During the survey, the researcher maintained various ethical considerations so that it would not hurt the sentiments of any respondents or the villagers engaged with the research work. The researcher was very much conscious of the deceptive information and any kind of business was ignored while conducting the fieldwork. Especially dealing with women one has to be very polite and soft-spoken. While collecting the data some names were kept anonymous as the information provided by them was very secretive. Though the present research work is not polemic but also some confidentiality was also maintained.

1.13. Limitations of the Study

The present study had certain limitations in investigating the selected forest villages of Darjeeling Hills. The foremost limitation of the study is that the researcher failed to cover entire forest villages situated in Darjeeling hills as it was not possible due to constraints of time and financial crunches. Before conducting the survey, the researcher was not aware of the geographical proximity of the forest villages. During the survey researcher faced tremendous problems as the study area was located in an off-beat location and there was a problem of transport and communication. The researcher stayed overnight as there was no other alternative to return. Being a female researcher is also one of the major challenges in terms of safety concerns. As the survey was conducted in the forest area there was a fear of wild animals too.

The researcher visited several times to ensure the availability of the respondents and the forest officials in the study area and finally collected information from them. The major problem was gaining conviction from the respondents as they were not providing information because they were very suspicious and thought that the researcher was from some government agency. Due to their shy nature and various social obligations, it was very difficult to convince women respondents. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2019 created lots of havoc in everyone's life. To curtail the spread of the virus, social distancing was imposed. As such the traditional research procedure which involved the direct face-to-face communication between the scholar and guide was also affected to a large extent. During that period, the researcher in the present study was not able to carry out their remaining field survey and was not able to access the library either. This acted as one of the major hurdles to the completion of research work in the stipulated time.

1.14. Sum Up

This chapter provides a brief background of the tribals, their concentration, economic activities, and the concept of forest tribes. Apart from the above-mentioned issues, this chapter focuses on various concepts like the role and status of tribal women. Here, the objectives and research questions of the present study have been discussed. The literature review has been done systematically. The study area and methodology have been discussed in detail and the reason for selecting a particular study area has been given.

References:

- Bisht, N.S. and Bankoti, T.S. (2004). *Encyclopaedic Ethnography of the Himalayan Tribes*, Global Vision Publishing House, Delhi (India).
- Bose, N.K. (1977). *Tribal Life in India*, National Book Thrust. New Delhi.
- Chaudhary, S.N. (2015). *Tribal Women; Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. Rawat Publications, Jaipur.
- Dixit, Nishi K. (2006). *Tribes and Tribals; Struggle for survival*. Vista Int. Publishing House. Delhi (India).
- Haralambos&Heald. (1980). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.
- Joshi, Vidyut. (1998). *Tribal situation in India; Issues in Development*. Rawat Publications. Jaipur.
- Kothari, C.R. (2004). *Research Methodology; Methods and Techniques (second revised edition)*. New Age International (P) Limited, Publishers. New Delhi.
- Mahanta, K.C. (1997). *People of the Himalayas; Ecology, Culture, Development and Change*. Kamla –Raj Enterprises. Delhi (India).
- Marshall, Gordon. (2004). *Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.
- Nazer, M. (2012). *Status of Tribals*. Discovery Publishing House Pvt.Ltd. New Delhi.
- O'Malley L.S.S. (1907). *Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling*. LOGOS Press. New Delhi.
- Pande, P.N. (1996). *Drudgery of the Hill Women*. Indus Publishing Company. New Delhi.
- Paul, Suma.&Bhualmal, Anil. (2011). *Forest Resources and the Poor*. Abhijeet Publications. Delhi.
- Peet, Richard&Hartwick Elaine. (2010). *Theories of Development: Contentions, Arguments, Alternatives*. Rawat Publications. Jaipur.
- Pfeffer, Georg. &Behera Kumar Deepak. (1997). *Contemporary Society, Tribal Studies*. Concept Publishing Company. New Delhi.
- Rao, V.M. (2003). *Tribal women of Arunachal Pradesh*. Mittal Publication. New Delhi.
- Rao, V.M. (2006). *Tribal women in India*. ABD Publishers. Jaipur. India.
- Ritzer, George. (2011). *Sociological Theory*. McGraw Hill. New York.
- Sarkar, Anjashi. (2017). *The Sherpas Across the Eastern Himalayas (Testing of Space and Time, c.1870s-2000)*. Abhijeet Publications. New Delhi.

- Sengupta, Sarthak. (2001). *Tribes of the Eastern Himalayas*. Mittal Publications. New Delhi.
- Shangpliang, Rekha M. (2013). *Socio-Economic Dimensions of Forest among the Khasis*. Concept Publishing Company Pvt. LTD., New Delhi.
- Singh, K.S. (1982). *Economies of the Tribes and their Transformation*. Concept Publishing Company. New Delhi.
- Singh, K.S. (1994). *The Scheduled Tribes*. Oxford University Press. Calcutta.
- Srivastava, Archala. (2010). *Socio-economic status of women and Gender Disparity*. Serials Publications. New Delhi (India).
- Subba, T.B. (1989). *Dynamics of a Hill Society*. Mittal Publications. Delhi (India).
- Thakur, Devendra&Thakur, D.N. (2009). *Tribal women*. Deep and Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- Vidyarthi, L.P.& Rai Kumar Binay. (1976). *The Tribal Culture of India*. Concept Publishing Company. New Delhi.
- Waddell, L.A. (1899). *Among the Himalayas*. Westminster. Archibald Constable &Company.

Journals

- Behera, Bijayananda. (2015). An Analysis of Symbiotic Relationship between Forest Dwellers and Ecological Stability (In Special Reference to Jharkhand State). *Journal of International Academic Research for Multidisciplinary*.Vol.3. Issue 5.
- Batricevic & Paunovic. (2019). Ecofeminism and Environmental Security. *Law and Politics*. Vol.17, pp. 125-136.
- Bhattacharya, Bela. (2006-07). Tribal Demography of West Bengal in 2001: Some Observation. *Journal of the Department of Anthropology*. University of Calcutta. Vol. 10 and 11.pp.16
- Bhattacharyya, Gayatri. (2014). The predicament of the Tamang in search of identity. *Himalayan Journal of Development and Democracy*. Vol.9, No.1
- Bhutia, Sherap. (2011). A Future Growth of Tribal Population: A Case Study of Darjeeling Himalaya. *Tribal World*, Orion Press International. Vol: 1 No: 1.
- Chhetri, Gyanu. (2002). A Social and Cultural Perspective of Women and Community Forestry in Nepal. *Contribution to Nepalese Studies*.Vol.28, No.1.
- Chhetri, Prasad Durga. (2013). Tribal Population and Development Policies in the Himalayan state of Sikkim: A Critical Analysis. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*. Volume 2 Issue 5.pp.9
- Digal, Pratap. (2016). De-Constructing the term “Tribe/Tribal” in India: A Post-Colonial Reading. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*.Vol.1 (1).
- Ezhilarasu, B. (2014). Impact of Globalization on Tribals in India. *Indian Journal of Applied Research*. Vol.4, Issue 10.pp.176
- G, Beena. (2016). Eco-Feminism: A Significant World-View towards Empowering Women and Environment. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*. Vol. IV Issue VII
- Giri & Murugesan. (2019). A Study of Forest Resources for Sustainable Rural Development in Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal. *Think India Journal*. Vol-22- Issue-35.pp.1052

- Gurung, Gem Prasad. & Koirala, Kamal Prasad. (2019). Environment Conservation of Nepali Women: In Socio-Cultural Standpoint. *International Education & Research Journal. Volume. 5. Issue. 3*
- Lama, Sudash. (2011). A Review of Tamang Marriage System. *Karatoya, N.B.U, Journal of History, Vol.4.*
- Lama, Sudash. (2012). Identifying a Tribe of Sub-Himalaya: A Socio-cultural aspect of Tamang. *Karatoya, N.B.U Journal of History, Vol.5.*
- Mukherjee, Ranjeeta. (2013). Eco-feminism: Role of Women in Environmental Governance and Management. *Galgotias Journal of Legal Studies. Vol. 1 No. 2.*
- Mukhopadhyay, Rajatubhra. (2010). Formation of North Bengal Villages in the Colonial Period. *The Eastern Anthropologist. Vol.63. No.3-4.pp.*
- Olalekan, et al. (2019). Women's Role in Environmental Conservation and Development in Nigeria. *Ecology & Conservation Science. Vol.1. Issue 2.*
- Purkayastha, Nabarun. (2016). Concept of Indian Tribes: An Overview. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences. Vol.5. No.2.pp.4*
- Raina, Ahmad Javeed. (2017). Feminism: An Overview. *International Journal of Research, Volume 04 Issue 13 October. pp. 3372-3374*
- Roy, et al. (2013). Exploring Perceptions of Mangrove Forest “Sundarbans” goes Women about Environmental security. *The Macro Theme Review. Vol.2 Issue 1.*
- S.K, Aditya. (2016). Role of Women in Environmental Conservation. *International Journal of Political Science and Development. Vol.4 (4)*
- Saha, Manika and Sengupta, Susmita. (2014). Symbiotic Relationship between Forest and Tribes: A Case Study of Santhal Tribe of Jaypur forest, Bankura district, West Bengal, India. *Transactions: Institute of Indian Geographers. Dept. of Geography. University of Pune. Vol. 36, No.2.*
- Sarker, Debnarayan and Das, Nimai. (2002). Women’s Participation in Forestry: Some Theoretical Issues. *Economic and Political Weekly. Vol.37, No.43.*
- Sengupta, Sushmita and Saha, Manika. (2012). Tribal Women and Forest Resources: A Micro-level Study of Jaypur Forest, Bankura District, W.B. *International Journal of Current Research, Vol. 4 Issue 11.*
- Sherpa, Narbu. (2016). A Study of the Sherpa Tribe of Darjeeling Hills: Changes and Adoption. *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies. Vol. 4. Issue 12, December*
- Sonowal, C.J.(2007). Demographic Transition of Tribal People in Forest Villages of Assam, *Studies of Tribes and Tribals, Vol.5, No.1. Kamla-Raj Enterprise, Delhi, India*
- Sonowal, Chandra Jyoti. (1997). Forest Villages in Assam: Continued Ghettoisation. *Economic and Political Weekly, 32, no. 39*
- Tamang, Sangay. (2018). Becoming Twenty-First Century Tribe: Between Gorkha and Tribal Identity in Darjeeling Hills. *Indian Anthropological Association. Vol.48, No.1.pp.64*

Reports

- Towards Equality. *Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India. 1974, GOI. Ministry of Education and Social Welfare. Dept. of Social Welfare. New Delhi.*

- *Report of Committee on Forests and Tribals in India*, 1982. Dr. B.K. Roy Burman Committee. Delhi: Himalaya Publishing House.
- *Statistical Profile of Schedule Tribes in India*, 2013, Ministry of Tribal Affairs Statistic Division, Government of India, www.tribal.nic.in.
- *Forest Rights Act, 2006: Act, Rules and Guidelines*, 2014, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.
- *Environmental & Social Impact Assessment*, For HVDs & GIS Sub-Project of Darjeeling including Kalimpong District under WBEDGMP with World Bank Fund Assistance, 2022. Indian Institute of Social Welfare & Business Management, Kolkata.
- Project on *Gender and Development* by Quebec Committee on Women and Development, 2004:22-23.

Published/Unpublished Ph. D Theses

- Bal, Randeep. (2015). Socio-Economic Status and Livelihood Security of Rural Women in Punjab, Punjab School of Economics, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.
- Ibid., p.7
- Das, Tarun. (2020). Socio-Economic Characteristics of Forest Villagers in Alipurduar District of West Bengal, Dept. of Geography and Applied Geography, University of North Bengal.
- Ghimire, Mahesh. (2014). Socio-Cultural and Economic Condition of Tamangs; Case Study of Angsarang, Nepal, Diaconia University of Applied Sciences.
- Limbu, Vinay. (2019). Limbus of Darjeeling Himalaya: Aspects of their Economy, Society and Culture in Relation to Habitat, Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal.
- Rahman, Fazlur. (2007). Impact of Forest Economy on the Socio-Economic Development of Tribes- A Case Study of Chhattisgarh State, Department of Geography, Aligarh Muslim University, India.
- Rakshit, Kumar Swapan. (2003). Forest Resource: Its Problems and Prospects: A Study of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri District, W.B, Department of Geography and Applied Geography, North Bengal University.
- Roy, Chandreyee. (2009). Forest and Tribals: Right to Access over Natural Resources. Human Rights. University of Calcutta.
- S. Devika Roy (Lama). (2004). Changing the identity of Women of Darjeeling Hills- A study in Cultural, Social, Economic and Political Development (1835-1985), Department of History, University of North Bengal.
- Saikia, Sangeeta. (2012). A Sociological Study of the Forest Villages in Assam, (M.Phil Thesis), Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.
- Sarma, Indrani. (2012). Issues of Conservation and livelihood among the forest villagers in the Nameri Area of Assam, Department of Sociology, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tezpur University.
- Swami, Swati. (2006). A Structural Analysis of the Bhutia Society and Position of Bhutia Women in Sikkim, Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal.