

The Mangars: Origin and Settlement in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling

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Abstract: *The history and culture of the Aryans have been extensively dealt with by different scholars but the description of the non-Aryans or the aboriginal tribes still hold obscurity either it is about their contribution to the primitive history of India or facts of their origin in the Indian sub- continent. The history of origin of Mangar or Magar in India is also shrouded in obscurity. It is due to this fact; a variant of opinions is adjoined with them. However, some scholars emphasized on the fact that the Magars or Mangars, are one of the aborigines of Sikkim and Nepal, belong to the Kirata community of the Eastern Himalayas. They are one of the oldest tribes of Sikkim. Rajesh Verma has reasonably stated that the Kiratis include Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Mangar and Tamang tribe of Sikkim. S.R. Timsina has also mentioned that the Mangars, Limbus and Lepcha are the earliest settlers of ancient Sikkim. J.D. Hooker has also described them as the aborigines of Sikkim, whence they were driven by the Lepchas westward into the country of the Limboos and by this latter further west (Nepal) still. At the end of 20th century, the identity aspirations and sense of identity have offered a new dimension to the assertiveness of the ethnic groups and similarly to this community. It is in this background, the history of origin of Mangars and their traditional values came to prominence and look for an identification of the facts in the district of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling. Hence, the article attempts to find the history of its origin and their inhabitation in these districts of West Bengal.*

Keywords: *Kirata, Primitive, Aborigines, Indo-Mongoloid, Sub-Himalayas.*

Introduction:

The name Kiratas is for the first time found in the Yajurveda (*Sukla Yajurveda, Vajasaneyi Samhita*, XXX, 16; also, *Krsna Yajurveda, Taittiriya Brahmana*, III, 4.12.1). Macdonell and Keith have the following note in their *Vedic Index on Kirata*: 'Kirata is a name applied to a people living in the caves of the mountains, as appears clearly from the dedication of the Kirata to caves (guha) in the *Vajasaneyi Samhita (also Taittiriya Brahmana)*, and from the reference in the Atharvaveda to Kirata girl (*kairatika*), who digs a remedy on the ridges of the mountains'. Later the people called *Kiratas* were located in Eastern Nepal, But the name Seems to have been applied to any hill folk, no doubt aborigines, though the *Manava Dharma- Sastra* regards them as degraded *Ksatriyas* (ref.X,44)' (Chatterjee 1951: 27-8). The *Kiratas* pre-eminently figure among the tribes described in ancient Indian and Classical (Greek and Latin) literature, which constitute one of the major segments of the tribal communities living in the Himalayan and sub-Himalayan regions, forest tracts, Mountainous area and the Gangetic plains, valleys and delta of India, have been a subject of least important (Singh 2008: 2). However, the subject has been accorded the prominence

by the ancient Indian writers, classical geographers and historians while dealing with the Primitive races of India.

G.P. Singh opined that in the post- Vedic times the epics-the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were the most useful sources where the *Balkanda* and the *Kiskindha Kanda* of Valmiki *Ramayana* dealt with their origins, movement, physical characteristic, dwellings in the marshy region near the sea- coast, etc. Tulsidasa also referred to the Kirata and Khasa together in the Uttarkanda of his Ramacharitamanasa. Similarly, *Mahabharata* – a semi historical work also provides a very clear and reliable account of the Kiratas. Out of the eighteen Parvas of the Mahabharata, ten are valuable for the study of Kiratas. The puranic records comprising both the *Mahapuranas* and the *Up-Puranas* are the repository of historical information about ancient Indian tribes and races. It is true that the traditional accounts, contained in the *Puranas* have been vitiated by mythological details, interpolations, exaggeration of religious bias and other anomalies. However, in spite of many obvious defects the Puranic accounts cannot be regarded as wholly untrustworthy. The *Kiratas* have been described in different *Puranas*, which supply very positive information about different aspects of the life and culture of the *Kiratas*. They have been described as the peoples, the countries and *Janapadas* of the eastern, northern or *Uttarapatha*, southern western and mountainous regions of India (Chatterjee 1951: 24).

Rajatarangini of Kalhana, the chronicle of Kashmir and the first celebrated historian of ancient India between CE 1140 to 1150, mentions Kiratas as associated with some other aboriginals' tribes living in the Vindhya hills and Rajputana (Chatterjee 1951: 24). According to him, the *Subhasitavali* of Vallabhadeva of Kashmir (not earlier than fifteenth century CE) describes the *Kiratas* as a degraded mountain tribe, who lived mostly by hunting. Ronnow Kasten's article '*Kirata- A Study on some Ancient Indian Tribe*' (Ronnow, 1936 vol. XXX: 90-170), is helpful in finding the graphic description of the origin, migration, settlement, expansion, etc. of the *Kiratas* inhabiting different region of India. G.P. Singh has also appreciated him in preserving the detailed account of the subject as well as for critically examining the views of different scholars regarding the Indo-Mongloid theory of the origin of Kirata.

Mangar as One of the Kiratas Communities:

The Kiratas, one of the living representatives of the primitive non- Aryans race, construct a wide scope for making of historical study of their culture and civilization. The present scenario reflects that they are widely scattered and divided. After having been defeated and driven away by the Aryan race, they took refuge in dense forests, mountains, and hills. In ancient times the "North Eastern, North Western, Central and Deccan regions" were the cradles of the Kirata culture (Singh 2008: 6). Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has observed that the original Mongloid incomers were a very primitive people, being mostly hunters and food-gatherers who also used caves for habitation. The Mongoloid tribes of Tibeto-Burman speaking dialect had probably found a centre of dispersion in the tract to the east of Tibet and north-east of Assam, from where they might have spread into India and Tibet prior to

1000 BCE. The Tibetans, according to a late Buddhist tradition which is of very doubtful historical value, are said to have entered their country during the lifetime of Buddha- say about the middle of the first millennium BCE. They may have been preceded by earlier tribes who formed the nucleus or basis of the 'Himalayan' Mongoloids of Nepal, speaking languages like Newari, Lepcha, Magar and Gurung and the '*pronominalised*' languages like Dhimal, Khambu, Kanawari and others. The speakers of the '*pronominalised*' dialects probably represent the earliest waves: and the Newars, Lepchas, Magars, Gurungs, etc., represent later arrivals. The Himalayan groups of Indo- Mongoloids were thus probably the first to be established in India, and settled in Nepal, and pushed as far west as Garhwal and Kumaon, and further to the west; but they have remained largely in a very primitive state: except Newars (Chatterjee, 1951: 41).

Different Views Regarding the Origin of Mangar:

The origin and history of Mangar is not easy to trace, but some scholars have tried some of the possible views regarding the origin of Mangar. Michael Witzel mentions, 'Magars were apparently known already to the Mahabharata as Maga, to the Puranas under the name of Mangara and in a Nepalese copper plate inscription of 1100/1 AD as Mangvara' (Witzel 1991: 18).

The mythological narratives describe Mangar as the descendants of 'Gana Devta' of the Lord of Kirateshwar (Shiva). It tries to bring the fact that the entire tribes of Himalayas as descendants of Kirateshwar, ranging from the Kashmir Himalayas range to Myanmar and from Tsangpo river of Tibet to the Gangetic Plain (Pradhan 1996: 4). A Copper Plate Inscription of Shivadeva, dated 221 Newar Era (1110 CE) has been discovered (The Gazetteer of Sikkim: 10, 38). On it is mentioned the name of a *vishaya*, or province, called Mangavara. Scholars believe that the name was an archaic form of Magar. They came into prominence as a great power in about 1100 A.D., when Mukunda Sena, the Magar King of Nepal invaded and conquered the Nepal Valley and committed terrible atrocities during the reign of Hari Deva, King of Nepal (Pradhan 1991: 35).

Apart from this, it is to be mentioned that the eighteenth century king, Prithvi Narayan Shah, the founder of the modern kingdom of Nepal announced and loved to call himself 'the king of Magrat' or 'the king of Magar country' (Beine, 2013: 61-74). According to Marie Lecomte -Tilouine, a senior researcher in social Anthropology at the French National Centre for Scientific Research, Prithvi Naryana Shah narrated in his autobiography about praying to a goddess who he described as the daughter of Rana or Magar (Lecomte-Tilouine 2009: 81-120). The Scottish contemporary writer, Francis Buchanan- Hamilton, in his journal contends that the shah dynasty was derived from the Magar tribe (Hamilton 1819: 26). Many prominent Historians of Nepal have claimed that '*Aramudi*', an eighth-century ruler of the Kali Gandaki region was a Magar King (Shrestha, 2003 and Prapannacharya 2014-15: 518). *Aramudi* derives from the word for 'river' in the Magar language which means, '*ari*' stands for 'Source of Water' and '*modi*' stands for 'River',

which means, ‘*Arimodi*’ or ‘*Arimudi*’ literary meant for the source of river. But due to lack of historical evidence there are conflicting ideas regarding the originate of Magar in Nepal. The Magaras or Mangars, one of the aborigines of Sikkim and Nepal, belong to the Kirata community of the Eastern Himalayas. They are one of the oldest tribes of Sikkim. Rajesh Verma has stated that the Kiratis include Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Mangar and Tamang tribe of Sikkim (Verma 2015: 7).

As per Kirat Mundhum, Iman Singh Chemjong states that a place called Shin in the northern part of the Himalayas was the original home of the Mangars. They were headed from north to South by Shin (Chemjong 2003: 138). The Magars (Mangars) are described by Hamilton (1819) as a Himalayan Tribe “Wallowing in all the ancient abominations of the mountaineers” and found anywhere in the Himalayan region (Vansittart 1896: 104). S.R. Timsina has mentioned that the Limbus and Magars, were identified as ethnic groups in Sikkim in 1642 (Timsina, 1998, pp.22 & 42). Iman Singh Chemjong further stated that ‘in the East Nepal and Sikkim the Mangars are so called because they were the children of Mang, Mong or Mongol people. The Chinese and Burmese people call *Mang* or *Mong* for Mongolians; and *ar* or *arui* means children. So Mangar means the Children of Mongols. He regards it as the correct interpretation as their complexion proves that they are no other than scattered Mongolians (Chemjong 2003: 141). On the authority of Madhya Asia ka Itihas (History of Central Asia) by Rahul Sanskritayan, the learned author has identified the Ancient Mangar Kirat tribe of Sikkim and Nepal with ‘Kirait’, one of the nomadic tribes of Central Asia. He says that long before the adoption of the name Mongol or Mongolians (in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE) in Central Asia, one branch of the tribe Kirait and Mongku tribe of Central Asia spread towards Suchuwang, Yunan, Burma, Eastern India and Nepal. They did neither hear the name Mongol nor do they claim to be of their origin. The Mangar tribe of Nepal, he says, must be from the composite group of Kirait and Mongku who came to Sikkim and became Mangar (Chemjong 2003: 74-5). The Mangars or Magars after having settled in Sikkim in Ancient times roughly before the fifth century ruled in its various parts independently like the Lepchas and Limbus (Singh 2008: 96).

John Dalton Hooker, who conducted a scientific exploration in Sikkim in 1848-49, has mentioned that “Mangars, a tribe now confined to Nepal west of Arun, are the aborigines of Sikkim, whence they were driven by the Lepchas westward into the country of the Limboos and by this latter further west (Nepal) still. They are said to have been savages and not of Tibetan origin and are now converted to Hindooism” (Hooker 1855: 180). S.C. Das⁹ in his book has mentioned about the existence of Magar in Sikkim very earlier and described that while travelling to Tibet, he heard of Kangpachen People (a district to the west of Kanchenjunga) and of Magar, the ruins of their forts and towns in the Kangpachen

⁹ He writes, “The legend which I heard of the Kangpachen people (west of Kanchan Gongga), and of the Magars the ruins of whose forts and towns we saw in the Kangpachen valley, is very interesting. People say the account is correct and true...”.

Valley, which seemed to him very interesting and the people assured him about its correctness and truth (Das 1902: 26-7). Northey and Morris also approved of inhabitation of Magar in the temperate region which was immediately to the north of foothills (Northey and Morris 2014: 165).

H.H. Risely, while dealing with the *History of Sikkim and its Rules*, also mentioned about the rule of the Magar kings or chiefs in Sikkim (Risley 1894: 27). During 1600 CE. or so the chief Sintu Pati Sen had established a Magarjong at Mangsari, West Sikkim, and ruled surrounding areas for many years. The Ruins of Mangarjong at Mangsari, West Sikkim is still there. Similarly, ruins of many Mangarjong such as Sukhia Pokhari of Darjeeling; Mansong Mangarjong of Suldung, Kamrung, Famtham, Sudunglakha, Berthang-Berfok Mangarjong and Rateypani Kateng Mangarjong, are the historical and archaeological significance¹⁰ (Allay 2003: 45-65).

The Mangar tribe of Sikkim were in existence is also evident from the account of the travel of the first Chogyal Phuntsho Namgyal, who travelled through his entire kingdom. When Phuntsong Namgyal was summoned to Yuksom by the three Buddhist monks to proclaim him as the first Buddhist King (Gyalpo) of Sikkim in 1641 CE a team of three messengers had travelled through Sang, halted at Rumtek and while proceeding through Yangang, they encountered a group of Lepchas and Mangars¹¹. They were gathered there to witness and welcome their one of the would be first king of Sikkim (Namgyal, & Dolma 1908).

Settlement of Mangar:

I. Jalpaiguri

The settlement of Mangar in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling district is one of the inquisitive facts to find. The common factor that brings them together is the growth of tea plantations in these places in the early second half of the nineteenth Century.

One of the long-lasting impacts of the imperial rule in the Jalpaiguri district especially in the Western Duars was the commercialisation of agriculture, and this process of commercialisation made an impact not only on the economy of West Bengal but also on society as well (Milligan 1919: 21). It should be mentioned that the considerable potential of Duars as a tea growing area was noticed as early as 1859 by Brougham at *Gazaldoba* (Gupta 1992: 56). The year 1877 marked a significant year, because the first Indian pioneer in tea industry Munshi Rahim Baksh opened a tea garden at *Jaldhaka* on 17.8.1877 on 728 acres of land (Ghosh, 1970: 283). In 1877 *Baintbarrie*, *Baniandanga*, *Ellenbarrie*, *Danidim* and *Washabarrie* tea gardens were started (Ghosh, 1970: 284). By 1881 the number of

¹⁰ Allay has thoroughly written about those historical sites with the mythology related with and its importance as ancestral heritage in Sikkim.

¹¹ The travel account of Chogyal describes the evidence of their presence a, “the next day they (the king and his followers), crossed over the Rag-dong Bridge and proceeded through Yangang. While passing through Yangang, where Lepchas and Mangars, as the party happened to be riding on ponies and some of the retainers had matchlock guns, which they went firing along the road, the simple natives who have never seen ponies, nor firearms, said to others, the entire party rode on huge hogs, and some of them bore sticks which when pointed towards you produced great sounds.”

gardens rose up to 55 and by 1890 Duncan Brothers had its agency in 12 gardens with a planted area of 5,795 acres.

II. Darjeeling

Darjeeling was originally a part of the Kingdom of Sikkim and was inhabited by the Lepchas, a tribe native to the area since the beginning of time. It was invaded by the Gorkha army from Nepal and attacked the ancient capital of Sikkim Rabdentse and annexed territories up to the Teesta River in Nepal. By 1816 the whole of the area of the then British Sikkim belonged to Nepal. After the Anglo-Gorkha war, one third of its territories were ceded to the British under the Sugauli Treaty in 1816. By the treaty of Titalia signed on 10th February 1817, the British returned it to Sikkimese Chogyal (Dozey, 1989: 196).

Dr. Campbell brought Chinese tea seeds in 1841 from the Kumaon region along with a number of Chinamen to teach the pioneers in this industry. He started growing tea on an experimental basis near his residence at Beechwood, Darjeeling. This experiment was followed by similar efforts by several other British. The experiments were successful and soon several tea estates started operating commercially. By 1856 the tea industry was well established in Darjeeling and by next six years it was extended to the Terai. The Makaibarie and Aloobarie were planned out in 1857 and soon followed by Takvar Tea Company in the next two years. The number of tea gardens were 39 by 1866, each having an average acreage of 256^{1/2} acres and aggregate yield of 133,000 lbs of tea and within four years the number of tea gardens rose to 56 in 1870. The constant growing tea estates in Darjeeling, increased the importance of Darjeeling and many citizens of Sikkim, mostly of the labour class, started to settle in Darjeeling as British subjects (Dozey, 1989: 197).

Under this background it is to be mentioned that the most of the Mangars are found in these areas as the plantation labourers and also as agriculturists. Thus, they are now found over most parts of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Sikkim and other districts of West Bengal. They are mostly concentrated in Dooars, Darjeeling Hills, Dehradun, Bhaksu, also in Assam especially in Naga Hills and few are scattered in other parts of India. The 1901 Census figures for the Magars or Mangars were 3214 in Jalpaiguri and 11,174 in Darjeeling (*Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. 3: 206). J.F. Grunning mentioned that there were 3709 Mangars in Jalpaiguri district as per the 1911 Census figures (Grunning 1911: 41). As per the census of 1931, the Mangar population in West Bengal was 24,042, out of which 14,613 were in Darjeeling District alone. The Census of 1951 gives the figure of Mangars in West Bengal as 42,663 and in Darjeeling Hills as 34,350 (Mitra 1954: 72-92).

Jalpaiguri has been a homeland for different ethnic groups. Mangar being one among them enriched with their rich ancient culture and rituals have settled in tea-plantation and agriculture areas like Kalchini, Dalsingpara, Lankapara, Bandapani, Kumargram etc. In Darjeeling they are found in almost every part of the district but mostly concentrated in Rangbhang Valley Tea Estate, Magarjong, and Sukhia Pokhari etc. in Kursong Pankhabari Tea Estate, Babukaman and in Kalimpong, Samalbong Busty, and Kumai T.E. Chiboo

Busty etc. Most of the people of the Mangar community in these regions are farmers or peasants or tea-plantation labourers (ABMS to CRI, dated 29.12.03).

As mentioned by I.S. Chemjong, the Mangar tribe in India, were in Sikkim and ruled there before the Bhutia of Sikkim and in the sixteenth century, they had built a vast kingdom in Western Sikkim by Sintu Pati Sen. He mentions that another proof of the affinity of the Mangar and Lepcha tribe in counting numbers. The Mangars count one, two, three, four, and five as *kat, net or nis, sam, buli, banga*, and the Lepcha tribe says *kat, net or nis, sam, fali, fungu* (Chemjong, 2003: 142). The history of Sikkim describes that the Mangar chiefs were so active in Sikkim that they kept on fighting with the Sikkimese chief up to the 18th century. The Sikkimese chiefs tried their best to keep them under their power by matrimonial connection but failed and perhaps were driven out with no mention in history. With the passage of time the various socio-economic and religious factors contributed to their fall from a powerful and glorious past to a little-known backward caste of Nepali community and so as of Indian society. Most of the people from this community earn their livelihood by engaging themselves in occupations mostly in tea plantation and cultivation.

Conclusion:

The ruins of Magarjong (fort of Magars) at Mangsari, West Sikkim and similar ruins of Mangars in Sukhia Pokhari Darjeeling, Mansang and other places indicate their existence in these areas since antiquity. The Ethnological team led by Sinha in Suldung village of West Sikkim under Chakung constituency also confirmed Mangar Settlement in the village. Hence, the existence of Mangars in West and South Sikkim is stated to have existed before the formation of “The Greater Sikkim” in 1642 CE.

The Limbus and Magars (Mangars) were identified as ethnic groups in Sikkim in 1642. CE. Das observes that the ethnic scene of Sikkim began to undergo a rapid change with the advent of the British. Till 1780, Darjeeling was a part of Sikkim. During 1780-1816 it remained under Nepal. In 1816, for implementing the Indo- Nepal Treaty or Segauli treaty, it was ceded to the British. On 10th February 1817 according to the Treaty of Titalia, Darjeeling was transferred to Sikkim by the East India Company and again taken back from Sikkim on 1st February 1835 (Timsina 1998: 35, 42, 43). From the Maharaja’s History of Sikkim, it reveals that the Mangars were in Sikkim prior to 1642 as evident from the account of a travel of the first Chogyal Phuntsho Namgyal of Sikkim, who was consecrated in 1642, across the Kingdom (Namgyal and Dolma, 1908). Shiva Kumar Rai has appropriately stated that “some parts of Nepal were under Sikkim once and likewise some parts of Sikkim were Under Nepal....Therefore, it is natural that the various communities living in Sikkim and Nepal...freely moved and settled in various parts of Sikkim and Nepal” (Rai 1995: 12). Hence, the settlement of Mangars in Darjeeling which was once an adjacent part of Sikkim is a natural process whence, they were driven by the Bhutia chieftains in Sikkim. Similarly, concentration of Mangars in Jalpaiguri as being the adjacent foot hill of Darjeeling, might have been an obvious settlement in search of livelihood and the

commercialization of agriculture and tea industry during the period advanced the process of settlement in these two districts of North Bengal.

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