CHAPTER VI

POLITIZATION OF CULTURE: ETHNICITY AND REVIVALISM
OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN DARJEELING

The Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis, the three prominent groups in the Darjeeling Hills, clubbed together as Hillmen till the Gorkhaland Agitation fought against the chauvinism of the plainsmen, especially the dominant Bengalis. They knew unity amongst them was essential if they were to pose a united front against them. Sadly today, because of the increase in population and scarcity of resources, people like the Lepchas, Bhutias and even the various sub-groups within the larger Nepali society, have begun to understand the meaning of culture and identity and have started to manifest themselves consciously. Culture and ethnicity are being used as the main resource to attain material and political benefits.

The changed political atmosphere in Darjeeling after the formation of the DGHC in 1988 has had different ramifications in the area under study. The GNLF, a party formed mainly to carve and protect the distinct identity of the Indian Nepalis of Darjeeling in particular, has produced a kind of demonstration effect on the other communities living in the area. The Lepchas and Bhutias, who have now become the ethnic minorities, when compared to the major Nepali community, but have been living here since time immemorial, are keen on bringing revivalism of their own respective ethnicity, traditions and culture.

The Lepchas and Bhutias who have been recognized as the tribals of the region have been living with other Nepali groups together with the plainsmen (consisting of Marwaris, Bengalis and Biharis). Though they have their distinct culture, tradition and language, there has been some sort of acculturation between them. As it has been mentioned earlier, the Nepali language has become the lingua franca of the region. In spite of living together as neighbours and learning some traits of the others, there is still a huge social and cultural gap between the Lepcha-Bhutia and the Nepali to permit assimilation. The Lepchas are either animists and follow a type of Bon
religion together with Lamaist Buddhism. Many of them especially in Kalimpong area have converted to Christianity and are third or fourth generation Christians. Under the generic term "Bhutias" are included the Dukpas, Sherpas, Yolmos Kagatey and Tibetans, majority of them are Buddhists. Both of these communities have similar food habits and consume a lot of meat especially beef. They are also fond of fermented millet beer called "chi" (Lepcha term) or "chyang" (Bhutia term). The Buddhist Lepchas and Bhutias have elaborate death rituals and have to feed the Lamas. They have to donate generously for the building and maintenance of "gompas" and monasteries. Their marriages involve heavy bride price and elaborate wedding feasts. Regarding their dress, the common dress of the Lepcha woman consists of a blouse (Tugo) and a lower garment called "Domdyam", a piece of either cotton or silk cloth worn around the waist and tied neatly on both the shoulders with the help of some pins. The male dress in called "Dom-Pra", a long cotton vesture, thrown around the body and leaving the arms free, it reaches up to the knee.

On the other hand, the Hindu Nepalis do not consume beef. Their marriage prices are cheap or are negligible. The common dress of the Nepali male consists of a top with strings called "dawra" and a set of tight trousers called "suruwal" and they also adorn a cap or "topi" called dhaka-topi. Women wear the "gunuey cholo" and "phariya" consisting of a blouse with strings and a lower dress tied on the waist with a long band of cloth called "patuka".

Initially it was mainly to counteract the numerical superiority of the Nepalis that the Lepchas and Bhutias appeared as one composite group. "The acculturation, i.e social and cultural absorption of the Lepchas and Bhutias was virtually complete and reached such a high degree that the Lepcha-Bhutia together emerged as a composite ethnic group."1.

Lepchas and Bhutias were assimilated in culture, religion, social integration and also through inter-marriage. They considered themselves as the original inhabitants of the area. The Bhutias were especially loud in this regard to show their numerical strength. The Limboos or the Tsongs too were considered the indigenous inhabitants of the region and included as one of them.
It was believed that the blood treaty that was signed earlier between Thekong Thek, the Lepcha wizard and Khye Bumsa, the Bhutia chief in Kabi Lungchok in North Sikkim in the mid 13th Century, was consecrated with the blood of a Limbuni or Limboo woman. The treaty is called "Lhomentsongsum" to show the relationship between the Lhcppas (Bhutias), Monpas (Lepchas) and Tsongs (Limboos).

Of course, modernization, new methods of communication, transport and education have brought a closer link between all groups. Though there has been a sort of cultural convergence amongst them, there still is social divergence. The Nepalis have always retained their Nepali identity, their separate religion, culture and language. The Lepchas and Bhutias apprehended that their language and culture would be swamped and submerged in the swelling Nepali flood. The Lepchas and Bhutias emerged as one group having tribal identity, but many of the tribals of this region are losing their characteristic tribal identities. What is now happening is that they are being conscious of their identity, which has led them to review their own positions, which is manifested through the process of ethnicity. Ethnicity and cultural revivalism sometimes urge for fulfillment in the political, economical and social fields. Increase in population and scarcity of resources have led people to use culture and ethnicity as the main resources to attain material benefits.

A.C.Sinha lays down that "the economic and territorial distribution of resources accentuates ethnic competition."2. Lionel Caplan further says "what is in essence a confrontation over land comes to be seen as a battle for survival of a way of life."3. Thus the cultural distinctiveness serves as a weapon in the struggle for land. A. Cohen states ethnicity is a political phenomenon because "traditional customs are used as mechanisms for political alignment."4.

If cultural differences are used as the main factors for quarrels amongst people, it means they are associated with political cleavages. Culture thus assumes a political role. "Culture may be seen as a symbolic system within which a group of people operate in order to perpetuate or fight against a hegemony, whether through coercion or elite bargaining."5.
“Culture is not an independent or isolated symbol in harmonious equilibrium with another culture, but it is a system in constant conflict within and with other cultures for better appropriation of the available resources of the state.”6.

People who have the same culture have a similar set of ideas, ways of behaving, interacting and communication. Political elites of respective groups choose certain strands of culture, which they believe would bring concrete material benefits in a particular situation. It is by reminding people of who they are and where they come from, reminding them of their cultural traditions, which will help them shape a vision of where they should be going. For indigenous people, "reclaiming and asserting their histories is a first step towards securing the future for themselves."7.

People belonging to the various ethnic groups have started to revitalize cultures to blaze their development paths. Culture has begun to be recognized as one of the most important factors to construct alternative to development. Even though it is impossible for people belonging to the same community to actually meet in real situation, "yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."8.

ETHNICITY AND REVIVALISM AMONG THE LEPCHAS

It has been pointed out by various historians like Gorer, E.C.Dozey, G B Mainwaring, J. C. White, Christopher Haimendorf and others that the Lepchas are the original inhabitants of Darjeeling and Sikkim. But by the beginning of the 20th Century, it was seen that the Lepcha population, was soon outnumbered by the other groups like the Bhutias and Nepalis. Under the influence of the Bhutias and Nepalis, there was a change in the Lepcha's culture, habits, customs and language. Moreover with the advent of modernization and urbanization in these areas, the process of detribalization set in. There was a change in their social values, norms, attitudes, habits, practices, customs and manners, indicating a process of decay.

Their detribalization was mainly because change was inherent in the society itself and also because they came under the influence of the Bhutias,
Nepalis and Christian missionaries. The Lepchas were first attacked by the Tibetans in the 17th Century, which paved the way for the Namgyal Dynasty in Sikkim, by the Bhutanese in 1700, by the Gorkhas in 1780 and by the Britishers in 1835 and 1865. By nature, they were carefree, casual and also termed as “pitale bhara”, which means they could be moulded and fitted anywhere. Their inter-marrying with other Nepali communities and Bhutias and with Europeans too, Chinese marrying Lepcha women, have resulted in the decline of the community. They also participate freely in non-Lepcha ceremonies.

There is both a process of assimilation and integration of the Lepchas with other communities living in the area. Assimilation means the total loss of identity, whereby a society becomes a sub-system of another dominant community, but integration is a two way process, in which not only the dominant section influences the less dominant one, but they get mutually affected in the course of interaction.

Modernization has also helped in the spread of education of the Lepchas, increase in their literacy rate and has brought about social mobility amongst them. Though majority in the rural areas still practice agriculture, many of the Lepchas today are into teaching, government services and a few of them in businesses too. It is these professional classes of the Lepcha elites, who are trying to bring about a revival of their community, utilizing culture as the main tool. Though Lepchas today have become politically conscious, the level is quite low. Their political representation in the State Assembly and Parliament is negligible or non-existent. Like the Bhutias, the educated middle class of the Nepalis rejected the separate ethnic and linguistic identity of the Lepchas, for gaining political space in national, sub-national, government and local arenas. In the various GNLF slogans, the Lepchas were clubbed together with the dominant Nepalis, “Lapche, Bhone, Nepali sabai mili Gorkhali" (meaning all Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis are Gorkhalis).

Today there is an undue emphasis on the theory of numbers, majority versus minority. The Nepalis are culturally dominant because of their numerical and political superiority. The Lepchas and Bhutias have learnt the language of the majority community – the Nepalis, but they in turn never
cared to learn the Lepcha or Bhutia language. The Lepchas are ignored by all political parties, because of their numerical weakness. They are considered as one of the sub-communities of the larger Nepali community. In fact the "GNLF movement seems to have subsumed the status position of other communities in the hills like the Lepchas and Bhutias."11. Not only political and numerical weakness being disadvantageous to them, the community is also socially and economically weak. The Constitution of India has provided various safeguards and privileges for the protection of minority groups, whether religious or linguistic. Various provisions for linguistic minorities are given in Articles 29, 30, 347, 350, 350A and 350B.12.

In spite of this, the weaker communities are always faced with a serious challenge from the more numerically and politically dominant community or group. The Lepchas are being overwhelmed by the dominant Nepalis and the former group is fast being designated as a "vanishing tribe." What is being witnessed today in the Darjeeling hills is that a strong process of re-tribalization is going on amongst the Lepchas. They are eager and enthusiastic to carve their separate ethnic identity and further their claims as the one and only indigenous community of the area. As the tradition, culture, history, how old a race is to a particular region, are important markers to be taken into consideration in the political and social formation of a region.

Cultural revivalism among the Lepchas actually could be seen even in the early decades of the 20th Century. The District Lepcha Association was started in Kalimpong in 1925 and the Lepcha Culture Centre established in 1967. Today, "Shezums" or Lepcha associations are seen in every village. It is mandatory for the Lepchas to become members of the Shezum, which is ultimately under the aegis of the Lepcha Association.13. It is this Association that is helping the Lepchas to protest for their community. As has already been mentioned before, its main demand include amongst others, demand to include them as a Primitive Tribal Group.

The Fifth Plan (1974-75) even recognized the Lepchas as one of the six other listed tribes of West Bengal, who were under extremely under-developed stage.

There must be three criteria for the identification of Primitive Tribal Groups namely,
(i) almost stagnant population or extremely low growth rate, facing danger of extinction,
(ii) Having pre-agricultural level of technology,
(iii) Extremely low level of literacy. 

The Lepchas have all the criteria to be recognized as a Primitive Tribal Group (PTG) but unfortunately during the Fifth and Sixth Plan, the Ministry of Home Affairs identified only three groups as Primitive in West Bengal namely the Birhor, Toto and Lodha. Many of these tribal groups have lost their traditional economy, language, earlier customs and rituals.

Today under the leadership of the Lepcha Association, the Lepchas are organizing various public meetings, processions and rallies to put forth their demands. On the 23rd and 24th March 2002, the 19th Annual State Conference of the Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikash Parishad, West Bengal Branch took place in Burdwan. A Memorandum was placed by the Lepcha Association President to State President, Mr. Birsa Tirkey and made the following points:

1. Recognition and introduction of Lepcha language in the schools and colleges for Lepcha children in Darjeeling District,
2. Recognition of indigenous tribal Lepchas of Darjeeling District under the list of Primitive Tribal Group,
3. Provisions of six reserved seats for the Lepchas in the DGHC,
4. Removal of Domicile Certificate in respect of the indigenous Lepchas of the Darjeeling District and Sikkim,
5. Land taxes should be minimized for the tribals of West Bengal.

Again on January 17th 2005, the General Secretary of the Lepcha Association met the Minister of Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal, Mr. M K Chaudhari, mainly to recognize the Lepcha tribe of Darjeeling District under the Primitive Tribal Group list. Recently, they also met the UPA Chairperson, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, Mr. P R Kyndiah, Union Minister of Tribal Affairs and Mr. Kunwar Singh, Chairperson of National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and placed their demands regarding the same.

Today there is a better relationship between the Lepchas of Darjeeling District and Sikkim. They have become politically conscious and assertive regarding their rights and privileges. In Sikkim, the Lepchas have the right to
12 reserved seats together with the Bhutias in the State Assembly out of the 32 seats (01 seat is reserved for the Buddhist Sangha, 02 seats for Nepali Scheduled Castes and 17 seats for General). Moreover, the Lepchas in Sikkim have been recognized as a Primitive Tribal Group in January 2005. This has further encouraged the Darjeeling District Lepchas to further the same demand. "The socio-economic and political conditions for the Lepcha tribes of Darjeeling District must be strongly protected by recognizing and listing them under the Primitive Tribal Group." In Sikkim, the Bhutias and the Lepchas have formed an organization called Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC) to demand political safety for these two ethnic groups. Similar demands are also coming up in the Darjeeling hills.

The Lepchas have always been a meek, docile and submissive race. They never protested when they were vanquished by other communities and their land was taken by the others. But today under the able leadership of the Lepcha Association, they are raising their voice for the protection of their land, to which their very culture and identity are linked.

Both the British and later the Bengal Governments passed various laws to protect the lands of the Lepchas. The transfer of lands by the Tribals in West Bengal was restricted under the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885. Later this was repealed with the enforcement of West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955. This Act restricts transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals.

It was the Bhutia tribals who gained by these laws and were successful in getting land at nominal prices from the poorer Lepchas. Notwithstanding the various loopholes in the land laws, lands from the Lepchas were going to non-tribals, especially the Nepalis. This is mainly because of the Nepali’s dominance not only in politics, but also in the socio-economic life, that Lepchas are losing out on their ancestral land. The very survival of the Lepchas is dependent and woven around land. Their survival depends on how and for how long they can hold onto their land in the face of dominating influence of the other advanced sections of the society, who can use clandestine methods to usurp land from them.

Today, if the Lepchas want to sell their land, they have to bring the case before the Lepcha Association, where certain discussions and meetings take place. It is only after strict vigilance and only in cases of deteriorated
economic conditions that they are allowed to sell their lands, at certain prices fixed by the Association, according to the current market valuation.

The Lepchas are called upon to preserve, conserve and maintain their cultural heritage if they are to survive as an indigenous and the one and only true sons of the soil of "Nye Mayel Lyang." The Lepcha Association and the various shezums working under it are trying to unite the Lepchas and safeguard their identity. They are doing this by recording audiocassettes, writing books and journals containing their various folk songs, poems and legends. The Lepcha Delegation also submitted a memorandum for establishing a Lepcha Unit in All India Radio, Kurseong on August 26th 2004, to maintain and preserve the rich and ancient Lepcha language, literature and cultural heritage. They are reviving their traditional cultural festivals too. All of them celebrate "Namsoong" or the Lepcha New Year in December -January. Lepchas from Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong gather at Dzongu in Sikkim for this festival. They also celebrate the birthday of Mensalong, who was a renowned "bongthing" or medicine man and who helped in syncretizing Buddhism with the original Lepcha Bon religion. "Pang Lhabsol" is celebrated by both of them with much gaiety to commemorate the blood treaty that was signed in 1275 AD between Thekong Tek and Khye Bumsa in Kabi Valley.

The Lepchas call this festival as "Chyu Rum Faat" ("Chyu" means Himalayan peaks, "Rum" means God and "Faat" means offering, all meaning "offering to the Himalayan God."). All Lepchas today come together to celebrate the birthday of Panoo Gaebloo Achyuk of Damsang Dee on December 20th every year at Kalimpong, the last Lepcha King who was assassinated by the Bhutanese at Daling Fort, Damsang in 1781.

One of the most important obstacles in the Lepcha community in Darjeeling District is the religious divide between the Christian and Buddhist Lepchas. Comparatively in Sikkim, only about 8 % of the Lepchas are Christians and the educated elites are drawn from the Buddhist Lepchas, who have a close affiliation with the Bhutias. In the case of Darjeeling, the ratio between the Buddhist and Christian Lepchas is almost equal. The latter being more educated and urbanized provided leadership to their Buddhist counterparts, but unfortunately, the former could not gain full support and confidence in them. The Christian Lepchas have certain western influences in
their traditions, culture and mannerisms, but certainly they have not totally isolated them. Their culture is an intermingling of Lepcha and Western. Both Christians and Buddhist Lepchas have an equal degree of respect for their culture and tradition. Religion should not be made the dividing factor amongst the Lepchas, which is already a minority community, otherwise it will have an ill bearing on their ethnicity. The Lepcha Association is trying to bring unity amongst these Lepcha religious groups to put them at a secure place, vis-à-vis the majority community, the Nepalis.

REVIVALISM OF ETHNICITY AMONG THE BHUTIAS

There is heightening of ethnic consciousness not only amongst the Lepchas but also amongst the Bhutias in the Darjeeling hills. Even though the Bhutias have been interacting freely with the other communities like the Lepchas and Nepalis, they have firmly clung on to their own religion and culture. The very important factor that brings their ethnic homogeneity is their age old religion, that is Tibetan Buddhism.

All their activities whether it is art, literature, craft, philosophy, drama, dance, beliefs and superstitions bear the stamp of religion. Wherever they have gone and settled, they have overzealously built "Gompas" or monasteries. It is mainly because of this strict adherence to their faith and tradition that has saved them from linguistic and cultural disintegration.

Though the Bhutia dialect is an offshoot of the Tibetan language, the dialects spoken by the various sub-groups vary from the main source, the Tibetan language. The earlier the migration of these groups from Tibet, the greater is the difference. For example, the Yolmos and the Sherpas migrated earlier than the Denzonpas, therefore the Denzonpa dialect is more similar to Tibetan.

Not only religion, but common religious literature also binds the various Bhutia groups together. Their early literature consists mostly of religious subjects and there is a consistency in the language, grammar and orthography. This together with common form of worship has held the different ethnic groups together. The religious background of the Bhutias has established their ethnic identity. The Bhutias, in spite of interactions with the
Lepchas and Nepalis, have always maintained their own distinct Bhutia identity. Aware of the increasing number of Nepalis in the Darjeeling area and knowing that they would be soon outnumbered, the Bhutia Welfare Association was established in Darjeeling in 1968 by the various Bhutia elites. It is a cultural organization and its main aim is to unify the Bhutias, to build a strong organization of Bhutias, to protect their social and economical rights and also to encourage the study of Tibetan art, language and culture.

One of the oldest organizations of the Bhutias in Darjeeling is the Chensiling Kyidhu and it was responsible for introducing many of the Bhutia folk dances in Darjeeling. Both the Chensiling Kyidhu and the Bhutia Association are involved in cultural activities and social works. The Bhutia Association no longer exists. In its place is another organization, the "Kyidhu Chu", which is a union of ten mini associations. It represents the local Bhutias on important issues affecting the community. In 1998, the Manjushree Centre of Tibetan culture was established in Darjeeling. It gives lessons on Tibetan on a part time basis to local students and also runs a regular class for students from abroad. It also publishes the annual literary magazine, "Loie Munsel" (Light of Wisdom). Another institute, the Institute of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Culture, established in Kalimpong in 1947 by Rev. Dhando Rimpoche, has played an important role in preservation of Buddhist culture. It gives lessons in Bhutia music, songs, dances and art. It also runs a school and prepares textbooks for the teaching of the Bhutia language for boys and girls. The Tibetan Literary Society was formed in Darjeeling in 1959. It translated and published Rabindranath Tagore's "Natir Puja" in Tibetan. This was later adopted as a text in the Degree Language Course in Tibetan under the North Bengal University. Many works of Sanskrit have been translated into Tibetan. Written literature in Bhutia, whether it is translation work or creative literature work, has helped to keep the cultural identity of the Bhutias.

The Bhutias of Darjeeling as well as of the Sikkim Himalayas, having Indian citizenship, do not call themselves Tibetans or their speech as Tibetan. They prefer to be called as Bhutias or Bhote or Bhotia. Even the Sikkim Government has declared Bhutia as one of its official languages. It has also published several textbooks in Bhutia language for school children, mainly to
distinguish it from the Tibetan language, even though it is an offshoot of Tibetan itself.

BHUTIAS VIS -A -VIS THE TIBETANS

The Bhutias want to distinguish themselves from the Tibetans, who arrived in this region after 1959. Though they are the same culturally, they are different only politically. The overpowering of Tibet by Communist China was almost complete by 1950. In March 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama fled to seek refuge in India together with hundreds of other Tibetans. In 1965, out of 85,000 people who came from Tibet, 20,000 reached India. Many died on the way because of fatigue, hunger and starvation. The Indian Government set up various transit camps for them like the Misa Mari transit camp in Assam and Buxa Duar in Bengal. Nehru personally chose Dharamsala to be the Dalai Lama's permanent home in exile. Many of these Tibetans who had now become refugees also began settling in the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas.

The Tibetans found the environment similar to their own homes. Not only were there physical similarities but also a close cultural affinity with the local people here, especially the Lepchas and the Bhutias. The Tibetans had fled their homes not only to protect their lives but also to preserve their religion and culture. The refugees began learning the principles of their new and alien life. They also began learning the language of their new home. Even though all classes of Tibetans had followed the Dalai Lama, they knew that if religious scholarship and practice is to be preserved, then their lamas or monks had to be given a supportive environment. From the nucleus of these 1500 lamas, came many of the scholars and pioneers, who had built monastic tradition in exile. But Tibet's loss has not only been the gain of the Bhutias of Darjeeling and Sikkim, but also of the Ladakhis, Lahoulis, Spiti and Bhutanese Bhutias. "Their religion has been revitalized by scholar lamas, being driven into exile."19.

The adaptation of the Tibetan refugees in the Darjeeling Himalayas has been comparatively easy than in the plains. This is because of the various racial, linguistic, religious and cultural affinities between them and the people of this area, the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis. Racially all of them belong to
the same Mongoloid stock. In terms of language also, the language of the Lepchas, Bhutias and various ethnic groups of the Nepalis, like the Tibetan language, all belong to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. In the religious sphere also, the Tibetans are all rigid Buddhists. Though apparently, the Himalayan zone is supposed to have a minority Buddhist population, it is a Buddhist zone. Although the Nepali community is called a Hindu community, only some Nepali communities can be called pure Hindus, i.e., the Bahuns, Chettris, Thakuris, Kamis, Damais and Sarkis. The Sherpas, Yolmos and Tamangs are Buddhists, whereas the Newars can either be Buddhists or Hindus. The Rais, Yakkas, Limbus, Thamis, Bhujels, Gurungs are Hindus and Animists. In Darjeeling, both Hinduism and Buddhism co-exist side by side, all communities worshipping deities belonging to both religions. T B Subba says “Buddhism was rather dormant till the arrival of the Dalai Lama in India in April 1959. The process of revitalization that has begun since then is spectacular. Hinduism, that was making its inroads into the traditional Buddhist stronghold, has received a major jolt after that.”

Not only in the above sphere, there are other factors also which helped the Tibetan refugees. They have been receiving aid from the government of India as well as foreign governments. The Government of India has helped them by providing land, cattle, personnel, industrial and raw materials, agricultural seeds, fertilizers and employment. Even the various governments from abroad have helped them in their rehabilitation programmes.

The Tibetans are a hard working community and have learnt to survive in even the most severe of conditions. In the last few years they have generated various self-employment schemes. Many in the Darjeeling hills are involved in handicrafts, weaving, carpet making, thangka paintings, woodcarving, dairy products and farming. From the very early days, they were good and keen traders and this enterprising nature has surfaced even in exile. The Tibetan women are seen in the pavement bazaars selling sweaters, woolen shawls and other products. Many have opened restaurants selling foods like momos, thukpa, chowmein and chyang. The Mahakal Shopping complex, owned by Lakpa Dong, a Tamang, has sold all the shops in it to Tibetans. The shops in Singalila and Fancy market in Darjeeling are owned by the Tibetans. They have shops selling sweaters, clothes, shoes, bags,
cosmetics, shawls and other accessories. Therefore it can be said that they carry out businesses, which do not clash with that of other communities. For example, the Marwaris are engaged in cloth and wholesale business, Biharis have shops selling tea, snacks and sweets, Newars are involved in nurseries and floriculture and few of them are involved in retailing too.

Many of the Tibetans in the Darjeeling Himalayas have got access to the best of education in renowned schools. They know that in order to get good jobs in the future, education is very important. The Tibetan parents have worked hard to educate their children. It is mainly because of this that the doors of employment are open to them. Many have got jobs in the service sector, lest we forget that they can avail being members of the Scheduled Tribes.

The following table shows the occupational distribution of Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling in 1976.

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From the above table it can be said that many Tibetans are now involved in business and office, i.e. about 38.2 %, about 21.2 % are students and teachers. They are successfully occupying various posts in various government departments. Many of them are doing very well in the business sector and have gained prosperity. This has drawn resentment from the local communities. Even though the Bhutias and Tibetans belong to the same ethnic stock, the former does not want to be lumped with the Tibetans and resent the Tibetan assertion.
The Bhutias had been celebrating the Tibetan New Year, "Losar" with the Tibetans till recently, which falls in January or February, but today, to be different from Tibetans, they celebrate the "Sonam Losar" or "Losung." It is a seven day harvest festival and is celebrated in December. The Yimi Association, another association of the local Bhutias reminds its people that since they were born and brought up in Darjeeling – Sikkim, their dialect and culture is different from the Tibetan Bhutias. Thus there is a growing animosity against the Tibetans by not only the Bhutias, but also by the Lepchas and Nepalis too.

Cultural and traditional affinities alone do not guarantee ethnic co-operation and thus cannot prevent ethnic tensions and conflicts. "When the ethnic boundaries based on such primordial values and ideologies disappear, new boundaries appear to keep them separate. Such tendencies are generally stronger in areas which have scarce resources."22.

The economic prosperity of the Tibetans, their receiving aid from both the Indian and foreign governments, systematic and organized rehabilitation and resettlement programmes for them have all secured their positions. However it is also alleged that many of them are acquiring land under pseudo names.23. It is very difficult to demarcate the boundary line between a Tibetan Bhutia and a local Bhutia. Children born to Tibetan parents, who came to India after 1959, can claim Indian citizenship through birth and can avail the facilities and privileges given to Scheduled Tribes of India.

A recent happening in Darjeeling showed shades of communalism and highlighted anger against the Tibetans. A daughter of a well known person in Darjeeling, Lhawang Tenduk Pulger, had gone to receive her friend in the India-Nepal border of Pashupatinath. Unfortunately, her friend was in possession of some drugs. The apolitical organization in Darjeeling, the AGSU (All Gorkha Students' Union), under its leader Roshan Giri led protests especially against the Tibetans, saying they were responsible for bringing ill effects to the majority community in Darjeeling. Even the GNLF remained silent when the AGSU carried out arrests and raids for robbery and drug peddling. The Bhutias and Tibetans had lost faith in the GNLF, which had failed to protect the interests of the minority communities.
Another factor which has brought not only inter but intra-ethnic conflicts not only in the Darjeeling hills, but the entire Himalayan region is because the Tibetans have shown cultural and religious chauvinism and accord inferior status to other cultures. They have remained aloof and distinct from other communities. The Dharamsala administration also discourages their assimilation and naturalization and encourages them instead to remain a separate group, mainly in their desire to fight for independent Tibet. “Thus economic disparity, vigorous attempts to protect one’s cultural superiority and assertion of superiority over other sub-cultural identities becomes fertile matrix for intra-ethnic conflicts and hostility.”

There are many amongst the Tibetans who have naturalized and learnt the language and ways of the Nepalis. They have grown up in a free and democratic environment of the region. Observing many young Tibetans today, majority of them do not adorn their traditional dresses and are more fluent in Nepali. “The most distinctive feature of education or any other aspect of life in Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Gangtok is the all pervasive influence of Nepali culture, more specifically language and there has been linguistic onslaught on Tibetans in India, and many are banning speaking of Nepali in their homes.”

The Tibetans could have assimilated completely with the other communities of the region, but their great reverence to the Dalai Lama acts as a self restraint, provides leadership to them and has reconstituted their social and political organization in exile. Not only common faith, but another element, their anti-Chinese ideology keeps them together as one strong group. They participate together in such activities like the 10th March uprising or the birthday of the Dalai Lama in July.

The Bhutias, including the Tibetans do have strong ethnic feelings amongst their own selves, but the Tibetan speakers are a minority group in this area. They can never hope to challenge the ethnic group in power, the Nepalis. In case of cultural erosion, the various elites will once again revive their primordial values in order to survive as a distinct ethnic group. The Bhutias do not take an active part in politics and as seen before, there are even lesser Bhutia politicians. They as members of the Scheduled Tribes enjoy certain privileges and facilities and it has been easier for them to get
certain jobs. This often has drawn resentment against them, especially from the majority group, the Nepalis.

ETHNIC REVIVALISM AMONG THE NEPALIS: CHANGE OF IDENTITY FROM GORKHA OR NEPALI TO TRIBAL IDENTITY

The Gorkhas or the Nepalis of Darjeeling fought together in the Gorkhaland movement in the eighties. Their main issue was to carve a distinct identity of the Indian Gorkhas or Nepalis. In 1988 with the formation of the DGHC and with the name “Gorkha” inserted in the Hill Council, they felt that their identity issue was solved. But things have not remained the same with the suspension of the GNLF agitation, democratic movements in Nepal blowing in the period of the 1990's and with the Tibeto-Mongoloid races of the Nepali community fighting against Bahunization or Nepalization in Nepal.

In Nepal in 1990, the revolution was successful because there was the participation of not only political parties dominated by higher castes, the Bahuns and Chettris but there was strong participation of the various ethnic groups, human rights activists and women organizations too. In Nepal, various identities had remained submerged during the Shah regime (1769-1846), Rana regime (1846-1951) and suppressed during the panchayat period (1960-1990). However today, especially after 1990, the various social, political and cultural identities have been questioned and reformulated. The determining factor is the changed political climate. The ethnic groups of Nepal today designate themselves as “Janjati” (Nationalities and Indigenous people), to separate themselves from the ruling Hindu group and to make a distinct identity for them selves. Moreover the year, 1993, and the whole decade ahead being declared as the year and decade of the Indigenous people, has given further impetus to various ethnic organizations not only in Nepal, but also in Darjeeling and Sikkim.

A new Constitution was framed in 1990 in Nepal. Unfortunately it was again done by the few high Hindu castes and it still declares Nepal to be a Hindu state. Today various ethnic organizations are at work to protect their own identity, history and culture.
The Nepal Janajati Mahasangh consisting of about 22 ethnic organizations is one of the most important organizations, and its main objective is to integrate the various ethnic groups into the Nepalese state, with equal rights and opportunities. Its avowed aim is to "to encourage different cultures to flower since diversity, not unity is a global fact and (thus) to make a single sovereign state of nations."26.

Unlike in Nepal, in Darjeeling there is no domination in the political and economic fields by the higher castes or Bahunization as such, but like in Nepal, the various Nepali ethnic groups are becoming more aware of the need for a revival of their respective languages and culture. Till recently, the Nepalis in Darjeeling were known under the umbrella term “Nepali” or “Gorkha” and not specifically as Rai, Gurung, Tamang, Newar, Mangar or any other. Today, each group is conscious about their ethnic identity and there is a race amongst various groups to trace their respective culture, language and tradition. Ethnic groups are busy refurbishing their lost histories. It is mainly because of the lack of concrete historical documents here, that they again have to depend on Nepal, the land the Nepali ethnics once abandoned in search of better pastures. “History becomes the most important argument for the shaping up of political ideas and identity of Nepal’s "(or Darjeeling’s)" ethnic groups.27.

T. B. Subba says, there is an insurrection of "subjugated knowledges"28 and the various Nepali ethnic groups are in the process of re-discovering their lost identities. Various ethnic organizations of the Newars, Tamangs and other groups were there in Darjeeling even in the beginning of the 20th Century, but the environment was such that they could not become very active. Largely owing to the fact that they had to face a more superior race with an advanced culture, the Bengalis. It was mainly because of this, that the various ethnic groups joined together under the umbrella term “Nepali” or Gorkha.”

In the 1951 Census, the West Bengal Government under Dr. B C Roy, had considered only the Bahuns, Chettris, Kamis, Damais and Sarkis to be Nepali speakers and laid down that Nepali speakers constitute only 19.9 %. But in 1961 when all communities were included as Nepali speakers, their number was shown as 80 %. Today more and more communities in
Darjeeling are becoming aware of the need for revival of their languages and culture and want to be designated as tribals or the indigenous people of a particular area. Failure of the Gorkhaland Agitation to give the people of Darjeeling of Nepali origin a definite status and other privileges, the only other alternative was to seek the status of a Scheduled Tribe, to get various benefits from New Delhi.

The Constitution of India does not define Scheduled Tribes as such. Article 366 (25) refers to Scheduled Tribes as communities who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. According to this Article, the Scheduled Tribes are the tribes or tribal communities, which have been declared as such by the President of India through a Public Notification. As per the 1991 Census, the Scheduled Tribes accounted for 67.76 million, representing 8.08% of the country's population.

In West Bengal, the tribal population constitutes about 3.8 million. There are about 38 tribal communities in West Bengal. Some of the characteristics of these communities are,

(i) Primitive traits, (ii) Geographical isolation, (iii) Distinct culture, (iv) Shy of contact with community at large, (v) Economic backwardness.

Even though some consider being tribal as being savage or uncivilized or the very term derogatory, the question arises as to why various groups (not only in Darjeeling but in other areas as well), prefer to be classified "tribal" or indigenous or even backward. Classification as a tribal in India can entitle various educational and economic benefits from the state because of their unique cultural history and language.

As mentioned earlier, when the Mandal Commission report of the 1950's was implemented in the 1990's, various groups of Nepali origin in Darjeeling and Sikkim too were included in the OBC category. Notwithstanding the various privileges extended to the OBCs, many of them are rejecting this status and are keener on being designated as tribes. Economically, not only members of Scheduled Tribes but also the Scheduled Castes have various low interest schemes and reserved posts in government agencies. Educationally, they benefit because of the lowering of the qualifying marks needed to pass various examinations and entry to various educational
institutions, vocational institutions and government jobs. Unlike the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste the Other Backward Classes are not entitled to any financial schemes offered by the government. No wonder, many of these groups who have attained OBC status are ready to surrender their OBC Certificates and are keen to embark on their journey to be classified as tribals instead. In field works conducted, it was seen that many Newars, Rais, Mangars, Gurungs, Thamis and others want to be tribals. Thus ethnicity is not something static but dynamic. Different aspects of ethnicity can be chosen at different circumstances by the various elites to gain different objectives and benefits.

GRANTING OF TRIBAL STATUS TO LIMBUS AND TAMANGS

As mentioned earlier, there is a strong competition among all Nepali ethnics today to be granted tribal status. The long struggle of the Limbus and Tamangs to become Scheduled Tribes was rewarded in 2003. (See APPENDIX). The Limbus are considered as one of the indigenous inhabitants of the region of Darjeeling and Sikkim. The Lepchas and the Bhutias always considered the Limbus or Tsongs to be a part of them. This can be evident in the treaty signed in the mid 17th Century called “Lhomentsongsum” between the Lhopas (Bhutias), Monpas (Lepchas) and Tsongs (Limbuss). Later on the Limbus were identified with the Nepalis. Even the seats reserved for the Limbus in the Sikkim Assembly was withdrawn in 1974.

The Limbus formed their own ethnic organization and made certain appeals to recognize them as tribals, citing their overall backwardness in education, development and political voicelessness. A Memorandum was submitted by sixty prominent Limbu leaders and three members of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly to the Indian Prime Minister on November 5th 1981 for the same demand.

The Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limbu Chumlung submitted a Memorandum on June 14th 1990 to the President of India to include them as a Scheduled Tribe. The Limbus in Darjeeling have been greatly helped by their counterparts in Sikkim in being recognized as tribals.
The Tamangs too were earlier given the chance to be tribals, but since at that time, they were in the process of sanskritisation, refused to be so then. The All India Tamang Buddhist Association (AITBA), formed in 1981, laid before it, the main objective to include Tamangs as tribals. Its nearly two decades of struggle was finally over in 2003. Their efforts were greatly helped by the Tamangs in Sikkim too because in Sikkim, such ethnic groups have easier access to their sympathetic politicians. Moreover, the Sikkim Chief Minister, Mr. P K Chamling is much in favour of the pro-tribal policy and got much appreciation from the AITBA. Today Limbus and Tamangs are recognized as Scheduled Tribes in Sikkim and West Bengal, but are still to get a nationwide tribal status.

INTRA-ETHNIC TENSIONS WITHIN THE NEPALIS: THE TAMANG CONTROVERSY

Considering the number of Nepali ethnic communities in Darjeeling, it can be said that the Tamangs form the majority group in the area study, followed by the Rais. Tamangs in the Darjeeling Gorkha Autonomous Hill Council (DGAHC) area total 1, 25,987 and Limbus total 66,124. (For the Tamangs and Limbus presence in different urban and rural areas of DGAHC, more is given in Table B that follows later in the chapter). Today the community wise breakup of the different sub-Nepali groups is not available except for some areas. For example, the Gram Panchayat- wise Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe population under Kalimpong Block I.29. It was already seen that there, the Tamangs number about 7968. The Rais also form a formidable part of the Nepali population but statistics are not available. The Limbus number around 4625. Considering such numbers, the following table is a survey for inhabitation of scheduled tribe population in Bijanbari-Pulbazar Gram Panchayat:
### TABLE A: Survey of Inhabitation of Scheduled Tribe Population of each Ward/Village

**Name of Block:** Darjeeling – Pulbazar Development Block  
**Name of GP:** Bijanbari-Pulbazar  
**Name of Mouza:** Bijanbari.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward No./Line</th>
<th>Bhutia</th>
<th>Lepcha</th>
<th>Sherpa</th>
<th>Dukpa</th>
<th>Yolmo</th>
<th>Tamang</th>
<th>Limbu</th>
<th>Total Of Each Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>153</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Nil</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>1332</td>
<td>1785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Office of the Pradhan, Bijanbari – Pulbazar Gram Panchayat.*
The above table shows that amongst the Scheduled Tribe population in Darjeeling Pulbazar Development Block, the Limbus form the majority group numbering 1332, followed by the Tamangs numbering 237. The number of Bhutia, Lepcha, Sherpa, Dukpa and Yolmo is comparatively low.

The Tamangs are also known as the Nisangs, Sangs, Sains and Murmis. Tamang comes from two words, "ta" meaning horse and "mang" meaning traders, giving the meaning, horse traders. It is believed that they came from some part of Tibet and were mainly Bon religion followers, but later, they came in contact with Buddhist lamas and slowly inculcated their ways and traditions. Many of them began settling in various parts of Nepal too. They were subjects to southern influences and slowly gave up their mother tongue, cultural heritages and took up the Hindu way of life. Though they have their own traditional dress, songs, dances like the "Tamang Selo" and food habits, they have been integrated within the Nepali society as one of its various sub-communities.

In Darjeeling today, there are two Tamang organizations. Unlike the All India Tamang Buddhist Associaton (AITBA), the Tamang Buddhist Gedong was formed in 1994. Its main objectives are to preserve the Tamang culture, tradition, language and religion. Their organization is zilla-level oriented unlike the AITBA, which has an all India characteristic. Its registered members cover 1500 houses and have about 7000 members. The Gedong helps its members especially in time of death in the families by giving a sum of Rs. 1000/- to the family members of the deceased.

Since the last few years, the Tamangs have been asked by their ethnic organization, the AITBA, to renounce Hindu customs and traditions as they are mainly Buddhists. They have been ordered to abandon wearing Sindoor (married Hindu women were the sindoor or vermilion as a symbol of marriage), use "totola" flowers in various ceremonies like marriage and to wear their traditional dress. They also have been asked not to celebrate the main festival celebrated amongst the Nepali Hindus, the Dasshera or the Durga Puja called "Dashai" in the hills and instead to celebrate Sonam Lochar, which is celebrated in January and February. They lay down that they are predominantly Buddhists but because they are keen on persevering their
identity, which is on the verge of getting lost with Hinduisation taking place at a fast pace, Lochar is an indication of their determination to preserve their identity. On the contrary, the Tamang Buddhist Gedong insists that since they have been celebrating Dashai for ages, there is no reason as to why they should not celebrate it now. It also emphasizes that the Tamangs wear the typical Nepali traditional dress, that is, the "Phariya" and "daura-suruwal." With different conflicting views, the Tamangs are confused. In the fieldwork report, some said that they have stopped celebrating "dashai" but others said that they still celebrate it like before.

The GNLF leader, Subhash Ghisingh has attacked the Tamangs for their alleged revivalism, especially their celebration of Lochar and laid down it is a tendency to lean towards Tibetan culture and tradition. But the Tamangs say that this does not equate them with the Tibetans. Lochar is different from the Tibetan Losar and is celebrated at a different time. Moreover, their dress is also different. They wear the “Tagi” (headgear), “hangri” (shirt), “khanyanga” (coat) and “sherlung” (trousers), which are different from the Tibetan dress, the “bakhu”. Ghisingh himself a Tamang, has accused the Tamangs of dividing the Gorkha race. On the other hand, the Tamangs lay down that their organization is not political and they do not intend to divide the Gorkhas. Their organization is mainly to preserve their own tradition and identity.

Ghisingh also accused them of having links with the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), the Pakistani spy agency. The entire Himalayan region including Darjeeling and Sikkim, though having a minority Buddhist population is called a Buddhist zone. Moreover, it has always been feared as to what would happen to the Tibetan refugees in the absence of their leader, the Dalai Lama. Darjeeling Himalayas has always been amiable to the refugees not only because of similar environment but also because of similarity of culture and tradition, especially with the indigenous Lepchas and Bhutias. It is feared that the Tibetanization of such communities like the Tamangs would further help in increasing their numbers in the region. Moreover, "in 1947 itself, the Tibetan authorities in Lhasa wrote to the government of India, to return from Indian border areas, extending from Ladakh, including Darjeeling and Sikkim." Such claims seem quite dangerous to the people in the region.
But the members of AITBA feel that it is politics and politicians who are flaring the whole issue and they only have their ethnic organization to preserve their tradition and culture.

ETHNIC ORGANISATIONS OF NEPALI SUB–GROUPS IN DARJEELING

Today it is seen that various ethnic groups are forming their own organizations both in Darjeeling and Sikkim. The demography of the two is almost similar except that in the latter, the Lepchas and Bhutias occupy important posts both in the political and economical fields. But Sikkim enjoys certain advantages when compared to Darjeeling. It is a full-fledged state whereas Darjeeling is still only one of the districts of West Bengal. In Sikkim, the policy making decisions are made by the local politicians in its capital, Gangtok, whereas the decisions for Darjeeling are made by Bengali politicians in Calcutta. Moreover, Sikkim occupies an important strategic geo-political position and wields political clout disproportionate to its size and population.

If ethnic organizations are to survive in Darjeeling, they must have links with their counterparts in Sikkim and vice-versa. This is because the ethno-political organizations in Sikkim have easier access to the local politicians. But again the Sikkimese organizations need the larger membership and cultural knowledge of their Darjeeling counterparts. Even the language movement in Darjeeling, to recognize Nepali as one of the languages in the VIII Schedule was possible because of the concerted efforts of Sikkim, especially the then Chief Minister, Mr. N B Bhandari.

Some of the various ethnic organizations in Darjeeling include the Newar Samaj, Thami Association, Lafa Mangar Samaj, Mangar Association, All India Kirat Yakha (Dewan) Chumma (organization),32. Limbu Tribal Association, Gurung (Tamu) Kalyan Sangathan, Gurung Association.33. Kirata Rai Association.34, Mukhia Samaj, Tamang Buddhist Gedong, All India Tamang Buddhist Association, Bharatiya Gorkha Khas Hitkari Samellan,35 , All India Nepali Scheduled Caste Association (AINSCA).36.

On an overall basis, the main objectives of these ethnic organizations are to preserve and revive their respective communities’ culture, language and tradition. It was especially in the period of the nineties and after, that
these organizations have started becoming very active or new ones are mushrooming very quickly. After a long period of homogenization by the Nepali culture, each of these groups is now projecting themselves as a separate and distinct group, having a tribal identity. They are trying to forsake the pan-Nepali identity in favour of other tribal identities. But it is difficult for them no doubt, especially because they have been under the dominating influence of the Nepali culture for long. Only a few of them know, speak and write their respective languages and are genuinely aware of their traditions and culture. The Mongoloid races of the Nepalis are trying to invent certain symbols to differentiate themselves from the Tagadharis and also the untouchables, who have a similar culture. But since they have been living together for such a long time, their economic interdependence, language, dress, destiny binds them together instead of separating them.

The Kiratas, for example, want to depict the “Kipat system” and their priest called “mundhum” as the main symbols of Kirata culture. The worshipping of Tagera Nyinmaphuma is shown as their supreme deity. But since this deity is equivalent to Lord Shiva of the Hindu pantheon, the Kiratas cannot claim the deity as their exclusive god. Many of the Nepali ethnics have also started naming their children in their own languages instead of Nepali. Instead of calling the bahun or Brahmin priest for their ceremonies, they prefer to call their own traditional priests to officiate their birth, marriage and death rituals. Amongst the Newars, a unique ceremony is conducted called “beli­bya”, whereby a girl before attaining puberty, is married to a “bel” (wood-apple – a Himalayan fruit). It is the “Gubaju”, the Newar priest who conducts the entire ceremony nowadays.

Many Nepali ethnics today consider the “dashai” or the Durga Puja as a Hindu festival and many have been asked by their respective ethnic organizations to stop celebrating it. But others continue to celebrate it with the same gaiety as before, saying it is this festival that is typically Nepali and is the main thread which binds all Nepalis together.37 Even the Diwali festival has been abandoned by some of them.

In the year 2005, during the Durga Puja, the GNLF chief, Mr. Subhash Ghisingh asked the people not to worship the Durga idol, but instead to worship “shila” or stones to depict the tribal characteristics of the Nepalis.
The “Jhakris” or witch doctors are shown as another tribal symbol. They play an important role to cure the sick and ward off evil spirits by going into a trance, shivering and chanting mantras. Sacrificing a rooster by them is part of their rituals to appease the spirits.

Celebration of Independence Day on August 15th 2005 was unique in Darjeeling. This was because instead of the usual drills and performances, about 32 different communities, including the different sub-communities appeared in their traditional attires and performed their typical traditions and dances. Different dances like the Lakha, Maruni, Tamang Selo (a typical Tamang dance, danced to the tune of their special instrument called “damphu”), Chhyabrung dance of the Limbus and others were put up. The Damai Samaj performed their marriage procession, whereby the bridegroom’s party goes to the bride’s house playing their traditional musical instrument, the “Naumati Baja”.

All the above facts confirm the tendency of the Nepali ethnics of their trend towards ethnic revivalism, becoming aware of their respective ethnic identity. But of course the political situation and the political factor in bringing about these chain of events cannot be ignored. There is a sharp competition among all Nepali ethnic groups to be accorded tribal status, aware of the benefits and privileges extended to them. This is not only so in Darjeeling but also in neighbouring Sikkim. The regional party there, the Sikkim Gorkha Democratic Party has pledged to fight for the majority Nepali community (including all Nepalis to be made Scheduled Tribes) who comprise 80% of the population, but are denied full rights in contrast to the Lepchas and Bhutias.

EMPHASIS ON HAVING A TRIBAL IDENTITY AMONGST THE NEPALI ETHNICS IN DARJEELING.

Notwithstanding the privileges extended to the Scheduled Tribes in India, in education and employment, another reason why there is so much pressure amongst the Nepali ethnics in Darjeeling to become tribals is because of their demand for the creation of a separate state, Gorkhaland, under the V1th Schedule of the Constitution. Subhash Ghisingh and his men
demanded an alternative to the DGHC, which often was described as a "dead corpse". It was in the beginning of 2005, that Ghisingh brought a new issue, to include the DGHC under the Vth or V1th Schedule but was more in favour of the latter.38 The Vth and V1th Schedules are meant for administration of predominantly tribal areas or scheduled areas under Article 244 of the Constitution. It provides administrative autonomy with the objective of preservation of the tribals' culture and protection from exploitation at the hands of outsiders.

The Vth Schedule covers tribal areas of nine states, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh. The V1th Schedule is applicable to the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. The areas are governed by Autonomous District Councils, which enjoys executive, legislative and judicial powers. The ADCs are empowered to make laws on land, forest, water, village or town administration, marriage, divorce, inheritance of property, social customs and many more. The ADCs can decide whether an act of Parliament or Assembly, concerning the powers and subjects conferred to it, can be applicable to the council area or not. It is empowered to set up courts, to administer justice within its jurisdiction. It also wields significant economic powers through taxes and tolls.

But one of the main criteria to bring an area under the V1th Schedule is that it must be a predominantly tribal area. Tribal population in the Darjeeling Gorkha Autonomous Hill Council area is only 35 % as seen in the following table.

173
### TABLE B

**SURVEY REPORT ON TRIBAL DOMINATED MOUZAS UNDER DARJEELING GORKHA HILL COUNCIL BASED ON 2001 CENSUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Total Mouza</th>
<th>Proposed I.T.D.P Mouzas</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>ST Population</th>
<th>% S.T</th>
<th>Tamang</th>
<th>Limbu</th>
<th>Total ST</th>
<th>% ST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Darjeeling Rural Areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD Block Darjeeling Pulbazar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CD Block Rangli Rangiot</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD Block Jorebungalow Sukhiapokhri</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>CD Block KPG II</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD Block Gorubathan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total in Rural Areas of DGHC</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>591236</td>
<td>64263</td>
<td>11.48%</td>
<td>118,912</td>
<td>63134</td>
<td>245541</td>
<td>41.53%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Urban Areas</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Darjeeling Mun'pality</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>107197</td>
<td>12747</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>3850</td>
<td>1607</td>
<td>18204</td>
<td>16.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurseong Mun'pality</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>40019</td>
<td>2304</td>
<td>5.07%</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>4304</td>
<td>10.75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPG Mun'pality</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>42998</td>
<td>5421</td>
<td>12.60%</td>
<td>1505</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>7571</td>
<td>17.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirik</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>9141</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>3.31%</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>8.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total In DGHC Area</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
<td>790591</td>
<td>85038</td>
<td>10.88%</td>
<td>125987</td>
<td>66124</td>
<td>276381</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: District Welfare Office, Backward Classes Welfare Dept. DGHC, Darjeeling.
(The above table shows the figures according to the 2001 census, but Tamangs and Limbus were accorded Scheduled Tribes status only in 2003) The total percentage of tribals in the Darjeeling Gorkha Autonomous Hill Council is now 35% with the addition of Tamangs and Limbus). It still falls short of the required percentage of 65% tribal population needed to form an autonomous district council or to bring it under the VIth Schedule. It was thus demanded to make the whole Gorkhas as Scheduled Tribes. "Only a selective granting of Scheduled Tribe status would create confusion among the hill community." 39. Earlier the Britishers had classified all Nepalis as tribals in the 1931 Census and this was brought forward to strengthen the issue.

A new organization has been formed called the Bharatiya Gorkha Janjati Manyata Samiti, stressing this similar demand to make all Gorkhas "tribals". It consists of 22 ethnic organizations including Mukhia, Newar, Thami, Khambu Rai, Lafa Mangar, Gurung and Dewan amongst others. It also includes the Kadasa (Kami, Damai, Sarki – the Nepali low castes), and also the Bharatiya Tagadhari Hitkari Sammellan (Bahuns, Chettris, Thakuris and Sanyasis – the Nepali upper castes). 40. The organization led by a Bahun (Brahmin), wants the same facilities and privileges, which are given to other tribals to the Nepali upper castes too. (They have been excluded from the OBC list).

Till recently, the main objective of the Bharatiya Gorkha Khas Hitkari Sammellan was solely to preserve their culture and tradition. But now it has developed a political objective of making them too tribal. "If we are made tribals, we will get protection and security. Land is also another important factor. If we remain in the general category, we will not be able to buy and sell land from tribals." 41. No wonder then, they too have started the groundwork to confirm their tribal status. They have written books and articles to show their tribal traits alongside submitting memorandas to the Centre for the same cause. Even the opposition, the People’s Democratic Front, lent support to the demand of inclusion of the DGHC under the VIth Schedule, but was of the view that all the hill people of Darjeeling be made tribals first.
SIXTH SCHEDULE PUT FORWARD AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE PRESENT COUNCIL

The DGHC elections were to be held in March 2004, but it was deferred for eight months, as the administration was busy preparing for the Parliamentary elections in May 2004. Another extension was granted up to March 2005 by the State Government. On March 21st 2005, 25 GNLF Darjeeling Gorkha Autonomous Hill Council Councillors surrendered their offices and Mr. Subhash Ghisingh became the sole caretaker cum administrator for six months. Since the elections could not be held before September 25th 2005, another extension of six months was given to Ghisingh again. Moreover he did not want elections to the DGHC unless an alternative to the Council was brought about and the V1th Schedule was to be the alternative.

During the second round of Tripartite meeting between the Centre, West Bengal Government and DGHC representatives on January 8th 2005, an appeal was made again to make all hill people tribal. Again on the fourth Tripartite talks on March 14th 2005, appeal was made to put Darjeeling Hills under the V1th Schedule. On the fifth Tripartite talks held on July 1st 2005, the Centre agreed to confer V1th Schedule status to Darjeeling Hills, but the CPM government of West Bengal put forward Article 371(J) as an alternative to the Council and even prepared a draft for the same.

But provisions like,

(i) Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Council by rotation,

(ii) One third reservation for women,

(iii) Council to supervise gram panchayat samitis and municipalities

(iv) Council to levy, collect and appropriate taxes, grants-in-aid to the said Council from the Consolidated Fund of the state , (v) Create funds for crediting all money received by and on behalf of the Council ,were all rejected.

Moreover, putting Darjeeling Hills under Article 371 meant that the DGHC would be like a Regional Development Board, which is entirely administrative. But the DGHC is a politico-administrative body. It is subject to control by the state government and political autonomy would be absent. One
third reservation for women was welcome, but the chairman would have no powers of nominating his own members. It was also apprehended that reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes by rotation would create a rift between tribals and non-tribals. The inclusion of Tamangs and Limbus as Scheduled Tribes (by a Government Notification in January 2003) has almost divided the Nepali community into tribals and non-tribals.

The ruling party in the Hills, the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLNF), headed by Ghisingh, saw only the V1th Schedule as the answer. Not only would it arm the DGHC with greater administrative, legislative and financial powers, funds would be received directly from the Centre without any interference from the state government. It could make laws regarding allotting, occupying and using land. The greatest advantage was that the V1th Schedule would give Constitutional status to the autonomous council.

The DGHC was designed on the model of the V1th Schedule Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous Council Act, 1979, but it hardly enjoyed the autonomy in the scale put forth under it. Now it was laid that the Bodoland Territorial Council would be the new model for administration in the Darjeeling Hills. The Bodoland Territorial Council Area District (BTCAD) was created after the Parliament passed the Constitutional V1th Schedule (Amendment Bill) on August 6th 2003.

Certain modifications were made in the schedule according to the 99th Amendment Bill, 2003 in the case of BTCAD mainly for the protection of non-tribals. (In BTC area, tribals comprise only 38 %. In Darjeeling too, they consist of 35 %). In the V1th Schedule of the Constitution, which mainly deals with administration of tribal areas of only Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura, there is no reservation for non-tribals. The Bodoland Territorial Council has 46 members (30 seats reserved for tribes, 05 for non-tribals, 05 for all communities and 06 to be nominated by the Governor from the BTC area). In order to protect the interests of the non-tribals in the BTC area, language and medium of instruction in educational institutions cannot be changed without the Assam government's approval. The Panchayat Raj system ceases to operate and all powers are given to the council. It has executive, administrative and financial powers but no legislative powers. It has full control over delegated subjects. The District Magistrate and police remain
outside the BTC purview. The BTC reflects the same aspirations like the DGHC.

But there are apprehensions that if the DGHC is included under the V1th Schedule, it would require an amendment in the Constitution. As this Schedule is meant for administration in the North East only, that is Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura "Introduction of the V1th Schedule outside the North East might open a pandora's box, as many small ethnic groups would be inspired to ask for autonomous status under the V1th Schedule."42.

Not only the demand for the V1th Schedule, but Ghisingh also wants inclusion of the Bengali dominated Siliguri and Dooars under the DGHC, but various parties in the plains are against this. The Kamtapur People's Party does not want the GNLF or any other party to claim territory in Siliguri or Dooars. The Kamtapuris and Jharkhandi tribes lay down that they are the indigenous inhabitants of the plains of North Bengal. The Kamtpuris are fighting for a separate state in North Bengal. Another organization in the plains, Amra Bangalee had gone to the extreme step of calling Nepalis as foreigners, which had drawn sharp criticism from the Hills. (The All Gorkha Student's Union (AGSU) even called a twelve hours strike on August 31st 2005).

The main question awaiting the Darjeeling hills is whether the application of the V1th Schedule to it would be beneficial or not. The Schedule would bring about an autonomous politico-administrative body based on ethnicity. But there are apprehensions whether the society would be able to tolerate the ethnic politics inherent within it. Even before the talks of the V1th Schedule here, "the social fabric of the hill people has been disturbed and at the margins, vital threads have begun to unravel."43.

Just by putting an area under this Schedule does not guarantee peace and harmony. The Karbi-Anglong Hill district of Assam has been put under the authority of the Karbi-Anglong Autonomous District Council, but hardly any development has taken place. The political elite have wealth and power, but the poor continue to suffer. Earlier, all tribes were united in their demand for greater autonomy and separation from Assam, but now various ethnic groups have separated and there are ethnic clashes between certain groups. In Karbi-Anglong, from September 27th to October 2005, "some 34 people were
killed from both the Karbi and Dimasa tribes, at least 400 villages razed and 500 displaced.44. In Meghalaya too, which falls under the V1th Schedule, there are frequent ethnic clashes between the Khasis and the Garos.

The question remains as to whether the same would happen in the Darjeeling Hills once it is granted the V1th Schedule. The main demand of the people, including all hill parties still continues to be the creation of a separate state, Gorkhaland. In the fieldwork report, 76.6 % said that a separate state, Gorkhaland was necessary.

Amongst them, 7.6 % laid down that Nepalis would be recognized as Gorkhas in India, 20.65 % said that there would be better facilities for all communities residing in the area, 3.26 % said there would be a greater say in political decisions. Whereas, 23.91 % were in favour of both the latter two answers and 43.39 % answered in favour of all answers.

Only 23.3 % thought that a separate state Gorkhaland is not necessary.

Amongst them, 10.71 % said there would be better facilities for Nepalis only, 42.85 % said there would be tension between different communities.

About 7.14 % laid down that there would be further sub-divisions within the Nepali community in Darjeeling, 60 % thought that only a few powerful will gain.

Regarding the question, whether there is a need or a possibility for a movement again, 60 % answered in the positive. Amongst them, only 9.72 % laid down mainly because of ethnic tensions, 13.88 % said because of lack of infrastructure in the present system,

31.94 % said it was because the earlier movement did not gain much momentum, 19.44 % said because of administrative failure and 25 % said because of an inefficient DGHC.

At the same time, 32.5 % of the people believed that there was no such possibility of a movement again. Amongst them, 15.38 % laid down that there is no efficient leader to mobilize the people, 46.15 % said that the earlier movement was enough, causing much discomfort to the people's economy and education, 34.46 % said that the people now preferred peaceful existence, whereas no one said there is political suppression. Even if there is
a movement, it will not be as volatile as before. 7.5% said they could not say what will happen in the future.

Analyzing the situation today, distrust amongst the various ethnic groups and frequent competition and rivalry amongst them would greatly help those who are opposed to the statehood demand. There has been assimilation and acculturation among all communities here, including all the hill tribals like the Lepchas and Bhutias, who stayed like nail and flesh with the Nepalis. But today feelings of communalism are being exerted. There is intense competition amongst all Nepali sub-groups for attaining tribal status.

MEMORANDUM TO INCLUDE DGHC UNDER THE SIXTH SCHEDULE

The much awaited Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) took place on December 6th 2005. The memorandum was signed by the Union Home Secretary, Mr. V K Duggal, West Bengal Chief Secretary, Mr. A K Dev and GNLF leader Mr. Subhash Ghising. Both the Centre and State agreed in principle to accord Sixth Schedule status to DGHC. The MOU envisages replacing the DGHC by an autonomous self-governing council under the V1th Schedule to the Constitution of India, following due legislative, constitutional processes by making amendment to Article 244. The MOU would be followed by due consultative, legislative and constitutional processes by the State and Central government so as to fulfill economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and preservation of land rights, social, cultural and ethnic identity of the hill people. The new council was to be named the Gorkha Hill Council Darjeeling (GHCD) as this would give identity to hill people as Gorkhas or Nepalis.

The State Government agreed to hand over nine projects to the new council like, modern dairy, fishery, horticulture, educational sports, tourism infrastructure, establishment of cultural complex, super-speciality hospital and poultry farm training centre till now under the state government.

Even though Siliguri was not granted to the DGHC, sixteen mouzas were given to it (for details, see Annexure A,B,C).
The interim administration of the area would continue to be with the DGHC till elections and a new GHCD would have to be completed within six months of enactment of Parliament Acts.

ANOTHER INTRA-ETHNIC TENSION WITHIN THE NEPALIS: PROTESTS BY NEPALI SCHEDULED CASTES

The Sixth Schedule mainly brings a tribal administration and emphasizes on the interests of tribals. Apprehensions are there that if the Schedule is implemented in the Darjeeling Hills, there would be a scuffle between tribals and non-tribals. The first chord of tension was broken when the apex body of the Nepali Scheduled Castes, the All India Nepali Scheduled Castes Association (AINSCA), protested against the proposed Sixth Schedule administration. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) provides for 33 seats in the Council, 10 seats for tribals, 15 seats for non-tribals, 03 seats for minorities and 05 seats to be filled by the Governor's nominees. Thus another friction amongst the Nepalis was again manifested. In other Sixth Schedule areas, there is reservation only for tribals. The AINSCA, laid down that "there is reservation for non-tribals also in the proposed council, which means anyone can contest for these seats. He need not specifically be a Nepali, he can also be a Bengali or Marwari."45. So their argument is if there is reservation for non-tribes, there should be reservation for Scheduled Castes too.

The Scheduled Castes population in the DGHC comprises 72,056 (about nearly 10 % of the population in the Darjeeling Hills) and they demand 3 seats for themselves in the Council. On the contrary, Ghisingh wants the entire Gorkhas, including the Scheduled Castes to be converted to tribals. This proposal is welcome by the Scheduled Castes as there will be all round development for all. "But if domination is to be by the 35 % (who will be like masters) over the 65 % "others"(or slaves) we will not accept it."46.

The AINSCA has undertaken various steps to get seats in the proposed Council. They have met Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, one of the most important Scheduled Castes leaders, given a letter to the West Bengal Chief
Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, met Dr. Suraj Ban (Chairman of National Commission of Scheduled Castes), met Mrs. Meera Kumar (Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment) and also met Mr. L K Advani, the leader of the opposition groups in Parliament.

Amongst the Scheduled Castes, a parallel organization has been formed called Gorkha Janjati (Tribal) Kami Damai Sarki Sangh, which is in favour of changing their identity from caste to tribes. They have started the groundwork of informing their community members of the benefits of converting into tribals and coming out of the shackles of oppression and discrimination. (Interviews with many from the Scheduled Caste communities reveal that the majority of them still want to keep their caste identity).

RESOLUTION FOR SETTING UP A NEW AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL

On March 16th 2006, the West Bengal Assembly accepted the resolution for setting up a new autonomous council for the Darjeeling hills. Both the Centre and the State had their own objectives of supporting the Sixth Schedule demand. The Congress has always used the Darjeeling Hill issue to play its card against the Marxists. The Marxists lent support mainly keeping in mind the ensuing Parliamentary elections in May 2006.

If the Sixth Schedule status is really granted for the Darjeeling Hills and if all the Nepalis or Gorkhas are granted tribal status, what we can for see for the future is that, there will be intense competition and rivalry amongst all Nepali groups for the various quotas, reserved in employment and educational institutions, for which all will be eligible.

The British succeeded in undermining the power of the Indians by adopting the policy of divide and rule. Even though voices are still being raised for a separate state of Gorkhaland, the Bengal government is vehemently against the division of Bengal. By agreeing to implement the Sixth Schedule for the hills and to grant tribal status only to some Nepali groups, it has to some extent, sown the seeds of disgruntlement and division among the Gorkhas and undermined their strength.

Before, the Nepalis used to think of themselves as all of them belonging to the same Nepali or Gorkha identity. Now each community within
the Nepalis is bent on how to benefit themselves. Instead of “we” concept, “mine and me” concepts have become more important. The Nepalis are only a small microscopic community in India’s large diverse population. They must stay united. It will be catastrophic if any of the sub-communities choose to maintain a separate stand. They will become a thin minority, who then, will hear their voice? Their main demand to form a separate state, Gorkhaland will never materialize, if each of them maintain and assert their separate identities, instead of standing as one block. It is apt here to reproduce the sayings of Parasmani Pradhan, who was one of the most important literary figures in Darjeeling. “We are all Nepalis. By the term Nepali, we understand various communities within it, namely Newar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Bhote, Lapche, Tharu, Sunuwar. All communities have their own languages but it is the Nepali language, which can be spoken and understood by all. All of us must make efforts to bring about the progress and improvement of the Nepali language first, but I do not mean to say that only the Nepali language’s progress must be brought about. We must not forget our respective community’s language. We must try to find more about different languages and cultures, including Newar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Bhote, Lepcha and also write books in these languages.”

It is commendable when various ethnic groups make an effort to know and preserve their own language and culture, but it must be done in a right way. Assertion of ethnic identity over the collective one often results in catastrophic events as is happening in various parts of India.

CONCLUSION

No doubt the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis in the Darjeeling region have been living in peace and harmony for many years, but recent trends show the acute assertion of their respective ethnic identities and revivalism of their own culture. With increase in population and scarcity of resources, the only way to seek protection and security of their interests, seems to be by picking ethnicity as their main tool or instrument.
The Lepchas, who are the indigenous community in the region and who have already been designated as a Scheduled Tribe both in West Bengal and Sikkim (in 1950 and 1978 respectively), are now demanding Primitive Tribal Group status. The Bhutias too want a clearer and precise definition for themselves to be differentiated from the Tibetan refugees, who came in hordes especially after 1959. Till now, the quota of seats reserved for the tribals in the hills stand like before, that is six percent, but with more Nepali communities like the Tamangs and Limbus being accorded tribal status, the position of the Lepchas and Bhutias has been relegated to the background. Thus a sense of insecurity and fear amongst them has been very acute in recent times.

The Nepalis form the majority group in the region and all the sub-communities within it were earlier subsumed under the generic term "Gorkha" or "Nepali". But accruing the facilities and advantages enjoyed by the minority groups, the Lepchas and Bhutias, especially in education and employment, mainly because they are designated Schedule tribes, has drawn resentment from the Nepali community.

What is evident today is that each sub-community of the Nepalis is keen to assert their separate ethnic identities as Mangar, Kirata Rai, Newar, Thami, Gurung, Bhujel and others. In fact all these communities are competing against each other for a tribal status.

The question that seems most evident today is whether the Sixth Schedule, if really applied to the Darjeeling Hills would really be beneficial to its people or not. Whether the region will be able to withstand the ethno-politics that is so inherent within the Sixth Schedule. Granting of tribal status to all Nepali groups is welcome but it can be seen that there will be intense rivalry and competition amongst all groups to grab the quotas and seats in various institutions, for which all will be eligible. Ghisingh has grabbed the offer of Sixth Schedule granted by the Centre and the State, without ensuring whether it would be really beneficial or advantageous. Seeds of discontentment have already been sown, as was evident in the protests by the Nepali Scheduled Castes.

The division of the Nepali community into tribals, non-tribals, scheduled castes could snowball into a major conflict in the Darjeeling Hills. No doubt,
many of the Nepalis can be included as Scheduled Tribes but this might only be a temporary phenomenon and they may again ask for being granted another status, for example, most primitive group status, as are now being demanded by the Lepchas. The process is unending. Ethnic conflicts like in other parts of India have not manifested here. But behind the picture of social, cultural and religious harmony, lies the undercurrent of tension and displeasure. This, if not checked in time has the capacity of exploding.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

9. In Gnassey village, which has 82 households, 50 households are Lepchas. All Lepchas are farmers due to the fact that they have land. But recent trends show that, at least one member of the family are into other professions like teaching, services, law and administration.
10. Presently Mr. Gaulan Lepcha is one of the MLAs from Kalimpong (GNLF party) in the West Bengal State Assembly. Mr. S P Lepcha is the General Secretary of the CPIM (Hill Unit). There was no Lepcha candidate amongst the 28 elected councilors in the DGHC, whose real term expired in 2005. Mr. D T Tamlong was one of the few Lepchas who occupied the coveted post of the Principal Secretary in the DGHC.


12. "Article 347 lays down that, on a demand being made in that behalf, the President may, if he is satisfied that a substantial proportion of the population of a state desire the use of any language spoken by them to be recognized by the state, direct that such language shall also be officially recognized throughout the state or any part thereof for such purpose as he may specify. Article 350 also says, every person shall be entitled to submit a representation for the redressal of any grievance to any officer or authority of the union or of the state in any of the language used in the union or in the state as the case may be. Article 350 A – It shall be the endeavour of every state and every local authority within the state to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education. Article 350 B – There shall be a special officer for linguistic minorities to be appointed by the President," Kamlesh Kumar Wadhwa, Minority Safeguards in India, Thomson Press (India) Ltd, Delhi, 1975, pp.248-49.

13. Shezum collects Rs.10/- per month from its various Lepcha members. 60 % of it is kept in own shezum for magazines and journals and 40 % goes to the "Pun" or the main office. The shezum helps its members especially in harsh economic difficulties.


16. Memorandum for the "Demand for the Identification and Recognition of the Lepcha Tribe of the Darjeeling District, West Bengal, under the Primitive Tribal Group List," submitted by the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA) on April 2005.(for details refer to their memorandum in appendix.).
17. The President of the ILTA is Mr. D T Tamsang, Vice-Presidents are Palden Lepcha, S M Lepcha, K K Lepcha, S T Lepcha, M F Lepcha, GT Lepcha and Basub Lepcha, The General Secretary is Mr. L S Tamsang (an ex-British Army official, has been awarded the Lok Bhasha Samman, Vir Birsa Munda Rashtriya Samman), Joint Secretary – N Y Lepcha, Culture Secretary – S T Lepcha (Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee), Literary Secretary – P T Lepcha (Bhasha Samman Awardee and acclaimed scholar).

18. In an interview with one of the prominent Lepchas in Kalimpong, name not disclosed, it was learnt that some of the Lepchas still look at the Nepalis with contempt and still consider them migrants. They have a different word in their language for the Nepalis whom they call "Lum". They themselves prefer to be called "Rongkups".


21. Interview with Dr. Sonam Wangyal, a Bhutia, who said that his parents made sure that he had the best possible education, despite the fact that his other three brothers having to be educated in a village school.


23. Interview with an old resident in Kalimpong, name not disclosed, said that it has been ordered that land should not be sold to the Tibetans at any cost, even if they offer high prices because other communities especially the Lepchas are losing land at a phenomenal pace.


27. Karl-Heinz Kraemer, “Ethnicity and National Integration,” Department of Political Science of South Asia, South Asian Institute, University of Heidelberg.


29. Refer to Table IX in Chapter II.

30. Interview with the President of the Tamang Buddhist Gedong, Mr. A B Yonzone and General Secretary, Mr. Isha Mani Pakhrin, May 10th 2006.


32. All India Kirat Yakha (Dewan) Chumma was founded in 2003 but in Darjeeling it was formed in 2004. It consists of 218 registered members. President – Dr. Ratna K Dewan (Gangtok), General Secretary – Dr. Dick Bahadur Dewan (Pedong, Kalimpong).

33. The Gurung Association held its first conclave on May 29th 2005 in Rangpo, Sikkim.

34. The Kirata Khambu International Meeting was held in Namchi from May 26th – 30th 2005. They talked about Rai culture and tradition. Since Rais have a colossal variety of dialects amongst them, it was decided to make the Bantawa dialect the main Rai language as it is comparatively easier than other Rai dialects.

35. The Bharatiya Gorkha Khas Hitkari Samellan was established in 1934 itself and included not only Bahun, Chettri, Thakuri, Khas but also the Mangar and Newar. It was the Bhajan Samiti, which kept the organization alive. From 1995 onwards, it became more active and today includes the Bahuns, Chetteris, Sanyasis and Thakuris. This organization covers Darjeeling, Mirik, Kalimpong, Bijanbari, Takdah, Singay, Panighatta and Luksan. Its registered members today stand around 1,20,000. It functions through its Sakha (branch office), Anchal (division office) and Central Committee. It collects Rs.5/- from its members, Rs.3/- stays in the branch office, Rs.1/- goes to Anchal and Rs.1/- to the Central Committee.
36. In 1924 in Darjeeling, there were only three castes associations, viz, the Biswakarma Samaj (formed in 1919, also called the Poor Boys’ Fund), the Tamang Association and Newar Samaj. The AINSCA was formed on August 19th, 1947, and was motivated by the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi and B R Ambedkar’s movement for emancipation of depressed classes. It was formed because of the support of persons like D.B. Khati, D.B. Chettri and Mangal Singh Lama. Its objectives are to bring social reforms and to remove the injustices against Scheduled Castes. Its achievements include, including Kami, Damai and Sarki into the Scheduled Caste List. But one controversial point is that while including them in the SC list, the word “Nepali” has also been mentioned in brackets. For example, Kami(Nepali), Damai(Nepali) and Sarki(Nepali). While mentioning the various other communities as Scheduled Castes and Tribes, there is no mention of their community with them. “If we see broadly, the Nepalis or the Gorkhas are looked upon as foreigners.” Interview with Mr. Kaman Singh Ramu Damu, President (AINSCA), March 17th, 2006. Their other achievements include securing quotas for SCs in Nursing Training Institute, Darjeeling, B.Ed College and other government offices.

37. Nepalis celebrate Dashai, which is different from the one celebrated by Hindus of the plains. It is a fifteen days celebration, which takes place in the bright lunar fortnight ending on the full moon. The goddess Durga is worshipped. Bulls, goats, buffaloes and other animals are sacrificed on a special occasion called “Maar.” The seventh day is called “phool pathi”, where people go out in processions carrying “kalash” (brass vases) filled with water, sugarcane tied with cloth and “jamara” (paddy saplings). The eighth day is called Maha Aastami and animals are sacrificed in various households. The ninth day is called “Nawami” and prayers are held. The tenth day is celebrated as “tika” where people receive blessings and “tika” (made with rice, curd and some colouring) from elders.

38. Earlier in the days of the Gorkhaland Agitation, when it had been stated that the hills would be granted the Sixth Schedule, Ghisingh had rejected it. He had laid down that such provisions were applicable only to Assam’s backward tribal population. He also stated that the Nepalis are not tribals.
Such status can be given only to people who are uncivilized and backward, but now he demands an autonomy reserved only for tribals.


40. The President of this committee – Mr. N K Kumai (a Bahun), Vice President – P K Allay (Mangar), Secretaries – Bijay Pradhan (Newar) and B K Mukhia and Assistant Secretary – Govind Pradhan. Those communities who have already been recognized as tribals like the Tamangs and Limbus are not members of this committee but give moral support to their demand.

41. Interview with an office bearer, Bharatiya Gorkha Khas Hitkari Sammellan, Darjeeling, May 30th 2006.


45. Interview with Mr. Kaman Singh Ramu Damu, President of AINSCA, Darjeeling, March 17th 2006.

46. Interview with Mr. Kaman Singh Ramu Damu.

47. An appeal against the Denial of Constitutional Justice to the Scheduled Castes in the Gorkha Hill Council, Darjeeling, addressed to the President of India is given in Appendix.

48. Quoted in Kumar Pradhan, Pahilo Pahar, Shyam Prakashan, Darjeeling, 1982, pp.38. (Paras Mani Pradhan said this while laying down the foundation of Nepali Sahitya Sammellan and stressing the importance of the Nepali language but it can be reproduced here, seeing the present situation).