

14 COMMUNITIES IN SEARCH OF IDENTITIES IN SIKKIM

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Sikkim joined the Indian Union in 1975. Till then, the Government of Sikkim recognised two ethnic blocks: Lepcha-Bhutia on the one side, and the largely (immigrant) Nepalese on the other. From among the Nepalese, Damai, Kami and Saraki were recognised as the Scheduled Castes and allotted a seat in the State Council and the Buddhists among the Limbus (Tshongs) were allotted another seat in the State Council in 1967. The Government of India accorded status of Scheduled Tribe to the Lepchas and Bhutias and the status of the Scheduled Caste to Damai, Kami, Manjhi and Saraki in 1978. This was done to provide constitutional framework to accord with what had been in practice since 1952. The Indians of Nepali Origin (INO=Nepamul or simply the Nepamul; Sinha, A.C. and T.B. Subba:2003) were busy in consolidating 'Nepalese solidarity' in Sikkim. They were agitated on the issue of doing away with the seat reservation for the 'Nepalese' in the State Assembly and demanded that all the 'General' seats in the State Assembly be declared as the 'reserved' for them, a demand, which was found legally unacceptable by the Supreme Court in India. In 1980s B.N. Mandal Backward Commission Report was submitted and after a good amount of debate, it was accepted for implementation in 1990s. Sikkim could not remain untouched from these developments. Demands were made to declare various communities enumerated as the 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC) and, many of the communities from among the Nepamul social commonwealth not being satisfied with the provisions of being among the OBC,

further demanded to be identified as the scheduled tribes. The paper tries to report on those developments in the State of Sikkim.

For that purpose, the author feels that it is imperative to understand the legal and *dharamshashtric* stipulations of the Nepalese social structure, which continues to be relevant for the Nepamul. *Secondly*, it is also necessary to understand the on-going *janajati movement* in Nepal, because demand for tribal status by the various Nepali communities in Sikkim is largely influenced and inspired by such developments in Nepal. *Thirdly*, we have tried to briefly review the anthropological tradition of defining a community as 'tribe' and see how the concept of scheduled tribe emerged as a political nomenclature, and not a scientific anthropological one. *Fourthly*, we have subjected the Sikkimese situation in the context of the demand for Scheduled Tribal status by the various communities. And lastly, we have briefly mentioned our limited field experience with a view to verifying the claims of the various communities the status of Scheduled Tribes. At the end, we comment on the ethnic scenario in Sikkim and report how new formations are emerging because of the availability of the legal and constitutional framework.

Traditional Social World of the Nepamul Sikkimese

Communities like the Limbu, Lepcha, and Magar lived within the present boundaries of Sikkim prior to the consecration of Phuntsog Namgyal as the first Chogyal (king of righteousness) in Sikkim in 1641. However, Sikkim's boundary with Nepal was fixed in 1817, although Sikkim had a claim over Limbuan, the land east of river Arun in east Nepal. Similarly, Nepal staked its authority over Morung, the low-lying foothills below Darjeeling hills. However, there are no historical evidences or references to indicate that the other communities from among the Nepamul were in Sikkim before 1641. Hence they must have come to Sikkim during its subjugation by Nepal for some years in the end of the 18th century and more prominently after the Treaty of Segowlee signed in 1815. Bulk of the ethnic cousins of the Nepamul Sikkimese continues to reside in Nepal and are governed by prevalent social and civil codes of

that country. Though there were Buddhist rulers at times in certain regions and some of the Nepamul communities claimed to have their kings in the past, Nepal had been known as a Hindu kingdom for centuries. Way back in the 14th century, King Jayasthiti Malla got the caste system codified and imposed it in Kathmandu valley over a basically egalitarian ethnic base. This was done with an eye to boost economic development by introducing professional specialization through occupational castes (Bista 1970: 56-57). Prior to consolidation of the Gorkha kingdom, Nepal was divided into sets of polities from west to east: *Baisis* (conglomeration of 22 principalities), *Chaubisis* (conglomeration of 24 principalities), Nepal (Malla rulers of Newar extraction at Patan, Kantipur and Kathmandu in the Kathmandu valley), Rais (Khambuan), and Limbus (Limbuan). Within Chaubisis, there was a small principality of Gorkha, which was destined to change the history and political structure of Nepal.

It may be noted that Nepal had a multiplicity of ethnic communities from the ancient times. In the words of Dor Bahadur Bista, "owing to lack of communication between different groups each remained in its traditional areas, isolated from other groups until quite recently... People with so many different origins and cultural backgrounds cannot possibly be arranged into a strict social framework. However, the values of the Hindu caste system tend to pervade the entire Nepal situation" (Bista 1980: xii-xiv). The western hills in Nepal were the home of Magars and Gurungs. Northern hills were abode of the Buddhist communities such as Sherpa, Tamang and Bhutia. The industrious Newars inhabited the Kathmandu Valley. Eastern Nepal was the domain of Kirata communities such as Limbu, Khambu (Rai), Yakkha, Sunuwar and Lepcha. In such a socially complex situation, there used to be small rulers in almost every mountain top or river valley. Writing in 1896, the District Recruitment Officer to the Gurkha regiments in British India, Eden Vansittart informs that among 'the aborigines of Nepal, Magars, Gurungs, Newars, Sunuwars, Rais, Yakkhas, Limbus, Tamangs and Lepchas may be counted. He also notes that Rais, Yakkhas and Limbus belong to the Kirata group' (Vansittart

1896:56). Furthermore, he records that while some Damais and Sarkis are recognized as “Gurkhalis”, only ‘fighting classes’ consisting of the Thakuris, Khas, Magars and Gurungs are counted among the ‘Gurkhalis’. Another recruitment officer, Major C.J. Morris, wrote in the same vein some four decades after Eden Vansittart in 1933 that ‘Gurkhas are grouped into a large number of tribes’: Thakuri, Chetri Gurung, Magar, Rai, Limbu, Sunawar, Tamang (Morris, C.J.: 1993:28). Though bulk of the recruits for the British regiments are obtained from Magar and Gurung tribes, Rais, Limbus and Sunwars are enlisted for the Gurkha regiments of the British Indian Army. With exception of certain tribes, all the Gurkhas speak Nepali, their lingua franca. Inter-tribal marriages cannot, strictly speaking, take place except between the Rais and the Limbus.

During the medieval period of its history, Nepal was divided into a series of castes and tribes and many of them spoke their own tongues. Further more, there were Buddhist Newars, who were themselves divided into castes. This was also the period, when Muslim rule in India was on decline and the British East India Company, perceived by the Nepalese rulers, to be a Christian entity, was emerging on the political scene of the subcontinent. Nepal was seen within Himavatkhand as the northern extension of Bhratkhand, the classical India of epic period. The king of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah, whose ancestors claimed to have migrated from Chittorgarh in Rajasthan to Nepal and who claimed to be ‘the king of the Magars’ (*Magarat kō raja mai hum*), laid the foundation of a strong Hindu kingdom. He consolidated Nepalese State into a Hindu kingdom in third quarter of 18th century by uniting 60 political units, termed it as ‘real land of the Hindus’, not polluted by the Muslims and Christians (*asal Hindustan*), ‘a garden of four estates and 36 castes’ (*4 Varnas and 36 jatis*). In his famous *Dibya Updesh* he exhorted his people thus: “...if the members of the council of nobility (*bharadar*) eschew luxury (the sound of) my sword will ring out on all four sides of (my kingdom’s) boundary markers. If they take to (a life of) luxury, the country is not earned out of my small pains; it is a garden of all castes, if they have sense

to realize it. All (those) of this garden, high and low, belong to the four *varnas* and thirty-six *jatis* (castes), since it is the pure land of the Hindus, should not abandon the customary religion of (their respective) lineages. (They) should redeem the master's (king's) salt..."(Sharma, P.R.: 1997:479).

A Garden of four *Varnas* and 36 *Jatis*: A Collectivity or A Hierarchy

Prithvi Narayan was a visionary in the sense that he could rally a broad cross-section of Gorkhali society inclusive of the Brahmins, the Khas, the Gurungs, the Magars, and others to his cause. His army comprised men of all the castes and social groups, an integration of some sort. The Gorkha kingdom was administered on *dharamshashtric* rules. The king, the Brahmins and the cows were above the laws. The regions vanquished by him, apart from being allotted to army commanders as *jagirs* (fiefs), were permitted to continue their customary laws and their traditional rulers were invariably not disturbed. It is a common knowledge that Gorkha kings acknowledged the continuation of 'tribal' rulers by conferring titles of '*Subba*' (revenue collectors — *Subedars* — governors in Urdu) on the Limbus, Rai (the honoured ones) on *Khambus* and *Mukhia* (the headmen) or *Dewan* (minister) to the Yakhas. Marshal communities were encouraged to emulate Khatryia style of life by adopting titles such as Singh, Rana, Jung, Bahadur, etc. and intermarrying in Khatryia families. Many of the clan names turned out to be the titles in course of time. In this context, tribes' relaxed attitude to sex and institution of polygamy among the rulers played decisive roles. After the death of Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1775 at the age of 47 years, his successors over-ran the territories between river Sutlej in the west to river Teesta in the east and Kuti pass in Tibet in the north to northern Gangetic plains in the south. At long last, they collided with the British East India Company, ruling over India, resulting in Treaty of Sugauli in 1817. By which, within four decades after the death of great nation-builder Prithvi Narayan Shah, territorial limits of modern Nepal were fixed and Hindu kingdom of Nepal came to be recognized as semi-independent

Himalayan principality. Next three decades were the period in Nepalese history marked by court factionalism, intrigues, and murders of high functionaries and massacre of aristocrats and rule by the infant kings.

This was also the period (1816-1839), which was termed as the 'silent years' and the years of 'the silent cry' on the part of the Nepalese peoples. For Ludwig Stiller, not only was the legal dialogue of the period building up a record of legally sanctioned differences in custom and practice, it was also building up a record of differences in treatment meted out to citizens of different ethnic or caste backgrounds. The dialogues, besides preparing the way for a unified code of law was also preparing the way for a code of law that would fail to recognize that all citizens were equal before law (Stiller S.J.L.: 1976: 182). All these resulted in mass massacre of the functionaries in the royal court and emergence of Rana Jung Bahadur in 1846 as the effective power wielder in Nepal leading to an autocratic system of Ranacracy. Among many features of Rana regime, two may be noted as the most significant: complete internal autonomy and consistent friendship with the British colonial rulers in India. What resulted on the social scene of Nepal because of these developments was marked by extensive migration of the impoverished masses to India as job seekers in the form of soldiers, herdsmen, wage earners, porters, lumbers, labourers and sundry handy boys. The British did consider the Nepalese (the famous Gurkhas) as the reliable soldiers for their armed forces and constabulary and an inexpensive labour force for economic development of eastern Himalayan marches. And that is how Nepalese were encouraged to settle down in Sikkim in spite of the local opposition.

In words of historians, "Ever since king Prithvi Narayan Shah's reign in the 18th century, Nepali speaking Hindu high castes dominated the remainder of the population. In order to maintain their social position, the high caste groups had used two powerful tools — the Nepali language and the Hindu religion. The ruling elite successfully incorporated all the ethnic groups in Nepal into the caste system and those groups came to accept a subordinate

position in Nepalese society as a direct result of this policy” (Hoftun *et al.*: 1999: 320). Rana Jung Bahadur promulgated the famous ‘*Mulki Ain*’ (‘national’ or ‘civil code’) in 1854, which confirmed location of every community of Nepal in a hierarchy of social order. Among its salient features are the following: twice born supremacy (*tagadharis*), clean castes waiting to be incorporated among the twice born castes on certain conditions (*Matwali* clean castes), intoxicant communities divided into enslaveable and slaveable (*Matwalis*) ones and untouchable castes remain at the bottom of the social ladder. It attempted to arrange all the different groups in a countrywide hierarchy. John Whelpton presents a simplified form of the classical Nepalese social structure in a table adopted from Hofer’s study of the ‘code’ and noted that the structure broadly corresponds to the present reality (Whelpton, J.: 2005: 9-10). The caste (ethnic?) hierarchy as per the *Mulki Ain* was the following:

1. *Tagadharis*: caste groups of “wearers of the holy cord” :
 Uppadhyayas
 Rajputs (Thakuris) — warriors
 Jaisis
 Chetris (Ksatri) — warriors
 Dew Bhaju (Newar Brahman)E
 Indian Brahman
 Ascetic sects (Sanyasi, etc.)
 “Lower” Jaisi
 Various Newar Castes E*
2. *Namasinya Matwalis*: Non-Enslavable Alcohol drinkers:
 Magar E
 Gurung E
 Sonuwar E
 Some other Newar castes E
3. *Mansinya Matwalis*: Enslavable Alcoholic drinkers:
 Bhote E (Tibetan and some Tibetanoids)
 Chepang E
 Kumal (potters)
 Hayu E

- Tharu E
 Ghart (descendants of freed slaves)
4. *Pani na chanya choi chito halmuna paranya*: Impure, but touchable :
- Kasai (Newar butchers) E
 Kusle (Newar musicians) E
 Hindu Dhobi (Newar washermen) E
 Kulu (Newar Tanners) E
 Musalman *
 Mlecch *
5. *Pani nachalnya choi chito halnuparnya*: untouchable castes:
- Kami (blacksmith)
 Sarki (shoemaker-tanner)
 Kadara (Stemming from union of Kami and Sarki)
 Damai (tailors and musicians)
 Gaine (ministrels)
 Badi (musicians)
 Pore (Newar skimmers and fishermen) E
 Chyme (Newar scavengers) E
- * = The position (status) of the caste within the group is not precisely determined.
 E = Ethnic Groups

The points needs to be noted are that the Indo-Nepalese caste system had brought the Magars and the Gurungs within the caste framework by granting them position below the twice-born Khas, but above their impure castes. *Secondly*, Kiratis were placed in the same general category as the Magars and the Gurungs, — pure but not with the twice born. *Thirdly*, unlike the tribes in the western parts of Nepal, the Kiratis were not intimately associated with the Nepal State and possibly negotiated their internal autonomy and communal land ownership (*kipat* system) as the price for submission to the Gorkha rule. It is another matter that Newars and Kiratis were not admitted into the army in pre-Rana Gorkha State.

The significant point for us is that about 20 per cent population of Nepal known as 'other hill or mountain ethnic groups (tribes)'

were termed as the clean castes, but were not entitled to wear sacred thread, a mark of ritual superiority among the Hindus. The communities counted among them were (Whelpton, J.: 1997:53): Magar (7.2%), Tamang (5.5%), Rai (2.8%), Gurung (2.4%), Limbu (1.6%), Sherpa (0.6%), Chepang (0.2%), Sunawar (0.2%), Bhotiya (0.1%), Thakali (0.1%), and Thami (0.1%). While all ethnic groups could be enslaved in the first half of the nineteenth century, this could no longer be done to higher castes Hindus. It was in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century that first the Magars and Gurungs and then other ethnic groups were freed from liability to the penalty of enslavement (Pfaff-Czarnecka, J.: 1997:430). Various social groups were engaged in upward mobility by adopting traits of Brahminical style of life. Moreover, the *model of sanskritization* was available to ethnic groups to raise their status in the caste hierarchy of the country. By this way, they did invite the Brahmins to officiate as the priests on various rituals, ceremonials and on the eve of the rite-de passage among most of the communities and, at the same time, they continued to practice their local level ethnic customs and traditions. The communities began to adopt markedly Hindu festivals such as Dasai, Dewali, Sankranti, Holi and so on. They began to hire the Brahmins to solemnize their marriages, use vermilion and strings made of green small beads as marks of the Nepalese Hindu married women's symbols and even cremate their dead. All through Rana period in Nepalese history, the social scene of the country was governed by the above civil code. In spite of the democratic experiment in 1950s, the *Mulki Ain* continued till king Mahendra abrogated it in 1963, but ethnic situation remained frozen on the model of the past practices. Things began to change in 1980s, when we learn the formation of *MAGURALI* (MAGAR-GURUNG-RAI-LIMBU), as an informal hill ethnic federation. Stirrings were on till 1990, when Nepal was declared as a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual State despite calling itself a 'Hindu Kingdom'. So far the State is concerned, Nepal did not declare the ethnic groups as the 'scheduled tribes' and their 'untouchable castes' as the 'scheduled castes' as done under 1950 Constitution of Indian Union with serious political and socio-economic consequences.

Nepal Janajati Mahasangh: Nepal Federation of the Nationalities (NEFEN)

Very soon *Nepal Janajati Mahasangh (Nepal Federation of the Nationalities, NEFEN)* was established (in 1990) to bring in all the ethnic bodies under one umbrella. To begin with, NEFEN was founded as a federation of seven different organizations: four represented Newars, Tamangs, Magars and Gurungs, the other three were Kiranti bodies, one representing Limbus, and two Rais. By 1995 it was agreed among the members that there could be only one representative body per ethnic group and thus, the federation in 1995 accepted only 21 such groups as the members (Gellner, D.A.: 1997:20). On the pattern of neighbouring democratic India, the 'tribes' demanded political, economic and social shares 'reserved' for them in the political system of Nepal. The federation claims to speak on behalf of its members on ethnic matters to the 'State' as such. Nineteen federating units are listed in its pamphlet brought out in 1993. In spite of its claim to be a non-political body; its 17-point demands submitted to the government are unmistakably political. NEFEN maintained an anti-Brahmin attitude in its dealings with various communities. Its members were supposed to be avowedly anti-Hindu. So much so that when the associations of the Chhetris and the Dalits tried to join NEFEN, they were advised to shun Hindu practices before they could be welcomed in the 'club' and naturally their request was turned down (Gellner, D.N.: 1997:22). Thus, now there is a trend among the ethnic groups in Nepal at large to distance themselves from the Hindu caste system, Brahminical practices and what came to be termed as the Hindu great traditions. The ethnic groups are now engaged in emphasizing their distinctive markings away from the caste Hindus.

Further more, NEFEN responded on U.N. resolution of December 1993 calling for a *decade of Indigenous Peoples* on March 1994 by defining "Indigenous People" of Nepal as those communities:

- “1. which possess their own distinct and original lingual and cultural traditions and whose religious faith is based on ancient animism (worshippers of ancestors, land, season,

- nature), or who do not claim “the Hinduism” enforced by the State, as their traditional and original religion;
2. those existing descendants of the peoples whose ancestors had established themselves as the first settlers or principal inhabitants in any part of the land falling within the territory of modern state (Nepal), or/and who inhabit the present territory of Nepal at the time when the persons of different cultures and ethnic origin arrived there and who have their own history (written or oral) and historical continuity;
 3. which have been displaced from their own land for the last four centuries, particularly during the expansion and establishment of modern Hindu nation State and have been deprived of their traditional rights to own the natural resources (Kipat — communal land, cultivable land, water, minerals, trading points etc.);
 4. who have been subjugated in the State’s political power setup (decision-making process), whose ancient culture, language and religion are non-dominant and social values (are) neglected and humiliated;
 5. whose society traditionally erected on the principle of egalitarianism — rather than hierarchy of the Indo-Aryan caste system and gender equality (or rather women enjoying more advantageous positions) — rather than social, economic and religious subordination of women, but whose social norms and values have been slighted by the State;
 6. which formally or informally, admit or claim to be “the indigenous peoples of Nepal” on the basis of the aforementioned characteristics”(Indigenous: 1994:23).

Tribe, Caste and Community: the British Understanding

Coming to the Indian situation, it was Alfred C. Lyall, who initiated a debate on the nature of the Indian society in post-1857 period (Owen, R.: 1973: 223-243). And it was agreed as a policy to show India as a divided entity between castes, tribes, races, regions, religions, languages, food habits, dresses and what not and it was

made loud and clear that India was just a geographical entity held together by the British might. Moreover, it was presumed that it was in the colonial interest to show India divided in various ways enumerated above. The census operations, district gazetteers, 'Peoples of India' series of publications and tribal monographs were used to show the variety within India with ethnographic support and purposefully collated write-ups were touted as the scientific treatises. Then came the British administrative policy to the distant areas inhabited by the turbulent tribes in the form of special dispensation to the frontier tracts. These tracts were turned into 'backward areas' in the Government of India Act, 1919, which came to be known as the "*Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas*" as per the Government of India Act, 1935. Colonial administrators and some of the Christian missionaries were conspiring to carve out a *Crown Colony in North-East India and Upper Burma* in the second quarter of the twentieth century on the eve of the Indian independence. With a view to forestalling such divisive moves, the *Constituent Assembly of India* came out with provisions of the '*Sixth Schedule for the Tribes*' of North-East India in the Indian Constitution, applicable since 1950.

All through eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, British scholars did not distinguish between 'tribes' and 'castes' in Indian social situation. So much so that while what came to be known as the tribe were invariably termed as *savage, barbarian, primitive, wild* etc. and there were references such as the *Brahmin Tribes, Rajput Tribes, Jat Tribes, Muslim Tribes*, etc. indicating that there was hardly any difference between castes and the tribes in those days. Events of 1857 led to a racial polarization, in which the British went all the way to establish whiteman's racial superiority. Incidentally, this also marked the beginning of ethnological investigation all over the world. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published in 1858 followed by his *Origin of Man* and Louis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* in 1871. The age of geographical discoveries, scientific explorations, and a number of technological inventions preceded this. Australia, Latin America, Africa, and bulk of Asia were already divided among the European

Imperial powers. Science was the key word of the age; 'progress' was the *mantra* of the period; and whiteman of Anglo-Saxon extraction was taken to represent the apex of human civilization. Though African and Asians were considered as 'the Whiteman's burden, who were deemed "*half devil and half child*" (Kipling, R.: 1977). "That was also the heyday of the museums. Science teaching was focused around show cases exhibiting specimens classified by types — fossils, rocks, insects, stuffed birds, caged animals in zoo — fixed entities, changeless, everlasting" (Hugh-Jones, S. and J. Ludlow: 2000: 84). There was also a new movement to lay down Botanical Gardens all over the world, which did not only have scientific motives, but also commercial ones. Morgan's evolutionary formulations with its three-fold sub-divisions: savagery, barbarism and civilization was taken to be as if the final truth.

Human beings were 'objectified'; they were to be scientifically measured and photographed as specimens representing a type; their indices were to be established so that generalizations (principles) could be made. Edward Tuit Dalton reports in his *Descriptive Ethnography of Bengal* how a grand design of ethnographic mapping of India for the sake of scientific understanding was proposed in 1868. It was proposed that two specimens of every Indian community (as their nominated representatives) were to be sent to Jubbolpore, at the centre of India, to be measured and photographed with a view to developing an understanding of the Indian peoples. Unfortunately for the sake of the British science, the Chief Commissioner of Assam spoiled the game. He informed his superiors in Calcutta that he would not risk a rebellion on hand, as his specimens might die on way to or from Jubbolpore because of the hot climatic conditions between his domain and the place of proposed *ethnographic fair* in Central India. The Imperial government could not dare to risk such an adventure and the ethnographic fair could not be held on time. However, E.T. Dalton was asked to complete the *Descriptive Ethnography* on the basis of his own data, reports from administrators, missionaries, explorers, travellers and, in fact, anybody, who could volunteer to report and

photograph the subjects. And that is how Dalton's famous Descriptive ethnography was compiled, which became a model for the future Peoples of India volumes (Dalton, E.T.: 1872).

The first population census of India was conducted in 1872, for which British ethnographers' help was sought in formulating the questions to be asked to the respondents. Since then, India is one of the few countries of the world, which has regularly conducted census operations every ten years. From the beginning, anthropologists were associated with its operations. Herbert H. Risley was the Census Commissioner for 1901, who in course of time, published *Castes and Tribes of Bengal* and *Peoples of India*. John H. Hutton was the Census Commissioner of 1931 operation and his data on castes and communities are still considered as the most authentic such figures used by the Governments and the political activists. It was J.H. Hutton, who used the term, 'scheduled castes' for the communities known as such today and identified seven attributes for a caste to be so listed. The volumes on different 'provinces' were written for British administrators in a rounded manner; locations from where the data were collected not mentioned; differences in practice were ignored within a community and efforts were made to show the distinctions between the communities. Administrators, missionaries, explorers, adventurers and petty government officials provided the data for these volumes. It is interesting to note that data on origin, food habits, religious beliefs, social practices such as marriage, dress, ornaments, industry, tools and implements and even hair-do of the communities were described to show them different from 'others'. Similarly, the photographs of the community specimens were taken from front and sides, besides sex-wise indices.

In the year 1873, an *Inner Line Act* was passed, by which tribes residing in the hills were prohibited from crossing an imaginary line to the plains in Assam. Similarly, any non-tribal missionary, explorer, traveller, businessman, wood-cutter, hunter, and honey collector was to seek written permission from competent authorities to enter such designated areas. The British intention was to safeguard the tea plantations in the plains from tribal raids. Similarly, they

intended to provide security to the non-tribal entrants to the hills from the tribes and tried to see that they did not exploit the 'simple' hill communities. The Governor of the province was to administer such areas at his discretion. Present day Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram came under such dispensation. The Government of India Act, 1919, declared these areas as the '*Backward Tracts*' and kept them away under the special power of the Governor separate from the legislative pervue of the provinces. In the year 1935, these backward tracts of Lakhimpur, Sadiya, and Balipara frontier tracts, Naga Hills District, and Lushai Hills District were termed as the '*Excluded Areas*' and the Garo Hills District and Darjeeling were clubbed among the '*partially excluded areas*'. It may not be out of place to inform the readers that the Government of India appointed J.P. Mills, ICS, a bureaucrat trained in anthropology, as the *first Tribal Adviser to the Governor of Assam* in 1940s, followed by another bureaucrat, Nari K. Rustomji. And for the last ten years, 1953-1964, it was Verrier Elwin, a self-taught ethnographer, who advised the Governor of Assam on tribal affairs. Once the Constituent Assembly met for drafting the future Constitution of India, it made the provision for listing such excluded and partially excluded areas under the 'Sixth Schedule' with special dispensations.

Tribal Policy in the Indian Union

Tribal communities attracted attention of Indian social reformers, political activists and the Hindu ascetics from western India. On the basis of their faith, customs, institutions and living in the contiguous hilly tracts, especially in the western peninsular India, these good-doers termed the tribes as the '*backward Hindus*'. On the other hand, the British administrators, missionaries, and anthropologists found the tribes a different world all together and they were to be treated separately. While the formers charged the latter to entertain the tribes as museum specimen, the latter found the formers swallowing the tribes under the discriminative caste ridden Hindu system. In this context, the acrimonious debate between assimilative Bombay sociologist, G.S. Ghurye and

missionary turned ethnographer, Verrier Elwin (1943) is relevant. Ghurye charged Elwin to follow a policy towards the tribes, which he termed '*isolationist*' and *maintaining them as museum species for study of the anthropologists* (Ghurye, G.S.: 1943), a charge, which the latter vehemently denied and 'pleaded for a slow pace of development for the tribes; so that they could absorb the shock of change smoothly'. It is to the credit of the independent India that two great humanists, Jawaharlal Nehru and Verrier Elwin, evolved a rational, human and scientific tribal policy for the integration of the tribes within the larger Indian society, while maintaining their innate ethos. In course of time, this policy came to be known as the "*Tribal Panchsheel*", five co-related aspects of tribal development and administration (Elwin, V. : 1964).

Tribes were accorded special treatment along with *the Dalits* in the Constitution of India by providing special measures for their representation in the policy-making bodies, creating avenues for their socio-economic advancement and taking care of their overall welfare. They were listed for such a treatment initially for a period of ten years, which was later extended indefinitely. As the resources were limited in early 1950s, welfare measures were also modest. Now, the measures for the tribal welfare have been increased in quantity and quality and, consequently, the quality of their life must have improved, though one must hasten to add that tribes continue to remain one of the least developed segments of the Indian population. Now there is an academic and also a common sense problem: Who are the tribes? What makes them distinct from that of the other population? Are the 'scheduled tribes' the same what anthropologists consider as the 'tribes'? Anthropologists, who claim to have specialized on studying the tribes, have advanced many definitions, which create problems in evolving a universally acceptable definition of the phenomena (Beteille, A.: 1974: 61-74). Beteille examines some of the definitions provided by the leading anthropologists and shows that most of the definitions are either contextual to the 'tribe' under study or they refer to a list of the characteristics found in the 'tribe' studied by the particular author. So much so that even the most standard and obvious source

of definition of the phenomenon gives about half a dozen meaning of the term 'tribe'.

Anthropological Approach to the 'Tribes'

Oxford English Dictionary provides a definition of 'Tribe', which may lead to the following: (i) Tribe has varied meanings; synonymous with family, lineage, or even community with defined Territory. (ii) Tribe means 'an organization of peoples along ethnic lines'. (iii) Tribe is 'an administrative category as in Solon's Athens'. (iv) Tribe is 'a political division of people as in ancient Rome'. (v) Tribe is 'merely a geographical or a territorial category as in the Bermudas'. (vi) Tribe is 'a community of peoples claiming common descent and generally practicing endogamy. (vii) Tribe is 'a simple society guided by a headman or a chief' (Beteille, A.: 1974). However, this inability of the scholars to provide a comprehensive and, if not universal, near universal definition of 'tribe' does not necessarily display their academic inadequacy. It is also pertinent to understand that the extent, spread, variety, stage of technology, and sophistication of culture are as well responsibility for defining them in an acceptable way. Look at the scenario; from vanishing Red Indians to Arrant, Onge, Birhor, Santal, Agnate, Khasi, Monpa, Bhil, and etcetra: how to describe all of them in to a single definition? Thus, we are forced with accepting a working formula by identifying the salient features of the tribe. *Thus, we assume a tribe to be more or less homogeneous society having a common government, a common language/dialect, and a common culture.*

For the policy framers, above anthropological predicament of defining the tribe was of no help, as various pressure groups were in no mood to wait for an ideal definition of the tribe. They acted on the second best option they had. The Indian policy-makers were aware of the 'tribal tracts', excluded and partially excluded areas. Then there were hill districts. All these regions were known to be abodes of the tribes. Then there were census reports, in which communities were enumerated by castes and tribes. It became obvious that by the time of 1931 census, the distinction between

tribes and castes had become an issue of some importance. Tribes came to be viewed more and more in religious and not just in ecological terms. "If a group could be shown clearly 'Hindu' in its religious beliefs and practices, it was a caste; if it was (an) 'Animist', it had to be treated as a 'tribe' (Beteille, A.: 1974: 63). Indian society in 1940s presented a confusing array of the variety in terms of hierarchy, economy, religiosity and ecological expanse. Demand on the political economy of the time was so pressing that special provisions had to be made. It is instructive to know that prior to terming the 'tribes' as the "scheduled tribes" in the Indian Constitution on the pattern of the 'scheduled castes' these communities were variously termed by the British administrators as the 'primitive tribes', 'aboriginal tribes', and 'backward tribes'. However, "before promulgating the list of the Scheduled Tribes in 1950, the State Governments were requested to suggest tests for determining as to which of the tribes should be treated as Scheduled Tribes. The criteria suggested by 14 State Governments were mentioned in Appendix IV of the First Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes (1951). They offered conflicting views. However, the following appeared to be the features common to the tribes in various States: (i) tribal origin, (ii) primitive way of life and habitation in remote and less easily accessible areas, and (iii) general backwardness in all respects" (Tripathi, C.B.: undated). Thus, what construed, as the political management in the form of '*Scheduled Tribes*' has to be seen in relation to then existing politico-economic scenario of the country. Thus, it is difficult to identify a single way of satisfactory classification of 427 tribes originally listed as the 'Scheduled Tribes' in 1950. The writer of these lines is not aware of if any community has been de-listed from the above, but the current list of such communities has 698 entries.

The list of the Scheduled Tribes has a notional image of being economically backward, but it does not mean that all of them are equally and similarly backward. There are communities, which are extremely vulnerable from economic point of view such as Birhar of Chhotanagpur. Then, there are tribes like Nocte Nagas,

who are Vaishnavite Hindus; others are similarly, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, nature worshipers and even Muslims. They are spread from extreme north of the country, Ladakh to the south, Andaman Islands and east in Manipur to west in Rajasthan. Some of the tribes are located in only one small corner of the country, while there are some, which are spread in many states. There are tribes in the schedule, who number in double digit demographically and others, whose size run into hundreds of thousands. From cultural point of view, some of them have a tradition of very rich heritage and others have a simpler form. Way back in 1950s, Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) conducted '*cultural traits survey of India*' (Bose, N.K.: 1961). Some three decades later, the ASI similarly mapped out the country from cultural and social points view through its massive project of '*Peoples of India*' and published a series of volumes on various states. From political points of view, the Scheduled Tribes were organized in 'states,' principalities, chieftainships, elders' councils, village panchayats and some other forms of administration. Sum total of the entire arguments is the conclusion that except being listed as socially and economically the most backward communities in the country, the Scheduled Tribes among themselves have very little in common. And that explains partly the absence of an all India forum for the Scheduled Tribes.

Most of the Scheduled Tribes of North-East Region are demographically small in size. And that's why none of the three largest Scheduled Tribes, Bhil, Gond and Santhal, are from North East India and their problem are also basically different, as these large tribes live side by with the hierarchical Hindu society. Commenting in a different context, a perceptive scholar has following to record: "The tribes of Central and Western India are completely different from tribal communities in North-East, where there is better education and other facilities and indeed, where tribal political elite have been in power for 50 years, as in the case of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills, which became Meghalaya in 1972. One could remark that so-called primitiveness of the tribes is more in the Fifth Schedule States (outside the North-East Region), where education, political awareness and empowerment as well health

facilities are extremely poor and income levels at the bottom. The mainstreaming of these groups, where their lands have been taken over by plain settlers and others, has not really helped them very much. Indeed, it has devastated their culture, their environment and their social standing as well as their economic status" (Hazarika, S.: 2004).

Ethnic Scenario in Sikkim since 1950

On December 5, 1950 the Maharaja of Sikkim, Sir Tashi Namgyal, signed the Treaty between India and Sikkim. By then India had already sent J.S. Lall, ICS as the Dewan (chief administrator) of the State. The political parties were agitating for people's participation in the administrative affairs of the State. In this background, the Mahraj Kumar (the crown prince, Palden Thondup Namgyal) made the representatives of the political parties agree to an '*ethnic parity*' formula in May 1951, by which Lepcha-Bhutia communities were equated with the Nepalese communities for political representation in the future. In January 1952, the ruler issued a Proclamation envisaging an elected State Council. The Proclamation envisaged that while the Nepalese candidates were to be elected by the entire electorate of the constituency in question, the Lepcha-Bhutia candidates were first to be elected by the Lepcha-Bhutia voters only of the constituency concerned and thereafter to be voted again by the whole electorate of the constituency (Basnet, L.B., 1974). The Maharaja issued a Constitutional Proclamation on March 23, 1953 laying down the rules for the formation of State Council, Executive Council, their powers and their functions. The State Council was to consist of six Lepcha-Bhutia, six Nepalese and six 'nominated' members. The plea was that the Lepcha-Bhutia were considered original settlers of the land and the Nepalese were seen as the recent migrants from Nepal. On the eve of the third General Election in 1967, one seat each for the 'Scheduled Castes' (Damai, Kami, and Sarki from among the Nepalese 'untouchables') and Tshongs (a section of the Limbus, who were alleged to be Buddhists) were added to the Council on the ethnic consideration (Sinha, A.C.: 1975).

Once the Tripartite Agreement was signed between ruler of

Sikkim, representative of the Government of India and leaders of the political parties in Sikkim, a thirty-two member State Council was envisaged. The Agreement envisaged a State Council in which there were to be 15 seats each for the Lepcha-Bhutia and Nepalese of Sikkim and one seat for the Scheduled Castes and another for the Buddhist monasteries. And 1974 election was fought on that basis and once the State was merged with India in 1975 the State Council was termed as the State Assembly. The Bill No. 79 (for re-arranging the seats in the State Assembly in Sikkim) was introduced in the Lok Sabha on May 18, 1979, which became an act in 1981. This parliamentary provision stipulated 12 seats reserved for the minority Lepcha-Bhutia communities, two seats for the Scheduled Castes, one for the Monasteries and rest of 17 seats were declared as the 'General, on which, any Indian who is a *bona fide* voter in Sikkim, could be elected. Keeping in mind that the Lepcha-Bhutias have a distinct culture and tradition, which is different from that of the Nepalese, they have been treated as the Scheduled Tribes under Article 342 of the Constitution of India (Kazi, J.N.: 1994: 339).

Consolidation of Nepamul and Emergence of the OBC

Nar Bahadur Bhandari's third term as the Chief Minister of Sikkim from 1989 onwards marked the gradual integration of the State into the Indian political system. This was also the year, Indian National Congress (I) lost the power at the Centre and a rag-tag coalition of political parties in Delhi under the leadership of former Congress man, V.P. Singh came to power. With a view to garnering Hindu support base in its favour, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) launched a movement to construct a temple of Lord Rama at Ayodhya, a holy site in the State of Uttar Pradesh on a disputed plot of land, where an unused mosque stood for centuries. This emotive move of B.J.P polarized the Indian society into Hindus and Muslims. With a view to counteracting such a development, Prime Minister V.P. Singh removed the collected dust from the Report of the 'Backward Class Commission', filed by a backward caste activist, B.N. Mandal and decided to implement some of its recommendations. In view of the Mandal Commission, a bunch of intermediary castes (below the twice born and above the untouchable

castes) were identified as 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC) and 27 per cent reservation for them on the basis of their population in 1931 was recommended in the jobs and educational institutions. The communities listed as the beneficiaries in the Report mounted an aggressive demand for the implementation of the recommendations of the Report. Naturally, Sikkim could not remain untouched from this development. Chief Minister Bhandari, hailing from a Chhetri caste, instead of responding positively to the demand of the OBC, was spearheading demand for recognition of Nepali language as one of the Indian national languages.

By then Bhandari had reached a plateau in his political career as a leader of a regional political party, Sikkim Sangram Parishad. He was turning impatient and arrogant with his people, as the members of his political party occupied all seats in State Assembly. One of his long time associates, Pawan Kumar Chamling, a Minister in the State cabinet, raised the issue of implementing the Report of the Mandal Commission in Sikkim in 1992 and for that he was expelled from the Sikkim Sangram Parishad Legislature Party. Thus, P.K. Chamling occupied the lone seat on the opposition bench in the State Assembly. However, a turning point came very soon, the State Assembly passed the resolution against the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report in 1994. Very soon, 19 out of 31 members of the SSP legislature party deserted the Chief Minister Bhandari and formed a parallel Sikkim Sangram Parishad (Sanchman). Bhandari was voted out of office on May 19, 1994 and Sanchman Limbu was appointed the new Chief Minister. The first move of the new Sanchman government was to recommend to the Union Government to include seven communities from among the Sikkimese of Nepali origin as 'socially and educationally backward Classes' (OBC). Consequently, Bhujel, Gurung, Limbu, Mangar, Rai, Sunawar and Tamang were declared as the OBC in Sikkim on June 2, 1994.

Claim for the Scheduled Tribal Status and Looking for the Evidence

Even this belated step did not satisfy the aspirations of some of the communities such as Limbus, whose reserved seat in the State

Council as the Tshongs was undone in 1974. They continued to press for recognition of their status as 'Scheduled Tribe'. Thus, in December 2002, Limbus and Tamangs were accorded the status of Scheduled Tribes in Sikkim and Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Furthermore, in partial modification of earlier orders by Notification No.2/WD of June 2, 1994 and Notification No. 236/SW/251(3)/WD dated June 15, 2000, the State Government of Sikkim declared (i) Bhujel, (ii) Dewan, (iii) Gurung, (iv) Jogi, (v) Kirat Rai, (vi) Mangar, (vii) Sunawar, (viii) Thami as the 'Most Backward Classes (MBC) and (i) Bahun, (ii) Chetri, (iii) Newar and (iv) Sanyasi as the 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC) in Sikkim (Sikkim Government Gazette: Extraordinary. No. 308 dated Gangtok, Friday 19th September, 2003). To add to the pitch further, the State Cabinet decided on January 29, 2005 that the Lepcha Scheduled Tribe would be accorded the status of 'Most Primitive Tribe' (MPT) in Sikkim, a status unknown to the Government of India. It appears that the Government of Sikkim is not aware of the implication of such a move at all India level.

It is known since 1979 that the Government of Sikkim and people of Nepalese origin in Sikkim have been demanding for the reservation of seats for the Nepalese in the State Assembly, as it was done for the community between 1953 to 1979 in the State Council. However, it has not been conceded till date, but Sikkim has joined North-Eastern Council (NEC) for the purpose of overall development. There are a number of States in North-East India within NEC, which are known as the 'tribal States', as they have more than their fifty per cent population recognized as the scheduled tribes. The Government of Sikkim approached the Government of India to accord the status of the Scheduled Tribes to the communities listed as the Most Backward Classes (MBC) by them.

Reading the Ethnographic Reports on the Communities: Out of eight communities claiming status of the Scheduled Tribes, six of them filed their 'ethnographic reports' before the appointed Committee looking into the issue: Bhujel, Dewan, Gurung, Magar, Rai and Sunuwar. Two of them, Jogi and Thami, did neither approach the Committee with their demands nor their spokesmen

could be identified by the concerned functionaries of the State Government for filing their petition, if any. All the communities claimed to be the 'kirat'; emphasised uniqueness of their daily practices distinct from others; tried to prove that they were ancient communities with history, kingdoms, language and script; claimed different food items, artifacts, crafts, architects, even vocations. None of them referred to their unique myths of migration, genealogies, animist belief as a form of faith. All of them quoted the same historical sources of British army recruitment offices, whose speculative reports may not have much scientific validity. Similarly, G.P. Singh's speculative Kirat history, based on largely conjectural Indological evidence, was taken as the proven historical fact. These claims run counter to certain realities: extensive inter-marriage among the demographically small migrant communities, largely mixed settlements of the Nepamul migrants along with local tribesmen and extensive sanskritisation of their social world. Instead of emphasising their folk traditions of pre-literate stage, the thrust had been on script and language, which are invariably neither written nor spoken today. They are trying to be tribals and accordingly, they are acting as such: "We must learn how to be a tribe. This is difficult for us, but very, very important" — said 70 years old leader of Darjeeling's Mukhia/Sunuwar/Rai Ethno-Political organisation, Mr. Mukhia in his Hill Boarding School English (Shneiderman, S. and Mark Turin: 2006: 54).

The above anthropologists referred a comical case of their own work. Mark Turin had compiled a thin pocket size volume of Thami dictionary of endangered native lexicon. The dictionary did not serve the purpose in the expatriate ethnic groups in India, who found it too small to help their claims of Scheduled Tribal status. The same year, in fact, a more substantial Thami-English Dictionary was published by a member of the community, bolstered by a high number of Nepali loan words. This served the ethno-political agenda far better, more words that could be included, the heavier and, therefore, a more appropriate component of a tribal portfolio. Taking the point further, they informed us how the State Government has got 13 tribal languages listed as official language, in which *Sikkim*

Herald, the Government weekly news bulletin, is published. It is entirely another matter that many of these languages are neither spoken, nor read by their claimed patrons. Similarly, they noted a peculiar Sikkimese phenomena of scriptophilia. Most of the communities staking claim for tribal distinctiveness, are busy evolving their 'lost ancient' scripts largely borrowing from the Deonagri script of Nepali, which is the lingua franca of Sikkim (Shneiderman, S. and M. Turin: 2006).

Field Observation from the Tribal Sikkim: With a view to understanding the ground reality, we decided to visit certain villages of the various communities to see for ourselves how unique they are in their actual every day lives. A glimpse of the field report is recorded below:

Gurungs/Thami: They claim that traditional vocation had been sheep rearing. In fact, some of them still tend sheep, their traditional vocation; they cannot graze them on the barren or forestland, as it is against the laws relating to the forests. They do spin woollen threads and weave them into blankets, rugs, and other forms of daily necessities. There were households, which were settled in the village for the last 8 generations, say around 1800 AD or soon after. They eat basically millet products; ferment millet beer at home and use milk products on occasions of celebration. Though they take help of their community elders as medicine men, priests, sorcerors and diviners, there are occasions, when rich among them hire Brahmins to solemnize the weddings. In case of the inter-tribal marriages, which are more common than before, the community formally adopts the girl in the 'tribe', and then follow their normal marriage rituals. There are some Jogis and Rais in the village.

Megitara is a Buddhist village near Rinchenpong bazaar; They do sheep breeding along with cultivation of the dry crops on the slopes, as there are no rice fields in the village. They are building a Lamaist Gompha in the village with monetary help from the government here too; nobody speaks Gurung language. We visited

near by *Sangadorji* village, where we found three traditional Gurung houses on age-old structure. They were crumbling in the absence of maintenance. The Government should help these houses to be maintained as heritage, may be with help of INTAK etc.

Besides the Gurung Taksari (copper miner and coin minters) family of Mr. B.B. Gurung, there were two families of Gurungs: Dhanu Thikadar and Param Thikadar, who had taken land on lease from the Estate department of the Namgyal rulers. This has to be seen in the light of the Namchi Kazi family in Western Bhutan, who were ruthless landlords on the Duar settlers. They held land lease for mining lime, sand, and stone; clearing the forest and settling the Paharias for the Dorji family, who held fiefdom over the Western Bhutan. The question to be reconciled is : How come the Gurungs, who are traditionally the denizen of the region north-west of Kathmandu valley and engaged in sheep grazing, travelled all the way to the slopes of mount Kanchanjunga and Bhutan Duars and, though most of them remain marginal subsistence cultivators, some of them were assigned feudal privileges of landlords and minting the copper coins?

Rais or *Khambus* : *Meyong* village is close by Rinchengpong daktung and has 188 households. They are bilingual, speaking Rai or Bantawa at home and Nepali outside. The village was reportedly settled some 6 generations back; say in around 1870s. It is believed that a British lady, possibly the Political Officer's wife, camping at Rinchengpong daktung, visited the village and found the Rai villagers so servile that they could mew their voice like a cat. Since then the village came to be named 'Meyong after cat's mew'. Right from the hilltop to the bank of the river stream down below, the entire slope is inhabited by the Rais. There are many Rai villages in the locality. Many of the Rais are strict vegetarians, as they follow Prarthana Samaj and Kabirpanth. Of late, some other Hindu ascetic sects, from outside Sikkim or local, have emerged in the region with considerable following :

Magar: *Saldung*, is a Magyar village in Chakhung Constituency and has more than 200 households and it has the distinction of

being the biggest Magar village with as much as 1,000 voters. They claimed that it was an old village with a small Hindu Kali temple at the bottom of the slop, which produced a copper plate dated sambat 1913 (1856 AD) as the date of its foundation. We saw it, but an authority did not issue it, though its antiquity may be questioned, but if it was a genuine one, then the temple suggests that the village was in existence in 1850s. Apparently, it is an old village, as right at the top of the village on a hilltop, there are relics of Magargarhi or Magardzong, a Magar fort. As Jarathan, the alleged settlement established by the Gorkha General Jawahar Singh Thapa prior to 1700s, this area is likely to be under the Gorkhas during 1770 to 1815. And thus, the village has its antiquity. However, none of the Magars could speak their tongue in the village. Magars, Gurungs, Jogis and Dewans inter-marry among themselves.

Jogis: They claim to be the followers of Yogi Gorakhnath, a *tantric* sage of medieval period. Gorkha rulers, the ancestors of the present king of Nepal, were said to be his followers and Jogis claim to be the royal priests. They are unlike the Brahmins, who go on reciting holy prayers and *mantras* in the night and blowing conch shell for the welfare of the community and visit the householders in the morning to collect uncooked food items from the respective benefactors. They do not officiate as the priests for religious occasions. They are a type of degraded Brahmins, who do not live in compact settlements in the villages. They worship Kali and Bhairav. They claim to have 108 *Gotras* (clans) such as Kashyap, Kasi, Kaushila, etc. As their number is small and they live scattered in various villages, they inter-marry with Magars, Sunawars and others. For the purpose of the appointed Committee, nobody appeared before it or made memoranda or filed a claim for acquainting others with their problems, if any. It appears that the community does not have even a social or cultural or a welfare body representing them unlike the cases of other communities in the State. They do not have their distinct language and speak Nepali.

At long last, we could locate a Jogi, Man Bahadur (50), son of late Ganga Prasad Jogi, in the Magar village of Saldung, who had married a Magar lady some 16 years back. As his in-laws provided

land to him, he resides in this village cultivating it and does not follow his caste profession of reciting *mantras* in the night and blowing conch shells, rather he appeared to be apologetic about doing so in the past by his ancestors. Earlier he resided with his father and brothers (M.B. Jogi, Chaturman Jogi and Kaila Jogi) and first wife, who expired, at Sherpa Gaon, Upper Burmiok, West district. His brothers reside at Hathi Dhunga, West district. Two of his nephews, Til Bahadur Jogi and his brother, sons of Jogi Kaila, reside at Rinchingpong village working as school teacher and in the State Electricity Department respectively. There are Jogis found in the following villages: 7/8 houses at Sherpa Gaon, Upper Burmiok; 5 houses at Dorong in Kamling Block; approximately 10 houses at Ralang; 8/10 houses at Jerung; 15/20 houses at Nandu Gaon in Namchi Assembly constituency; 3 houses at Lingchom in Geyzing Constituency; 5/6 houses at Soreng village; One house of one Arun Jogi at Tatopani near Reshi. Goverdhan Jogi (78) and Purna Bahadur Jogi (67) residents of Upper Burmiok claim that their families were residing in the village for the last four generations.

Bhujels: Their traditional occupations have been making of beaten parched rice (*chira*) and *palanquin* bearing. They are also found scattered in the villages; there is hardly a Bhujel village in Sikkim. The informant, Hastaman Bhujel (about 65/70 years of age), resides at Tadong in his father-in-law's house, as his father had sold all his land in the village Sanga Dorji. There are Bhujel houses at Chakhung, Gyalzing Kyonsa (one house) and Sanga Dorji (one household).

Sunawars or Mukhias or Koincho: It is the community, who by tradition make bamboo crafts: *doko*, *thumse*, *nanglo*, *dalo* and a variety of baskets. They are proficient hunters. The literal meaning of 'Koincho' is the one, who looks down from a height, i.e. who are proficient in climbing trees. They were also reported to be settlers of high mountain slopes. They claim to have 12 clans such as Lawkush, Rujiz. They claim to have their own language, which they have forgotten and are trying to revive. They have their own tradition of diviners, who secretly perform their rituals at night.

However, of late they have been calling Brahmins to officiate as the family priests on occasions. It is reported that there are about 50 houses of the Sunwars at Chakhung, Chumbung and Pokki Gaon, where some of the respondents informed that they had been there for the last 5 generations. Furthermore, Sunawars are found at Galling (3 or 4 houses), Dara Gaon, Mendo Gaon to Khola Ghari in Chakhung Constituency (about 35 houses).

Dewan or the Yakhas: Limbus, Khambus and Yakhas claim to be the 'Quirt', which claim to have their kipat land. Yakhas, who relate themselves to the classical 'Yakshas' in the Hindu myths, are said to be a small community along with the other two in the Eastern Nepal during 1750s. It is alleged that they could not be subjugated by Prithvi Narayan Shah and for that matter he deputed his brave nephew, Chandrabir. When Chandrabir failed to defeat the Yakhas in the battle, he invited the adult Yakha warriors to his place of residence, Chainpur, in a picnic, where all the able adult Yakhas were killed. The surviving elder village headmen accorded title of 'minister' — Dewan like the Limbu Subbas, Khambu Rais and since then like other two ethnic groups, Yakhas got another ethnic nomenclature, Dewan. For Chainpur, the Yakhas claim that original name was 'Chiyen Gaon', meaning 'grave yard'.

They constitute a small community of about around 20,000 in Nepal, about 1,000 in Darjeeling and 500 to 600 in Sikkim (some 67 to 100 houses). As their number is very small and they do not reside in compact villages of their own, they have been counted among the Rais in Sikkim. They inter-marry with the Rais and are not enumerated separately in the decennial Census operations. Of late, the community has begun to identify itself separately by emphasising distinct marriage and death rituals. They have as well begun identifying a distinct language different from the Bantawa, the dominant Rai tongue.

Ratan Kamal Dewan, owner of the Himalayan Nursery in the Development Area in Gangtok, is the president of the Yakha Association. His father worked for the Namgyal rulers in the forest department and had come to Sikkim from Darjeeling in 1918. Similarly, Mr. R.K. Dewan and his sons work for the Government

of Sikkim. Their most populous village is reported to be Ghum, 3 kilometre away from Namchi town in South District, where at one time there used to be about 20 houses of Dewans, presently it is reduced to 7 only. There are 2 households of Dewans at Tadong in the East District.

Jogis, the medicants and holy beggars, Bhujels, the *chira* makers and planquin bearers, and Sunwars, the hunters and basket makers are similar to clean occupational castes in the Gangetic plains, who are counted among the OBC. Jogis are apparently located in the caste structure as a part of the Nepalese caste system to serve the Hindu population at large. And naturally, they do not have their distinct language other than Nepali and recite some folk legends in honour of Gorakhnath or Bhairav, or Lord Shiva. Bhujel and Sunawar may have their tongues similar to Rais and Limbus as they lived among them. In view of the possibility that they may be recognized separately as an ethnic group, they are busy discovering distinctive attributes for their communities. It is logical that a community with a sizeable population should have its dialect, not necessarily different from that of its neighbours. With the exception of the Lepchas, Limbus and to an extent Bhutias, all the communities in Sikkim are migrants from Nepal during the last two hundred years or so. Some of them moved to Sikkim during the Gorkha invasion in 1770s and it is logical that some of them would continue to reside in Sikkim. Thus, none of them can claim to a distinct territory in Sikkim. As many of the communities live in the mixed villages, their claim to an exclusive social, religious and cultural life is similarly limited. Even dominant four ethnic groups, Limbus, Khambus, Gurungs and Magars inter-marry among themselves and with the minor communities, such as Jogis, Dewans, Sunawars, and Bhujels. The communities counted among the Kirat commonwealth, like Limbus, Khambus inclusive of Dewans, Sunwars (?) and Bhujels (?) appear to have a near clear case to the status of Scheduled Tribes. One is not sure whether Gurungs and Magars can be counted along with the Kirat. But the case of the Jogis, is clearly the case of OBC, and in no case it should be counted among the Scheduled Tribes. It should also be noted that in States of Punjab, Himanchal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gorkhas, a

term inclusive of all the Nepamul residents, are counted as the OBC. In Assam, the individual communities such as Rai, Gurung, Magar, etc. are counted among the OBC. It should be kept in mind that in most parts of India, internal ethnic and caste divisions within the Nepamul community is simply ignored and all are collectively lumped together as Gorkha or Nepalis.

There is another problem: Sikkim is the only State in India, where seats in the State Assembly is reserved on the name of the communities, because of their being the 'significant sections of population' on eve of its merger to India. As it was the part of the 'tripartite agreement', 12 out of 32 seats in the State Assembly are reserved for the two Scheduled Tribes, the Lepcha and the Bhutias. This issue was taken up even to the Supreme Court, which opined that the seat reservation was integral part of the 'agreement', on which ground Sikkim joined Indian Union. However, the impression continues among the communities in Sikkim that once they are declared as the Scheduled Tribes, they will have separate seats reserved for them in the State Assembly. And thus, the series of demands are made for being declared as the Scheduled Tribes. Inspired by the *Janajati* movement in Nepal, a number of communities in Sikkim have staked their claims to be counted as the Scheduled Tribes, and for that, they have begun displaying social distance from Nepalese caste practices. Further more, Sikkim has joined North-Eastern Council in recent years, a forum in which four out of eight States have 'an image of being tribal States'. This impression has created a possibility for being counted as the majority scheduled tribal State by according MBCs the status of Scheduled Tribes.

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