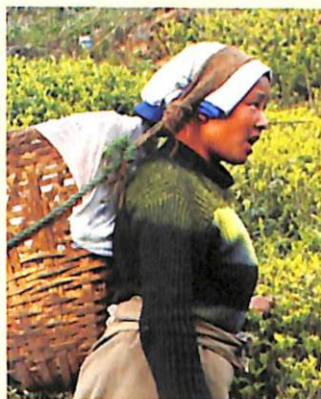


# Marginalization of Gorkhas in India

A Community in Quest of Indian Identity



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Das

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# MARGINALIZATION OF GORKHAS IN INDIA

A COMMUNITY IN QUEST OF INDIAN IDENTITY

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## Preface

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Writing the present book entitled "MARGINALIZATION OF GORKHAS IN INDIA—A Community in Quest of Indian Identity", we the authors, had to keep the objectivity that had interwoven with the Gorkhas of their living in the country over the period of last five hundred years or so both in the Indian Himalayas and mainland of the country. At every turn of their life, they had been marginalized by the mainstream communities instead of their dedication to the nation building process of the country. The present study is mainly based on the experiences of the authors in North-East India including the Darjeeling hills. In fact, the Gorkhas are concentrated in Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas. About one crore Gorkha population are living in India today without any specific identity realization by the mainstream communities of the country. The Gorkhas are serving the nation in militia, agrarian belts, plantation frontiers and service sectors of the country in the process of nation building endeavours. The present study shall highlight as to how the Gorkhas instead of having their contribution to the nation building endeavours are hardly recognized

and brought under the mainstream of national life. The study universe is Darjeeling, Dooars and Terai areas of West Bengal in particular and North-East India in general. In the process of marginalization of Gorkhas in India, an analysis has been made both from the micro level and macro level taking into account of the genuineness of the problems of the Gorkha community in India. How intra-community marginalization as well as inter-community marginalization processes are on vogue in the Gorkha community of the country is another objective of the study. How holistically, the Gorkhas are marginalized in the democratic country like India today is still another objective of the study. The study has also incorporated a case study of Gorkha tea plantation workers of Darjeeling to establish the fact that how the Gorkhas as a whole have been marginalized in the country. Marginalization is the social process of human society in which a major group marginalizes the other minor groups. For instance, in West Bengal, the Bengalis have marginalized the Gorkhas ever since the independence of the country. This marginalization process called for the emergence of a new theory palatable to a marginalized community like Gorkhas as the existing theory which binds the community like Bengali in West Bengal can not explain the real problems of the Gorkha community of Darjeeling-Dooars areas of West Bengal as well as North East India. So, the present study tries to evolve a new theory of social dynamics of the Gorkhas in India in general and at West Bengal in particular.

Working on the research project, we were fully supported by our wives and children and we are

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therefore grateful to them all. Heartfelt thanks are due to Shri Narad Prasad Sharma of Block Development Office of Sibmandir, Kadamtala, Darjeeling for inspiring us and contributing some noble ideas to the authors. We are also thankful to the CBWE family who had given ample access to us to endeavour ourselves fully to the work. We would also like to thank the people of our survey universe (Darjeeling-Dooars of West Bengal and North East India) who extended all sorts of cooperation and supports to accomplish the research study on the marginalized Gorkhas of the region in due time.

Finally, we would also like to thank Shri J.K. Singh of Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi for taking keen interest to publish the book in time.

Siliguri, West Bengal

**Dr. K. R.Sharma**  
**Shri T.C. Das**

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# 1

## Introduction

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[The Gorkhas are known to the world as vigilant soldiers with all sorts of sincerity, stubbornness and kindheartedness across the world] (Northey and Morris; 1976). Coming to the question of their <sup>they</sup> immigration <sup>can</sup> across the Himalayas, it is found that they made the entire Himalayas as their abode putting all their sweats, blood and lives. Their aspiration for national identity has to be however recognized with the history of five hundred long years of their living in India.] The Indians know that they are very sincere soldiers having superb martial characters. But their martial endeavours have gone into dust bin as their struggle for acquiring Indian identity has so far been hardly taken into due consideration by the Indians. Simply they are known for manual workers, chowkidars, soldiers and bodyguards of big sorts or aristocrat families of the Indian metropolis.

The present work is the outcome of thirty informal years of research study of the <sup>many have focus on</sup> authors regarding the marginalized status of Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers of North-East India. The marginalized status of the Gorkha tea plantation



workers is prototype of the entire Gorkha community of North-East India at the micro level research analysis. Being the Gorkhas by ethnicity, we, Dr. K.R. Sharma and Shri T.C. Das have perceived the same glimpses of life while interacting with the central communities of the country. Simply, the so-called big sorts among the Gorkhas are made Shields (*Moharas*) of the other communities of the country. It means that the Gorkhas are marginalized from both within the respective community and from other mainstream communities of the country.) In the present study, we <sup>the authors</sup> have <sup>here</sup> tried <sup>their</sup> our level best to analyze the process of internal and external marginalization of the Gorkha community with our personal life experiences as well as the case study of tea plantation industry of North- East India including Darjeeling hills)

The Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers are mainly concentrated in tea plantations and agrarian belts of Darjeeling-Dooars areas of West Bengal and the state of Sikkim of North-East India. Their immigration history from Western Himalayas is the history that started in 15<sup>th</sup> century. The original Gorkhas from India immigrated to Western Nepal, Gharwal, Sikkim, Darjeeling and North-Eastern Himalayas including Assam to save their Gow Dharma (cow-Hindu religion) from the treacherous attacks of Muslim rulers including their Indian followers.) The push factor for their immigration to Indian Himalayas from the Nepal Himalayas was poverty, caste rigidities and aspiration for class enrichment. That had lead to the emergence of male immigration to Indian mainland (*Munglan*—the land of Mogals) in search of jobs particularly in Indian armies and other forces. It is found that the Gorkhas also joined the army of

Kauravas during the great Mahabharata war. In fact, then, there was no specific political boundary between present India and Nepal. The same was the picture in respect of other countries adjoining India like Burma, Bhutan and Sikkim as well as Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh of North East India. This was the main reason as to why the people used to move freely from one corner of Indian sub-continent to another.

Even the present country like Bangladesh had no specific political boundary with India which helped Bengalis of Bangladesh to move freely to the present West Bengal state and settle down permanently. Similar <sup>same theme</sup> was the case of Gorkhas of Nepal who being acclimatized in the Himalayas preferred to settle in the Himalayan regions of East and North-Eastern India including Maynmar. The same thing is also found in case of North-East India where people from Burma, Thailand, Tibet etc. migrated and settled down in various regions of North-East India (Bose:1997) permanently. Still today, we found that some people of North-East India visit their relatives' homes very frequently especially at the time of festivals and ritual ceremonies. In quest of survival, some communities among others tried to make better living than other communities by following the process of marginalization. So, marginalization is the alpha and omega of human civilization. The process of marginalization has lead to the emergence of inter-ethnic rifts and struggle for better existence. The specific characteristic features of these highlander communities are shaped by the isolated Himalayan jester, culture and languages/dialects which are mostly dissimilar to Indian mainland communities.

The above <sup>7/2</sup> observation indicates that the Gorkhas along with other ethnic communities of North-East India were the boarders of the same boat in the pages of history in so far as their immigration history in the region is concerned. The pertinent point is that some communities immigrated little bit earlier in the region than the other communities. In fact, (since the time when those communities had been immigrated from Burma, Thailand, Tibet etc. to North-East India, also the Gorkhas (Kshatriya and Brahmins) of India were immigrating to Nepal Himalayas. This may be the obvious reason why the present Indian Gorkhas immigrated to Indian mainland a little bit later than they immigrated to the Himalayas. From this perspective, if we can analyze <sup>(It is wrong)</sup> the history of whole communities of the region, we find that every ethnic community had been the immigrated community to the region. So, it is really misnomer to call only the Gorkhas as immigrants from Nepal. In fact, the Gorkhas were the immigrants from India to Nepal once upon a time during the Muslim rule in India.)

### Gorkha Immigration to North-East India

Talking about Gorkha immigration to the Eastern Himalayas consisting of Darjeeling, Sikkim and Bhutan, it is found that it was 1652 A.D. when Chowgel dynasty started at Sikkim, few Newars (goldsmiths) were invited to Sikkim to mint coins (*Chaptay Paisa*). This along with the introduction of settled cultivation (terrace cultivation), a large number of Gorkhas especially, Bahun, Chhetri, Mangar, Gurung, Kami, Damai, Sarki, Rai, Limbu, Thami, Tamang, Gurung etc. were invited to Sikkim-Darjeeling by the then Chowgel kings of Sikkim-Darjeeling. It was because of this fact

that to have sustainable revenue source, settled cultivation was a Must for the Chowgel kings. The local Sikkimese Lepchas and Bhutias were not accustomed to have such terrace cultivation of sustainable nature. It shows by the revenue history of Nepal (Regmi: 1971) and Western Indian Himalayas that only the Gorkhas were the exponents of terrace cultivation in the Himalayas (Sharma; 2005). This is even found today at Arunachal Pradesh (Sharma: 2003) where the local tribes have leased out their land for terrace cultivation to the Gorkhas no matter whether they are from Nepal, Assam or other places of North-East India. The history of Gorkha immigration to the then undivided Assam is found to be the history of five hundred long years when Ahom kings used to rule the present entire Assam consisting of present entire North-East India. The terrace cultivation along with *Gai Goth* (cow sheds) as well as animal husbandry of the Gorkhas attracted the Ahom kings as it used to provide good revenue to the government of Ahom kings. This was the main reason why the Gorkhas did not like to join tea plantation jobs later on in Assam when the British planters started tea cultivation in Assam. By the time, tea cultivations had started in Assam, the Gorkhas were already well received and recognized by the local government for settled cultivation in the region. Later on, the same strategy was followed well by the other government of North-Eastern states in so far as the question of settlement of the Gorkhas in North East India was concerned. This fact has been well found to be exposed when we visited Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram and Assam during 2002-2006 A.D. Here, in this respect, whosoever the Gorkhas are there, they are mainly concentrated in rural areas

of the region. Miles together, we found the *Gai Goths* (cow sheds) of the Gorkhas. Almost all the lands having terraces in hill areas are raised by the Gorkhas for settled cultivation. So, they have made the land cultivable making fertile with cow dung and other natural fertilizers. In this way, the settled cultivation of the respective state governments of North East India, gave rise to end to some extent the Jhum cultivation of the local tribes. This is the main reason why the terrorist outfits of local tribes today of North East India do not like to have more and more Gorkhas in the region being supported by their governments for state revenue. Of course, this is the main reason why the Gorkhas are being evicted through the whole hearted socio-economic, cultural as well as political marginalization processes of the mainstream communities of the region. The state governments are also the covert supporters of the process of marginalization of Gorkhas by the mainstream communities and terrorist outfits as no concrete action is being taken by the governments of North- East India against such terrorist outfits whenever the Gorkhas are ousted or ejected from the region by such terrorist outfits.

Pondering on the immigration history of Gorkhas in Eastern Himalayas particularly the Bhutan and Sikkim along with Darjeeling, it is found that the Gorkhas are again concentrated in the rural niches of the region. It is also found that at first Gorkhas were not preferred for tea garden jobs because the Adivasis as tea garden workers were recruited in Darjeeling hills between 1840 to 1848-49 from Santhal Parganas, Ranchi and other places of Bihar, present Chattisgarh and Orissa, but those Adivasis could not however work

in the hill tea gardens as they could not adjust with the adverse climate of hills and therefore they were replaced by the Gorkhas from various parts of Darjeeling hills and also a few couples from the Nepal Himalaya's in and around 1850 A.D. Interestingly, there is no accurate account of labour immigration at the tea plantations of Darjeeling hills from Nepal. Thus, it is all about the utter speculations or presumptions that all the tea plantation workers of Darjeeling hills are hailed from Nepal.

It is really a politically motivated Bengali chauvinist politics to call Gorkha tea plantation workers of Darjeeling hills as the immigrants from Nepal. In fact, the then Nepalese Government of Nepal was antithetical to supply tea garden workers at Darjeeling from Nepal. This was the main reason why the British planters recruited the Gorkha Sardars and Gallawalas (labour recruiters) to recruit their respective caste/tribal workers from their places of origin. Here, the places of origin as mentioned by some scholars are very vague as not a single specific account has been found to have stated so far regarding the accurate places of origin of the recruited workers of hill tea gardens. Of course, culturally, linguistically, emotionally and racially, all the Gorkhas draw their traditions from the mainland of Nepal.

In the research analysis, it is found that not a single worker could utter the actual place of origin of his/her ancestors. In fact, we had a haunch to explore the rationality behind blemishness of calling Gorkha tea plantation workers as immigrants in the region and found instead of their settlement history of more than two hundred years at the plantation industry, they

are whimsically called immigrants and descendents of immigrants from Nepal. But finally, after intensive investigation, we found that they are all baseless blemishes as not a single tea garden worker wants to leave tea garden and go to Nepal for their settlement permanently. Some people go to Nepal just to meet their relatives there in the same manner as some Bengalis of West Bengal/North-East India go to Bengaladesh particularly Shylet district of Bengaladesh for the such purpose. If it is so, can we call all Bengalis and North East India including West Bengal as the Bengaladeshi immigrants to West Bengal of North East India?— certainly not and the same is to be established in case of the Gorkhas of West Bengal and North-East India as all the Gorkhas have settled here permanently giving their blood, sweats and perseverance to the land of their settlement. The same thing is also found in case of Bhutan and Sikkim where the Gorkhas actually made the land cultivable, habitable and worthy to lead comfortable life for all the communities of these countries. But Gorkhas today are simply being used as “USE AND THROW COMMODITY” (*Kam Chalo Bharo Afal Tero Tharo*)—and this prevalent process we have operationalized in the study as the Marginalization process of entire Gorkhas and at the plantation society we have conceptualized the marginalization process of the Gorkha tea plantation workers of Darjeeling Himalayas in terms of the Plantation Sociology—the effort of specific theory building in the period of globalization of 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is the need of the hour to explore a suitable theory for the Gorkha community and Gorkha tea plantation workers in so far as the sociological theory building is concerned in the globalized era.

### Why the Gorkha Migration Taken Place?

Culturally, the Gorkhas, since time immemorial, had deep conviction for male mobility across the countries and connect the workplaces with their home. It is said in Nepali proverb that "*CHORA KO JAT KI RAN MA KI BAN MA*" which indicates the fact that the son of a Gorkha family should either die in War field or in Jungle, to survive either by defeating the wild animals or enemies or die while fighting with the wild animals or enemies. It clearly shows that the Gorkha community was in the habit of globalizing their community people since time immemorial in the Himalayas. So, globalizing the Gorkha community as a whole, they had to encounter with the process of marginalization everywhere. Therefore, the globalization and marginalization are two sides of the same coin for the Gorkha community. But instead of the marginalization of the Gorkha community, it survives due to having their perseverance, stubbornness, sincerity, commitment, discipline and dedicated services to the global communities and thus they belong to *Khati Kahnee Jati* (Sharma:2005) or labourous community in the world. This is the main reason why the world knows that the Gorkhas as the martial race and therefore famous in war front but hardly the Gorkhas are known as the integral part of the working class of the world.) The present study highlights the facts that they are equally a committed workforce of the industrialization as well as urbanisation processes. The example is the present study that highlights about the tea plantation industry of India particularly of North-East India where they are serving with all commitment and dedication for centuries together but marginalized by the national mainstreams. Thus,



marginalization is the characteristic feature of the Gorkha society as a whole and the tea plantation workers of Gorkha community in particular.

Of course, the globalization as antithetical ethos in the past to the Indian working class has appeared to have been the positive impacts among the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers as it has helped to liberalize the Gorkha community of India from the centurion old segregation, subordination and thereby marginalization. At least now, the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers can not be made serfs or slaves at the plantation frontiers and North-East India. The present study highlights on the one had the impacts of globalization of Gorkhas on Gorkha tea plantation workers and marginalization of the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers on the other. Both the processes are overwhelming forces to generate a new type of theory building in studying such a kind ethnic group of working class having most marginalized status in the country. The theory has been generated from the study which is called Theory of Plantation Sociology or the Sociology of Ethnic Marginalisation which is quite dissimilar to the centuries old Theory known as Industrial Sociology ever evolved during the British rule in India and neo-colonial post independent rule of Sovereign, Democratic and Republic India through the Government of West Bengal.

Defining Plantation Sociology is a herculean and de-novo task. It starts with the very nomenclature of plantation because the plantation is neither purely agriculture nor absolutely industrial unit of production. It is an agriculturally dominated industrial unit. It can neither be labelled as industrial organization in very true sense of the term nor can it be called as an

agricultural unit having agrarian characteristics. Thus, the Plantation Sociology is the Sociology of industrial organization guided by the Sociology of agrarian social structure because apparently the Sociology of the industry is as good as the Sociology of rural hamlets that are found around the plantations. So, the Plantation Sociology is the synthesis of Industrial Sociology and Rural Sociology. It has distinctively a peculiar form of social system that is neither prevalent in an ideal industrial organization nor in a typical agrarian niche of the country. The mode of production is industrial but relation of production is purely agrarian regulated by Minimum wages being articulated by the industrial level tripartite agreements, minimum fringe benefits and most marginalized status of the workers among the industrial labours of the country. All the plantation workers are being defined alike under the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 coupled with the system of recruitment on *Badli* (substitute) basis. The workers recruited under the *Badli* system of labour recruitment can be ousted from the employment like the agricultural workers of the big Zamindars in Indian villages because the tea plantation workers have not been supposed to serve with the termination of service notice as per the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. Thus, the relation of production between the labours and management is as good as the agrarian production relation. In this way, the plantation workers are marginalized today in the period of globalization in so far as the provisions of Plantation Labour Act, 1951 are concerned.

The study is centered round the North-East India. In North-East India, the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers are mainly concentrated in

Darjeeling-Dooars of West Bengal and Sikkim states. However, Sikkim being a separate state, the extent of marginalization from above i.e., the government level is at the lowest ebb but the marginalization of the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers is at the highest level in West Bengal as West Bengal government belong to the Bengali community—the most *Subidabadi* (opportunist) community of the country. The West Bengal Government is merely concerned with the revenue from tea plantations, tourism industry, agrarian belts and urban areas for socio-economic development of Bengalis of West Bengal as it has nothing to do with the socio-economic development of the Gorkha community of Darjeeling-Dooars region of West Bengal.

At the tea gardens as well as other areas of Darjeeling-Dooars, the remote control mechanism lies with the Bengalis in so far as the *modus operandi* of the tea plantations and other economic sectors of the region are concerned. A few local vendors of the plantations and agrarian sector as well as urban sectors of West Bengal in the form of trade union leaders, management personnel cum owners as well as government officials helped to extend and establish the marginalization process of the Gorkhas and Gorkha workers in all aspects of their life. Talk about the trade union leaders, they are Bengalis, talk about the management, they are all belong to Bengali community and again talk about the West Bengal Government officials, they are all the Bengalis of West Bengal. So, a triangular matrix of management, trade union and government is responsible factor for the formation of marginalization of Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers of West Bengal. Unlike Adivasi workers who have their Jharkhand state, the Gorkhas and Gorkha

tea plantation workers of the region do not have any specific state to represent them in India or abroad. This is another reason for evolving a new theory of Sociology known as Plantation Sociology or Sociology of Ethnicity to study the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers in India including West Bengal. The proper assessment of human resource capital of the plantation industry and agrarian sectors with urban sector economy under the globalization process has been kept aside by the process of marginalization as West Bengal Government has adequate nostalgia for socio-economic development of the Gorkha community including the Gorkha tea plantation workers. Of course, with all political motives rarely, the government tries to launch some stray programmes for the Gorkhas and Gorkha workers keeping in view of merely the upliftment of the Gorkhas and Gorkha workers rather than the overall socio-economic development of the community and the workers as a whole.

The appropriate theory for this upliftment paradigm of Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers is the theory of Plantation Sociology or Sociology of Ethnicity. Secondly, the new theory is meant for the upliftment of Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers rather than development especially ever since the independence of the country in 1947. The theory is based on communal Bengali ethnic orientations especially launched by the West Bengal Leftist Government for the last 33 years as Leftists believe on caste/community politics based on ethnic nationalism (ethnocentric-chauvinism) rather than the class politics (Ganguli:2010) for the working class of the country.

The marginalization of Darjeeling-Dooars is apparent from the Siliguri-centric as well as Kolkata-centric (Debnath: 2009) development process of Bengalis and Bengal Government. The statement can well be supplemented by the fact that the Bengalis are concentrated at the towns where all the infrastructural, financial and holistic development funds are under the process of diffusion. In spite of having Darjeeling town as district headquarters ever since the British days, the development strategy is at the lowest ebb compared to the Siliguri town over the last two decades. Citing unstable political situation in Darjeeling hills as a cheap slogan by the Siliguri Bengalis led by Shri Asok Bhattacharjee, the Municipal and Urban Development Minister, the Government of West Bengal has been spending all the funds at Siliguri and thereby marginalizing the Darjeeling hills. This is the government way of marginalizing the Darjeeling hills. Secondly, historically the Darjeeling-Terai-Dooars had never been with West Bengal or at the hand of Bengalis of West Bengal. Here, in this context, Prof. Anand Gopal Ghosh (2010), the prominent historian of North Bengal University, has once stated that historically, the entire Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas as well as sub-Himalayan Terai/Dooars and parts of Coochbehar had been inhabited by Kiratas—Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Gurung, Mangar, Lepcha, and Rajbanshi—the Koch people. Interestingly, he has not mentioned anything about the Bengalis in these areas and thus it appears from his observation that entire present Bengalis of the region are immigrants from the then East Pakistan and present Bangladesh. According to Prof. B.K. Mishra of North Bengal University, prior to the merger of North Bengal to the British Raj, there was no Bengali

in North Bengal except a few Bengali Sanyasis (Sadhus) from South Bengal and the Bengali Sanyasis had no *locus standi* in North Bengal. The factor of Bengali immigration from Bangladesh to Himalayan and Sub-Himalayan belts made themselves conscious so as to marginalize the local innocent tribal Kiratas who mainly belong to Gorkha community and Rajbanshis. This is how the eternal marginalization process is working well for the Gorkha community.

At the micro level analysis, we would also like to cite an instance as to how the marginalization of Gorkha community takes place among the Gorkhas only. Here is a case study of Dr. K.R. Sharma who was marginalized as a Gorkha personality under the process of marginalization in the region, that too at the highest academic level. Dr. K. R. Sharma, a young man from the Gorkha community of 22 years hailing from Kalimpong of Darjeeling district at North Bengal University in 1981 completed his M.A. in Sociology and Social Anthropology. In fact, he was highly impressed by his post graduate mini thesis writing project that was conducted at Purbong Busty of Kalimpong where all the people belonged to the Gorkha community. Their pitiable socio-economic conditions invited him an urge of pursuing himself for research study. But for the next two years after 1981, he had to loiter here and there at Kathmandu, Sikkim and Kalimpong in search of a suitable job but alas in vain. Finally, at the end of 1984, Dr. Tanka Bahadur Subba, a research scholar from Kalimpong, inspired and encouraged him to leave teaching job that Dr. Sharma was doing at the Government High School, Kalimpong and join the research project being launched at the University of North Bengal for hill Darjeeling. So, he

had to join the University of North Bengal as a Research Assistant at the Centre for Himalayan Studies. The name of project was Eco-Development Project—a project of Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India. Here, at that juncture, he was given impression by Dr. T.B. Subba and his teacher, Prof. N.C. Choudhury that along with his working in the project, he could do his Ph.D. and both of them also ensured him to provide a job when opportunity comes at the university. Working in the project for the next three years, he tried his level best to get his Ph.D. synopsis registered but Prof. Choudhury, somehow played dirty Bengali politics and did not encouraged him to do the same. Finally, in 1986, Dr. T.B. Subba, the then lecturer at Centre for Himalayan Studies of North Bengal University, somehow under his guidance got Dr. Sharma's Ph. D. synopsis registered. This was the way how for almost three years, he as a Gorkha research student was marginalized by his own teacher on the one hand and by his own community person on the other. But by the time Dr. Sharma's synopsis was registered, Dr. Sharma was on his crucial stage of life in so far as his age limit to get a government job was concerned.

In the meantime, Shri Kamal Kumar Sharma, the friend of Dr. T. B. Subba informed and suggested Dr. Sharma to apply for the post of Education Officer at the Central Board for Workers Education under the Ministry of Labour, Government of India. So, Dr. Sharma did the same considering his age to get the government job and the crisis of getting a suitable job. Fortunately, Dr. Sharma was selected from the Nepali speaking group but he had to leave the research project at the University of North Bengal and joined

as Education Officer Trainee at the Indian Institute of Workers Education, Bombay. That ends Dr. Sharma's NBU chapter. But Dr. Sharma sensed the politics of ethnic marginalization accurately at NBU during 1986 when he applied for the post of Research Assistant at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of North Bengal, Darjeeling. Here too, his project supervisor (Prof. N.C. Choudhury) was the Chairman of the interview committee. As per the impression given by Prof. Choudhury, he was damn sure that he would be getting the job, but Prof. Choudhury being a Bengali selected a Bengali friend of Dr. Sharma, Shri Prasanjit Deb Barman for the post. That made Dr. K.R. Sharma really frustrated but later on he came to know that his project supervisor (Prof. N.C. Choudhury) and Research supervisor (Dr. T. B. Subba) had concertedly decided not to give the post of Research Assistant to Dr. K.R. Sharma.

Later on, after joining the job of CBWE as Education Officer at Siliguri in 1987, Dr. K.R. Sharma tried to continue his research work under Dr. T. B. Subba, but he straightway rejected to do so due to the instigation of Dr. Subba's friend, Shri Kamal Kumar Sharma who was also then an Education Officer in Central Board for Workers Education at Siliguri. Dr. Subba rejected to guide Dr. K.R. Sharma for research work objecting on Dr. Sharma's personal matter and the matter was his marriage with Sarita Chhetri, M.A. B. Ed. So, Dr. K.R. Sharma had to leave the idea of doing his research under Dr. T.B. Subba. But after some time, Dr. Mita Bhadra, the wife Dr. Sharma's teacher, Prof. R.K. Bhadra, asked Dr. Sharma to talk about the research work with Prof. R. K. Bhadra of the department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of North Bengal.



Dr. Sharma did the same and started a fresh research work on Cinchona Plantation Workers of Darjeeling hills. So, under Prof. R.K. Bhadra, Dr. Sharma did his Ph. D. in 1996 and thus he became a doctorate for the first time in his life.

Here in this context, Dr. Sharma was marginalized both at the micro as well as macro levels. At the micro level, Dr. T. B. Subba hailing from the same ethnic community marginalized Dr. Sharma may be due to his fear psychosis that academically Dr. Sharma would be at par with him in so far as the academic pursuit is concerned. Still later on, Dr. Sharma came to know that the friend of Dr. Subba named Shri Kamal Kumar Sharma had misguided Dr. T.B. Subba against Dr. Sharma not to guide him for his Ph.D. thesis. The case study shows that Dr. Sharma's micro level marginalization from his own community fellows. Talking about the macro level marginalization, Prof. N.C. Choudhury being a Bengali thought it better to provide the job of Research Assistant to another Bengali who once happened to be the batchmate of Dr. Sharma. After acquiring his Ph.D. degree, Dr. Sharma approached Prof. R.K. Bhadra, his guide for a job at the University of North Bengal. But he too asked Dr. Sharma to try in hill colleges of Darjeeling because he also might have felt that Dr. Sharma too would be again at par with his Bengalis at NBU. Dr. Sharma found the NBU to be the colony of so-called Bengali academicians mainly hailing from Kolkata. Again, Dr. Sharma approached Prof. R.K. Bhadra to help him to get registered for his post doctoral synopsis. Dr. Bhadra again suggested Dr. Sharma to write more and more books rather than pursuing on post doctoral research study. However, for the last 25 years, Dr. Sharma has

been pursuing himself on academic writing and published nine to ten books so far on Gorkha cinchona and tea plantation workers of North-East India and very shortly Dr. Sharma is going to get his post doctoral degree.

Analyzing Dr. Sharma's marginalization episode, two things have been explored and the exploration leads us to draw a tentative generalization that Gorkha society is infected by all sorts of individualism in so far as its social upliftment as well as development is concerned.

- A Marginalization leads Dr. Sharma to face challenges both at the micro as well as macro levels, and,
- B. Make a place for Dr. Sharma in the academic world.

At the micro level, after pursuing research on cinchona plantation workers, Dr. Sharma was obstructed as well as interrupted thoroughly on the office works by Shri Kamal Kumar Sharma, his own fellow Education Officer from his own community. This again had further negatively positivised Dr. Sharma's heart to do some concrete academic works by way of completing his Ph.D. Thesis. Here, the role of his beloved wife, Smt. Sarita Sharma is always commendable and appreciable. It is because of her active association and supports, Dr. Sharma did his Ph.D. At the macro level again, the same Dr. Mita Bhadra tried to exploit Dr. Sharma in many ways as Dr. Sharma was by ethnicity a Gorkha but somehow Dr. Sharma managed Dr. Mita Bhadra who used to sabotage Dr. Sharma by instigating her husband, Prof. R.K. Bhadra (Dr. Sharma's guide) to delay in going

through Dr. Sharma's Ph.D. manuscript. So, Dr. Sharma being a Gorkha was positively inspired to face challenges with all stubbornness both at the micro as well as macro levels. In fact, Dr. Sharma promised himself to do something different so as to bind Dr. Mita Bhadra and Kamal Kumar Sharma to call him Dr. K.R. Sharma in course of time to come on and he did it and now both of them have to address him as Dr. K.R. Sharma as his name is there in the department as one of best Education Officers of CBWE from North East India and at the national level website. In fact, at the micro level, Dr. Sharma was awarded by the Central Board for Workers Education, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India as the best Education Officer from North-East India in 2009 with the name Dr. K.R. Sharma only. Mr. Kamal Kumar Sharma, now Regional Director, CBWE, Siliguri chapter has to address him as Dr. K.R. Sharma. So, at the micro level also, Dr. Sharma's marginalization helped him in turn to go constantly ahead with his academic and professional pursuits. This might be the apparent reason why by the end of 2010, Dr. Sharma has planned to definitely complete his post doctoral research. Putting Dr. Sharma on the marginalization track by the people so described above inturn helped Dr. Sharma to himself gallop ahead to the process of his mainstreaming to the highest academic world and this is the living example of Gorkha sentiment, glory and stubbornness as a whole.

Dr. Sharma's sense of challenging the marginalization process is a prototype of entire Gorkha community. The challenges that Dr. Sharma took up will definitely be a glaring example that should encourage the future Gorkha scholars to comfortably

go ahead in contributing and enriching the literature on marginalized Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers of our country in general and North East India in particular.

### **Operationalization of the Concept of Study**

The process of marginalization of Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers is an unheard phenomenon as nobody knows anything in details about the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers. In general, the Gorkhas are known as martial race suitable to the militia job that carries sincerity, commitment, stubbornness and loyalty to the masters and commanders. Their contribution to the Indian economy by working at tea plantation frontiers of North-East India has been for the first time introduced by the present scholars. Their utter marginality has been realized today in the period of globalization as Darjeeling hill Gorkhas and Darjeeling tea industry (universe of the Study) falls under the fair trade certificate along with other international certificates provided by the international customers especially U.S.A.. Interestingly, the fair trade policy has been administered for the tea products and not for the Gorkha workers who produce the fair trade orthodox tea for the international buyers. The marginalization is the characteristic feature of Gorkha community and therefore the Gorkha tea plantation workers. In order to operationalize the marginalization concept, following observation on Darjeeling tea plantation workers has been made with our experience of last thirty years of research study in Darjeeling. The marginalization process has been operationalized giving a theory and the theory is the Theory of Plantation Sociology or

Sociology of Ethnicity. The marginalization of an ethnic community by another community takes place after the span of long history of living together in the same geographical niche.

### **History of Marginalization of the Gorkha Tea Plantation Workers**

The history of Gorkha tea plantation workers of Darjeeling Himalayas coincides with the history of marginalization of Gorkha ethnic community of the region. In the present section, we have tried our label best to historically describe the ways and means of marginalization of Gorkha tea plantation workers in Darjeeling hills. The marginalization of Gorkha tea plantation workers is the history of marginalization of Gorkha community in North-East India. Besides Gorkhas, there are Adivasi tea plantation workers in West Bengal but the Adivasi tea garden workers of Dooars/Terai and Assam have national existence as they have Jharkhand, Orissa and Chattisgarh states in India while the Gorkha tea plantation workers along with the whole Gorkha community as a separate ethnic community do not have any state of their own in India and therefore they have been still considered as immigrants or descendents of immigrants from Nepal by the mainstream communities of the country in spite of having five hundred years of their settlement in various parts of Darjeeling hills and North-East India (Sharma: 2010).

The marginalization history of Gorkha tea plantation workers can be classified into three phases, viz., British era, post-independent era and globalized era. In the study, the marginalization of Gorkha tea plantation

workers has been found to be a holistic process of organized exploitation as the workers have been marginalized by all stakeholders of tea industry and society as a whole. The tea plantation workers are considered as peripheral entity while tea economy is central to all concerned whenever Indians including the Bengalis talk about the economy of Darjeeling hills.

Historically, ever since its inception from 1840, the marginalization of Gorkha tea garden workers of Darjeeling hills started with the recruitment of workers by the respective Gorkha caste and tribal Sardars and Gallawalas. In the process, first of all, the respective caste/tribal Sardars followed the method of luring their respective caste and tribal people to join the tea garden jobs stating that "*CHIYA KO BOT MA PAISA FALCHA*" meaning thereby the tea bushes provide ample as well as easy money to the workers. Here, the process of marginalization was telling lies to the people concerned and cheating them later on at the plantation enclaves. It shows that the push factor for labour migration from agrarian belts of Eastern Himalayas to the tea estates of Darjeeling hills was the caste and tribal sentiments and emotions that were being well played by the respective Sardars and Gallawalas (Sharma:1997). Interestingly, it is found that there is no specific account of labour migration from Nepal as blemished by the present West Bengal Bengalis because the recruitment of workers then was to be kept at the top secret by the management of tea plantations. Secondly, during the formative period of tea industry at Darjeeling hills when there was labour shortage, the then Nepal Government banned her citizens from joining the tea garden jobs at Darjeeling or *Munglan* (India—land of Muslims) except to be the *Lahurees* (soldiers in British

Gorkha Regiment at Lahore—now Pakistan). The term *Lahuree* emerged as they had to go to Lahore—the then headquarters of British Gorkha regiment. This may be the apparent reason why Prof. Sukomol Sen (1977) has stated that Darjeeling tea garden labours had been hailed from the local areas only. Geographically, then the entire eastern belts of Nepal adjoining Darjeeling hills were under inaccessible dense forests. So, there was no question of importing tea garden labours from Nepal. Of course, a few workers had joined Darjeeling tea garden manual jobs after the opening of Terai belts of Nepal (1950) with the eradication of malaria programme by the United Nations Organization (UNO).

The indentured nature of recruitment at their places of origin was supplemented by the forceful marriages on the ways before arriving at the tea gardens of the region. Doing this, the married couples could not run away with the hazardous nature of jobs at the plantations as well as unhealthy enclaves of the tea plantations. Therefore, living at isolated tea garden enclaves made them marginalized not only from the mainstream life but also the management and supervisory categories of the plantations.

Living at the respective caste and tribal labour *Dhuras* (labour lines) made each caste and tribal Gorkha tea garden workers marginalized from other castes and tribes having divergent dialects. Thus, socio-culturally, every caste and tribal Gorkha labour was marginalized from other castes and tribes. That was a kind of planters/managers' articulated marginalization process. Every worker had to seek permission from the planters/managers while pursuing any kind of socio-cultural activities in the garden including the

marriage of their children. Many beautiful daughters of the workers had been made the victims of carnal sexual desires of the British tea planters. This may be the concrete reason why many Anglo-Indian families are still found at the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills today. Politically, the workers were encouraged to struggle for separate territorial jurisdiction for Darjeeling hills from the mainstream of West Bengal (Nag: 2008). It was a kind of British political gimmick on the ground that if the British Government was really interested for separate political existence of Darjeeling then how for the eleven hours on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, the East Pakistani flag (Pradhan: 1978) had been hoisted at the top of Capital Cinema Hall of Darjeeling town? In this way, the Gorkha tea garden workers in particular and Gorkhas in general were to be fully marginalized. Here the parameter of marginalization was telling lies by the British planters so that they could easily manage their tea gardens without any disturbance from the local people and then the so-called Communists of West Bengal. The spectacular feature of the process of British marginalization of Gorkhas and Gorkha tea garden workers was of the overt type i.e., established exploitation which was the apparent means for marginalization because the tea gardens along with the entire Darjeeling hills were enclaves, isolated, indentured and low wages and employment of husband, wife and children (Bhowmik: 1981) units of British economy. It however became a covert type after the independence of the country.

During the British period, each caste and tribal Gorkha worker had to work under the respective Sardars. So, Sardari system was the prevalent method of labour recruitment, employment and administration



of workers at Darjeeling hill tea gardens. The Sardars used to get Rs. 10/- as recruitment Bonus at the time of Dashara (Dasai) and the Sardars therefore used to act like employers, guides, guardians as well as the benefactors of the workers. Under the marginalization process, the workers had to compulsorily visit Sardars' hearth and homes at the time of Dasai to receive Tika (cultural blessings). In this way, they used to converge into a marginalized hierarchy (class) and thus they were made peripherals in the local social system. The colonial planters with colonial government became hundred percent successful to marginalize the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea garden workers in respect of socio-economic as well as political aspects of their life in the region. Politically, each tea garden had its own democracy which was called **Plantocracy** (Devi: 1989). In fact, democracy in India is the political system for the majority community, by the majority community and of the majority community (Subba: 1990). The Gorkha tea garden workers had been marginalized both at the micro level as well as at macro level. At the macro level, the Gorkha workers along with the entire Gorkha community had been marginalized in the region with the ethnic identity crisis and at the micro level, the colonial exploitation in the tea garden enclaves. The marginalization in the literature indicates as the process of making a minor group or community marginalized by the major group. The Gorkha tea garden workers of Darjeeling hills were made marginalized under the white colored British colonialists during the British period as ruling class and after the independence of the country under the ruling neo-colonial Indian owners, government mechanisms and planters-management. The common feature of marginalization of Gorkhas and Gorkha tea garden

workers after the independence of country is the continuation of colonial legacy of dividing the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea garden working class into groups, factions, socio-cultural groups as well as religious sects by the West Bengal Government with the politics of Bengali Sakuni/Chanakya Niti.

### Literature Survey

There is hardly any study on the marginalization of Gorkhas and Gorkha tea garden workers in India. The study of Prof. Sharit Bhowmik (1981) on Class Formation in the Plantation System depicts how the Adivasi tea garden workers of Dooars region of West Bengal had been fallen into the category of working class in spite of having distinct socio-cultural living of their own. The study by Virginius Xaxa (1997) indicates the existence of dual characters of tea plantation industry in the Dooars region of West Bengal. The Women Workers of Tea Plantations in India (1992) by Dr. Mita Bhadra shows as to how the women tea plantation workers have to adjust themselves as housewives and workers with the problems of their dual roles in tea industry in India. There are many other empirical studies conducted in various parts of the country on tea plantation workers and the Gorkha community in India but none of them are centered around the ethnicity aspects of workers on the one hand and none of the studies tried to explore as to how the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers are really marginalized with reference to North-East India. Hence, the present study tries to explore the ways and means of Marginalization of Gorkhas and Gorkha Tea Plantation Workers in India. Doing this, the present study tries to evolve a new theory and

the theory has been coined as the **Theory of Plantation Sociology or Theory of Ethnicity**. The study is also based on our earlier research study done and published with the title known as **Globalization and Plantation Workers in North-East India** (2009).

### **Methodology of the Study**

In the study, the Social-Economic Anthropological approach has been adopted by visiting Gorkha workers households and other Gorkhas of North-East region of India with compact structured questionnaire. The study has also been done on the basis of participant observation method of Anthropology. The Gorkha tea plantation workers of Darjeeling hills along with other Gorkhas of the North Eastern region of India were closely observed. The rationale behind the selection of Darjeeling-Dooars tea industry and Darjeeling hills is due to the single most reason that Gorkha tea plantation workers and Gorkhas in majority are found in only Darjeeling-Dooars areas of West Bengal. About thirty thousand Gorkha tea plantation workers are there in Dooars-Terai areas of West Bengal. About one crore Gorkhas are living today in the country. There is hardly any significant percentage of Gorkha tea plantation workers in Assam as well as other North Eastern Indian tea plantations. Whatever the Gorkhas are there in Assam and other north eastern region, they are mainly concentrated in agrarian niches of these states of North-East India. The Darjeeling-Dooars tea industry and Gorkha tea plantation workers are two sides of the same coin. Almost 52,000 Gorkha tea plantation workers are there in Darjeeling hills. The anthropological observation of marginalization process of Gorkhas and Gorkha tea plantation workers of Darjeeling hills and

Dooars forms an interesting research proposal for intensive investigation. The method appears to be the most suitable ones to the scholars like us as we belong to the same community i.e. Gorkha Community and Gorkha tea garden workers mainly belong to Darjeeling-Dooars. Initially, we were not wholly accredited as well as recognized by the Gorkhas and Gorkha tea garden workers for our research study but after six months, we got full cooperation from the Gorkhas and Gorkha workers to accomplish our research study. We started our field work in early 2009 A.D. and completed the study in 2010. So, almost one year we took time to conduct the fieldwork at tea gardens and other areas of Darjeeling hills and Dooars. At first, we felt it really an impossible task but at the expiry of one year of our study, we were inspired and determined by our urge and finally we could complete the field study by the end of 2010.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Off the two prime objectives of the present study, first one is to explore the contents pertaining to the marginalization of Gorkha tea plantation workers of Darjeeling hills in particular and India in general and secondly the marginalization of Gorkhas of West Bengal in general. It will indicate as to how the Gorkha community as a whole has been marginalized in India. Still another objective of the study is to evolve and establish the Theory of Plantation Sociology or the Sociology of Ethnicity for the academic world and the scholars who are interested to understand the ways and means of marginalization of Gorkha community in India.