

Kirata Tribes Of Colonial Darjeeling: Historical Understanding Through Discourse Analysis

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Abstract:

Kirata tribes and their culture is an ancient phenomenon which had been referred in various Vedic literatures. Their origin and the historical discourse have had always been manifested in and around Himalayan region. Darjeeling hills and terai, being a part and parcel of Eastern sub-Himalayan, still traces the history of Kirata tribes where some caste and communities thrive through ages and claiming kirata origin in present times. These communities include Rai, Limbu, Yakha, Sunuwar, Magar, Gurung, Dhimal, Tamang, Lepcha, Sherpa, Tharu etc. They have been marginalised in the context of their population, but they are culturally, economically and politically neglected to subordination. The colonial British Government drastically changed not only the demography of the region but also the significant nature of tribes and tribalism throughout their hegemony. Hence, the present study would be an attempt to trace the historical discourse of the subject and make a critical analysis over the nature and context of Kirata tribes and tribalism.

Keywords: Kirata, local communities, colonial set-up, migration, demography, cultural assimilation, tribalism.

One of the most popular races of ancient India is the Kirata which constituted the largest tribal group the time. Those who had been living in caves, mountain and forest regions, particularly of Northern and Eastern Himalayan regions ever since the pre-historic period and known as the *Ādivasis* or aborigines were called for the first time as 'Kirata' by the later Vedic Aryans.¹ The Kiratas were by and large of the indigenous origin who belonged to different stocks with their various different racial characteristics. The word Kirata or Kirant of Kiranti's source is much disputed. However, the oldest record of the word, as we find in Yajur Veda (*Shukla XXX.16, Krishna III.4,12,1*) and Atharva Veda (*X.4,14*), says that it is from the Sanskrit word 'Kirata'. The Atharva Veda draws the information as the Kirata word derived from *Cirāyita* or *Cirāta* or *Cireta*, the name of a medical herb that was known to the mountainous people who came to be known as 'Kirata' to the Aryan people. In the Atharva Veda we have a reference to a Kirata girl or *Kāirātikā* who digs for an herbal remedy on the ridges of the mountains. Famous Kirata scholar and Kiratologist, *Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterji*, in his celebrated work '*Kirata-Jana-Kriti*' makes an exhaustive survey of the ancient connotations of the word and those akin to it in the Indo-Aryan languages. According to him, the word 'Kirata' had a negative, sub-human or animal connotation. He gives the explanations as 'those who move along the mountain sides, or in bad, dirty places, kira; those who move about talking gibberish, kira or kila' were the Kiratas. Thus, he referred the word Kirata to an ugly man, a wild man who lived in caves, a cruel and mean person, a corn-chandler, a robber, a forester and the like whom he manifested from Indo-Mongoloid origin. There is no unanimous view on the etymology of the term as there are many other theories as well to define it.

However, regarding the origin of the tribe most of the historians have unanimously advocated and supported the view of indigenous origin. And many have approved the Himalayan and Cis-Himalayan region as the original homeland of the Kiratas. They were as old as the Aryan, and within the region of Indian sub-continent. The so-called advanced and civilized Aryan people were known to the Kiratas and vice-versa. In the words of *G.P. Singh*, the Kiratas brought the Eastern Himalaya and its terai region under control during the 6th Century B.C.² The establishment of their political hegemony over the Himalayan valley of Nepal at a very early date can be supported by a number of reliable Indian and foreign sources. Although they were supreme in the mountainous tracts, yet they were under the cultural influence of the Aryan victors. They were in the process of shifting from one place to another.

The Darjeeling hills and terai which comprise the integral part of the Eastern Himalayas have been subjected to the trends of socio-economic and political transitions throughout the ages. First of all the establishment and replacement of the political hegemony in this region over the indigenous tribes have a profound impact. The supremacy of Gorkha power in Nepal and the establishment of Namgyal dynastic rule in Sikkim were important landmarks in this regard. However, the Kiratas tribes could retain something of their cultural legacies which became the basis of their struggle for re-linking their identity and thus the claim of their tribal status in the present constitutional governance of India. Some historical and semi-historical studies have been conducted about the history and culture of the Kiratas of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. The present study also attempts to make an analytical exploration about kirata culture, discourse and discontinuity during colonial period.

The tribal communities in Darjeeling claiming kirata thus includes Rais or Khambus, Subba or Limbu, Magar, Gurung, Sunuwar, Tamang, Yakha, Dhimal, Sherpa, Lepcha, Raimajhi, Tharu, Saukha, Marchha etc. According to *Prof. S.K. Chatterji* and other prominent linguists, Rai, Limbu and Dhimal languages are pronominalised with Austric influence, strongly indicating earliest migratory wave of these people compared to other Tibeto-Burmans whose languages are non-pronominalised.³ The Kirata inhabiting in these regions were subdivided into three segments. As per *George A. Grierson* in '*Linguistic Survey of India, 1967*', the places of Kiratis where they lived have been divided into three parts, namely *Wallo Kirat*, *Majh Kirat* and *Pallo Kirat*. He describes the Wallo Kirat as Hither Kirat covering the area from Sunkosi to Likhu river, the Majh Kirat or Middle Kirat stretching from Likhu river to the Arun River and as Pallo Kirat or Further Kirat from Arun River to Mechi river and the Singalela and also *Uh-Pallo* or further beyond up to the river Teesta including Darjeeling and Doars of North Bengal. The Rais or Khambus have emerged as the single largest community not only among other Kirata community but also above all other non-Kirata people in and around *uh-pallo kirat*. However, they have been lagging behind than Limbu in consolidating their Kirata identity. For, the Limbus have been successful to revive their culture and tradition along with their Kirata script and language. More recently, the Limbus have become successful to be recognized in the status of Scheduled Tribe (ST) along with Tamang by the Indian Constitution in 2002.

The history of Darjeeling Himalaya has had been witnessed a widespread cultural conflict between the indigenous inhabitants like Lepcha, Bhutia, Kirata tribes and all. The conflicts and confrontation between them reached the climax during the 18th and 19th Centuries which radically changed the habitats of Eastern Himalaya into socio-cultural combativeness in the 20th and 21st Centuries. Another wave of political and cultural conflict between Gorkhas and Kirat ideals surfaced in the Kirat region of present-day Eastern Nepal during the last quarter of the 18th Century, could subsequently affect the geo-political history of sub-Himalayan region beyond the river Teesta. The hilly and Terai region of Darjeeling district and the separate state of Sikkim, Bhutan and some portion of Assam, once regarded as the part of Pallo-Kirat or far kirata land, has now turned into a land of ethnic conglomeration. The so-called North Bengal, with the advent of British and their administrative and economic initiatives has been transformed into a demographic centre with different variant of ethnic people. Besides this, there has been the intermittent and continuous struggle among the different ethnic people for their identity recognition as well as the demand for separate political set-up.

However, the political and cultural history of Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalaya have been changing constantly over the past three hundred years or so as its ownership changed hands owing to various agreements and treaties. The place is surrounded by Nepal in the west, Tibet and China in the north, Bhutan in the east, Bangladesh in south and Bihar state in the south-west. This politically sensitive Himalayan region with its national and international proximities and boundaries, has been constantly influenced throughout the ages. The villages in Darjeeling are socially much more complex. Each village represents many more caste, communities and religions. There is hardly any linguistic community

which has a number sizeable enough to sustain its own language. As a result, 'Nepali' is not only the lingua franca but the mother tongue of almost all the inhabitants. Knowledge of one's own language is definitely very poor, even non-existent. Thus, 'Nepali' assumes a distinct identity of a community in the Indian diaspora whereas in Nepal it only refers to their nationality.

Regarding the population of Darjeeling hilly tract comprising 138 square miles, which was granted to the British in 1835, it has always been referred by many scholars and researchers to the well circulated and dependable work of *LSS O'Malley, 'Darjeeling District Gazetteer'*. In accordance with, when the British acquired the tract first in 1835, it was almost entirely under forest and contained only one hundred souls.⁴ But renowned and lone historian of Darjeeling itself, *Dr. Kumar Pradhan*, after making a thorough and impartial scanning of the fact, has stated that the habitation of hundred souls only as mentioned by the British, was the population of the periphery of today's Mahakal Dara. The Makahal Dara was known as Observatory Hill during British days where a Monastery had existed prior to 1788 A.D. The Monastery was destroyed by the Gorkhas in 1788 A.D. when they overran Darjeeling.⁵ The construction of Monastery obviously proves that a good number of people, who were inhabiting the place, for offering prayer and performing socio-religious rites. Again, the recent findings of the archaeological relics from a place called Badamtam about fourteen kilometres far from Darjeeling town, clearly reflects that there was a mixed civilization in the undivided Sikkim, where we find the traces of Mangar, the Lepcha and the Limbu Kings ruling this part of their Kingdom. Thus, the legacies of many animistic cultures resembling to Hinduism shows that there was considerable number of Kirata people in Darjeeling region since long years back.

However, the Bhutia rule in Sikkim was hereditary and after the promotion of Buddhism in the state the rulers not only kept aloof themselves from other subjects including Limbus and other Kirata groups but also, they did not allow them to recognize and flourish their culture within the Kingdom. Both the Kingdoms of Sikkim and Bhutan adopted the policies of suppression of indigenous practices of Kirata culture and replacing with those of Tibetan Buddhism. Bhutan's religious rulers established a tradition of appointing religious missions to other Himalayan Kingdom through which they were able to establish extensive influence in the region. Thus, the Kirata tribal people were deprived of their culture, religion and language in the hands of theocratic rule in Sikkim and Bhutan principalities.

With the advent of the British along with their several economic and political designs the socio-economic and political history of Darjeeling underwent through a radical change. The period of more than a century of British hegemony witnessed different scale of transformation in every aspect of life. After the East India Company Government got a golden opportunity to seal the fate of expansionist policy of Gorkhas of Nepal in 1814 A.D. they began to influence the Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim and cast an eye upon the hilly tract of Darjeeling which they acquired through a grant in 1835 A.D. It was only in 1841 A.D. full six years after obtaining the 'Grant', the British Government granted the Raja of Sikkim, an allowance of Rs. 3,000 as compensation which was raised to Rs. 6,000 in 1846 A.D. and again to Rs. 12,000 per annum in 1850 A.D. to keep a good relation with Sikkim. However, the real motive of British policy was economic and political to control the strategically important position in commanding the entrance to the Himalayan Kingdoms of Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. The proposal of a sanatorium for the British soldiers in Darjeeling was a secondary importance. In 1850 A.D. the British annexed Sikkim Terai region and the hills surrounded by River Ramam, Greater Rangit and Teesta along with the presented land became the part of British India. Thus, Darjeeling and other occupied areas of Sikkim, Kurseong sub-division and Siliguri sub-division permanently merged into British India. The Kalimpong sub-division, which was once the Sikkim territory, was under the occupation of Bhutan since 1706 A.D. The Bhutan army was defeated by the British in 1765 and the sub-division was also incorporated with British India in accordance with the *Treaty of Sinchula* signed on 11th November of the year. After merging it in Darjeeling the whole annexed region was declared as Darjeeling

District and thus ruled separately by treating it as Non-Regulated Area. Thus, by 1866 A.D. the East India Company emerged successful to annex the whole region of present Darjeeling district covering an area of 1234 square miles into the British dominion. So, the desire of the Britishers to occupy Darjeeling proceeded to change the destiny of the region by giving rise to diplomacy and politics in the region. Throughout the British regime, the introduction of advanced culture including railways, roadways, plantation industries, building constructions and other developments brought a drastic change in the tribal history of the region.

The Kirata tribes of Darjeeling and Sikkim region had to face another cultural inroad in the hands of British rule. The endogenous Kirata tribal people who were hardly able to sustain their dominated culture received a big thwart with the opening of new economic prospect especially in Darjeeling hill under the British. The effort of the British for making modern Darjeeling and the Doars region had physical support of the Lepcha and Kirata people residing in the region. But the dimension of the development activities encompassing the entire area being enormous, it was natural to have a dearth of manpower in proportion to the population of that period. Hence, there was compulsion for the British to encourage able-bodied peoples' migration in serving their purpose. Thus, an influx of people from neighbouring lands of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and plain areas of North Bengal was inevitable. Thus, the decision of the East India Company to develop Darjeeling as a hill resort gave the opportunity to neighbouring people to migrate and take part in the development. The few Lepchas and Kiratas who were original inhabitants of Darjeeling, were rapidly outnumbered by settlers from Nepal and Sikkim. As the matter of fact, the hill gained the utmost majority of the Kirata people as they were also in large number among the immigrants. By the year 1850, *Dr. Arthur Campbell*, the first superintendent, whose object was to inspire the aboriginal people of the hills with confidence in British rule, reported that the number of inhabitants has risen to 10,000. The rapid influx was also noted by Sir Joseph Hooker, when he visited Darjeeling about that time. When in 1869, a rough census was taken of the inhabitants of this tract, the total was found to be over 22,000. By the time of the first Census of India in 1872, the population had rapidly increased to 94,712 and in 1901 Census it was 249,117.⁶

Thus, during early colonial period, the British officials had directly or indirectly ignored the presence of Kirata people in Darjeeling Himalaya. *Captain Lloyd* and *Charles Grant*, who were the first British to step in Darjeeling Hill had cited the presence of not more than 100 souls in Darjeeling in 1835 A.D. clearly ignored other tribal people around the Observatory Hill or present Darjeeling town area which also reveals the Kirata tribes dwelling in and around the hill with their traditional livelihood were totally ignored. Thus, it is evident that the British administration also showed their indifference to the tribal status of Kiratas in Darjeeling hill. A massive migration of people into Darjeeling hill during 2nd half of 19th Century basically blurred the Kirata identity in the region. The researches and the history of migration level in Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas have showed different contradictory figures. However, it can be observed that Darjeeling owes a large proportion of its population to the advent of immigrants. The great bulk of the immigrants were from Nepal, chiefly as labourers in the tea Garden. Thus, the majority in the hill population became of Nepali as well as the Nepali language became the lingua franca of the region. In the Terai, the district received numerous settlers from the adjoining districts of Purnea and Jalpaiguri who engaged in cultivation and a large number of coolies from Chhotanagpur and the Santhal Parganas, who were attracted by the wages given in the tea gardens. The early immigrants were, however, dying out and their children born in Darjeeling were taking the place of their parents. Thus, the flow of fresh immigrants was growing less at the beginning of 20th Century.⁷ By that time the population of Darjeeling was exceedingly heterogeneous. According to *O'Malley*, the majority of the people in the hills were of Mongolian origin belonging chiefly to various Nepalese caste, but also including a large number of Lepcha, Bhutias and Tibetan. So, it is to be noted here that the Kiratas, generally known from Mongolian origin could maintain their racial majority in Darjeeling population till the end of 19th Century. In the Terai, the mixture of races was equally great. The aboriginal Koches, or Rajbansis were most

numerous and the Mundas and Oraons from Chotanagpur and the Santhals from the uplands of the Santhal Parganas were in respective majority. In 1898, there was a report called as 'Terai Settlement' which deals with the classification, occupation, settlement of the land, road, Hat-bazaar, climate, ethnic composition etc. of the plain portion of Darjeeling district, locally known as 'Darjeeling Terai'. The Terai Settlement Report, 1898, as per the then available records contain caste wise population as follows:

1. Bhuimali/Mehter-	1,079	13. Magar	-	1,347
2. Bhutia	- 422	14. Munda	-	255
3. Brahman	- 630	15. Murmi	-	1,002
4. Damai	- 108	16. Newar	-	507
5. Gharo	- 229	17. Oroan	-	4,623
6. Gurung	- 1,916	18. Rajput	-	514
7. Kaibarta	- 329	19. Sarki -		151
8. Kami -	630	20. Sunur/Sunuwar-		101
9. Khambu	- 2,773	21. Yakha	-	54
10. Kachh/Kochhe-	11,133	22. Buna	-	1,270
11. Lepcha	- 1,024	23. Shaik	-	6,301
12. Limbu	- 524			

In contrast, we can present here the number of populations from different caste in the hilly region of Darjeeling on the basis of 1901 Census. These are as follows:

1. Rai/Khambu	-	33,133	2. Sanyasi	-	1,151
3. Chettri	-	11,597	4. Brahman	-	6,470
5. Magar	-	11,912	6. Newar	-	5,770
7. Tamang	-	24,465	8. Gurung	-	8,378
9. Limbu	-	14,305	10. Sunuwar	-	4,428
11. Yakha	-	1,143	12. Damai	-	4,643
13. Kami	-	9,826	14. Sarki	-	1,823
15. Gharti	-	3,448			

The above figures show that there were considerable number of Kirata tribal people nay the majority among all, in the hill as well as in the Terai and plain regions of Darjeeling district. The mentioned castes like Khambu or Rai, Gurung, Kochhe, Limbu, Magar, Murmi, Sunuwar, Yakha etc belonged to the Kirata tribe. Thus, apart from the hilly region, these people contributed a lot in the socio-economic structure of Terai and Doars region.

It is true that the development of Darjeeling is found to have ushered in along with the entry and takeover of the place by the British. The British had started construction of buildings, hotels, cottages, roads and bridges, so the planning and designing as contemplated by the British to make the modern Darjeeling consumed a load of energy, blood and sweat from the indigenous Lepcha, Kiratas and other Nepali caste people, as they had a discernible presence in the region. Though the immigrants were also many Kirata people from the East Nepal, they were inclined more to the economic prospect of the free forest land of Darjeeling. Thus, the tribal legacies of this group entered into the phase of liquidation. The process of clearing forest, making roads, bridges and buildings and other construction practices involved the large number of hard working Kiratas as the workers or wage labourers. By 1840, a road had been made from Pankhabari and hotels had been started at Kurseong and Darjeeling. The industrious Kirata people from within and without Darjeeling including Sikkim, participated in the process of construction along with Lepcha and other Nepali caste.

In the context of the agricultural efflorescence of Darjeeling and Sikkim, the great contribution of Kirata tribes can be reckoned with the terrace cultivation in the region. Since pre-colonial period, the Lepchas and Bhutias of Sikkim had been taught the art of terrace cultivation by the Kirata people of the region. However, the Kirata agriculturist had to face the critical problem from the influx of another agriculturist. As regards the immigration of the agriculturists, its extent will be apparent from the exceptional growth of the population of the Kalimpong tract to the east of the Teesta River. This tract extends over 401 square miles, of which 213 square miles were covered by forest, while 10 square miles were occupied by tea garden and the remainder 178 square miles had been reserved for the native cultivation by the end of 19th Century A.D.^{viii} However, the number of Kirata people were comparatively less among the native cultivators in this area. Despite they had been striving lot to the agricultural development since early cultivation. When Kalimpong was annexed to British India in 1865, then it was estimated to have a population of 3,530 souls. This number increased considerably which reached 41,511 in accordance with the Census report of 1901.

The various Nepalese castes were well represented in the district but the most numerous are the Khambus and Murmis. Among the different Kirata sub groups of Darjeeling Himalaya, the Khambus of Rais are in great majority. According to *Dr. R.K. Sprigg*, based on Bengal District Gazetteer (Darjeeling), the population of Khambu speaking people in Darjeeling was 39,488 out of the total population of Khambus and Rais being 40,409, meaning 97.62 percent of Khambus and Rais used to speak their own Khambu dialect. The following table shows the number of Rais as well as other Kirata clans recorded in the Darjeeling district.

CENSUS	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Rai	33,133	40,409	41,236	47,431	56,794
Tamang	24,465	27,226	30,450	33,481	43,114
Limbu	14,305	13,804	14,191	16,288	17,803
Magar	11,912	12,451	14,934	16,299	17,262
Gurung	8,378	9,268	9,575	11,154	15,455
Sunuwar	4,428	3,820	3,691	4,055	4,882
Yakkha	1,143	1,119	-	850	825

(District population with preferences given to mother tongue)

The Rai or Khambu Kirata have always been numerous in the district and numbers have steadily increased. They were distributed throughout the district wherever Nepalese are found. The Kirata tribe has been well-known with its homogeneous characteristics and as an endogenous group. This firm of the Kirata began to decline with the changing demographic profile and socio-economic and political condition of Darjeeling. The inroads of immigrants into the region and new openings of industrial occupations could easily dismantle the attitude of tribal culture. The agriculturist Kirata turned into wage labourers and tea garden workers. They became exposed to the economic oriented environment. The Kiratas of Sikkim also got an opportunity to flee from the oppressive clutches of their Bhutia kings. The slavery structure of Sikkim and the Nepal government encouraged the Sikkimese and Nepal Kiratas to leave their places and exploit the economic prosperity of Darjeeling. It was not only the one-sided impact upon Darjeeling Himalaya. The beginning of trade and commerce centering from Darjeeling deeply influenced the tribal structures of neighbouring countries of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan as well.

With the introduction of several administrative set up in Darjeeling throughout the colonial phase, the tribal principality had been influenced in variant degrees. In the exception, the Kirata tribes of Darjeeling, which faced the several ups and downs in the hands of European administration passed through the ages of cultural domination by others, their own cultural degradation and the ages of acculturation. These all the process of their cultural conflicts and confrontation during the colonial phase led the foundation of their question of cultural identity crisis which was resulted in the following post-colonial phases. During the early colonial period, the British officials were very much compassionate to the indigenous tribal people of Darjeeling including Lepchas and Kiratas. As the matter of fact, the far-sightedness of the British, could easily, steadily and rapidly involved the indigenous tribes into their economic designs. Nevertheless, they did not strive much to protect the indigenous tribal configuration of Darjeeling Himalaya.

A brief review of the politico-administrative arrangement in Darjeeling hills experimented by the British Government could produce something fruitful for the safeguard of tribal cultures in the hills. However, the Kiratas as a whole, could not be identified as a vast tribal group during the first-half of colonial phase, as there was the citation of different name of sub-groups like Khambus, Limbus, Yakkha, Dhimal, Sunuwar, Magar etc. separately. So, it was the Lepcha tribe which received the greater attention from the British, who regarded them as a sole indigenous tribe of the hill region. Though, the separate administrative systems were introduced in the all-Sub-Himalayan regions under the British Government reflected on the ideas of preservation of indigenous and tribal socio-cultural structure, the British had latent motive of economic and political strategy in the regions. Otherwise, they would not welcome such a vast influx of immigrants from all side irrespective caste, religion and languages.

Under British rule, the Darjeeling hill was initially a *Non-Regulation District*, a scheme of administration applicable to economically less advanced districts in the British Raj, and the Acts and regulations of the British Raj did not automatically apply to the district in line with rest of the Country. But the *Council Act of 1861*, ceased the existence of distinction between Regulated and Non-Regulated provinces. Again the Act of 1870 brought Darjeeling under Non-Regulated system with three main considerations which were:

- a) presentation of indigenous system of land tenures,
- b) necessity of entrusting undivided responsibility to the District Officer, and
- c) formulations of simple laws in conformity with native institutions and simplicity of local people.

The Act No. XV of 1874, declared Darjeeling as a '*Scheduled District*' granting a special status along with other four district of Bengal. These districts were kept outside the ambit of general laws in operation throughout the rest of India. The Government of India Act of 1919 had replaced the term '*Scheduled District*' by a new terminology '*Backward Tract*'. Again the Government of India Act, 1935, brought in its wake significant changes in the administrative system and substituted the '*Backward Tract*' by '*Excluded*' and '*Partially Excluded*' areas with the intent to provide a special status to certain areas including the district of Darjeeling as a Partially Excluded Area remained out-side the purview of general administration and isolated throughout the greater part of British rule in India. A careful study would reveal that the *Laws, Local Extent Act – 1874* made Darjeeling a '*Scheduled District*' and in 1919 it became a Backward Tract which changed to Partially Excluded Area in 1935 and continued till the dawn of independence in 1947. Thus, throughout the history of British rule, Darjeeling was never allowed to come within national mainstream and enjoy the benefits of constitutional reforms. It is rightly stated that the policy of 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' areas was designed to alienate the tribes from general population and divide the country by playing on social and cultural distinctions.^{ix}

In the Census Report of 1931, the population Darjeeling is published as 3,19,635, said to be identified as 'All Tribes' as most interesting indeed as the population was still covered by the regional identify as 'Backward Tract' and treated 'Excluded' being totally outside the purview of Central or Provincial general administration. However, this 'Excluded' identity was marginally reduced to a 'Partially Excluded' designation when in 1941 Census recording population of 3,76,369 was published on the basis of which was undertaken using Nepali and Gorkhali languages. Thus, it deprived a large population of regional identity with the other tribes was reduced to an insignificant figure. As a matter of fact, a large body of the hill population was delisted from 'All Tribes' identity to non-tribal population in 1941 Census. Thus, the Kirata people of Darjeeling Himalayas have had to face a bulky problem to be regarded as tribal people throughout colonial as well as post-colonial period.

The entire administrative history of Darjeeling District since 1835 to 1947 is peculiar to understand. But at the same time, it is coded with potential features containing concepts of regional identity of 'Tribal India distinguished as Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas' described above in marked contrast to British India and Princely India. However, regarding the Kiratas of Darjeeling, the British tribal policy was ineffective and unfavourable. Because, the Kirata tribes were disseminated in the hill and losing their tribal structure. Moreover, the different Kirata clans were intermingled with other ethnic groups and were making their stay in socio-economic heterogeneous hill region. Nevertheless, the separate scheme for Darjeeling during whole colonial phase, kept the region out of mass or all India dissemination of tribal people which could lengthen the moribund stage of Kirata tribal structure in the region.

Under the colonial rule, the easy grants of land in lease became wide practice which lured more migration into the place. There were land lease and farming lease which changed the forest tract into highly economic prone areas. The Kiratas who were engaged in such wealth making system had little concern over their landownership. However, the government was the direct proprietor of the estate. There were no intermediaries between government and the ryots, who is in most cases, the tiller of the land. The village headman called 'Mandal' became the direct representative of the government on the estate. The Kirata communities who were on the verge of their decline of their tribal society, composed the main section of ryot with other Nepali caste for whom all the agricultural land was reserved. The land settlement in the beginning of 20th Century in Darjeeling district, had fixed the rent of their holdings for ten years and in the event of their failing to, their property could be sold up.^x The ryots were strictly forbidden to sublet their holdings or transfer any part of the land to others unless they have previously obtained the consent of the authority. Thus, the ryots including earliest cultivators Kirata community of Darjeeling, have been equally subjected to the various economic reforms of colonial and post-colonial government. This led not only to their diffusion of culture but also completely lost their economic organization. However, they had been playing a leading role in cultivation of agriculture in the hills and side by side engaging themselves in contemporary trade and commercial activities.

End note:

1. G.P. Singh – Kiratas in Ancient India, p.449
2. Ibid. – p.131
3. S.K. Chatterji – Kirata-Jana-Kriti, p.31
4. LSSO' Malley – Darjeeling District Gazetteer, p.35
5. D.S. Bomjan – Darjeeling-Doors: People and Place under Bengal's Neo-Colonial Rule, p.4
6. LSSO' Malley, op.cit. p.35
7. Ibid. – p.39
8. Ibid. – p.36
9. Dilip Kr. Sarkar – Search for Kirat Identity: Trends of De-Sanskritization among the Nepamul Sikkimese, p.68
10. LSSO' Malley, op.cit. p.41

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