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THE '*RONG*' VERSES, SUBVERSES AND SUBVERSIONS : THE '*VERSICAL*' ART OF CREATION OF SPACES OF REMEMBERING, RECONFIGURATION OF CONTESTED SPACES, AND RESISTANCE AGAINST HISTORICAL ERASURES

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ABSTRACT

Presupposing a possible triadic relationship between narrative, memory and identity with an understanding that narrative constitutes collective memory, and it, in turn, facilitates the constructions of collective identity, the present paper seeks to explore how the discourse of collective memory, as it is enacted through literature, shapes the formation/construction of identity by a group, with particular focus on the poetic literature of the Lepcha Community in Darjeeling Hills. The paper proposes that places, constructed spatially, have multiple meanings for their inhabitants, yet, space is not simply a geometric 'thing out there'. The sites of memory are the points where space and time meet memory. Memory is spatial and is created from places and images. A

place (locus) is easily memorized –a construction, a characteristic location. The identity between people, heritage, and territory is also brought about by the use of varied metaphors, and the effective expressions of narratives of nations. Loss of territory erases history, jeopardizes historical and cultural self-consciousness and renders identities invisible. The present paper, grounded on such theoretical underpinnings, while interrogating the methods and motives of remembering the past and revising how histories are recovered, explores how the Lepchas have endeavoured to reclaim memories, rewrite history, recreate, reframe and perform a collective identity for their nation, amidst threats of active construction of ignorance of their history and territory on the one hand, and of the threats of assimilation by dominant identity-based movements in the region on the other as tactical reversals to destabilize the (hegemonic?) mainstream discourse on history and identity in the region.

Keywords: Eastern Himalaya, Rong, Lepcha, Remembering, Spaces, Contestation, Erasures, Music

Introduction :

Today, folk and popular songs, as a part of the popular culture have become a dominant socio-cultural force and enjoy extraordinary influence all over the world. Popular culture in general affects peoples' imaginative pictures of the world, moulding perceptions of reality, including that of politics. Hence, it involves political socialization, that is, the acquisition of images and ideas about the political world and the role of individual citizens in it. Governments around the world have recognised the power of folk and popular music in moulding politics. As a response,

generally, authoritarian regimes attempt quite overtly to control popular culture and mass communication, banning, marginalizing, or attempting to undermine the popular and folk genres of expressions and communications that challenge the status quo: social, political and economic. Music, says Susanne Langer, symbolizes the dynamic forms of human feeling and articulates something that language cannot set forth. Ethnomusicologists like Merriam, suggest that music carries important functions such as communication, validation of social institutions and religious rituals, and the integration of society, providing a rallying point around which the members of society gather to engage in activities. This further explains the importance of the songs as a medium of communication and an effective tool for the ventilation of public opinion and in some contexts, of a community striving for a political space. Its role in political mobilization is revealed in the process of social redefinition, or the mobilizing and eventual legitimization of discontent which turns more dissatisfaction with the social order into a force for change is a crucial and relatively unstudied area. As Finlay (1980) has noted, if one examines just the lyrics of songs associated with social issues of a community, one can find many examples of diagnoses of what is wrong with the present order of things, proposed solutions to these wrongs, and rationales for participation in such mobilizations. In addition to this, a second important function of songs in endeavours for assertions of a community's claims and conditions is in the development of social solidarity among members and potential members (Gamson, 1975; Cashmore, 1979). The songs of social change attempt to *appeal to* and *reinforce* common values and social identities among potential and active members. The fact that music, and for that matter, song is not often taken seriously as a political activity often gives protest politics more license to reach a broad range of audiences. By musically appealing to the common values and traditional roots of a larger audience (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977). In addition, there are symbolic aspects of the music of most protest publics that help to both define ideology and develop solidarity that is not contained strictly in the lyrics of the songs themselves. The musical forms chosen by the protest public usually involve elements drawn from the traditional music of the oppressed group. This function of emotionally charging the interests of group members is more effectively done via music, a non-rational medium than it is via

speeches, pamphlets, or other rational, language-based means. Thus, as Durkheim suggested in the context of religion, musical events can provide the sorts of emotional, euphoric, vitalizing, and integrative experiences that more rationalistic appeals cannot. Presupposing a possible triadic relationship between narrative, memory and identity with an understanding that narrative constitutes collective memory, and it, in turn, facilitates the constructions of collective identity, the present paper seeks to explore how the discourse of collective memory, as it is enacted through literature, shapes the formation/construction of identity by a group, with particular focus on the poetic literature of the Lepcha Community in Darjeeling Hills. The paper proposes that places, constructed spatially, have multiple meanings for their inhabitants, yet, space is not simply a geometric 'thing out there'. The sites of memory are the points where space and time meet memory. Memory is spatial and is created from places and images. A place (locus) is easily memorized –a construction, a characteristic location. The identity between people, heritage, and territory is also brought about by the use of varied metaphors, and the effective expressions of narratives of nations. Loss of territory erases history, jeopardizes historical and cultural self-consciousness and renders identities invisible. The present paper, grounded on such theoretical underpinnings, while interrogating the methods and motives of remembering the past and revising how histories are recovered, explores how the Lepchas have endeavoured to reclaim memories, rewrite history, recreate, reframe and perform a collective identity for their nation, amidst threats of active construction of ignorance of their history and territory on the one hand, and of the threats of assimilation by dominant identity-based movements in the region on the other as tactical reversals to destabilize the (hegemonic?) mainstream discourse on history and identity in the region.

Introducing the Lepcha Community of the Eastern Himalayas

The Lepchas are one of several tribes inhabiting the southern slopes of the Eastern Himalayas. An acknowledged fact is that the history and chronology of the Lepchas are obscure because all research and studies on the community are based on the selective use of oral history sources. Although scholars and historians like G. Gorer (1938), E. C. Dozey (1922), G. B. Mainwaring (1971), J.

C. White (1909), Christopher von Fürer-Haimendorf (1982), Ram Rahul (1970), Arthur Fonning (1987), K. P. Tamsang (1983) and others[1] point out that the Lepchas are the original inhabitants of Darjeeling and Sikkim, which the Lepchas fondly call the *Mayel Lyang* or the '*abode of the Gods*', the oral history of the Lepcha paints the picture of a huge Lepcha Mayel Lyang, stretching from Chumbi Valley in the North to Titalaya in the South, as far as Punakha (Bhutan) in the East to the Illam region (Nepal) to the West. Regarding the term '*Lepcha*', there are different versions. One version says that it was the Nepalis who called them *Lapches*, meaning '*vile speakers*'. Another version says that *Lapche* was a type of fish found in Nepal, which is believed to have the characteristics of being '*submissive*' like the Lepchas. But the Lepchas themselves prefer to be called *Rongs* or *Mutanchi Rongkup* meaning '*beloved sons of the mother of creation*'. Yet some believe that the word Lepcha comes from the word *Lep*, meaning '*a well of creation'* in *Mayel Kyong* (hidden eternal village). Legends have it that it is the door through which the first among the Lepchas, *Fudong Thing* (the first male) and *Nuzong Nyu* (the first female) were made to step down from paradise into this world. Lepchas regard the *Zaa Tshaong* (the family) as the most important, fundamental unit of social organization, where each member is related in kinship ties of blood and marriage. They have an elaborate clan (*moo*) system consisting of both matrilineal and patrilineal clans. However, according to K. P. Tamsang (1983), the Lepchas are divided into four sections politically and geographically. They are *Renjyongmoo*[1] (Lepchas of Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Siliguri/plains), *Illammoo*[2] (Lepchas of Illam, the Eastern District of Nepal), *Tamsangmoo*[3] (Lepchas of Kalimpong), and *Promoo*[4] (Lepchas of Western Bhutan). Originally, Lepchas were animists. However, there is some religious diversity among the Lepchas today — some follow Buddhism, some converted to Christianity, and some are still staunchly animist in their faith. In terms of Demography, in Sikkim, in the last four decades or so, the ratio of the Lepcha population to the total population of the state has remained more or less stagnant (between 7.3 per cent to 7.5 per cent). This small population of the Lepcha is scattered across the four districts of Sikkim. The north district of Sikkim, where the traditional sacred home

of the Lepchas is located, houses the maximum number of the Lepcha population. Yet they are only 37.47 per cent of the total population of the district. Demographically, Lepcha today are a minority even in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The minority status of the Lepchas has acted as a driving force for the community to re-assert their identity and existence through the revival of their culture and religion[1]. Hence, the Lepchas in Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills today are vehemently opposed to any threat to their religion, culture and livelihood opportunities because of the apprehension that it may lead to the vanishing of a 'Vanishing Tribe'[2].

The '*Rong*' : Verses, Subverses And Subversions

Malkki (1990) shows how an identity between people and territory is created and naturalised through the visual device of the map, which represents the world of nations "as a discrete spatial partitioning of territory" with no "bleeding boundaries". The original Lepcha kingdom is said to have been composed of the entire present-day Sikkim, the Darjeeling District of West Bengal, the western part of Bhutan, and the eastern part of Nepal. In the North, it is said to have extended up to the Chumbi Valley in Tibet. To the west, it was bordered by the two rivers of Tambur and Arun (approximately up to the present-day Biratnagar area of Nepal), to the east it extended up to the area of Ha in present-day western Bhutan, inclusive of the strip of Duars, and the south, up to Titaliya in present-day Bangladesh. Human attachment to particular places requires an understanding of peoples' traditional knowledge, cultural practices, forms of communication, and conventions for imagining the past. That is, 'world-building', 'place-making', and 'constructing places' constitute basic tools of historical imagination through multiple acts of remembering, conjecture, and speculation. Gillian Rose argues, "One way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by feeling that you belong to that place. It is a place in which you feel comfortable, or at home because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place" (Rose 1995). Lepchas called their land '*Nye Mayel Renjyaong Lyang'* or '*Mayel*

Lyang' which means the '*Land of Hidden Paradise*' or '*Delightful Region or Abode*'. *Mayel Lyang*, a hidden paradise, "*a place where the largest tree is never cut down, strongest deer is never hunted, and wild orchids sprout aimlessly from the top of trees, making pink and purple bursts in the sky"*. It is normally said that one has to be fixed in space and in time if she desires to 'belong', and the Lepcha community claims to belong to this wide stretch of *Mayel Lyang*. Music has the strong capacity to evoke, embody and narrate the past. In the collective or individual history of minorities like the Lepcha community in Darjeeling Hills, there are often traumatic events, as these groups have suffered various forms of discrimination. Narration is a way to get some distance from the traumatic past without having to forget it. Narration in music can have a similar function. However, one major function of music in general and folk songs in particular is to act as mechanisms of remembrance and hence, to evoke the nostalgic memory of the past. A classical Lepcha folk song titled Takna Lyang (My Beautiful Takna Land) describes Mayel Lyang thus:

Takna Lyang/My Beautiful Takna Land

Pho yu pho kup song lyem lam lyang,
Ago anyit sa Takna lyang.
Aey… sna ban tho ley!
Ago anyit sa Takna lyang.

A place for birds to play and fly,
Takna is a happy and prosperous land
Hey.. sna ban tho ley!
Takna is a happy and prosperous land.

*(*Lyangsong Tamsang, 2008: 74-75*)*

Loss of territory erases history, jeopardizes historical and cultural self-consciousness and renders identities invisible. The Lepcha community has experienced a loss of territory. The loss has been affected by multiple factors. Yet, two of these factors require elucidation in the present context: the active construction of ignorance of Lepcha territory and history, and, the continuous threat of assimilation by a dominant identity-based movement. Amidst such threats, the Lepcha attempts at the **reclamation of the memory of the (Lost) Sacred Space becomes significant**. Lepchas' 'Sacred' spaces are closely related to their origin stories. According to the creation stories, the first and foremost primogenitors of the Lepchas were Fudongthing and Nuzong Nyu. They were created by God from the pure, virgin snows of Kingtsoomzaongboo Choo's pinnacle and sent them down to live, prosper and spread all over the fairyland of *Mayel Lyang*, which lies on the lap of Kingtsoomzaongboo Choo, that is Mount Kanchenjunga (Tamsang, 1983). Dzongu[1], the traditional *Fakram-Takram*[2], in the Northern District of Sikkim is located in the southern face of the Eastern Himalayas.

A certain nationalistic discourse always refers to a particular space as the homeland, ultimately striving to function as a mechanism of governing. Producing the national territory is bound up with constructing typical landscape and soundscape representations, but also with experiencing them in everyday practice.

The identity between people, heritage, and territory is also brought about by the use of botanical metaphors that '*suggest that each nation is a grand genealogical tree rooted in the soil that nourishes it*'. Of course, not many references to these botanical metaphors are found in Lepcha lore, yet it is substituted by geographical ones. The origin of the Rivers *Teesta* and *Rangeet* is associated with a mythical story of a couple finding two different routes of escaping their home to a far-off place to finally get married. The following two songs about Teesta and Rangit Rivers elucidate the case:

Mao- Mae Vom /Farewell to the Himalayas

Rangnyoo:
Aey le le num Rangeet
Sak ma daok, sak ma daok
Num sat she kao plong ka, sa ra ra…
Go amin
Ho aplong
Lem lungdo naong gat ma. Sa ra ra .. sa ra ra..
Ho meethook kasa sa
Kiduk chaom sukdum tyaol
Sak madaok num rangeet
Kani lem lung naong gat ma. Sa ra ra.. sa ara ra..
Rangeet
Rangnyoo Rangeet kanyi munlaom kat ngoon sa lyang
Punzaok arey namkao sa saknaon thaom kanyi sa.
Sa ra ra .. sa ra ra..
Ho kasa
Go ado sa
Sukdum lyang kanyi sa
Mithook mithook sung rey chaom shyo rangnyoo
Rangeet sa. Sa ra ra.. sa ra ra…

Rangnyoo, the female:
Oh! Rangeet, my love,
Please don't grieve and get upset.
On your strength, sa ra ra… sa ra ra…
Me below
You above
Let us go together with love, sa ra ra… sa ra ra ..
You are my eternal love,

A friend in need, in this world
Please don't grieve and get upset, Rangeet,
Let us go together with love. sa ra ra.. sa ra ra..
Rangeet, the male:
Rangnyoo, Rangeet,
You and I,
Our union at 'Panzaok',
A plce to remember by, sa ra ra… sa ara ra…
(Lyangsong Tamsang, 2008: 84-86)

The song a part of which is excerpted above is Mao-Mae Vom, a duet folk song written by Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha which speaks of the love between *Rangyoo* and *Rangeet* rivers who promise eternal love to each other as they bid farewell to the Himalayas and promise to meet each other at *Panzaok*. They hope that the story of their union will be told to posterity by *Fodaong*, *Tukryook* birds from the Himalayas carrying *Kursaong* and *Punten* flowers. This song carries with it a strong geographical metaphor associated with the two mighty rivers in the Sikkim and Darjeeling Himalayas, thereby establishing the community's rootedness in the place. This rootedness is further accentuated by the production of another song again about the two rivers, as an extension of the lore related to them thus:

Rangnyoo Rangeet/ Teesta And Rangeet
Avhaom phlaot chaom rik na dam rey jaong,
Kat aphing kat abop jaong,
'thi-sa- tha' bryang bun a ting chyoo naong

' Toot Pho', the bird,
'Paril bu' the serpent
United the two rivers at Panzaok.
Like combing a maiden's long, floeing hair into starnds,

In two colours, blue and nuddy grey
Embracing together they flow forever the plains of India
With a Lepcha name, 'thi-sa-tha'
(Lyangsong Tamsang, 2008: 92-93)

This is a song by Miss Hildamit Lepcha, who writes about the folklore of Teesta and Rangeet and their confluence at *Panzaok* which is called *Pesok* in the present day. The song describes how the rivers were united by *Toot Pho*, the bird and *Paril Bu*, the serpent at *Panzaok* where they embraced each other to flow together towards the plains of India with the Lepcha name *Thi-sa-tha.* The song's strong political message lies in its explication of the name Teesta as a corrupt Lepcha phrase *Thi-sa-tha*, thereby asserting the fact that the region associated with the river and their confluence and the stretch towards the plains is a land to which the Lepcha belong. Hence, folk songs have been effectively used as the memory of the past. Especially the songs like '*Kaongchhyen Kaonglo*' (The Lepcha Land); *Rum Lyaang Mo, Dzongoo Lyaang AArey* (Dzongu: The Lepchas Holy Land); *Ney Maayel Lyaangsaa Jaonkup Ryaamsyo Gong* (A Suitable Lepcha), among others are the songs that have been put to perform the identity of the community amidst perceived threats of assimilation.

The present section further interrogates the political uses of folk culture by strategically juxtaposing cases from different corners of the Lepcha world. Folk culture, however, it is defined, has long provided the symbolic repertoire through which claims of connection and continuity are made credible and emotionally potent. This section of the paper explores how particular cultural forms representing a particular "folk" are deployed within historically specific struggles for visibility, power, and economic advantage. They all, in other words, query the complex relationship between "folk culture" and politics. One such instance in the present study is the move towards emotional solidarity building of the community by resorting to issues of language, culture and customs. Songs can powerfully tie social protest to the traditional values and symbols of the group; they can project

a powerful emotional message that may be more effective in promoting solidarity than other rational' modes of communication; and above all music, in this emotional communication, can charge the interests of the group, elevating them to the intensity of moral rights. It is apparently for this reason that social movements and protest publics have historically utilized song as an important element in their host of repertoires of actions. In addition to this, a second important function of music in social movements is in the development of social solidarity among members and potential members (Gamson, 1975; Cashmore, 1979). Of several songs apt to be referred to in this context, *Aachulay* (Hail to the Himalayas) deserves special mention, a part of which is excerpted below:

Achuley…!
Ka mootanchi Rong Kup
Hun na ka aey yong
Rong vom theng mayun gong,
Rong alok lok makhan gong,
Mootanchi li shyong ka aey yong
Kam maryam na aey yong!
Achuley..!

My Lepcha brothers and sisters!
You being a Lepcha,
If you don't know how to sing a Lepcha song,
If you don't know how to dance a Lepcha dance,
I'm afraid, you are not worth calling yourself a Lepcha!
Hail to the Himalayas!

(Lyangsong Tamsang, 2008: 66-67)

This song, and more particularly, the verses cited above interrogate the Lepcha youth of whom circumstances have compelled them to a situation whereby they have remained oblivious to their native language, literature and culture—of their

Lepcha identity. Inherent in the song is a move towards forcefully indoctrinating youths to imbibe in them the spirit of being a Lepcha, embrace and learn Lepcha culture that would perform the function of a bonding mechanism in their pursuit of (re)creating, performing and delivering Lepcha Identity. Another song that attempts to inculcate in Lepcha youths a sense of solidarity and a sacred duty to work for Mayel Lyang (politically, Lepcha land in the present context) is Salvation, which is excerpted below:

Ka sa sakchin/ Salvation

Aey! Mayel lyang
Jachhaong dep kayoo jyoo bam ba la
Mak naon ba la dep
Chyakao nyirao mat ka amooo sa
Asaom mapal song tet
Amoo tundaok ka ho mak gong nye
Gun len la koo chhyen chen
Sakching ho na noon bi amoo sa
Taob kahat boo saong gyao chen.

If you die working for Mayel Lyang
You will be called a cultured person
Consider yourself fortunate
To find your ultimate salvation in Mayel lyang.

(Lyangsong Tamsang, 2008: 112-115)

Salvation/*ka sa sakchin* is a folksong by Norbu Tshering Lepcha. It is addressed to the utopian land of the Lepchas- *Mayel Lyang* which is described as a beautiful land crowned by the golden peaks of Kanchenjunga and whose beauty is enhanced more by the morning dew playing on the *Kursaong* and *Survo* flowers. Her flowing dress (*dum dem)* is the evergreen forest filled with luxuriant trees and mountains, hills and dales are her riches (*dum pim).* The rivers *Teesta* and *Rangeet* are her arms which guard her. She is the sacred land where Gods, Goddesses and angels

reside. *Poomju* is also situated in this holy land where one meets one's ancestors after death where one achieves Salvation. Thus, *Mayel Lyang* is the land of ultimate salvation. Although the song is apparently about the mythical and utopian land, it is interesting to note that it carries a political meaning and message. Mayel Lyang, along with its other equivalents like the Takna Land, for all intents and purposes is the Darjeeling Hills for the Lepcha community in the Hills today (say for instance the significance of *Mayel Lyang* in Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board); and hence, the political function of the song is to imbibe in the Lepcha youth a sense of responsibility to strive for the reclamation of the lost territory of the past, thereby being similar to the act of being a martyr in similar soundscape representatives of other (dominant) community in the region.

Social science researchers have begun to fruitfully use the work of Michel Foucault to analyze and problematize many practices and structures of the production of knowledge. For Foucault, resistance was inherent within relations of power, and resistance was itself predicated on the existence of a free subject. Resistance was not an isolated, quixotic event; rather, Foucault saw it as a means of self-transformation through the minimization of states of domination. As Ortner (1995) notes, resistance at one time was a fairly unambiguous concept, connoting an oppositional response to the exercise of domination, which itself was seen unproblematically as a fixed and institutionalized form of power. Foucauldian interpretations of less formalized, more pervasive and everyday forms of power and James Scott's work (1985 and 1990) on equally "everyday forms of resistance" have complicated the delineation of what is or is not resistance. In the present study, since we are involved in discussing the resistance against the erasure of territory and history of the smaller communities and cultures by more dominant ones, the Foucauldian framework may be fruitfully employed in the analysis of the present kind. However, we have slightly improvised the Foucauldian power-knowledge framework by adding yet another dimension: ignorance. Shanon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (2007) have discussed at length the concept of 'Ignorance' and its socio-cultural, political and epistemological implications. Ignorance, in common

parlance, is often thought of as a gap in knowledge. It is viewed as an epistemic oversight, seemingly accidental, or a consequence of the absence or scarcity of time and resources at the disposal of human beings to investigate and comprehend their world. Although Sullivan and Tuana (ibid.) agree that such ignorance may exist, they point out the possibility of other varieties of ignorance: actively produced lack of knowledge or unlearning for purposes of domination and exploitation. Such forms of ignorance may take different forms, viz. the centre refusing to allow the margins to know, or, the centre's ignorance, that is, deliberate constructions of its ignorance of injustice, cruelty and suffering meted out to the margins. In the case of the Lepcha Community in West Bengal, it is the active production of both these varieties of ignorance by the centre for the appropriation of a territory through the active process of the creation and dissemination of the 'knowledge' about the existence of the Lepcha in the Hills of Darjeeling and 'creation and dissemination' of 'ignorance' of their territory and history from the foothills to the Titalaya in the plains. This part of the *Mayel Lyang* that disappeared has no history; it has always been elusive, having neither any mythological nor historical reference to its disappearance from Lepcha control.

This creation of active ignorance is perpetuated through songs that speak of the Lepcha land in the Darjeeling Hills, grossly in connivance with the Lepcha oral history. See, for instance, the song, Takna Lyang:

Takna Lyang/ My Beautiful " Takna" land

Lee damphoo long klyaok ka chaok ngan lyang,
Sam lavo kacher myen Rum Fat Lyang
Aey.. sna ban tho ley!
Sam lavo kacher myen Rum Fat lyang.
Pho yu pho kup song lyem lam lyang,
Ago anyit sa Takna lyang.
Aey… sna ban tho ley!
Ago anyit sa Takna lyang.

A warm flat land, my beautiful Takna land,
A sanctutary of traditional Lecha houses
Built on flat stone slabs.
In the month of 'Sam Lavo', April
'Kacher', wheat, abound,
Takna is a blessed land,
Aey.. sna ban tho ley!
Takna is a blessed land.

(Lyangsong Tamsang, 2008: 74-75)

The Beautiful *Takna* Land/*Takna Lyang* is a song which praises the beautiful and blessed *Takna* Land. The Lepcha culture, customs and traditions are described as *Puntyen,* a creeper winding its way through the thick forest and living in harmony among the evergreen trees and the New Year festival is compared to a beautifully decorated *Poyaong,* a bamboo straw which is a source of joy and delight. This land is a sanctuary of traditional Lepcha houses built in April (*Sam lavo)* when wheat (*Kacher*) is plentiful. Here, Takna Lyang is Lepcha homeland. However, it needs to be noted here that amidst changes and transformations that effected the folk songs, there still have been gaps in the songs designed to communicate a specific message to the community. For instance, the Takna Lyang is still a fictitious, imaginative and mythical 'flat land' that has no connection whatsoever with the topographical characteristics of Darjeeling Hills. Secondly, to attract Western readers, additions like refereeing to the month of 'April' have been inserted into the folk songs, taking away its folkness altogether.

Political manoeuvring has remained a central act in the transformation of oral folk literature to written folk literature among the Lepcha community of Darjeeling. Even the researched analysis of insider scholars has been met with scathing criticisms while trying to subvert history. For instance, the song below is a response to Arthur Fonning's Lepcha: My Vanishing Tribe, which appears in Tamsang's work (2008) as an old Lepcha folk song.

Too na lee wang go fat det myaong Rong Kup?/ Who says the Lepchas are vanishing?

Nuzaongnyoo sa ache akup, Fadongthing sa kasok ban kup,
Eetboo Rum sa kurvong na
Too na lee wang go fat det myaong Rong Kup?
Dam pla Rong Kup ho, lee lee na
Tukbam moong tyang soo phalli na
Too na lee wang go fat det myaong Rong Kup?

The beloved children of Nuzaongnyoo,
The able and gifted children of Fadongthing,
Originated from the laps of creator
Who says the Lepchas are vanishing?
'Quick, you Lepchas, come out from your houses;
Black clouds are gathering on four sides'
Who says the Lepchas are vanishing?

(Lyangsong Tamsang, 2008: 88-89)

Amoo Ring rem phyaok lao cha ka

Amoo Ring rem phyaok lao cha ka
Mootanchi Rong Kup song
Phat la naon boo ka might rem
Lao tar ka suk dum lyang ka

Gek na ti hryen moo kurbaong ka
Thaong na nyin rey amoo sa
Rong Kup gum Mootanchi lyang sa
Ache akup amoo sa

Hryaop makaon ka aka amoo don
Chyakao mat lung do bam ka

Amoo ring rey noorpoo atim
Kaom jyer gichyao len la
Chur arey ka kayum thyak bam
Rong Kup sukdum lyang ka
Jarthap ajak jook na bam ka
Ka migit ajoom tho ka

Amoo ring dom myamet chyoboo
Rong Kup sa tukmoo gum
Amoo ring naongtao mamat boo
Mootanchi sa punjyum gum
Mayel lyang sa kingtsoom Choo jong
Amoo ring ajoom tho ka.

Salute to Mother Tongue
Let us salute our mother tongue,
Beloved Children of Mother Nature and God
Stop; halt the Lepcha language from vanishing
Keep the Lepcha identities going

We are born and grown
Sucking the mother's milk
We are the Lepchas of this land
The Beloved Children of Mother Nature and God
Let us not make our mother cry
Let us serve her well

Our mother tongue is most precious
Far more than gold and silver
The Lepchas are identified in the world
Through their language
Therefore, preserve and maintain it
To keep the Lepchas immortal

Those who insult and suppress the Mother Tongue
Are cheats and stealers
Those Lepchas who care and protect not
The Lepcha Mother Tongue
Are the foes and adversaries
Like Mt Kanchenjunga of Mayel Lyang
Let us be strong and powerful
To keep the Lepcha Mother Tongue alive and well

As revealed, the bulk of the repertoire considered "folksong" in Lepcha is young. This is because there is an unscrupulous insertion of verses and new additions thicky available in what is referred to as classical and old folk songs. Oral traditions do not become nationally significant and symbolic merely by existing somewhere, but through their transformation (Anttonen 2005: 88). Therefore many new songs and arrangements of folk songs have been created, with ramifications moving beyond the obvious, and impinging on the politics of belonging in the region.

Concluding Observations:

In interrogating the methods and motives of remembering the past and in revising how histories are attempted to be recovered by the community, and the nature of the responses of the state towards such attempts, a few interesting findings are revealed. First, the efforts of the ILTA in this direction seem to have yielded some positive results in terms of the development of Lepcha political consciousness over time and the resultant increase in political participation. Secondly,

the community, although not succeeding in its attempt to get recognition of a PTG status, succeeded in getting a political space in terms of the establishment of the *Mayel Lyang* Lepcha Development Board (LDC). However, these achievements of the ILTA should not blind us to at least a few issues that further problematize the concept and construction of a nation. For instance, in the present study, the Lepcha's attempt to 'imagine' a homogeneous nation is jeopardised by at least two things:

First, the Locational Geopolitics[11], and Second, as a consequence of the first, the Selective Motives of Remembering the past by the community divided in time and space. Further, the emergent fissures between the ILTA (Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association) and the AILA (All India Lepcha Association) speak of a deeper difference in terms of clan and geo-historical differences between the *Renjyongmoo* (Lepchas of Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Siliguri/plains), *and Tamsangmoo* (Lepchas of Kalimpong). Whereas the ILTA favoured the LDC outside the purview of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), the AILA expressed (and is still expressing) the desire to constitute the LDC directly under the GTA[12] . Although the state response in the form of LDC independent of GTA control would in the short-run appear as a significant move towards the solution of the Hill crisis through political manoeuvring, yet, this difference amongst the members of the Lepcha community signals a possible forthcoming communal tension in the region amongst various ethnic communities, accentuating the Hill crisis.

Furthermore, this region reveals hierarchies of emergent nations, unlike what Prasenjit Biswas projects as Nation From Below and Nation from Above. The Diadic Model fails in the region. For instance, at the lowest rung of the hierarchy is what I call the Emergent Lepcha micronation; higher up we could see Gorkha mesonation; and still higher up, the Bengali macronation. This implies that the Identities are no longer either "native" or "metropolitan." Rewriting the past and reinventing history has "recast the relationships between places, people, identities,

and discourses in new and discontinuous ways, always bearing the imprint of an unsettling and unsettled multiculturalism."

Hence, continuous politicking by the community in tandem with the cultural and historical choice of centres of power, through myriad means including manipulation, transformation and addition to the folk culture when it is reproduced in print media, like, for instance, in all classical, old and recent folk songs, the message that would arouse Lepcha nationalist sentiment, has not been received unequivocally by all sections of the Lepcha community. The deep-rooted experience of history is the common factor dividing the community into clan-based differences. Whereas the cultural modes of subversion of dominant history are dominant among members of one clan that have succeeded in terms of delivering Lepcha identity via the Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board, the process itself has implied the subversion of the lived history of another clan that shares its history with the dominant Gorkha community. Hence, what appears as Lepcha Folk Culture disseminated through ILTA is but a culture of one clan and remains far from being generalized as Lepcha Culture and Cultural History. Hence, it needs to be noted here that considering the jan-jatis and their studies requires a vigilant analysis and ample caution of smaller social formations within the groups which impinge not only on their social structure and power configurations but also in their manifestations vis-à-vis the dominant communities in the peripheries of the tribal and indigenous world.

Notes :

[1] Versical connotes expressions through verses, as in poetry, songs, etc.

[2] The most prominent of historians and social scientists who have worked on the Lepcha community and its society, economy and polity include, among others, E. C. Dozey, *A Concise History of Darjeeling District since 1835 with a Complete Itinerary of Tours in Sikkim and the District* (Calcutta: Art Press, 1922); Arthur Fonning, *Lepcha: My Vanishing Tribe* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987); G. Gorer, *Himalayan Village: An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim* (London: Thomas, Nelson & Sons, 1938); Christopher von Fürer-Haimendorf, *Tribes of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) (Indian Reprint:

Oxford India Paperbacks, 1982); J. D. Hooker, *The Himalayan Journal* (London: n.p., 1854); G. B. Mainwaring, *A Grammar of the Lepcha Language* (New Delhi: Manjushree Publishing House, 1971), Ram Rahul, *The Himalayan Borderland* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1970); H. H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Ethnographic Glossary*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891); D. T. Tamlong, *The Mayel Lyang and the Lepchas (About Sikkim and Darjeeling)* (Darjeeling: Mani Printing House, 2008); K. P. Tamsang, *The Unknown and Untold Reality About the Lepchas*, (Hong Kong: Luen Sun Offset Printing Co. Ltd, 1983); and J. C. White, *Sikkim & Bhutan: 21 Years on the North East Frontier (1887–1908)* (London: n.p., 1909).

[3] The *Renjyongmoo* Lepchas are the Lepchas of Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kureong and Siliguri. Tamsang (1983) argues that the inclusion of these three categories of Lepchas into one *moo* owes to the fact that this geographical area was once a part and parcel of Sikkim until 31 January 1835, when these territories were annexed to British India. *Renjyong* here means Sikkim and *moo* as a suffix means '*belong to*', hence referring to Lepchas of Sikkim.

[4] Illam is a district in eastern Nepal. Lepchas who are inhabitants of the Illam region in east Nepal are called *Illammoo* Lepchas in Lepcha terminology.

[5] Tamsang (1983) points out that Kalimpong was once an independent state ruled by a Lepcha king named Gaeboo Achok Pano. King Gaeboo Achok Pano and his forefathers, according to Tamsang, belonged to the Lepcha Clan called Tamsang, and they were also called Tamsang Pano by the Lepchas. Hence, owing to their history of being ruled by Tamsangs, they are called Tamsangmoo. He says further that this kingdom came to an end with Gaeboo Achok Pano being killed at Daling Fort, after which it became a part of Bhutan and, eventually Kalimpong became a part of British India in 1865 when Bhutan was defeated at Daling by the British under the command of Brigadier General Dunsford CB (see Tamsang, *The Unknown and Untold Reality*, p. 44 for details).

[6] *Pro* in Lepcha refers to the country of Bhutan. According to Tamsang, after the Daling War, the Lepchas in the Terai region were uprooted by British tea planters who moved eastward and settled in a place called the Lepchas as Zaongsaw in the western part of Bhutan. This group of Lepchas in western Bhutan are called Promo Lepchas.

[7] Culture is created and developed on the collective experiences of a set of people in a particular environment. It then becomes a set of values, norms, behaviours and institutions possessed by a group of people in sustained social interaction, that have been derived historically and experientially as mechanisms that allow a group to maximize benefits to the group in that particular context. Culture can therefore be illuminated by focusing especially on areas such as religion, language, the imaginative, visual and performing

arts, music, patterns of eating, and images such as dress and conceptions of beauty. Each of these areas provides clues into the set of norms, beliefs and values that form culture. Hence, a potential exists for a situation where two or more cultures may meet in the same space, as is the case of the dominant Gorkha cultural practices and the minority Lepcha culture in Darjeeling Hills. Over time, this has led to the Lepchas practising extract behaviours of the dominant cultural group, thereby producing diffuse cultural identities. The ILTA stresses falling back to traditional Lepcha religious and cultural practices so that the community can identify and project itself as a unique minority community in terms of its religious and cultural practices. The ILTA has called upon the Lepchas to preserve, conserve and maintain their cultural heritage and language and to protect their lands around which their culture and identity are linked and interwoven. For the re-assertion of their distinct identity by way of reviving the 'dying' culture, the Lepchas have also established the Lepcha Culture Centre; and formed '*shezums*' (Lepcha associations) in every village, the membership of which is mandatory for every Lepcha person.

[8] Lepchas have been referred to as a Vanishing Tribe by an authoritative Lepcha 'insider' author Arthur Fonning Lepcha in *Lepchas: My Vanishing Tribe*. Christian by faith, Fonning's labelling of the Lepcha as a Vanishing Tribe not only poses the question of the identity crisis of the community vis-à-vis the other Hill communities but also relates the history of the Lepcha tribe to the concept of the 'Lost Tribe in the Christian religious literature.

[9] Ren Lyangsong Tamsang of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association based at Kalimpong, in his letter addressed to Shri Pawan Kumar Chamling, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Sikkim, clarifies the meaning of Dzongu. According to Tamsang, the current usage of 'Dzongu' is a mispronunciation of the correct '*Dzongbu*, which means the land of plenty, of abundance, of prosperity. Explanations on Dzongu-the Mayel Lyang could also be obtained from D. T. Tamlong, *The Mayel Lyang and the Lepchas* (About Sikkim and Darjeeling) (Darjeeling: Mani Printing House, 2008).

[10] The concept has been explained by Dulal Chandra Roy, "Demographic Profile of the Lepchas in the World: A Case of India, Nepal and Bhutan", *Aachulay-A Quarterly Bilingual News Magazine*, (Kalimpong: ILTA, 2007) Vol. 12, No. 1, April thus: Dzongu was originally called *Faokram-Takram* by the Lepchas. *Faokram* in Lepcha means a ladder and *Takram* refers to a standing tree which is cut at different places to act as a ladder so that the climber can climb up. The physical-topographical structure of Dzongu is said to look like a staircase. However, according to Tamsang in his letter addressed to the Chief Minister of Sikkim, the meaning of *Faokram Takram* is the "Source of Lepchas' Origin and Life'.

[11] The ILTA attempted to mobilize the different Lepcha groups in the process of the construction and reconstruction of a homogeneous imagined Lepcha nation out of the Lepcha population divided in terms of religion, clan categories, and geographical location. However, the collective imagination of a nation, to the extent that it represents the aggregate collective identity of its diverse components, is itself a composition of individual imaginations; and the geographical imagination of a nation in a state may often contrast with the geographical positioning of the state in which the imagination of a nation occurs, and its strategic and security implications. The ILTA tried to bring together the Lepchas spread over the length and breadth of the Eastern Himalayas, including the Lepchas in Sikkim, Bhutan and eastern Nepal. On the one hand, the state of Sikkim enjoys special status within the Indian federal structure, and the Sikkimese Lepchas, enjoying political patronage of the state of Sikkim, bound by their imagination of being a privileged category both within Sikkim and outside it, would restrict themselves from actively involved in the campaign for recognition of the community as PTG, the reclamation of their lost territory and identity by their brethren in the kin state of West Bengal. On the other hand, the creation of refugees by Bhutan and the experience of an ultra-left movement in Nepal, both having security implications for the Indian state, imply that a campaign to unite across geographies would impinge on the security concerns of the state. The geopolitical positioning of the Indian state and its security and strategic concerns contradicts the interest of the Lepcha community to forge an imagined nation (Nepal, 2013), compelling the elites and leadership of the Lepchas to abandon such strategy and settle with something lesser in the form of a non-territorial development board.

[12] This fissure represents the difference between the *Renjyongmoo* who share a longer period of shared history with other Gorkha communities vis-à-vis- the *Tamsangmoo* (Lepchas of Kalimpong), the territory which for a considerably longer period remained with Bhutan and hence, has a slightly different historical experience.

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