

Chapter 8 Indigenising The Limbus: Trajectory Of A Nation Divided Into Two Nation-States¹

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Much has been written on how the concept of 'indigenous people' originated and evolved during the last four decades or so.² Most of them are concerned with its conceptual overlap/difference with tribe while others are more concerned with political or legal implications of adopting it. There is also a lurking suspicion in the writings of some scholars, at least in India, about possible hegemonic designs of the West in the entire discourse. I briefly examine some such literature here.

B. K. Roy Burman is perhaps the most notable Indian scholar to have written on this concept and his position in this regard is clear. However he appears to have earned more respect globally for having taken a stand and pursuing it than for the merit of the stand itself. In his article published in 1992 he appears more a nationalist than a scholar, though there is no reason why a person cannot be both. While he accepts that the word 'indigenous' is applicable to 'primitive' tribes in India he also thinks that the concept is applicable to a few other tribes 'in the sense of their being relatively more committed to ecological ethics, more guided by historical-ethical sanctions in their social relations than by the coercive power of the state, more sensitive to the muse of nature than to the guiles of Mammon, more in harmony with their social self than is the case with the atomised individuals or the sophisticated societies' (Roy Burman 1992:35). I would think that such a definition of the "indigenous people" would be extremely difficult to operationalise. One also notices in his article an exaggerated concern about the designs of Western hegemonic powers when he says that 'self-determination ... should mean nothing more or nothing less than internal self-determination' (*ibid*:34). Self-determination in the sense it is commonly understood is not a part of the declaration on indigenous rights drafted by the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. The declaration

talks about self-determination but clearly within existing nation-state boundaries (Maybury-Lewis 1996:640).

While it is praiseworthy to draw our attention to the global designs such efforts should perhaps, not even unintentionally, serve the interest of our own nation-states, which usually thrive on serving the dominant interests and which would feel uncomfortable even to talk about indigenous rights. The states in most parts of the Third World are not only against such formulations but are also actively opposing any such effort by international organizations or by indigenous peoples themselves. Even the United Nations, instead of empowering indigenous peoples as suspected by many to be its hidden agenda, has actually empowered the nation-states by accepting the subject of human rights as a state's internal matter. By doing so, and also by not clearly recognizing collective rights, it has, so to say, made a mockery of indigenous rights. It is unfortunate that some renowned scholars have inadvertently served the interest of the state by showing how problematic this concept is. As Jaganath Pathy rights points out, '...neither a concept can be discarded on the ground that it is not comprehensive enough to capture the prevailing objective reality nor the reality can ever be fully subsumed under any conceptual category' (Pathy 1992a: 6-7). There can always be exceptions but a lot depends on what we want - to empower those who have been economically, demographically, and culturally marginalised for centuries or be simply concerned academically with the problematique of operationalising a concept. I for one would choose the former.

André Béteille's article published in *Current Anthropology* is quite widely read and read essentially, as anti-indigenous discourse because he brings out the problems related to this concept most sharply of all scholars, particularly when it is applied to Asian countries like India. But if one reads his article positively, one finds that he is not against the concept itself. 'There are of course regions of the globe', he writes, 'where the tribal population is the indigenous population and this can be clearly established by historical evidence' (Béteille 1998:188). However his article gives rather extra attention to tribal-indigenous relationship and ignores communities in India, which are neither tribes nor castes in the constitutional sense but are the first settlers, natives, autochthons, aborigines, etc. in particular geographical spaces. They may be termed indigenous even in the sense of being marginal, minority,

subordinate, or colonized, or in the sense that their language, culture, religion, etc. are facing serious threat of extinction.

I now refer here to an article by Imchen (1998). His main argument is that the tribal peoples of India will be more advantageous vis-à-vis the nation-state if they indigenize themselves. One of the major advantages of this, according to him, is its association with the concept of "self-determination", which is not associated with tribes though he considers a separate state for every people to be practically impossible in Indian context.

Let me now briefly dwell on a very important article written by Virginius Xaxa (1999). His is one of the most exhaustive treatment of both the concept and issue of "indigenous peoples". He has devoted a lot of space, like most others who have written on the subject, to the relationship between tribe and indigenous people. He has thoroughly examined the arguments for and against the latter concept. One important point brought out in his article is that the problem of identifying the indigenous peoples has arisen partly because nation and region are not clearly distinguished by many scholars whereas what may be true of one region may not be true of another. He thinks that the adoption of this concept by tribal peoples in India is reactive. According to him, the denial of territorial rights and privileges to tribal communities by dominant regional communities has 'led to increasing articulation of the idea of indigenous people by the tribal people' (Xaxa 1999:3594). He says quite clearly that the indigenous peoples can be identified in a given region if there is a political will to do so, thereby linking the issue of 'indigenous people' with the state politics.

Past is Precious: Limbus Look Back

The traditional habitat of Limbus is the geographically contiguous eastern part of Nepal, western part of Sikkim, and the district of Darjeeling. They are also called Chong in Sikkim, although they prefer to call themselves Yakthungba. Of the various names the scholars have adopted to identify them the most frequently used is "Limbu". Being in the most inaccessible and underdeveloped periphery of both Nepal and Sikkim they are economically and educationally one of the most backward Himalayan communities. Their primary occupation is agriculture though some of them practise pastoralism and a little trade as well. They are also in the armed services in India and abroad in significant number because they were considered as one of the martial communities favoured

by the British for their army.³ Whereas no one knows what their traditional dress and ornaments looked like prior to the unification of Nepal in 1769, their language has shown considerable resilience. Despite the overwhelming influence of the Nepali language all over the places where they inhabit, the Limbu language is still vibrant in the eastern part of Nepal and Sikkim. According to conventional estimates, their total population is 2.6 *laks* distributed over East Nepal, Sikkim, and Darjeeling (Subba 1990, 1999a).

Limbus were apparently a strong "nation" for several centuries. The Limbu nationhood began to weaken perceptibly in Sikkim from 1641 when Phuntsog Namgyal, a fugitive from Tibet, was successful in getting himself consecrated as the first 'King of Righteousness' there. With this began promotion of the Lamaist form of Buddhism that swept the indigenous Lepcha community completely but the Limbus, barring a few, resisted any proselytization into Buddhism. This was possible because they received support from their brethren from east Nepal. But from 1769 onwards there were pressures for hinduizing themselves not only in east Nepal but also in Sikkim, as these areas began to receive Hindu migrants from western Nepal in significant numbers. They did not look towards Tibet and they could not expect any support from the malarial south. Although, unlike other indigenous hill communities of Nepal, they were successful in obtaining some special privileges from the Gorkha king Prithivinarayan Shah in the form of inscribed promises, hardly any of them was honoured by subsequent rulers and there was a steady downfall of this community in Nepal from 1769.⁴

The subsequent kings of Nepal did not respect the special privileges granted to them by the first king and indulged in confiscating their lands through various means - legislative as well as racist - and subjected them to various forms of marginalization (see Caplan 1970, Stiller 1975, Pradhan 1991). The confiscated lands were redistributed among the high caste members migrating from the more heavily populated west to the east. Legislation was made to legalize the transfer of their land to the high caste migrants.⁵ Limbus began to slide down the socio-economic ladder compelling many of the able-bodied persons among them to migrate to India and elsewhere in search of employment. Those who earned enough to repay the mortgages to the high caste members returned home but most did not succeed and never returned to their villages. In the process, they turned into an insignificant minority in their own

homeland by the end of the twentieth century (Subba 1999b, Table XI:42-43). Such a condition of Limbus was explained by high caste members in terms of the former's extravagant culture whereas Limbus blamed their own leaders for ignoring the interest of their people and conniving with the high caste people for selfish gains such as the office of a Subba or revenue collector. No one quite looked at the unholy alliance between the state and the high caste members to usurp their land and other resources.

By the end of the nineteenth century most of them had become bilinguals, as they spoke in both the Limbu and Nepali languages. The reason for this was that Nepali was the only language that could be taught in Nepal and Darjeeling then. While the high caste members jeered at the way Limbus spoke in Nepali the former made no effort whatsoever to learn the Limbu language and even after more than two centuries of their migration to the Limbu habitat the former hardly knew a word of the Limbu language. The Limbu language was considered *manchhe khane kura* or "the cannibals' tongue" and if any two Limbu met and spoke in their own language in the presence of a high caste member the latter would ask the two not to speak in *manchhe khane kura*. The latter was seen as the surrogate state and hence no protest was usually made openly against such remarks, as if they admitted their language to be so.

Limbu situation outside Nepal was no different. In Sikkim, after initially protesting against the Tibetan hegemony, they entered into a 'blood treaty' called *Lhomentsongsun* with the Lepchas and Bhutias in early seventeenth century.⁶ This treaty disabled the Limbus of Sikkim, as it did the Lepchas there, and paved the way for both political and cultural hegemony of the Bhutias, particularly after the consecration of Phuntsog Namgyal as the Chogyal in 1641. While Limbus were largely successful in preserving their religion even after that Lepchas were not, and in the next one century or so, they were all converted into Buddhism. But since their conversion into Buddhism was not always out of free will the vertical spread of this religion was limited and their pre-Buddhist religion called 'Bon' continued to form the substratum of their religious structure (Gorer 1938). Even Bhutias did not bother much about Lepchas practising their traditional religion so long as they formally accepted the tenets of Buddhism and sent their youngest son to monastery for monkhood.

The subordination of the Limbus in Sikkim, until it became a part of India, was essentially political. They were not as easily

available as Lepchas were for various forms of subordination by the Bhutias, partly because the Lepcha habitat was in the north and hence in contiguity with Bhutia habitats. Though the Bhutias had the patronage of the kings the balance of power between them was quite delicate because Limbus were not only numerically dominant in West Sikkim but could easily seek help of their brethren from across the border with Nepal. The Sikkimese rulers were never too comfortable with their western neighbours, particularly after 1769, due to the expansionary wars fought by the Gorkhas on Nepal's eastern as well as western borders. This unease continued to persist until 1890 when the border between Nepal and Sikkim was formalised with British help. This was one of the reasons why the capital of Sikkim was shifted twice from west to east of Sikkim between 1769 and 1890.

While the British government was responsible for bringing peace to the Sikkim-Nepal border it was also responsible for changing the demographic balance of Sikkim in favour of the Nepalis who the British government needed for carrying the loads across the border with Tibet, for construction of roads and bungalows, and for reclamation of land for agricultural expansion. The British government was apprehensive of Tibetans for various historical reasons. Hence, they wanted to create a reserve of "loyal Gurkhas" within the territory of Sikkim. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, the three indigenous communities of Sikkim - the Lepcha, Limbu, and the Bhutia - had turned into a minority constituting together not more than one third of the total population. However, politically and administratively, the Bhutias managed to remain dominant till as late 1975. The status of Sikkim as the 22nd state of India was certainly a big loss to Bhutias but a bigger loser was perhaps the Limbu community. While there were (and still are) reserved seats in the state assembly for Lepcha-Bhutias ensuring a fair representation of these communities even the single reserved seat for the Limbus of Sikkim prior to 1974 was done away with under the new dispensation. Furthermore, the Lepcha-Bhutias enjoyed considerable protection and patronage as Scheduled Tribes but no such protection or patronage was given to the Limbus till December 2002 when they too were listed as a Scheduled Tribe. However, politically they are not at par with Lepcha-Bhutias for whom seats in the state assembly are reserved.

In Darjeeling, which was a part of Sikkim till the middle of the nineteenth century, history took a different turn due to its beauty and healthy air that was to heal the sick and the injured

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among the British soldiers. Hence, the area came under direct administration of the British as early as 1835. The presence of Bengalis in Darjeeling was significant politically, culturally and administratively. They were a powerful community there as second fiddlers to the British and could manipulate the destiny of the hill peoples to a great extent. Hence, the hill people, whether they were indigenous Lepchas, Limbus, Bhutias, or the migrant Nepalis, had to come together and form a wider solidarity for common survival.

In both Sikkim and Darjeeling Limbus were the biggest losers because of several reasons of which their Nepali identity was one. While they called themselves Yakhungbas or Limbus others identified them with the Nepalis. To be identified as Nepalis was detrimental to their interest because the name carried certain connotations like being a "migrant", "people from Nepal", "Hindu", "caste society", and so on. Their being indigenous, tribal, and Animistic was ignored completely. Needless to say that some of them were recent migrants from Nepal.

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By "indigenizing the Limbus" I mean the process of reinventing their tradition, language, script, culture, religion, etc. *Mundhum*, or the repertoire of Limbu traditions and folklore, has been brought to the fore as the legitimate and authentic source of such knowledge. Interpretations of a tradition in the *mundhum* have differed from person to person as well as place to place but never to the extent of threatening the psychological unity of the people. *Mundhum* is not only sacred to them but also an important symbol and it gives them the sense of being one of the oldest inhabitants of the land as it at times does with the appropriation of the Sanskrit word "Kirata" (Subba 1999).

Several Limbu writers have felt the need for indigenizing the Limbus from time to time. They have found the state to be always against them: they have been persecuted in Nepal and Sikkim for propagating their language and religion. They give instances of the eighteenth century Limbu scholar Sri Janga who was hanged to death by the rulers in Sikkim for trying to revive the Limbu script and teaching Limbus to read and write in it. The minutes of the Limbu organisation called All India Kirant Chumlung Association Sabha established in 1925 in Darjeeling also indicate cases of harassment by the state officials in Sikkim as well as Nepal. While mobilising Limbus for certain political agenda was

extremely difficult until recently either in Nepal or in Sikkim for the conspicuous absence of democratic form of government there, the need to indigenize them was felt by many of them due to a process they called "delimbuisation" that took place during the last two hundred years or so. There has not only been degeneration in their political status but also in their demographic, linguistic, cultural, and other aspects. This may be briefly elaborated here.

Till the middle of the seventeenth century they lived in relatively inaccessible habitat and nurtured a culture based on nature and nature worship. The scope for growth of cultural, religious, or linguistic heterogeneity was limited as they lacked interaction with non-Limbu communities except the Rais on the west and the Lepchas on the east. There was a limit to which one could travel on foot or interact with members of other communities. Even men would not travel long distances alone for the fear of being killed en route.⁷ Fairs and festivals did provide some scope for interaction with other Limbus and non-Limbus and so did the weekly markets to some extent. Buddhism was contained on the northern side of the Himalayas whereas Hinduism was confined to the plains and valleys of India on the south. The Muslims apparently did never come in contact with them in any significant way.

The exposure to religious heterogeneity came first from the east, with the establishment of the Buddhist theocratic kingship in Sikkim in 1641. It is often told that some Limbus had even adopted Buddhism but such adoption must have been very insignificant, certainly much less than it was in the case of Lepchas and must have taken place in the easternmost periphery of the Limbu kingdom which was well within the present territory of Nepal. Their orientation towards the west was further strengthened after the political unification of Nepal by king Prithivinarayan Shah in 1769. The Gorkha king in Nepal thenceforth aggressively began Hinduising the newly subjugated peoples of Nepal. Buddhism in Sikkim also had the royal patronage but the westward orientation of Limbus made it difficult for this religion to make any significant influence on them.

Conversion into Christianity began in the end of the nineteenth century and there were some Limbus among the earliest converts. But such conversions could take place only in the hills of Darjeeling; it began in Sikkim in any significant number only after 1975 and in Nepal after 1990 though there were some conversions

taking place surreptitiously in these two Himalayan kingdoms from much earlier days.

Besides conversions to these two major religions of the world, Limbus have been converted to a host of religious sects like the Pranami Dharma, Josmani Dharma, Ba'hai, and the like some of which preach pure vegetarianism and teetotalism. Like other people in the region they have also had the influence from various other sources like educational institutions, languages, media, and so on making them as heterogeneous as any other community in the Himalayas.

This heterogeneity is what many orthodox Limbus call 'delimbuisation'. To these Limbus the various traits that Limbus have acquired over the past two centuries or so are not assets but aberrations that must be contained in order to reconstruct a true (also translated as "pure") Limbu society. To them, to be a true/pure Limbu has been a necessary condition for the legitimacy of their demands for greater autonomy (in east Nepal) or a Scheduled Tribe status (in India). For such purity, they often insist that the Limbus must first begin to live as Limbus, which means speak the Limbu language, learn to write in the Limbu script, profess Limbu religion, etc. which is quite impossible for them in Darjeeling, if not in Sikkim and Nepal as well. Few leaders are ready to accept the fact that some of the Scheduled Tribes in India have hardly anything in common with other Scheduled Tribes and there is considerable diversity not only within the Scheduled Tribes but also within each Scheduled Tribe in India. In order to substantiate what I have been trying to argue I present here a conversation between one of the prominent Limbu leaders, who was also my English teacher in school and myself. It took place in Kalimpong, Darjeeling district, West Bengal (India) in the winter of 1992. We spoke in English.

He: Nice to see you, Tanka. Where're you these days and what've you been doing?

Me: I'm at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, teaching Anthropology.

He: How's the situation there nowadays? Are you safe? (This question is asked because Shillong is well known for a number of communal riots and outsiders are believed to be unsafe there.)

Me: Yes, we are.

He: How're your folks in Tanek (my village in Kalimpong)?

Me: They're fine.

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He: You see, I can't move about much nowadays. (He is suffering from gout in his knees.) When I was young I visited almost all the villages around on foot. The youths today are lazy. They want comfort and wait for a vehicle even for going to town from here (which is about a kilometre)! What do you expect from such people? Where's the future of such people? You know, all this land below the town once belonged to our community (read Limbu) but look who are occupying them now?

Me: Yes, that's unfortunate but we are not the only ones who have lost our lands. The Lepchas...

He: But, they're at least getting jobs in tribal quota!

Me: You're right.

He: This is what our people should be fighting for but for that we need to know ourselves first.

Me: What do you mean?

He: I mean, we need to learn our language and script. We should bring back those who have strayed into Christianity or Hinduism. We have such a rich culture and tradition but how many Limbus know all this? Is any one bothered to know or learn them? Like it is said the wives of other men are more beautiful than your own the language, culture and religion of other people are always more attractive. What our people do not realize is that they are theirs and will never be ours!

Me: Not even after centuries?

He: No, never. Let me illustrate my point. You see, I had once written a poem in Nepali. A Bahun (Nepali hill Brahmin) colleague of mine complimented to me by saying "You've written it very well even though it is not your language". Do you see the point? Yet, we speak in Nepali, call it our language, fought for its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India, and...

Me: But, haven't we contributed to the growth and development of this language over centuries?

He: Yes, we have but that was wrong, a waste of labour, an act done with the false idea that Nepali was a common language of all of us hill people. Time has come now to realize this mistake and rectify it.

Me: But, for many of us like myself, it is not easy to find a person with whom I could speak in Limbu in Shillong. Actually, there was a Limbu from Haflong (upper Assam) doing his doctoral research in my department for some years but he couldn't speak a word of Limbu.

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He: You could've taught him to speak our language. But, our people have no respect for our own language. It is like discarding your own mother because she is dressed in rags. That is why we are backward and exploited.

[He went on with his theory of Limbu's backwardness but I kept quiet and ended the conversation at this point. I realized suddenly that I needed to walk back quite a distance to reach my home, both physically and metaphorically.]

Reflecting on this conversation that took place about twelve years ago I would tend to agree with him more now than I did then. I remember how well my grandparents spoke the language and how I myself laughed when they spoke a few words of Nepali with typical Limbu accent. My parents knew the language very well and could speak too, but actually seldom did between themselves or with us children. I can understand quite a bit but can speak much less whereas my child has not learnt a word of it. Should such degeneration be allowed to continue? Is it enough to inherit a Limbu surname like Subba? I have often wondered if all this is enough but I also feel that nurturing such an idea may encourage the forces of homogenisation of Limbu culture. If internal homogeneity in terms of language, culture and religion is over-emphasized it may even be counter-productive to the political aspirations of the community. I have noticed dissatisfaction among some Limbus in my village (Tanek in Kalimpong, Darjeeling District) and elsewhere over what I understand as promotion of certain cultural traits at the cost of certain others. Though such a homogenization process is set in motion for the last few decades in Nepal as well as India this does not seem to agree much with the grid of culture, if not with the will of the state, too.

Indigenization of the Limbus has, however, already begun and to the extent it builds a sense of awareness and pride in their culture and tradition it is perhaps acceptable to all. One of the mistakes that ethnography of Limbus has committed is representing them as a homogenous culture whereas there has been considerable variation in their culture, particularly during the past two hundred years.

Active part of this process is rarely a decade old now. But there is resistance not only from within but also from without. Due to frustration at home and the lure of the international indigenous movement the leaders often orient themselves towards international agencies whose intentions are seldom clear. Though,

of late, tribal and indigenous peoples are treated as analogous concepts neither of the two is accepted by Nepal and India. Clearly the Limbu situation is different in India and Nepal and even in Darjeeling and Sikkim. In Nepal, Limbus are just an "ethnic group"; they are neither a tribe nor an indigenous group. Even the mainstream academia have objected to some western anthropologists for "over-emphasizing" the differences between the high-caste Nepalis and the Limbus and emphasized on how they share the same culture and traditions (Dahal 1979, Sharma 1978, 1986). In fact, there is amazing similarity between the mainstream scholars in India and Nepal on matters of caste-tribe relationship. Indian anthropologists are freely referred by mainstream Nepali scholars to buttress their views that the various castes and ethnic groups in Nepal have interacted with and borrowed from each other during the past couple of centuries. But whereas concepts like tribe and nation are very well accepted in India even the use of such words for the ethnic groups of Nepal is strongly objected to by the high caste mainstream Nepali scholars. For example, Prayag Raj Sharma, one of the best known scholars of Nepal, writes: 'A greater obscurity shrouds the definition of 'nation' to a people, and we don't propose to discuss it here at any length, since we think that it has not even a remote application to any minority group in Nepal' (Sharma 1986:131).

The situation of the indigenous peoples' movement in Nepal is very succinctly brought out by Parsu Ram Tamang, the general secretary of the Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NEFEN) and a lecturer in Economics at Tribhuvan University. On the basis of NEFEN's definition of the indigenous peoples⁸ a large number of communities with their own language, culture, traditional religion (Animism), marginality, and aboriginality in Nepal have been identified and Limbu is one of them. He notes that the new constitution of Nepal, adopted in November 1990, recognizes the right of the ethnic groups to (a) 'protect and develop its language, script and culture, to establish schools for providing education to children upto the primary level in their mother tongue', and (b) 'maintain its identity and for that purpose to manage and protect its religious places and trustees' (Tamang 1996:163). However, he also notes that the same constitution has "restricted the formation of associations and political parties on the basis of religion, caste, tribe or religion" (*ibid*: 164). It may be noted here, however, that the various communities identified by NEFEN have "mother tongues" even in Tamang's language, which shows how even a university

teacher can be a victim of the dominant discourse. The words like "tongue" and "dialect" are used mistakenly for languages without scripts of their own but this is linguistically incorrect.

In Sikkim they were an Other Backward Class (OBC) till December 2002 and a Scheduled Tribe today and their language is recognized as one of the state languages there. The Limbu language and script are also taught up to the level of Bachelor of Arts. In Darjeeling too they are constitutionally a Scheduled Tribe, but socially a "caste", which means they are organically a part of the Hindu/Nepali caste system. There is no recognition of their separate culture and language or their being co-partners with Lepchas as original inhabitants there.

The European ethnography from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards is replete with the word 'tribe' being unhesitatingly used for the Limbu community. One of the best-known scholars on Limbus, Lionel Caplan, traces the use of the word 'tribe' for them since 1811 with the publication of Colonel Kirkpatrick's *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (1990). In spite of being acutely aware of the shortcomings of this concept or the opposition to its use from some Nepalese scholars he argues that the concept is still relevant in the context of Limbus due to their special relationship with land (Caplan 1991:307-08). History shows that they had communal form of landownership called *kipat* which was gradually changed into *raikar*⁹ by the Gorkha rulers in order to suit the interests of the migrant, high caste, Nepalis from western Nepal. This is still a major cause for cleavage between the high caste migrants and the native Limbus who are now reduced to a minority.

Conclusion

There is a strong case for recognition of Limbus as an indigenous people in both India and Nepal. The problem of identifying the indigenous peoples is not really as serious as it is made out to be by some scholars provided we take the regional rather than the national view, look at them from the periphery rather than from the centre, or view them from the people's eyes instead of the state's. This might, however, not be enough: the dominant communities, wherever they are not indigenous, should be ready to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of at least those who are indigenous. The problem is not so much conceptual as it is ideological, as Jaganath Pathy has rightly remarked (Pathy 1992:6). Although their status in West Bengal and Sikkim as Scheduled

Tribes is very recent they know from their experience that such a status will not be able to protect them from being exploited, dispossessed of their land, and displaced from their traditional, natural resource-rich, habitats. Hence some of them emphasize on their indigeneity so that they do not outlive this identity, as they may perhaps someday outlive their tribalhood and be deprived of the protection and privileges extended to them as a Scheduled Tribe. Whether the states of India and Nepal will ever recognize them as indigenous people is however extremely difficult to predict.

Notes:

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² See Pathy 1992a, 1992b; Roy Burman 1992, 1995, 1997; Greaves 1996; Béteille 1998; Imchen 1998; Xaxa 1999 for details.

³ The other three martial communities were Rai, Magar and Gurung.

⁴ The following passage contains the promise of King Prithivinarayan Shah made to the Limbu of Nepal in 1769.

We hereby pardon (a)ll of your crimes and confirm the customs and traditions, rights and privileges of your country. Join our Bharadars and render them assistance. Take care of the land as you did when it was being ruled over by your own chieftains. Enjoy the land from generation to generation as long as it remains in existence...As mentioned above, remain under your chieftains and enjoy your traditional rights and privileges and your lands. In case we confiscate your land, may our ancestral gods destroy our kingdom. We hereby inscribe this pledge in the copper plate and also issue this royal order and hand it over to our Limbu brethren (*Regmi Research Collections*, 6(5) 1974:85)

⁵ See Caplan 1970, Regmi 1976, Stiller 1973/1975, Pradhan 1991, etc. for details.

⁶ See Subba 1990, 1999b:112-113, for details.

⁷ This is attested by anyone who has travelled through the hills of Nepal where the fear of being looted, poisoned or killed *en route* is indeed genuine. I had myself carried with me an anti-dote to certain common forms of poisoning while I was travelling in Nepal in connection with my research.

⁸ The indigenous peoples have been defined by NEFEN as follows:

- those communities which possess their own distinct and original lingual and cultural traditions and whose religious faith is based on ancient animism... or

who do not claim 'the Hinduism' enforced by the state as their traditional and original religion;

- those existing descendants of the peoples who ancestors had established themselves as the first settlers or principal inhabitants in any part of the land falling within the territory of the modern state (Nepal), or who inhabited the present territory of Nepal at the time when persons of different culture or ethnic origin arrived there, and who have their own history (written or oral) and historical continuity;

- those communities which have been displaced from their own land for the last four centuries, particularly during the expansion and establishment of the modern Hindu nation-state and have been deprived of their traditional rights own the natural resources;

- those communities who have been subjugated in the state's political power set-up (decision-making process), whose ancient culture, language and religion and non-dominant social values have been neglected and humiliated;

- those communities whose society is traditionally erected on the principle of egalitarianism, rather than the hierarchy of the Indo-Aryan caste system, and gender equality...rather than social, economic and religious subordination of women but whose social norms and values have been slighted by the state;

- those communities who formally or informally admit to claim to be 'the indigenous peoples of Nepal' on the basis of aforementioned characteristics.

⁹ Raikar land is under direct control of the state.

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