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Los Angeles

MUSIC FROM THE MARGINS: PERFORMING AND (RE)DEFINING GORKHA
CULTURAL AND POLITICAL IDENTITY AT INDIA'S BORDERLANDS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of
Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

by

Angsumala Tamang

2012

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2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Music From The Margins: Performing And (Re)Defining Gorkha Cultural And Political Identity
At India's Borderlands

by

Angsumala Tamang

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Helen Rees, Chair

Extending over an area of 3,149 square kilometers, Darjeeling district, located in sub-Himalayan northeast India, is the site of my research. Flanked by the international boundaries of Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Tibet (China), this region is politically sensitive to India and culturally strategic to Gorkhas, the ethnic group of Darjeeling. Gorkhas are Nepali-speaking Indian citizens, who have been struggling for recognition since 1907. They call themselves “Gorkhas” to differentiate themselves from Nepalese, citizens of Nepal, with whom they share linguistic and cultural similarities. As part of their current movement for a home-state in India to secure their Indian identity, music performed in culture festivals such as Mahadasai Sanskrit Utsav during *Dasai/Dussehra* (October), a ten day annual festival celebrating the female power, Goddess Shakti, and *Diwali* (November) has emerged as a powerful medium for voicing the Gorkha cause in India.

My research includes both archival and ethnographic work. Historically, I look into the musical and lyrical repertoires of Gorkha songs to determine how they establish and/or contradict definitions of Gorkha identity inscribed by colonial and nationalist discourses, and inform contemporary productions of Gorkha music at India's margins. The bulk of my archival research was conducted at the Central Library, North Bengal University, Paras Mani Pradhan library, Darjeeling, and All India Radio, Kurseong. Ethnographically, I first investigate the role of Gorkha music as it is performed in music festivals to represent Gorkha identity. Second, considering media – radio and television – as “leaky” medium seeping beyond and through ideological boundaries, I study the borderlands as a place of untethered possibilities engendering works of imagination that influence Gorkha movement at India's borders. Third, I study Gorkha musicians and their agency to note how they are able to subjectively represent and re-present Gorkha identity from their respective positions as Gorkha subjects located at and from India's borders. Lastly, approaching borderlands as an in-between space where culture is in a state of constant flux, I identify Gorkha borderland music as a dynamic voice that urges us to cross borders in order to allow new passages of awareness and self-knowledge.

The dissertation of Angsumala Tamang is approved.

Akhil Gupta

James Newton

Roger Savage

Helen Rees, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles
2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Growing up speaking fluent Nepali and Bengali amongst the majority Bengalis and the minority Nepali-speaking Gorkhas at India's sub-Himalayan border, I encountered frequent moments of differentiation in everyday discourse such as "*hamro esto . . .*" ("ours like this" in Nepali), "*uniharko testo . . .*" ("theirs like that" in Nepali), "*amader erokom . . .*" ("ours like this" in Bengali), "*toder orokom . . .*" ("yours like that" in Bengali). However, despite these day-to-day demarcations of boundaries, my growing-up years in Siliguri were fun-filled days spent among some of the most loving and caring Bengali neighbors. They have been and remain to this day like my second family. Later, when I began my undergraduate and graduate studies at Varanasi, one of the oldest Hindu pilgrimage sites in north India, certain experiences led me to be conscious of my "unconventional" Indian looks for the very first time. Away from the foothills of the Himalayas, I was always mistaken as a Japanese or a Chinese (most Indians associate my "Mongolian" looks with either China or Japan). But, on hearing me speak Hindi, some would be curious, while others expressed disdain. Moreover, my mother-tongue being Nepali, many would struggle to connect Nepali language and a Mongolian face with India.

Needless to say, at our farewell party, my undergraduate juniors in their first and second year in college at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, had this title cut out for me: "[Hindi] *Ye ladki jara si diwani lagti hai, hame to ye gudiya Japani lagti hai*" (This girl seems a little bit crazy/unusual, because to us she looks like a Japanese doll). This was of course done in good humor and camaraderie, but the line, taken from a well-known Hindi film song, aptly described how most people in India perceived me – rather Japanese than Indian. Thereafter, in the United States, I got further "fine-tuned" to be either from the Philippines, Korea, Tibet, China, or

Indonesia. In short, anything “Asian” but Indian. These experiences have been exasperating at times, but I have come to be at peace with them and realize their invaluable contribution to my life. Today, I am sure beyond doubt of their important role in my life’s purpose in motivating me towards my current line of research in music and minority borderland identity. Therefore, I would like to first and foremost thank my life experiences in bringing me to where I am today as a student, a researcher, and an activist.

My graduate study at UCLA, fieldtrips to India, conference presentations, and dissertation write-up were made possible by several grants and scholarships. These include Teaching Assistantship from the Graduate Division, UCLA (2007-2009); Graduate Research Mentorship Program, UCLA (2009-2010); Taraknath Das Foundation Award, South Asia Institute, Columbia University (2010-2011); and Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA (2011-2012). The research for this dissertation was carried out in sub-Himalayan Darjeeling district in northeast India for a period of eight and a half months spread over three years – two weeks in 2008, three months in 2009, and five months in 2010-2011. I am grateful to my advisor Prof. Helen Rees for her insightful suggestions and patience for painstakingly enduring my “academic adolescence” as I explored and played with theoretical ideas in relation to my work. My debt to her for her timely advice and re-reading every chapter as I revised it numerous times is too large to easily express. I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks to Prof. Savage for showing me the way to understand myself better and helping me to turn the discourse of my life-experiences into this dissertation work. I owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Gupta for his thoughtful comments and words of encouragement for my work. To Prof. Newton, I am extremely grateful for agreeing to be on my doctoral committee and help me with his brilliant comments and

suggestions. I would like to convey my special thanks to Bashu Isasiah Rai Lorung and the Lorung family for their commitment and enthusiasm to help me with my research in Darjeeling hills in 2010. Also, my gratitude to Ajay Edwards Pradhan, Basant Chhetri, Bhaskar Pradhan, Bhaskar Rasailly, Chandan Lomjhel, Deep Arora, Dilip Biswa, Gagan Gurung, Gautam Waiba, Heera Rasailly, Isa Mani Pakhrin, Mala Chhetri, Matabir Rai, Mingma Bhutia, Namrata Blon, Nima Tamang, Palzor Tsering Bhutia, R. P. Waiba, Sudhir Rai, Usha Gomden, Vicky Mukhia, members of the Darjeeling Grassroots Revival Project, and students of My Music School, Darjeeling, for welcoming me warmly and openly sharing their experiences and knowledge.

In addition, I would like to thank Bidhan Golay and Prof. Kumar Pradhan for giving me their precious time and energy out of their busy schedule in 2009 and 2010 to listen patiently to my questions and answer them with care and thoughtful suggestions. My gratitude also goes to the Vice-Chancellor, Arunabha Basu Majumdar, North Bengal University, for granting me permission to work at the North Bengal University Library and Uday Mani Pradhan from Paras Mani Pradhan Library, Darjeeling, for graciously permitting me to use all available resources and helping me find important books and documents. I am extremely grateful to all the staff-artists of All India Radio, Kurseong, and All India Radio, Siliguri, for their willingness to listen to my queries and answer them with eager interest. My discussions with them provided me with some of the most insightful comments and perspectives that I am still contemplating even today.

As I approach completion of this dissertation, I want to thank my parents, my brothers, and my sister-in-law. Without their love, help, and support, I could not have come this far in life. My heartfelt indebtedness to my music *gurus*/teachers, Ramesh Chhetri, N. Rajam, and V. Balaji, for imparting me the knowledge of Indian classical music. Their *talim* or lessons helped me to

develop a critical edge in my research work, concurrently as it provided me with moments of much-needed relief and diversion when I needed a break from my academic analysis and too much theorizing. I am indebted to Dillon Sellars for his unconditional support, unwavering faith, and bottomless patience to ensure I was able to complete my dissertation in due time. He has been my rock of strength. Last but not least, I am thankful to my six-year old daughter, Viola Sohini, who was born ten days after I joined graduate school in 2006. She has been my greatest inspiration and a constant reminder that I do not forget to enjoy life as I share precious moments of joy and laughter with her.

PREFACE

1. Unless otherwise noted, all my non-English quotations are in Nepali. Where such quotations are in other regional Indian languages, they are marked in the following manner:

“[Hindi:] . . .

“[Bengali:] . . .

2. City names are referred by their current official names in twenty-first century India. It may be noted that the following city names were previously known as:

Kolkata – Calcutta (until January 2001)

Mumbai – Bombay (until November 1995)

Chennai – Madras (until August 1996)

For the township of Varanasi, also referred interchangeably as Banaras/Benaras or Kasi/Kashi, it may be noted that the official name has always been Varanasi.

3. I do not follow or use any specific conversion charts for the romanization of Nepali, Hindi, or Bengali names and terms. I use no phonetic symbols as well. Rather, I use two similar vowels (aa, ee, etc.) to denote a long sounding vowel in Nepali, Bengali, or Hindi and one vowel for short sounding vowels. For example, “sangeet” (music), “raag” (melodic scales of Indian classical music), “taal” (rhythm/beat), “kalakaar” (artist), “Teej” (a Hindu women’s festival), etc.

VITA

Education

2008-Present	C.Phil. in Ethnomusicology, University of California, Los Angeles
2006-2008	M.A. in Ethnomusicology, University of California, Los Angeles. Paper: “Negotiating Cultural Traditions – Promoting Hindustani Music in Los Angeles”
1997	M. Music, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India (distinction in performance and course-work)
1995	B. Music, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India (distinction in performance and course-work)

Honors and Awards

2011-2012	Dissertation Year Fellowship Award, UCLA
2010-2011	Taraknath Das Foundation Award, South Asia Institute, Columbia University
2009-2010	Graduate Research Mentorship, University of California, Los Angeles
2000-2001	Junior and Senior Research Fellowship Award, UGC-NET, for research work at any Indian university
1997	Banaras Hindu University Gold Medal (M. Music)
1995	Banaras Hindu University Gold Medal (B. Music)

Publications

2011	“Mimicry and the Indian Violin: Towards (Re) Representing <i>Image-Identity</i> of ‘Indianness’ and Indian Classical Music” in <i>Issues of Identity Crisis and Being Indian</i> , Vol. 1, edited by Padam Nepal, 98-114. New Delhi: Vijay Prakashan.
2007	“Ruling the Roost.” In <i>The Statesman</i> , Kolkata, Friday, 7 th September 2007, Section: North Bengal Extra, 1000 words

Performance Experience

2010	Performed for SPICMACAY-UCLA chapter “Baithak”
2007-2010	Music of India Ensemble, Spring Festival of World Music and Jazz, Schoenberg Hall, UCLA
2008	Festival of World Music: Music of India ensemble, Hammer Museum, UCLA
2007	Music of India Ensemble, Royce Hall, UCLA
2007	Music of China Ensemble, Gamelan Room, UCLA
1988-1997	Performed in India and All India Radio, Siliguri and All India Radio, Kurseong

Teaching Experience

Spring 2012	Assistant Professor, Sikkim University, India, “World Music” and “North Indian Classical Music”
Spring 2009	UCLA Teaching Assistant, “Music of Asia”
Winter 2009	UCLA Teaching Assistant, “Ellingtonia”
Spring 2008	UCLA Teaching Assistant, “Music of Latin-America”
Winter 2008	UCLA Teaching Assistant, “Development of Jazz”
Fall 2007	UCLA Teaching Assistant, “Music of Asia”

Fieldwork Experience

2010-2011	Five months of fieldwork in Darjeeling, Sikkim, North Bengal University, India, and Sikkim University, India.
2009	Two and a half months fieldwork in Darjeeling and North Bengal University, India.
2008	Three weeks’ fieldwork at Gangtok in Sikkim, India

Seminar Presentations

2012	“The Darjeeling Music Festival:” Mapping and (Re)Mapping Gorkha Identity at India’s Borderlands.” <i>Re-framing and Un-mapping</i> , A Collaborative Student Conference on Folklore and Ethnomusicology, Dept. of Folklore Studies, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, November 17-18, 2012
2010	“Mimicry and Indian Violin: Towards (Re)Representing <i>Image</i> -Identity of ‘Indianness’ and Indian Classical Music.” Society for Ethnomusicology – Southern California and Hawaii Chapter, Claremont, February 20-21, 2010.
2010	“Trajectory of the Indian Violin: Examining <i>Image</i> -Identity of Indian Classical Music and ‘Indianness.’” Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities, Honolulu, January 12-16, 2010.

Languages

Bengali	Fluent speaking, basic reading, basic writing
English	Fluent speaking, reading, writing
Hindi	Good speaking, reading, writing
Nepali	Fluent speaking, reading, writing

Professional Memberships

Society for Ethnomusicology
SPICMACAY (Society for Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Among Youths) –
UCLA Chapter
South Asian Music Association at UCLA

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

My research focuses on the music, identity, and political activism of Gorkhas, the Nepali-speaking Indian citizens who live predominantly in sub-Himalayan northeast India. According to A. C. Sinha, professor of sociology at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, there are no concrete figures indicating how many Nepalis live in India today. He claims the population probably ranges from five to ten million, with the greatest numbers in states like Sikkim, north West Bengal, and Assam/Asom, and fewer in the states of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur (Sinha 2009: 18) (Figure 1.1). What adds to this uncertainty is the “open border policy” that India shares with Nepal following the Indo-Nepal Peace Treaty signed in 1950 between the two countries. This treaty legalizes Nepalese immigration to India as it does Indian immigration to Nepal (Subba 2003: 54). Before I continue further, I would like to make three things clear. First, the distinction I make between the terms “Nepali” and “Nepalese” in my work; second, the specific location of my ethnographic fieldwork; and third, the concept of Gorkha identity as a multi-ethnic heterogenous *jati* (community) versus a homogeneous ethnic *jati*.¹

To clarify the first point, I follow the classification offered by Tanka B. Subba, professor of anthropology at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. According to Subba, “Nepali” denotes a broader culturo-linguistic denomination, while “Nepalese” specifically indicates the language and people from Nepal (Subba 2003: 56). His rationale is that *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* states that the suffix “ese” refers to “names of foreign countries and towns meaning (inhabitants or language) of,” and so the meaning of “Nepal-ese” is restricted only to Nepal,

¹ *Jati* is a Nepali, Bengali, and Hindi term to denote a community.



Figure 1.1: West Bengal and the northeastern regional states of India

whereas “Nepali” signifies a comprehensive group of people speaking Nepali beyond the limitations of place, race, and ethnicity. However, since “Nepali” in general is used to denote both the language and the people of Nepal, there is an overwhelming misunderstanding that all

Nepali speakers in India are from Nepal. Likewise, it is also important to keep in mind that “Gorkha” is the name of a province in present-day western Nepal, but the local inhabitants there do not identify themselves as Gorkhas. They call themselves Nepalese. The term “Gorkha” therefore does not necessarily denote a linear historical connection between the community who call themselves Gorkhas in India and the Gorkha province of Nepal. The coining of the term “Gorkha/Gurkha” was started by the British after the end of the Anglo-Nepal war (1814-1815) to refer to the “short, broad chested, flat faced, snub nosed men with *khukuri*”² (Rathaur 1983: 33). Impressed by their valor, the British East India Company decided to cut down the number of Hindu soldiers with “brahmanical prejudices” and form a division of Himalayan soldiers in the British Indian Army. The first battalion of “Gorkhas” was formed in 1815 and called the Gurkha/Gorkha Rifles.³ Thereafter, the Nepali-speaking population of India, including the retired British Gorkha soldiers of Darjeeling hills, appropriated the term “Gorkha” to mark their identity in India versus the citizens of Nepal.

One of the reasons that marking differences between Gorkhas and Nepalese becomes imperative is the “open border policy” India shares with Nepal. This legalizes Nepalese immigrants to work in India as it does Indian immigrants in Nepal. But, owing to India’s strong economic presence in South Asia and Nepal’s poor economic infrastructure, which brings thousands of Nepalese immigrants to India each year as low-paid manual labor, Nepali-speakers in India are openly ridiculed as “lowly foreigners.” As a result, the minority borderland community of Nepali-speaking Gorkhas find themselves being mistaken for Nepalese citizens and discriminated against by their fellow Indians. Also, with India’s leading position in south

² A curved knife that can be used as a tool or as a close combat weapon (Kamal Raj Singh Rathaur 1983).

³ Nepali-speaking Indians prefer to spell it “Gorkha,” while the English in general prefers to spell it “Gurkha.”

Asia, the term “Gorkha” has come to denote a sense of elitism that differentiates the relatively well-to-do Gorkhas of India from the citizens of Nepal, whom many Indian-Nepalis consider to be “socio-economically backward” and with whom they share a “love-hate” relationship across the border. Moreover, with the West Bengal state government and the Indian Central government taking no initiatives to protect the identity of Gorkhas and discourage social prejudices against them, the borderland minority Gorkhas harbor a deep psychological anxiety when it comes to delineating their identity in India. Likewise, the need for representation – official, legal, and judicial – then becomes paramount for every Gorkha in India.

Second, although Gorkhas live in all the regional states of India, my research in sub-Himalayan northeast India primarily focuses on the Gorkhas living in the Darjeeling district of the state of West Bengal (Figure 1.2). The district of Darjeeling includes the four sub-divisions of Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kalimpong, and Siliguri (Figure 1.3). I shall collectively refer to the first three subdivisions as “Darjeeling hills” (Figure 1.4) and Siliguri as the plains, or the *terai* (Figure 1.5). Darjeeling district covers an area of 3149 square kilometers, with an average rainfall of 3092 mm per annum in the hills and 3620 mm in the *terai*.⁴ The air temperature ranges from a mean annual maximum of 14.9° Celsius to a minimum of 8.9° Celsius in the hills⁵ and from a mean annual maximum of 35° Celsius to a minimum of 15° Celsius in the *terai*.⁶ I was born and brought up in the Siliguri *terai*, but the Darjeeling hills is the area where I mostly center my fieldwork. With Sikkim bordering the district of Darjeeling, and many Gorkha musicians and culture experts working and/or settled in Sikkim, I also conduct part of my fieldwork in Sikkim.

⁴ <http://www.darjeeling.gov.in/dist-prof.html>, last viewed June 28, 2012.

⁵ O'Malley 1999: 17; <http://www.darjeeling.gov.in/dist-prof.html>, last viewed June 28, 2012.

⁶ <http://siliguri.co.in/weather>, last viewed September 20, 2012.



Figure 1.2: The northeast sub-Himalayan location of Darjeeling district in the state of West Bengal, India



Figure 1.3: The subdivisions of Darjeeling district – Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kalimpong, Siliguri *terai*/plains



Figure 1.4: The Darjeeling hills. Photo by author. Darjeeling, December 7, 2012



Figure 1.5: The Siliguri *terai*/plains. Photo by author. Siliguri, May 12, 2012

Third, Gorkhas, despite sharing one language – Nepali – and being referred to as “Nepalis” in India, are basically multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-religious as a community (*jati*); in short, they constitute a community of sub-communities. As a result, they do not “fit in” with the normative idea of a homogeneous racial, ethnic, religious Indian community with hierarchies of *jaat*/castes divisions.⁷ For the community of Gorkhas, anthropologist Tanka B. Subba notes that they constitute over nineteen endogamous groups professing different religions, speaking different languages, and holding different positions in the social hierarchy. Some of these groups disdain “Nepali” identity while others are stripped of such an identity by the Constitution, ignoring whether or not they want to identify themselves with the “Nepalis” (Subba 1992: 37). Explaining this in detail, he states:

For instance, the Limbus often assert themselves as a group apart from the “Nepalis” and also the Tamangs, to whom Subhas Ghising himself belongs, of the district have been demanding to be “recognized as scheduled tribe as a sub-tribe of the Bhutias” . . . On the other hand, the Sherpas and Yolmus (or Kagateys) are “people of Nepali origin” but are institutionally treated as “Bhutias.” Besides there are many Limbus and Magars in Sikkim who are recognized as “Nepalis” but are not “people of Nepali origin.” . . . [It] maybe pointed out that most groups corporately identified as “Nepalis” today had separate identities until 1920s [in India]. They identified themselves as Limbus, Rais, Magars, Tamangs, etc. and the only groups which identified themselves as Nepalis until then were the Bahuns, Thakuris, Chhetris, Kamis, Sarkis, and the Damais. It was only after 1920s that all these groups began to identify themselves as “Nepalis.” Thus “Nepali” as an ethnic group is of rather recent origin.

(Subba 1992: 37-38)

⁷ *Jaat* is a common term used in Hindi, Nepali, and Bengali to denote caste. The Gorkhas are basically a group of different multi-ethnic sub-groups, each with their own hierarchical or horizontal social set-up, but who also follow the caste-divisions that were imposed throughout multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-religious Nepal after Kathmandu valley was conquered by the Hindu king Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1769. On the Hinduization and the Hindu conquest of Nepal see Sinha & Subba 2003.

Therefore, even though at a glance it may appear that the high-caste and the low-caste Gorkhas are Aryans with those of the Mongolian stock⁸ jumbled up in between, sociologist Khemraj Sharma and Subba argue that each of the Mongolian groups such as the Rai, Pradhan, Gurung, Thapa, Tamang, etc., is a complete community in itself (Subba 2003, Sharma 2003). That is to say, each one of the communities is a self-standing group with its own internal organized clans and sub-clans that may or may not be hierarchical in nature. For example, my last name, “Tamang,” signifies my belonging to the Tamang community, but my identity as a Gorkha would differentiate me from the Tamangs of Nepal vis-à-vis the Tamangs of Darjeeling. Also my clan name, “Pakhrin,” indicates who I can marry, maintain kinship relationships with, and adopt as my second family within the Tamang community.

A Brief Backdrop of Nepal’s History – 1769 Onwards

Nepal’s mainstream history begins when Kathmandu valley was captured in 1769 by Prithvi Narayan Shah, a Hindu prince from the Gorkha province in western Nepal. Shah’s ancestors hailed from Rajasthan, India, and according to Gorkha scholars like Kumar Pradhan (1983), Subba (1992), and Sonam B. Wangyal (2006), his successors came to control the entire region from Sikkim in northeast India, to Uttaranchal, Garhwal, Kumaon, and the *terai* plains in north India, including the Kathmandu valley in Nepal by 1805. However, with the British aggressively expanding their territories in India as well, a border dispute from 1804 to 1812 between the Gorkha Shah kingdom and the princely state of Butwa, which was a British protectorate, led to the Anglo-Nepal war in 1814. Following the Treaty of Seagauli in 1815,

⁸ There is no particular way people who look like me are referred to in India. Some refer to us as the Mongolian stock, while others prefer to use the term Tibeto-Burman instead.

Nepal had to cede Uttaranchal, Garhwal, Kumaon, and the *terai* plains of central north India, and the *terai* and mountain regions of Sikkim. It is in this mountain region of what used to be Sikkim that Darjeeling district is located, and I discuss its history in the following section of this chapter.

Hence, with Nepal surrendering the above-mentioned territories in 1815 to the East India Company, the present-day boundaries of Nepal were set. After limiting the borders of the Gorkha Shah kingdom with the Treaty of Seagauli (1815), the British began to refer to the inhabitants of the Himalayan kingdom as “Nepalese” and the kingdom as “Nepal.” Pradhan feels strongly that the Nepalese could not have started calling themselves “Nepalese” because Nepal as a country in 1816 comprised diverse ethnic/regional tribes, who were more loyal to their tribal chiefs or religious heads than have a sense of a nation-state identity. Nevertheless, Prithvi Narayan Shah’s conquest in 1769 initiated two major inter-related changes in the Himalayan landscape – of Hinduizing and “unifying” Nepal.⁹ Since Nepal was ruled by regional kings or tribal chiefs with diverse religious beliefs, and in view of the presence of numerous ethnic groups like the Kirats, the Licchavis, the Sakyas, etc. (Shaha 1992),¹⁰ the unification of Nepal as a “Hindu Kingdom” was fraught with the politics of socio-religious partiality and racial exclusivity. That is to say, the ruling Hindu-Aryan groups came to represent the elite ruling class while non-Hindu – non-Aryan groups were “othered” and robbed of their socio-political and economic rights. Pradhan adds, “*Saha sashanma parneybittikai romantic dhacha ko itihās le bhanna khoje jastai sabai jatigoshti*

⁹ The term “unify” has become quite problematic in terms of the Nepalese nationalist agenda. Despite the new rulers’ unifying Nepal by imposing Nepali as a common language for all Nepalese subjects, especially non-Hindu and/or non-Aryan groups, bureaucratic and cultural power remained predominantly in the hands of the upper-caste Hindu-Aryan Nepalese. In addition, forcing Nepali as a vernacular language on non-Nepali speakers of Nepal has further helped the dominant class to legitimize their stranglehold, citing poor language and communication skills among “other” Nepalese.

¹⁰ It may be noted that even within a particular ethnic group, there are instances of a combination of races. It is mostly visible with the upper caste/class non-Aryan ethnic groups having Aryanized features – possibly through inter-marriage with Hindu-Aryans. Hence there is no straight line that specifically differentiates ethnicity from race among Nepalese or Gorkhas, as the concepts often overlap.

milera euta brihat Nepali jati janmenan” (As much as Nepalese historians romanticize that Nepal became unified after Prithivi Narayan Shah became ruler of Nepal with all ethnic tribes/ castes coming together to form a united Nepal, it was not the case) (Pradhan 1983: 11). With Gorkha Shah rulers being strong patrons of Hindu religion, many Hindu priests migrated to Nepal in the late 1700s and began to spread Hinduism among the Mongolian tribes of Nepal. However, being unable to graft the Mongolian non-Hindu groups within the linear arrangements of the Hindu caste-system, the Nepalese Shah rulers designated caste positions based on the non-Hindu-Mongolian groups’ willingness to adopt Hinduism as their main religion (Mukhia 2002, Dasgupta 1999). Thus, becoming a Hindu in Nepal came to symbolize being “civilized” versus those who continued to follow, in varying degrees, their “backward” indigenous customs, beliefs, and food-habits.¹¹

As part of this socio-political discrimination, certain Mongolian ethnic groups like Gurungs and Magars, who embraced Hinduism easily, were encouraged to join the British army, while others such as Tamangs and Yolmos were debarred from doing so. However, since all Mongolian or non-Aryan Himalayan ethnic groups looked more or less alike, I was told during one of my personal communications with a member of the Tamang Association that Tamangs often changed their surnames to Gurung to enlist in the British army. Today Nepalis, both in India and Nepal, practice a blend of religious beliefs – Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and indigenous – with the Gorkhas enjoying a relatively more egalitarian social set-up in India than the Nepalese, who continue to operate largely within an over-arching conservative Hindu

¹¹ Some of these include meat-eating habits like consumption of buffalo among the Newars, beef among the Tamangs, pork among the Rais, and sheep among the Gurungs, as against the pure vegetarian diet of the Aryan-Hindus. Indigenous beliefs include the animistic rituals of *jhakri* (shamans) and syncretic rituals considered to be “low” and “crude” in relation to the “sophisticated” Vedic Hindu practices (for an in-depth reading see Lawoti 2012: 129-154).

paradigm. The Aryan-Hindus in Nepal also introduced the “Khas bhasa” (Khas language) as the national language of Nepal. This “Khas bhasa” was for the first time referred to as a “Nepali” language in 1820 by James Alexander Ayton in his book *A Grammar of the Nepalese Language*, which was published from Fort Williams in Kolkata in British India (Pradhan 1983: 13). Nepal ended its monarchy in 2008 after two hundred and thirty-nine years of royal rule.¹² Today, the republic of Nepal remains embroiled in the politics of power and control with most Nepalese ethnic groups demanding their right to equal representation and socio-economic benefits.

Gorkhas in Darjeeling: History and Struggle for Recognition and Representation

Flanked by the international boundaries of Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Tibet (China) (Figure 1.6), the sub-Himalayan northeast region is politically sensitive to India¹³ and culturally strategic to Gorkhas, the dominant community of Darjeeling district. Gorkhas, who have been labeled a “martial race” for their valor in the British Army, have historically had to strive for recognition as legitimate Indian citizens. So, why have the Gorkhas been at the receiving end of being repeatedly mis-recognized as “immigrants” in their own home-country? And why is it important for Gorkhas to highlight their Indian identity, for which they have been struggling since 1907? To better explain, let me narrate the complex history of Darjeeling district, which is intricately connected with the histories of British India, independent India, Sikkim, Nepal, and Bhutan.

¹² http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/28/world/asia/28iht-nepal.4.13283900.html?_r=0, last viewed September 5, 2012.

¹³ China refused to recognize Sikkim as an integral part of India until the last decade of the 20th century. In the 1980s when China tried to encroach upon the borders of north Sikkim, the Indian army had to be deployed to control the situation. Even today after China has finally acknowledged Sikkim as a part of India, the situation remains grim and under surveillance (Arora 2007).



Figure 1.6: The international boundaries surrounding the district of Darjeeling, situated in the north of the state of West Bengal – Nepal lies to the west, Tibet (China) to the north, Bhutan to the east, and Bangladesh to the south

The entire region of Darjeeling district, including Siliguri *terai*/plains, Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, and Kalimpong, was initially part of the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim (Dash 1947). However, in 1706, the Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling district was taken from the Raja of Sikkim by the Bhutanese kingdom. Around the later half of the 1700s, Sikkim was engaged in unsuccessful struggles with the Gurkha/Gorkha kings of Nepal who took over Darjeeling hills and the Siliguri *terai* from Sikkim in 1780. In the *Bengal District Gazetteer: Darjeeling*, Dash writes that for the next thirty years (1780-1810), “the Gurkhas overran Sikkim as far east as the Tista [Teesta] and conquered and annexed the Terai” (Dash 1947: 37). But with the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814 ending with the Treaty of Seagauli (1815), the Gurkha kings had to cede Darjeeling hills and Siliguri *terai* to the East India Company. Then, following the treaty of Titaliya in 1817, Darjeeling hills and Siliguri *terai*, which the Nepalese had wrestled from the Raja of Sikkim, were restored to the latter, guaranteeing his sovereignty (ibid.).

Another book, *A Concise History of the Darjeeling District* (1922), written by E. C. Dozey also states that prior to 1816 the entire Darjeeling district known as British Sikkim belonged to Nepal. Following disagreement over the frontier policy of the Gorkhas, war was declared by the British towards the close of 1813. After the British launched two campaigns against the Gorkha Shah king, the latter was defeated by General Ochterlony in 1815. The treaty signed at Segoulie/Seagauli at the end of 1816, had the “Nepalese surrender the 4,000 square miles of territory, which in turn by the treaty signed at Titaliya on February 10th, 1817, was handed to the Sikkim Rajah with the intention of hedging in Nepal with the kingdom of an ally, and preventing all possibility of further aggrandizement by the Gurkhas” (Dozey 1922: 2).

To support the Gorkha annexation of the Sikkimese territory from the Tista/Teesta to the Mechi *terai* (part of Siliguri plains), Pradhan claims that according to local sources and Francis Hamilton's book *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal and of the Territories annexed to this dominion by the House of Gorkha* (1816), by 1789 the Gorkhas had captured Darjeeling district from Sikkim. There is also evidences in Hamilton's book that strongly indicates that the Gorkhas had spread all over Darjeeling by the late 1780s. Hamilton clearly states that in 1782, one of the Lepcha chiefs of Sikkim called Rup Chiring/Tsering "resided at Darjiling, and had there a fort, or strong houses of brick, which an old Bengalese, who visited it at that time, describes as very splendid" (Hamilton 1819: 119).¹⁴ Thereafter, a Lepcha chief was regularly appointed by the Gorkha Shah rulers to rule Darjeeling for them from 1802, with Gorkha soldiers stationed at Darjeeling hills and Siliguri. Gorkha soldiers were also stationed at Nagari, which is southwest of Darjeeling in RungBong Valley and today known for its sprawling Nagri tea estate (Pradhan 1983: 10).¹⁵

Referring to another English writer, Brian H. Hodson, who lived in Darjeeling from 1844 to 1858, Pradhan states that Hodson's book *Essays on the Language, Literature, and Religion of Nepal and Tibet – Together with Further Papers on the Geography, Ethnology and Commerce of Those Countries* (1874) notes the presence of Gorkhas in Nagri in the early 1800s (Pradhan 1983: 10). However, after the Anglo-Nepal war in 1814, followed by the Seagauli Treaty of 1815, the Gorkha generals left Darjeeling and returned to Ilam, a border town in Nepal. Taking this point into consideration, Pradhan, whom I met in 2009, believes that not *all* Gorkha subjects living in Darjeeling and Nagari from 1780s to 1816 left with their generals. Complaining that

¹⁴ I have personally read this book as well.

¹⁵ http://www.chamong.com/nagri_farm_tea_estate.html, last viewed August 13, 2012.

history always paints events in broad strokes, Pradhan evoked Alexander's invasion of India in 321 B. C. and the possibility of some Greeks staying back in India to express his opinion that perhaps not all Gorkhas left Darjeeling after 1815 (Interview with Pradhan, Siliguri, November 27, 2009). As for legitimizing his point that Darjeeling and Nagari were check-posts for frequent travel between the princely kingdom of Gorkha and other kingdoms of the Indian sub-continent, Pradhan provides two examples in his book on the history of the region (1983). They are in the form of two letters dated 1815 and 1826, respectively. The first one states:

*Swasthi. Shri Kaji Ranadhwajthapakasya patram . . . aage ghowishola purwa **Nagari-gari** sama wat ghatka amalidar chowki jghati gairahake yathochit upranta . . . Puri baata Ramanujdas Mahantale sarkarma chapai pathayaka Mahaprasad liaaunawairagi Laxmidas Darwar wida bhai lal mohar chithi ra gaira ka tanushako mohur li suwa Jayant Chhatri cheu janchan.*

(my emphasis) (Pradhan 1983: 16)

Translation:

Greetings. Kaji Ranadhwaj Thapa's letter . . . for the officer at the Nagari-gari check-post . . . Ramanujdas Mahante from Puri [in present day Orissa, India] has dispatched citations and offerings for the government, and to fetch it Laxmidas Darwar has left. He will take the red seal of approval and fetch the coin with the boar-head in the morning and go to Jayant Chhatri.

(Pradhan 1983: 16)

The second letter is from Nepal and refers to the Lepcha uprising called the "Kotapa Insurrection" in Sikkim over 1825-1826. Some Lepcha chiefs, having faced political discrimination from the Sikkim Rajah, revolted against him and fled to Nepal, taking with them eight hundred houses of Lepcha subjects to seek Nepal's help in this matter (Singh 1997: 174). The writer of this letter is Jayant Chhatri (one of the commanding officers of the Gorkha king), and he relates how the Lepchas from Sikkim had arrived in Nepal and were asking for help to avenge the insult from the Sikkim Rajah. This letter mentions "Phasidewa," a small town, which

still exists today in Siliguri *terai*. In fact, my former high school is at Phasidewa. Pradhan informed me that when Siliguri *terai* and Darjeeling hills were occupied by Gorkhas in 1788, Phasidewa was their military base, and its name came from the fact that it was where the prisoners of war were hanged (*Phasi* meaning “hang,” and *dewa* meaning “given”). I mention Phasidewa (located in Siliguri plains/*terai*), to emphasize that Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, and Siliguri plains were annexed by Nepal from the Sikkimese kingdom. I do this to contradict the general notion among Bengalis and other Indians that Gorkhas do not belong to the *terai* plains and should therefore be confined only within the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, and Kalimpong.

After the Anglo-Nepal War (1814) and the Treaty of Seagauli (1815), the Gorkha Shah rulers ceded Darjeeling hills and Siliguri *terai* to the East India Company. But, with the Company wanting to keep Sikkim a buffer state between British India, Nepal, and Tibet/China, the Sikkimese Rajah, who had fled to Tibet during the Gorkha occupation, was reinstated via the Treaty of Titaliya in 1817. Signed between the Rajah and the East India Company, the treaty made Sikkim a protectorate under the British in India. But with unrest in Sikkim after the 1825-1826 Kotapa Insurrection, and ongoing border disputes between Sikkim and Nepal, the Company remained involved with the politics of the Himalayan kingdoms. Thus it was the Kotapa Insurrection and a border dispute with Nepal called the Antoo Border Dispute that brought J. W. Grant, Commercial Resident of the Company at Malda, to Sikkim and Siliguri in 1827. In 1829 on their way to Sikkim, Grant and Col. Lloyd caught a glimpse of “the old Goorkha Station of Dorjeling” (Pradhan 1983: 18) and suggested its suitability for a sanatorium to the then Governor General of India, Lord William Bentinck.

The following year, in 1830, Capt. Herbert, in the company of Col. Lloyd, presented a favorable report of Darjeeling. In 1835 Col. Lloyd presented the Company's wish to the Sikkim Rajah to build a health resort in Darjeeling, and the Rajah obliged, with a deed of grant dated February 1, 1835 (Subba 1992: 34). After that in November 1836, Grant and Col. Lloyd were asked to spend nine months in Darjeeling and keep a detailed journal about the place. By 1839, construction of the road joining Siliguri *terai* with Darjeeling hills began, and Darjeeling was on its way to becoming the most well-known hill-station of British India. But since the Sikkim Rajah's deed of grant had not clearly stated the terms between Sikkim and the East India Company for leasing Darjeeling, misunderstandings began to crop up between them. This resulted in the Sikkim War of 1860, followed by the Treaty of Tumlung in 1861. This treaty brought Siliguri *terai*, Darjeeling, and Kurseong permanently under Company rule, thereby limiting the Sikkim Rajah within the confines of his hilly domain. Thereafter, with border disputes arising between Bhutan and the East India Company, 1864 saw the outbreak of the Anglo-Bhutan war. This war ended with the Treaty of Sinchulia in 1865, which led to the annexation of Kalimpong and the Doors/Duars *terai* regions of the district of Jalpaiguri in West Bengal (Dasgupta 1999).¹⁶

Thus with the present Darjeeling district (Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kalimpong, and Siliguri) coming together to become an integral part of British India in 1865, the Company began to concentrate on the development of the tea and timber industries, and on making Darjeeling a health resort for British officers to recuperate in its cool climate (Lama 2009: 195). As Darjeeling

¹⁶ Doors/Duars at present belongs to another district of West Bengal called the Jalpaiguri district. At present the Gorkha leaders are negotiating to incorporate those areas of Duars with a majority of Nepali-speakers within the jurisdiction of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), which was established by an Accord signed between the chief minister of West Bengal and Gorkha Janmukti Morcha on July 18, 2011 (<http://news.outlookindia.com/items.aspx?artid=728097>, last viewed June 25, 2012).

district developed in the late 1800s, Darjeeling district was put under the Bengal division controlled by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. But as regional provinces began to be carved out for administrative purposes, it became part of the Kuch Behar Commissionership from 1866 to 1875. After 1875 Darjeeling district was attached to the Rajshai Division of Bengal until 1905, when it was temporarily moved to Bhagalpore division of Bihar. However, with the distance between Darjeeling and Bhagalpore being too far, Darjeeling district was re-grouped under the Rajshai Division of Bengal in 1912 and remained so until independence in 1947 (Lama 2009: 172-175).¹⁷ Developments in Darjeeling district also led to the creation of the Hillmen's Association in 1905, whose members were well-educated and high-ranking retired Gorkha soldiers from the British army or the Darjeeling Police. Unhappy that the Darjeeling district was put under the Rajshai Division of Bengal as a "Excluded/Schedule District" or a "Backward Tract," which meant laws and rights applicable to British India were not applicable to Darjeeling district, the elite Hillmen's Association submitted its first memorandum to the British government in 1907. It pleaded "for the creation of a separate administrative unit for Darjeeling outside Bengal but within the British Indian Empire" (Dasgupta 1999: 58). Other such memorandums followed in 1917, 1920, 1930, 1934, and 1941, and after India's independence in 1947, 1950, 1955, 1961, 1979, and the 1980s (Dasgupta 1999: 60-63).

The demand for a separate administrative unit for Darjeeling district by making it an inclusive regional province of British India was not accepted due to the fear that the Gorkhas might join the Indian freedom movement and revolt against the British army. It may be recalled that after the Anglo-Nepal War (1814), the Company officials, impressed by the valor of the

¹⁷ <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/opinions/general/3435-rewriting-history-part-i.html>, last viewed January 11, 2012.

Gorkhas, had raised an army of “mercenary” Gurkha/Gorkha soldiers by 1816. Thereafter, the Gorkhas became essentialized as a martial race, who took delight “in all manly sports, shooting, fishing . . . [were] bold, endearing, faithful, frank, independent and self-reliant . . . [and] look up to and fraternize with the British whom they admire for their superior knowledge, strength and courage, and whom they imitate in dress and habits” (Cohn 1996: 124). With the “martial mercenary Gorkhas” kept “excluded” from mainstream British India, Gorkhas remained relatively isolated during the early years of India’s nationalist movement. But by the 1900s, Gorkha freedom fighters like Helen Lepcha,¹⁸ Dal Bahadur Giri, Durga Mallah, Dal Bahadur Thapa, Bhagat Bir Tamang, Dambar Singh Gurung, and many more came forward and joined the Indian freedom movement (Lama 2009: 270-273).¹⁹ They began to work side-by-side Indian leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, and Chittaranjan Das. However, despite their immense contribution, Gorkhas became victims of colonial history that the founding fathers of free India invariably repeated and reinforced after 1947. According to sociologist Partha Chatterjee and post-colonial critic Gayatri Spivak, the dominant Indian ruling class, who hailed from the upper-caste Hindu aristocracy and were the by-products of an English education system, were ambiguous in their roles as collaborators or opponents of the British and showcased similar attitudes to consolidate their own positions of power in India after colonial rule.

For example, nationalist leaders like Dinabandhu Mitra and Raja Rammohan Roy voiced displeasure with imperialism on grounds of morality but never questioned the legitimacy of colonial rule itself. Then there were those like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who opposed

¹⁸ Mahatma Gandhi preferred to call Helen Lepcha as Savitri Devi.

¹⁹ The Hillmen’s Association comprised of upper class Gorkhas employed in the British Army or the Darjeeling Police department. They wanted separation from Bengal, but did not oppose British rule in India. Gorkhas from the lower and lower-middle class joined India’s freedom movement and revolted against the British rule. However, after independence, when Gorkhas were denied recognition in India, all Gorkhas came together to fight for their Indian identity by demanding separation from the state of West Bengal.

Western rule by glorifying the Sanskrit texts promoted by Orientalists, while others such as Bipin Chandra Pal resisted colonialism by emphatically not being English, after having lived in England for quite some years. Another group, including Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, engaged in passive revolution by garnering peasant support to create a nation-state where the peasant masses would be represented, but of which they themselves would never be a constituent part (Chatterjee 2008: 23, 24, 63, 64, 81; Bhabha 2007: 124). With these myriad standings, India's nationalism emerged as a fragile attempt, with indigenous elites' individualistic means to self-gratification overtaking any kind of committed social responsibility (Chatterjee 2008: 7-28, Spivak 1984: 77). Hence, after the boundaries of independent India were drawn, the borderland communities like the Punjabis and Bengalis (to name a few) underwent tremendous social trauma due to Hindu-Muslim partition.²⁰

Having to conform to India's mainstream ideology, which derived its narrative from the colonial texts dictating that one could be either Hindu or a Muslim, communities professing plurality were torn apart. The result was the division of Punjab into east Punjab (India) and west Punjab (Pakistan) to differentiate between Muslim Punjabis of Pakistan versus the Hindu or Sikh Punjabis of India, and the division of Bengal into West Bengal for Hindu Bengalis in India and Bangladesh for the Muslim Bengalis of East Bengal.²¹ However, for the minority Gorkhas, most of whom practiced Hinduism, there was no pressing need to differentiate Gorkhas on religious lines of being either a Hindu Gorkha or a Muslim Gorkha. Additionally, with colonial texts

²⁰ The partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 saw a complete breakdown of law and order. Many died in riots, ethnic massacre, and hardships of flight and migration. As stated by Richard Symonds in *The Making of Pakistan* (1950), it was one of the largest population movements in recorded history, with half a million people dying and twelve million rendered homeless.

²¹ Bangladesh was earlier known as East Pakistan, and was created along religious lines with West Pakistan (modern day Pakistan) after India became independent in 1947. However, after years of friction with West Pakistan resulting in the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, the independent nation-state of Bangladesh came into being in 1971 (Sissone and Rose 1990).

typecasting Nepali-speaking Gorkhas as “mercenary soldiers from Nepal,” the creation of a Gorkha state with India’s other ethno-linguistic regional states was out of question. Hence, with no regional state to anchor Gorkhas in India, their “immigrant” and “mercenary” identity became dominant as Nepali-speaking Indians began to ebb from the domain of India’s consciousness.

Perhaps nothing demonstrates this fact better than the comments of India’s well-known leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and Morarji Desai. Nehru, who was the first Prime Minister of independent India, had this to say about the “Gurkhas” in his popular book *The Discovery of India* (1946). Nehru first mentions the Gurkhas/Gorkhas in reflecting upon the stronghold of British rule in India. After stating that the British succeeded in dominating India by a succession of fortuitous circumstances and luck, he recalls the occasions when they were defeated by Haider Ali, Tipu Sultan, the Marathas, the Sikhs, and the Gurkhas (Nehru 2010: 299). He claims “the only truly independent kingdom in India is Nepal on the north-eastern frontier, which occupies a position analogous to that of Afghanistan, though it is rather isolated” (Nehru 2010: 338). But, having linked Gorkhas with India, Nehru then contradicts himself by saying “their attachment to their homelands was great, and this sentiment made them formidable fighters in its defense. They gave a fright to the British, but made no difference to the issue of the main struggle in India” (Nehru 2010: 302).

Following this comment, Nehru continues, “The British got the support of the Gurkhas and, what is much more surprising, of the Sikhs also, for the Sikhs had been their enemies and had been defeated by them only a few years before. . . . It is clear, however, that there was a lack of nationalist feeling which might have bound the people of India together” (Nehru 2010: 354). It is apparent that Nehru develops amnesia about his earlier statement about the Gurkhas/Gorkhas

defending and defeating the British and their role in India's freedom movement. Instead, he chooses to highlight only the Gorkhas as soldiers working for the British government, and remains silent about all the other Hindu and Muslim Indian soldiers who had been serving the British army long before the Gorkhas arrived on the scene. Moreover, with Sikh Punjabis also mentioned here as supporting the British army, I have often wondered why the Sikh Punjabis with their Aryan "good looks" never faced the problem of an identity crisis in independent India.

Another prominent Indian leader, Vallabhbhai Patel, who was the first home minister of free India, expressed his feelings towards the Gorkhas in his letter to Nehru dated November 7, 1950. Patel was in charge of bringing together all the sovereign kingdoms under the Republic of India after independence in 1947. Discussing relationships with China and Tibet, Patel had to say this about the Gorkhas:

All along the Himalayas in the north and northeast, we have on our side of the frontier a population ethnologically and culturally not different from Tibetans or Mongoloids. The undefined state of the frontier and the existence on our side of a population with its affinities to Tibetans or Chinese have all the elements of potential trouble between China and ourselves. . . . Let us also consider the political conditions on this potentially troublesome frontier. Our northern or northeastern approaches consist of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Darjeeling (area) and tribal areas in Assam. From the point of view of communications, they are weak spots. There is almost an unlimited scope for infiltration. Police protection is limited to a very small number of passes. There, too, our outposts do not seem to be fully manned. The contact of these areas with us is by no means close and intimate. The people inhabiting these portions have no established loyalty or devotion to India. Even the Darjeeling and Kalimpong areas are not free from pro-mongolian [sic] prejudices.

(Moktan 2004: 173-174)

Such racial, regional, and linguistic discriminations against the inhabitants of Darjeeling district continued on until the late 1970s. When Nepali-speaking Indians demanded that Nepali be recognized as one of the official languages, the fifth Prime Minister of India, Morarji Desai, famously declared in 1977 that Nepali was a "foreign language" and was exclusive to Nepal

(Subba 1992: 68). Also, when the *Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasa Samiti* (All India Nepali Language Committee) submitted a memorandum to Desai on September 29, 1977, he openly rejected it saying, “You people came to India to join the army and to live in different parts of India. . . . We give you an inch and you want it all” (Sonntag 2002: 171). These incidents of gross insensitivity from India’s high-ranking officials reinforced an inferiority complex that has Gorkhas suffering from an acute sense of identity crisis in India. The repeated refusals by the Indian government to recognize Nepali *bhasa* (language) as one of India’s official languages until 1992²² heightened the already sensitive psyche of the Gorkhas. The Indian bourgeoisie not only repeated the colonial definition of Indianness, but also favored a certain line of colonial knowledge to fulfill their political motives. For example, they reiterated Col. Lloyd’s 1837 statement that Darjeeling was “deserted,” but failed to notice that when Col. Lloyd had visited Darjeeling in 1829, he had something entirely different to say about Darjeeling hills (Pinn 1990, Subba 1992, Lama 2009).

When the idea for a sanatorium in Darjeeling was in its infancy in 1828-1829, Col. Lloyd had described Darjeeling as “formerly occupied by a large village or town (an unusual circumstance in the country) and some shops were set up in it; one of the principal Lepcha Kajees resided here, and the remains of his house, and also of a Gompah or temple . . . both substantially built of stone, are still extant; also several stone tombs or chtyas of different forms” (Pinn 1990: 120). However, when Col. Lloyd returned to Darjeeling in 1836 after the Sikkim Rajah had issued the deed of grant leasing Darjeeling to the Company, he wrote, “There are no villages in the Sikkim hills that I have ever seen. . . . When the Sikkim Rajah gave the

²² <http://www.lisindia.net/Nepali/Nepali.html>, last viewed January 7, 2012.

Darjeeling tract to us in the year 1835 there were no inhabitants on any part of it” (Pinn 1990: 14). Also, if history is to be believed, Col. Lloyd raised the subject of Darjeeling with the Sikkim Rajah on February 12, 1835, but the deed of grant from the Rajah is dated February 1, 1835 (Subba 1992: 34). Could the Rajah have backdated his signature, and if so what circumstances had compelled him to do so? Caught up in strengthening their power in India after 1947, the bourgeoisie turned a blind eye to such inquiries and chose to perpetuate the Orientalist history and the stereotype of Gorkhas as a “martial race” and “mercenary soldiers” for their own interest.

As Subba suggests, given the Orientalist bias and problems of communication with the local people in the nineteenth century, it would have been sensitive and pragmatic to treat British early accounts as tentative rather than decisive. He backs his point by stating in villages of Darjeeling hills nobody really knows about all the subgroups of his own caste, much less the situation in the wider Gorkha community. So how could the British coming from thousands of miles away know everything about the Gorkha community or caste, however small it might be? Moreover, the emerging Indian ruling class did not bear in mind that the history of Darjeeling and the Gorkhas was not written by trained historians. Most British authors were primarily botanists, doctors, administrators, and travelers, who could only include their own experiences or information they obtained from their “Indian subjects,” not to mention the subjects’ own prejudices against the hillmen of Darjeeling. Thus with the Orientalist text confining Gorkhas to “Nepal” and the Indian ruling class preserving and sustaining this prejudice after independence, the Gorkhas became victims of the trauma of being “unhomed” and left nation-less after 1947. This led them to harbor a sense of insecurity and feel alienated from the Indian government system, which despite stigmatizing Gorkhas as “foreigners” continued to employ them mostly as

low-ranking soldiers in the Indian army. As one retired Indian army officer I met in Siliguri remarked, on assurance of anonymity, “*Combat ma Gorkha sadhai first in line . . . desh ko lagi jyan mangnu hunae, tara deshma aafnu chinhari ko laagi aafnu aagan magnu chayi na hune?*” [Translation: “The Gorkhas are always first in line during combat . . . how is it okay that we are asked to lay down our lives for the country but not okay when we ask for our own land to be recognized for the sake of our identity in India?].

On the economic side, most of the Gorkhas earn their living working in government jobs, the local tourist and tea industries, and the Indian army. In all of these spheres, Gorkhas are mostly employed in the lower ranks, with the dominant Indians managing government offices, owning high-end hotels and tea gardens in Darjeeling hills, and commanding the regiment. In addition, the Government of India’s benevolent attitude towards the Tibetan refugees, who make up a sizable portion of Darjeeling’s population, leaves the Gorkhas feeling slighted by their own fellow citizens (Interview with Diwakar Pradhan, Siliguri, October 30, 2010). This feeling arises since Tibetans enjoy more cultural representation and social benefits from the Indian government than the Gorkhas. As a result, Tibetans have come to occupy positions of power in government offices and own hotels and property, while simultaneously enjoying access to socio-economic benefits reserved for disadvantaged, minority and/or backward groups or classes in India.²³ These benefits include reserved seats for government jobs, concession for admission to colleges/universities, stipends/scholarships, healthcare, and small-scale industry development programs to help assimilate underprivileged groups within the mainstream of India. Thus, humiliation from being repeatedly denied their Indian identity and political rights as Indian citizens, frustration

²³ “Tibet’s Stateless Nationals II: Tibetan Refugees in India” (www.tibetjustice.org/.../stateless-nationals-ii/stateless-nationals-ii.pdf, last viewed June 28, 2012).

from being unable to participate in shaping the public will, and exclusion from socio-political rights and privileges (Ricoeur 2005: 200) have made Gorkhas extremely vulnerable to shame and sensitive to their position as second-class citizens in India.²⁴

Given this situation, the mobilization of music and culture to promote their political cause has emerged as a powerful tool for the Gorkhas since the last decade of the twentieth century. As part of their ongoing movement for a home state in India, musics, performed in elaborate culture festivals such as Mahadasai Sanskrit Utsav during *Dasai* and *Diwali*²⁵ (October-November), have become symbolic in voicing the community's aspirations. As a result, Gorkha musics – folk, *adhunik*/modern, rock– portray a fascinating organicity and a blending of sorts that not only revise the limits of Gorkha identity but also stretches the margins of perceiving place, space, and identity. This blending of musics, creating overlaps and disjunctures, then echoes what sociologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (2001) and Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldua (2007) define as the “borderlands” – a narrow strip along steep edges that push the limits of identity and simplistic notions of belonging from a seemingly unproblematic division of space between peoples, places, and cultures to ongoing processes of cultural-political practices.

Since the demand for recognition of Gorkha identity came to the forefront in 1980s, the Gorkha movement to resist discrimination and domination in India has evolved with time.

Gorkha resistance against India's dominant ruling class then showcases an ambit of strategies

²⁴ Although these words may sound harsh considering that Gorkhas are eligible to vote and obtain Indian passports, the structures of discrimination and marginalization are reinforced in discursive, often invisible, ways. For example, Gorkha votes go towards electing just one Nepali-speaking representative in the State Legislative Assembly, who is actually representative of the majority party of West Bengal. Therefore, he/she is more a puppet representative of the West Bengal government and pre-occupied with issues of Bengal's leading political party's agenda than with the socio-cultural and economic aspect of the Gorkha cause. The same goes for the Central Government in New Delhi, where a Member of the Parliament (MP) from Darjeeling district is elected to “represent” the Gorkhas. Likewise, with poor education facilities and no scope for higher education, Gorkha youths remain excluded from mainstream India and are deprived of equal opportunity for education and better job facilities.

²⁵ Hindu religious festivals where the female goddesses of Shakti are worshipped.

that ranged from the intellectual move in the 1970s, to the violent agitation in the 1980s followed by Subhas Ghising's dictatorial rule from 1988 to 2007, to the non-violent "Gandhian" movement from 2007 to the present.²⁶ The current form of resistance stands out by the fact that it actively mobilizes music as its "symbolic weapon" to assert Gorkha cultural identity in India. Although the strategy of mobilizing music is not a new idea in itself, the promotion of "traditional" music and culture by the Gorkhas has nevertheless come to signify an important theme in the ongoing movement for a Gorkha home-state in India. Since Indian regional states are created on the basis of ethno-linguistic self-determination – an ideology championed by the founding fathers of modern India to promote diversity and multiculturalism – major groups fitting easily within a homogeneous category were assigned regional states (Oommen 2000: 143-172). For example, West Bengal for Bengalis, Tamilnadu for Tamils, etc. In short, a regional state legitimized an ethno-linguistic group's connection with the Indian union.

However, this desire to promote ethno-linguistic diversity in reality led to standardizing the Hindu-Aryan paradigm promoted by Orientalist scholars like William Jones, John Stuart Mill, H. H. Wilson, McKim Marriott, Max Muller, Louis Dumount, and Abbe Dubois, etc. As Chatterjee (2008) points out, Indian nationalism, despite claiming new political possibilities, inevitably came to follow the West's body of knowledge "containing" and "representing" India. This meant that non-Hindu–non-Aryan cultures remained "othered," with differences in Hindu-Aryanism becoming the norm to represent Indian diversity. For the Gorkhas, using music and culture to further their identity in "multicultural India," the limitations of identity are

²⁶ Subhas Ghising was the leader of the bloody revolt for Gorkhaland over 1983-1986. Following this event, Darjeeling hills was declared an autonomous hill region with its headquarters in Darjeeling. However, Ghising soon became an agent of the Bengal government and ruled like a dictator for twenty-one years (1986-2007), during which period any opposition was met with violent repercussions (<http://mygorkhaland.wordpress.com/2008/07/12/gorkhalands-first-commander-subash-ghisingh/>, last viewed January 6, 2012).

extrapolated by first underlining “Hindu Nepalianness” to draw difference with other ethno-linguistic groups of India. Then, Gorkha music is decisively grafted with Hindi patriotic songs on the occasion of “Gandhi-Jayanti” (Mahatma Gandhi’s birthday) and India’s Independence and Republic Day celebrations to draw differences with Nepal. I call this move the play of “difference within a difference” that is both “crucial” and “critical” at the same time. It is crucial because it underlines how Gorkha music differs from other regional musics of India; this, via the right to self-determination, is intended to help qualify Gorkhas for recognition as a distinct ethnic group of India. It is critical because by highlighting Nepalianness, Gorkhas tread a fine line of (mis)identification where the danger of being linked with Nepal is never too far. It shows the desperate and anxiety-ridden existence of borderland minorities – nameless, invisible, overlooked, and taunted²⁷ – and the “courage born out of desperation” (Anzaldúa 2007: 33) provoking idiosyncratic dangerous ways of achieving recognition from the dominant group.²⁸

When I attended the Darjeeling music festival in 2008, having also attended previous music festivals in 2004, and 2005, I was intrigued by the changing context and content of presenting Gorkha music and by extension Gorkha identity as well. The 2003 and 2004 music festivals had mainly featured a Western-centric music presentation, with the musicians communicating with the audience in English while singing popular Nepali and English rock songs and also performing jazz and fusion music numbers. In 2005, with Subhas Ghising, the then supremo of Darjeeling hills, pushing for the Darjeeling hills to be declared a “tribal

²⁷ I use the term “nameless” because mainstream Indians try to categorize the Gorkhas under other categories like Assamese, Manipuri, Tibetans, Bodos, etc., other than “Gorkha”; “invisible” refers to the fact that there is no political representation for Gorkhas in India; and the sense of being “taunted” arises from the discriminating notion of martial races being “thick-headed,” which most Indians use to justify why Gorkhas are not intellectually inclined and hence not seen occupying positions of power.

²⁸ The dominant group of India would be the majority upper-class/caste Indo-Aryan Hindu Indians.

region,”²⁹ he had the music festival designed such that it reflected the “tribal” or indigenous beliefs, rituals, and life-styles of the Gorkhas. People were debarred from worshipping Hindu gods, any form of idol-worship was declared an offense, *jhakri* and *bijuwa* (shamans) were highlighted, and the public was encouraged to drink locally made alcoholic drinks and beverages. In keeping with this theme, the music festivals in 2005 and 2006 exhibited a tribal-centric music performance, with other tribal groups such as the Siddis from Gujarat, Santals from north Bengal, and Todas from south India invited to perform. However, with this idea not going down too well with the general public and the political winds changing in favor of Bimal Gurung as opposed to Subhas Ghising, the music festival scene changed drastically in 2007.³⁰

With non-violence and cultural renaissance being the motto of the day, music, musical instruments, dress, cuisine, folk-arts, local Nepali literary texts, etc. were promoted. No longer were popular, jazz, and/or fusion music showcased; rather, Nepali “traditional” music, musical instruments, dances, and Indian classical music genres were performed, with musicians, dancers, and audience members collectively wearing traditional attire and jewelry. Ironically, in this sudden rush to promote Gorkha traditional music, folk musicians from Nepal were invited to perform in the Darjeeling music festival in 2008. In addition, Gorkha traditional dress, similar to that worn in neighboring Nepal, was brought in and overtly highlighted as part of the Gorkha cultural identity. In fact, one of my neighbors’ relatives, who was visiting Darjeeling from Nepal, remarked that he had never seen Nepali culture being promoted thus even in Nepal.

²⁹ Having Darjeeling hills officially recognized as a tribal region would have relieved the Bengal government of its recurring headache of Gorkhaland. It would have pegged the Gorkhas as a “backward group” and thus unfit to have a state in their own right.

³⁰ Bimal Gurung is the leader of the current political party heading the peaceful movement for Gorkhaland in Darjeeling.

Research Questions

Having an understanding of “what is” by examining local cultural traits within local habitats and histories and the importance of symbols in culture as a guidance system for imposing meaning on the world (Geertz 1973), I struggled to make sense of the changes I witnessed at the 2008 Darjeeling music festival. Rather than representing Gorkha identity as a specific “Indian” category, it seemed Gorkha music was undermining its own ideological foundation in relation to identity and place. For example, didn’t having Nepalese musicians performing at a Gorkha music festival weaken the claim of Gorkhas being Indians? What about performing Gorkha folk music that featured guitar, conga, bass guitar, and drums? Why were migratory Nepalese *sarangi*³¹ (Figure 1.8) players invited to perform when *sarangi* is not a common folk instrument of Darjeeling hills? What about the imposition of a dress code in which *daura-suruwal* (shirt and slacks), *chaubandi choli* (blouse) and *phariya* (sari) were brought from Nepal, since tailors in Darjeeling did not know how to sew the “traditional outfits”? How was the erecting of boundaries between “us” (Gorkhas) and “them” (Nepalese) to be legitimized if this very claim was not being clearly maintained or marked in the first place?

As I deliberated upon these questions, the works of ethnomusicologists Martin Stokes (1997), Anthony Seeger (2004), and Helen Rees (2000), anthropologists Amanda Weidman (2006) and Arjun Appadurai, historian Janaki Bakle (2005), post-colonial critics Gayatri Spivak (1984, 2005) and Homi K. Bhabha (1994), Chicana queer theorist Gloria Anzaldua (2008), and philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1990, 1991, 2005, 2006), amongst others, helped me develop a critical

³¹ *Sarangi* is a four-string bowed instrument, which is used either to accompany the voice or to play solo instrumental pieces. This instrument is commonly associated with the *gaine* – a caste of roaming musicians who perform religious and popular songs in Nepal and in Darjeeling hills and Sikkim in India.

understanding of music's social and cultural efficacies. They assisted me in re-assessing upon my earlier line of thoughts and expectations of understanding music, place, people, and identity. Now I began to read music as (a) a vital form of social creativity that defied confinement within narrow chauvinistic or sexist categories and often leaped across boundaries to put into play unexpected and expanding possibilities (Stokes 1997: 24); (b) a political event where aspects of foreign music are adopted as a way to incorporate the power or symbolic order of the dominant culture to simultaneously establish the otherness of others and the changing, growing, creative self-ness of a community (Seeger 2004: 59); (c) a category that "needs" specificity of place and ethnicity concomitantly as it "unmarks" them, giving rise to problems of nomenclature whose interpretations offered by different commentators illuminate shifting narrative structures of ethnic consciousness and being (Rees 2000: 171, Gadamer 1991); and (d) a complicated, conflict-ridden medium through which the politics of identity, voice, modernity, resistance, and adaptability is played out in ways that may or may not fit the way we interpret social facts about a society or community.

Therefore, focusing mainly on the Darjeeling music festival scene (2003-2010), my dissertation presents three central issues that I pursue in my research, both archival and ethnographic: a) the dynamics of Darjeeling music festival from 2003 to 2010 in highlighting, (re)defining, and remarking Gorkha identity through performance; b) Gorkha identity as it emerges from the interstices of colonial, nationalist, and local discourses; and c) the activism of Gorkha music in establishing identity at India's borderlands as a postmodern condition of discursive practices and imagined places through the workings of popular, mass, and electronic media.

Darjeeling Music Festival and (Re)Presenting Gorkha Identity

First, I explore the all-important role of the ongoing music festival scene in Darjeeling for supporting and representing the demand for a recognized Gorkha state within India since the late 1990s. These music festivals are arranged during the celebration of *Dasai* and *Diwali/Tihar*, two of the major festivals of the Hindu calendar in India. The festivals signify the triumph of good over evil, and the female goddesses of *Shakti* (positive energy/power) and prosperity, such as Durga, Kali, and/or Laxmi, are worshipped. This part of my research, which is primarily ethnographic, focuses on the role of Gorkha music, both folk and popular, as it is performed and presented in music festivals all over Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong. Inspired by Thomas Turino (2004) and Martin Stokes' (1997) theory that music and musical events are strong indicators of music's social significance in identity-building processes – either to distinguish against or to unite with those with whom it interacts – I examine the role of Gorkha music in music festivals in drawing similarities as well as differences with and within India's cultural diversity as well as with Nepal.

Likewise, I identify public music performance as a communal activity that “evokes and organizes collective memories and presents experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (Stokes 1997: 3). This activity generates a sense of identification, which brings members of a group together as one close-knit community. In this sense, the venues of music festivals become places from where musical performances operate mimetically by symbolically mediating signs and symbols of identity to recreate Gorkha music and Gorkha cultural identity. By “mimesis” I do not just mean the imitation of an action or idea by community members to represent themselves in the political sphere. Rather, taking it to

be a “work in progress,” I also see mimetic modes of representation as an ever-expanding process of symbolic human productions that creatively imitate and continuously augment its presentation with time and experience (Ricoeur 1984, Savage 2009). For instance, in earlier music festivals called the “Darjeeling Carnival,” *sarangi* was not visible, nor was it promoted as part of Gorkha music. Instead, following the history of Gorkhas in colonial India, the Carnival music represented a Western-centric Gorkha identity. In other words, Western-centric instruments like the violin, conga, guitar, keyboards, and drums were prominently featured than *madal* (folk drum)³² (Figure 1.7), *sarangi* (Figure 1.8), *tungna*³³ (Figure 1.9), *murali*³⁴ (Figure 1.10), and *damphu*³⁵ (Figure 1.11). Similarly, the music genres performed were mainly *adhunik* (modern) Nepali songs, rock band music in English and Nepali, and fusion music instead of Nepali folk music.

Identifying with Western-centric music and musical instruments like the guitar, violin, keyboards, and drums, the West became emblematic of Gorkha music, which the Gorkhas used to represent themselves over and against their Bengali rulers. Leaning to the West for a Western-centric Gorkha identity was strategic for Gorkha resistance that invoked the “good old times” of the colonial era in comparison to deteriorating standards under the West Bengal government. This move positioned the West, the British, as former rulers of Bengalis, hence attributing the

³² *Madal* is a cylindrical hand drum. Its main frame is made of wood, and it has two leather heads at either end. It is played using both hands. The larger version of the *madal* is generally played in eastern Himalayan folk music, also in Darjeeling hills. The smaller version, according to folk musician Dilip Biswa, is preferred by musicians from the western Himalayan regions of Nepal. However, today both the versions of *madal* are common in Darjeeling hills.

³³ A four-string plucked lute, which is commonly associated with the Mongolian ethnic sub-community of Gorkhas.

³⁴ *Murali* is a transverse flute made out of a single hollow shaft of bamboo. It is the most common instrument that invariably accompanies Nepali folk songs in Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, and Nepal.

³⁵ *Damphu* is a percussion instrument that is commonly associated with the Tamang community. This is a double-sided disk-shaped drum that is topped with a leather membrane held together by 30-32 bamboo sticks, including one or two sticks at the base. The base sticks are played with the left hand while the right hand keeps the time of the main rhythmic scale.



Figure 1.7: Folk drum, *Madal*. Photo by author. Darjeeling, December 16, 2010



Figure 1.8: *Sarangi*, a four-string bowed folk instrument. Photo by author. Darjeeling, December 20, 2010



Figure 1.9: *Tungna*, a four-string plucked instrument. Photo by author. Darjeeling, December 20,

2010



Figure 1.10: *Murali*, a transverse bamboo flute. Photo Bashu Isaiah Rai Lorung, Darjeeling,

October 2008

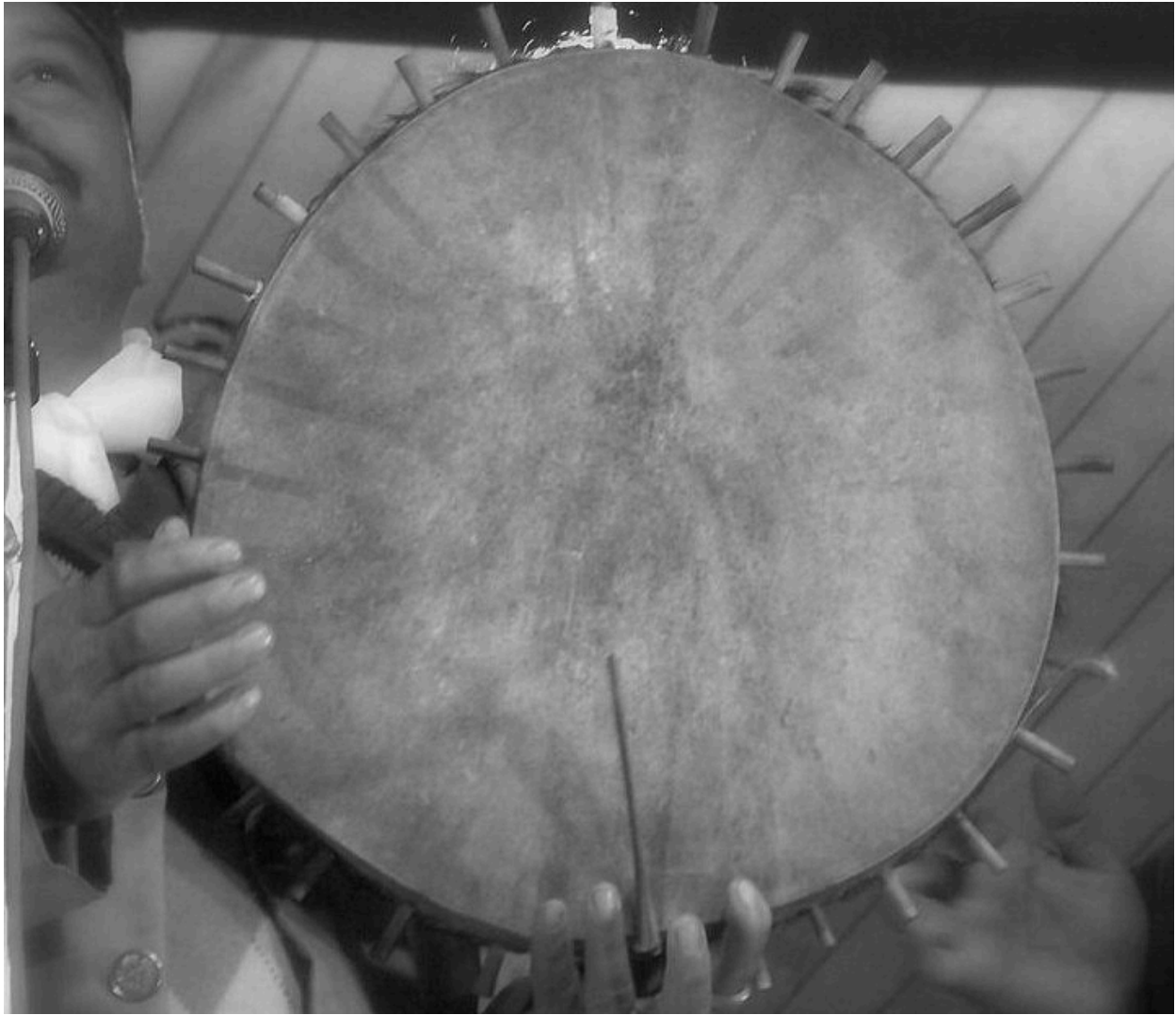


Figure 1.11: *Damphu*. Photo by author. Darjeeling, September 2009

colonial set-up with better governing capabilities than the ruling administration of West Bengal. The memory of colonial rule became critical in underpinning the Western-centric Gorkha music, which all Gorkhas could identify with, such that denying its validity was next to impossible. In addition, the colonial narratives of Gorkhas in India also contributed to legitimizing Gorkhas as Indians by (a) highlighting Gorkhas as an integral part of Indian history by virtue of their shared

experiences with other Indian colonial subjects, and hence as rightfully Indians; (b) representing Western-centric Gorkha music as being essentially an assimilation of Western and/or modern music that differentiated Gorkhas from the typical village-centric folk music commonly identified with Nepalese music across the border; and (c) marking cultural differences between Gorkhas and Bengalis in the state of West Bengal. However, with Darjeeling's developing political scene and changing socio-cultural awareness, the Western-centric Gorkha music production of Carnival 2003 underwent a series of revisions in 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, and 2010.³⁶ These underlying factors became precursors to future projections of Gorkha identity that called for re-arranging and re-presenting the context and content of Gorkha music in India. Thus I read representations of identity via music as an inter-connected activity that works in conjunction with an array of human actions, pre-determined meanings, political events, history, and communal and individual desires to strategize the performance of identity with the changing demands of time. Likewise, I observe changes in Gorkha music through successive music festivals (2003-2010) to analyze the factors that go into making the identity-building process a discursive and ambivalent affair.

I also focus on the negotiation of identity via creative mobilization of history and memory to sustain a politically and emotionally charged theme by appropriating, subverting, and/or highlighting certain ideas drawn from a community's experiences of place and time. In this regard, I read "experiences" as an integral part of a resistance movement and in so doing focus on the role of resistance in not only changing the dominant group's view about the

³⁶ For example, some critiqued 2003 Darjeeling Carnival as being too Western-centric. Music festivals of 2005 and 2006 were critiqued as too indigenous culture-centric, festivals of 2008 and 2009 were hugely welcomed for being uniquely traditional, and the 2010 festival was again critiqued for losing some of its traditional flavor (newspaper sources: *Himalaya Darpan*, *The Statesman*, *The Telegraph*).

dominated, but also shaping the latter's self-identity as to how "they are subject to someone else and the manner in which they come to be tied to their own identities through self-knowledge" (Gupta and Ferguson 2001: 19). This observation brings me to the second aspect of my research, which examines how the present representations of Gorkha identity through "traditional" folk music and "traditional" culture symbols like dress, food, art, jewelry, and language help to legitimize and mark the "meaning" and "being" a Gorkha in India. Here "being" signifies the casual journey of living life or existing through time, while "meaning" denotes the act of signification, of explaining, of marking, or giving meaning through cultural signs, symbols, and rituals to substantiate and validate the connection between identity, place, and belonging.

Gorkha Identity from the Interstices of Colonial, Nationalist, and Folk Music Discourse

The one thing that is striking in both colonial and nationalist texts (both local and non-local) is the constant effort to securely locate the multi-ethnic Gorkhas of West Bengal, broadly categorized as Nepali, Magar, Kirat, etc., within a specific geographical area – only within the confines of Darjeeling hills (Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, and Kalimpong). However, if one were to pay attention to native folk music productions, both textual and oral, one notices that notions of fixed territory are often meaningless. In fact, old Gorkha folk melodies refer to places only in terms of *gaau* (village), *sahar* (town/city), *pahad* (hills), and/or *madesh* (plains). Similarly, the concept of "Gorkhality," as in being a Gorkha of India, or "Nepaliness" as in being a speaker of Nepali language, do not seem to be tied to specific cultural aspects such as dress, cuisine, music, or any particular musical instrument. For example, one of the most popular Nepali *lokgeet*

(folksongs), “Phariya leidechan” (He has bought me a sari), sung by the well-known Gorkha folk singer Heera Devi Waiba in the 1960s, reads as follows (Musical example 1.1):

*Phariya leidechan, teipani rata ghanana,
Tei pani man parena, bhani deuna bhanana.
Paspuraiko lacha ma dori batera lei deu na,
Nepal bata Nepali phariya satera lei deu na.
Rachi ma bata potey ma dori kineyra lei deu na,
Kashi ko china bindulei tika chuneyra lei deu na.*

Translation:

He (lover/husband) has bought me a red sari/*phariya*,
but it is too heavy/gaudy,
I don't like it, could you please convey this to him.
Do get me ribbons/*lacha* for my hair from Paspura,
And then do exchange the red Nepali sari you bought from Nepal.
Do buy me hand-sewn necklaces/*potey* from Ranchi,
And then buy me the choicest *tika* [a mark worn on the forehead] from
Kashi.

This is a typical eastern Himalayan folk song (*purbeli lokgeet*) from Darjeeling hills with a female voice being accompanied by musical instruments. *Lokgeet* is sung by both male and female singers – solo or together. This song is set to 4/4 meter with an added emphasis on the first beat as shown below:

X				X				
1	2	3	4	/	1	2	3	4
dhang	ti	naka	dhing	/dhang		ti	naka	dhing (sing)

These syllables do not mean anything in particular and are said to just imitate the sounds of the *madal*.

Meter 4/4 स = G

Pha-ri-ya - lei-de- chan lei-pani ra - ta

ग प- दनि प पुमं ग रे ग पुमं ग द

gha- ha - na - lei-pani- man- pa - re - ha -

स रे (स) द द दनि रे ग पुमं ग मरे ग द

bhani-deuna-bha- ha na

रे सनि द स स

Pas-pu- rai - ko la- chana- do - ri ba-tera- lei- deu

द दनि रे ग पुमं ग मरे ग (स) द रे सनि द सरे

na Ne- pal- ba - ta Ne-pali- phari- ya

स द द दनि रे ग पुमं ग मरे ग (स) द

sa-tera-lei- deu na Ne- pal- ba - ta

रे सनि द स स द दनि रे ग पुमं

Ne-pali- phari- ya sa-tera- lei- deu na

ग मरे ग (स) द रे सनि द सरे (स) द

Tei-pani- man- pa re - na - bhani-deuna- bha- ha

द दनि रे ग पुमं ग मरे ग (स) द रे सनि द स

na

स

Musical example 1.1: Transcription of the first three lines of the song “Phariya leidechan”

This folksong is about a young girl asking her beloved to get her jewelry, sari/*phariya*, and other adornments from a number of places. Although this is a Nepali folksong, it does not refer to things exclusively “Nepali” or related to Nepal. Rather, the second and third verses refer to an assortment of items that are to be bought from Paspura, a village in the Begusarai district of Bihar, India; from Nepal, with no reference to any particular place; from Ranchi, capital of Jharkhand, India; and from Kashi/Varanasi, one of India’s ancient townships in Uttar Pradesh. Likewise, the instruments accompanying this folksong include the *madal* (folk drum), *murali*, bells, guitar (doubling both for melody and rhythm), and an accordion. It brings into perspective the works of post-colonial theorists,³⁷ who reiterate the “systematizing” of India and its inhabitants into distinct categories as part of the British colonial project to organize the “chaotic” and “unruly” sub-continent in order to rule better.

For, as clearly stated by Nicholas Dirks in *Castes of Mind* (2007) and by John Keay in *History of India* (2001), formations of new kingdoms and changing borders had very little to do with keeping people in or out of a particular region or area. Rather, a nominal tribute was paid to the ruling body while people went about their business as usual. Public allegiance was not centered on a political figure or place, but included the descent group of a clan or caste in abstract ways that were inclusive rather than exclusive in nature. Bernard H. Cohn clearly outlines this aspect in his article titled “Representing Authority in Victorian India” (2009), where he describes the ideology behind the ritual of incorporation at durbars through exchange of special clothes or emblems (*khelats* in Urdu) between the sovereign and his subjects in the form of *nazar* (gold coins in Urdu) or *peshkash* (precious possessions in Urdu). This ritual of

³⁷ For example Gayatri Spivak (1990), Homi K. Bhabha (2007), Nicholas Dirks (2001), Bernard S. Cohn (1996).

incorporation was not seen in terms of an exchange between the “giver” and the “receiver,” but as an “idea of continuity and succession” of an inclusive whole (Cohn 2009: 168) where ideas of belonging and becoming were mobile and not rigidly marked by boundaries of place, nation, ethnicity, or language. In other words, originary history or the past was not invoked when incorporating a subject or a community under the ruling sovereign’s jurisdiction. Taken from this perspective, the repeated invocation of Gorkhas as “Nepalese” or Nepali-speakers and hence non-Indian by colonial texts, later appropriated by the Indian leaders as a “normative fact,” becomes a problem.³⁸ The representation of Gorkhas as “outsiders” led to abuses of memory that glorified historical experiences with “*too much* memory here and *not enough* memory there” (Ricoeur 2006: 79).³⁹ That is to say, there is typically too much history of Gorkhas as mercenary soldiers and border-crossing immigrants in India and not enough history of Gorkhas as natives of Darjeeling hills who were crossed by their borders, of Gorkhas participating in India’s freedom movement, and laying down their lives to protect India’s independence.

From a musical point of view then, music not only reflects but provides a fascinating perspective into providing clues for re-reading the dominant discourse by summoning memory to remember what is mostly forgotten or easily overlooked. For example, non-Gorkha musicians loosely refer to all Gorkha folk drums as *madal*. They note its similarity with other Nepalese folk drums and likewise link Gorkha cultural identity with that of Nepal. But a close study of Nepali nomenclatures for the percussion instruments reveals otherwise. Not only are there a wide

³⁸ The *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling* (1907), by L. S. S. O’Malley, despite acknowledging Darjeeling hills were inhabited by indigenous people, repeatedly highlights immigration by people from Nepal to work for the tea gardens. He calls the inhabitants of Darjeeling “Nepalese.”

³⁹ Starting with the Husserlian sense of memory in terms of whose and what memories are used for representation, Ricoeur investigates the phenomenology of memory to distinguish between impeded, manipulated, and abused memory. He asserts the danger of mobilizing memory to write history leading to too much memory in a certain region of the world, hence an abuse of memory, and not enough memory elsewhere, hence an abuse of forgetting.

variety of Gorkha drums, but the Nepali terms used for referring to each one of them, such as *paschimay madal* (drum from the west), *purbeli madal* (drum from the east), *manipurey madal* (drum from Manipur, a state in India), *dyangro* (drum from Lhasa, Tibet), and *dholak* (now used to refer to the drums of Punjab and India), clearly indicate influences from other places and cultures. It throws light on how Gorkha culture, like all other cultures for that matter, emerged in the Indian sub-continent – mobile, gathering moss as it rolled through time and history with a snowball effect. However, this assimilative notion, being at odds with India’s idea of an exclusive cultural identity, led to forgetting of Gorkha cultural history from the mainstream of India’s consciousness.

Continuing on a similar note, but from a different angle, a *sawai* (narrative poem)⁴⁰ composed in 1969 by Dilusingh Rai describes the notorious 1956 landslide of Darjeeling. It easily refers to the “Angrez” (English) as *Bharat ko bashinda*, meaning “inhabitants of India.” Also, he refers to the Indian bourgeois (Gorkhas and non-Gorkhas) collectively as *Bharat ka jatichan vidwan* (all the scholars of *Bharat*/India) in the line “*Bharat ka jatichan vidwan jan sabai yo binti mero liyun, bala hun agyani bhanyera sabley bhulchuk muwaki diyun,*” where the poet humbly requests to be pardoned for his errors by his fellow literary scholars of *Bharat*, another name for India. It also implies that the author expected his work to be read by all *vidwan* (learned scholars) of India even though it was written in Nepali. This sung poem portrays how identifying oneself in relation to the dominant society did not necessarily reflect how the dominant system identified itself with a minority. It underlines the moment where two different lines of thought regarding identity and identity relations crossed each other in India.

⁴⁰ *Sawai* is a narrative folk poem arranged in verses with rhyming end words. It is sung solo in free meter without any accompanying musical instruments.

The dominant colonial and national discourse defined identity as historical, exclusive, racial, and bound to a place through linear time, while the common Indian practice emphasized identity in terms of the present, inclusiveness, and being beyond the limits of place or time. Discussing this aspect of identity with Diwakar Pradhan, associate professor of Nepali at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India, I realized that none of the ancient music treatises, be it Sarangadeva's *Sangeethratnakara* (13th century A.D.) or music texts written by Persian music scholars from the 13th century onwards, ever claim to represent the "authentic" music of Bharat/India (Interview with Diwakar Pradhan, October 30, 2009). Instead, all old musical texts either describe the type of music in practice during the author's time, or the music the royal musicians performed for the sovereign. This realization helped me understand the processes of identity formation that have diachronically changed through epochs of Indian history. Focusing on Gorkha contemporary folk music, I study how Gorkha musicians appropriate, establish, or contradict colonial and nationalist texts and older Gorkha folk music to either repeat or expand notions of Gorkha identity in their performance and during the month-long Darjeeling music festival.

What are the points of similarities and/or differences between the themes of the old folk songs and the new, and which ones are highlighted during the music festival? What aspects of colonial and nationalist discourse does current folk music highlight or suppress? How does recorded modern folk music express the shifting consciousness of Gorkha identity through colonial and post-colonial India? Do old folk forms such as *sawai* and *lokgeet* also express the shifting political, social, and ethnic consciousness of Gorkhas? If so, then in what ways do present-day folk artists articulate ideas of belonging any differently than their older counterparts

– especially when performing in public for a political cause? How has the use of certain music genres and musical instruments, previously considered synonymous with Gorkha cultural identity, changed since the inception of Darjeeling music festival? To help shed light on these questions, I analyze old and contemporary compositions of Gorkha music performed in Darjeeling music festivals from 2003 to 2010, and examine the similarities and differences in content, context, and socio-political messages that the music productions aim to convey.

Music and Identity: Multiculturalism, Postmodernity, and Discursive Practices

Lastly, approaching India's borderlands as locations where culture and cultural meaning are constantly in a state of flux due to processes of modernity, I identify Gorkha music and musical events as one of the vital means of providing ways by which people recognize, separate, and construct meanings of identity, ethnicity, locality, and boundaries that unite or separate them. In this case music and dance not only become symbolic objects to be deciphered within a context but are themselves "patterned" context (often ambivalent) within which other things happen or on which other things are superimposed (Waterman 1990: 213). In other words, what becomes important is not just getting the message across to the dominant power but also doing it in a way that is effective, dramatic, and even contrary at times. As a result, the presentation of Gorkha identity is not only important in terms of just the performance of Gorkha music, but also in terms of creating a "good and catchy" performance in order to get its message across to the audience (both Gorkhas and non-Gorkhas). Hence, to show Gorkha identity and Gorkha "traditional" music, ironically a genre that is relatively less practiced in Darjeeling district, Nepalese folk musicians from across the border were invited to perform at the month-long Darjeeling festivals.

This traditionalizing trend is further accentuated by the wearing of *daura-suruwal*, *choubandi choli*, and *phariya* during the entire festive month, and by invocation of Gorkha regional cuisine, literature, and folk arts as part of the twenty-first century Gorkha cultural renaissance of Darjeeling. And while all this is going on, musicians playing Western music from Darjeeling, who had earlier re-grouped to perform during the Darjeeling music festivals in 2003, 2004, and 2005, are studiously ignored. Rather, musicians specializing in folk and traditional genres from Darjeeling hills were promoted and widely acclaimed for their contribution towards preserving and promoting Gorkha identity in India. Also, the aspect of specifying Gorkha identity within a fixed category of “traditional India,” the way I read it, seems to be a kind of policing that imprisons identity within a collective whole where subjectivity is denied an existence. This makes me wonder what would result if a community in India had just shirts and pants to confirm as traditional attire and contemporary twenty-first-century music and life-style to express their Indian identity. Would *not* having a “traditional culture” that was distinctively exotic and exclusive disqualify their application for a home state in India? Does multiculturalism within India have to be based on the lines of an “ethnographic Indian state” drawn by the colonial texts to identify, classify, and categorize Indians according to their respective traditions (Dirks 2001: 09)? Why can it not be amplified to encompass what William Dalrymple outlines in his book *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi 1857* (2006) – an all-inclusive approach to identity so intimate that it could almost be confusing?

In his book, Dalrymple highlights the example of Sir David Ochterlony, who “every evening was said to take all thirteen of his wives [both Hindus and Muslims] on a promenade around the walls of the Red Fort” (Dalrymple 2006: 49), and William Fraser, a linguist and

scholar from Inverness, who pruned his moustaches in the Delhi manner, gave up beef and pork so that he could share his table with both Hindus and Muslims, wore Mughal clothes, and lived in a whole-heartedly Mughal style (Dalrymple 2006: 63).⁴¹ In addition, the readers are told about the Skinners of Hansi, the Gardners of Khasgunge and the circle around Begum Sumru of Sardhana, all descendants of eighteenth-century Company officials married into the Mughal elite of Delhi. We are told that these families developed a hybrid lifestyle, a sort of Anglo-Mughal Islamo-Christian style that professed Christianity while speaking Persian and Hindustani. In fact, so intimately fused was everything that even Sir David while assisting Begum Sumru with mourning rituals is said to have confided to a friend “that the old Begum so mixes Christian customs with the Hindoostanee that though anxious to do that which would please the old lady, he simply did not know what was required” (Gardner 1820: 41). Reading Dalrymple, in addition to historian Nicholas Dirks (2001, 2004) and post-colonial analyst Ranajit Guha (1983), and reflecting upon my upbringing in India where it was difficult to extract one aspect from another, the promotion of cultural exclusivity, which the Indian government upholds dearly, makes me question the validity of multiculturalism and its political agenda in conveying Indianness in the twenty-first century.

As explained by Spivak in “Questions of Multi-Culturalism” (1990), perhaps one way would be by reminding ourselves of “culture” as a dynamic term. An example would be to unlearn “Western culture” as only “Western” and re-learn it as an assimilation of more than just traditions of Euro-North America – a combination of number systems from India, alphabets from

⁴¹ David Ochterlony was born in 1758 and went to India as a cadet in 1777. He died in Meerut, India, in 1825. William Fraser was assistant to Ochterlony and arrived in India in 1806. He was a great patron of Indian art and supported one of India’s greatest poets, Mirza Galib. Fraser died in 1835 (for further reading see Dalrymple 2002 and 2008).

the Middle East, and food derived from regions beyond the Western worlds (Wax 1993: 109). In the Indian context it would entail careful re-telling and re-revising Indianness from a canonized stereotyped society made up of “authentic” and “othered” Indians to a society of “all-settlers” professing a synthesis of ideas, customs, and rituals. Doing so, I believe, will help to undermine notions of authenticity and stasis, and make us think twice before we sweep everything under homogenized mega-categories like the First World, the Third World, the Indians, the Americans, the Bengalis, the Gorkhas, etc. Therefore, I study Gorkha identity not as that of a homogeneous group, but as a collage of identities, subjective and collective, that crisscross the topography of Gorkha identity spread over multiple histories and manifold experiences based on diverse cultural influences and class differences.

In this respect, I am motivated by Spivak’s speech at a seminar of Black independent filmmakers at the Commonwealth Institute in London. She said, “You are diasporic Blacks in Britain and you are connecting to the local lines of resistance in Britain, and therefore you are able to produce a certain kind of idiom of resistance; but don’t forget the Third World at large, where you won’t be able to dissolve everything into Black against White, as there is also Black against Black, Brown against Brown, and so on” (Spivak 1990: 65). To me it stressed the importance of not overlooking specificity for the sake of communal oneness. Therefore, taking Spivak’s critique on multiculturalism and specificity, and incorporating it with Anzaldua’s notion of two worlds merging to form a third – a border culture (Anzaldua 2007: 25), I perceive Gorkha music and identity as always *in* process of articulation – a suturing, an over-determination, that is never a “perfect fit” (Hall 2008: 3). This frontier culture then becomes a place where play of difference contradicts the logic of a stable monolithic identity. It obeys the logic of more-than-

one as musics and identities are worked and re-worked through mimetic human productions involving mimesis 1, mimesis 2, and mimesis 3. Musically speaking, it opens up a space for understanding music and identity from beyond a fixed place, essence, or time to cover a wide range of practices from inter-linked histories, organic cross-cultural interplays, and cross-border existence. It blends and assimilates “here” and “there,” to revise earlier binaries concomitantly as it reproduces new categories only to dismantle and re-revise it all over again. It is a process of “traditionality” that involves innovation and sedimentation (Ricoeur 1990: 219), set within the backdrop of constant change, overlaps, and multiplicity through discursive and idiosyncratic ways.

Existing Literature on Darjeeling and the Gorkhas

Early Gorkha historiography is rich with writers and narrators hailing especially from the West. The content couldn't be any more diverse as well. It includes the early letters of Col. G. W. A. Lloyd, the Government Agent in charge of maintaining relations with Sikkim and who visited the “old Gurkha military station” at *Dorje-ling* (Pinn 1990: 1) in 1829; letters of J. W. Grant, commercial resident of Malda, and Dr. Archibald Campbell, the first superintendent of Darjeeling in 1840; and numerous other personal accounts, district gazetteer records, botanical records, and descriptions of topography, climate, people, and a host of other different subjects. However, when it comes to describing the local music or musical life in Darjeeling, I could barely find a handful of references. A book titled *A Concise History of the Darjeeling District since 1835 with Complete Itinerary of Tours in Sikkim and the District*, by E. C. Dozey, while meticulously laying out details about Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong, and Siliguri, touches

briefly upon “Dances and Entertainment.” Dozey mentions a “ghost dance” at the Gymkhana Club and “the Knights-Errant,” where the “Band of the King’s Own played selections, then a variety entertainment, and finally a delightful dance which brought [the] successful function to a close” (Dozey 1989: 117). The other reference to music I found was in Aditi Chatterji’s book *Contested Landscapes: The Story of Darjeeling* (2007). Here she mentions “The Kisch Collection,” comprising a series of letters written between 1874 and 1889 by Hermann Michael Kisch of the Indian civil service to his family in England. These letters provide a glimpse of British high life in Darjeeling.

Of particular interest is the description of an “At Home” party at the town hall in Darjeeling. On August 15, 1884, Kisch writes:

On Tuesday afternoon at 3 o’clock Lady Ulick Brown had an “At Home” at the Town Hall. First there was a little very good music and singing and then a small piece was acted by Major F. W. Holiday. The piece was “Cups and Saucers” a musical and satirical sketch. I had seen it before and I daresay you have. After this there was dancing which was kept up until about 7 o’clock. . . We are going to have a small musical afternoon next week, but as yet Alice has only asked Mrs. and Miss Morgan who both play very well. Miss Morgan sings also and plays the violin. One of the nicest things at Lady Ulick’s at home on Tuesday was a song with banjo accompaniment, and a chorus of girls sang “Ring the bell watchmen” . . . Miss Kate Garnett played the banjo and sang the song and led the chorus . . .

(Chatterji 2007: 250)

Another entry, dated August 22, 1884, reads:

There was a dance at the Town Hall the night before last given by the bachelors of Darjeeling. We went but I don’t think either of us cared much for it. Alice of course could not settle down to dancing as we had necessarily to leave very early. Besides hill dances are not like the plains ones where there is always a great abundance of men. A tennis tournament has just been started.

(Chatterji 2007: 250)

As far as local music is concerned, there is a mention of an article published in the daily newspaper, *The Englishmen*, on February 27, 1839, under the pseudonym “THE WANDERER” (Pinn 1990: 67). Here the author gives a detailed account of his visit to a Lepcha village near Darjeeling. In addition to giving a striking description of a Lepcha village, he outlines the inhabitants’ lifestyle, their religious beliefs, and native music. He says that secular music was performed while resting after a day’s work and that the main music instrument was a “short flute or pipe of bamboo, having four holes as stops, called a pullit, with which [the player] really discoursed most excellent music, and amused us for some time with a series of wild airs, bearing a striking resemblance to the Highland pibrochs” (Pinn 1990: 87). Another book, titled *Tours in Sikkim and the Darjeeling District* (1917), by Percy Brown, contains a brief narration of religious music in Sikkim. Brown mentions the “devil dance” and the “war dance” performed by the lamas/priests at a Sikkimese Buddhist monastery. “It is a piece of rare fortune to see a devil dance,” says Brown, as he notes the dancers’ clothes made of marvelous brocades from China, and their “horrible” masks adorned with fantastic designs. He refers to a band of lamas playing strange musical instruments in the “devil dance” and includes a photograph of the devil dancers and musicians at the Kartok monastery in Sikkim (Brown 1922: 7). Looking closely, I could identify the *rolmo* or bronze cymbals with large central knobs; a hand-held drum played with a curved stick; a pair of *rgyaling*, a double reed oboe with a hardwood body; and a pair of *dungchen*, a telescopic long horn similar to the Swiss alp horn.

The second dance described by Brown is called the “war-dance,” and is said to be performed occasionally by lamas or youths of good birth to celebrate the spirit of Kanchenjunga, the highest mountain peak of Darjeeling hills and Sikkim. This dance is noted to be violent with

difficult physical movements in which sword-play is an important part. The dancers are portrayed as wearing elaborate costumes and head-dresses surmounted by gaily colored draperies and a crest of peacock feathers. There is no mention of music or musical instruments accompanying this dance. The other early reference to Darjeeling's music I have come across is the story of my great-grandfather owning a gramophone in his house in Darjeeling during the early 1900s. According to my father, he would display it proudly in his sitting room and listen to hand-me-down English records from the *sahibs*, or to Indian songs in Hindi.

The literary works of local writers like Paras Mani Pradhan, I. B. Rai, and Agam Singh Giri focus mainly on the literary aspect of Nepali language and nationalist agendas, as was the practice during the first half of the twentieth century. Although some of their later works mention the rich cultural era of Darjeeling's dramaturgical productions (1930-1970), no description whatsoever is available about the music, musical instruments, singers, composers, and dancers accompanying the dramas.⁴² The works of later Gorkha writers, poets, and historians similarly discuss a wide range of topics but exclude details, either technical or descriptive, of any music from Darjeeling hills and the Siliguri *terai*. I have found some scholarly works by Prof. Bhimkanta Upadhyaya and Prof. Kumar Pradhan on folk-narrative songs such as *sawai* at the Central Library, North Bengal University, but they are written from literary and poetic standpoints rather than considering musical notes/*swara* or *tala*/rhythm. The same goes for popular *adhunik* (modern) music and band-oriented musics of Darjeeling. I have not found any autobiographies or biographies of singers, composers, or musicians from Darjeeling hills.

⁴² Gorkha scholars and musicians like Diwakar Pradhan, Gagan Gurung, and Kumar Pradhan claim this was the golden era of Darjeeling's cultural renaissance, flourishing along with India's nationalist movement. This period witnessed extensive literary works, productions of drama and music, and the launching of many local Nepali newspapers and magazines.

Hence with much of Darjeeling's music history remaining primarily embedded within memory and the practice of performing music itself, I rely largely on my personal communications with Gorkha musicians and singers living in Darjeeling hills and Siliguri. In this regard, personal interviews with musicians, singers, and songwriters have been particularly helpful. Since specific literature on native musical practices of Darjeeling is extremely difficult to find, I draw largely from literary, anthropological, and historical data about Darjeeling and its people from the mid 1800s. I also use newspaper articles from *Sunchari*, *Himalaya Darpan*, *The Statesman*, and *The Telegraph* and other media reporting to help me understand the backdrop of Gorkha identity and the current use of music in the ongoing Gorkha struggle for recognition.

Further Theoretical Considerations

My theoretical framework draws primarily from a combination of deconstruction, reflexive ethnography, and practical application of ethnographic/ethnomusicological research. Part of my research is based on the deconstruction of colonial and national discourses in relation to local narratives that survive in the works of some of Darjeeling's well-received historians. For reflexive ethnography, I turn to feminist anthropologists Lila Abu-Lughod, Kirin Narayan, and D. Soyini Madison for the "critical" aspect of ethnography involving my own self doing ethnography in a place where I born and raised. In terms of practical application of my research, I aim to draw on the model of advocacy advanced by ethnomusicologist Anthony Seeger, Chicano cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldua, and Indian theorist Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak.

Deconstruction

Inspired by post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak, who advocates “productive” deconstruction to enable re-reading and re-telling of history from a space of translation that gives a critical edge to all possible totalization/generalization (Spivak 1990: 122), my research will try to uncover spaces from where Gorkha music and identity can be re-told or re-read differently. In the first instance, I approach this work by closely reading what early colonial texts project about the history and people of Darjeeling and how nationalist texts, both Gorkha and non-Gorkha, either internalize the colonial identifications of Darjeeling’s past or contradict it. Then, observing the performance of Gorkha folk music and the work of the media at India’s borders, I note points of continuation and departure from the meta-narratives of colonial and nationalist discourse dictating Gorkha identity in India.

Although deconstruction has been severely critiqued by the likes of Noam Chomsky because of its “pretentious rhetoric” (Chomsky 1995:5), my interest lies in “provoking not an anti-Enlightenment but a new Enlightenment” (Caputo 1997: 54). Rather than being reactive, I aim to question the axioms, certainties, and uncertainties of Enlightenment and the structure of mega-histories. The Gorkhas remain primarily bracketed within the Orientalist gaze of the colonial constructs of valor, which has been appropriated and mobilized by the ruling Indian bourgeois through nationalist policies outliving the formal end of colonialism (Golay 2006: 27). Thus, deconstructing Gorkha identity from its colonial, nationalist, and local discourses, I believe, will not only help in questioning the rationality of mega-histories but also help to understand the role of the Indian bourgeoisie, and the Gorkhas themselves, in repeating, internalizing, and contradicting dominant histories to promote their respective political aims and

objectives. For example, I look at the dominant Indians highlighting their “authenticity” based on Orientalist colonial texts, and at the Gorkhas insisting that they are not only as valiant as colonial texts present them to be, but also culturally and musically endowed, as exemplified by the contribution of Captain Ram Singh Thakuri, who was the bandleader in the Indian National Army from 1941. This army consisted of ex-army personnel and Indian civilians, and was commanded by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.⁴³ Captain Thakuri is well known for his composition “Kadam kadam baraye ja” (Keep marching step by step), which is one of the most preferred marching tunes of the Indian army.

Second, by approaching deconstruction as a way of showing how texts are not meaningless but rather overflowing with multiple and conflicting meanings, I explore how the construction of Gorkha identity relates to the concept of “iterability.” Iterability is the capacity of signs/texts to be repeated in new situations so that they can be grafted onto new contexts to reproduce new meanings, partly different from and partly similar to previous understandings (Balkin 1996: 4). Likewise, I study how Gorkha music representing Gorkha identity portrays new and different overlapping meanings of Gorkhaness that allow for (re)representing and (re)interpreting Gorkha identity from different perspectives at different times. In this regard, I infer boundaries defining Gorkha identity are often unclear as they negotiate aspects of Gorkhaness with changing political contexts to privilege the Gorkha cause. Therefore, I suggest considering Gorkha identity not as being without boundaries, but as having “flexible” boundaries that are brought to play in various ways in different circumstances of justification and rationality.

⁴³ Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945 presumed) was a freedom fighter who advocated India’s independence at the earliest opportunity. This contrasted with the All-Indian National Congress, whose members wanted it in phases through negotiations. Having fallen out with Gandhiji’s strategy of non-violence, Netaji advocated violent resistance. His famous motto was: “Give me blood, and I will give you freedom” (Bose 1999).

For example, consider how Gorkhas have negotiated their musical margins – first by imitating Western-centric music to become colonial subjects in the early 1900s; then promoting Gorkha traditional music as part of India’s nationalist movement in the 1940s; then again “Westernizing” Gorkha music after independence to assert differences with the dominant Bengali culture of West Bengal and the “socio-economically backward” Nepalese across the border; and most recently getting back once again to “traditional” music to promote the Gorkha political agenda within the logistics of a “multicultural” India. Taken from the perspective of music instruments, I have observed the widespread use of *madal* (drum) and *murali* (bamboo flute) during the era of cultural high drama in Darjeeling between 1920 and 1960; then the promotion of guitar, violin, drums, and other “Western” instruments to re-define Gorkha music/identity from the 1960s to the early 2000s; and from 2008 on, the revival and re-promoting of *madal* and *murali*, in addition to *sarangi*, *tungna*, and other folk instruments to “traditionalize” Gorkha identity, in order to justify the demand for a home state within India.

Agency/ Subjectivity

Next, aside from the collective symbolic activity of Gorkhas within the widespread domain of music festivals and collective performances, I study the work of agency to explore how Gorkha musicians are able to subjectively contribute towards the Gorkha cause. Although it is stated that the capacity of human beings are always culturally constructed and maintained (Ortner 2006: 139), I study how agency or individual desires may or may not underpin collective intentions in pursuing political goals. Considering Gorkha musicians as conscious social subjects/actors, who are able to express their agency to resist social structures, my interviews

with Gorkha musicians highlights how they perceive and articulate their opposition to forms of domination and hegemony naturalized through boundary making activities. I invoke versions of “practice theory” as delineated by Pierre Bourdieu (1990), Anthony Giddens (2004), and James Scotts (1990) in which social actors, as existentially complex being, are able to reflect and seek meanings through myriad actions or agency. This is important because, as Sherry Ortner (2006) argues, ignoring subjectivity would impoverish an important aspect of the human and human understanding in the discipline of human sciences. Therefore, subjectivity not only entails being conditioned by socio-cultural constructs, political demands, and attributes of time, but also involves being a thinking-acting subject with degrees of reflexivity and access to the underlying logic of their own practices as members of a specific community/group or an organization.

Reflexive Ethnography and Practical Application of Research

Anthropologists Kirin Narayan and Lila Abu-Lughod agree that the identity of the ethnographer automatically tends to provide a particular standpoint; however, they suggest that this standpoint be considered carefully, since many ethnographers have diasporic identities today. Abu-Lughod even coins the term “halfie” to describe the ethnographer who has multiple subject positions and identities (Abu-Lughod 2000: 262). In fact, the goal that Malinowski championed – to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world (Malinowski 1961) – has been re-worked to accommodate “native” anthropologists, assumed to be “insiders [forwarding] an authentic point of view to the anthropological community, regardless of their complex backgrounds” (Narayan 1993: 676-677). As Narayan suggests, the aspect of “situatedness” of the native/indigenous ethnographer, and likewise their situated

knowledge in relation to their position with the people they study or work with, needs acknowledgment (Narayan 1993: 678-678).

This is particularly essential for me, because as a Nepali-speaking Indian who basically grew up in a Bengali ambience, was educated in an English-medium Catholic convent, attended a conservative Hindu university, and am now “returning” to my birthplace as a student of an American university, my ethnography concerns me as part Gorkha, part Bengali, part Indian, and also part North American. Given this “situatedness” of myself and my association with my Nepali-speaking, Bengali-speaking, and Hindi-speaking consultants, reflexivity helps me to be aware of the various layers of hegemony, power relations, and the politics of representation that weigh heavily with any kind of ethnography or documentation. After all, representation has its consequence – how people are represented is how they are treated (Hall 1997). Ethnography then becomes “an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain” (Madison 2005: 5) during particular points in time. As ethnomusicologist Anthony Seeger writes, he has always believed that researchers have an obligation to use their knowledge and observation in the “real” world of social and political action (Seeger 2004: 141-148).

For my research project, this brings into focus my positionality as an ethnographer in accounting for my “research paradigms, [my] own positions of authority, and [my] own moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation” (Madison 2005: 7) within a complex set of relations of which I am and am not a part. In this respect I draw on Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldua, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, sociologists Akhil Gupta and Stuart Hall, historian Janaki Bakhle, Eastern Himalayan culture studies experts Tanka Subba and A. C. Sinha, and

post-colonial critics Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Nicholas Dirks, and Partha Chatterjee.

My work also reflects ethnomusicological studies of minority groups by Helen Rees (southwest China) and Anthony Seeger (Suyá of Brazil), and philosophical works by Paul Ricoeur and Roger Savage.

Data Sources and Field and Archive Research

This dissertation is based on field and archival research carried out in Darjeeling hills, Siliguri, and the neighboring state of Sikkim (also a Gorkha stronghold) over December 2008, September-October 2009, and October 2010-February 2011. In particular, I offer “thick description” and detailed analysis of several cultural and music festivals I have documented on video and via interviews, and draw on the archival resources of North Bengal University, Paras Mani Pradhan Library in Darjeeling, and All India Radio, Kurseong, for historical information. In addition, I am using newspaper reports, online blogs, online reports, and other ephemera from the last few decades. My current research is also informed by my previous observations as a resident myself for many years in the Darjeeling district. My own fluency in Nepali, Bengali, and Hindi allows for a particularly nuanced study of the way different participants and observers talk and/or write about what is going on locally and nationally in terms of the Gorkha movement in Darjeeling hills. Not least, I aim to provide a unique case study of the remarkable flexibility of borderland music and identity and the ways people “write” and “re-write” musical performances as part of a non-violent political movement unfolding in a multi-cultural postcolonial India.

Structure of the Dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, chapter two, titled “Performing Music, Culture, and (Re)representing Gorkha Identity at Darjeeling Music Festivals,” focuses on the Darjeeling music festivals from 2003 to 2010. I take into consideration the critiques and comments in local newspapers (*Himalaya Darpan*, *Himal Chuli*, *The Statesman*, *The Telegraph*, etc.), magazines (*Darjeeling Today*, *Sikkim Times*, etc.) and websites (www.darjeelingtimes.com, www.himalayanbeacon.com, etc.) regarding the organization and the presentation of each year’s music festival. In addition, I closely follow what is being performed, who is performing, and in what context; what genres are made conspicuous and/or suppressed; audience reaction and/or participation; and how the music festival is portrayed by the local and the national media.

This brings me to chapter three, which is titled “‘The Work of Imagination’: The Role of Music, Mass Media, and Popular Media in Marking Gorkha Identity at India’s Borderlands.” It focuses on the role of state and popular mass media, radio and television, and their collective role in promoting, documenting, and disseminating notions of identity/identities in relation to space, place, and diversity. Considering both radio and television as “leaky” mediums (Enzenburger 1976) that seep through and beyond man-made ideological boundaries, I study India’s sub-Himalayan borders not as a place that implies the end of something but rather as a place of emergence and new beginnings or creations. The borders then become a place that essentially comes to signify a field of untethered possibilities that collectively work towards re-working and re-ordering meanings of belonging, place, identity, and diversity through creative and imaginative ways.

In contrast to collective social presentation and re-presentation of identity and place, chapter four, “Subjectivities and Agency in Performing Gorkha Music: What Does it Mean to be a Gorkha at India’s Margins?” brings forth the issues of subjectivity within the collective. Likewise, this chapter moves from the collective to focus on subjective/individual opinions and practices of Gorkha musicians in creating their own forms of resistance against hegemony from their respective position of lived experiences at and across the border. I narrate my interviews with Gorkha musicians such as Basant Chhetri, Gagan Gurung, Dilip Biswa, Chandan Lomjhel, and Matabir Rai to study their work and ideas about being and representing Gorkha identity from India’s margins. To do so, I look into aspects such as their relative experiences of performing in Darjeeling hills versus performing in other parts of India and Nepal in relation to their genre of music.

Following this, chapter five is titled “Towards a New Musical Identity– Rethinking Representation and Resistance From India’s Borderlands.” Here I examine how Gorkha music and musical events at India’s margins provide Gorkhas the means to resist archetypal notions of belonging, ethnicity, and boundaries that legitimize pre-determined ideas of Indianness. To add depth to my analysis, I compare literary works of some well-known Gorkha writers, past and present, to better analyze the work of resistance and its effect in transforming the representation of Gorkha identity at India’s borders. In this regard, I not only posit Gorkha borderland music as a dynamic voice for political resistance to change dominant prejudices and misinterpretation of identity, but also as a transformative experience that usher in a new level of awareness, sensitivities, and sensibilities to re-think the tenor of a borderland minority existence.

Chapter Two

PERFORMING MUSIC, CULTURE, AND (RE)REPRESENTING GORKHA IDENTITY AT DARJEELING MUSIC FESTIVALS

From the early 21st century, the annual Darjeeling music festival has become the most visible venue for the musical presentation, representation, and re-representation of Gorkha identity. In what has since 2008 become a month-long extravaganza of performances by Darjeeling residents and their neighbors and co-ethnics, we can see the shifting political dynamics of the Gorkha movement manifesting through sonic and visual form, while the intricate negotiations among organizers, participants, local audience members, and visitors are played out through oral, written, and online commentary. This chapter focuses on the changing content and discourse surrounding the music presentations and culture festivals held in Darjeeling since 2003. It is based both on personal observations and on interviews, written descriptions, and audio and video documentation of the festivals at which I was not present.

It should be noted, however, that the phenomenon of public performance directed in part at outsiders did not start with the 2003 festival. Instead, with Darjeeling's reputation as one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in India growing especially in the 1960s and 1970s, public performance of music and dance had been going on for decades. I begin, therefore, by introducing the precursors of the twenty-first-century large-scale music festivals in order to offer some historical context. Many of the musicians I interviewed for this purpose provided not only valuable data but also historically informed comments on the present unfolding of musical and socio-cultural events. I then proceed chronologically through the modern festivals that started in 2003 to show how the changing content and perceptions are inextricably interwoven with emic

and ethnic experiences of Gorkha identity on local (within Darjeeling district), national (within the Indian nation), and transnational (between India and Nepal) levels.

I begin with the history of how music, dance, and drama in Darjeeling hills came to the forefront – first as part of India’s independence movement in the early 1900s, second as a tourist attraction in the 1990s, third as annual fortnightly music festivals starting in 2003, and lately as elaborate annual month-long music festivals from 2008 on. This is to say, the switch from small-scale performance to large-scale music festivals in Darjeeling hills did not happen overnight. Instead, it went through successive stages that went hand-in-hand with the changing political situation of Darjeeling hills. I will provide a normative description of the Darjeeling music scene beginning from the early 1900s through the 1990s and then focus on the music festival scene from 2003 to 2010. I personally witnessed the music festivals in 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, and 2010. For 2003, 2005, and 2006, I draw my narrative from photographs, videos, and my interviews with former festival organizers and participating musicians/artists. I analyze the music performances and the ways in which the music festival showcases changes and improvisations through time to represent Gorkha identity from within the parameters of an Indian identity.

Precursors to the 21st-century Music Festivals

The Cultural Renaissance of the 1930s

When India was ablaze with the freedom movement in the early 1900s, Darjeeling district was not aloof from the political scene consuming pre-independence India. In fact, Darjeeling came to the limelight when an unsuccessful attempt was made to assassinate the then Governor

of Bengal, Sir John Anderson, in Darjeeling on May 8, 1934.⁴⁴ Following this event, Darjeeling hills witnessed a spurt in the number of Gorkha freedom fighters taking up the cause for India's independence. Some of the well-known freedom fighters were Helen Lepcha, Mitra Sen Thapa, Major Durga Malla, Dal Bahadur Giri, Chabilal Upadhyay, Capt. Dal Bahadur Thapa, Bhagat Bir Tamang, Capt. Ram Singh Thakuri, and Pushpa Kumar Ghising.

In addition, with the Indian nationalist agenda being paralleled by a strong sense of cultural renaissance, Darjeeling hills in the early 1900s was likewise stimulated with intellectual vigor. This era witnessed the rise of many poets, novelists, dramatists, musicians, and scholarly figures committed to the cause for the motherland from Darjeeling hills. Some of the well-known literary figures from this era are Paras Mani Pradhan, Agam Singh Giri, Rup Narayan Sinha, Dhanidhar Sharma, and Surya Bikram Gyawali. All of them were associated with literary publications and cultural organizations such as the Nepali Sahitya Sammelan (NSS) (Association of Nepali Literature) founded in 1924, the Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sanga (GDNS) (Organization for Welfare of Gorkhas) in 1932, and the Himalaya Kala Mandir (HKM) in 1950 (Golay 2006: 84, Lama 2009). While the NSS focused on Nepali literature and the GDNS on drama and theatrical productions, HKM concentrated mainly on music and dance. Many senior musicians and literary scholars I met during my fieldwork in 2009 and 2010 referred to this period as the “golden era” of Darjeeling's history.

⁴⁴ <http://www.darjeeling.gov.in/independence.html>, last viewed Nov. 28, 2011.

The Himalaya Kala Mandir (1950 – Present)

The Himalaya Kala Mandir (HKM) is one of the oldest professional music organizations of Darjeeling hills (Figure 2.1). According to Basant Chettri, its present director, the HKM was established by a group of local musicians and dramatists dedicated to making Darjeeling the cultural epicenter of north Bengal. Well-known among them were singers Karma Yonzon, Gopal Yonzon, Heera Devi Waiba, Alok Ghosh, and Gagan Gurung; instrumentalists Amber Gurung, Sharan Pradhan, and Dilip Biswa; and north Indian classical Kathak dancers Usha Gomden and Gopi Kishan. After its inception in 1950, HKM's reputation grew as an organization, and its musicians, singers, and dancers were highly regarded for their musical excellence. The HKM



Figure 2.1: Himalaya Kala Mandir, Darjeeling. Photo by author, December 10, 2012

performers were regularly invited to perform for important guests, visiting state dignitaries, and foreign tourists at state functions and for cultural evenings at high-end hotels in Darjeeling. These programs were generally arranged to feature music and dance performed by local artists to showcase the regional flavor of Darjeeling hills. Usha Gomden, who I met on December 7, 2010 during my fieldwork, recalled many such evenings of music and dance while discussing HKM's bygone days. She fondly remembered those days as “*Darjeeling ko tyo birseyko din haru*” (those forgotten days of Darjeeling's yore) while bemoaning the present state of cultural and



Figure 2.2: Usha Gomden sharing some of her earlier pictures with the author. Photo by Bashu
Isaiah Lorung Rai. Darjeeling, December 7, 2012

administrative affairs in Darjeeling hills (Interview with Usha Gomden, December 7, 2010).

Gomden informed me that the musicians of HKM also performed in Kolkata (capital of West Bengal) and across the border in Kathmandu (capital of Nepal) as invited guests during the 1960s and the 1970s. She showed me pictures of HKM artists with well-known Indian personalities like Jawahar Lal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Gita Dutt, Dilip Kumar, Dev Anand, the King of Sikkim and his Queen.⁴⁵ Gomden described herself and the musicians of HKM as being the cultural ambassadors of Darjeeling hills and of Gorkha culture during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (Figure 2.2).

In comparison to GDNS, which deals mainly with social dramas and skits, HKM is dedicated to preserving and promoting the traditional musics of Darjeeling hills. The genres promoted by HKM's annual music concerts, music presentations, and music lessons are Indian classical music and Gorkha folk music. But with HKM's singers like Sonu Rai and Sudhir Rai making a mark in today's Darjeeling music scene, HKM now incorporates Nepali modern/*adhunik* music within its area of expertise as well. However, Chhetri makes it a point to underline the fact that HKM's *adhunik* music is fundamentally based on Indian raags, although it may have Western music elements like chords and harmony in its compositions and instrumentation. Therefore, along with folk music instruments like the *madal*, *sarangi*, *basuri*, *damphu*, and *tungna*, HKM supports the use of guitars, keyboards, and violins only as a way of supporting or embellishing the *adhunik* music compositions sung by its artists (Interview with Basant Chhetri, December 3, 2010). Other than singing, HKM also promotes Indian classical

⁴⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru was the first Prime Minister of independent India from 1947 to 1964. Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, was the first woman Prime Minister of India from 1966 to 1977 and then again from 1980 to 1984. Gita Dutt, Dilip Kumar, and Dev Anand are well-known Bollywood actors, who frequently visited Darjeeling hills for work and vacation in the 1950s, 1960s, and the 1970s.

dance and Gorkha folk dance. As pointed out by Usha Gomden, one of HKM's senior most dancers, during the 1960s and 1970s when Gorkha folk music was relatively unknown in other parts of India, HKM dancers would be invited to represent Darjeeling hills in New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Kolkata. However, as situation deteriorated from the 1980s with the West Bengal Government and the aftermath of the violent Gorkha agitation in 1986-1988, HKM's role as the cultural ambassadors of Darjeeling hills began to decline. DGHC was not too keen to support HKM since it had its own Department of Information and Culture for performing Gorkha folk music and dance in the 1990s. Nevertheless, with the month-long Darjeeling music festival coming into the scene from 2008, Chhetri and Gomden unanimously agreed that things were improving for HKM's artists, teachers, and students. The annual Darjeeling festival gives the artists and dancers of HKM something to look forward to every year, confirms Gomden looking quite satisfied (Interview with Gomden, December 7, 2010).

Upon discussing the role of HKM in the current trend of month-long music festivals to represent Gorkha identity, Gomden and Chhetri pointed out to me that performing music to showcase Darjeeling's culture was not a new phenomenon in itself. The difference was that in the past HKM artists performed for an exclusive audience, while now in the month-long festivals HKM artists perform for a larger cross-section of audiences. Also, keeping in mind Darjeeling's political situation, Gomden astutely pointed out that whereas earlier the term "Nepali" would suffice to represent Darjeeling hills, it was now imperative to mention "Gorkha" to protect the rights of India's Nepali-speaking citizens. Gagan Gurung and Dilip Biswa, two of HKM's senior musicians, also expressed satisfaction with HKM's role in the month-long Darjeeling music festival. Gurung believed that it was important for the upcoming generation of Gorkhas to know

the richness of their culture so that they would be saved from showing merely an “empty stare” (*twaa parera hernu*) when asked about their traditional music. Gurung said that before the month-long festivals were in vogue, it was normal to hear kids asking him “*yo madal ke ho, yo damphu ke ho, yo sarangi ke ho?*” (What is *madal*, what is *damphu*, what is *sarangi*?) (Interview with Gagan Gurung, December 4, 2010).

My discussions with Dilip Biswa also evoked similar feelings. According to Biswa, the gradual under-representation and mis-representation of Gorkhas from the late 1970s on by the West Bengal government, which is run by an all-majority-Bengali-dominated bureaucracy, led to a cultural predicament and an identity crisis among Gorkhas, leaving them feeling bitter and vulnerable at the hands of their Bengali rulers (*Bangal lei hamilai thicho-micho garda, hamilai aafno astitwa bachaunu garo bho ani hami almalieu*) (Interview with Dilip Biswa, December 5, 2010). But with the Darjeeling month-long festivals stressing folk music and folk culture, Biswa felt it was doing a great service to help Gorkhas regain their *atma-samman* (self-worth/pride) once again. However, on an objective note, Biswa was quick to point that single-mindedly blaming the Bengal government for all the woes of Gorkhas was not acceptable to him. He recalled that Darjeeling hills had had a Gorkha leader in Subhas Ghising from 1988 to 2007, but all that his rule had introduced in was unabashed political tyranny and rampant lawlessness. Echoing similar feelings, other HKM artists like Basant Chhetri, Gagan Gurung, Menuka Pradhan, and Sudhir Rai said Ghising did more harm than good to the image of Gorkha identity and to the Gorkha cause in India by the notorious excesses of his autocratic rule.

The era of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (1988-2008)

From the early 1980s, Darjeeling hills was home to frequent demonstrations and violent outbursts demanding that Nepali be recognized as one of India's official languages and a Gorkha state be created within the Indian union. This development was triggered following the creation of the state of Sikkim in 1975⁴⁶ and the Indian government's reluctance to recognize Nepali as one of the official languages of India. This discontentment grew until it emerged as a full-blown violent movement demanding a Gorkha regional state in India in 1986. Many lives were lost, and Darjeeling hills was transformed into a battle zone – a far cry from its reputation as one of India's most peaceful and scenic hill stations. After two years (1986-1988) of continuous strife and bloody turmoil, the situation was brought under control after a Tripartite Agreement was signed between the Gorkha leader Subhas Ghising, the West Bengal government, and the Indian government at New Delhi. An autonomous governing body called the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was established in 1988, and Ghising, who had led the violent uprising in Darjeeling hills, was appointed the Chairman. The Council had nineteen departments under its jurisdiction, one of which was the Department of Information and Culture.

By the early 1990s, the Department of Information and Culture began to arrange music and dance performances at tourist locations like the Rock Garden at Barbotey, about ten kilometers from Darjeeling (Figures 2.3), and the Shrubbery-Nightingale Park near Chowrasta-Mall Road (Figures 2.5). In fact, DGHC built these “culture parks” to showcase the music of

⁴⁶ Sikkim was not involved with India or India's freedom movement since it was an independent monarchy under the Chogyal (king). However, after independence Sikkimese subjects were granted Indian citizenship when India absorbed Sikkim in 1975, while Gorkhas continued to bear the brunt of being branded as foreigners in their own mother country. As Basant Lama mentions in his book *The Story of Darjeeling*, the creation of Sikkim without Darjeeling was “a historic blunder of monumental proportions for which generations of Darjeeling people shall have to suffer” (Lama 2009: 265).

Darjeeling hills to visiting tourists.⁴⁷ Darjeeling is one of the most popular tourist destinations of India within the state of West Bengal. According to the Indian Tourism Statistics of 2003,⁴⁸ Darjeeling had the second highest number of hotels registered for tourists after Kolkata in West Bengal. While both modern and folk Gorkha music and dance were performed at the Rock Garden during the day, Shrubbery-Nightingale Park came alive with traditional folk music in the evening. Musicians and dancers I met agreed that the performance at Shrubbery-Nightingale Park was “strictly” traditional and specifically based on eastern Himalayan folk music genres like the *maruni*,⁴⁹ the *Tamang selo*,⁵⁰ the *jhaurey*,⁵¹ and so on.

Dilip Biswa, an authority on Gorkha folk music and retired staff artist of DGHC’s Information and Culture Department, specifically mentioned that care was taken for the performance at Shrubbery-Nightingale Park to ensure the audience enjoyed music that was “*hamro sanskriti ko chinnari*” (representative of our culture) (Interview, December 5, 2010). By “our culture” Biswa meant the music had to be specifically eastern Himalayan since Darjeeling hills was on the eastern side of the Himalayas. Biswa emphasized that since eastern Himalayan music was the essence of Gorkha music, effort should be made to preserve its history, musical nuances, and its socio-cultural ethics. Also, the music performed at Rock Garden, according to

⁴⁷ <http://updateox.com/tourism/rock-garden-darjeeling/>; <http://sandeep-hamrodarjeeling.blogspot.com/2011/08/nightingale-park.html>, last viewed May 15, 2012.

⁴⁸ <http://tourism.gov.in/CMSPagePicture/file/marketresearch/FTAIS2003.pdf>, pp. 84-88, last viewed May 15, 2012.

⁴⁹ *Maruni* is a classic dance form of the eastern Himalayan regions of Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, and eastern Nepal. It is performed during the festive season of *Diwali* and other life rituals such as marriage and harvest. Earlier danced only by men, today it is performed by men and women dressed in colorful clothes and shining ornaments. The dancers may be accompanied by the drum *madal* or the nine-instrument ensemble called the *naumati baja*.

⁵⁰ *Tamang selo* derives its name from the Tamang community, who largely practice this song and dance form during life-cycle rituals, accompanied by the beat of the *damphu*. Related to the name of this instrument, the Tamang selo dance is also known as the *damphoo* dance (<http://www.mapsofindia.com/sikkim/society/tamang-selo.html>, last viewed May 12, 2012). Most Tamang selo are set to 4/4 with stress on the first beat and silence on the fourth.

⁵¹ *Jhaurey* are folk melodies or songs/*geet* that are accompanied by *madal*, a cylindrical folk hand drum with leather heads at each end. *Jhaurey* are set to 4/4 or 8/8 time cycles that alternates within the same song. The song themes include a variety of subjects like love, grief, life experiences, etc.

Biswa, could not be called traditional since it only included modern Nepali songs, which despite being audience-friendly were less “authentic” than the music presented at Shrubbery-Nightingale Park (Interview with Dilip Biswa, December 5, 2010).

Listening to Biswa, I was reminded of my visits to both the parks in 1997 and 1998. Truly as Biswa had pointed out, I had been more impressed by the music performance at Shrubbery-Nightingale Park than by that at the Rock Garden. As I recall, the presentation at the Rock Garden was casual with the tourists joining in the fun and taking pictures of the dancers while they performed. The dances were choreographed to recorded Nepali folk or *adhunik* (modern) songs, readily available in the market, and the dancers’ costumes, although traditional, were not striking (Figure 2.4). The dancers were school or college-going youngsters, some of whom were affiliated to the Himalaya Kala Mandir (HKM). The funds for the performance were allotted by the DGHC, and the remuneration to the dancers, though meager, was enough to make them happy. One dancer I happened to meet during my visit to HKM recalled that she, then a school student, would be thrilled to receive the payment because it meant she could go shopping.





Figures 2.3 and 2.4: Rock Garden, Darjeeling. Photos by Bashu Isaiah Lorung Rai, Summer 2001





Figures 2.5 and 2.6: Shrubbery Nightingale Park, Darjeeling. Photos by Bashu Isaiah Loring Rai, Summer 2001

The musical presentation at Shrubbery-Nightingale Park, on the other hand, had a grander ambience than the Rock Garden presentations (Figure 2.6). Not only were the music and dance performed by professional musicians, but there was also a general sense of seriousness maintained by the audience members and the performers themselves. This is to say, the audience maintained their distance and did not join in with the performers, nor were they encouraged to do so by the performers. The performers' attire, make-up, and jewelry were strikingly magnificent, enhanced further by the well-lit stage against the backdrop of colorful fountains, the setting sun, snow-capped mountains, and the beauty of marigolds and rhododendrons swaying in the crisp mountain breeze. The sound equipment was better managed, the presentations well rehearsed, and the dance numbers mostly accompanied by live singers and musicians. Most of the performers performing at Shrubbery-Nightingale Park were folk musicians and singers employed

as staff artists in the Department of Information and Culture, DGHC. I spoke to Heera Rasailly and Dilip Biswa (November 11, 2010, and December 5 and 16, 2010 respectively), who performed quite regularly at the Shrubbery-Nightingale Park in the 1990s. Both Biswa, now retired, and Rasailly, still employed as a staff artist at DGHC's Department of Information and Culture, fondly remembered those evenings of music and dance, and also the amount of work and time they spent to make sure the performance was flawless and up to the mark. Biswa felt that those days signified a sense of renewed enthusiasm and vigor amongst the musicians of Darjeeling hills, since cultural activities had sharply declined since the 1970s. Recalling the buzzing cultural scene in the late 1990s, Biswa said he was certain then that Darjeeling was at the verge of regaining its past glory once again. Biswa also mentioned that the revival of culture and cultural activities in Darjeeling hills during the 1990s made him feel strongly that the time had come to properly represent the "immaculate culture" (*uttam sanskriti*) of the Gorkhas so that they would not be misidentified as a "primitive/backward" community (*pachaute jaat*).

It may be noted here that during my interviews with Biswa, he would always make it a point to emphasize that representing the *uttam sanskriti* of Gorkhas was essential to re-write the identity of Gorkhas in India. By this he meant moving away from the narrow constructs of a martial race to an alternate identity of a civilized, progressive community. When I asked him which communities of India he considered to be more advanced than the Gorkhas, Biswa replied, "*jasto hamro Bangali, Marathi, ani Tamil haru*" (for example like our Bengalis, Marathis, and the Tamils). However, Biswa felt strongly that the Gorkhas were much more advanced than the *Adivasi*, the *Kantapuri*, or the *Bahey* (these are the names of the other indigenous groups residing in north Bengal). Whereas for Biswa the 1990s era of music performance at Shrubbery-

Nightingale Park indicated a time of positive developments, for Heera Rasailly, it was a time of uncertainty as to whether music, dance, and art would be free to progress from the internal strife of Darjeeling's new political environment. Hesitant at first, Rasailly eventually opened up to inform me that there was a lot more going on than met the eye during Ghising's rule from 1988. For example, there was rampant bribery, and the artists had to perform according to orders from the higher officials of the DGHC's Culture Department. Also, as the days went by, Ghising's eccentric one-man rule began to take its toll on Darjeeling, with rampant daytime murders of common people and even DGHC officials who dared to question Ghising's policies.⁵² Rasailly, Biswa, Basant Chhetri, and Gagan Gurung shuddered as they recalled those days. "*Boley ki ta chha inchi ghatai mangnu*" (talk and you will have your six inches reduced [i.e. you will be beheaded]) was the open vulgar protocol of Ghising's rule in the 1990s. Rasailly noted that after DGHC was formed in 1988, misrule and mayhem gripped Darjeeling hills. She and others I interviewed remembered those "dark ages" and said it often made them wonder whether their situation had worsened under the DGHC, or was better under the West Bengal government. Nevertheless, not many dared to question Ghising or his policies for the cause of Gorkha identity at that time.

Despite Darjeeling hills' rapidly deteriorating political situation from 1999, the musical evenings at Rock Garden and Shrubbery-Nightingale Park continued till the early 2000s. But with Ghising's one-man-(mis)rule taking its toll in Darjeeling hills, funds for the upkeep of parks and musical performances, although available on paper, never reached their intended destinations. With agents and contractors mushrooming at every step of the way, the rumor was

⁵² http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-07-24/special-report/29809654_1_gorkha-volunteers-cell-rudra-kumar-pradhan-gnlf (last viewed May 15, 2012).

that the agents and contractors themselves pocketed the funds. Nima Tamang, a contractor by profession who is currently active in the revival of Gorkha culture and music, joked how he was initially misunderstood by many for his interest in the current phase of the Gorkha movement that started in 2007. Tamang recalled that initially many would jokingly say to him “*iya ta paisa khaney baato chaina hai*” (there is no chance of hoarding/making money here) (Interview, December 7, 2010), but he remained undeterred. According to Tamang, he was aware of the contractors’ or agents’ lousy reputation from Ghising’s time and was determined to prove that it didn’t have to be like this. So, with the money allocated for the upkeep of the parks and musical performances “losing its way” (*paisa ta bato manai harauthiyo*) (Interview with Nima Tamang December 11, 2010), cultural evenings became sparse from 2000 on and the DGHC staff artists were left with nothing to do other than receive their salary and “do nothing.” By the end of 2000, the Shrubbery-Nightingale Park was in disrepair and had instead become a meeting place for drug addicts, while the Rock Garden, by virtue of its scenic grounds, remained a tourist attraction – minus the musical performance. Today, the Shrubbery-Nightingale Park is a desolate place and remains under lock and key. It is strictly guarded by the Darjeeling Police department and is a far cry from the glorious evenings of live music I had witnessed way back in 1997 and 1998.

The Darjeeling Music Carnival, 2003 – 2006

Objectives of the Darjeeling Carnival – 2003

Following the dwindling music programs at the Rock Garden and Shrubbery-Nightingale Park from 2000 on, Darjeeling hills, after a hiatus of three years (2000-2003), came alive with enthusiasm for a ten-day cultural festival called “The Darjeeling Carnival.” Although basically a

music festival, it was vigorously advertised as being tourist-friendly and a way of “dressing up Darjeeling hills for some old-time music, fun, and festivities” (Interview with Ajay Edwards Pradhan, October 10, 2009). So in 2003, the Darjeeling Carnival debuted from November 7 to November 16.⁵³ This festival had numerous venues around Darjeeling hills such as the Chowrasta, the Rock Garden, and the Happy Valley Tea Estate, and included a host of tourist-friendly activities. A website set up by the organizers of the Darjeeling Carnival had this to say about their objectives:

Even after 16 years of the Gorkhaland agitation, a distinct fear psychosis continues to haunt the Darjeeling Hills today. It is in this context, that the Darjeeling Carnival was born, as an attempt to collectively motivate society through positive thinking and pro-active community mobilization. In terms of economy, the Carnival also aims at bringing the Darjeeling hills their lost glory and bring the region back in the tourism map as one India’s best destinations, through a celebration of this unique region’s multicultural wealth.

(<http://darjinitiative.tripod.com/id4.html>, last viewed June 28, 2012)

Thus, the Carnival aimed at highlighting the regional flora and fauna, food, religious rituals, folk music, indigenous art, the tea industry, Land-Rover road shows, and the life-styles of the various ethnic groups of Darjeeling. Ajay Edwards Pradhan, the principal motivating figure in suggesting and organizing the entire project of Darjeeling Carnival – 2003, is the owner of Glenary’s Bakery, the oldest and most famous eatery in Darjeeling. However, besides being a businessman, Pradhan was also the leader of the Youth Wing of the Gorkha National Liberation Party (GNLF), the party that had led the violent agitation for Gorkhaland under the leadership of Subhas Ghising, the chairman of DGHC (Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council), in the 1980s.

⁵³ <http://www.nepalitimes.com/issue/168/Travel/5253>, last viewed September 27, 2011.

Political Background to the Darjeeling Carnival

When I met Ajay Edwards Pradhan on October 9, 2010, he made it clear that the objective of the Carnival was mainly to boost Darjeeling's tourism, which had dwindled considerably since the late 1990s, to revive the past glory of Darjeeling hills, and to mobilize the youths in a positive way. Focusing on the musical side, Pradhan said the Carnival was geared towards bringing together the past musicians of Darjeeling hills, whom the present generation had largely forgotten. Pradhan felt this would help the youths of Darjeeling, who suffer from a sense of inferiority in relation to their Indian counterparts. Knowing the richness of their heritage, according to Pradhan, would help Gorkha youths take pride in themselves and their culture. Recalling the "good old days of Darjeeling," Pradhan explained that Darjeeling's deteriorating political, economic, and education systems had the Gorkha youths feeling frustrated and depressed. As a result, they had started to adopt "bad habits" to vent their resentment against the failing system. "Bad habits" here implied drugs, prostitution, vandalizing public properties, bullying innocent people, and demanding bribes from local shopkeepers. Pradhan informed me that the youths of Darjeeling were so demoralized and angry in the late 1990s that they had become a high-strung volatile lot, who could turn violent at the drop of a hat.

The main contributing factor, according to Pradhan, was the West Bengal government's attitude towards the Gorkhas. Although the Bengal government had promised greater representation and equality when the Tripartite Agreement was signed in 1988, much was left to be desired in practical terms and desired measures. Pradhan accused the West Bengal government of double standards and said their promises had always been hollow. He felt the Bengali *babus*, by being insensitive to the woes of the Gorkhas, had made a mockery of Gorkha

sentiment by preventing the DGHC from functioning to its full capacity. Becoming visibly upset as he recalled those days, Pradhan went on to explain how, despite all the political jargon of the 1988 Tripartite Agreement, the Bengali bureaucrats had managed to deny DGHC some of the basic executive powers. Some of them were the right to (a) appoint or even recommend the recruitment of grade four office staff such as sweepers, peons (day-laborers), *malis* (gardeners), and clerks; (b) have a say in regularizing the wages and benefits of the tea-leaf pickers in the local tea industry; (c) have a C.S.C. (College Service Commission) and an S.S.C. (School Service Commission) set up in Darjeeling hills for recruiting teachers for local schools and colleges; (d) exercise full administrative and financial duties in the nineteen departments under the DGHC; and (e) request reserved quotas for hill students in some of West Bengal's well-known institutes in Kolkata.

Pradhan felt that by compelling Ghising to keep running to Kolkata for every little thing, from recruiting *malis* (gardeners) to building roads, repairing landslide-hit areas, and maintaining tourist sites (which happen to provide the major chunk of income for Darjeeling locals), the West Bengal government was making its point – the DGHC was not “autonomous” in the real sense. Rather, ironic as it may sound, Pradhan said the DGHC was actually serving to boost the Bengali psyche by underlining who was the boss in this game of control and power. Recalling official visits to the Writers Building⁵⁴ in Kolkata on a couple of occasions as the president of the Gorkha National Youth Front, Pradhan described how he and other party members were often barred from meetings held between Ghising and the former chief minister of West Bengal, Jyoti

⁵⁴ Writers Building is the secretariat house of the state of West Bengal. It was initially built in 1780 and has undergone several modifications since then. At first, the Writers Building served to house the office of “writers” or junior servants of the East India Company (<http://kolkata.clickindia.com/tourism/writersbuilding.html>, last viewed May 15, 2012).

Basu. Ghising would be whisked off by the officials at Writers Building while he and his colleagues were left twiddling their thumbs. It was soon apparent that transparency was not the name of the game. It showed in the way Darjeeling hills began to reel severely from mismanagement of funds as numerous projects came to an abrupt halt. As Pradhan astutely pointed out, the West Bengal government weighed the Gorkha cause solely as a socio-economic problem and hence assumed that providing funds to DGHC was the answer to solving the Gorkha identity crisis. However, Pradhan said that the Bengal government's extreme greed for power and control did not even allow for the financial aid to reach the DGHC. By highlighting the West Bengal government's paltry attention to the grievances of the Gorkhas, Pradhan justified his stance that "the only way out for the Gorkhas was to learn to take things in their own hands and not be dependent on the Bengal government to solve their problems" (Interview with Ajay Pradhan, October 10, 2010). In this endeavor he believed the youths of Darjeeling had a leading role to play and hence needed to be mobilized for the task.

As the president of the Gorkha National Liberation Youth Front, Pradhan took it upon himself to send out feelers suggesting the organizing of a cultural festival in Darjeeling hills. At that time Pradhan recalled that he had no specific name in mind for the festival, but as time went by he and a few of his friends decided to call this festival "Darjeeling Carnival – 2003." Pradhan's idea was readily accepted by the youths, who volunteered in large numbers to make this project a success. In fact, a documentary was even made to reflect the upbeat mood of all those actively involved in the organizing of the Carnival. The film was called "In Tune with Darjeeling" and can be accessed via YouTube.⁵⁵ Recalling the enthusiasm of the youths, who

⁵⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne6HwhEWq80>, last viewed 09/21/2011.

worked tirelessly day and night to make this event successful, Pradhan explained that although it was initially thought of as a music festival, the outpouring of ideas and the zeal to make it happen were contagious. Soon the Carnival extended to becoming a culture festival that highlighted the food, folk art, flora and fauna, and historical heritage of Darjeeling.

Musical Background to the Darjeeling Carnival – 2003

Moving on to the musical aspect of the Carnival, I met Deep Arora on December 7, 2010.⁵⁶ He was actively involved in organizing and performing for the Darjeeling Carnival – 2003. Arora is a restaurateur by profession and was brought up in Darjeeling. As a young man he performed for a well-known local Western rock-band called “Forbidden Fruit,” but since the band broke up in 1985, he has remained a musician who enjoys listening to music and strumming his guitar during his free time. Upon learning that I was interested to know about the Carnival, he was extremely happy and obliged me with several anecdotes regarding how he and his friends made it all happen. Arora fondly recalled his restaurant providing free food to over a hundred volunteers for two weeks and commented that the overall ambiance was so upbeat that he and his friends were sure this project would be fruitful. Arora described this enthusiasm as a “positive vibe” that Darjeeling and the youths of Darjeeling were experiencing after a long period of pessimism. He happily remembered how frantic they were when they realized the funds were low and had to organize a last-minute door-to-door fund-raising campaign twenty-four hours before the Carnival began. He also recalled working tirelessly for hours at a stretch and the numerous obstacles they faced in obtaining good audio-video equipment from Kolkata.

⁵⁶ All information in this section comes from my interview with Deep Arora in Darjeeling on December 7, 2010.

At this time Arora began to reminisce about his own musical past in the 1970s and the early 1980s, when he and his buddies often had to make do with hand-me-down guitars, badly repaired drum-sets, cracked violins, carelessly taped-up congas, and bad amplifiers. He also said that he and his band had to wait for several months before they could get hold of LPs and/or cassettes of Western rock bands that they liked to listen to and emulate. In comparison, Arora felt today's youths were lucky in that they can obtain good instruments, good sound equipment, and an unlimited supply of good music at a click of a button. However, despite all these advantages, he felt that today's generation lacked the dedication and the discipline to make it big in the Indian music scene. Arora pointed out that the young Gorkhas of Darjeeling, being unable to make it in the Indian music industry, often crossed over to Nepal, where the booming Nepalese popular music industry provides them a lucrative substitute and easy recognition – something they could never imagine receiving in India. As an example, he mentioned Abhaya Subba, the lead singer of “Steam Injuns,” one of Nepal's most popular rock bands.

Abhaya Subba was born and raised in Darjeeling and encouraged by her father to pursue music as her profession.⁵⁷ Although Abhaya's father could not devote himself to learning music due to his hectic work schedule, he nevertheless extended support to the musicians of Darjeeling, who often met at his place to perform music during the weekends (Interview with Deep Arora, December 7, 2010). Growing up in this atmosphere, Abhaya began to sing at an early age, and after graduating from college worked as a radio jockey for Times FM and Hits FM in New Delhi. Later, Abhaya joined Kantipur FM Radio in Nepal and thereafter made Nepal her home. Arora bemoaned her loss and said with young talents like Abhaya Subba immigrating to Nepal,

⁵⁷ <http://www.wavemag.com.np/issue/article2956.html>, last viewed September 21, 2011.

Darjeeling hills was being drained of its talent. Talking about Abhaya Subba's band "The Steam Injuns," Arora mentioned that she had named her band to reflect her roots, the place where she belonged – Darjeeling, the land of chugging steam engine trains nicknamed "toy-trains." He recalled that she had mentioned this to him when she formed her band in Kathmandu in 2003.

Arora envisioned the Carnival as a platform to showcase young talents of Darjeeling, who could use it as a launching-pad to make it big in the Indian music industry. Here Arora mentioned Louis Banks, a well-known figure in the Indian music scene. Born Dambar Bahadur Budaprithi, Banks was born and raised in Darjeeling, but now lives in Mumbai.⁵⁸ He is one of India's most versatile music composers and finest jazz pianists. Banks was invited to perform in the Darjeeling Carnival, and he did not dishearten his Darjeeling fans. He came and stayed in Darjeeling for the entire ten-day program and, like Arora, was extremely happy to see the budding talents of Darjeeling perform at the Carnival. They were discussing opening a certified music school in Darjeeling, which would be affiliated with the Trinity College of Music, London, recalled Arora.

Music at the Darjeeling Carnival – 2003

The Darjeeling Carnival – 2003 primarily showcased Nepali *adhunik*/modern music, jazz, and Western popular music, with Nepali folk music being presented as secondary music of Darjeeling hills. One of Darjeeling's oldest music bands, "The Hillians" (founded in 1959 and disbanded in 1966), also re-grouped after thirty-seven years to present its most popular numbers.

⁵⁸ Louis Banks' father was a trumpeter, who worked in Kolkata for a European band. He changed his name to George Banks and his son's name from Dambar Bahadur Budaprithi to Louis Banks. Within the Indian context, the name change would imply that the family converted to Christianity and adopted Anglicized names. According to Arora and from what I had heard from my parents, Banks was born in Darjeeling, but his website, <http://www.louizbanks.com/bio>, states that he was born in Kolkata.

Growing up I remember my father mentioning this group as the “Sikkimese Beatles,” who became widely popular after performing at the Sikkim Chogyal’s (king’s) wedding in 1965. I came to know from Arora that it was the *Times* magazine that had given them the epithet “Sikkimese Beatles,” a decade before Sikkim merged with the Indian union in 1975.

Looking at some of the videos and documentaries of the Darjeeling Carnival – 2003, especially the one titled *In Tune with Darjeeling*, it seems the overlying theme of the Carnival was mainly to rekindle “fond memories of a bygone era – *gora sahibs*, tea gardens, and the toy train.”⁵⁹ This documentary mentioned, but did not elaborate upon, the regional folk music of the people of Darjeeling; nor did it talk about the underlying struggle of Gorkha identity in India. Instead, the documentary mainly portrays Darjeeling as a post-colonial hill-station that is still strongly in the grip of its colonial legacy. The main highlight of the Carnival each evening was music performed by local bands from Darjeeling hills, both old and new, doing rock and popular numbers in English and a few in Nepali, with the main instruments being chiefly guitars, violins, drums, saxophones, congas, and keyboards. As mentioned earlier, the Hillians, who had regrouped to perform for the Carnival, introduced themselves to the audience in English and recalled the good old days of working in the British Gorkha regiment.⁶⁰ In fact, as the documentary rolls on, one of the band’s guitarists, M. M. Gurung, even mocks the Gorkhaland movement, saying that during the 1980s agitation everybody was caught up in the demand for Gorkhaland – even stray cats and dogs of Darjeeling.⁶¹ Louis Banks, who was the star attraction at the Carnival, also performed jazz and popular indipop numbers with his band.

⁵⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne6HwhEWq80&feature=related> (1:27-1:37), last viewed September 21, 2011.

⁶⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne6HwhEWq80>, last viewed September 22, 2011.

⁶¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-K4fDgeOqSY&feature=related>, last viewed September 21, 2011.

In addition, the Carnival portrayed the religious diversity of Darjeeling hills, highlighting the indigenous rituals of the ethnic groups that comprise the Gorkha community like the Lepchas, Sherpas, Yolmos, Rais/Kirats, Tamangs, etc., and included some Nepali folk dances. English was the predominant language used by the hosts moderating the music program. Also, the Carnival was hailed as apolitical: no political party, it was alleged, was involved in any way in organizing the Carnival. It was stated that the Carnival was a way for the people of Darjeeling to express their desire and expectation for a better Darjeeling (Interview with Ajay Edwards Pradhan, October 10, 2010). Suren Rai, one of the Carnival organizers I briefly met on December 10, 2010 in Darjeeling, proclaimed that he had never witnessed the Darjeeling public so united in their hope for a better tomorrow. The Carnival – 2003 was a huge success and, according to Arora, left the people of Darjeeling feeling renewed and alive once again in anticipation of a better future.

Darjeeling Carnival – 2004

The Darjeeling Carnival – 2004 kicked off on November 7 and ended on November 16.⁶² Once again the Carnival spirit enlivened Darjeeling hills, and since my husband Dillon and I were in India for our “Indian marriage ceremony,” we decided to visit Darjeeling and attend the Carnival as well. Darjeeling town looked busy, and the tourists seemed to be pouring in from everywhere. Our hotel manager informed us that the tourists, whose numbers had gone down for the past few years, were returning to Darjeeling once again. He also told us he was having a good tourist season that year (2004) and that at times hoteliers even felt stretched to their limits in

⁶² <http://www.wavemag.com.np/issue/article654.html>, last viewed 9/21/2011.

accommodating their last-minute arrivals. I vividly remember remarking to Dillon that I had never seen Darjeeling so over-crowded, as I jostled my way through the overflowing quaint streets trying my best to keep my handbag from trailing behind me. Almost every restaurant we went to had a long wait time, and cafés were full, with people drinking tea standing outside since all the chairs were taken.

As for the content of the musical performance, Carnival – 2004 showcased the same genres of music that Carnival – 2003 had set in motion. The predominantly Western music presentations were accompanied by a few Nepali folk dances and stage shows highlighting shamanistic rituals of *jhakri* (shamans), which many people of Darjeeling believe in. In addition, with the Carnival taking place around the time when Christmas celebrations begin in Darjeeling, the musical presentations included the enactment of the story of Jesus, followed by hymns sung in his praise. The Christian community of Darjeeling and students from missionary schools around town participated in this day's event. The other days' presentations comprised a variety of activities such as sit-and-draw art competitions, quizzes, recitations, debates, flower shows, art exhibitions, and knitting competitions during the day, and music programs during the evenings. However, I did notice the music program always concluded with Western-influenced rock bands (both local and invited) performing English and Nepali numbers to the thunderous applause of the gathered audience. Given this situation, the one or two folk dances presented at the beginning of the program were like a “starter” that whetted the appetite of the audience eagerly waiting for the rock music to take center-stage every evening in the ten-day-long celebrations. Nothing related to Gorkha cultural identity was highlighted at Carnival – 2004, where the overall theme was nostalgia for a bygone Darjeeling, when all was well, good, beautiful, and blissful.

Darjeeling Carnival – 2005 and 2006

For the years 2005 and 2006, based on my discussions with Ajay Edwards Pradhan and Deep Arora, and from pictures and posts from various websites and blogs,⁶³ I observed that the content of the musical performance remained, in general, the same. Rock music was predominant, interspersed with some folk or indigenous dances, talent show contests, Land Rover cross-country rides, and art shows. In short, the content had not changed much other than inviting tribal communities from other parts of India to present their indigenous/tribal culture and music. For example, in 2005 Sidis from Gujarat, Bhils from Madhya Pradesh, and tribals from Bengal were invited to participate in the carnival. Also, 2006 being the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Himalayan Darjeeling Railway, floats resembling the Darjeeling train were displayed, making it the most recurrent theme of the 2006 Carnival celebrations.⁶⁴

However, despite Darjeeling Carnival's overall success in bringing people together for a ten-day-long grand event from 2003 to 2006, there arose doubts as to whether the carnival organizing committee would be able to raise enough funds for Carnival – 2007. Pradhan told me that the lack of funds coupled with the changing political atmosphere in Darjeeling hills made it impossible to organize Carnival – 2007. Unexpectedly the changing political scene in Darjeeling was initiated by a reality television show. The shift that unfolded thereafter was something neither the media nor the Gorkhas could have envisioned – a television reality singing competition called “Indian Idol” paving the way for the exit of Subhas Ghising from Darjeeling hills and the emergence of another leader in the history of Gorkha struggle. I shall discuss this in detail in chapter three.

⁶³ <http://darjinitiative.tripod.com/id4.html>; <http://www.usefilm.com/image/977682.html>; <http://www.kalimpong.info/2006/11/22/aircel-presents-darjeeling-carnival-2006>, last viewed 9/21/2011.

⁶⁴ <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/news/Top-Story/darjeeling-carnival-begins.html>, last viewed 9/21/2011.

Ominous Changes in 2005 and 2006

While the Carnival festivities began to gather speed in Darjeeling hills each year between 2003 and 2006 in the month of November, Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, which had until then arranged modest *shovayatra* (processions/rallies) on the occasion of *Phulpati*, the seventh day in the annual ten-day-long festival of *Dasai/Dussehra*, began to step up their presentations as well. *Dasai* is one of the most popular Hindu festivals in Darjeeling hills and celebrated by most people from all walks of life and different religious backgrounds.⁶⁵ Durga, the Mother Goddess, is worshipped in this festival, which essentially symbolizes the triumph of good over evil and also *Shakti*, the divine female energy. So on *Phulpati shovayatra*, young girls dressed up as Durga are taken around town accompanied by folk music and religious songs (*bhajan*). But by 2005, the procession began to showcase less of the “Hindu” aspects and more of the “tribal” or indigenous shamanistic beliefs of the Darjeeling hill people. “Hindu” here implies the worshipping of Hindu idols, celebrating Hindu festivals like *Dussehra* and *Diwali*, having Brahmins officiate at religious and life rituals (birth, marriage, death, etc.), visiting Hindu temples, and married women wearing vermillion on their hair partings.

This stood in sharp contrast to the non-Hindu or “indigenous” practice of animism, shamanism, nature worship, and women sporting different symbolic items to denote their married status instead of the vermillion in their hair parting. This change from Hinduism towards tribalism occurred after Subhas Ghising ordered all Gorkhas to stop worshipping Hindu idols and begin paying obeisance to stones and trees,⁶⁶ to underline their tribal identity. Given this situation, the Gorkhas in the hills were forced to follow Ghising’s orders, but Gorkhas living in

⁶⁵ http://www.darjeelingnews.net/darjeeling_festivals_dashain.html, last viewed 9/21/2011.

⁶⁶ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1051011/asp/siliguri/story_5343295.asp, last viewed 9/22/2011.

the *terai* plains of Siliguri and Duars openly defied his diktat. They went ahead and worshipped Durga as usual. Local and national newspapers reported this bizarre edict from Ghising, and soon the “indigenous issue” garnered a lot of public attention in regard to Darjeeling hills.⁶⁷ Likewise, the newspapers carried stories of the *Phulpati* celebration in 2005 and 2006 with reports of Gorkhas worshipping *shila* (stones) and shamans leading the *shovayatra* performing their spiritualistic rituals (Figures 2.7, 2.8). In addition, the ten-day-long celebration of *Dasai* was limited to three days,⁶⁸ with all ethnic groups encouraged to showcase their indigenous culture in terms of dress, rituals, and religious beliefs. For example, ethnic groups like the Kirat/Rais, the Tamangs, and the Yolmos, etc., had to showcase their animistic beliefs in the *Phulpati* procession and shun Hindu-centric practices.

This imposed categorization of Gorkhas as being essentially a non-Hindu community caused extreme confusion within the Gorkha community, which is known for its syncretic and liberal approach to all religious practices and beliefs. Further, with the dominant “middle-caste” Mongolian Gorkhas and the high-caste and low-caste Aryan Gorkhas practicing a mishmash of Hinduism, Buddhism, shamanistic beliefs, and frequent inter-caste marriages, the unexpected diktat from Ghising to shun idol-worship and other Hindu rituals came as a rude shock. This plan of action was motivated by the fact that by showcasing Gorkhas as an indigenous or tribal community, Ghising could have Darjeeling hills be declared a “tribal area.” By doing so, according to various newspaper articles and blogs, Ghising was conspiring with the West Bengal

⁶⁷ <http://www.east-himalaya.com/news/2005/october/11100501n.htm>, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1051006/asp/siliguri/story_5320125.asp, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1051011/asp/siliguri/story_5343295.asp, last viewed 9/22/2011.

⁶⁸ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1051006/asp/siliguri/story_5320125.asp, last viewed 9/22/2011.

government to squelch the century-old demand for Gorkhaland.⁶⁹ Likewise, Ghising was reproached by the public for being a “traitor” and delaying the long-awaited dream of Gorkhaland by at least a hundred years. Although having Darjeeling hills as a tribal area under the Sixth Schedule would mean conferring more administrative powers on the DGHC, it also implied that Darjeeling hills would remain forever a protected “tribal area” within and under the jurisdiction of the West Bengal government.



⁶⁹<http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/news/news/Darjeeling-Hills-and-the-Project-of-Sixth-Schedule.html>, <http://www.prsindia.org/billtrack/the-sixth-schedule-to-the-constitution-amendment-bill-2007-149/>, <http://www.india-forums.com/news/politics/326017-people-angry-over-ghisingh-sixth-schedule-demand-gjm.htm>, last viewed 9/22/2011.



Figures 2.7 and 2.8: Shamans leading *Phulpati* procession in 2005. Photos by Bashu Isaiah
Lorung Rai, Darjeeling, October 2005

The Sixth Schedule in the Indian Constitution was intended to better the lot of “backward” tribal communities by creating autonomous districts/councils for the tribal communities of northeast India such as Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.⁷⁰ Having this provision of a “council within the state,” the government of India was making sure that the interests of backward communities were safeguarded and not trampled upon by the dominant cultural groups of each state. However, it also implied that the councils had to be “under the protection” of the Central Government of India, New Delhi and the state governments, and could

⁷⁰ www.education.nic.in/articles/sixthschedule.doc, last viewed 9/22/2011.

not exist as self-governing bodies in themselves. So the autonomous council had to be a district within a state in which the tribal communities could practice their indigenous ways of protecting their land and water, agriculture, livestock, handloom cottage industries, social customs, etc. Thus to implement the Sixth Schedule in Darjeeling hills meant (a) to categorize Gorkhas as tribals, or a “backward community”; b) to hinder the creation of a separate state for Gorkhas by limiting them within a council/district under the West Bengal government; and (c) to create a permanent rift within the multi-ethnic Gorkha community so that Gorkhas could not unite to work towards a separate home-state in India. Hence, to have the Gorkhas categorized as a “backward community” was interpreted by Gorkhas as an insult from the Bengali government.

It became a topic that engulfed Darjeeling hills during 2005-2006, and everyone was caught debating the pros and cons of the Sixth Schedule. It may be important to highlight that the demand for the Sixth Schedule was also motivated by a larger political event gripping India in 1990. That year, Rajeev Goswami, a student of Delhi University, publicly attempted self-immolation to protest against the “Mandal Commission.” The Commission was set up in 1979 under Prime Minister Morarji Desai’s government to reduce social and educational backwardness among Other Backward Classes (OBCs), who constituted 52% of the population of India (Maheshwari 1994: 21; Sarikar 1994).⁷¹ The plan was to have reserved seats in schools and government jobs for OBCs so that they could be integrated within India’s mainstream society. This caused an uproar, and those opposing the commission argued it would lead to social, religious, and caste divisions due to reservations in schools and other sectors. They also argued that the commission’s data was compromised, and with the only *dalit* (backward caste)

⁷¹ <http://www.pucl.org/from-archives/Dalit-tribal/mandal-2.htm>, last viewed May 8, 2012.

member of the commission, L. R. Naik, refusing to sign the final report for fear the “upper backward classes would monopolize the Mandal jobs,” tensions began to mount.⁷² In addition, after the Goswami incident, a series of self-immolations carried out by college and university students led to Surinder Singh Chauhan being the first to die in September 24, 1990.⁷³

Soon the nation was in uproar and the citizens of India were divided between either supporting or opposing the implementation of the Mandal Commission, which cost the then Prime Minister of India, V. P. Singh, his office (1989-1990).⁷⁴ Despite all the political tussle and protests, the Supreme Court of India decided to uphold the OBC reservation bill in 2008. Thus fueled by the national drama unfolding towards securing reservations for the OBCs in India, Subhas Ghising put forward the grievances of the Gorkhas along the same line of argument and demanded inclusion in the Sixth Schedule. Ghising thought the central issue of poor socio-economic development and lack of proper education facilities in Darjeeling hills could be tackled by identifying Gorkhas as “tribal” under the category of OBC. Thus, with Darjeeling hills torn between Ghising’s supporters and those who did not believe in the implementation of the Sixth Schedule, the winds of political change in Darjeeling hills began to gather speed. Political leaders of Darjeeling began to speak up in opposition to the Sixth Schedule, and the cultural scene of Darjeeling slowly began to come alive. One of the hallmarks of this period was the launching of a satirical play titled *Bhanu ra Pala* in 2008. Directed, produced, and written by actor Lalit Goley, who lives in Kalimpong, it became one of the much acclaimed plays of Darjeeling hills after almost two decades of silence.

⁷² http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2006-04-12/edit-page/27800797_1_mandal-report-mandal-commission-obcs, last viewed May 8, 2012.

⁷³ <http://www.whitec0de.com/india-against-current-reservation-system/>, last viewed May 8, 2012.

⁷⁴ V. P. Singh had to step down just a year after he was sworn in as the seventh Prime Minister of India in 1989.

I happened to be in Darjeeling on October 31, 2010, to watch the play *Bhanu ra Pala* at the Gymkhana Club, Darjeeling. In this play, Goley clearly mocks Subhas Ghising and his idea of the Sixth Schedule for the Gorkhas as tribal or OBCs. This idea is made clear when the character of Pala, acted by Goley himself, points out how the triple celebration of the Sixth Schedule in Darjeeling hills, commemorated by Ghising and his followers in 2005 and 2006, had reduced the Gorkhas to “nakedness.” By this Goley tries to imply that the first celebration relieved Gorkhas of their upper garment, the second celebration of their lower garment, and the third of their undergarments! This is because in India being “tribal” is directly related to primitiveness, and tribal communities are considered to be “antiquated” like jungle dwellers (*bana bashi*). It is a common belief that tribals wear either nothing or just animal skins or leaves, use basic tools for hunting and gathering food, and practice animism and shamanism. With this being the over-riding Indian concept, the Gorkhas unanimously opposed the imposition of the Sixth Schedule in Darjeeling hills. It was the last straw for the Darjeeling Gorkhas, who had endured enough of Ghising’s dictatorial and eccentric politics over the previous eighteen years (1988-2006). There followed general outrage, and with other political parties of Darjeeling hills such as the All India Gorkha League (AIGL), the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists (CPRM), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Congress coming forward to oppose the Sixth Schedule, Darjeeling hills was once again engulfed in uproar.

The public, who had been silenced up to this point by the terror tactics of Ghising, began to voice their dissent, so that Ghising’s goal to make Darjeeling hills a “tribal area” faced serious opposition. As I shall describe in Chapter 3, in a quite unexpected way, music and reality television became the catalyst that finally evicted Ghising from power in Darjeeling hills. It also

ushered in a new Gorkha leader, Bimal Gurug, whose political party, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM), launched on 7 October 2007, has promoted a non-violent movement based on Gandhian principles to realize the ultimate establishment of a Gorkha state within India. In comparison to the violent agitation led by Subhas Ghising in the 1980s, Bimal Gurung stressed non-violence and adopted non-cooperation tactics against the West Bengal government that were similar to Mahatma Gandhi's strategy during India's freedom movement. Likewise, the image of Gandhi came to occupy the center-stage in all GJMM's public meetings, peace rallies, and hunger strikes, which always began by paying obeisance to the Father of the Nation.⁷⁵ Soon Bimal Gurung had got ex-councilors of DGHC and Gorkha intellectuals on his side supporting his non-violent movement, something Ghising had studiously avoided doing during his one-man rule over Darjeeling hills (1988-2007). This move gave Gurung much credibility among the masses as a leader who could bring together both experience and intellect in his party. In addition, Gurung took the initiative to unite all five to ten million Gorkhas living in India.

Thus with ideas pouring in from Gorkhas living outside Darjeeling hills, the issue of Gorkha identity was able to garner significant media attention and along with it promote the revival of Gorkha culture and Gorkha traditional music as well. It paved the way for another chapter in the history of Darjeeling hills and the struggle for "Gorkhaland" in representing Gorkha identity through traditional music from 2008 on. Between this intense political turmoil that lasted from 2007 to mid-2008 and the organizing committee's difficulty in raising the required funds, there was no Darjeeling Carnival – 2007. Soon, however, a completely transformed and extended month-long version of the carnival arose from the ashes. This version

⁷⁵ Mahatma Gandhi is fondly remembered as the father of the Indian nation.

was the one in which the shifting sands of change and/or revisions of Gorkha identity were played out through subtle changes in repertoire, presentation, and performance manifesting themselves from one year to the next.

The Month-long Darjeeling Music Festival – 2008, 2009, 2010

Following the rise of Bimal Gurung as the undisputed leader of the Gorkhas, a new era began to unfold in Darjeeling hills. This period heralded a trend that promoted tradition as a way of representing Gorkha identity. Music-wise, the staging of month-long music festivals began with reverberations of a cultural renaissance that called for “going back to the roots,” beyond Darjeeling’s colonial past. Musical and cultural negotiations that ensued from 2008 on walked a tightrope between political ideology, imagination, and utopia. They brilliantly illustrate how change is perhaps the only constant criterion when it comes to showcasing identity via identification. I refer to “identification” here as “a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption” (Hall 2008: 03), which means that delineating identity through identification is never a “proper fit.” Rather, it either over-determines or assumes a lack. In other words, the anxiety of defining identity makes it an impulsive utopian act that is quick to mark and unmark boundaries by creating “frontier effects” to consolidate the identity-making process as soon as possible.

For example, when the culture movement was stated by GJMM in 2008, it was determined that Gorkhas were overly influenced by Western culture, which was detrimental to their identity as Indians. Hence, the culture movement aimed to “bring back” the Gorkhas to their roots. In this endeavor, the GJMM, in its anxiety to create an Indian identity for the

Gorkhas, over-assumed India's ethno-linguistic model for self-determination, thereby overriding the colonial aspect of Darjeeling's history and culture. Instead, creating Gorkha identity via identification with other ethno-linguistic groups of India like Bengalis, Marathis, Punjabis, etc., the Gorkhas felt they had to display specific dress, music, cuisine, language, etc. as part of their cultural heritage in order to be identified with India's multi-cultural paradigm. It was rationalized that by showcasing Gorkhas as a specific ethno-cultural or ethno-linguistic group different from the Bengalis of West Bengal, the demand for Gorkhaland would be justified as per India's policy for ethno-linguistic self-determinism. Hence, GJMM ordered all Gorkhas to wear their ethnic dress (*chaubandi choli-phariya*⁷⁶ for women and *daura-suruwal*⁷⁷ for men) during *Dussehra* and *Diwali* to show that Gorkhas were different from Bengalis.

However, representing "tradition" became a questionable ideology when the general secretary of GJMM, Roshan Giri, stated "those who did not adhere to the dress code risked finding themselves in an awkward position although this was not to be construed as social ostracism."⁷⁸ Giri also went on to say GJMM's policy regarding a dress code for the entire Gorkha community for a month during *Dasai* was to "highlight that they are culturally different and do not resemble other ethnic communities in West Bengal."⁷⁹ Following this announcement by the GJMM, there were reports of some unfortunate events when those who did not wish to comply with the "dress-code" were accosted by GJMM supporters and smeared with black paint.⁸⁰ When some of India's leading newspapers like *The Telegraph*, *Statesman*, *Himalay Darpan*, and numerous television channels reported the incidents, GJMM softened its stance by

⁷⁶ *Chaubandi choli* is an upper garment or blouse and *phariya* is a nine-meter long sari that is worn draped around the waist.

⁷⁷ *Daura* is a top garment like a long-sleeve t-shirt and *suruwal* is a type of tight pants.

⁷⁸ <http://www.hindu.com/2008/10/11/stories/2008101160781300.htm>, last, viewed December 11, 2011.

⁷⁹ <http://www.hindu.com/2008/10/11/stories/2008101160781300.htm>, last, viewed December 11, 2011.

⁸⁰ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1081015/jsp/siliguri/story_9968368.jsp, last viewed December 11, 2011.

claiming it had “requested,” not “ordered,” that all Gorkhas wear the traditional dress. One of GJMM’s foremost leaders, Harka Bahadur Chhetri, now an elected member of the state legislative assembly (MLA) representing Darjeeling hills, came out with a statement that “wearing traditional dress is just a strategy to show that we are different from the rest of Bengal. People must understand this significance and not think that wearing the traditional dress is tantamount to identity. The issue of identity is complex. If we understand the significance of the strategy, wearing the dress will be more enjoyable. After all, *daura-suruwal* is merely another dress.”⁸¹ Chhetri further said that “[we/Gorkhas] must be liberal as a society. I have personally noticed that our society is getting intolerant and restless. We have to come across as a tolerant society.”⁸²

This specific incident reflects how the anxiety-ridden process of identification often becomes an impulsive act that is quick to judge and draw boundaries. In the haste of wanting to justify its stance, performing identity via identification morphed to become a war of positions played out strategically for ideological motives. Shouldering the age-old burden of representing Gorkha identity, GJMM’s over-determination of Gorkhaness was apparent in stressing Gorkha traditional dress while undermining Darjeeling’s colonial past and its position as the most favored location by Western tourists, whose perennial presence in Darjeeling hills is a closely woven part of Gorkha life. Likewise, influential factors in highlighting prototypical Gorkha folk music also became an over-determination of tradition that grossly undermined the presence of Western music in Gorkha culture. In terms of music, I explore the discursive processes of

⁸¹ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091109/jsp/siliguri/story_11716352.jsp, last viewed December 11, 2011.

⁸² http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091109/jsp/siliguri/story_11716352.jsp, last viewed December 11, 2011.

articulating Gorkha traditional music in the month-long music festival.⁸³ As stated above, with the dominant understanding of ethno-linguistic self-determination influencing GJMM's strategies, music performance in the 2008 month-long festival was mobilized to showcase Gorkha traditional music. This move was underlined to show that Gorkhas did not perform *Rabindrasangeet*, West Bengal's most popular music genre to portray Bengali culture.⁸⁴ Instead, Gorkha music had its own folk genres that were different from Bengali music in terms of language, instrumentation, composition, and execution.

Month-long Darjeeling Music Festival – 2008

The “apolitical” 2008 music festival, under the aegis of “Gorkha Kala Sansthan,” a cultural organization of GJMM, kicked off on *Phulpati*, October 6, 2008, in Darjeeling hills with a *shovayatra* (procession) amidst much fanfare. As reported by *The Telegraph*, GJMM took care of all the logistics in organizing the festivities.⁸⁵ The 2008 *shovayatra* in Darjeeling began around 10:30 in the morning near the Darjeeling Motor Stand and had everybody wearing *chaubandi choli* and *phariya*, and *daura-suruwal*. I noticed that Darjeeling's non-Gorkha minority communities like the Marwaris, Biharis, and Bhojpuris were participating in the *shovayatra* as well. People carried colorful banners and sang and danced to folksongs accompanied by instruments like the *madal* (drum) and the *panchey baja* or the *naumati baja*

⁸³ The month-long festival has undergone many a name-change between 2008 and 2010, for example *Gorkha Sanskritic Utsav*, *Mahinawyapi Gorkha Sanskritic Utsav*, *Gorkha Mahadasai Sanskritic Utsav*, etc. However, for the sake of convenience, I refer to it as “Darjeeling month-long music festival.”

⁸⁴ Songs written by India's first Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, are referred to as *Rabindrasangeet*. This literally means “Rabindra's music.” It is based on Indian raag music and appropriates the earlier form of vocal dhrupad style of Indian classical music instead of the latter vocal khayal style of Indian classical music. For example, like the dhrupad-style, *Rabindrasangeet* prefers to use pakhawaj instead of the tabla and uses dhrupad talas such as chaताल (12 beats), dhamar (14 beats), sultaal (10 beats), and tivra (7 beats).

⁸⁵ <http://beacononline.wordpress.com/2008/09/27/morcha-for-banner-less-festival-call-for-%E2%80%98apolitical%E2%80%99-dussehra/>, last viewed 9/23/2011.

(five-instrument or nine-instrument ensemble) (Figure 2.11). *Panchei baja* or *naumati baja* are played on auspicious occasions such as victory marches, religious festivities, and weddings. This music ensemble is associated with the *damai* or the tailor caste of the Hindu caste hierarchy. *Naumati baja* includes two *sahnai* (shawm)⁸⁶, two *damaha* or *nagara* (large kettledrum), one *tyamko* (small kettledrum), one *dolakhi* (two-headed drum like the *madal*), one *jhyali* (cymbals), two *narsingha* (long curved horns), and the *panchei baja* has one *dholaki*, one *tyamko*, one *damaha* or *nagara*, one *sahnai*, and one *jhyali* (Figure 2.9).⁸⁷

The *shovayatra* also featured young girls dressed as Goddess Durga, who were taken around Darjeeling town on horseback to bless the land and people with good health, prosperity and happiness. The pomp and show of the 2008 *shovayatra* was extravagant (Figures 2.10 and 2.11) and eye-catching. Many compared it with the sparse festivities of 2005 and 2006 when Ghising had ordered Gorkhas to worship stones and trees to highlight the tribal character of the hills and expressed their satisfaction with the turn of events in 2008.⁸⁸ In fact, so contagious was the festive mood that I even saw some European tourists wearing *chaubandi choli*, *phariya*, and *daura-suruwal*, and a group of Bengali tourists sporting *Dhaka topi*, the traditional hat worn by Gorkha men with pride. There were also members of the secular religious organizations/groups

⁸⁶ A double reed conical oboe, common in North India, West India, Nepal, and Pakistan. It is made of wood, with a metal flare bell at the end. Its sound is said to create a sense of auspiciousness.

⁸⁷ http://www.spinybabbler.org/traditional_arts/music/instruments.php, last viewed December 11, 2011.

⁸⁸ <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/news/News/Hills-reverberate-with-Phulpati-celebrations.html>, last viewed 9/23/2011.

like the *Sai Samaj*,⁸⁹ Art of Living, and the *Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University* (BKWSU),⁹⁰ who were enthusiastically participating in the 2008 *shovayatra*.⁹¹



Figure 2.9: A model of the *naumati baja* ensemble on display at my relative's house in Gangtok, Sikkim. It consists of two *sahnai* (shawm), two *damaha* or *nagara* (large kettledrum), one *tyamko* (small kettledrum), one *dolakhi* (two-headed drum like the *madal*), one *jhyali* (cymbals) and two *narsingha*, long curved horn. Photo by author. Gangtok, March 17, 2012

⁸⁹ The *Sai Samaj* consists of the followers of Sathya Sai Baba, who claimed to be a miracle healer and a spiritual saint from south India.

⁹⁰ The BKWSU is an all female monastic new religious movement in India. It teaches a form of meditation called Raja Yoga, and derives its teachings that are imparted through mediumship and spirit possession.

⁹¹ <http://www.darjeelintimes.com/news/News/Hills-reverberate-with-Phulpati-celebrations.html>, last viewed September 23, 2011.



Figure 2.10: Girls dressed as *Durga* in *Phulpati* procession in Darjeeling town. Photo by author.

Darjeeling, October 2008



Figure 2.11: *Naumati baja* at *Phulpati*. Photo by author. Darjeeling, October 2008

The month-long music program began on October 7, 2008 and ended on November 6, 2008. The time for the music program was 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm in the evening, and it unfolded simultaneously at several locations in Darjeeling hills – Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kalimpong, and Mirik. The festival primarily showcased Nepali folk music with performances by invited Nepalese artists performing for the Gorkha audience. They performed western Himalayan folk music such as *dohari geet* (dialogue/debate songs), which ironically are not sung or performed in Darjeeling hills. Also, modern Nepali songs and dances presented by Nepalese performers, although popular in Darjeeling hills, were not composed or performed by Gorkha musicians or singers. Nevertheless, the month-long music festival continued with invited Nepalese artists taking center-stage, with local institutes like the Himalaya Kala Mandir (HKM) and ethnic organizations like the Lepcha Association, Gurung Samaj, Kirat Sangh, Darjeeling Tibetan Association, All India Tamang Buddhist Association, etc. performing their musics on designated days.⁹² It was a no-brainer to observe that musical evenings with professional Nepalese artists were more successful in terms of audience reception than the local music presentations.

As I witnessed one local performance by the Lepcha Association on September 29, 2008, I happened to overhear a group of young ladies, two of them Gurung, one Rai, and one Magar, bemoaning the quality of the presentation and even making fun of the performance. However, they were also quick to point out that Nepal and Nepalese musicians had the advantage of having a Nepali music industry while Darjeeling did not, even though Darjeeling was more economically developed than “rural” Nepal. As I got drawn in to their conversation, I recognized the “betwixtness” of a love-hate relationship that I commonly perceived between Gorkhas and

⁹² <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Himalaya-Kala-Mandir-Darjeeling/249527281726225>, last viewed 9/23/2011.

the Nepalese. Having grown up in a family who proudly identified themselves as “town-bred” Gorkheys in contrast to people from “rural” Nepal, I had nevertheless identified moments when my family felt the lack of ruralness when faced with the dilemma of portraying their cultural identity. It brought home to me the essence of a borderland existence where fractured identities, shifting alliances, layered histories, bilingual strategies, hybridity, and an unspoken desire to be like the dominant group were always at play. Identifying thus with the anxiety and the “absolute despot duality [of existing in the margins] that says we are able to be only one or the other” (Anzaldua 2007:41) has motivated me to work on music and borderland identity for my doctoral research.

Month-long Music Festival – 2009

In 2009, as a Ph.D. student, I again arrived in Darjeeling hills to conduct pilot fieldwork on the festival for a month. I aimed to observe the proceedings of the month-long music festival, meet organizers, and lay the groundwork for more elaborate research in 2010. As usual, the 2009 music festival began all over Darjeeling hills on *Phulpati* with an elaborate *shovayatra* (procession) on September 25. But unlike the previous year (2008), when GJMM had called for an “apolitical” celebration, the 2009 *Phulpati* celebrations began with GJMM leaders like Bimal Gurung, Roshan Giri, and Binay Tamang openly asking people to wear their traditional dress for a month and to present their traditional music at the month-long music festival.⁹³ I also noticed that following the call for a “dress-code” by the GJMM in 2008, the *chaubandi choli-phariya* and *daura-suruwal* had become a staple dress for Gorkhas participating in the *shovayatra*

⁹³ <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/news/Photo-Stories/Darjeeling-observes-phulpati-2009.html>, last viewed 9/23/2011.

(Figure 2.12). However, there were those who chose to wear their ethnic dress for the *shovayatra*, while alternating between *chaubandi choli-phariya* and *daura-suruwal* and their ethnic dress for the rest of the festive month. As in 2008, the 2009 *shovayatra* featured non-Gorkha minorities like the Marwaris, Biharis, Bhojpuris, and Tibetans of Darjeeling hills taking part in the festivities as well (Figure 2.13).

The music program commenced on September 27, 2009, and ended on October 24, 2009. In contrast to the 2008 music festival, at which one witnessed Nepalese musicians performing quite regularly, the 2009 music festival mainly featured singers, musicians, and dancers from Darjeeling hills. The music festival also featured music performed by various ethnic groups of Gorkhas, whose presentations were better rehearsed and more appealing to the audience than they had been in 2008. Personally, I found their dress, make-up, ornaments, and choreography to be more eye-catching, with vibrant colors and better dance-steps in 2009. In addition, I noticed that the *sarangi*, the four-string bowed lute, was being highlighted and romanticized as one of the forgotten music instruments of the Gorkhas. On the day the Kirat/Rai Association were to present, they had a *sarangi* player performing on the *sarangi*. When I met another *sarangi* player Matabir Rai at his residence in Siliguri in 2009, he honestly expressed his surprise at finding himself to be the center of attraction at local functions organized by the Gorkhas in and around Siliguri town. He even informed me that students from the Nepali Department, North Bengal University, had come looking for him to perform for their Annual Day celebrations (Interview, January 5, 2011). I shall relate more of my meeting and interview with Rai in chapter four.



Figure 2.12: *Phulpati* procession. Photo courtesy Bashu Isaiah Rai Lorung. Darjeeling, September 2009



Figure 2.13: Non-Gorkha minorities in the *Phulpati* procession. Photo by author. Darjeeling, September 2009

The other thing I noticed in 2009 was almost all Gorkha audience participating in the music program was also dressed in *chaubandi choli-phariya* and *daura-suruwal* or wearing their ethnic dress when their ethnic group was presenting their music. This was not the case in 2008. On the day the Tamangs were performing, I asked a Tamang lady, resplendent in her costume more brilliant than the performers, why she chose to wear her ethnic dress instead of *chaubandi choli* and *phariya*. She replied it was to encourage the performers and let them know Tamangs were in the audience too. Thereafter, observing the crowd very evening, I could make out who were Gorkhas (those wearing *chaubandi choli-phariya* or *daura-suruwal*), Gorkhas hailing from a particular ethnic group (wearing their ethnic costume), and non-Gorkhas and visitors of Darjeeling.

In fact, one day as I tried to engage in small talk with some audience members as I recorded the music program, I was even mildly scolded by an elderly lady for not wearing my ethnic dress. When I pointed out that I was wearing *chaubandi choli* and *phariya*, she sized me up and said that was not enough. Furthermore, she asked me where I lived, and when I answered “America,” she began to explain why the “dress campaign” in Darjeeling hills was important – especially to educate youngsters like me, who had forgotten about the greatness of their “lost” history, traditional knowledge, and ethnic identity. She said it was not enough that I be a Gorkha; I had to be a “Tamang” first! She suggested that after my research on Gorkhas was over, it was my duty as a “daughter of a Tamang” (*Tamang ko chori*) to research Tamang culture in various locations in Nepal. When I asked her, why Nepal, she said that those locations in Nepal were the original place of the Tamangs. Then, as I reasoned with her, saying wouldn’t that make all Tamangs Nepalese, she said no, because she was talking about a time that was long, long ago.

Also she astutely pointed out that since the *Angrez* ruling India had conquered Darjeeling hills from Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim,⁹⁴ the Gorkha Tamangs likewise were Indians.

By contrast, the vice-president of GJMM, R. P. Waiba, who is also a Tamang, stated that for him and his family, being a Gorkha was more important than being a Tamang. Waiba said neither he nor his family ever attended any event organized by the Tamang Association or wore the ethnic dress of Tamangs. He added that I need not go to Nepal if I wanted to do research on Tamang culture because he believed there was plenty of material to work on in Darjeeling hills, Siliguri, and Sikkim (Interview with R. P. Waiba, December 21, 2010). When I visited Waiba's home, I saw an entire room dedicated to Buddhist idols and images,⁹⁵ but he never publicly visits a Tamang Buddhist monastery. I highlight these incidents to show the complexities of intra-Gorkha identities that are at play simultaneously as the larger issue of Gorkha identity is being addressed and represented. To me it also showed how identity could be subjective at the same time that it was collectively perceived and personified. This is to say, for some it was OK for Gorkhas to draw connections with Nepal in terms of belonging to an ethnic group such as Gurung, Pradhan, Rai/Kirat, Lepcha, Sherpa, Tamang, etc., whereas for others it was important that Gorkhas shun any connection with Nepal even for ethnic, political, or academic reasons.

Music-wise, the 2009 festival was similar in tone to the 2008 month-long festival. It showcased Indian classical music, traditional Nepali folk music, and ethnic community musics of the Gorkhas. Folk dances were mostly choreographed to recorded songs, accompanied by instruments like the *madal*, *murali*, *tungna*, and *sarangi* along with keyboard and guitars

⁹⁴ As noted in chapter one, Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Siliguri, annexed by the East India Company from Nepal in 1816, were initially part of Sikkim. The Company captured Kalimpong following the Anglo-Bhutan War of 1867 (Dasgupta 1999, Golay 2006).

⁹⁵ Tamangs are generally considered to be “born Buddhist,” which means it was the religion of all their forefathers. However, a minority of Tamangs identify themselves as Hindus, while some are converted Christians.

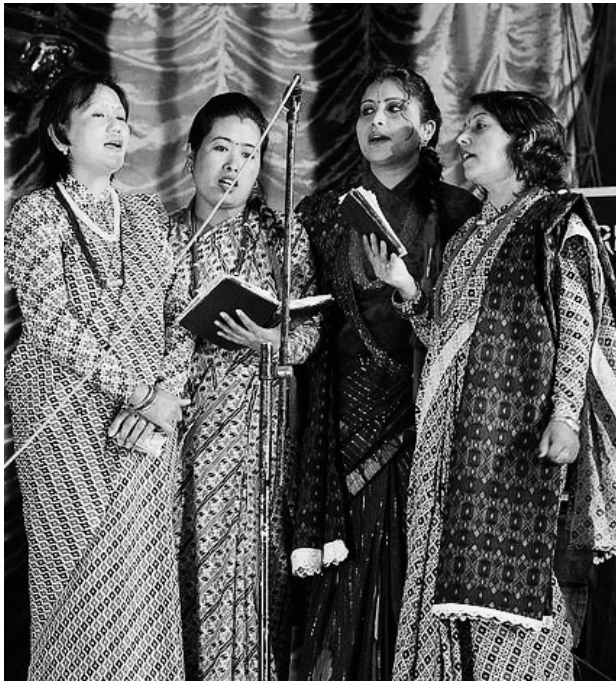
(Figures 2.14, 2.15, 2.16, 2.17). Almost all of these folk songs were produced, performed, and recorded in Nepal by Nepalese artists. Gorkha ethnic groups performed on their designated days. Almost all ethnic groups performed to recorded music except for the Lepchas, Rais/Kirats, and the Tamangs (Figures 2.18 and 2.19). When I asked some audience members what differentiated one ethnic group's music from the other, they said it could be a number of things. Sometimes it was the language, or the singing style like the call-and-response of Gurung *rodhi*,⁹⁶ or the sounds of certain music instruments like *chya:brung*⁹⁷ for Limbus, or *damphu* or *tungna* for Tamangs, etc. The 2009 music festival also hosted Nepalese artists, but unlike 2008, when Nepalese artists had dominated the month-long music scene, they performed just for a day. Their presentation included folk songs from western, central, and eastern Nepal and a few modern Nepali songs. One of the moderators even mentioned Nepal supporting Gorkha singer Prashant Tamang in the Indian Idol competition, when Sony Entertainment channel opened voting lines throughout South Asia (discussed further in chapter three). He also further claimed that Gorkhas and Nepalese were "brothers of the same mother" despite being separated by political boundaries.

On October 2, 2009, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, a huge portrait of Gandhi and the tri-color Indian flag adorned the stage. Bimal Gurung and other high-ranking GJMM leaders attended the function and spoke at length about Gandhi's non-violence policies. They also highlighted the contribution of Gorkha freedom fighters who had laid down their lives to free

⁹⁶ Gurung villages have meeting places called *rodhi ghar* set up for young men and women to meet, socialize, and chose their life-partner. *Rodhi ghar* singing is dialogic, with the boys and girls taking turns to sing. At present, this type of singing is popularly referred to as *dohari geet* in Nepali music.

⁹⁷ *Chya:brung* is a barrel drum chiefly associated with the Limbu community. These drums are said to imitate the sounds of nature and birds and animals. The dance accompanying the drum is song-less with intricate footwork.





Figures 2.14, 2.15, 2.16, 2.17: Scenes from the Darjeeling music festival 2009. The photos illustrate performance of Indian classical music and Gorkha folk music at the festival. Photos by Bashu Isaiah Rai Lorung. Darjeeling, October 2009



Figure 2.18: Limbus performing *Chya:brung* dance. Photo by author, Darjeeling, September 2009



Figure 2.19: Lepchas performing Lepcha dance. Photo by author, Darjeeling, September 2009.

their motherland from English rule. The music program that evening mainly featured patriotic songs in Hindi, the national language of India, and some of Gandhi's well-known favorite *bhajans* (religious songs) such as *Vaishnava Jana To*, *Payoji Maine*, *Thumak Chalat Rama Chandra*, and *Shree Ram Chandra Kripalu Bhajamana*, etc. In addition to Gorkha ethnic musics, the 2009 festival showcased musics of other minority communities of Darjeeling hills such as the Tibetans, the Marwaris, and the Bhojpuris. The final day of the festival hosted a show of Nepali folk music by various music organizations of Darjeeling Sadar. Bimal Gurung was the guest of honor and thanked everybody for their support to make the music festival a grand success.

Month-long Music Festival – 2010

The 2010 music festival began on October 14, 2010, amidst colorful processions, traditional attire, the sounds of *madal*, *naumati baja*, *sankha* (conch), *maruni naach* (folk dance of the eastern Himalayas), and religious songs (*bhajan*) in Nepali and Hindi resounding all over Darjeeling hills.⁹⁸ Gorkhas, non-Gorkha minorities, and people from various religious organizations took part in the rally, carrying colorful banners and flags. The procession in Darjeeling town followed its customary path and converged at Chowrasta, where a dais was erected to host the month-long music festival. Compared to 2009, the 2010 podium was brilliantly and elaborately decorated in the tri-colors of the GJMM's flag – yellow, white, and green (Figure 2.22). I also noticed numerous booths being put up around the music festival venue. Upon inquiry I was told they would host traditional Gorkha food like *momo* (a kind of local made dumplings), *selroti* (fried bread), *gundruk ko achar* (pickles), *chiura* (flattened rice),

⁹⁸ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1101015/jsp/siliguri/story_13059638.jsp, last viewed 9/25/2010.

aaludam (potato curry), etc., sell Gorkha traditional dress such as *chaubandi choli-phariya*, *daura-suruwal*, *dacca topi*, and ornaments; and provide tourist assistance (Figures 2.20 and 2.21). When the *shovayatra* arrived at Chowrasta, Bimal Gurung, along with other GJMM leaders, welcomed the participants. Many went up to the dais to greet their leaders, and after some casual singing and dancing, the *shovayatra* came to an end. However, before dispersing, the audiences were reminded about the significance of the month-long festival and requested that they participate and lend support the Gorkha cause.

The music program commenced on October 15, 2010 and continued till November 9, 2010. The festival showcased Gorkha Nepali folk songs and folk dances in addition to musics of all ethnic groups of Gorkhas, and the minority communities of Darjeeling hills (Figures 2.23, 2.24, 2.25, 2.26). But instead of having just the Tibetans, the Bhojpuris, and the Marwaris perform for the festival as in 2009, the 2010 festival featured Bengalis and *Adivasis*⁹⁹ (Figure 2.27) performing their traditional music as well. The Bengali moderator was quite vocal about his support for Gorkhaland and the prejudices of the West Bengal government towards the Gorkha minorities of north Bengal. Hearing this the audience clapped and shouted their approval. Unlike 2008, the 2010 Darjeeling music festival did not include any performances by musicians from Nepal. Instead, the festival had invited Gorkha musicians and dancers from the states of Assam and Uttaranchal¹⁰⁰ performing for the Gorkha cause in Darjeeling hills.

⁹⁹ *Adivasis* are indigenous people of India. According to women studies expert, Piya Chatterjee (2001), they were initially brought from the Chota Nagpur plateau region (areas covering parts of West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand) to work in the tea plantations of Darjeeling hills and *terai*. However, since the *adivasis* could not adapt to the mountain climate of Darjeeling hills, immigration from Nepal was encouraged.

¹⁰⁰ Assam is a state in northeast India that has a sizable Gorkha population among its inhabitants. Uttaranchal is a state in northern India. Uttaranchal is a new state that was established in 2000. Historians and Nepalese political leaders claim parts of it belonged to Greater Nepal before the region was ceded to the British following the Anglo-Nepal War in 1814-1816 (http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2005-10-25/india/27867268_1_india-and-nepal-prachanda-maoist-camps, last viewed December 12, 2011; Dasgupta, 1999).



Figures 2.20, 2.21: Booths at the festival venue selling traditional wear and traditional food.

Photo by author. Darjeeling, October 2010



Figure 2.22: The venue of the Darjeeling music festival at Darjeeling Sadar. Photo by author.

Darjeeling, October 2010



Figure 2.23: Performance by Himalaya Kala Mandir. Photo by author. Darjeeling, October 2010



Figure 2.24: Performance by *Anjuman-e-Islamia*. Photo by author, Darjeeling, October 2010



Figure 2.25: Performance by the Tibetan Association. Photo by author, Darjeeling, October 2010



Figure 2.26: *Damphu* song performed by Tamangs. Photo by author, Darjeeling, October 2010



Figure 2.27: *Adivasis* performing at the Darjeeling festival. Photo by author, Darjeeling, October 2010

It was one of the most significant moves in Darjeeling's history when Gorkhas from other parts of India started becoming involved with the Gorkha cause in Darjeeling hills. While the troupe from Assam underlined Darjeeling hills as the revered motherland of all Gorkhas, the troupe from Uttaranchal did not mention this. The Gorkhas of Uttaranchal spoke accented Nepali thickly inter-woven with Hindi words, while the Gorkhas from Assam spoke a Sanskritized version of Nepali. Nevertheless, the surge of excitement and optimism from the visiting Gorkha musicians from Assam and Uttaranchal in the Darjeeling music festival was visibly evident in their well-rehearsed presentations. The 2010 music festival also hosted presentations by various religious organizations of Darjeeling hills such as the *Anjuman-e-Islamia*, the Muslim organization of Darjeeling hills, established in 1909; All Himalayan Buddhist Organization, established in 2009; and the *Tagadhari Hindu Samaj*, established in 2009.

On the flip side, with GJMM having complete control over the month-long festival, especially in terms of music being performed, there occurred an incident that was disconcerting for me to say the least. On the day the Sherpa community was to perform on November 5, 2010, Karma Sherpa, one of the finalists from Zee Bangla TV singing competition, was to grace the evening. He sang a number of Nepali songs, followed by some popular Bollywood numbers in Hindi. Even though the audience went berserk with joy, GJMM committee members overseeing the day's proceedings became visibly upset. There was a flurry of back-stage movements and hurried communication between the Sherpa Association members and the GJMM organizers. After Karma Sherpa finished his show, one of the GJMM leaders forthrightly announced that all ethnic communities were only to perform their traditional ethnic musics and anything beyond that would not be allowed. Following this announcement, a group of young Sherpa boys, waiting

patiently in the wings to perform to a popular Hindi song, were led off the dais by their elders. It was disheartening to see the sheer disappointment on their faces that evening.

The remaining days of the music festival went on without any further mishaps. However, having witnessed what had occurred on November 5, 2010, I was surprised to learn that a Gorkha rock band from Darjeeling would be performing on the last day of the music festival. This band was called the “Darjeeling Grassroots” and featured a vocalist, a mandolin player, a bass guitarist, a harmonica player, and a drummer (Figure 2.28). After performing a couple of Nepali rock songs whose lyrics centered on the theme of Gorkhaland, they performed two bluegrass numbers. This was followed by a variety show consisting of Nepali folk songs, folk dances, musics of some ethnic groups, a grand display of fireworks, and the handing out of mementos by Bimal Gurung to all the participating ethnic and religious organizations (Figure 2.29). Gurung then formally declared the month-long music festival closed with the promise that the music festival in 2011 would be still grander than the music festival of 2010.

Analyzing Music Festivals in Darjeeling Hills – 2003 till 2010

Observing music festivals in Darjeeling from 2003 to 2010, I identify music festivals as venues for fostering oneness through communal participation. This oneness helps to solidify indices of iconic signification, which provide community members with a blueprint of cultural symbols they are able to connect with relative ease. As Turino would say, it engenders a heightened sense of wholeness, “potentially invested with greater feeling and senses of intimacy . . . with other people and forms of life . . . for feeling a direct *empathic*



Figure 2.28: Gorkha rock band “Darjeeling Grassroots” performing at the Darjeeling festival.

Photo by author, Darjeeling, November 2010



Figure 2.29: Bimal Gurung distributing mementos to the performers. Photo by author,

Darjeeling, November 2010

I. *connection*” (Turino 2008: 16). This empathy in communal participation via music, either as a performer or an audience member, is evoked by “collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (Stokes 1997: 3). This intense emotion is generated through works of art, known for their power to fire imagination, create emotional bonds, and produce physical effects in integrating the *self* with what anthropologist Victor Turner calls *communitas*. *Communitas* is a heightened collective state “achieved through rituals where all personal differences of class, status, age, gender, and other personal distinctions are stripped away allowing people to temporarily merge through their basic humanity [or ideology]” (Turner 1969: 96). This collective artistic ritual generates a collective feeling, giving rise to a heightened sense of *communitas* that link members of a community as a collective whole. The mimetic power of these works of art underlies the generation of *communitas* through music and culture festivals. This power also underlies the strategies of resistance, negotiation, and legitimation through artistic/musical tactics of appropriation that aim to further a political cause or demand. In this regard, music plays a meaningful part along with other accompanying factors in which the semantics of collective action, desires, memory, and history figure in mobilizing musical performances at Darjeeling music festivals for the cultural self-representation of Gorkhas.

Plato limits mimesis to imitation in the sense of a “redoubled presence” or a “weakened copy” of its intelligible model (Ricoeur 1991: 138). In contrast, Aristotle relates mimesis to the arena of human action/actions, where the production, far from producing weak images of pre-existing ideas, brings about a heightened sense of meaning in the

practical field or lifeworld. In other words, it is a “creative imitation” that augments the field of human actions. Likewise, I do not refer to mimesis as simply imitating for representation’s sake, but follow Aristotle’s explanation of creative mimesis to turn to Paul Ricoeur’s explanation of the sense-making engagement through mimesis or modes of representation. Mimesis involves “the concrete process by which the textual configuration mediates between the prefiguration of the practical field [the lifeworld] and its refiguration [transfiguration] through the reception of the work” (Ricoeur 1984: 53). By “prefiguration,” Ricoeur refers to the prior understanding of the actions and the meanings that they have for social agents/actors with regard to their cultural, linguistic, and symbolic resources. This becomes fundamentally important because as Ricoeur deftly puts it, “If, in fact, human action can be narrated, it is because it is always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms. It is always already symbolically mediated” (Ricoeur 1984: 57). Narrative emplotment then coordinates actions and events to reveal political aims, the meaning of events, characters’ intentions through shaping of history, and the creation of memory by configuring identity and validating it from within a comprehensive interpretive framework.

In 2003, the Carnival organizers did not simply conceive the theme or genre of the festival based on their personal taste or preference, but were influenced by prior political actions, their meanings, unfolding political events, Gorkha history, and the on-going narrative of Gorkha struggle in Darjeeling hills. Therefore, drawing from the deteriorating political situation in Darjeeling hills and the West Bengal government’s insincerity towards the Gorkha cause, the Darjeeling Carnival adopted its theme to resist misrule by the West Bengal government. In addition, fed up with Ghising’s dictatorial rule and failure to bring

about socio-economic developments in Darjeeling hills, a certain class of Gorkha youths decided to take matters in their own hands for the betterment of Darjeeling hills. Hence, the idea of having a music festival called the Darjeeling Carnival was born in 2003. Intricately linked with this endeavor was the question of Gorkha identity and how to communicate this by marking cultural differences between Gorkhas and their Bengali rulers. India's policy towards ethno-linguistic self-determinism of promoting cultural diversity by carving regional states on the basis of cultural and linguistic differences then became the backdrop to one of the highlighted themes in the Carnival music performances. As a result, Western-centric music genres and Western-centric Gorkha music instruments such as guitars, violins, keyboards, drums, Nepali rock music, and Nepali *adhunik*/ modern music were performed to reinforce cultural differences between Gorkhas and Bengalis.

The Western-centric musical representation of Gorkhas was further accentuated by emphasizing the “golden era” of Gorkha's colonial past resplendent with tea gardens, railroads, *gora sahibs*, and happy memories of the Gorkha soldiers. This act of directly connecting the colonial experiences with the Western-centric Gorkha music performed at the Carnival also became a way of comparing the “incompetent” rule of the West Bengal government with that of the “efficient” ruling system of the colonial masters in Darjeeling hills. Evoking the Western-centric narrative in terms of musical instruments, music performance, language, dress, and Gorkha colonial history then left little or no space for Gorkha folk music instruments like the *madal*, *damphu*, *sarangi*, or the *naumati baja*. After Darjeeling Carnival 2003, the subsequent changes happening in the Carnival festivities in 2005 and 2006 were again influenced by Ghising's demand for the implementation of the

Sixth Schedule for Gorkhas in Darjeeling hills. Following this, the barrage of opposition via public protests, word of mouth, published articles in local and national newspapers and magazines¹⁰¹ and online news sites¹⁰² criticizing the Sixth Schedule and the Carnival's support for it led to the closing of Darjeeling Carnival in 2007. This shift was further hastened by the establishment of Bimal Gurung's leadership in Darjeeling hills. Gurung, who hailed from a humble background, claimed to revive the demand for Gorkha statehood in India on the Gandhian principles of non-violence and non-cooperation. This led to Gurung's party, the GJMM, asking Gorkhas not to pay taxes or electricity and phone bills to the West Bengal government from April 1, 2008.¹⁰³ Inspired by India's nationalist movement, Gurung also called for reviving the folk music and folk culture of Gorkhas by openly stating that Western-centric and tribal-centric representations of Gorkhas had done more harm than good to the Gorkha cause. This marked the launch of a folk-centric Gorkha identity that went beyond Darjeeling's colonial past to bring forth the pre-colonial history of Gorkhas in India.

Taking advice from Gorkha intellectuals, whom Gurung actively sought out and Ghising had outright rejected, the era of month-long "traditional" music festivals began in 2008 under the aegis of Gorkha Kala Sansthan (GKS), a group affiliated with GJMM. As part of the narrative of Gorkha pre-colonial history, the month-long festival engaged in reproducing a "traditional" identity based on an accepted pre-determined notion of village-life mediated via dress, jewelry, food, and folk music. However, Darjeeling being an

¹⁰¹ *Himalaya Darpan, Darjeeling Times, Darjeeling Today.*

¹⁰² <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/>, <http://kalimpongnews.net/newz/aboutus/>, <http://thehimalayanbeacon.com/magazine/>, etc., last viewed December 12, 2011.

¹⁰³ <http://kalimpongonlinenews.blogspot.com/2012/01/cpm-supports-gjmms-demandid-proof.html>, last viewed November 2012.

industrial hill-town, whose economy is sustained by its tea, tourism, and timber industries, the symbols of traditionality, be it dress or music, had to be brought in from Nepal. It was ironic that Nepalese items and folk music were deployed to represent a Gorkha “traditional” identity, despite Bimal Gurung’s denial of the Gorkha movement having anything to do with Nepal at all. To overcome the slippage of wearing Nepalese *chaubandi choli-phariya* and *daura-suruwal*, and having Nepalese artists perform in the month-long festival, the narrative of independent kingdoms in South Asia before colonial rule began was schematically recalled and reiterated. The manipulation of memory played a crucial role in making sense of a Nepalese-oriented Gorkha “traditional” identity and legitimizing folk music in preference to Western-centric music of Darjeeling hills. In addition, with the realization that ethno-linguistic self-determination in India not only entailed marking differences but also required having cultural symbols such as dress, music, food, etc. to back it up, the practice of wearing traditional dress and practicing folk music came to the forefront. It put the context of the Gorkha cultural movement for statehood alongside other statehood demands in India in such a way that condemning the Gorkha demand as “illegal” or baseless was next to impossible.

The Gorkha community, having suffered so far from an acute sense of identity crisis in representing themselves to their fellow Indians, took to the “traditional” move spearheaded by the GJMM like fish to water. The overall excitement was palpable and noticeable in the way Gorkha men and women thronged garment shops in Darjeeling hills to buy the Gorkha “traditional” dress in support of the culture movement gripping Darjeeling hills in 2008. Having a “traditional” dress and a “traditional” music to showcase Gorkha

identity seemed to help redress some of the issues related to the anxiety of identity crisis among Gorkhas in India. As a result, in 2008 the entire Darjeeling hills came alive in collectively representing their “traditional” identity through dress, music, food, and rituals to support the Gorkha cultural agenda. The media played its part by reporting the fervor of the Gorkha cultural movement and soon signs and symbols of Gorkha “traditional” identity reached a wider audience in India. *Daura-suruwal*, *choubandi choli-phariya*, *naumati baja*, *madal*, *sarangi*, etc. came to be recognized as part of Gorkha culture by other Indian communities who were attuned to understanding the language of cultural diversity in terms of an exclusive identity related to a particular regional community or group. Hence, having struggled so far in representing themselves in shirts, pants, and performing Western-centric music, Gorkhas found themselves being acknowledged by other Indians when wearing and performing in their “traditional” dress and music. These experiences powered in the realization and validation of the importance of a “traditional” identity to productively strategize the Gorkha movement in order to secure the rights of Gorkhas as legitimate citizens of India.

Soon, side-by-side with the representation of Gorkha “traditional” dress, the performance of Gorkha “traditional” folk music also began to take center-stage after 2008. Performing Gorkha folk music in all public functions, political rallies, and meetings in Darjeeling hills became the norm such that by 2009 and 2010, the lesser-practiced folk music of Darjeeling hills had developed enough to stand on its own. This was apparent in no longer needing to invite Nepalese folk artists for the month-long music festivals, which became solely a Gorkha affair from 2010 on. The legitimization of the promotion of folk-

centric Gorkha identity and music was also mediated by claiming that representation of either a Western-centric or tribal-centric identity for Gorkhas had led them nowhere in India. This was communicated by GJMM leaders and in particular by Bimal Gurung, who in a public meeting that I attended on December 2010 in Darjeeling condemned Western culture and Western music for usurping Gorkha youths and leading them astray. Also involved in presenting a “traditional” identity for Gorkhas was the need to highlight Gorkhas as being essentially Hindu so that (a) any notions of Gorkha tribal status, championed by Ghising earlier, were put to rest and (b) Gorkhas as Hindus would come under India’s over-arching Hindu-centric paradigm to validate them as Indians in a world where being Indian and being Hindu is mostly considered to be synonymous.

Nonetheless, with too much emphasis on folk music, aggressively promoted by overtly suppressing Western-centric music in Darjeeling hills, the barrage of public criticism led to a Gorkha rock band performing five Nepali rock songs on the closing day of the 2010 month-long festival (Figure 2.28). Their songs expressed the desire for a Gorkha home state in India and three of the band members were dressed in the “traditional” Gorkha *daura-suruwal* outfit. Another notable development in 2009 and 2010 was the assimilation of other non-Gorkha Indian communities in the festivities of the Darjeeling month-long music festival.¹⁰⁴ With the basis of Gorkha struggle being mainly to secure Gorkha identity in India and to incorporate Gorkha culture and Gorkha music within the parameters of an Indian identity, having Indian communities perform at the month-long music festivals

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/main-news/politics/1630-the-goddess-a-the-games-glow.html>; <http://www.kalimpong.info/2009/09/27/happy-dasai-fulpati-2009-kalimpong-photographs/>; <https://gorkhatimes.wordpress.com/2009/09/26/morcha-kicks-off-dress-code-with-phulpati/>; http://www.telegraphindia.com/1101015/jsp/siliguri/story_13059638.jsp last viewed December 12, 2011.

became symbolic on many levels. First, the Gorkhas, learning to feel their way through cultural self-representation in India, experienced sharing and performing their “traditional” music with other “traditional” musics of India; second, this move helped to engender a sense of nationalistic connection between Gorkhas, Bengalis, Assamese, Muslims, Marwaris, Bhojpuris, and other Indian communities that had been grossly lacking in the Indian political set-up so far.

In this way, different representations brought about successive and overlapping processes of agency, actions, events, political aims, history, *aporia*, paradox, and irony that were mediated by the use of narratives to validate and evade tensions of time, constant rearranging, and re-producing of identity. In this way, the vital role of narratives in producing and signifying identity in the practical/political world through works of imagination, performance, desire, and power (Appadurai 1996, Bhabha 2007, Hall 2008) brings about a “potpourri” of approaches and cultural productions that is never a straightforward operation. Rather, representing identity becomes a complicated affair set within the complex of temporal narratives, assessment of human actions, unfolding events, and meanings configured within life experiences of social agents and their expectations, which they aim to transfigure/re-figure in contingent ways.

Chapter Three

“THE WORK OF IMAGINATION”: THE ROLE OF MUSIC, MASS MEDIA, AND POPULAR MEDIA IN MARKING GORKHA IDENTITY AT INDIA’S BORDERLANDS

Imagination, which plays an important role in representing and constructing an identity, becomes vital to minority borderland communities bearing the brunt of misrecognition and misrepresentation from the dominant culture group. For the Gorkhas, who are overtly portrayed as Nepalese immigrants, imagination, then, becomes an essential tool to counter the ruling narrative. The “work of the imagination” (Appadurai 2006: 4), unfolding through music, cultural events, and media, enables Gorkhas not only to re-tell their history in India, but also to negotiate their Indianness by stressing sameness with India and differences with Nepal. Appadurai uses the term “work of the imagination” to theorize how mass migration and the rapidly moving images of the electronic media fuel public spheres that confound theories depending “on the continued salience of the nation-state as the key arbiter of important social changes” (ibid.). Observing disjunctures such as Indian Hindu families in the U.S. gathering to celebrate *Diwali* or music bands in India modeling themselves on the Backstreet Boys or Michael Jackson, Appadurai explains that the work of imagination allows for a space of possibilities where individuals and groups mesh global and local to create their own practices of the modern. In short, the media and migration ruffle stereotypical identity to make way for change and revisions.

Today in the twenty-first century, when moving people (ethnoscape), moving images and sounds (mediascape), and moving ideas (ideoscape) are part of everyday life, there can be no doubt about the media affecting the Gorkha cause as well. Mediascapes and the landscape of moving people in Darjeeling hills, be it tourists (local or international) or Gorkhas living abroad

and visiting home, allow for mass mediation by offering new resources for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds (Appadurai 2008: 3). In addition, being located at the borders/margins, an area that is often described as a place of new beginnings rather than the end,¹⁰⁵ the Gorkha movement further takes flight as it imaginatively adds new chapters and possibilities to the one hundred and five-year-old cause (1907-2012). Like the mass and the popular media, which pervade manmade boundaries by virtue of being “leaky” (Stokes 1997: 12), the Gorkha movement has been a drippy affair involving the “work of the imagination” being played out both at and across the borders.

As we have seen in chapter two, from importing Nepalese attire (*choubandi choli*, *phariya*, *daura-suruwal*), inviting Nepalese artists to perform at the Darjeeling music festival, adopting Hindu rituals to re-claim *Hindutva*¹⁰⁶ for Gorkhas, performing to songs sung, composed, and recorded in Nepal, to largely excluding Nepalese artists from the Darjeeling music festival from 2009 on while incorporating ethnic and religious communities of India, performing Indian patriotic songs and highlighting Gandhian non-violent principles, the movement for Gorkha identity has never been a straight shot. Instead, the work of imagination unfolds a complex labyrinth of culturalism.¹⁰⁷ It goes beyond the customary bindings of an unchanging cultural and nation-state identity and cultural differences, by creating disjunctures to fuel collective action in relation to new ideas of nationhood, ethnicity, rights, and socio-economic prospects. With easy access to media (local and global) and its rapidly moving images, ideas, and sounds, imagination is no longer limited to an individual or an exclusive group. It has

¹⁰⁵ Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (2007), Gloria Andaldue in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (2008) and *This Bridge I call my Back* (2008).

¹⁰⁶ This literally means “being” a Hindu, or the marker of being a Hindu.

¹⁰⁷ Appadurai describes “culturalism” as identity politics mobilized at the level of the nation-state (2008: 15).

become a property of collectives – “‘a community of sentiment’ . . . that begins to imagine and feel things together” (Appadurai 2008: 8). These communities connect by place or language, experiences, religious beliefs, and shared dreams, which may or may not be limited by national boundaries.

This chapter concentrates mainly on the role of the popular and mass media in creating and recreating Gorkha community sentiment, operating on both the local and the transnational levels. Beginning with my personal experience growing up at India’s borders, I discuss and compare the role of the radio (state and private) in imaginatively recreating boundaries and opening new avenues of dialogue regarding diversity and integration in northeast India. The three main radio systems I mention here are All India Radio (A.I.R.), Radio Nepal, and Radio Misty FM 94.3. After this I examine how television, state and private, has played a crucial role in contributing towards the Gorkha cause from within and outside India’s borders. In this respect, I view both forms of media, radio and television, as important mediators in creating disjunctures so as to allow prevailing structures to expand their meanings, definitions, and ideas.

Radio, Identity, and Representation at the Borderlands

All India Radio – Kurseong and Siliguri

The history of a regular broadcasting service in India took shape in 1926 when the Government of India under the British Raj entered into an agreement with a private company called the Indian Broadcasting Company Limited. Initially, only two stations were inaugurated, at Mumbai (then Bombay) and Kolkata (then Calcutta) in 1927. Thereafter the broadcasting service was placed under the administration of the Department of Industries and Labor in 1932,

following which the nomenclature “Indian State Broadcasting Service” was changed to “All India Radio” (A.I.R.) in June 1936.¹⁰⁸ According to the online A.I.R. manual located on the homepage of All India Radio,¹⁰⁹ broadcasting was then placed under the Department of Communication from November 1937, and expanded exponentially with the political events preceding World War II. Pre-war events such as Adolf Hitler taking over as German Chancellor in 1933, followed by Germany’s massive re-armament program,¹¹⁰ the Japanese invasion of China over 1931-1933, Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the Spanish civil war in 1936, Japan’s capture of Beijing (then Peiping) in 1937,¹¹¹ the Japanese invasion of Russia in 1938, and German expansion in Europe¹¹² made it a necessity in British India to expand the broadcasting network to keep up with these critical developments in Asia and Europe. Hence, four A.I.R. stations were set up, in Delhi (1936), Madras (now Chennai) (1938), Lucknow (1938), and Tiruchirapalli (1939), in addition to those in Bombay/Mumbai and Calcutta/Kolkata that was inaugurated in 1927. When India became independent in 1947, it had six radio stations functioning fully as A.I.R. stations.

Other than entertainment, A.I.R., also referred to as the “community radio” in post-independence India, aimed to broadcast educational and social awareness programs in science, literature, agriculture, family welfare, public relations, health, hygiene, and women’s issues to educate the masses. A.I.R.’s website describes the role of radio as follows: “Broadcasting in India being a national service, constitutes the most powerful medium of mass communication. It plays a significant role, as a medium of information and education, in a developing country like

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.allindiaradio.org/Misc/AIR-MANUAL-VOL-1.HTM>, see page 2, last viewed May 31, 2012.

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.allindiaradio.org/>, last viewed May 31, 2012.

¹¹⁰ Brody 1999: 4.

¹¹¹ Eastman 1986: 547-551.

¹¹² Collier and Pedley 2000: 147.

India, where the reach of other communicating media is not extensive.”¹¹³ Today, A.I.R. broadcasts in twenty-one major Indian languages and two hundred and forty-six tribal and other languages and dialects. In addition, A.I.R.’s website claims that its external or international services now reach fifty-four countries all over the world.

Darjeeling district in the state of West Bengal boasts two A.I.R. stations, which are located only twenty-three miles apart. While A.I.R. Kurseong, inaugurated on June 2, 1962, is located in the hill sub-division of Kurseong at an altitude of 1458 meters (4860 feet), A.I.R. Siliguri, unveiled on July 7, 1963, is located in the *terai* plains of Siliguri.¹¹⁴ Although I was unable to find any written text spelling out the need to have two state-run radio stations in such close proximity to each other, talking to A.I.R. Kurseong and A.I.R. Siliguri employees on condition of anonymity, I sensed that the overall idea was to designate A.I.R. Kurseong for the Nepali-speaking population of Darjeeling hills and A.I.R. Siliguri for the Bengali-speaking public of the plains. Hence, other than broadcasting twenty-minute news programs from A.I.R. Delhi in Hindi and English in the morning and the evening, each radio station uses the predominant local language as their main language of communication. A.I.R. Kurseong almost exclusively broadcasts in Nepali and A.I.R. Siliguri in Bengali. In fact, in all my years of listening to A.I.R. Kurseong and A.I.R. Siliguri, I do not remember hearing any collaborative program or either radio station broadcasting in the other language.

With all regional state radio stations conceived to provide ethno-linguistic self-determination and cultural representation after independence, the A.I.R. is a case-in-point of India’s policy of cultural diversity gone amiss. Initiated with good intentions, the act of

¹¹³ <http://www.allindiaradio.org/Misc/AIR-MANUAL-VOL-1.HTM>, see page. 3, last viewed May 31, 2012.

¹¹⁴ <http://www.allindiaradio.org/Misc/AIR-MANUAL-VOL-1.HTM>, see page 22.

designating one radio station exclusively for one language proves to be divisive rather than inclusive in ensuring representation to all. This is to say, regional state radios in India seldom feature collaborative programs involving more than one regional language except for news in Hindi, the official language of India, and English, the “subsidiary official language” of India. Even when regional dialects or languages are included in A.I.R.’s programming for fifteen or twenty minutes a day, an overall sense of hierarchy underlies the differential positions for language speakers and speakers of regional languages and dialects. It is similar to the hierarchy I often observed at A.I.R. stations between Indian classical musicians and folk musicians. It is not written or openly acknowledged by anyone, but its palpable underpinnings are undeniably felt and experienced by all. Hence, such linguistic and ethno-cultural “boundaries,” ironically set forth in the name of diversity, have A.I.R. Kurseong broadcasting predominantly in Nepali and A.I.R. Siliguri in Bengali. In fact, having performed for both the radio stations, I would often feel the need to highlight my “Nepaliness” at A.I.R. Kurseong and then my “Bengaliness” at A.I.R. Siliguri. Adding to this divisive scene is the fact that Gorkha staff-artists are mostly employed at A.I.R. Kurseong and Bengali staff-artists at A.I.R. Siliguri.

Radio Nepal

Nepal’s first broadcasting station, Radio Nepal, was established on April 1, 1951 at Kathmandu. Following its inception, according to Radio Nepal’s website, the broadcasting station has “strengthened its institutional capacity considerably and diversified itself in terms of programme format, technical efficiency and coverage.”¹¹⁵ Radio Nepal’s public outreach extends

¹¹⁵ <http://radionepal.org.np/aboutus.php#introduction>, last viewed May 31, 2012.

beyond its borders to the Himalayan regions of north and northeast India, where a sizable Nepali-speaking Indian population resides. Since Nepali-speakers in India in the late 1950s and early 1960s did not have a radio station broadcasting in Nepali, according to Basant Chhetri,¹¹⁶ they would tune in to Radio Nepal for entertainment and music (Interview with Basant Chhetri, December 9, 2010). Chhetri recalled that in the 1960s, it was common to hear broadcasts from either Radio Nepal or Radio Ceylon¹¹⁷ blaring out songs from every household in Darjeeling hills.

Chhetri also remembered how he and his group of musician friends waited for days to hear their favorite songs, noted the lyrics and melody, and then waited again for days to note down their chords in order to perform them. Since both Radio Ceylon and Radio Nepal had powerful short-wave broadcasting capacity, they were easily received in and around Darjeeling hills. They were also the radio stations that most Gorkhas listened to during the 1960s and the 1970s. In fact, according to Basant Chhetri, Dilip Biswa, Menuka Pradhan, and Usha Gomden, even after A.I.R. Kurseong was inaugurated in 1962, people in Darjeeling preferred listening to Radio Nepal and Radio Ceylon instead. This was because the entertainment and music programs from Radio Nepal were presented better than those on A.I.R. Kurseong. Highlighting the fact that

¹¹⁶ Basant Chhetri, introduced in chapter two, is a singer, composer, and the president of Himalaya Kala Mandir, Darjeeling.

¹¹⁷ Radio Ceylon, located in Sri Lanka, is the oldest radio station in South Asia. Broadcasting was started on an experimental basis in Ceylon by the Telegraph Department in 1923, just three years after the inauguration of broadcasting in Europe. Radio Ceylon launched a Hindi Service in the early 1950s that turned out to be quite lucrative. Millions of rupees in terms of advertising revenue came from India. The station also employed some of the most popular Indian announcers of those days, who established Radio Ceylon as the “King of the Airwaves” in South Asia. When B. V. Keskar, Minister of Information and Broadcasting from 1950 to 1962, banned Hindi film songs from A.I.R. saying that they were vulgar, Radio Ceylon jumped in and created a number of Hindi film-based programs. Most popular among them was the *Binaca Geet Mala*, which was sponsored by a Swiss company called CIBA (Punathambekar 2008). Hence, Radio Ceylon was not only instrumental in forging a “national audience” around the songs and stars of Mumbai cinema, but also helped to launch Indian commercial cinema onto a whole new level in South Asia. Growing up, I remember my relatives excitedly tuning in to Radio Ceylon in the evening to listen to an hour-long program of Hindi film songs. Also, musicians I interviewed during my fieldwork would keep referring to Radio Ceylon and its pivotal role in influencing a generation of Gorkha musicians and singers during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

Radio Nepal had already been on the air for more than a decade when A.I.R. Kurseong was established, Chhetri reasoned that people in Darjeeling hills preferred to tune in to Radio Nepal as a set habit (Interview with Basant Chhetri, December 9, 2010). A.I.R. Kurseong was normally preferred for daily news, radio dramas, and sometimes for modern Nepali songs.

It may be important to note that even though A.I.R. Kurseong is located in Darjeeling hills, owing to the mountainous terrain reflecting and deflecting much of its medium-wave capacity, it is often difficult to receive A.I.R. Kurseong in nearby hill towns of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Mirik, and even Siliguri. Regular broadcasts from Radio Nepal cover a duration of eighteen hours, from six in the morning to midnight everyday. Unlike regional community radio stations in India, which, as already noted, typically broadcast in one major local language with news in Hindi and English airing twice a day, Radio Nepal, following the Nepalese state policy of “one nation, one language, and one religion” (Shrestha 2003), broadcasts primarily in Nepali. Other than that Radio Nepal designates three hours and fifteen minutes daily for regional or indigenous programs. Radio Nepal’s website states, “[in] a mountainous country like Nepal, radio broadcasting has proved to be a very effective medium for disseminating information, educating people and entertaining the masses. Radio Nepal recognizes that its primary obligation is to serve its listeners.”¹¹⁸ Since Nepal is a Himalayan nation-state with mountainous terrain and remote villages that have no access to roads, highways, motor vehicles, entertainment facilities, or any other form of communication, the radio acts as a vital link in providing entertainment as well as connecting citizens. Moreover, with Nepal’s literacy rate being quite low, Radio Nepal plays an important role in disseminating news and information to those unable to read and “creating mass awareness in its attempt to reflect the views of all sections of the

¹¹⁸ <http://radionepal.org.np/aboutus.php#introduction>, last viewed May 31, 2012.

society.”¹¹⁹ In the recent political developments in Nepal, with the monarchy coming to an end in 2008¹²⁰ followed by Maoist-led civil unrest and the establishment of a democratic government, radio, both state-run and private, played a vital role in Nepalese politics.

I recently happened to come across an article on the Internet titled “Democracy in Nepal: The Role of Community Radio.”¹²¹ It carried an interview of Raghu Mainalay, founder of Nepal’s Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, by James Deane, managing director of the Strategy for the Communication for Social Change Consortium, in Rome. What I found fascinating in this article was Mainalay describing the role of the radio in bringing four million people to the streets in Nepal demanding justice and freedom. Mainalay claims there was a direct correlation between the radio and the way the political movement unfolded in Nepal in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. He relates how the radio went about “using programmes very strategically to attract the attention of the people, arranging a lot of unique events that would get onto the front pages of the newspapers and international media.”¹²² In that sense, all radio broadcasters led an independent radio movement involving state-run and commercial radio stations. Hence, with more than fifty radio stations throughout Nepal covering over sixty-five percent of the population, when the King banned the news, the radio managed to spread the message by “singing the news!”¹²³ Today Radio Nepal is Nepal’s primary source of mass communication for news and entertainment, but it is not popular in Darjeeling hills as it used to be in the 1960s and the 70s. Instead, the new wave of private FM Radio has taken Darjeeling district and Sikkim by storm.

¹¹⁹ <http://radionepal.org.np/aboutus.php#introduction>, last viewed May 31, 2012.

¹²⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/28/world/asia/28iht-nepal.4.13283900.html>, last viewed June 30, 2012.

¹²¹ <http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/mazi-articles.php?id=326>, last viewed January 4, 2012.

¹²² <http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/mazi-articles.php?id=326>, last viewed January 4, 2012.

¹²³ <http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/mazi-articles.php?id=326>, last viewed January 4, 2012.

Radio Misty FM 94.3 (Siliguri, Darjeeling hills, Sikkim)

Private FM commercial radio broadcasts began in the four metropolitan cities of India – New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai – in the mid 1990s. Soon other FM stations in Goa, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Jaipur, and Lucknow followed suit.¹²⁴ Today FM radios in India are programmed to provide only entertainment, since the Government of India prohibits them from broadcasting any news. As far as north Bengal is concerned, the first FM radio station in this region was Radio Misty FM 94.3. It was launched in 2007 at Siliguri and by 2010 expanded to cover the entire region of Darjeeling hills, Siliguri, and Sikkim (Figure 3.1). Its programs are set in the pattern of a talk-radio format where the radio jockey not only plays music but also creates an ambience of active interaction with his/her audiences.

Radio Misty FM 94.3 broadcasts in five languages, namely Nepali, Bengali, Hindi, Bhojpuri, and English. According to the latest reports, Radio Misty FM 94.3 is the most popular radio station in north Bengal and Sikkim and was entered in the *Limca Book of World Records* (2011 edition) as the radio station in India that broadcasts in the greatest number of languages.¹²⁵ In Sikkim, Radio Misty FM 94.3 is the only radio station to air its programs twenty-four hours a day. In addition to being a popular radio station, Radio Misty FM 94.3, unlike other state-run radio stations such as A.I.R. Kurseong, A.I.R. Siliguri, and A.I.R. Gangtok, actively engages in socio-cultural activities as part of its entrepreneurial goals to live up to its slogan “[Hindi] *Misty Radio har pal ka saathi*,” which translates as “Misty Radio – your friend every step of the way.”

¹²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FM_broadcasting_in_India, last viewed January 5, 2012.

¹²⁵ <http://www.nbmc.org/2010/plasma/radio-misty-the-official-radio-partner-of-plasma-2010/>; <http://www.bestmediainfo.com/2011/07/rising-star-nishant-mittal-ceo-radio-misty/>; <http://isikkim.com/11-2011-radio-misty-enters-limca-book-of-records-84/>; <http://thehimalayanbeacon.com/magazine/2011/05/09/radio-talk-radio-misty-enters-in-limca-book-of-records/>, last viewed January 5, 2012.



Figure 3.1: Advertisement of Radio Misty FM 94.3 at a shopping mall in Siliguri. Photo by author, Siliguri, April 9, 2012

Also, with its overriding motto, “Local People – Local Voice – Local Station – Local Choice,” Radio Misty FM 94.3 actively promotes local music bands, local musicians (folk and popular), local music productions, local cultures, local languages, and local religious festivals throughout the year, in addition to broadcasting popular Hindi film music. The style of compèring programs by the radio jockeys at Radio Misty FM 94.3 is designed to engender closeness and certain kind of casualness with their listeners, which is quite unlike A.I.R.’s style of formal announcements.

Growing Up and Experiencing Radio at the Margins

My parents were brought up in Darjeeling amongst the Nepali-speaking Gorkhas in the 1940s, while I was born and raised predominantly in a Bengali-speaking part of Siliguri in the 1970s and 1980s.¹²⁶ Although I spoke Bengali most of the time outside the house, my parents insisted I speak Nepali at home. In terms of religion, my parents, themselves both born to Buddhist parents, observed a syncretic mish-mash of Buddhist and Hindu practices. This meant that we would have either a Buddhist lama or a Hindu priest officiating for religious ceremonies at our house. Also, with the Gorkha community being a multi-racial ethnic group, I often heard my relatives referring to Brahmins and the low castes as the “other” and all Mongolian middle-castes as *okhar-pangra* (literally meaning “walnut-lucky beans/pangra pods,” to figuratively denote sameness or similarities).

However, when it came to positioning Gorkhas in terms of their Bengali neighbors, my family and relatives turned a blind eye to the racial differences among Gorkhas. In this given situation, all Gorkhas became “us” and the Bengalis “them.” Nevertheless, the standards my

¹²⁶ As described in chapter one, Siliguri is in Darjeeling district but lies geographically in the plains or *terai* of Darjeeling hills. Although Siliguri is diverse, with Nepali-speaking areas, Hindi-speaking areas, and Bengali-speaking areas, I grew up in a Bengali-speaking area surrounded by Bengali-speaking neighbors and friends.

parents set before me were inspired by eminent Bengali personalities like J. C. Bose,¹²⁷ Megh Nad Saha,¹²⁸ Kazi Nazrul Islam,¹²⁹ Manabendra Mukherjee,¹³⁰ Satyajit Ray,¹³¹ Nikhil Banerjee,¹³² Allauddin Khan,¹³³ and so on. I grew up learning and listening mostly to north Indian classical music or Bengali music rather than to Nepali folk or popular music. Also, given my interest in classical music, part of my ear-training routine included listening to the greats of Indian classical music on the radio and cassette player, and attending Indian classical music concerts. As far as non-classical music was concerned, I would listen to *Nazrulgeeti*, Bengali modern songs, *Rabindrasangeet*, Bengali children's songs, and a few English songs that my music teacher, Sister Noela, taught us at school. In comparison, I barely recall listening to any Nepali songs as a youngster. Visiting relatives in Darjeeling hills during vacations, I would often feel out of place not knowing the Nepali songs my cousins sang and danced to. Often, when I liked the melody of a particular Nepali song, I would hum and learn its lyrics, but after coming

¹²⁷ Jagadish Chandra Bose was a physicist, botanist, and writer of science fiction. He studied at Cambridge and taught at Presidency College, Kolkata. His research was on radio waves, wireless communication, and plant research concerning electromechanical pulsations of living cells. He established Bose Institute in Kolkata in 1917 and a High Altitude Research Centre at Darjeeling in 1934 (<http://www.calcuttaweb.com/people/jcbose.shtml>, last viewed May 31, 2012).

¹²⁸ Megh Nad Saha was a physicist, well known for his work in special theory of relativity, quantum theory, and astrophysics (<http://www.calcuttaweb.com/people/msaha.shtml>, last viewed May 31, 2012).

¹²⁹ Kazi Nazrul Islam was a Muslim-Bengali poet, musician, writer, and a revolutionary, who espoused spiritual rebellion against colonial rule. His musical compositions are called *Nazrulgeeti* and are known for their musical dexterity, aesthetics, and the use of Persian vocabulary (http://zeenews.india.com/news/exclusive/kazi-nazrul-islam-the-eternal-rebel-lives-on_777461.html, last viewed May 31, 2012).

¹³⁰ Manabendra Mukherjee was one of the most versatile singers from West Bengal. His work in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s took Bengali modern song to its peak. He had a strong background in Indian classical music and was famous for his inimitable rendition of *Nazrulgeeti* (<http://www.last.fm/music/Manabendra+Mukhopadhyay/+wiki>, last viewed May 31, 2012).

¹³¹ Satyajit Ray was an eminent filmmaker, renowned for his independent films on the topic of social life, and for fantasy films, detective films, and historic drama. He was awarded India's highest award, the *Bharat Ratna*, and the Oscar Lifetime Achievement Award in 1992 (http://www.satyajitray.org/about_ray/introduction.htm, last viewed May 31, 2012).

¹³² Nikhil Banerjee was a sitarist. Banerjee was well known for his spiritual approach to music, depth of expression, mellifluous rendition of raag, and maintenance of a humble lifestyle that shunned the limelight of popularity (http://www.hundredstrings.com/artists/Nikhil_Banerjee/, last viewed May 31, 2012).

¹³³ Allauddin Khan was a Bengali-Muslim musician who could play different musical instruments. He is chiefly remembered as the guru of Ravi Shankar and his son Ali Akbar Khan (<http://adagio.calarts.edu/~bansuri/pages/allaudin.html>, last viewed May 31, 2012).

back to Siliguri, I would soon forget the words, with just a lingering trace of the melody left to remind me of my visit to Darjeeling hills.

The other way I came across Nepali music while growing up was through A.I.R. Kurseong and Radio Nepal, which my mother listened to while knitting or sewing. Her choice would always be either A.I.R. Kurseong or Radio Nepal, very rarely A.I.R. Siliguri. I remember those afternoons when she tuned in to Radio Nepal or A.I.R. Kurseong as she got tea ready for my father returning from his office. Looking back, I realize that this was perhaps a way of creating her own private space in which she could reconnect with her Nepali culture living amongst Bengalis. Having moved to Siliguri after marriage, especially in a Bengali-populated area where my father worked at North Bengal University, she perhaps found A.I.R. Kurseong or Radio Nepal provided her with a much-needed cultural familiarity via sounds, ambience, and music. Likewise, she would encourage me to listen to the children's program in Nepali aired by Radio Nepal twice a week in the evening. Often, when I returned home after play, I found our radio set broadcasting a children's program from Radio Nepal around 6:00 p.m. As I went about the house, I would pay attention to some of the children's songs composed to teach the Nepali alphabet (*akshar*) to children. Some of these tunes are vivid in my mind even to this day. In addition, I would listen to the children's program in Nepali broadcast once a week from A.I.R. Kurseong. But, other than these specific programs in Nepali, our radio would be tuned to A.I.R. Siliguri for the most part of the day.

On weekdays, I began my day listening to A.I.R. Siliguri at six in the morning. It functioned as an alarm clock to wake me up for the day. From then on, my morning routine, before I left home for school at 8:20 a.m., was set around A.I.R. Siliguri's morning schedule. For

example, the 7:30 a.m. news in Bengali, followed by *Rabindrasangeet* at 7:45 a.m., meant it was time for me to get dressed; the Hindi and English news at 8:00 a.m. meant it was time for breakfast; and by the time the news ended at 8:20 a.m., I headed for the bus-stop to wait for my school bus. On weekends, I would listen to a variety of Bengali songs like *Rabindrasangeet*, *Nazrulgeeti*, and *adhunik gaan*,¹³⁴ and the children's program in Bengali called *Sishu Mahal*/Children's Palace. Looking back, the difference that stands out in my mind about the children's programs on A.I.R. Kurseong, A.I.R. Siliguri, and Radio Nepal is in the case of Radio Nepal, my mother would promptly switch off the radio as the Nepalese anthem began to play at the end.

In contrast, listening to A.I.R.'s children's programs, which ended with national integration songs in various regional languages of India, my parents encouraged me to note down the words, learn the melodies, and sing them as well. As I grew older and my music lessons began to take a serious turn, it was suggested that I listen more to the A.I.R. Indian classical music broadcast every day for an hour and to the two-hour special program on Tuesdays and Saturdays. As a result, starting from seventh grade (1986-1987), the children's program from Radio Nepal ceased to air in our household, even though I recall my mother listening to Radio Nepal once in a while. In 1988, my parents took me to A.I.R. Siliguri and A.I.R. Kurseong to audition for the youth program called *Yuva-vani*. Soon I found myself performing for both A.I.R. stations. My gravitating towards Indian classical music also meant that my range of music listening got limited to classical music and classically-based genres like *Nazrulgeeti*, *Bengali raag-prodhan gaan* (raag-based Bengali songs), and *Rabindrasangeet* broadcasted from A.I.R. Siliguri.

¹³⁴ *Bangla adhunik gaan* literally means "Bengali modern songs." These Bengali songs include songs from Bengali films or composed by contemporary composers, who incorporate instruments such as keyboards, synthesizers, drums, congas, violins, and guitars. These songs revolve around common themes such as love, pathos, nostalgia, etc.

As far as A.I.R. Kurseong was concerned, my parents would listen to it when my performance was aired in the *Yuva-vani* program. Other than that, the only other time my parents tuned in to A.I.R. Kurseong was on the occasion of *Tihar* (*Diwali*) to listen to *deusi* and *bhailo*. These are special songs that are sung separately by men and women, respectively. During the three-day celebrations of *Tihar*, Gorkha women and men visit their neighbors' homes and sing *bhailo* and *deusi*, and offer blessings of good health, and happiness. While *bhailo*, sung by the women on the first day of *Tihar*, is sung either in call-and-response or in a monophonic phrase set to 3/4 meter, *deusi*, performed by men, is always performed in a call-and-response pattern and set to an even rhythm of 2/2 or 4/4. The call-and-response is both sung and recited. Sometimes, when men and women perform together, the performance is referred to as *deusi-bhailo* and is more common in Nepal than India.

For my parents, who were raising their daughter amongst Bengalis in Siliguri, it was essential that I be familiar with the *bhailo* and *deusi*, although I was not expected to perform them. Since Bengali culture was so dominant in my life growing up, my parents felt that this was perhaps one way of connecting me with my Gorkha heritage. My mother would make special deep-fried bread called *selrotis* (Figures 3.4, 3.5) for *Tihar* and send my brother and me with platefuls of festive Gorkha food to the only other two Gorkha families living within the university campus. Visiting their houses, I would hear their radio sets loudly playing *deusi* and *bhailo* music from A.I.R. Kurseong or Radio Nepal as well. On one such occasion when I was about fifteen, one of our neighbor Gorkha uncles avidly explained the context of *deusi* and



Figure 3.2 and 3.3: Making *selrotis*. Photo by author, Darjeeling, November 5, 2010

bhailo to me. Furthermore, pointing out differences between the *Diwali/Tihar* celebrations of Bengalis and those of Gorkhas, he ardently began discussing how Bengali culture, according to him, was devoid of the sophistication inherent in Gorkha culture and traditional rituals. Although I was too young to fathom why he felt the need to talk about Gorkhas and Bengalis that *Diwali* evening, I believe the ambience of *deusi* and *bhailo* music in addition to the mood set by festival rituals may have led him to do so. As Martin Stokes states, it is often through music that powerful affective experience of social identity is embodied, encouraging people to feel they are in touch with an essential part of themselves, their emotions, and their “community” (Stokes 1997: 12, 13). It was perhaps this “affect” of music then that the handful of Gorkha families living in a Bengali-dominated cultural setting of North Bengal University campus was seeking by tuning in to the *deusi* and *bhailo* broadcast on *Tihar* evenings.

Even the weak reception of *deusi* and *bhailo* songs from A.I.R. Kurseong¹³⁵ represented special symbolic capital for the Gorkhas living within the campus. In this case, neither the quality of reception nor the content of the *deusi* and *bhailo* songs mattered. What really counted was the genre or category that was significant in representing Gorkha identity in an overpowering Bengali ambience experienced everyday around them. Since Gorkha families living in North Bengal University campus had to speak Bengali and adapt to Bengali culture, the *deusi-bhailo* broadcast gave them the space to assert and define their social identity as Gorkhas, even if it was only for those three days a year. Not only did the *deusi* and *bhailo* playing loudly from the radios of Gorkha households make evident their different socio-cultural standing among

¹³⁵ Although A.I.R. Kurseong is located approximately 24 miles from Siliguri, due to mountainous terrain and valleys, the reception of A.I.R. Kurseong radio waves is quite weak in Siliguri. Moreover, with A.I.R. Siliguri and Radio Nepal, respectively, having stronger transmitting capacity, A.I.R. Kurseong could only be heard clearly in and around Darjeeling hills.

their Bengali neighbors, who also enjoyed listening to the broadcast, it also gave “authenticity”¹³⁶ to their Gorkha identity that could not be easily denied or overlooked.

This is to say, having *deusi-bhailo* music as part of A.I.R.’s special annual broadcast offered socio-political standing to Gorkhas, who as a minority borderland community felt authenticated as Indians by the broadcast. Being part of A.I.R.’s repertoire extended a sense of “Indianness” to Gorkha culture, which for Gorkhas, starved of recognition in India, was both validating and comforting. Since community/state radio in India is typically centered around one primary regional language for communication, it leaves minority communities living among the dominant culture group feeling slighted or grossly under-represented by the state-run media. With policies for regional community radio continuing to operate on the prevailing standards of promoting diversity through cultural difference rather than “integrative cultural plurality,” there leaves much to be desired from the state media in representing India in the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, for my relatives and cousins living in Darjeeling hills, tuning in to the *deusi-bhailo* radio broadcast was not as important as for Gorkha families living in a Bengali-dominant population of *terai*. Whereas Gorkha families in Siliguri waited eagerly for a few *deusi-bhailo* groups to visit and bless their homes, my aunts often expressed mild annoyance at the never-ending stream of *deusi-bhailo* groups visiting their house in Darjeeling hills during *Tihar*.

Overriding the prevalent state policy, however, are the emerging commercial FM radios that are heralding a new chapter in India’s broadcasting history. These radio stations not only use Hindi, the national language of India, but also combine liberal amounts of English and other regional languages as part of their “primary languages” of communication. As I have noted

¹³⁶ I acknowledge the word “authenticity,” which is closely linked and commonly invoked with the politics of identity, is both problematic and powerful. I use this term here to precisely highlight this tricky, often difficult, aspect in defining and constructing ethnic and communal identity today.

earlier, Radio Misty in this regard has come out way ahead of other FM radios in the country. It includes five languages (Bengali, Nepali, Hindi, English, and Bhojpuri), which has fostered unimaginable developments in north Bengal. During my five-month-long fieldwork in India in 2010-2011, I happened to go shopping with my best friends, Gopa Gurung and Suman Rai. All three of us were brought up in Siliguri and speak fluent Nepali, Bengali, Hindi, and English. As we went around Siliguri town, we decided to enter an apparel store, whose owner was a Bengali. As usual, three of us began talking to him in Bengali, but I was surprised to hear him reply in Nepali. In all the thirty-eight years I have lived in and out of Siliguri, I had never once heard a Bengali speak fluent Nepali with my parents or me. As we went about choosing fabrics, I continued speaking to him in Bengali and the storeowner kept replying to me in Nepali. “How ironic,” I kept thinking over and over again. After we made our purchase and stepped out of the store, the first thing I said was, “What just happened?” I was excited, but my friends were rather unmoved. They said nowadays most Bengalis spoke Nepali. Having never heard a Bengali speak Nepali except for two of my father’s colleagues, who spoke broken Nepali with me, the experience took me by surprise.

Next, we decided to go to a shopping mall since my friends wanted me to see Siliguri’s latest development. As we entered I was dumbstruck again by what I heard. A popular Nepali folksong was playing in the background at the mall. As we made our way to several stores, I saw many Gorkha and Bengali associates working together and speaking to the customers easily in Bengali, Nepali, Hindi, and English. Then, deciding to take a tea break, we entered a café. The server who came to take our order spoke to us in Nepali, although I could tell he was not a Gorkha. As usual, I replied to him in Bengali as he took my order. Sipping tea while processing

all that I had witnessed that day, I decided to talk to our server in Nepali. When he came back to give us our check, I thanked him in Nepali, complimented him on his excellent accent, and inquired how and where he had learnt it. He replied that he was from Bihar, a state in eastern India, but had many Gorkha friends in Siliguri. Then, pointing his finger upwards to draw my attention to the music playing in the background, he said “Radio Misty, I listen to this radio station all the time – day and night.” Pleased with my interest, he went on to inform me that neither of his parents spoke Nepali, but his two brothers and two sisters were fluent in Nepali, in addition to Hindi, Bhojpuri, and Bengali. Moreover, he added that one of his favorite foods was *momo*, a form of dumpling commonly associated with Gorkhas and Darjeeling hills. I thanked him and left, leaving a generous tip.

On another occasion, when I went sari shopping with my mother, I began to speak in Bengali with the shop associate. He replied in Bengali, but after some time switched to Nepali, suggesting some saris that were on sale. My mother went along and started asking him things in Nepali, but I still held back. I guess the process of unlearning something I had learnt early in life, “you’ve got to speak Bengali, even better than them, if you are to command respect as a Gorkha,” needed time and effort from my part. Although I can’t remember how I had figured out this “strategy” as a child, looking back it does say a lot about the insecurity subconsciously internalized by the minority Nepali-speakers in India. When I finally brought myself to reciprocate in Nepali, the associate greeted me with the widest of grins. He was so pleased that he was even willing to give us a bigger discount than advertised. As we kept talking, I remembered to ask him how he had learnt Nepali. He said, “*Hamro dokan ma Darjeeling, Sikkim bata dherai customer aaucha. Paila ali-ali gardai seeke, tara aajkaal radio, TV-tira sunnera*

confidence baryo.” It translates as “We have lots of customers coming to our store from Darjeeling and Sikkim. At first I began slowly, but now hearing Nepali on the radio and television, my confidence has grown.” After our purchase was done, I expressed my appreciation and left thinking, this will definitely make for some good dissertation material. The above incidents emphasized for me the concept of borderlands – a place of emergence instead of an end – where the confluence of peoples and languages, and the practice of fusing, combining, and using different linguistic codes becomes the normative practice of everyday living.

By modifying the state’s “reactionary policy” of promoting diversity by justifying one radio station for Gorkhas because there is one radio station for Bengalis, Radio Misty sets new standards. Its fundamental criteria in broadcasting in five different languages makes Radio Misty exemplary in demonstrating how “integrative policy,” based on plurality and inclusivity can usher in a whole new perspective to the concepts of “diversity” and “unity” in India. By imaginatively creating breaks or disjunctures within the prescribed state policies of broadcasting in north Bengal, Radio Misty offers possibilities for re-working, re-imagining, and re-examining possible improvisations to represent an Indian diversity. Like the media Now I move to the most popular form of entertainment in India, television, to narrate how state-run and private television channels have also unwittingly steered the course of the Gorkha cause for greater representation in India.

Gorkha Music and the West Bengal State Television/Bengali Doordarshan

One of the most significant developments outlined in the 1988 accord signed by Subhas Ghising, the West Bengal government, and the Government of India, was the representation of

Gorkhas via the state television. Accordingly, Doordarshan Kendra, Kolkata (the West Bengal government's state television channel at Kolkata, hereafter referred to as DKK) promised to allot half an hour's broadcasting time every day from Monday to Friday for Gorkha musicians from Darjeeling hills. This program was called "Program in Nepali" and was aimed at allowing greater representation to the people and culture of Darjeeling hills. I vividly remember the excitement of that day when the momentous inauguration of this music series was to be broadcast on the West Bengal state-run television. It was momentous because it was one of the many important events that were to unfold in the history of Darjeeling hills in relation to Gorkhas and their movement for political recognition in India.

It was a hot summer Saturday morning in 1989, and I was fifteen then. The excitement of my family, friends, and relatives was high. As for me, I was not only excited about Nepali music being broadcast by DKK for the first time, but also enthusiastic because I personally knew the singers and the musicians performing for the inaugural program. The one-hour-long inaugural program started at about eleven in the morning, and it was indeed a grand presentation!

However, I was a little disappointed because the majority of the program featured classical-based songs followed by some folk and *adhunik geet* (modern) Nepali songs. The term "modern" here implies songs that are basically composed keeping in mind the taste of the upcoming generation and the requirements of the popular Nepali media. *Adhunik*/modern songs in India include regional film-songs and album numbers that are sung in local languages with themes like love, betrayal, and yearning as their main focus. The orchestral accompaniment consists of instruments like the guitar, congas, harmonica, accordion, keyboards, drum-set, violins, pianos, table, and the harmonium. *Adhunik geet*, also referred to by some musicians as *sugam sangeet*,

use chordal harmony, in addition to raag (classical) music. I recall feeling a little let down by the inaugural program, because I was looking forward to witnessing a variety program showcasing the gamut of Gorkha culture rather than just songs sung by Gorkha artists. In retrospect, I think I was expecting too much from this television event; because I often had to explain Gorkha/Nepali culture to my Bengali friends and neighbors, I was hoping the television program would clarify everything. Therefore, I was looking forward to watching a program that comprehensively demonstrated all that was culturally and musically Gorkha – folk music, folk dances, dramas, skits, etc. Nevertheless, the general wave of optimism that swept Darjeeling hills and the Nepali-speaking Gorkhas after the inaugural television program was too overwhelming to leave any space for objective criticism or critique.

Having grown up within the campus grounds of North Bengal University (NBU),¹³⁷ where my father worked, the upbeat discussions that took place almost every evening at our house between my parents and all the Gorkhey uncles¹³⁸ from Darjeeling hills pursuing their Ph.D.s at NBU consumed my attention. This was partly after my seventh-grade geography teacher, who was a Bengali, openly accosted me saying that *my* demand for Gorkhaland was utter rubbish! Taken aback, I was intrigued why the demand of the Gorkhas was “rubbish,” and why the demand had to be “mine.” Being born and raised in Siliguri among Bengalis, any notion of my being different from Bengalis had never crossed my mind, let alone having any fixed idea about the political demand of the Gorkhas. In fact, I had always considered myself a combination of both, never giving it any serious thought. But now being labeled as a Gorkha in school, I was

¹³⁷ North Bengal University is located at Siliguri, the foothills of Darjeeling hills. It was established in 1962 and is the nearest university available to the hills students wanting to pursue higher education. It has an independent Nepali department and also a Center of Himalayan Studies, which offers courses for M.A. and Ph.D. programs.

¹³⁸ In India it is considered impolite to address one's elders by their names. So the general norm is to refer them as *mama* or *kaka* (uncle), *dada* (elder brother), *didi* (big sister), or *mami*, *kaki*, *mashi* (aunty) even though one may not be related to them on either the mother's or the father's side.

interested to learn about the Gorkha demand and why Gorkhas felt marginalized living in India. Coming face-to-face with the awkward dilemma of having to choose whether I was to be a Gorkha or a Bengali rather early in life (I was thirteen then), I began to be conscious of “living life in the crack” (an in-betweenness that is neither here nor there). It marked the beginning of a journey that has inspired and motivated me to do what I do today as an ethnomusicologist, musician, researcher, and an extension of the Gorkha community with whom I share a close connection. As my awareness of my new interstitial position between Bengalis and Gorkhas grew, I often wondered (a) why it was so essential for the Gorkhas to be recognized as Indian citizens and (b) why the majority of Bengalis were prewired to oppose the Gorkha movement. As a teenager, I also began to notice how my parents and our Bengali neighbors would studiously avoid the topic of Gorkhaland while animatedly discussing “neutral” subjects like the Cold War between the United States and Russia, or the assassination of India’s prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi by Sikh Punjabis, etc. Talking about the Gorkhaland movement was a strict no-no with our Bengali friends, even though my family engaged in lively discussion with their Gorkha friends and neighbors regarding DGHC and the broadcast of the “Program in Nepali” from DKK.

DKK began telecasting this thirty-minute-long Nepali program from the summer of 1989. It was scheduled to air weekdays from 4:30 pm to 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday. My family and I eagerly looked forward to this program and dutifully followed it every afternoon at the given time. Looking back, I could sense that this program provided a sense of validation to my parents, our Gorkha neighbors and friends, and the entire Gorkha community with a sense of Indianness that the Nepali-speakers of India had been denied so far. Also, having a Nepali program

broadcast by the West Bengal state television channel was like an acknowledgement by the dominant Bengali culture group of the presence of the minority Gorkhas in north Bengal. However, this initial euphoria about the “Program in Nepali” began to gradually subside as it became extremely difficult not to notice the rapidly deteriorating standards of the telecast program. Looking back, I realize that the rapidly declining quality of the music program coincided directly with rumors of rampant bribery and the dictatorial rule of Subhas Ghising (the chairman of DGHC) beginning to grip Darjeeling hills. Speaking with a high-ranking DGHC official on condition of anonymity, I met briefly during my fieldwork in December 2010, and R. P. Waiba, ex-councilor of DGHC, I came to know that soon after DGHC was formed, it came to be solely controlled by Subhas Ghising and his band of “loyal men,” who followed Ghising’s every diktat without hesitation. Likewise, the choosing, scheduling, and appointing of singers for the “Program in Nepali” became a politics of “contract” that severely jeopardized the quality of music in favor of political favoritism and rampant misrule. “Contract” here implied that the agency or agents paying the highest bribe to Ghising and his “men” were given the deal to perform for the television program. These agents provided singers who were exempt from any kind of auditions or screening process before they performed and recorded for DKK.

To add to these woes, Chandan Lomjhel, a senior musician and band-leader from Darjeeling, keenly pointed out that the not-so-well trained singers and musicians from Darjeeling hills found themselves up against a whole new set of impediments upon landing in Kolkata. Not only were they literally in a “different landscape”¹³⁹ but also in a land of a foreign language (i.e.

¹³⁹ The district of Darjeeling is mostly hilly and mountainous, whereas Kolkata, situated in the delta regions of Sundarbans, is part of the eastern north Indian plains. Also, in comparison to Darjeeling’s cool temperate climate ranging from 40 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit, Kolkata is hot and humid, with temperatures ranging from 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. But with humidity in Kolkata crossing the 100% mark, the temperature feels more like 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

Bengali), a different cultural set-up, and a different mind-set of appreciating music, not to mention being nervous about performing before the television crew and camera. Bengali music culture, compared to Gorkha music culture, is predominantly North Indian classical music-based, so that most Bengalis are attuned to appreciating musics that are classically based or performed by classically trained vocalists and/or instrumentalists. That is to say, Bengali musicians in general are accustomed to a different set of standards for music appreciation than their Gorkha counterparts, who are less classically inclined and more familiar with Western music in general. Hence with this overarching difference in interpreting musicality and performing music between the Gorkha and the Bengali musicians, the Gorkha singers felt their accompanying Bengali musicians were often insensitive and judgmental about their performance or their requests for certain musical sound accompaniments for performing Gorkha music.

Chandan Lomjhel elaborates this situation in the following manner. According to him, some Gorkha folk songs, which are performed to a folk-beat called *samala*, are similar to *keharwa tala* of north Indian classical music or the 4/4 time signature of Western music. Literally, the word *samala* has no meaning, but it is one of the most commonly played rhythms in Nepali folk music or dance. This beat is spelled as:

1 2 3 4 / 1 2 3 4
dhang –ti nak dhing / dhang –ti nak dhing (sing)

(These syllables mean nothing and loosely imitate the sounds of the *madal*)

In comparison, *Keharwa* is an eight-beat rhythmic cycle or *tala* used in north Indian classical music and is generally used to accompany semi-classical compositions or dance numbers. The beat arrangements and spellings are as follows:

1 2 3 4 / 5 6 7 8
dha ghe na ti / na ke dhi na (sing)

(These syllables do not imply anything and loosely echo the sounds/*bols* of the tabla)

Thus, instead of listening carefully to the rhythmic and aesthetic needs of the Gorkha artists, the Bengali musicians would “negligently” override the essence of *samala* and play *keharwa tala* instead. The same would happen with the Tamang *selo*,¹⁴⁰ which, although set to a 4/4 meter, requires a nuanced understanding of its points of stress and rest such as:

1 2 3 4 / 1 2 3 4
Chyak dum dum – /chyak dum dum –
Stress – – rest /stress – – rest

(The syllables heard here are imitative of the percussion sounds from the *damphu*)

With the Bengali musicians ignoring the needs of the Gorkha folk singers, Lomjhel lamented that the Gorkha folk songs lost much of their essence and aesthetic appeal. Also, repeated requests by Gorkha singers for *madal* and *sarangi* accompaniment would fall on deaf ears, in which case they had to make do with either tabla or electronic drum accompaniment. Lomjhel tried to explain this socio-cultural misunderstanding between Bengalis and Gorkhas by saying, “*Bangali haru le hamro geet sangeet lai bujhidiana ani hamro bhasa alag ra haat badhiye koley garda hami le pani uniharulai bujhaunu sakenau*” (Bengalis never try to understand Gorkha music, and because we speak a different language, we are limited in expressing our music to them better). However, on a lighter note, Lomjhel also had this to say:

“*Gorkhey lai jasto Bangali macha pakaunu audaina, tesare Bangali lai kailei Gorkhey gundruk*

¹⁴⁰ Although this genre of folksong is essentially related to the Tamang ethnic group, its performance is not strictly limited to Tamangs. Anybody is welcome to perform it, but hearing its signature rhythm I have noticed audiences recognizing it as “Tamang music.”

pakaunu audaina” (just as Gorkhas can never cook fish like the Bengalis, the Bengalis can never cook *gundruk*¹⁴¹ like the Gorkhas) (Interview with Chandan Lomjhel, December 17, 2010).

Meeting with Gorkha singers and musicians also helped me to confirm a certain rumor I had heard about DKK’s changing policies for the “Program in Nepali.” It was often commented that Gorkha singers, who were initially allowed to take accompanying artists with them to Kolkata, were gradually barred from doing so. Rather, it was announced that DKK would provide Gorkha singers with accompanying artists in Kolkata. This decision, followed by funds being released only to cover the singers’ travelling costs to Kolkata, left Gorkha singers with no alternative than to make do with whatever musicians they were provided by DKK. Chandan Lomjhel and Mala Chhetri, who performed as Gorkha singers at DKK, confirmed this rumor. Lomjhel and Chhetri reminisced how they had to haggle with the Bengali officials to take their musicians to Kolkata and would often have to return home unsatisfied with their performances. They remembered having to deal with the haughty arrogance of the Bengali musicians, who were either in a hurry to finish the recording session or busy flaunting their “better judgment” of knowing Gorkha music better than the Gorkhas themselves (*hami bhandā barii janney*) (Interview with Mala Chhetri, October 6, 2010).

Chhetri also recalled that the Bengali musicians’, recording engineers’, and other Doordarshan officials’ sense of superiority extended not only to being insensitive towards the invited Gorkha singers, but also to the way Bengali musicians were inclined to flaunt their musical skills as superior to those of their Gorkha counterparts. Both Lomjhel and Chhetri felt

¹⁴¹ *Gundruk* is made of fermented leafy vegetables, namely mustard leaves or radish leaves, and is one of the most popular foods of the Gorkhas. It is usually soupy and eaten with rice, but sometimes it is also made into a pickle (*achar*) and served as a side dish. In the past, *gundruk*, rich in essential vitamins and minerals, was eaten during the lean years when the diet mainly consisted of tubers and maize.

that there was no “musical give and take” (*sangeet ko aadan pradan*) between the Bengali and Gorkha musicians during the recording sessions in Kolkata. Rather, it was always subtly made apparent that the Bengalis were doing a big favor by allowing Gorkhas to perform at Kolkata, and hence the latter were expected to be grateful for the opportunity offered. It may be noted that I choose to highlight the comments and feedback of Lomjhel and Chhetri because Lomjhel is a professional musician, singer, and band-leader with experience of composing, performing, and recording all kinds of music for more than thirty years, while Chhetri is a classically trained singer who grew up in Kolkata and Siliguri, reads, writes, and speaks fluent Bengali, and is well-versed in the ethos of Bengali music and culture. In addition, both Lomjhel and Chhetri are approved All India Radio (A.I.R.) artists and have been performing for A.I.R. Kurseong for over two decades.

I emphasize the credentials of Lomjhel and Chhetri because unlike them, most Gorkha singers assigned to perform for “Program in Nepali” at DKK did not have an extensive Indian classical music background and had very little or no professional experience at all. Some Gorkha singers I met during my fieldwork such as Bhaskar Rasailly and Namrata Blon were quite bitter recalling their respective experiences at DKK. In fact, Blon was even reluctant to talk about it for long. Both Rasailly and Blon are non-professional music performers, who do not speak or understand Bengali well, are not familiar with the nuts-and-bolts of music arrangement or the technical aspects of music recording, and were also experiencing the metropolitan life of Kolkata for the first time in the 1990s. Therefore, one may infer that if Lomjhel and Chhetri, well-trained musicians and relatively fluent speakers of Bengali, were having problems with their Bengali counterparts, then other singers like Rasailly or Blon would have had an even harder time.

Listening to Lomjhel, Chhetri, Rasailly, and Blon's accounts of othering, insensitivity, and the tug-of-war they all experienced in representing and performing their music at Kolkata, I was reminded of Manprasad Subba's well-known work titled *Words* in the book *Kinnara ka Awazharu* (Voices from the Margins). Subba, who specializes in works that are currently socio-politically relevant to the Gorkha cause for greater representation within India, expresses the following sentiment in his poem in English (Subba 2009: 76-77):

Till late last night
You'd speak and speak and speak
and I'd mutely listen.
Today
my muteness has broken into speech
Are you listening?
Or just vexed at my audacity?
....
Thundering *dhak*¹⁴² of your decree
has long been drumming my ears
but today
my eardrums beat
to *Sangini*¹⁴³ of their own conscience.
...
Today when I
laugh and cry
you only frown
and bluff the world
or keep shouting my history down.

Here Subba articulates not only the cultural domination of Bengalis over the Gorkhas in the words "Thundering *dhak* of your decree [versus *madal*, the Gorkha folk drum] has long been drumming my ears," but also the long-lasting issues of marginalization and othering that have

¹⁴² A type of barrel drum that is played during the Durga puja celebrations by the Hindu Bengalis. It is generally associated with the Bengali cultural identity of West Bengal, India.

¹⁴³ A typical Nepali folk music/dance form mainly performed by women during the festival of *Teej* in the eastern Himalayan regions of Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, and Nepal. It is performed in a slow 3/3 meter.

haunted the Gorkha psyche for decades. Since the re-writing of India's modern-day history and Indianness, Subba claims that the Gorkhas face not only political and economic discrimination but also racial discrimination in India, since the majority of the Gorkhas are of Mongolian/Tibeto-Burman origin. Subba claims that the dominant Indians, the Anglicized colonial subjects, who led India's nationalist movement, followed their British rulers' ideology by recognizing only the Euro-centric Hindu-Aryan paradigm as civil while subjecting minority Indians to "demographic liquidation" (Subba 2008: 6). As a result, Subba, like Bidhan Golay (2006) and Tanka Subba (1989, 2003, 2009), likens Bengal's (and dominant Indian's) attitude towards Gorkhas to that of "internal colonization" (Subba 2008: 5). However, whereas Tanka Subba and Golay relate "internal colonization" or marginalization of Gorkhas in terms of economic, political, and socio-cultural marginalization, Manprasad Subba adds to the meaning of "internal colonization" from a more profound psychoanalytical perspective.

Taking inspiration from Leslie Marmon Silko, a Native American writer and social activist, Subba writes that the Gorkhas, in addition to being socio-economically deprived, suffer from the brunt of being decentered subjects. They are subjects of suppressed history, who have been displaced from their own land and whose identity remains fixed within the colonial epistemological grid of "outsiders" blatantly appropriated by the dominant Indians for their benefit. Thus being subjected to oppression and dislocation, Gorkhas suffer from aphasia – a condition that causes a disconnect between words and things and an inability to recognize things in the world and assign proper names to them (Stoler 2008: 210). Because history tells and re-tells the identity of Gorkhas through the lens of a hegemonic interpretation bypassing native memory and local narratives, Gorkhas are caught between contradictory memories when it

comes to re-telling their identity. To counter this disjuncture, Subba urges Gorkhas to save and preserve their own stories. Here, “stories” imply indigenous narratives and memories that have been suppressed to facilitate the dissemination of the mainstream metanarrative. Quoting Silko’s statement that “You don’t have anything if you don’t have the stories” (Silko 2006: 2), Subba reiterates that Gorkhas should rise to protect their own “stories” from the dominant power so as to curb further destruction and confusion. Doing so, Subba asserts, will help the Gorkhas regain their indigenous history and set right their identity within India, which remains largely forgotten, lost, befuddled, and misconstrued within the folds of India’s consciousness (Subba 2009: 1-20) .

Likewise, with the predominant narrative of Indian classical music overriding all musics of India in terms of history, finesse, or cultural value from the early 1900s,¹⁴⁴ it comes as no big surprise that musicians from Darjeeling hills found themselves at the receiving end of Indian classical music’s prejudices and biases. With the parochial Bengalis directing the “less qualified”/“backward” Gorkhas, it was assumed by the former that they were extending a big favor to the latter. As a result, any suggestions from the Gorkha singers on how to improve their performance were sidelined and overlooked, with no mutual dialogue encouraged between the Gorkhas and the Bengalis. Hence, the thirty-minute-long broadcast chiefly came to signify thirty minutes of Gorkha singers performing music that was directed by their Bengali superiors. It never seemed to expand beyond that. Very rarely did we see presentations of folk dances, skits, dance-dramas, or plays. Gradually, by the early 1990s, new recordings ceased to happen and the old recordings began to be recycled to fill in the now fifteen-minute “Program in Nepali.” By the mid-1990s the time was a mere seven minutes, with the same old recordings doing the rounds

¹⁴⁴ Detailed discussion of the rise to supremacy of Indian classical music from the early twentieth century may be found in Allen 1997, Weidman 2006, and Bakhle 2005.

again and again, until in 1996 the “Program in Nepali” simply ceased to exist. The West Bengal government provided no explanations, and no enquiries were filed by the DGHC officials as a profound lull dampened the aspirations of Gorkha musicians from Darjeeling hills.

Basant Chhetri felt this discontinuity signified the breaking point of the tug-and-war between the Gorkhas and the Bengalis – an underlying factor that had always underpinned the relationship between the two communities. Chandan Lomjhel, however, stated that it was good that the “Program in Nepali” came to an end, since it was not serving its purpose well. Instead, he pointed out, the program had become a façade, with Gorkhas performing on stage as puppets, whose strings were manipulated by the Bengali *babus*¹⁴⁵ relishing their power as they sat in their sprawling air-conditioned offices in Kolkata (Interview with Chandan Lomjhel, December 20, 2012). Adding another perspective to this issue, Chhetri stated that the insensitive decision to cut funds for the “Program in Nepali” by the West Bengal government was hurtful to the Gorkha psyche, but to have Subhas Ghising, chairperson of DGHC, take no action against it was the final blow for the music community of Darjeeling hills. According to Chhetri, with Ghising’s dirty politics gripping the Darjeeling hills, there was very little the Gorkha musical community could do to articulate its grievances. He also bemoaned Ghising’s one-man rule over DGHC and his changing role of becoming a “yes-man” to the Bengali *babus* of Kolkata.

According to Chhetri, Ghising abused the trust of the entire Gorkha community and undermined the Gorkha struggle for an Indian identity and Gorkhaland. Ghising forgot about the sacrifice of the martyrs of the 1980s movement, Chhetri said, and added that Ghising “*le*

¹⁴⁵ The stereotypical Bengali *babu* was a product of the British colonial ideology, which came to signify the newly created Anglicized middle-class Bengalis. Because Calcutta (now Kolkata) was the capital of the British Presidency until 1905, the Bengalis were the first to benefit from an English education. Later they were hired to work as clerks in the East India Company’s office and came to be referred to as *babus*. Since the majority of the *babus* were from Bengal, the term “Bengali *babu*” stuck.

Gorkhaland ko mudda lai sasto banayo ra bechi khayo” (Ghising also demeaned the issue of Gorkha identity and sold it) (Interview with Basant Chhetri, December 9, 2010). Echoing a similar sentiment, Gagan Gurung likened Ghising to Mir Jafar, the military commander of Siraj-ud-Daulla, who betrayed his king to enable the British to take over Bengal in 1757. Interestingly, the tag “betrayal”/ “traitor” has stuck with Ghising ever since the public ousted him from power under the leadership of Bimal Gurung, the leader of Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM).

Discussing Ghising’s stint as chairman of DGHC from 1988 to 2007, I got the feeling that people felt with the concentration of power solely in his hands, he gradually morphed from being a revolutionary leader into an agent for the Bengali bureaucrats, who fed him enormous amounts of money to keep the issue of Gorkhaland under wraps. In fact, two ex-councilors of DGHC I met in 2010 stated on condition of anonymity that they witnessed “boxes of money” being transported to Ghising from various agents of the then communist West Bengal government. One of the ex-councilors also vividly recalled overhearing Buddhadeb Dasgupta, the ex-chief minister of West Bengal, saying to one of his colleagues during one of their official meetings in Kolkata, “I will kill Ghising with money” ([Nepali] *Mo teila [Ghising] paisa le maarchu*). Lamenting Ghising’s misrule of twenty-one years that robbed the people of Darjeeling of their voice and their expectations, the other ex-counselor, now retired from active politics, had this to say: “*Afnoi manche gaddar nisko bhane, tyo jati ko unnati kasle garnei?*” (If your own deceives you, then how can we as a community make any progress?).

When I asked him about the “Program in Nepali” being broadcast from DKK, he said it was indeed a positive step, but the execution of the whole idea suffered from gross mismanagement, misinformation, improper use of funds, and insincerity of purpose. After the

television program came to a halt, followed by the declining number of music performances at Rock Garden and Shrubbery-Nightingale Park, an uncomfortable lull descended over Darjeeling's cultural scene. There was an air of stagnant restlessness and tension among the Gorkhas, who seemed unable to decide what to do next. The positive outcome of this grey period was the organization of the Darjeeling Carnival in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006. As mentioned in chapter two, when the Carnival organizers found themselves on shaky ground regarding funds and Darjeeling's looming political change, an event unfolded that added another new chapter to Darjeeling's history. This began when a local boy from Darjeeling hills made his way to the final selection round in a popular reality television show in 2007, which involved direct public participation to support their favored contestant.

The “Indian Idol Phenomenon” of 2007

The reality television show I examine and discuss in this section is called the “Indian Idol 3.” It was a singing reality television program that was aired through one of India's most popular commercial television channels, Sony Entertainment Television. When the political hubbub in Darjeeling as to whether the Gorkhas should be officially designated as Hindus or indigenous tribes was consuming Darjeeling hills over 2005-2007, the third season of Indian Idol kicked off, on May 4, 2007. This season had Prashant Tamang, a native of Darjeeling town, participating in the competition. And, as Tamang successfully made his way through to the public voting rounds,¹⁴⁶ the resounding public hysteria that followed his victory every step of the way

¹⁴⁶ The Indian Idol basically has two types of rounds – the judges' rounds and the voting rounds. In the judges' rounds the singers are eliminated based upon the judges' decision until the top sixteen make it to the voting rounds. In the voting rounds, the elimination of the contestants is based upon the number of votes they obtain from their fans.

unprecedentedly contributed to the end of Subhas Ghising's political future in Darjeeling hills. This episode of Darjeeling's history, following Ghising's autocratic rule for the past nineteen years (1988 to 2007), had the public on the streets garnering support for Prashant Tamang as they voiced anger against Ghising. The civic outrage that ensued between Ghising's men and his opponents, enlivened with Tamang clearing every round in the competition, eventually paved the way for re-vamping the prevailing methods of demanding recognition for Gorkhas in India.

Tamang, who was born in 1983 at Tungsung Basti near Darjeeling town, worked for the Kolkata Police after his father, also employed in the Kolkata Police, passed away in a road accident.¹⁴⁷ At his work place, Tamang was a member of the police band and performed regularly for their shows in and around Kolkata. Although not a trained singer, Tamang was encouraged by his colleagues and senior officers to audition for the Indian Idol 3 auditions in Kolkata. Once he effortlessly made it through the initial judges' rounds to enter the voting rounds, the rest, as they say, is history. Since Tamang was the first competitor from Darjeeling hills in the Indian Idol 3 singing competition, his presence in this show became iconic for the Gorkhas. Unbeknownst to the program organizers, Tamang became a symbol of validation that legitimized the notion of Indian citizenship for Gorkhas all over India. The wave of joyous optimism following Tamang's endorsement by the mainstream Indian media was so palpable that talking to friends and family in India from Los Angeles, I felt carried away by their positive enthusiasm. Soon my curiosity got the better of me and I began to watch the program every week over the Internet. Tamang sang Bollywood songs, which is the norm for most reality music shows in India, except on the day when the contestants had to sing in their regional languages. Tamang sang in Nepali.

¹⁴⁷ <http://thehimalayanbeacon.com/encyclopedia/tiki-index.php?page=Prashant+Tamang&highlight=prashant%20tamang>, last viewed May 31, 2012.

In all the voting rounds, not once did Tamang come close to being in the bottom three. Instead, he breezed past every round as Gorkhas from India untiringly supported him with thousands and thousands of votes via their cell phones. So passionate were the Gorkhas, especially in Darjeeling hills, in ensuring Tamang's victory that when Reliance, the mobile phone company receiving votes for the Indian Idol 3 contestants, broke down, they cried foul amidst widespread protest. An Indian newspaper, *The Times of India*, had this to report on June 10, 2007:

For nearly four hours, rioters went on the rampage, targeting retail outlets dealing with Reliance service and vouchers with police failing to pacify angry rioters. Just a few days ago, people complained that their SMSes [sic] were not reaching the destinations and also warned of protests if services were not restored. Saturday's agitation and rioting were also due to the fact that rumours were afloat that the internet had declared Prashant not selected for the next round. Posters were also put up at Chowk Bazaar, condemning the Reliance service provider. Protesters even forced shops to down shutters and stopped all movement of vehicles. People gheraoed¹⁴⁸ the Darjeeling Sadar police station demanding immediate action against the cellular service providers.¹⁴⁹

With emotions running high in Darjeeling hills and Siliguri plains, Gorkhas from all walks of life came together to support Tamang. However, repeated pleas to Ghising to support Tamang fell on deaf ears. Equal to the extreme hysteria surrounding Tamang's presence in the Indian Idol contest was Ghising's utter indifference towards the whole affair. While people were going "mad with hopes of seeing their boy hit national limelight, . . . giving up their month's salaries, selling off their cars and jewellery to help Prashant,"¹⁵⁰ Ghising quietly left for Bangkok

¹⁴⁸ *Gherao* means "encirclement." Its origin is Hindi and signifies an Indian way of protest. A group of people surrounds a politician or government buildings until their demands are met. Owing to its popularity as a new method of labor protest, the word *gherao* was included in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed., in 2004. In common usage, however, the past tense of the verb, *gheraoed*, is more common.

¹⁴⁹ http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007-06-10/kolkata/27992259_1_smses-providers-prashant-tamang, last viewed September, 27, 2011.

¹⁵⁰ http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2008-03-06/india/27762665_1_subash-ghisingh-dghc-prashant-tamang, last viewed January 9, 2012.

to attend a seminar on tourism. This act of Ghising was interpreted by the Gorkhas as the ultimate slap to their aspirations by their own leader. With Ghising's popularity already on the wane following years of misrule, his insensitivity towards his own community's desperate desire to garner support for Tamang gave rise to strong anti-Ghising sentiments. As Anil Thapa, a teacher from Kurseong, put it, "We got upset when Ghisingh was disinterested in the one happy event in the hills after so long."¹⁵¹ This was in sharp contrast to Sikkim's chief minister, Pawan Chamling, who openly assured that Sikkim would extend all possible help to ensure Tamang's win in Indian Idol 3.¹⁵²

Taking this opportunity, Bimal Gurung, Ghising's former right-hand man, who had fallen out with his leader following Ghising's hypocritical politics, rose to the occasion. As he tirelessly campaigned to secure votes for Tamang, Gurung capitalized on the anti-Ghising sentiments to turn the situation in his favor. Gurung mobilized the "Prashant Tamang phenomenon" to successfully secure a popular mandate to oust Ghising and to present himself as the next leader of the Gorkhas. Gurung's claim was that he could make possible the dream of "Gorkhaland" in India by March 10, 2010.¹⁵³ Likewise, Tamang's victory at the Indian Idol contest on September 23, 2007¹⁵⁴ also signified a shift in the Gorkha leadership in Darjeeling hills. Bimal Gurung rose to be the new leader as Subhas Ghising was forced to quit Darjeeling on July 26, 2008, with his wife Dhan Kumari, son Mohan, and a handful of followers, and move to Siliguri.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2008-03-06/india/27762665_1_subash-ghisingh-dghc-prashant-tamang/2, last viewed January 9, 2012.

¹⁵² <http://sikkimdarjeelingkalimpong.blogspot.com/2007/09/pawan-chamling-supports-prashant-tamang.html>, last viewed May 31, 2012.

¹⁵³ http://sikkimdarjeelingkalimpong.blogspot.com/2007_12_01_archive.html, last viewed January 9, 2012.

¹⁵⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Idol_3, last viewed September 9, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/news/index.php?news=1116&vote=5&aid=1116&Vote=Vote>, last viewed September 9, 2011.

This fateful turning point came about when Bimal Gurung, after launching his party, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM), on October 7, 2007¹⁵⁶ began aggressively to question the policies of DGHC and Ghising's motive behind the Sixth Schedule for Darjeeling hills. Gurung organized rallies and public meetings and asked people to support him in overthrowing Ghising's one-man rule. As Darjeeling hills became enflamed in the crossfire between Ghising and Gurung amidst widespread protests, a bullet fired from the house of a DGHC councilor, Deepak Gurung, happened to kill Pramila Sharma, a GJMM activist, on July 25, 2008.¹⁵⁷ This incident was the last blunder of Ghising's party, as all GNLFF party members including Ghising were forced to leave Darjeeling hills amid high security. Also of note here is the fact that Ajay Edwards Pradhan, pioneer of Darjeeling Carnival and leader of the GNLFF Youth Front, who had supported the Sixth Schedule for Darjeeling hills, was also targeted. Pradhan's well-known bakery-restaurant Glenary's was ransacked, and he was ordered by GJMM to leave Darjeeling immediately.¹⁵⁸ Today, Pradhan lives in Siliguri, where he manages his family business, while his sister takes care of Glenary's in Darjeeling.

As for Tamang, after winning Indian Idol 3, he entered into a one-year contract with Sony and was awarded one million Indian rupees as a cash prize. He released his maiden album, *Dhanyavad* (Thank you), with BMG Sony in 2007 to thank his supporters and fans. This album included Hindi as well as Nepali songs. In 2008 he began his career as a playback singer for a Nepalese film, *Himmat 2*, along with his Indian Idol co-contestant Charu Semwal. In 2009 he embarked on his acting career in Nepal. His first film, *Gorkha Paltan*, was produced and

¹⁵⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorkha_Janmukti_Morcha, last viewed September 9, 2011.

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.darjeelintimes.com/news/Opinions/Himalayan-Faultlines.html>, last viewed September 9, 2011.

¹⁵⁸ <http://himalnews.wordpress.com/2010/04/01/morcha-axes-two-to-rebuild-singer%E2%80%99s-home-%E2%80%93-glenary%E2%80%99s-owner-flees/>, last viewed January 9, 2012.

released in Nepal in 2010 and did very well at the box-office. His second and third films, *Angalo Yo Maya Ko* and *Kina Maya Ma*, were produced, directed, and shot in Sikkim and released in March and June 2011 respectively. Last year, *Darjeeling Times* reported that Tamang was eyeing the Bollywood film industry for his next career move, but nothing has come of it as yet.¹⁵⁹

What I have left out so far in the narration of the Indian Idol 3 high drama is the involvement of all Nepali-speaking people, not just those in India, but worldwide. Soon after Tamang's entry, Sony Entertainment Television, which airs in other South Asia countries, announced it would open telephone lines to allow citizens of neighboring countries to vote for their favorite contestant. Following this there was a mad rush in Nepal and among Nepalese and Gorkha emigrants living all over the world to vote for Prashant Tamang. According to newspaper reports and media news, canvassing began in every village in Nepal to support Tamang for Indian Idol 3 as it did in India. However, in a remarkable development, instead of being just an icon of Gorkha identity in India, Tamang catapulted to becoming the representative of all Nepali-speaking people throughout the world. As an online article suggested, Tamang, with his presence in the Indian Idol 3 competition, became a way for Nepalese citizens to vent their displeasure against the discrimination and prejudice they faced in India. Dinesh Wagle writes, "Even in Nepal, the program was so popular that thousands of people from across the country rallied in Prashant's favor, collected hundreds of thousands of money and sent them to Darjeeling so that more votes to Prashant could be text messaged. Though the Indian Idol program's slogan was '*Bharat ka saan*' [pride of India in Hindi], many Nepalis were thinking that Prashant was actually '*Nepal ko saan*' [pride of Nepal in Nepali]."¹⁶⁰ Likewise, after Tamang's resounding win

¹⁵⁹ <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/main-news/entertainment/45-music-and-movies/1577-prashant-tamang-eyes-bollywood.html>, last viewed 9/22/2011.

¹⁶⁰ <http://blog.com.np/2007/09/29/indian-idol-protests-and-nepali-identity-in-india/>, last viewed January 9, 2012.

he was whisked off by the Nepalese entertainment industry as their “*chora/boy*,” which left Gorkhas feeling slighted and confused by Tamang’s willingness to opt for working in Nepal than representing the Gorkha cause in India.

India’s policy of not revising the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty,¹⁶¹ and India’s and West Bengal’s reluctance to integrate Gorkhas within the socio-political parameters of Indianness while reaping huge benefits from the local tea and tourism industries, has led to profound prejudices that haunt all three parties alike. The dominant Indians harbor the misconception that every Nepali-speaking individual in India is from Nepal and hence an immigrant worker; the Gorkhas suffer from an acute sense of insecurity from being misunderstood as “foreigners” in their own home-country; and Nepalese citizens feel insecure in a foreign land where the Indian government does very little to ensure their safety from ridicule or abuse by mainstream Indians. So Tamang, coming as he did from Darjeeling, from a non-immigrant family, and speaking Nepali, a language spoken in India and Nepal, came to signify different things within a wide range of contexts to dominant Indians, Gorkhas, and Nepalese. This story brought to light issues regarding nation-states and the tenebrous reality of borderland existence that often re-stage or upstage any prefigured sense of nationalism or identity in South Asia.

¹⁶¹ The Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950 is a bilateral treaty between Nepal and India establishing a close strategic relationship between the two South Asian countries. The treaty was signed on July 31, 1950 by Prime Minister of Nepal Mohan Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana and the Indian ambassador to Nepal, Chadreshwar Narayan Singh. The treaty allows for the free movement of people and goods between the two nations, and a close relationship and collaboration on matters of defense and foreign affairs. While India values the treaty as deflecting the influence of its regional competitor, the People’s Republic of China, the treaty has been unpopular in many segments of Nepalese society, where members often regard it as a breach of its sovereignty (http://www.nepaldemocracy.org/documents/treaties_agreements/nep_india_open_border.htm, last viewed May 31, 2012).

Analysis of the Work of the Media at the Borderlands

The workings of the popular, mass, and electronic media in Darjeeling district reflects a hybrid, anxiety-ridden space that in essence defines the crux of minority borderland existence. Be it tuning in to Radio Nepal to recreate one's familiar space of belonging or listening to *deusi-bhailo* broadcast by A.I.R. Kurseong to validate their Indian connection, articulating identity for minority borderland Gorkhas has never been easy. As Paola Bacchetta explains in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the dominant group's preoccupation with the minority group with their concerns and quest to know keeps the latter exhausted because no amount of explanation or conduct is ever adequate for the dominant to understand the minority's point-of-view ("okay, let me try harder to explain myself to you"). As a result, the minority is obliged to respond only from the dominant grid of intelligibility (that erases and silences them), thereby reinforcing the dominant's group's position over the minority, keeping the latter in check by not allowing them to imagine becoming themselves (Bacchetta 2007: xiii).

Likewise, Gorkhas having to live within the constraints of the dominant grid of Indianness (cultural, musical, linguistic, racial, and religious) find their hybrid/multiple inter-subjectivity as borderland communities silenced and ignored. Having to explain themselves endlessly to the dominant Indians to legitimize their Indian identity with no support from the Indian government, the Gorkhas are left feeling anxious about being ostracized as foreigners in India. Given this situation, the emergence of private media transcending state policies has helped to promote mass mediation by offering "new recourses and new disciplines for the negotiation of imagined *selves* [my emphasis] and imagined *worlds* [my emphasis]" (Appadurai 2008: 3). To this quote, I would also like to add "lived" selves and "lived" worlds that are often silenced when

translated to conform to the dominant grid/mode of expression or allegiance. I highlight “selves” and “worlds” to highlight the notion of hybridity and multiplicity that the singular use of the terms “self” or “world” often short-circuits. It erases the multiple layers that give identity its depth of lived reality. Hence, I suggest identity be understood as a double-edged metaphor for endless change and plurality, as much as it is portrayed as a passive, unchanging state of singular/linear existence.

To counter the state’s ideology of a specific ethno-linguistic identity for regional states in India, the media becomes a vital tool for minorities to catch the dominant group’s attention. For the borderland minority community of Gorkhas, tuning in to *deusi-bhailo* on A.I.R. Kurseong or Radio Nepal on *Diwali/Tihar* helped them to get the attention of the Bengalis, who seemed willing to acknowledge, even just for the three festive days, the existence of Gorkhas among Bengalis and their identity in terms of how they wished to represent themselves. The festive rituals, the sonic ambience, and the two or three groups of Gorkha youths visiting Gorkha families to sing *deusi-bhailo* captivated the Bengalis and other non-Gorkha families at North Bengal University. At present Radio Misty captivates Bengali and non-Gorkha audiences, who listen to the Gorkha DJs speaking to them in Nepali and playing Nepali folk and modern songs, which they love listening to all day, every day. This causes disjunctures, e.g. non-Gorkhas listening to Nepali broadcasts and vice-versa, which have led to the expansion of predominant notions and beliefs of Indianness to allow for a more inclusive identity in north Bengal.

The “leaky media,” seeping through ideological man-made boundaries and lines of demarcation of personal place and space, mark the advent of reconstituting identity where “identities” and “selves” become implicit with diversity and interstitial existence within a hybrid

cultural space. Likewise, the Indian Idol 3 phenomenon created a major disjuncture when someone from a borderland community, rendered invisible within the popular landscape of India, happened to make it to the public voting rounds. Not only were the Gorkhas feeling validated by Prashant Tamang's presence, but millions and millions of audience members in India and abroad watching Indian Idol 3 were suddenly made aware of the lesser-known Indians whom Tamang inevitably came to represent. With Tamang's Mongolian looks difficult to ignore, his breezing through every round consumed India's attention as India became acutely aware of his presence in the Indian popular media. There was no denying he was an Indian, because every week Tamang was introduced as the "boy/*ladka* from Darjeeling," a place almost everyone in India knows of or has visited. Here, instead of moving images and sounds meeting deterritorialized diaspora communities, images of Tamang met viewers at home unaccustomed to watching an "Asian"-looking Indian singing Hindi songs week after week in the national television network.

This disjunct image of a Mongolian-looking Indian singing Hindi songs opened a space for expanding notions of Indianness beyond the dominant nationalist grid. It brought awareness beyond the set idea of India's image-identity¹⁶² to reframe and recast it more in terms of a socio-realistic fact rather than a romanticized imagined fiction.¹⁶³ The media helped open up the ground realities to the home audience, who for the most part unquestionably accept and adhere to

¹⁶² Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large* (2008) explains that the global infrastructure of mediascape, technoscape, and ideoscape produces and disseminates information to audiences through images recreated by the media. But since these images are created from strips of reality, the lines between realistic and fictional landscapes get blurred. As a result, audiences conceive ideas of the imagined world from the point of a media-hyped image-centric narrative. Taking this point, I suggest that since media mostly tend to take images of the dominant culture group to create a certain "image-identity" of a particular place and its inhabitants, minorities and other groups suffer grossly from this misrepresentation. For example, the media-hyped image-identity of Indianness as being essentially "brown" and "Aryan-centric" is a far cry from the tapestry of India's realistic domain.

¹⁶³ Bernard Cohn in his well-known book *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (1996) expounds the interpretative strategy of the British to understand and label India through bizarre methods of historicization underpinned by Oriental studies, through which all the characters in the Bible (p.78) could supposedly be found in India. This led to romanticizing Indianness from a Indo-European paradigm and of canonizing it through a Euro-centric perspective, which still continues to be the dominant narrative of Indianness in India even to this day.

the constructed idea of modern India that was conceptualized by Indologists, colonial rulers, and Indian nationalist leaders in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century. This dominant notion of Indianness essentially upheld a myth of Aryan history as an unchanging continuity of its society and religious beliefs and practices in India for over three thousand years (Thapar 2002: 1-36). In the end, Indian Idol 3 may not have drastically changed the stereotypical image of Indianness, but it did effectively create a space in which dialogues and discussions of Indianness could be debated, deconstructed, and contemplated within the mainstream media by the majority and minority Indians alike.

For Gorkhas living abroad, sounds and images of the Indian Idol 3 that arose via Sony Entertainment Channel¹⁶⁴ not only created disjunctures as in “moving images meet deterritorialized viewers” (Appadurai 2008: 4), but the program also helped to validate and back their identity as Indians living abroad. Living in the United States, before 2007 I would often observe Gorkhas feeling shy or awkward mingling with other Indians from the dominant ethnic groups. Instead, they would either choose to fraternize with the Nepalese Associations set up to bring together the Nepalese community living in the U.S.A., or keep away from both the Indian and Nepalese organizations. So when Tamang entered the Indian Idol 3 scene, Gorkhas living abroad wired huge sums of money to help send SMS votes to support him.¹⁶⁵ Joining them in this venture were also Nepalese citizens, living in Nepal as well as abroad, who sent money to support and ensure Tamang’s victory in the Indian Idol 3 finale. Perhaps socio-cultural memories of discrimination as immigrant workers in India meshed with marginalization suffered by

¹⁶⁴ The two most popular and easily available Indian channels in the US and other countries are Sony TV and Zee TV.

¹⁶⁵ <http://www.tamangsamaj.com/Prashant%20detail.php>; <http://www.dancewithshadows.com/society/indian-idol-prashant-amit.asp>, last viewed January 12, 2012.

Gorkhas brought forth the spirit of a “Nepali nation” to jointly support Tamang in his pursuit. Although each group (Gorkhas and Nepalese) had their respective agendas in backing Tamang for Indian Idol 3, it nevertheless provided a good example of the mass-mediated “sodalities” that operate beyond boundaries of political identities.

As Appadurai explains, sodalities “have the additional complexity that, in them, diverse local experiences of taste, pleasure, and politics crisscross with one another, thus creating the possibility of convergence in translocal¹⁶⁶ social action that would otherwise be hard to imagine” (Appadurai 2008: 8). With the colonial experience and the unfolding of Indian history from the late 1700s being one of the main factors differentiating Gorkha socio-political and cultural experience from that of Nepal, the global processes involving popular media, mobile texts, and migrant audiences helped these politically different but linguistically related communities to converge translocally and unite in support of Prashant Tamang. However, once the victory was nailed, both parties (Gorkhas and Nepalese) celebrated Tamang’s win based on their respective local political arenas. The different reactions in Nepal and among Indian Gorkhas are well illustrated by the following incidents.

After Tamang’s win, when a radio jockey from a Delhi-based private radio station, Red FM 93.5, Jonathan Brady (alias Nitin Kumar),¹⁶⁷ said “[Hindi] *Aaj* [today] Prashant Tamang ‘Nepali *ladka* [boy] from Darjeeling’ has become Indian Idol (sarcastic laugh) . . . and we have match [cricket] tonight so we need to guard our own house/malls/restaurants by ourselves as there will be no Nepali people to guard these place and whole night we need to say ‘*Jagtay*

¹⁶⁶ Globalization is the transnational flow of global capital, whereas translocality means putting the local issues in the global context and making it widely accessible (<http://www.hz-journal.org/n8/wojtowicz.html>, last viewed July 1, 2012).

¹⁶⁷ Radio jockey Nitin Kumar is not a Bengali. Although I was not able to find more information regarding him, my friends in India said he was perhaps an Anglo-Indian from Goa.

Raho’ [stay awake].”¹⁶⁸ He further added “that all the footpath/street-side *momo* shops will remain closed as a Nepali guy has become the Indian Idol.”¹⁶⁹ Following this, Siliguri and Darjeeling hills erupted in violence.¹⁷⁰ Shops were closed, vehicles burnt, and ethnic clashes erupted, prompting the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, to ask for the army and the BSF (Border Security Force) to help control the situation.¹⁷¹ Moreover, the Chief Minister also demanded that Nitin Kumar be arrested for his derogatory remarks towards the Gorkha community.

And while all this political drama was unfolding on the India’s side of the border, Nepal was eerily quiet and quite unmoved about the whole affair. Other than reporting the incident in one of their dailies, nothing was said or done. Instead, the West Bengal government, which has so far outrightly opposed the demand for Gorkha statehood in India, was forthright in slamming the radio jockey’s comments and demanding immediate action be taken against him.¹⁷² With disagreement thereafter ensuing between Kolkata High Court and the Supreme Court of India, New Delhi, the latter had to step in with a restraining order to prevent West Bengal Police from arresting Nitin. Finally the radio station publicly apologized to Prashant Tamang and the entire Gorkha community, stating that the humor and satire of the radio jockey were unintentional.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ <http://blogtantra.com/2007/09/26/rj-nitin-from-red-fm-935-discriminated-prashant-tamang-and-nepali-community/>, last viewed May 31, 2012.

¹⁶⁹ <http://blogtantra.com/2007/09/26/rj-nitin-from-red-fm-935-discriminated-prashant-tamang-and-nepali-community/>, last viewed January 11, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007-09-27/kolkata/27973993_1_indian-idol-prashant-tamang-protest, last viewed January 11, 2012.

¹⁷¹ http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007-11-19/india/27966027_1_prashant-tamang-indian-idol-jockey, last viewed January 11, 2012.

¹⁷² <http://www.andhranews.net/India/2007/September/29-Indian-Idol-clash-17446.asp>, last viewed January 11, 2012.

¹⁷³ <http://www.andhranews.net/India/2007/September/29-Indian-Idol-clash-17446.asp>, http://www.radioandmusic.com/headlinesindia.mapsofindia.com/archive_html/29September2007_57959.html, <http://www.radioandmusic.com/content/editorial/news/red-fm-replies-ib-missive-says-it-has-already-cleared-air>, last viewed January 11, 2012.

These complex and overlapping explosive events surrounding the Indian Idol 3 saga, unfolding via the popular and the electronic media, add up to portray how the singular idea of identity based on locality, nation-state, religion, language, or race is rendered quite fragile. Rather, based on context-producing events, complex hierarchical organization within and between modern day nation-states, works of the imagination, notions of plurality, identities, belongings, and political allegiances have come to exemplify collective production in the twenty-first century. Having said that, although social projects are moving the “glacial force of the habitus into the quickened beat of improvisation for larger groups of people . . . [who] rarely formulate their plans outside the sphere of radio, television, cassettes and videos, newsprint and telephone” (Appadurai 2008: 6) to bring about change, the power of agency and reflexivity to re-work and re-define existing structures cannot be overlooked. It forms a vital part of grassroots subjective activism, which I shall discuss in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

SUBJECTIVITIES AND AGENCY IN PERFORMING GORKHA MUSIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A GORKHA AT INDIA'S BORDERS?¹⁷⁴

Sherry Ortner in *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* explains agency as a capacity of human beings whose form(s) and distribution(s) are always culturally constructed and maintained (Ortner 2006: 139). This capacity could engender notions of agency in terms of both (a) individual intentions/desires and (b) projects involving collective intentions/desires in pursuing cultural goals within a matrix of power differentials through collective communal activities. In chapters two and three I have focused on the “collective agency” of Gorkhas, who, as members of a community, are continually negotiating their Indian identity through complex, often discursive moves that do not portray a definite logic or pattern. However, moving away from “collective agency,” which is oriented towards culturally constituted projects, this chapter focuses on the notions of “subjectivity” and “agency” as far as personal intentions/desires for defining and representing Gorkha identity are concerned.

I present opinions of Gorkha musicians, most of whom I met and interviewed during my fieldwork in India in 2009 and 2010. Living at India's borders with Nepal, which allows free movement from and into both countries,¹⁷⁵ and pursuing music, an art-form transcending place,

¹⁷⁴ Although I mention “subjectivities” here, the interviews I present in this chapter are all with male Gorkha musicians. Initially I had hoped to present interviews with female Gorkha singers, but unfortunately things did not work out during my fieldwork in Siliguri and Darjeeling hills. Heera Waiba, singer and authority on Gorkha folk music, unexpectedly passed away a week before I was scheduled to interview her in Siliguri; Daisy Barailly, a singer, had become a recluse and refused to talk to me in Darjeeling; Shanti Thatal, a singer from Darjeeling, was in Kolkata for her cataract operation; and nobody seemed to know where Dawa Gyalmo, who has sung some of the most memorable songs in Nepali, lives nowadays. However, when this dissertation becomes a book, I aim to present interviews with both male and female Gorkha singers and musicians. Since my fieldwork, I have been in touch with Shanti Thatal and have obtained some information regarding the whereabouts of Dawa Gyalmo. I am also hopeful that I may be able to arrange at least one interview with Daisy Barailly in the future.

¹⁷⁵ As noted in previous chapters, India and Nepal share an open border policy following the Indo-Nepal Peace Treaty signed between the two countries in 1950. It legitimizes Indian immigration to Nepal as it does Nepalese immigration to India.

language, caste, or race,¹⁷⁶ Gorkha musicians offer interesting perspectives, both fascinating and contradictory at the same time. Listening to their life-stories and lived experiences, I was reminded of Gorkha musicians as conscious social subjects/actors who are able to resist social structures, hegemony, and domination through their agency. I personally know or have met most Gorkha musicians/artists I mention in this chapter, and offer a first-hand narrative of their work, achievements, intentions and/or desires. For Gorkha musicians or lyricists whom I did not meet or who have passed away, my sources of information are secondary, including interviews with their colleagues and close acquaintances. In addition, I refer to books, journals, and sound and/or video recordings of their work.

In this chapter, for the most part, I offer a narrative description of all that I observed, heard, and learnt while talking to Gorkha musicians. I invoke various versions of “practice theory” delineated by Pierre Bourdieu (1990), Anthony Giddens (2004), and James Scotts (1990), considering social actors as existentially complex beings, who think, feel, reflect, make, and seek meanings through their own subjectivity (Ortner 2006: 110). This is important because, as Ortner argues, ignoring subjectivity would impoverish an important aspect of the human and human understanding in the discipline of human sciences. Therefore, subjectivity not only entails being conditioned by cultural constructs, social structures, socio-political demands, and attributes of time, but also being a thinking-acting subject. Rather than the Bourdieusian habitus of dispositions for social actors and Giddens’ concept of partially knowing subjects, who are able to exercise a certain amount of reflexivity for “social reproduction,” I draw on Scotts’ notion of dominated people who understand the play of power in social life and have “hidden transcripts”

¹⁷⁶ All Gorkha musicians I spoke to unanimously agreed that music is a universal language that knows no place, age, race, caste, or time. Having said that, they would turn around in the same instant and criticize genres like rock music or “crazy” musics that today’s youths enjoy.

to resist domination and inequality. In this way, by looking at power as being double-edged, which can be exercised from above as domination and from below as resistance, I see agency acting interstitially between being dominated and resisting at the same time. This is to say, I recognize domination and resistance not only in terms of non-Gorkhas versus Gorkhas, but also in terms of an intra-Gorkha matrix of domination and resistance played out between and among individual Gorkha musicians within the community. This I see as being projected through diverse notions of selfhood, intentions of individual projects, and their social positionality based on positions of power and local differences based on musical background, musical genre, and class.

Personal Narratives of Gorkha Musicians

Basant Chhetri¹⁷⁷

Chhetri was born in 1950 on the day of *Basant Panchami*,¹⁷⁸ the first day of spring, at Chowk Bazaar in Darjeeling town. He grew up in a family that was musically and socially linked with Darjeeling's cultural scene. His father was the youngest of three brothers and was a businessman. His eldest uncle, Mathulal Chhetri, was a social worker and one of the founding members of Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sammelan (GDNS), established on June 3, 1932 at Darjeeling.¹⁷⁹ It may be recalled here that GDNS was started by the youths of Darjeeling hills to provide community-based service to the locals, who were harassed and ostracized by the British after Gorkhas joined India's freedom movement in the late nineteenth century. Eventually, this organization began to stage theatrical plays and dramas with social themes like colonial

¹⁷⁷ I met Chhetri on a number of occasions throughout my fieldwork in Darjeeling, but my primary interviews with him were conducted on December 3 and December 9, 2010 at his HKM office.

¹⁷⁸ *Basant Panchami* heralds the advent of spring in India. On this day the goddess of knowledge, Saraswati, is worshipped by students with the hope that the new academic year will be successful.

¹⁷⁹ <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/opinions/social/473-the-gdns.html>, last viewed February 23, 2012.

domination, class conflicts, and caste discrimination. Basant Chhetri's second uncle, Buddhiman Chhetri, was a dancer and a flutist, and was a *nautanki*¹⁸⁰ performer in Darjeeling during the 1920s. Chhetri recalled that when religious silent movies were featured in Darjeeling's community halls, his uncle would dress up as Rama or Krishna or Durga (all Hindu deities) and perform religious skits around Darjeeling town to advertise the movie show. According to Chhetri, Buddhiman Chhetri would often be invited to Siliguri and Kolkata to perform dance-dramas in the late 1920s. Therefore, given this family background, Basant Chhetri considers himself as hailing from a musical family, where he was always encouraged to pursue his musical endeavors. Chhetri even recalled his family buying him his first harmonium in 1965 for fifty rupees, which at that time was a considerable amount of money.

Chhetri counts some of Darjeeling's well-known figures like Amber Gurung, the late Aruna Lama, and the late Gopal Yonzan as his source of inspiration during his music-learning days, but above all there was the overpowering influence of Hindi film music from Bollywood. Recalling how Darjeeling was the hub for filming Hindi movies during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Chhetri recalled being deeply moved by the works of composers and singers like Salil Choudhury, Manna De, Naushad, and Madan Mohan. One of the high points of his interview was Chhetri fondly remembering meeting and arranging a music session at HKM (Himalaya Kala Mandir) with Salil Choudhury and the musicians and singers of Darjeeling in 1976.¹⁸¹ Chhetri recalled Choudhury's utter delight in listening to Gorkha artists sing and in return offering to

¹⁸⁰ *Nautanki* is a Hindi term used to describe folk theater in South Asia. Rooted in rural India, a *nautanki* is normally a nightlong performance with religious themes accompanied by dancing and singing to pulsating drumbeats.

¹⁸¹ Salil Choudhury was one of the most well-known and respected composers and lyricists of the Bollywood Hindi film industry. He composed in Bengali and Malayalam as well. Choudhury's debut in Hindi films came in 1953 as the music director for "Do Bigha Zamin." The film took his career to new heights when it became the first film to win the Filmfare Best Movie Award and also won the International Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1954.

help in any way to further their musical careers. In fact, Chhetri recounted Choudhury suggesting that Gorkhas begin making commercial films on a small scale and have local musicians compose and sing songs for the films. From his side, Choudhury promised to help make arrangements for cameras, lights, and other recording equipment. Chhetri mentioned he had all this recorded in a cassette as part of Choudhury's interview at HKM, but when he gave the cassette to Gagan Gurung, one of his senior colleagues in Darjeeling, it got lost. Thus, with Hindi films and Hindi film music and composers profoundly influencing his music, Chhetri considers *sugam sangeet* or *adhunik geet*¹⁸² (modern yet raag-based Nepali songs/music) to be his forte. In fact, Chhetri claims Nepali *sugam sangeet* is an exclusive product of Darjeeling hills and should be strongly recognized as part of the Gorkha cultural identity.

Reminiscing about some of his well-known musical works, Chhetri said his very first composition, "*Raat gaharindai jancha, kalpana ko sagarama maya dherai huncha*" (As the night matures, in its imagination, dwells my love and adoration) was sung by one of Darjeeling's well-known female vocalists, Dawa Gyalmo,¹⁸³ and recorded by Radio Nepal in 1970 on the occasion of King Mahendra's birthday celebrations. King Mahendra ruled Nepal from 1956 to 1972. In addition to working with the Nepalese music industry and Radio Nepal in Kathmandu, Chhetri was employed as a music teacher under the Royal Government of Bhutan from 1972 to 1975. During his tenure in Bhutan, Chhetri fondly recalled performing for the coronation ceremony of

¹⁸² *Sugam sangeet* or *adhunik geet* is a modern genre of almost all regional musics of India. Although sung in the regional language, the instrumentation is what essentially differentiates it from its folk counterparts. Although *sugam sangeet* may be raag-based and have folk instruments, it prominently features instruments like the keyboard, drums, guitars, congas, bass guitars, and violins, and also elements like chords and harmony.

¹⁸³ Dawa Gyalmo does not sing any more at present. My repeated attempts to meet her were unsuccessful.

King Birendra, who succeeded King Mahendra on January 31, 1972. Chhetri listed *khukuri*¹⁸⁴ dance, *damphu*¹⁸⁵ dance, and *maruni* dance as part of HKM's performance repertoire. Chhetri returned to Darjeeling in 1980 and was employed in the Department of Agriculture, Government of West Bengal until he retired in 2008. Today, he is the president of Himalaya Kala Mandir (HKM), Darjeeling, and is the general secretary of a local musical organization called Darjeeling Kalakar Sangathan. In addition, he devotes an ample amount of time to training upcoming singers in Sikkim. Chhetri maintains close ties with Nepal's contemporary singers like Deep Shreshta, Manila Sotang, and Uday Sotang, but has not performed in Nepal of late. Briefly touching on the topic of Nepalese artists performing for the month-long music festival, Chhetri added that the Gorkha music festivals should have not only Gorkha performers performing at the festival, but also music composed and sung by Gorkha artists to bring forth the true essence of Gorkha identity in India.

Interviewing Chhetri on the morning of December 3, 2010 at his HKM office over a cup of piping hot tea, we got talking about his upcoming projects and objectives for his students and the Gorkha musicians of Darjeeling hills in general (Figures 4.1, 4.2). Praising and comparing how Bengali parents support and dedicate their time to ensure their children have a good music education, Chhetri bemoaned the lack of such interest among Gorkha parents. He felt that no matter how hard he worked with his students, unless the parents made sure their children

¹⁸⁴ *Khukuri* is a curved knife that can be used as a tool or a close combat weapon (Rathaur 1983). A dance form performed by men yielding *khukuri*, who are ceremoniously seen off by the womenfolk for the battlefield, has come to symbolize the "bravery" of the Gorkha community. According to Basant Chhetri, it came into vogue in the 1950s in Darjeeling.

¹⁸⁵ As noted already in chapter two, *damphu* is a disc-shaped drum that has a mountain goat-skin or cow-hide covering on one side, which is held together by thirty-two three or four inch long bamboo pegs/nails all around the wooden circle called *ghero*. In addition, the *damphu* has one long stick attached to the base of the circle to stress or accentuate certain rhythmic tempos or patterns. This instrument is identified with the Tamang community, and so *damphu* dance is also sometimes referred to as Tamang dance.

practiced music everyday, no progress could be made. Stressing that Darjeeling's music seriously lacks the presence of a *kalakaar* (an artist), Chhetri emphasized his point of view in the following manner. A *kalakaar* is someone who not only does music but also lives it and practices it to leave behind his/her mark in the community. Chhetri pointed out that today's music performers from Darjeeling hills are more interested in making CDs and gaining overnight popularity like Prashant Tamang than taking the time to learn the finer nuances of performing and composing music. As a result, he stated, most upcoming musicians and singers from Darjeeling, although not lacking in talent, are becoming singers who "imitate" (*nakal garnu*) rather than "identify" (*chinera bujnu*) with their genre of music.

Chhetri differentiates between "imitating" and "identifying" as follows: imitating is simply copying by ear, but identifying is when you perform with a thorough knowledge and comprehension of musical notes, rhythmic variations, and raag expertise. Because Gorkha singers mostly imitate, Chhetri affirms, it keeps them from progressing beyond a certain point. Not willing to name names directly, Chhetri claims that the professional life of most Gorkha singers remain limited to singing Bollywood songs or Western numbers, or repeating songs from their locally made music albums in and around Darjeeling hills. Doing this for a long time then frustrates them, as they are unable to move beyond Darjeeling hills to make it big in the Indian musical scene. As a result, dissatisfaction sets in and musicians from Darjeeling hills begin wallowing in self-pity and insecurity due to lack of music training in Indian classical music. Adding to this problem, the ongoing identity crisis and the socio-political alienation Gorkhas face as soon as they step out of Darjeeling hills, according to Chhetri, further inhibits them from approaching the Indian music industry. Taking the example of Prashant Tamang, Chhetri explains



Figure 4.1: Basant Chhetri in his HKM office. Photo by author, Darjeeling, December 3, 2010

how despite winning the Indian Idol in 2007, albeit on a popular wave of Gorkha nationalism, Tamang has yet to make his mark within the Indian music industry. Because Tamang is not a trained singer, his lack of knowledge about Indian classical music and technicalities of voice training prevents him from impressing composers and music directors of Bollywood. Chhetri reasons that this is why Tamang has numerous projects with the Nepalese film and music industry, but none in India.

Given the standards of India's music industry, Chhetri asserts that one has to be extremely talented and thoroughly trained in classical music, not to mention being extremely lucky as well. He says, "*Hamro nani haruko Indian classical music ko gyan chaina, tele garda uniharu music profession ma agari barnu sakdaina. Chords ra harmony ko gyan hunuparcha,*

tara raag harko gyan hunu pani ekdom awasyakta cha” (Our kids don’t have much knowledge about Indian classical music and as a result cannot make it big in the music profession. It is good to know about chords and harmony, but it is essential to have a sound knowledge of raag music as well). Chhetri goes on, “*Bangali harko hernuhosta, harmonium liera Rabindrasangeet gauda jhoomnye manche attikai huncha. Hamro manche chai jhoomney hoina gati-charera jhulney manchey huncha*” (When a Bengali sings Rabindrasangeet with a harmonium, all the Bengali audience members are transfixed as they become one with the music. But our Gorkha audiences do just the opposite; instead of being mesmerized and encouraging serious Nepali music, they shamelessly doze off sitting right in front of you).



Figure 4.2: The author with Basant Chhetri at HKM. Photo by Bashu Isaiah Rai Lorung.

Darjeeling, December 3, 2010

Reflecting upon his role as a music educator in Darjeeling hills, Basant Chhetri says the driving force for him has been to impart whatever knowledge he has of Indian classical music, chord progressions, and harmony to his students. He strongly believes it will prepare them for the next step in future. However, with children in Darjeeling opting mostly for Western music, it is difficult to have them focus on Indian classical music or to perform Nepali *adhunik geet/sugamsangeet*. Chhetri points out that even with HKM being a pioneering institute for classical, *adhunik*, and folk music, it is extremely difficult to ensure students attend their classes regularly. Moreover, with most parents lacking proper knowledge of nurturing music education and/or being unable to afford basic musical instruments like the harmonium or the tabla, the students get to sing with music instruments only once or twice a week at HKM. This puts their ear training and voice-training process back considerably. At this point Chhetri reiterates that Darjeeling youths do not lack talent, but that proper guidance and the inability to dream big beyond releasing CDs and music albums locally stunts their progress.

The other aspect Chhetri emphasizes is that Gorkha youths should stop looking up to the Nepalese music industry and, instead, concentrate on making themselves aware of all that is unfolding in the contemporary Indian music scene, be it classical, *adhunik*, popular, folk and/or band music. Chhetri feels that if one aims to be successful in life, one should take the challenge of imitating the powerful and not seek refuge in associating with the weaker side. Then, pointing to the severe lack of funds for HKM and the Darjeeling music scene in general, Chhetri alleges that neither did Ghising's administration do anything concrete to promote the music and local musicians of Darjeeling hills, nor was the West Bengal government interested in doing anything either. For example, Chhetri points out that he is unable to pay any students for their

performances. Rather, to appreciate their enthusiasm, time, and energy for being a part of HKM despite all odds, Chhetri says he and his staff regularly arrange picnics, lunches/dinners, or other kinds of treats for them. Pointing out that some of the students often travel long distances from remote villages to come to HKM and pursue their dream of learning music, Chhetri says that government aid and funds would be extremely helpful in hiring good music teachers, organizing weekly music programs, obtaining audio-visual equipment, and ensuring better learning facilities for HKM's students. Nevertheless, on an optimistic note, Chhetri says since he is used to working against the odds, he will continue working for HKM as long as the institution needs him to do his part for preserving and promoting Gorkha music and culture for the upcoming generation.

Gagan Gurung¹⁸⁶

Gurung was born on September 30, 1933 on the auspicious occasion of *Dasai* in Darjeeling. His father, Dal Bahadur Gurung, a municipal commissioner in Darjeeling employed under the British government in India, was one of the founding members of GDNS and the Arya Samaj¹⁸⁷ in Darjeeling. Although initially named Gagan Bahadur Gurung, after graduating from college, Gurung struck “Bahadur”¹⁸⁸ from his name. Because “*madesh tira dhokey lei pani bahadur; Gorkha ko naam mai na honey. Driver lai pani bahadur bhaneko suneyko chu, muscleji lai pani bahadur; bahadur became a common name . . . so I made my name short and sweet,*

¹⁸⁶ I met Gagan Gurung almost every day while filming the month-long festival in Darjeeling in 2010; I also met him at his home twice for interviews on December 4 and December 8, 2010.

¹⁸⁷ Arya Samaj is a Hindu reform movement founded by Swami Dayananda on 10 April 1875. Dayananda believed in the infallible authority of the Vedas and emphasized the ideals of *brahmacharya* (chastity). There are about three million followers of Arya Samaj worldwide (Pandey 1972).

¹⁸⁸ *Bahadur* literally means “the brave.” However, with the term used by non-Gorkhas to derogatorily insinuate that Gorkhas are thick-headed or “stupid” and only fit for fighting, most Gorkhas are extremely sensitive to being called *bahadur* by others.

Gagan Gurung” (in the plains/*madesh* everybody calls us *bahadur*, Gorkhas have no other name/identity. I have heard taxi drivers being called *bahadur*, security guards being called *bahadur* . . . so I changed my name, short and sweet, Gagan Gurung). He began working for the Darjeeling Municipality on March 10, 1958, but took a year’s leave to pursue a diploma course in local self-development in Mumbai. After graduating with honors from Mumbai, Gurung thereafter returned to Darjeeling and was made the chief health-inspector of Darjeeling Municipality until he retired in 1993. Despite making a big deal about the term *bahadur* encumbering the identity of Gorkhas, Gurung, on discussing “what is music,” proudly mentions Maharaja Jung Bahadur Rana,¹⁸⁹ whom he calls *Nepal ko choro* (son of Nepal). Gurung states that he mentions Rana to highlight his pride in Nepali nationalism. Mentioning Rana’s extensive yearlong tour of Europe and the United Kingdom in 1850, Gurung narrates an interesting anecdote.

It was said that when Rana met Queen Victoria in London, he displayed his military skills in wrestling, sword fighting, and horse riding, for which he was widely known. Impressed by his talents, Queen Victoria arranged a party and a musical evening in his honor. After the musical performance, which Gurung explains comprised Western classical music, the Queen asked the Rana, “Did you understand our music?” The Rana, thinking the Queen was underestimating his ability to appreciate Western music, replied, “*Tapai le chari ko bhasa bujnuhuncha, koeli ko bhasa bujnuhuncha? Tara tesko ananda hami sabai le linchung*” (Do you understand the language of the birds or the cuckoo bird? No, but we still enjoy it). This reply, according to Gurung, is the best answer he has come across for answering “what defines music?” He believes music cannot be defined as ours or yours. Rather, it is something to be personally experienced

¹⁸⁹ Jung Bahadur Rana started the Rana dynasty in Nepal in 1846 after conspiring against the then ruling Shah dynasty.

and enjoyed: “One does not have to be born in the West to enjoy Western music or in India to enjoy Indian music. Do we have to be born as a bird or a *koeli* to enjoy the music of the birds?,” asks Gurung as he looks intently at me. Nevertheless, he asserts, it is of utmost important that there be a clear line of demarcation between Gorkha music and Nepalese music.

Continuing with his life-story and his background in music, Gurung believes that since his family, especially his father, was deeply involved with the cultural scene in Darjeeling in pre- and post-Independence India, music was something he grew up listening to and learning from an early age. Gurung is a well-known and respected singer, composer, and lyricist of Darjeeling hills, but at present because of his advanced age prefers to compose songs and groom young singers rather than sing himself (Figure 4.3). Gurung is the president of Gorkha Kala Sansthan, an organization founded in 2008 by Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM) to promote Gorkha music in India. Recalling his days growing up in Darjeeling between 1940 and 1960, Gurung notes that the years between 1954 and the early 1980s were the golden era of music in Darjeeling hills. This time-span saw a plethora of musicians, singers, dancers, and dramatists emerge from Darjeeling hills to create milestones in the history of Nepali music in two phases.

Phase one saw some of the most respected figures of Nepali music like Ambar Gurung, Kapil Raj Subba, and himself creating their magic during the 1950s. This was followed by phase two, when from the late 1960s to the early 1980s the likes of Sharan Pradhan, Ranjeet Gazmer, Gopal Yonzon, Karma Yonzon, Nayan Subba, Kumar Subba, Aruna Lama, Daisy Barailly, and Shanti Thatal came to represent the musical ethos of Darjeeling hills. However, following the violent Gorkha agitation during the 1980s, there developed a deep cultural void in Darjeeling hills, which was filled by Western popular music, rock music, and heavy metal music in the



Figure 4.3: Gagan Gurung and the author at the former's residence in Darjeeling. Photo by Bashu Isaiah Rai Lorung, Darjeeling, December 8, 2010

1990s. Although not averse to Western-centric music development in Darjeeling hills, Gurung expresses an innate need to revamp the current mode of musical performance in the hills. This makeover, according to Gurung, needs to take into consideration four important aspects of Darjeeling's music history and culture. They are a) folk music, which reminds us of our past, our heritage; b) modern/*adhunik* music or *sugam sangeet* from the 1950s to the 1970s, which indicates our community's cultural development from the folk to the modern era; c) *purano geet*, or "old songs" composed by the greats of Nepali music that tell us about our folk legacy; and d) contemporary Nepali music that reflects the contemporary musical productions of the present-

day generation. Likewise, believing strongly that musical productions are mirrors that indicate a society's development through time, Gurung emphasizes the need to have singers who no longer only specialize in just one genre of music such as folk or *adhunik* or rock music. Rather, Gorkha singers, Gurung insists, must develop the ability to sing and perform all genres of musics in order to create Darjeeling's own musical identity in India. As a result, he proposes that singing contests be held regularly throughout Darjeeling hills where singers can be judged and groomed to hone this ability.

Today, Darjeeling hills and Siliguri host a number of singing competitions for talented young Gorkha singers for the title of *Swarshree*.¹⁹⁰ The experience of participating in local music competitions, Gurung states, will help young singers overcome stage fright, gain experience performing before a live audience with live musicians, and get professional feedback from the local music experts. This is essential because with singers from Darjeeling hills leaving a mark in the national reality-singing contests like Indian Idol, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, and *Chhotey Ustad*, upcoming singers will have to live up to the expectations of all Gorkhas and the Nepali-speaking audiences living abroad. This is particularly important to Gurung, who says that having good Gorkha singers in the Indian national media or the Indian music industry will allow for opening a space to re-write the identity and history of Gorkhas in India.

With the underlying theme of “martial race” or *bahadur* overshadowing all other identities of Gorkhas in India, having talented singers from Darjeeling hills performing in the Indian national arena will help to revise the dominant discourse. Explaining this point further, Gurung says that when Indian audiences witness musical talent from Darjeeling hills on the

¹⁹⁰ *Swarshree* literally means “one who has mastered all the nuances of musical notes and melody.”

national television, they will be forced to rethink and realize that “*Yo Gorkhali haru khali laraku jaat mattai hoina, maarne ra morney khali hoina. Ihnaru ta geet pani gaudo raicha ta*, they have artists also. *Iniharu khali bahadur bhayera Vir Chakra*¹⁹¹ *ra Victoria Cross mattai thapdaina*, but can sing and be a musician too” (These Gorkhas are not only a martial race capable of only killing and being killed in the battlefield. They can sing and have artists too. They are not only *bahadurs* and capable of receiving *Vir Chakra* and Victoria Cross, but they can sing and be a musician too).

For example, Gurung mentions one of his compositions, which was inspired by the beats of a shamanistic ritual song sung by *jhakris*/shamans from Darjeeling hills. Gurung explains that the rhythmic cycle is similar to 6/8 and that Indians would call it *khyamta tala*, but to highlight Gorkha culture in his work, Gurung insists on calling it *jhakri* beat. He says that because we are not aware of and do not lay claim to our rich cultural heritage, we are called “foreigners” and “mercenary,” and famously well-known for losing our limbs so that others can rule over us (*aafuilai langare bahnayera, aaru lai samrajya dine*). Below is the transcribed song of Gagan Gurung set to *Jhakri* beat

(Musical example 4.1).

Meter/Beat 6/8

[1 2 – / 1 2 –]

¹⁹¹ *Vir Chakra* is a Hindi word, which literally means “brave wheel.” It is an award that India government gives for exceptional courage and fortitude in the line of action.

sai sai – / sai sai –

sai ba bu / sai ba bu

sai sai – / sai sai –

These words/syllables do not mean anything. Gurung is of the opinion that the shamans uttered them during rituals to focus their mind into a spiritual realm or another dimension of consciousness.

Gurung's song is as follows:

Kalo kesa,

seto bhayo,

jindagi ma,

ke-ke bhayo,

ke-ke bhayo,

ke-ke bhayo

Translation:

My raven-black hair

is now all white

What-what had I not to

endure in my life

Meter = 6/8 ♮ = C

ka lo ke - sa
प पु- म म-

se - to bha - yo
रे रे- रे- रे-

Jin - da - gi - ma
रे प- म रे-

ke - ke - bha - yo
मि स मि रे सु-

ke ke - bha - yo
मि स मि रे स

O - -
मि सं- मि - प-

ke ke - bha yo -
मि सं मि रे सं-

Musical example 4.1: Notation for Gagan Gurung's song "Kalo kesa, seto bhayo" set to *Jhakri*

beat (6/8 meter)

In a similar vein, Gurung also mentions *Rabindrasangeet*. He says Rabindranath Tagore, who is known for his numerous sojourns in Darjeeling hills during the 1920s to gain inspiration for his literary and musical works, appropriated songs of the Gorkhas to call them his own. To cite an example, Gurung mentions the *Rabindrasangeet* song “*Kharo baiyu boy meghe*” (Musical example 4.3) as the exact replica of the song “*Para bata aauney*” (Musical example 4.2), which is generally associated with the *Chhetri-Bahun* (the upper-caste Gorkhas) of Darjeeling. The two songs are as follows:

Folk version (Musical example 4.2):

Para bata aauney,
kaney topi launey,
kohoni tarsauney,
Ashoka banma,
shishau ko rukha ma,
runchan Sita mai.

Translation:

Coming from afar,
wearing a long-eared cap,
who is it that who scares me.

In the Ashoka forest,
Under a peepal tree,
Cries mother Sita.

Meter = 4/4 ♯ = C

Para-bata aau-ney kaney topi lau-ney

ग ग ग ग रे (प) ग ग ग ग ग रे (प) ग

ko-honi tar-sau-ney

ग ग रे स स स

Asho-ka ban-ma Shishau-ko ru-kha-ma

ग ग ग ग रे (प) ग ग ग ग ग रे (प) ग

run-chan Si-ta mai

ग ग रे स स स

Musical example 4.2: Folk song “Para bata aaune, kaney topi laune” set to 4/4 meter

Rabindrasangeet (Musical example 4.3)

Kharo baiyu boy meghe,

chari dik chai meghe,

Oguni naukhani baiyo.

Translation:

A harsh wind is blowing fast,

The sky is overcast all around,

O boatman row the boat in.

Meter = 4/4 $\sqrt{F} = G$

Kharo baiyu boy meghe chari dik chai meghe

সরৈ গগ গ গরৈ নিস রে রে রে নি

Ogu - ni nau - khani bai - yo - o

অনি সরৈ গ গরৈ নি রে স স

Musical example 4.3: Rabindrasangeet song “Kharo baiyu boy meghe” that sounds similar to the

Gorkha folk song “para bata aauney”

With due respect to Rabindranath Tagore's profound knowledge of music, art, and literature, it may be important to note here that unbeknownst to many Bengalis, Tagore's songs include not only his own compositions but also musics by others he ingeniously incorporated within his songs. This branch of *Rabindrasangeet* is referred to as *bhanga gaan* (broken music).¹⁹² Although in terms of modern copyright issues it may be problematic, Bengalis discuss and perform Tagore's *bhanga gaan* with pride and awe.¹⁹³ *Bhanga gaan* not only draw inspiration from India's regional folk music, but also from English, Scottish, and Irish sources that Tagore came across during his visits to England between 1878 and 1932. In fact, as claimed by *Rabindrasangeet* expert Sahana Bajpai-Harrett in a YouTube video excerpt,¹⁹⁴ Tagore in some cases not only incorporated foreign songs but translated them into Bengali, keeping the melody and the aesthetic mood of the original song intact.

Most noteworthy among them all is *Purano sei diner kotha* (Memories of the bygone days) (Musical example 4.4). Tagore translated this song from a Scottish poem, "Auld Lang Syne," which was written by Robert Burns, who heard it from an old Scottish shepherd and thereafter adding two more verses released it in 1788 as his own composition¹⁹⁵ (Musical example 4.5).

¹⁹² <http://www.anjanadey.com/rsangeet/rsangeet.html>; <http://news.priyo.com/music/2012/02/11/evening-tagore-s-bhanga-gaan-46610.html>; last viewed July 3, 2012.

¹⁹³ <http://krazzycollections.blogspot.com/2011/09/rabindranather-bhanga-gaan-by-arati.html>; http://www.daily-sun.com/details_yes_11-02-2012_An-evening-of-Tagore%E2%80%99s-Bhanga-Gaan_52_1_7_1_0.html, last viewed July 4, 2012.

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQjHDQVwhsQ&feature=related>, last viewed July 3, 2012.

¹⁹⁵ <http://www.robertburns.org/encyclopedia/AuldLangSyne.5.shtml>, last viewed July 4, 2012. In this video-clip Srikant Acharya, who is a well-renown and well-respected Bengali singer, composer, and lyricist from Kolkata, explains the background of the song, starting with Scottish shepherd, to being collected and adapted by Robert Burns, to Rabindranath Tagore translating and composing it in Bengali.

Rabindrasangeet song (Musical example 4.4)

Purano shei diner kotha,

bhulbi kirey

Hai o shei chokher dekha,

praner kotha

*Shei ki bhola jai*¹⁹⁶

Translation:

Memories of the good old days,

How can one ever forget?

Beheld with our eyes,

Expressed through our heart,

Can it be ever forgotten?

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=au3bZAadTQk&feature=related>, last viewed July 4, 2012.

Meter = 3/4 $\bar{H} = E$

Pu - ra - no shei di - ne - r
स स मि स ग- रे रे स

ko - tha bhul - bi ki - re
रे ग- स स स ग प-

ha - i o - shei - cho - kher -
प- स- र प-

de - kha pra - ner - ko - tha -
रे स- रे ग-

Shei - ki bho - la - jai
प- प- प मि स रे ग रे स -

Musical example 4.4: *Rabindrasangeet* song “Purano shei diner kotha”

Scottish version “Auld Lang Syne” (Musical example 4.5)

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,

and never brought to mind ?

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,

and auld lang syne?

We’ll drink a cup of kindness yet,

For days of auld lang syne.

English Translation of the Scottish song “Auld Lang Syne”¹⁹⁷

Should *old* acquaintance be forgotten,

and never brought to mind?

Should *old* acquaintance be forgotten,

and *old* lang syne.

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rId95N2teUc>, last viewed July 4, 2012.

Meter 4/4 स = E

Should auld ac-quain-tance be for-got, and
 स- स ग प र- स र ग रे

he-ver brought to mind? Should auld ac-quain-tance
 स- स ग प र- र प- ग ग स

be for-got, and days of auld lang syne? For
 रे- स र ग रे स- र र प स- प

auld lang syne my dear, for auld lang
 प- ग ग स रे- स र प प- ग ग प

syne. We'll drink a cup of kind-ness yet for
 र- र प- ग ग स रे- स र ग रे

days of auld lang syne.
 स- र र प स

Musical example 4.4: Notation of the Scottish shepherd's song that is similar to the

Rabindrasangeet song "purano shei diner kotha"

Likewise, Gurung argues that the Gorkhas are rich in culture and music, and hence it is for us and the younger generations to promote and re-write Gorkha history to enrich Gorkha identity in India. He goes on to say, “*Hamile hamro birta lai chinaunupardaina. Tyo ta hamro purkha harle gardisakeko cha. Hamile hamro aarko itihaas chinnaunuparcha*” (We don’t have to prove our bravery. Our forefathers have already done that for us. We should now focus on propagating our other histories and identities). Then, moving on to discuss the representation of Gorkha identity as part of the culture movement in Darjeeling hills, Gurung asserts that it is not a choice but a requirement, a need, towards preserving Gorkha identity in India (*This is not a choice, chori*.¹⁹⁸ *Yo Gorkha astitwa lai bachaunu ko lagi paristithi ko maang ho*).

Reminiscing about the 1970s, Gurung says he never felt the need to identify himself as a Gorkha then. “*Teti bela hami sabai Nepali thiyu*,” he says (We were all Nepali then). However, with changing times and political needs, Gurung advises that all Nepali-speaking Indians should emphasize their Indian connection by calling ourselves Gorkhas. The dominant discourse or official history of the Gorkhas, Gurung explains, begins from the 1860s, a mere hundred and fifty years ago, with the beginning of tea plantations in Darjeeling. “But what about the Segauli *Sandhi*/Treaty¹⁹⁹ or the Treaty of Titalia,²⁰⁰ We are not immigrants, *hami ta mato sanga aako* (we came with the land because of the Treaty),” Gurung continues assertively. He adds, people forget that Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, and Siliguri *terai* were part of Sikkim, which temporarily came under Nepalese rule before the Anglo-Nepal war in 1814. After the war ended in 1816,

¹⁹⁸ *Chori* means “daughter” in Nepali and “girl” in Hindi. Here Gurung was referring to me as *chori* or “daughter.”

¹⁹⁹ The Treaty of Segauli/Seagauli Sandhi was signed between the East India Co. and Nepal on December 2, 1815 after the Anglo-Nepal War (1814), in which parts of north India’s lowlands extending from the rivers Kali Rapti, Gunduck, Coosah/Kosi to Mitchee/Mechi and Teesta were ceded to the Company’s rule (Samantha 2000: 193).

²⁰⁰ As noted in chapter one, following the *Segauli Sandhi* (1816), the Treaty of Titalya (1817), the Treaty of Tunlong (1861), and the Treaty of Sinchulia (1865) brought the Darjeeling hills, Kalimpong, and *terai* lowlands permanently under British rule (Pradhan 1983, Pradhan 1991).

Nepal ceded Darjeeling hills, and Siliguri *terai* was surrendered to the East India Company in accordance to the Segauli *Sandhi*/Treaty signed in 1816. Emphasizing this point, Gurung argues that with Darjeeling hills and the *terai* coming under Company rule, and the Company ruling most of India by 1816, it would mean that Gorkhas became Indians more or less at the same time when other Indians became “Indian” too. This argument made me think about history, and what and whose memories we remember, glorify, and forget when it come to representing and re-presenting identity. Gurung’s point echoed with what I had recently read in Kumar Pradhan’s book *Pahilo Pahar* (First Hour) (1983).

In this book, Pradhan elaborates that Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Siliguri *terai* historically belonged to Sikkim until Nepal annexed them from Sikkim for thirty-seven years between 1780 and 1817. As noted in previous chapters, after the Anglo-Nepal war in 1814, Nepal surrendered Darjeeling and Siliguri *terai* to the East India Company following the Treaty of Segauli in 1816. Thereafter, the Company returned Darjeeling and Siliguri to Sikkim under the Treaty of Titaliya in 1817. But political misunderstandings led to the Sikkim War in 1860, and the Treaty of Tumlong in 1861 brought Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Siliguri *terai* permanently under the rule of British India. Soon after, the Anglo-Bhutan war led to the inclusion of Kalimpong and Jalpaiguri-Duars *terai* in Darjeeling district through the Treaty of Sinchulia in 1865. In other words, the total territory of present-day Darjeeling district comprising Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kalimpong, Siliguri, and the Duars *terai* came together in 1866. Hence, emphasizing the Segauli *Sandhi*/Treaty as “*hamro bhuleko itihaas*” (our forgotten history/past), Gurung bemoaned the irony of the “outsiders” (Bengalis in this case) calling indigenous Gorkhas “outsiders” in their own homeland. “How do you think that makes us feel?” asks Gurung. He states that the West

Bengal communist government's policy of subjugating Gorkhas by systematically impoverishing them socially, economically, and culturally for the past two decades has backfired in the shape of month-long music and culture festivals spread throughout Darjeeling hills and the *terai*.

However, voicing displeasure at Nepalese artists performing at the 2008 Darjeeling music festival, Gurung says it is a blunder better forgotten than remembered. He also adds that he is relieved no Nepalese artists were invited to perform at the month-long Darjeeling music festival in 2010.

As for the content of the music festival, Gurung expresses mixed feelings. Although he is happy that the Darjeeling festival provided Gorkha youths with a platform to showcase their talent, there is also the danger of the performers easily overlooking the main idea behind organizing the festival. The tug-of-war between representation, politics, and entertainment is, according to Gurung, like walking on eggshells. He explains it is important the performance not bore the audience, but simultaneously keep them entertained by engendering oneness to fight for the political cause. In other words, it has to be an act that balances public entertainment alongside the political objectives of the leaders steering the direction of the Gorkha movement. Gurung says this makes it extremely difficult for the organizing committee, of which Gurung has been the president for the past two years, to keep both sides happy. Unfortunately, with most performers focusing on audience reception rather than political representation of Gorkhas, the main motive behind the month-long music festival is sometimes difficult to maintain.

Looking visibly excited, Gurung mentions that although the performance of Nepalese professional artists was well received by the audience, it did more harm than good to the Gorkha movement. "When we are in the midst of revising our identity to counter years of

misrepresentation, then why connect Nepal with Gorkhas?” asks Gurung. He adds, “We may speak the same language, but we are historically and politically different from Nepal, just like West Bengalis are different than Bangladesh. *Hamro rail cha, chia cha, British itihaas cha, ani Gandhi cha, Nepal ko cha?*” (We have railroads, tea, a colonial history, and Gandhi, does Nepal have these?). Moreover, he argues that Gorkhas do not need *dohari geet*²⁰¹ from Nepal. Rather, “*hamilei hamro aafnu rail ra chia ko dohari geet banaunu parcha* (we, the Gorkhas, should make our own *dohari geet* based on our railroads, our tea, and history). Confessing that the idea to invite Nepalese artists was decided by some of GJMM’s executive leaders, Gurung confides that with all due respect to the vision of Bimal Gurung for the Gorkhas, he cannot help but disagree with GJMM’s move to invite Nepalese artists for the 2008 month-long festival. When I ask him about the sole evening when Nepalese artists had performed in 2009, I was told they (the Nepalese artists) had invited themselves and had volunteered to perform at the Darjeeling music festival. Some Nepalese artists come to perform and make a name for themselves in Darjeeling with the hope of making it big in the Bollywood music industry, reasons Gurung.

Acknowledging that he was then the president of Gorkha Kala Sansthan (GKS), an organization created by Bimal Gurung’s party, the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM), Gurung claims he had limited powers in his position. When an order came from the GJMM’s office, then there was no way Gurung could override or ignore it. Joking that his life might be in danger if Bimal Gurung were to hear of it, Gurung describes himself as a fearless man. “I did not hesitate to question Subhas Ghising’s motives during his rule,” says Gurung. In fact, being secretly informed by his friend Nayan Subba, the then Deputy Superintendent of Police in Darjeeling,

²⁰¹ *Dohari geet* literally means “two-way dialogue song.” It is part of a social ritual practiced in western Nepal among young men and women, who may choose their marriage partners in the process.

that his “head was in demand,” Gagan Gurung had had to spend four years in Nepal from 2002 to 2006. Discussing GKS’s aims and objectives, Gurung says inviting Nepalese artists for the month-long music festival, limiting GKS to music instead of incorporating drama, art, and literature, and the apparent insensitivity in representing the “real culture and music” of Gorkhas are some of the points about which he has strong reservations. By “real culture and music,” Gurung implies that the folk music performances in the music festival are quite modern and need to be more “crude,” which typically represents a community’s “real” cultural roots. For Gurung, the month-long Darjeeling festival has yet to raise its standards for representing the “real authentic Gorkha folk music.” Instead, he asserts, it has become a platform that essentially aims to showcase inter-communal harmony among Gorkha and non-Gorkha communities of Darjeeling hills. Gurung explains the only reason he agreed to be the president of GKS is because it does at least have something to do with music and culture: “After all, GKS is not an organization exclusive to Bimal Gurung or his party. I got involved because I wanted to do my part as an individual, as Gagan Gurung, in this cultural movement for Gorkha identity.”

According to Gurung, music and politics normally do not blend. In politics people shout all kinds of slogans, but in music, Gurung avers, one expresses sentiments that are felt only by an individual. Hence, his contribution to GKS’s activities was rendered solely to express how he, as Gagan Gurung, could express his *wyaktigat anubhav* (subjective feeling/experience) in the movement for Gorkha identity. Initially, recalls Gurung, he was satisfied calling himself a Nepali. But the political awakening he underwent through various events and situations has taught him to assert his identity as a Gorkha today. Taking examples of some of Darjeeling’s great musicians like Ambar Gurung, Gopal Yonzon, and Babu Nati Kazi, who forgot their place

of birth (i.e. Darjeeling) to become Nepalese citizens, Gurung feels it is incumbent upon him to show the younger generations that all is not lost to Nepal: “*Hami kamti chau, tara harayeko chainau. Darjeeling-ko kalakar aaile pani bachi raheko cha*” (We may be few, but we are not gone. Artists from Darjeeling are still alive). Then, reliving his experiences of discrimination in Nepal for being a *Darjeelingey* (from Darjeeling), Gurung says Gorkhas are not only considered outsiders in Nepal but also in Sikkim. He notes that Nepal tends to forget it was the artists and musicians of Darjeeling hills who contributed to Nepal’s music industry both before and after Nepal Radio came into being in 1950. Today, having learnt everything from Darjeeling, the Nepalese belittle *Darjeelingey*s by calling them *chiatarey* (the seventy-sixth one),²⁰² but this shows their (Nepalese) insecurity towards us rather than their superiority over us, Gurung contends. He says that whenever he is visiting Nepal, people come to meet him and try to find out what is the latest going on in Darjeeling hills. “They think I don’t understand,” Gurung says, “but I am aware the Nepalese are always inquisitive to know what is the latest thing going around Darjeeling hills.”

The same problem also exists between the Sikkimese and the *Darjeelingey*, bemoans Gurung. He informs me that the Gorkheys of Sikkim call the Gorkheys of Darjeeling “outsiders” and allege their superiority, economically and culturally, by stating they have a home state – Sikkim – while the latter do not. “But they miss the bigger picture, you see,” says Gurung, shaking his head with dismay. Hence, with his personal experiences of living life in Darjeeling hills, frequently visiting Sikkim to accept felicitations and state honors, and traveling across the border to Nepal, Gurung feels there can be no compromise in asking for what is rightfully ours.

²⁰² Nepal has 75 districts, and so Darjeeling is pejoratively referred to as *chiatarey* to indicate the superiority of Nepal over the Gorkhas of Darjeeling hills. It is also used to dismiss the Gorkhas as being a part of India since they have no home-state to call their own.

He questions, “*Mamata Banerjee ko ho? Uni hamrai aagan ma aayera hami lai bhanney yo Darjeeling lai mo Switzerland banauchu? Yo hamro aagan ho, hami aelai jesukai banaung*” (Who is Mamata Banerjee? Who is she to come to our threshold and tell us she wants to make Darjeeling the Switzerland of West Bengal? This is our land, it is up to us what we make of it).²⁰³ Gurung alleges that because Darjeeling belongs to the Gorkhas and not to Bengal, it is up to the Gorkhas to decide whether they want Switzerland or Gorkhaland. Therefore, he reiterates the “call of the time and situation” (*samay ani paristithi ko maang*) ask that all Gorkhas unite for their identity (*chinhari*) and land (*mato*) in India. This demand, Gurung states, is not only to resist Bengali hegemony, but also to give voice to the discrimination that Gorkhas endure in other parts of India and Bhutan as well.²⁰⁴

Last but not least, Gurung reminds me that Gorkhas themselves are not without blame in projecting an ambivalent stance towards the demand for Gorkha identity in India. He recalls that when he went to Assam, a state in northeast India, in 1975 as vice-president of *Bhasa Samiti* (a committee set up to promote Nepali language in India), almost every Gorkha house featured life-size portraits of the Nepalese King and Queen in their living room. In addition, the Nepali-speakers of Assam were more interested in “saving the King” (*Raja-lai bachaunu parcha*) than discussing the future of Gorkhas and Nepali language in India. “*Ke gareko testo?*” asks Gurung, looking intently at me, “*Nepal ko raja bhanda ta Gandhi ko photo launu ni*” (What do they think

²⁰³Mamata Banerjee is the 11th chief minister of West Bengal. She defeated the forty-year-old ruling communist party of West Bengal in 2011. She was quick to sign the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) agreement in 2011, but has been criticized for her ambiguous stand regarding the territorial dispute pertaining to the areas to be included in the GTA.

²⁰⁴ Bhutan always had a sizable Nepali-speaking population as rightful subjects of the King of Bhutan. However, in the 1980s, with ethnic tension on the rise with the growing population of Lothampa, as the Nepali speakers are known in Bhutan, hundreds of thousands of Bhutanese Nepalis were expelled from Bhutan. Many live in refugee camps in Nepal and some in the state of West Bengal in India. They remain unable to return to Bhutan or settle permanently in Nepal or India. Of late, the U.S. has taken the initiative to resettle 60,000 Bhutanese Nepalis in the U.S. (www.cal.org/co/pdf/files/backgrounder_bhutanese.pdf, last viewed May 21, 2012).

they were doing? Instead of the king, they should have Gandhi's portrait in their houses).

Likewise, Gurung also informs me that most Nepali-speaking families of northeast India put *tika*²⁰⁵ on the picture of Nepal's king and queen during *Dasai* before applying it to the rest of the family.

Hence, presenting these examples, Gurung asks, when the Assamese Gorkhas themselves assert their allegiance to the king of Nepal, then why all the hue and cry when Nepali-speakers of northeast India are ostracized as foreigners and forcibly removed from their land? These people not only harm the Gorkha cause in India, Gurung states, but also aid in presenting an ambivalent position, which is fully mobilized by other Indians to oppose a Gorkha state in India. Looking dejected, he comments, "It's a pity." Nevertheless, he urges "anthropologists" like me (no amount of explaining I was an ethnomusicologist worked) and others residing abroad from Darjeeling hills to work diligently in disseminating the demand for Gorkha identity in India. Gurung says that if all Gorkhas living abroad did this work from the outside while he along with Gorkhas from Darjeeling hills and India work towards the Gorkha cause from the inside, then this two-way approach would do wonders for the ongoing movement for the Gorkha cause.

Dilip Biswa²⁰⁶

Biswa is a folk percussionist, a folk *maruni* dancer, and a mandolin player, who was born in Darjeeling in 1942. He began his career playing folk and modern Nepali music, but gravitated towards folk music from 1965 on. This occurred after he realized Gorkha folk music was

²⁰⁵ On the last and the final day of *Dasai/Dusshera*, Gorkhas take blessings from their elders, who bless them by applying *tika* – a paste made out of soaked rice, curd, and color mixed together – on their foreheads.

²⁰⁶ I met Dilip Biswa at his home in Darjeeling for interviews on December 5, 2010, and December 16, 2010.

vanishing (*haraudai gayeko*) and on the verge of extinction. Motivated to do something for the *haraudai gayeko sanskriti* (vanishing Gorkha music and culture), he introduced *shovayatra*, the colorful musical procession, in Darjeeling hills. According to Biswa, the first *shovayatra* was flagged off from Gandhi Park (currently where the auditorium Bhanu Bhawan stands) on October 10, 1971. At that time, Biswa, employed in West Bengal's Department of Culture, wanted the *shovayatra* to be a separate communal occasion devoid of any religious significance. Nevertheless, with his department recommending it be incorporated with the *Dasai*/Durga puja celebrations so that the public could be involved, the *shovayatra* became part of the ten-day *Dasai* celebrations from 1973. Since then the practice of *shovayatra* accompanying the seventh-day procession of *Phulpati* continues to this day.

Biswa had hoped and envisioned in the 1970s that the ritual of *shovayatra* not remain limited to Darjeeling town, but spread all over the Gorkha populated areas of north Bengal like Kurseong, Kalimpong, Siliguri and the Duars. He was extremely happy to inform me how validated he feels today in witnessing the *shovayatra* as an integral part of Gorkha culture and *Phulpati* celebrations throughout north Bengal. Recalling the bygone days, Biswa remembers how he had to pull every string in the purse to manage finances, refreshments, and lodging for the musicians, singers, and dancers participating in the *shovayatra*. He even informed me that he and his group of close friends would often contribute part of their salary to meet the needs of the event. However, after the DGHC came into being in 1988, the Department of Culture and Information took over the burden of financing the *shovayatra* and other Gorkha cultural programs. This, according to Biswa, was a great help and inspired him to work hard towards promoting the culture of “our forefathers of Darjeeling hills” (*hamro purkhali ko sanskriti*).

Biswa, who worked for the Department of Culture and Information in varying capacities as a musician, treasurer, vice-president, and director until he retired in 2002, fondly recollects all the cultural activities and cultural evenings the DGHC helped to organize in the 1990s. However, in the same vein, Biswa is also agonized to recall how Ghising, after initially promoting Gorkha culture, brought it to its knees with his greed for power and control as the years passed.

According to Biswa, Ghising thought “culture” was an item he could use and mold to suit his personal political agenda. At this point, both Biswa and I remembered Ghising’s most talked-about statement, “Gorkhaland is my monkey; it will dance the way I get it to.”²⁰⁷ To put matters into perspective, Biswa says it was actually his idea in the late 1990s to invite shamans on the occasion of *Guru Purnima*²⁰⁸ to honor them for their contribution to the society. Although reluctant at first, the shamans agreed to come and eventually became an integral part of the *shovayatra* in Darjeeling hills. However, with Subhas Ghising’s political agenda changing in 2004-2005 to implement the Sixth Schedule in Darjeeling hills, the presence of shamans in the *Phulpati shovayatra* was politicized to highlight “tribal status” for the Gorkhas.

Mocking the whole idea, Biswa recounts how “*Jhakri ra bijua haru lai certificate dinu thalyo. Aabo uni haru lai kei aarthik subidha diye ko bha hunthiyo . . . certificate liyera uni haru ka jaanu? In fact, office ma as director hand-over ra take-over garnu jada maile dekhe ko, certificate ko eeti thak jhakri harko lagi . . . councillor ra chairman le signature gareko*” (They [i.e. the DGHC] used to give certificates to the shamans. If the DGHC had extended some financial help, it would have been helpful, but what were the shamans to do with certificates? In

²⁰⁷ <http://www.hindu.com/2008/03/15/stories/2008031555871100.htm>, last viewed May 18, 2012.

²⁰⁸ *Guru Purnima* falls on the full moon of June-July and is observed by Hindus and Buddhists to pay homage to their gurus and/or spiritual guides. Shamans in many Indian societies are considered not only healers, but also gurus or spiritual guides who advise people on the various aspects of everyday life.

fact, when I was in the office for the hand-over and take over of office duties as director, I saw a whole stack of certificates ready to be distributed among the shamans . . . duly signed by DGHC councillors and the Chairman, Subhas Ghising). Comparing the incident of “tribalizing” Gorkhas in 2005, Biswa believes the far-sightedness of the current leader, Bimal Gurung, has been a saving grace for Gorkha *sanskriti* and *chinhari* (culture and identity). As a result, he believes, Gorkha culture is again back on its feet and is being celebrated as it should be, without Ghising playing around with it like his pet monkey. It is important for Biswa that the identity of Gorkhas since 2008 is being performed and presented “correctly” to non-Gorkha Indians. By this he means “*jasto euta mala ma nana-thari ko phool huncha, teseri hamro Gorkha jati pani anek thari ko phool haru ko smawesh ho*” (just as a garland is made up of a bouquet of flowers, our Gorkha community also comprises a bouquet of sub-communities living together). He also let me know that he fully supports Bimal Gurung’s position in representing Gorkhas to be a Hindu-centric community with shades of indigenous tribal elements interwoven (*buney ko*) within its folds. However, on a cautious note, Biswa states that if in future Bimal Gurung’s politics mar the “true” (*assal*) representation of Gorkha culture, then he will not hesitate to voice his displeasure (Figure 4.4).

Expressing overall satisfaction about the unfolding of month-long music festivals since 2008, Biswa repeatedly tells me that *hamile yo parampara lai baraudai januparcha* (we should continue to uphold this tradition forever). He believes this will not only help artists and musicians of the Gorkha community to look forward to something every year, but will also inspire them to continue practicing their music and art. This will then automatically lead to Gorkha folk culture and music being preserved and promoted via communal practice through

generations to come, Biswa asserts. Then, turning towards me and taking me as an example, he notes that students like me will no longer have to come searching for him to know or learn about Gorkha music. Gorkha music will be everywhere – at every nook and corner of the streets. According to Biswa, if the month-long music festival continues to be an integral part of Gorkha annual celebrations, then the media and the social attention it garners will also ensure that Darjeeling's folk genres such as *maruni*, *deusi-bhailo*, *damphu naach*, and *cya:brung naach* become synonymous with Gorkha identity in India. This will, Biswa avers, bring Gorkhas and Gorkha culture to the point where they are at par with other Indian cultures. Just as Bengalis have genres like *Rabindrasangeet*, *nazrulgeeti*, *bhawaiya*,²⁰⁹ *bhatiyali*,²¹⁰ and *baul*²¹¹ to assert their cultural identity in India, so Gorkhas will have their own distinctive genres as markers of their cultural identity as well.

Biswa also metaphorically connected the role of the month-long music festival to that of a *rodhi-ghar*, which are meeting places found in Gurung villages. Noting that the music festival is not just a meeting place for Gorkha musicians and artists, he explains that the venue of the music festival is also a place where members of the Gorkha community come together to feel a sense of oneness. It keeps all Gorkhas united in their struggle for a home state in India (*aafnu*

²⁰⁹*Bhawaiya* is a Bengali folk music genre that is associated with farmers and bullock-cart drivers. The songs are sung accompanied by a one-string or a two-string plucked lute called the *ektara* and the *dotara*, respectively. The theme of *bhawaiya* music revolves around element of rural life like harvest, rain, local festivities, life events, joy, love, and sorrow (http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/B_0481.HTM, last viewed May 31, 2012).

²¹⁰ *Bhatiyali* is also known as the boatman's song and is most prevalent in the southern coastal regions of West Bengal and Bangladesh. *Bhatiyali* songs are either sung solo or accompanied by *dotara*, *dhak*, *basuri*/flute, and *manjira*/ hand cymbals. The theme of *bhatiyali* songs is predominantly life lived in and around rivers/*nadi*, the yearning for love, sorrow, and the philosophy of life with the boatman being the one ferrying all down the river of life and experience (<http://www.bangladesh.com/blog/bhatiali-music-of-the-river-communities>, last viewed May 31, 2012).

²¹¹ *Bauls* are a syncretic religious group whose members lead a nomadic life wandering from place to place singing poem-songs of religious harmony and the philosophy of life. *Baul* poem-songs are accompanied by a one-string plucked lute called the *ektara*. Lalan Fakir is considered to be one of the most important poet-practitioners of this tradition. He became an icon of religious tolerance and secularism in eighteenth-century India (<http://hinduism.about.com/od/artculture/a/bauls.htm>, last viewed May 31, 2012).

mato ko lagi ek hunu), believes Biswa. In addition, the venue doubles as a place where people like housewives and youngsters can mingle, meet friends, and catch up with the latest gossip and fashion around town. Taking the example of his own family members, Biswa comments that his wife and daughters-in-law always return home after a concert enlivened not only by the music, but also by the latest news or fashion in town. The women-folk especially, remarked Biswa, meet at the festival venue to discuss which store sells the best saris at the best price, and off they go



Figure 4.4: The author in discussion with Dilip Biswa at his residence. Photo by Bashu Isaiah

Rai Lorung, Darjeeling, December 5, 2010

shopping in a jiffy. Likewise, women and men seeing other people dressed in their traditional outfits and jewelry are apt to do the same, which helps to promote the practice of wearing *chaubandi choli-phariya* and *daura-suruwal* for the entire festive month. Moreover, Biswa reminds me that with Gorkhas being fashion-conscious, or rather “fashion-forward” (*nakal parnu ma aghari*), seeing another person wear a particular style of traditional dress, the observer wastes no time in doing the same or even outdoing the first person. The same is also applicable for music performance, Biswa continues, when musicians try to copy and outdo each other while participating in the month-long festival every year.

Moving on to discuss the quality and content of the musics performed in the month-long festival, Biswa notes with satisfaction that things are improving. He adds that although Gorkha Kala Sansthan (GKS), the organization founded by Bimal Gurung’s party to preserve and promote Gorkha culture in 2008, never approached him for any suggestions regarding the folk music to be performed at the music festival, he nevertheless keeps a close watch. It is important for him to know what is being performed, who performs, and how it is being contextualized. Concerned about Nepalese performers performing for a “Gorkha music festival,” Biswa feels it could have done serious damage to Gorkha identity in India. “We were actually lucky because no one took notice. What if the Bengalis and the Indian media had got hold of it and played it against us?,” asks Biswa. Moreover, he adds even though the 2010 music festival was good minus any Nepalese musicians, the repeated use of recorded Nepalese music performed by Nepalese artists was a damper. “Why do they keep dancing to modern songs from Nepal? Don’t we have our own folk music from Darjeeling?,” questions an exasperated Biswa. He then informs me about his folk music albums like *Samala*, which has danceable folk tunes pertinent to

the culture of Darjeeling hills. To Biswa, it is important that the folk music of Darjeeling hills be promoted as the “authentic” music of Gorkhas rather than modern Nepali music: “*Yo adhunik sangeet haru ta manoranjana ko lagi mattai ta ho*” (modern music is only for entertainment). But when I point out that some musicians in Darjeeling consider *sugam sangeet* as Darjeeling’s “true” music, Biswa shakes his head, saying this idea is not worth any further discussion.

Instead, choosing to talk about Nepal and bemoaning Nepalese music doing more harm than good to the music of Darjeeling hills, Biswa blames the Nepalese music industry for grossly misrepresenting the culture of Darjeeling hills in their audio-visual CDs. Mentioning Naveen Khadka, one of Nepal’s popular folk singers, Biswa says Khadka pirated a lot of folk dance songs from Darjeeling and released them as Nepal’s *paschimay naach sangeet* (western Himalayan dance songs) in his audio CDs. So to get back at Khadka’s insensitive action, Biswa confirms that he is recording an audio-visual DVD elaborating the folk music styles, dress, and ornaments of the Darjeeling hills. The CD is titled *Company Sarak* (meaning “Company Road,” where the colonial reference is used to draw differences between the Gorkhas and the Nepalese). Biswa promises me a copy of *Company Sarak* once it is released, towards the end of 2012.

Then, clarifying that he harbors no personal ill-will towards Khadka and that he duly acknowledges the latter’s musical talent, Biswa states it hurt him deeply to see the culture of Darjeeling hills being misrepresented and insensitively mishandled: “*Tesai ta hamilai bideshi bhancha ra hamro aafnu kei sanskriti chaina bhancha, tes ma hamro Darjeeling to sanskriti lai Nepal ko dekhauda hami lai jhan Nepal ko ho bhandaina?*” (As it is we are labeled as foreigners and degraded as a community with no culture to call our own. On top of that, if someone misrepresents our culture to be from Nepal then won’t our identity remain forever

misrepresented as Nepalese?). He further reasons, “*La je gara gara, tara kamsekam arka ko cheej lai na bigara*” (All right, do what you have to do but at least don’t mess around with other people’s culture). Hence, with his grudge against the Nepalese music industry, which was coincidentally pioneered by leading musicians from Darjeeling hills who migrated to Nepal for better opportunities in the 1970s, Biswa at present spends most of his time writing, composing, and producing his own CDs locally at his home studio. Assisted by his two sons, he proudly informs me that he has never allowed nor will allow any of his music to be produced or recorded in Nepal. This conviction of his, Biswa believes, will bear fruit in times to come through his work and music in the history of Darjeeling hills and Gorkhas in India.

When I ask if Biswa has ever performed in Nepal, he answers in the affirmative. It was on the occasion of King Mahendra’s birthday in 1970, but he is quick to point out that he went to Nepal as a servant of the Government of India. Since he was employed in the Government of West Bengal’s Department of Culture, Biswa was sent to Nepal to perform *maruni naach* and Nepali folk music as a “gift” from India to the Nepalese king on his birthday. Biswa then goes on to explain that even though from a distance Gorkha and Nepalese culture may seem similar, Gorkha culture, Gorkha language, and Gorkha history are different from that of Nepal (*hamro sanskriti, hamro rahan-sahan, hamro boli, ra hamro itihaas beglai cha*). For example, he points out that although *maruni* is performed in the eight-beat *khayali tala*²¹² in India and Nepal, one finds it difficult to perform *maruni* with Nepalese *madal* players since it is played differently in Nepal. The difference, according to Biswa, lies in the *uthan* (the percussion introduction part before the dance begins), the stress points, and *bhaka*, the aesthetic feel in executing the *tala*.

²¹² *Khayali tala* is an 8-beat time cycle. It is spelled as: *dhang - - tang / tang dhang dhang tang*.

When I try to clarify whether he means Gorkha Nepali is different in accent or language from Nepalese Nepali, Biswa replies that they are different in both respects. He explains Gorkha Nepali and Nepalese Nepali not only vary in accent, but also in terms of language – “*yo khali dhungo ra dhunga, ghuro ra ghura ko baat hoina, yesma sabda ra abhiwyekti ko pani kura cha*” (this is not simply a matter of *dhungo* and *dhunga*, or *ghuro* and *ghura*,²¹³ but it is also different word-wise and expression-wise). To explain better, Biswa says people in Darjeeling call rice *bhat*, whereas Nepalese call it *bhuja*; likewise window is called *khirki* in Darjeeling and *jhyal* in Nepal, and door *dailo* in Darjeeling and *dhoka* in Nepal, and so on. Therefore, citing these examples, he hopes that the Gorkhas learn to take care in highlighting their differences with Nepal and likewise convey it meaningfully to their Indian counterparts as well. On the same note, Biswa urges that Gorkhas should learn to uphold and promote their own folk music culture and folk musicians from Darjeeling hills and stop relying on cassettes and CDs produced in Nepal.

The month-long festival should not only ban Nepalese artists, but also stop using and promoting recorded music from Nepal says Biswa. He argues, “*Nepal ko manche le hamro CDs ra cassettes kinka? Hami kina uniharko kinnu?*” (Do people from Nepal buy our CDs and cassettes? So why should we buy theirs?). He also feels that it is high time for Gorkha musicians to be self-sufficient and stop relying on the Nepalese music industry to give them a break. Biswa notes that the popular feeling amongst Gorkha musicians that there is no scope for them in Darjeeling hills or in India for that matter is false. Taking his life and career as an example, Biswa asserts that it is possible to be a Gorkha musician and still be able to earn one’s livelihood

²¹³ *Dhunga*, meaning stone, is pronounced *dhungo* in Nepal, just as “knee” (*ghura*) is pronounced *ghuro* in Nepal. I can also personally attest to the fact that when I speak Nepali with Nepalese friends in front of my Indian friends, the latter often remark at the way my Nepali sounds different from the Nepali of my Nepalese friends.

through music in Darjeeling hills and in India. One just needs to know where to look for opportunities, and take the time and energy to practice and dedicate one's life to music. After all, he avers, "*Aakhir ma hamro sangeet ta autai ho, hoina ra? – hami sa re ga ma pa bhanchung, uniharu lei do re me fa so bhanchan*" (Whether you do Indian classical music or Western music, the basics are the same, aren't they? We say Sa Re Ga Ma Pa and they say Do Re Mi Fa Sol) (Figure 4.5). Lastly, he hopes that a day will come when the Darjeeling month-long music



Figure 4.5 Folk musician Dilip Biswa demonstrating *khyali tala* on the heavy *madal* at his residence in Darjeeling. The lighter version of the same *madal* can be seen on the right. Photo by Bashu Isaiah Rai Lorung, Darjeeling, December 16, 2012

festival will take place with Gorkha musicians performing only to musics performed by musicians from Darjeeling hills, minus any Nepalese music, even recorded, from across the border.

Chandan Lomjhel²¹⁴

Lomjhel was born in 1960 at the Governor's house (Raj Bhawan) in Darjeeling town, where his father, Kharka Bahadur Lomjhel, worked as a gardener/*mali*. He had two brothers and two sisters. He obtained his primary education from Swami Vivekanand School and middle and high school education from St. Robert's School, Darjeeling. Although not hailing from a musical family and being rather an avid player of football during his early years, Lomjhel's journey into the musical world began when he went around with his village seniors singing *deusi-bhailo* during *Diwali*. Gradually he learnt to play the mouth organ on his own, and when he was about thirteen or fourteen the leader of the *deusi-bhailo* group, the late Mohan Singh Lohagun, encouraged Lomjhel to play the harmonium as well. Likewise, his music teacher at school, Subhas Dewan, also motivated him to learn the basics of music composition and began to pass down more responsibilities in terms of music arrangements for school programs and Annual Day celebrations.

In addition, his close acquaintance with his school friend, Arun Singh, whose family was into music and knew several musicians from Darjeeling hills, played a vital role in finessing Lomjhel's talent and career in music. They had a music band called the Carnival, which performed Nepali and Hindi popular and folk songs. As a sixteen-year-old in 1976, Lomjhel

²¹⁴ I met Chandan Lomjhel on numerous occasions in Darjeeling during my fieldwork, but I specifically interviewed him for this chapter on December 17 and December 20, 2010.

began to perform with the Carnival as a side-percussionist playing the maracas. Then when he went to college and his experience grew with the band, Lomjhel was allowed to play the accordion in some Nepali songs. Lomjhel learnt to play the accordion on his own with some support from Mrs. Choudhury, who helped him to learn the basics of the piano.²¹⁵ From then on till the present Lomjhel has been closely associated with the Carnival band in Darjeeling hills and is currently its bandmaster. In 1980, in a music competition organized by Godanishadhara, a local club in Darjeeling, Lomjhel was awarded the title of the best music composer.

In 1983-84, Lomjhel had the rare opportunity to record some his songs in Kathmandu, Nepal, with his wife, singer Daisy Barailly. However, the most gratifying and inspiring moment for him was when Nepal's most famous singer, Narayan Gopal (October 1939-December 1990), sang his composition in 1990s. This song, written by Norden Rumba,²¹⁶ a lyricist from Darjeeling, and composed by Lomjhel, features the words "*Mera sabai raat aba mat haru bhaye, jindagi nai na bujne baat haru bhaye*" (All my nights are now drunk, my life has become a collage of perplexing chatter). It quintessentially expresses the general sense of pathos and anxiety of Gorkhas being unhomed²¹⁷ within their own homeland. Continuing on the topic of alienation and domination of Gorkhas in India, Lomjhel commented that every year on India's

²¹⁵ Mrs. Choudhury was a local dentist's wife. She hailed from Kolkata, but after marriage made Darjeeling her home.

²¹⁶ Norden Rumba was a well-known lyricist who wrote mostly about the identity crisis and profound alienation the Nepali-speakers of India had to endure since independence in 1947. His songs have been set to music by well-known composers like Chandan Lomjhel and Basant Chhattri, but remain mostly unknown and unheard by the general public. This particular song describes the state of Gorkhas as becoming confused and overtaken by perplexing never-ending chatter, which degrades and makes them temporary guests in their own land.

²¹⁷ Homi Bhabha and other postcolonial theorists have coined the term "unhomed" to explain the feeling of having been uprooted, alienated, and displaced. It is the sense of being in between two or more cultures/worlds with or without being physically dislocated or moved. Here, being "unhomed" does not mean being homeless. To be unhomed "is to feel not at home even in one's own home because you are not at home in yourself; that is, your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee" (Tyson 2006: 421).

Republic Day parade:²¹⁸ “*Swatantrata pako tirshat barsha pachi pani hamilai Delhi ma bolaudaina. Ra Bangal le hamilai eti thicho-micho gareko cha, hami lai kaile pathaune hoina*” (Even after sixty-three years of independence, we have never been invited to perform at Delhi. And Bengal dominates us so completely that there is no chance we will ever be sent to perform in future). “*Hami lai chance nai didaina*” (We are never given a chance), Lomjhel adds sadly, as he notes that musicians are sent from all the six northeastern states, including Sikkim and Bengal, but the Gorkhas are always left unacknowledged as if they do not exist at all in India.

Lomjhel asks, “*Hamro ke dekhaune kei chaina? Cha ni. Abo happarey naach, Limbu janajati ko, hernuhosta. Yo dui sau jana le Vijaypath ma nachyo bhaney katti ramro huncha*” (Don’t we have anything/culture to show? We do. Now imagine the *happarey*²¹⁹ dance, the dance of the Limbus. If two hundred of us perform this dance at Vijaypath,²²⁰ then how spectacular it would be). Moreover, being confined within Darjeeling, the Gorkhas have no scope to perform elsewhere in India. Then on a lighter note, Lomjhel remarks: “*Uiele bhanthyo, naachnu jandaina aagan tero, tara aabo chai naachnu jandaicha, tara aaganai chaina*” (Earlier there was a saying, can’t dance, blame it on the stage/verandah/threshold, but now we can dance but have no stage/threshold to perform on). Lomjhel believes people from Darjeeling hills do not lack talent or dedication, but notes sadly that it seems Gorkhas are destined to live their life for others rather than for themselves.

²¹⁸ India established its constitution on January 26, 1950. It was drafted to make India a sovereign, democratic republic that upholds justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity for all. Every year on January 26, India celebrates its Republic Day with an elaborate parade of the armed forces and each regional state representing their culture and specific themes on beautifully decorated spectacular floats along with dancers and musicians.

²¹⁹ *Happarey* dance is an energetic dance set to 4/4 meter identified with the Limbu community of Gorkhas.

²²⁰ Vijaypath is the venue in New Delhi, the capital city of India, where the Republic Day parade and celebrations are held every year.

Taking the example of Gorkha musicians and artists, who committed their talent and passion to build the Nepalese music industry while Darjeeling was left unrecognized and unheard, Lomjhel bemoans the fate of being a Gorkha. To explain better, he bursts into a song by Norden Rumba whose lyrics go as follows (Figure 4.6):

Pardesh e bhari, lahurey ko relimai

Janai bha hamro, sadhainai arulai

Janma ni kasto bhekai ma

Man ki na moryo, sunka barikai ma?

Translation:

All over the world there is great talk of the *lahurey*²²¹

We were born to dedicate our lives for the sake of others

Why had we to be born thus

Why did my dreams die so early?

Thus, with this song Lomjhel justifies why it is high time that Gorkhas negotiate to mark the borders of their own threshold so as to begin feeling at home within their own home. He also recalls the insensitive behavior of the Bengal government towards Gorkha musicians while recording for Doordarshan Kolkata, and takes it as another example of how Gorkhas are overtly dominated and dismissed indifferently by their Bengali “rulers.”²²² Nonetheless, being dedicated to Darjeeling’s music, Lomjhel says he is not in favor of leaving Darjeeling to make life elsewhere. He acknowledges that perhaps his wife’s and his government jobs in India may have

²²¹ *Lahurey* is a colloquial term for Gorkhas. Here *lahurey* is being used to refer to those Gorkhas enlisted in the British army, where they are acclaimed for bravery and for laying down their lives for their master.

²²² Bengalis are often referred to by the Gorkhas as “those who rule over us” (*hami mathi raj garne*). *Raj garnu* means “to rule” and *rajgarne*, the “rulers.”

been a major factor, but still he would prefer to remain in his hometown. After a brief pause, he says that when he goes to Nepal for concerts, he climbs up a hill to look towards Darjeeling or Kanchenjunga²²³ to remind him of his home.

When I ask him about his experience of performing in Nepal versus India, Lomjhel replies, “*Aafnu aagan bhaneko aafnunai huncha. Arkako aagan ma jattinai aiephal ropepani, aiephal khada ta kinera nai khanu parcha*” (Your own land/threshold is after all your very own land. No matter how much you harvest apples in your neighbor’s land, to eat an apple you still have to pay for it). Also, he ruefully adds, no matter how much you labor in another person’s land, the fame is there for the others to enjoy: “*Karma bhomi lei janmabhumi lai jiticha*” (The work-place overtakes your birthplace). Then taking examples of musicians/singers from Darjeeling hills who choose to work and stay in Nepal like Ambar Gurung,²²⁴ Gopal Yonzon, Peter Karthak, Kunti Moktan, Uday Sotang, Manila Sotang, and Suresh Kumar, Lomjhel says he feels proud of their achievements, but is saddened to realize that they have come at the cost of depriving Darjeeling of its talent and music. To prevent this from happening in future, Lomjhel suggests that Darjeeling hills should come up with registered music institutions that have the capacity to employ good teachers with competitive salary and benefits. As a comparison, he states, “*Bangali harko hernusta, uniharko aafnui sansthan haru cha junle uniharuko sangeekar lai naukari dincha. Yaha kunai musician cha bhane, ule aafai sansthan*

²²³ Kanchenjunga is the highest mountain peak in India. It has an altitude of 8,586 metres (28,169 feet) and is surrounded by Sikkim to the south and east, Nepal to the west, and Tibet to the north. As per popular myth, the name Kanchenjunga is derived from the Tibetan words “Kanchen” and “Dzonga,” meaning “Five Treasures of the Great Snow,” as it has five peaks (<http://www.thecolorsofindia.com/interesting-facts/geography/highest-mountain-peak-in-india.html>, last viewed July 12, 2012).

²²⁴ Ambar Gurung is considered to be the father of modern Nepali music. He left his government job in India in 1968 and made Nepal his home. He took Nepalese citizenship and is the composer of Nepal’s well-known national anthem *Sayung thunga phool ka*, which was adopted in 2007. Gurung is currently serving as the chancellor of the Nepal Academy of Music and Drama, a position he has held since 2010.



Figure 4.6: Chandan Lomjhel singing and listening to my recording of his song “Pardesh e bhari, lahurey ko relimai.” Also in the picture is Bashu Lorung. Photo by author, Darjeeling, December 17, 2012

kholnu parcha, aafui sikaunu parcha, aafui advertise garnuparcha. Tesari nai kunai cassette/CD banayo bhane, aafai record garnu parcha, aafui marketing garnu parcha, ra aafui bechnu parcha” (Look at the Bengalis, they have many certified institutions that employ well-known musicians as teachers. Here if we have a musician, then he/she has to open their own institution, teach themselves, advertise about their institution themselves, and so on. Just like when we make a cassette/CD, we record it ourselves, market it ourselves, and go about selling it ourselves as well).

Therefore, to counter Darjeeling hills' long history of losing its music and musicians to Nepal, Lomjhel hopes his work and his band "Carnival" will in some way fill the void left by Darjeeling's migrating musicians. Lomjhel informs me music bands in Darjeeling normally use just two keyboards, drums, guitars, and singers, but his band makes it a point to incorporate as many folk instruments as possible (Figure 4.7). This, according to him, is to preserve Gorkha folk music and the spirit/*bhaka* of eastern Himalayan music of Darjeeling hills. In this regard, the



Figure 4.7: Music instruments on display at Chandan Lomjhel's house. Photo by author.

Darjeeling, December 20, 2010

introduction of the month-long music festival in Darjeeling from 2008 has been a productive move, feels Lomjhel. He claims it has been like a breath of fresh air and helpful in resurrecting Gorkha culture and Gorkha folk music in Darjeeling hills. It has given the musicians of Darjeeling hills something to be excited about and look forward to every year, although much is still left to be desired and achieved as of now. Continuing in the same vein, he expresses his disdain regarding Nepalese music artists performing for the month-long Darjeeling music festival in 2008. However, he is quick to reason that since Gorkhas have been far removed from their folk roots, they needed a place to start somewhere. But now that the Darjeeling music festival has more or less established its format by arranging and re-arranging its content and context for the past three years (2008-2010), Lomjhel believes it is up to the Gorkhas to revive and reinstate Gorkha music among the younger generations. Educating the young is important because with the local market in Darjeeling preferring Nepali music cassettes and CDs from across the border, locally recorded music albums hardly stand a chance against the Nepalese music industry.

Given this situation, Lomjhel hopes that by promoting Gorkha music and Gorkha musicians among the Gorkha youths, his generation will help the upcoming generation to appreciate and be proud of their own music. Once this is achieved, the youths will buy CDs to listen to Gorkha music, which will help to support local musicians and the local recording business. Lomjhel says he is ready to work with local music producers and record CDs of Gorkha music so that Gorkhas do not have to rely upon Nepalese recorded music to perform in the month-long music festival because after all “*Hamro pani nachne layak geet sangeet haru chani*” (We also have danceable tunes and rhythms). He believes that the general ignorance of

Gorkhas regarding the depth and breadth of their own music keeps them from realizing the potential of what could be done to further it. Because the parents are unaware and the children don't know or haven't heard Gorkha folk music, they, the children, complain that *maruni* is too slow for them to dance to, notes Lomjhel. To counter this problem, Lomjhel feels that recording Gorkha folk music and teaching it to children will help them develop a taste for it, and then they won't complain about dancing to it any more. In addition, he suggests that monthly or fortnightly music programs featuring local artists/musicians and composers be arranged to foster a more music-centric ambience in Darjeeling hills.

Matabir Rai²²⁵

I first heard of Matabir Rai from my father in January 2009, during one of our phone conversations about my research and the possibility of my upcoming fieldwork in the fall of 2009. As we got talking about the month-long music festival and the latest version of presenting Gorkha identity via traditional clothes, culture, and music, my father mentioned an article from *Himalaya Darpan*, the local Nepali daily of north Bengal. This article carried a story of a local folk *sarangi* player, who had been making and playing the instrument for the past three decades. In addition, my father informed me that Rai had been invited as a guest performer by the Nepali Students' Union at North Bengal University for the Nepali Department's Annual Day celebrations. Intrigued and interested, I decided to meet Rai and began collecting information regarding his address and phone number. Unfortunately, I could not find anyone who could provide me with Rai's whereabouts. Nevertheless, upon arriving in India in the fall of 2009, my

²²⁵ I met Matabir Rai on November 5, 2009, at his residence in Salugara, a small developing town that lies on the outskirts of the main township of Siliguri.

inquiries about Rai at the Nepali Department of North Bengal University yielded some information about where he lived. I was told that since Rai was invited by the senior students who had graduated in the spring of 2009, the current students could only tell me that Rai lived somewhere in Salugara on the outskirts of Siliguri town. Finally, after a fortnight of running around and asking every possible person I thought might be of help, I was able to find an address where Matabir Rai lived.

Based on this information, my father and I arrived there on November 5, 2009, only to be told that Rai did not live there any more. However, members of the household were extremely helpful and directed us to another neighboring village in Salugara where they assured us Rai's residence could be found. Following the directions, my father and I arrived at a quaint house that stood in solitude from the other houses in the village. The house seemed very quiet, but considering that we had come all this way, we decided we should at least knock a couple of times before assuming no one was inside. So I knocked. No reply. After my second knock, which was a little louder than the previous one, we heard a voice saying "*aaudaichu*" ("coming" in Nepali). Soon the main door was unbolted and a smiling cheery gentleman greeted us. I introduced myself and explained my reasons wanting to meet him for my research regarding Gorkha folk music and the folk *sarangi*. Looking pleased, Rai welcomed us and we entered his sitting room. He excused the mess, saying his wife had recently passed away and he was still getting used to cleaning and cooking for himself.

Rai was born in a remote village on the outskirts of Kurseong near Darjeeling. He did not know the exact year, but mentions that his employment file records it as 1940. From his childhood, he was more interested in listening to music than attending school. This was,

however, not a problem, because hailing from a poor family with nine siblings and a single parent, he was encouraged to work in the fields and bring home money rather than go to school. Rai had no formal training in music. He listened to recorded Hindi and Nepali songs that were played on the radio or the gramophone at village weddings, at annual religious festivities like *Dasai*, or in grocery shops in Kurseong *bazaar*/town. Rai fondly remembered a *daju* (big brother) from his village who played the *murali* (transverse folk bamboo flute) and would sometimes teach and allow Rai to play the flute as well. Then, as the years passed, he managed to secure a government job in 1959 with the West Bengal Forest Department as a janitor, which brought him to Darjeeling town. There, having heard the *sarangi* from a *gaine* musician, Rai became interested to learn how to play the instrument. *Gaine* are caste-exclusive minstrels from the musician caste who go from village to village playing the *sarangi* and singing songs or relaying news or messages to the villagers (Hoerburger 1970).

Every year during winter, when the paddy is harvested and the work in the fields is done, *gaine* musicians from remote villages around Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, and Nepal take to the streets of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, and Gangtok. They come with the hope of earning some extra money entertaining pedestrians by singing Nepali songs, folk and popular. However, with “tradition” coming to the fore from 2008 to represent Gorkha cultural identity, I have observed more *gaine* musicians performing by the roadsides in Darjeeling and Sikkim in 2009, 2010, and 2012. When Rai had his first few lessons on the *sarangi* from his *gaine* teacher, he was in his mid-twenties. From then on he learnt by playing songs on his own, and if he met any *gaine sarangi* players by the roadside, he would discuss music with them and learn from listening to them playing their music. Gradually, Rai also began to take interest in making

sarangi, since it was difficult to come by them in Darjeeling town. Rai says, “*Hami ta gau ma basera kheti-pati garney manche hoina, tele garda eta tira ramro sarangi banaune manche haru pani kamti chan*” (Since most of us are not village-dwellers working as farmers any more, it is often difficult to come across a good *sarangi* maker here in Darjeeling hills and Sikkim). Therefore, having difficulty finding a good *sarangi* maker, Rai decided to make and play his own *sarangi* (Figures 4.8).

Going over the details of making a *sarangi*, Rai informs me that the wood best suited for the instrument is that obtained from a mature jackfruit tree. It is important that the *sarangi* be carved out of one single piece of the wood and that there be no joints or cracks anywhere to preserve the timbre and tonality of the instrument. Also, the animal skin/hide covering the sound box has to be made from goat hide or cow hide with a particular thickness in order to achieve the right degree of resonance. Then, pointing to the differences between *sarangi* made by Nepalese musicians and those made in Darjeeling hills and Sikkim, Rai says *sarangi* makers in Darjeeling and Sikkim use “Fevicol” or “Dendrite” to tape the hide over the sound-box, while Nepalese musicians still use a traditionally made glue containing a mixture of charcoal powder, goat blood, jackfruit tree resin, limestone, etc.²²⁶ Also, Gorkha musicians use violin or guitar strings and bridges on their instruments, while Nepalese musicians use gut strings made from goat or cat intestines and bridges made out of jackfruit tree. Then, demonstrating bowing techniques with a “traditional” handmade bow from the wood of a jackfruit tree, Rai points out that Nepalese *sarangi* players do “under-hand” bowing while most Gorkha musicians opt for “over-hand”

²²⁶ Fevicol and Dendrite are commercially available glues used by carpenters, construction workers, and for household repair.



Figure 4.8: A handmade folk *sarangi* by Matabir Rai. The bow can be seen partially in the picture. Photo by author, Salugara (near Siliguri), November 5, 2009



Figure 4.9: Matabir Rai performing on the *sarangi* and singing a Nepali folk song. Photo by author, Salugara (near Siliguri), November 5, 2009

violin bow rather than the traditional bow, since the former is available easily at any music instrument stores in Darjeeling or Siliguri. From a technical viewpoint, Rai adds, it is easier to use a violin bow when playing with the over-hand technique than to use the traditional bow. But, personally, Rai prefers a traditional bow even though he does over-hand bowing (Figure 4.9). As for the strings, he uses guitar or violin strings interchangeably depending on their availability.

When I ask how many instruments he makes in a year, Rai replies that earlier he would make two or three, but lately with the demand for *sarangi* going up, he makes about twenty to twenty-five a year. “People not only want *sarangi* for playing, but also as showpieces for their

homes,” says Rai. He adds, “people come to me requesting small *sarangi* as display items for their homes.” When I inquire why he thinks the demand for *sarangi* has gone up lately, Rai muses over the question for a while. Then scratching his head, he says: “*Yo hamro manche ko icha ho. Aafnu purkha ko sanskriti lai jannu ani bujnu*” (This is our people’s [Gorkhas’] wish. To know and understand the culture of their forefathers). He shows me numerous mementos from local music clubs, certificates of felicitations, and local newspaper coverage of his interviews, and says it feels great to be acknowledged as a *sarangi* player and a folk musician by his fellow Gorkhas. Then, mentioning his guruji, the late Pratap Singh, who was a staff artist at All India Radio Kurseong, Rai believes it must be the result of his blessings. A few more questions reveal that Rai had for some time (three years or so) learnt folk music and raag music from Pratap Singh when he was temporarily posted to the West Bengal Forest Department office in Kurseong. Rai happily chats about being invited to government Nepali schools in Siliguri, Kurseong, Darjeeling, and Kalimpong for lecture-demonstrations on the *sarangi*. Then, pointing out that he has been invited to North Bengal University as well, Rai says the university students were very respectful and graciously offered to pick him up and drop him off after the concert, not to mention paying him handsomely as well.

Next, when I ask how he generally dresses while performing for concerts, he seems a little confused. However, after I explain the context of my question based on the fact that Gorkhas are wearing their traditional outfits more often nowadays, he bursts into laughter and discloses that he does not owe a *daura-suruwal*. He informs me, “*Mo pant-shirt layerai janchu*” (I go wearing pants and shirt), and that he has never worn a *daura-suruwal* in his life so far. When I ask whether he has been invited to perform at the month-long music festival in

Darjeeling hills, he replies in the negative. As for the month-long music program, Rai says he does not keep track of the program although he is aware of the Gorkha movement and fully supports the cause of a Gorkha state in India. For him, asking for a Gorkha identity by doing music can do no harm and it is a better way of being a Gorkha than killing people. Likewise, Rai says that if he is invited to perform at the music festival, he will certainly accept the invitation.

Lastly, when I express my interest in buying a *sarangi* from him, he goes to the adjoining room and brings out three other hand-made *sarangis*. He then tunes them one by one, plays them, and picks one for me, saying it is the best he has at the moment. I thank him for his suggestion, pay him for the instrument, and ask if I can come back the following year to talk to him some more about *sarangi* and his music. He gladly agrees, but when I go back to meet him in 2011, I am told he sold his house to be near his daughter, who lives in Kalimpong. I haven't been able to get in touch with him, since and no one from Siliguri or Darjeeling seems to know his address. However, last year I got the information that Rai now lives with his second daughter in Sukna, near Siliguri town.

Some Conclusions

As is evident from my interviews with Chhetri, Gurung, Biswa, Lomjhel, and Rai, their social tendency in terms of Bourdieu's culturally and structurally constructed "disposition" is clear in their unanimous support for a Gorkha identity, albeit with some differences regarding how it should be achieved. As Giddens' "partially knowing subjects" who are able to reflect on, interact with, and critique authority and dominant structures that bear down on societies, all five of them are aware of Ghising's oppressive rule and how the DGHC had become an extension of

the bigger authoritative structures (West Bengal and the Indian government) in further alienating the Gorkhas. However, unlike Gurung, who forthrightly critiques Ghising and had to flee to Nepal when “his head was in demand,” Biswa and Lomjhel, who worked for the Culture and Information Department of the DGHC, had different responses to Ghising’s authoritarian rule. Biswa, on seeing how the “Program in Nepali” from Doordarshan Kolkata was deteriorating, refused to be a part of it, while Lomjhel – despite experiencing alienation – chose to perform on numerous occasions. Biswa justifies his decision by saying he did not want Gorkha culture to be humiliated, while Lomjhel feels that if he had given up then the West Bengal government would think they had succeeded in scaring off the Gorkhas from the landscape of Bengal altogether.

On the topic of month-long music festivals, all five of them agree that the cultural renaissance since 2008 was long overdue. However, whereas Gurung and Chhetri do not mince words in criticizing Ghising, Biswa and Lomjhel are more willing to blame power for blinding Ghising from his responsibility to his people. But once again, whereas Biswa, who pioneered the practice of felicitating local shamans and *shovayatra*, is extremely opposed to the idea of a tribal status for Gorkhas, Lomjhel is open to the idea of a “tribal” Gorkha community. Lomjhel states that with all the hue and cry for representation of all sub-communities, the Gorkhas no longer remain a united group as they were before. Rather, with too much emphasis on who is a Limbu, a Tamang, a Newar, a *bahun*/brahman, etc., Lomjhel fears the Gorkha community is being torn apart by two opposing forces – communal identity versus sub-communal identity. Wouldn’t it be nice, he asks, if we are just one Gorkha community? The tribal status, he feels, would give us equal opportunities and socio-economic privileges, and then there would be no strife regarding

who is entitled to the privileges and who is not.²²⁷ He enthusiastically participated in the *shovayatra* and the Carnival celebrations in 2005 in support of the Sixth Schedule for Darjeeling hills. However, given a choice between Sixth Schedule and a Gorkha state, Lomjhel agrees that there can be no better alternative than having one's own regional state called "Gorkhaland" in India.

Both Lomjhel and Biswa belong to the lower caste and were employed as state musicians in permanent government-salaried jobs. But, whereas Biswa supports the idea of the month-long festival with designated days for the different sub-communities of Gorkhas, including the *Biswakarma samaj*,²²⁸ to showcase their culture, Lomjhel is not too excited about it. He seems to have mixed feelings regarding this development and does not wish to discuss the matter in detail. All that Lomjhel is willing to say at the moment is that he feels it will rather divide than unite the Gorkha community in India. As can be recalled, Biswa, Chhetri, and Gurung support the idea of representing the Gorkha community as a bouquet of different flowers; however, Lomjhel is quite casual about the whole idea. He feels perhaps only time can tell whether showcasing plurality and ethnic differences within the Gorkha *jati*/community will enhance or hinder the bigger question of representing Gorkha identity in India. However, for Rai, who seems relatively

²²⁷ Low-caste Gorkhas are entitled to socio-economic privileges as "Scheduled Castes" by virtue of their birth, even if they may be economically sound, while high-caste Gorkhas are denied such privileges even if they may be in need of economic help. Likewise, within the "middle-caste" Gorkhas comprising the Mongolian sub-communities, the lines are not clear as to who qualifies for socio-economic privileges under the category of "Other Backward Classes" (OBC) or "Scheduled Tribes." When Ghising (himself a Tamang) was in power, he had the Tamangs, Rais, and Limbus included as "Scheduled Tribes" in addition to the Lepchas, Bhutias, and Yolmos. This created deep fissures within the Gorkha community, where other sub-communities like Gurungs, Newars, Magars, etc. felt alienated. This development brought into the limelight how being a Gorkha was not enough to acquire socio-economic privileges, since one had to be from a particular sub-community or caste to qualify for them. For example, in 1999, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, passed a verdict stating the "Rejection of the Request for the Inclusion of 'Gorkha' community in the Central List of Backward Classes of West Bengal" (www.ncbc.nic.in/Pdf/West%20Bengal/westbengal-Vol2/5.pdf, last viewed July 17, 2012).

²²⁸ The low castes in India are formulated on the type of menial jobs/trade the community traditionally did. For example, blacksmith, goldsmith, tailor, etc. The Hindu deity overlooking this type of work is called *Biswakarma*/*Viswakarma*. Likewise, the low-caste community in Darjeeling named their organization the *Biswakarma Samaj*.

unaware of the Gorkha culture movement despite being unconsciously roped in to represent Gorkha traditional music on the *sarangi*, music as such can cause no harm. When I ask him about sub-communities performing their musics at the Darjeeling music festival, he shrugs and says: “*Akhiri sangeet mattai ta gareko ho*” (After all they are just doing music). But when I ask if *sarangi* essentially represents Gorkha music or even “Rai music,” since he hails from the sub-community of Rais, he smiles and says he does not know how to answer that question. Nonetheless, he believes *sarangi* is what the earlier generation of Gorkhas played in villages, and going by what his guruji counseled him, if he learnt raag music then it would help him to perform better on the *sarangi*.

In terms of what essentially represents Gorkha music, Lomjhel believes that Nepali folk music, Nepali *sugamsangeet/adhunik geet*, and Nepali rock music together make Gorkha music. For him, music cannot be differentiated, and moreover, if one is to choose just Nepali folk music then it will wrongly limit the greatness of Gorkha culture. Gurung and Biswa, on the other hand, strongly vouch for Nepali folk music to be representative of the essence of Gorkha culture. Biswa has always been a folk musician and a folk dancer, but Gurung, who, in his own words, did rock and roll music in his early years, had converted with time and experience to believe folk music is the only way to go. In fact, because of this conservative belief, as I was told by Bashu Lorung, a dear friend and acquaintance from Darjeeling, Gurung and Chhetri are always at odds with each other. According to Chhetri, who specializes in *sugamsangeet* and claims that the genre was created by the musicians of Darjeeling hills, to dismiss *sugamsangeet* altogether from the essence of a Gorkha musical identity is absolutely unacceptable. In fact, Chhetri argues that Nepali folk music, although part of Gorkha music, essentially represents the “ruralness” of Nepal

rather than the relatively metropolitan lifestyle of Darjeeling hills. Because Darjeeling was a creation of the British, who were an “advanced race,” Chhetri believes it is this aspect of “modernity” that differentiates a *Darjeelingey* from a *gauley* (rural) Nepalese across the border: “*British le hamilai launu, basnu, khanu sikayo ani tes le garda hamro sanskriti Nepal dekhi bhinnai cha*” (The British taught us how to dress, live, and eat, and that makes us culturally different from Nepal). Chhetri further asks, won’t focusing solely on the *sarangi* and the *madal* and overlooking the guitars and drums overshadow the “guitar-culture”²²⁹ of the Gorkhas that they inherited from their colonial past?

When I present this question anonymously to Gurung the next day, he acknowledges the West’s profound influence on Gorkhas and their culture, but insists that eastern Himalayan folk musics like *maruni*, *damphu naach*, *chya:brung naach*, *happrey naach* and so on reflect the “roots” of the Gorkha culture. In turn, Gurung reasons that before the British came, our forefathers’ lifestyle and culture were in essence village-centric or folk. The other point where Chhetri and Gurung disagree is in their take on Bengali culture and Bengali music. As is evident from my discussions with Chhetri, he approves of Bengalis taking care to preserve and promote their music, not to mention being himself greatly influenced by some of the musical greats like Salil Choudhury and Manna De. Gurung, in contrast, points out how *Rabindrasangeet* is not as “original” as Bengalis deem it to be. So does it come as a surprise, then, to know that Gurung had cared less and misplaced Chhetri’s much treasured cassette containing Salil Choudhury’s interview? Supporting Gurung in this regard is Biswa, who believes Gorkhas have a much richer culture than the Bengalis. However, Lomjhel, despite accusing Bengalis of being biased,

²²⁹ Chhetri did not know or coin the term “guitar-culture,” but having heard me refer to it in our earlier meetings, he began to use it more frequently while discussing the culture of Darjeeling hills and the ongoing debate about the essence of Gorkha identity and Gorkhs music.

prejudiced, and insensitive towards Gorkhas, like Chhetri, speaks highly of their music, their discipline, and their stronghold of Indian classical music. Both Chhetri and Lomjhel recognize that the lack of a strong foundation in Indian classical music often puts Gorkha musicians at a disadvantage vis-a-vis their Bengali or other Indian counterparts. Likewise, both of them stress the importance of having good institutions/*sansthan* as the Bengalis do, where teachers and artists/*kalakar* can work towards grooming upcoming Gorkha musicians in the nuances of Indian classical music.

Because our youths lack basic knowledge of Indian classical music and the patience to fine tune their talent, they feel insecure competing with their Indian counterparts, explains Chhetri. He even goes on to say: “*Prashant Tamang le ta Indian Idol jityo, tara aaile ulai India ma usko naam rakhnu kati saro pardai*” (Prashant Tamang won the Indian Idol, but he is finding it so hard to keep his name in India). According to Chhetri, Tamang does not lack talent, but his lack of music training, and more importantly his unwillingness to overcome his deficiencies, limits him as to what he can sing or do with his singing career in India. As a result, Tamang is overlooked and remains alienated from the landscape of the Indian music industry and from other Indian singers as well. This, claims Chhetri, leads to frustration among Gorkha musicians and singers, who, like Tamang from Darjeeling hills, are left with no other option than to go to Nepal and complain that Indians always discriminate against the Gorkhas. Chhetri strongly believes that if a Gorkha singer is thoroughly trained in music and has talent, then no one can stop him/her from taking his/her rightful position within the Indian music industry. Then again, noting that discrimination against Gorkhas is a fact, a reality, Chhetri adds that it may be helpful to step back and evaluate how Gorkhas might also have a hand in perpetuating the “alienation

scenario” by not making a sincere effort to connect themselves within the overall Indian context. However, Lomjhel in this regard feels that no matter how much the Gorkhas try to assimilate themselves with India, other Indians always give them a hard time. He recalls how badly the Bengali musicians and Bengali television executives treated visiting Gorkha artists, even when they were experts in their own fields. No amount of explanation, Lomjhel reiterates, will suffice to override the dominate social prejudice of Gorkhas as being “outsiders” in their own country unless they have a state of our own. He recalls one of Norden Rumba’s songs that he set to music in the late 1990s, which expresses the pathos and anxiety of being branded an “outsider” inside one’s own home.

Looking visibly excited and enlivened, Lomjhel begins singing the song while accompanying himself on the harmonium. The song is titled “*Kothey Bari*,” meaning “land of our home/our hearth/our garden,” and goes as follows:

(Speaking) – *Ekdin mo Darjeeling bajar ko chowrasta ma basi raheko bela,*

auta parjatak/tourist lei sodhcha, timro naam ke ho?

Mo batauchu. Jagir khaney sthan sodhcha.

Mo jagir khaaney sthan batauchu.

Ani malai gaau sodhcha. Timro gaau ko naam ke ho bhand,

mo hatar-hatar Darjeeling bajar ko Singmari, Rajbari, Bhotey basti, Tungsung bhandina,
ra mo bhanchu . . .

(Singing) – *Kosaile sodhe kun ho timro gaau,*

Uttarma mo bhanchu – gurasu phoolne gau cha sano,

Dui gasa jutney thaau cha sano,

Mo bhanchu hajur yehi ho mero gaau.

(Speaking) – *Ani tyo parjatak lei malai sodhcha*

desh kun ho bhanda,

mo uttar ma bhanchu . . .

(Singing) – *Kosaile sodhe, kun ho timro desh*

Uttarma mo bhanchu – kadha ma mero, jaha gham lagcha,

Swarga ko cheu, jaha mana jagcha,

Mo bhanchu, hajur yehi ho mero desh.

(Speaking) – *Ani mo mero bhitra lukeko kura batauchu . . .*

(Singing) – *akha cha hamro, tara dekhcha arule*

Kalam cha hamro, tara lekhcha arule

Gau cha hamro, tara bascha arule

Jiwan cha hamro, tara khelcha arule.

Translation:

(Speaking) – One day as I sit at Chowrasta in Darjeeling bazaar,

a tourist asks me, “what is your name?”

I tell him/her my name.

Then he/she asks me, “where do you work”

and I answer that question as well.

But, when he/she asks where is your village,

I do not say Singamari, Rajbari, Bhotey basti, or Tungsung.²³⁰

²³⁰ These are names of villages in and around Darjeeling hills.

Instead, I say . . .

(Singing) – Someone asks me where is your village

I reply, a small village where the rhododendrons bloom,

a small place where I earn my daily bread,

Dear sir/madam/*hajur*, that is my village.

(Speaking) – And then the tourist asks me where is my country

and I say . . .

(Singing) – Someone asks me where is your country

and I reply,

on my shoulders where the sun shines,

where one is near heaven,

where the mind is free

I say, sir/madam/*hajur*, that is my country

(Speaking) – And then I share my innermost feelings . . .

(Singing) – I have eyes, but others see through them

I have a pen, but others write with it

I have a village, but others live in it

We have lives, but others live it.

Listening to this song, I was reminded of Gloria Anzaldua's analogy that being a *lo Mexicano* is like that of being a "turtle" (Anzaldua 2007: 43). Although Alzaldua interprets it in the sense that she carries her "rural, peasant, isolated, *mexicanismo*" wherever she goes, I read it from another context. According to my interpretation, for members of a dominated minority

group the “turtle” symbolizes “carrying the burden” of identity bearing down on each one of them as an undeniable, unforgettable, unshakeable part of everyday existence. No matter where they go or what they do, the scrutiny from the dominant group/culture is never too far away to elicit a bias, a prejudice, or an ignorant response from them. By this I imply that if someone from a dominant group does something society does not approve of, the community is not identified by his/her subjective action or behavior; the outrage of misconduct is limited to the person doing it, as in “X” is an alcoholic, gambler, or a murderer. However, if an individual from a dominated and/or minority group is accused of the same misconduct, then the entire community is desecrated by the individual’s action. For example, Muslims are often denigrated as being self-destructive/terrorists/suicidal, Blacks as being trouble-makers, Gorkhas as being brave but stupid and not fit for an intellectual career, and so on. This type of situation exemplifies a state of existence where “being” is engulfed in constant anxiety – a living on the edge – where the need to be identified and the cumbersome responsibility of representing one’s community’s identity is borne by every member of the group.

Having discussed this, it may be surprising to know that a few days ago as I was writing this chapter, one of my friends from Darjeeling informed me that Lomjhel had sold his composition “*Kothey Bari*” to a Nepalese band called “Nepathya.” He also sent me a YouTube link to prove his point.²³¹ Some of my friends were enraged and were planning to write about it in the local daily, but I was not surprised to hear the news. Having read Ortner’s *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (2006) and Purnima Mankekar’s *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics* (1999), I was reminded of their discussions about the

²³¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRSNy25a3xs&feature=youtu.be> (last viewed May 30, 2012).

multifarious unfolding of subjectivities based on individual motives, intentions, and desires as diversely positioned subjects. Drawn in particular by Ortner's brilliant critique that subaltern or minority subjects are often presumed by the majority dominant group to have a unitary identity and intention, I saw Lomjhel's action exemplifying the fact that there was in fact no one Gorkha motive, no one Gorkha intention, or no one Gorkha experience in representing a Gorkha identity. On the contrary, Lomjhel's and other Gorkha musicians' acts of introducing complexities and contradictions enliven the study of the dominated minority borderland Gorkha subjects. Their agencies, emerging out of cultural and psychological survival instinct edged between "the politics of external domination and the politics within a subordinated group" (Ortner 2006: 62), enrich the domain of Gorkha subjectivities. I intend to keep a close watch on the scene unfolding after my friend's article is published, and on how other Gorkha community members respond to it. Given this situation, this chapter then mirrors the work in progress of myriad subjectivities – creative, contrary, overlapping, and transformative – within unstable, ever-expanding, inter-discursive positions of the subject seeking "to accomplish valued things [desires and hopes] within a framework of their own terms, their own categories [and strategies] of value" (Ortner 2006: 145).

Chapter Five

TOWARDS A NEW MUSICAL IDENTITY– RETHINKING REPRESENTATION AND RESISTANCE FROM THE BORDERLANDS

New Developments: The GTA and the Tea and Tourism Festival 2011-2012

Last year, on July 18, 2011, the new West Bengal government led by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee signed an agreement with the GJMM chief Bimal Gurung, in the presence of India's then Home Minister P. Chidambaram, for an autonomous administrative set-up for the Gorkhas. This local body is called Gorkhaland Territorial Agreement (GTA) and replaces the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) that existed under Subhas Ghising from 1988 to 2007. The GTA will cover Darjeeling Sardar, Kurseong, Kalimpong, and five *mouzas* from Siliguri *terai*.²³² Although GTA comes with greater authority and more generous funds for socio-economic development of the hills and socio-political upliftment of the Gorkhas than the DGHC did, many remain skeptical about positive change in Darjeeling hills.

The main concern is the long-cherished dream of a Gorkha home-state to acknowledge Gorkha identity in India. Nonetheless, one keeps hearing frequent assurances from Bimal Gurung and other GJMM leaders that the GTA is in a way the “preparation for the separate state of Gorkhaland” or “a step towards achievement of Gorkhaland.”²³³ Quite a few of the recently

²³² *Mouza* is a type of administrative unit corresponding to a specific land area within which there may be one or more settlements. Before the 20th century, the term was used to denote a revenue collection unit in a *pargana* or revenue district. As populations increased and the villages developed to become common in post-colonial India, the concept of *mouza* declined with time. Today most censuses and voters' lists in India use the names of villages rather than *mouzas*. The addition of just 5 *mouzas* instead of the 398 *mouzas* demanded by the GJMM is still a major point of contention between the GJMM leaders and the West Bengal government (<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/sen-committee-for-only-5-mouzas-in-gta-gjm-threatens-stir-for-separate-state/960185/>, last viewed September 9, 2012).

²³³ <http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/27/a-conversation-with-gorkha-leader-bimal-gurung/>; <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/in-darjeeling-a-new-dawn/983935/0>; http://zeenews.india.com/news/west-bengal/gta-a-step-towards-achievement-of-gorkhaland_721451.html; <http://isikkim.com/2012-07-gta-shall-carve-way-for-formation-of-gorkhaland-gurung-24-1/>, last viewed August 31, 2012.

published articles in the local and national newspapers and on online websites/blogs like *Himalaya Darpan*, *Kalimpong News*, *Asia Times*, himalmag.com, www.atimes.com, darjeelingtimes.com, and www.ksnonline.org, have severely criticized Gurung for betraying the “Gorkha dream.”²³⁴ Irrespective of these internal tussles, a general election for the GTA’s forty-five-member administrative body was held on July 29, 2012, and the GJMM won with an overwhelming majority. The elected members, headed by Gurung, were sworn in on August 4, 2012, at Darjeeling in the presence of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and India’s present Home Minister, Sushil Kumar Shinde.²³⁵

Instead of relying solely on the West Bengal state government for funds and development programs, the GTA will be funded directly by the Central Government of India at New Delhi. In addition, the Central Government promised to consider the relaxation of certain criteria for recruiting Gorkha youths to the Indian Police Force, and the State Government repeated its commitment to build a university, a Nepali-language academy, two Industrial Training Institutes, and a well-equipped general hospital in Darjeeling hills. As for the Gorkha music scene in Darjeeling hills, I came to know from family, friends, local newspapers, and online websites that the 2011 Darjeeling month-long music festival was cut short by fifteen days. This was due to the massive 6.8 magnitude earthquake that jolted Darjeeling district and Sikkim on September 18, 2011, causing widespread devastation and loss of life. Despite this calamity, the Gorkhas in

²³⁴ <http://kalimpongonline.com/news/2012/07/gta-is-betrayal-of-gorkha-aspirations.html>; http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/MG21Df01.html; <http://www.himalmag.com/component/content/article/4524-bimal-gurung-sells-out.html>; <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/main-news/politics/4865-gtf-to-observe-gta-anniversary-as-black-day.html>; http://www.ksnonline.org/forum/topics/black-band-sit-in-at-jantar-mantar-new-delhi-on-july-18-2012#.UED7_kQ6KmU; <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/177241/darjeeling-hills-happy-see-gorkha.html>, last viewed August 31, 2012.

²³⁵ http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-08-04/india/33034658_1_gta-gjm-gorkha-territorial-administration; <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/269352/gta-members-sworn-centre-announces.html>; <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/component/content/article/52-top-stories/4950-gta-members-sworn-in-centre-to-give-rs-200-crore.html>, last viewed September 1, 2012.

Darjeeling hills and Siliguri came out in their hundreds onto the streets to participate in the communal *Phulpati* procession, less than a month after the disastrous earthquake. A national daily, *The Telegraph*, and local newspapers like *Himalaya Darpan* and *Kalimpong News* reported that the “quake gloom was washed away” by the annual festivities of the *Dasai*.²³⁶ The Darjeeling music festival showcased folk music and musics of ethnic Gorkha sub-communities. My cousin Bashu Isaiah Rai Lorung reported that in comparison to 2010, the 2011 music programs were toned down out of respect for those recuperating from the loss of their loved ones and the destruction of their property and homes in the earthquake. Lorung remarked that as it hadn’t been a month since the earthquake had rattled Darjeeling hills, many families who had lost their relatives were still in mourning and not celebrating *Dasai* in October 2011.

However, by December 2011, Darjeeling hills had recovered enough to organize a gala seventeen-day “Tea and Tourism Festival” from December 20, 2011 to January 5, 2012.²³⁷ This festival took place at four venues – Darjeeling, Mirik, Kurseong, and Kalimpong. It highlighted the “traditional” aspects of Gorkha music and dance on the inauguration day, but on other days the festival showcased a combination of Western-centric rock and popular music in Nepali and English. I did not personally attend this festival and so the information I present here was obtained from friends and relatives attending the festival in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. In addition, I was informed by media reports covering the festival such as those in *Himalaya Darpan*, *The Statesman*, *The Telegraph*, *Times of India*, and a few video clips posted by the

²³⁶ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1111004/jsp/siliguri/story_14585156.jsp; <http://www.kalimpong.info/2011/10/06/time-to-greet-friends-and-family/>, last viewed August 31, 2012.

²³⁷ <http://www.darjeelingtimes.com/main-news/entertainment/63-event-a-gossips/3959-photo-feature-tea-a-tourism-festival-in-darjeeling.html>;

organizers on YouTube.com.²³⁸ The YouTube videos from the Tea and Tourism Festival mostly show Western-centric rock music performed by local Gorkha Nepali music bands and invited music bands from Siliguri and Kolkata. However, one of my relatives who lives in Kalimpong noted that the Kalimpong music presentations were more traditional than the music presented at Darjeeling.

According to a local news blog, *mungpoonews.blogspot.com*, the Tea and Tourism Festival was organized by the Darjeeling District Administration with the help of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM).²³⁹ But neither Bimal Gurung nor any other GJMM leaders were present at any of the festival proceedings, despite the West Bengal development minister, Gautam Deb, inaugurating the festival in Darjeeling town. The Darjeeling venue of the Tea and Tourism Festival was graced by well-known actors and celebrities from the Hindi film industry (Bollywood) such as Zeenat Aman and Mahima Choudhury. The first day of the festival featured Gorkha traditional music and dance, Gorkha ethnic musics, and the Darjeeling Police marching band, resplendent with bagpipes and bugles. Starting from the second day, music performances in the afternoon and evening portrayed a variety program that included Gorkha traditional music, Nepali and Hindi popular songs, and Western-style rock music in Nepali and English. Relative to the Darjeeling music festivals during *Dasai*, the Tea and Tourism Festival had a more casual ambience that was geared mainly towards promoting tourism in Darjeeling hills. There was no

²³⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=634UoN4hpTs>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81wIfDTQsDM&feature=autoplay&list=PL0CEC6A6BB1D5848A&playnext=10>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qF8QnV9pEuk&feature=autoplay&list=PL0CEC6A6BB1D5848A&playnext=13>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnElz60Y3HM>; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qF8QnV9pEuk&playnext=1&list=PL0CEC6A6BB1D5848A&feature=results_main; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Z4-f4H5D8g&feature=autoplay&list=PL0CEC6A6BB1D5848A&playnext=2>, last viewed September 3, 2012.

²³⁹ <http://mungpoonews.blogspot.com/2011/11/darjeeling-tea-and-tourism-festival.html>, last viewed September 3, 2012.

“dress-code,” and no ban on Western or Nepali rock music and Hindi Bollywood music. The booths in and around the music venue, instead of selling “traditional” Gorkha dress and ornaments, sold fast food and Darjeeling tea, advertised touring packages, and hosted local horticulture. The announcers compèring the program spoke to the audience in a combination of languages including Nepali, English, and Hindi. Other than music, the festival honored eminent Gorkha personalities, including the well-known cinematographer from Bollywood Binod Pradhan, along with singers like Prakriti Giri, Prashant Tamang, and Kapil Thapa, and sportsmen Shyam Thapa and Sunil Chhetri, to name a few. In addition to the open-air stage at Chowrasta Mall in Darjeeling, the Gorkha Ranga Mancha, an ambitious community hall started by Ghising, which had remained closed to the public so far, was re-opened and a host of different functions and ceremonies were arranged at the auditorium.

From what I narrated in chapter two in terms of the ever-changing trends of the Darjeeling music festivals from 2003 to 2010, it is obvious that there was clearly a marked difference between the musics presented at the Darjeeling Carnival versus the month-long Darjeeling festival. The Carnival promoted Western-centric music, while the month-long festival was overly specific about the “traditional” content and context of the folk-centric Gorkha music it featured and keenly promoted. However, with the 2011 “traditional” Darjeeling music festival lasting for just fifteen days and the Tea and Tourism Festival being organized for sixteen days, there seemed to be a balancing of sorts in refiguring how the Gorkhas re-represented their musics in 2011-2012 . So far it seems that within the past couple of years, Gorkha musical identity has been re-configured again within the rhetoric of national multiculturalism that incorporates Gorkha folk, Gorkha modern, Indian, and Western music elements within its folds.

By showcasing and engaging with the various genres of musics and musical backgrounds, Gorkha identity has re-reemerged as an intricately woven tapestry of musics, cultures, and identities that is able to co-exist within the totality of a Gorkha identity in India. In the ambience of the Tea and Tourism Festival 2011-2012, a space/platform was created where carol singing, Christmas celebrations, Punjabi *bhangra*, rickshaws brought in from Siliguri *terai*/ plains, English, Hindi, and Nepali hard-metal rock music, Gorkha folk music, and Gorkha ethnic musics could be performed within the overall culturescape of Darjeeling hills.²⁴⁰ The only constant factor between the 2011-2012 Darjeeling Tea and Tourism Festival and the 2010 Darjeeling month-long music festival was in affirming differences between Gorkhas and Nepalese. As a result, both the festivals in 2010 and 2011 hosted no musicians or music bands from Nepal. Instead, by opting to highlight festively decorated rickshaws, pliable only in the *terai* plains rather than in the mountains of Darjeeling hills, and the thunderous music of the Punjabi *bhangra*, the Tea and Tourism Festival like the month-long Darjeeling music festival located Gorkha identity strongly within the parameters of an Indian identity.

This brought back memories of my interview with Gagan Gurung in which he had emphatically stated, “We may speak the same language, but we are historically and politically different from Nepal, just like West Bengalis are different from Bangladeshis. *Hamro rail cha*,

²⁴⁰ *Bhangra* refers to the music and dance that was performed during the harvest season in the Punjab regions of northwest India and eastern Pakistan. However, this practice ended after the partition in 1947. In 1950, this music was revived in the new folkloric music that came out of the state of Punjab in India, but it was standardized in the 1980s by the second-generation Punjabi emigrants to England and Canada. At present, Birmingham in England is considered to be the hub of *bhangra* music (http://www.bbc.co.uk/birmingham/content/articles/2006/08/14/birmingham_bhangra_capital_feature.shtml, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhangra_%28dance%29, last viewed September 3, 2012).

Rickshaw is a tri-cycle that is either manually pulled or pedaled. It has a seat at the back where one or two passengers can be seated. In terms of Darjeeling hills, the rickshaw is symbolic of “Bengaliness” or of the Bengali culture. Henceforth, rickshaw-walla’s (puller of rickshaw) are by default presumed to be Bengalis/plainsmen by the Gorkhas. In reality, however, rickshaw-pullers of north Bengal are Bengalis (mostly), in addition to Gorkhas, Biharis, and other minority Indians like Rajbhansis, Oraons, and the Santhals.

chia cha, British itihaas cha, ani Gandhi cha, Nepal ko cha?” (We have railroads, tea, a colonial history, and Gandhi, does Nepal have these?). I re-quote this from my previous chapter in this dissertation (page 210). With carol singing and Christmas celebrations epitomizing Darjeeling’s colonial past, and the Punjabi *bhangra* music and Bengali ricksha-wallahs explicitly symbolizing the Indian connection, the “wholeness” of Gorkha identity through music, be it folk, ethnic, modern, and/or rock, became undeniably set and underpinned by the national discourse of a multicultural India. Thus Gorkha music, like other regional musics of India, was presented by legitimizing its longstanding connection with India – during and after colonial rule. This development in representing a holistic Gorkha musical identity then brings home the fact that the coherence of an identity at the level of a nation-state is always made through emplotments of a narrative tradition/device rather than constituting an objectively present empirical truth (Gupta and Ferguson 2001: 2, Appadurai 2008: 15, Ricoeur 1990: 3). The narrative of Gorkha identity today not only includes the history of Gorkhas within India’s imperial past, but also locates it within India’s post-independence history unfolding in the present.

By “history of the present,” a phrase coined by Foucault, I imply the ongoing processes of sorting and re-articulating complexities in reworking multiculturalism in India in relation to how it was promoted in the past.²⁴¹ Given that “diversity” in post-colonial India has been limited mostly to “Hindu-Aryan monoculturalism” as in Bengali-Indian, Punjabi-Indian, etc., the media-hyped “Prashant Tamang phenomenon” in 2007 was a moment of social reckoning for India.²⁴² It

²⁴¹ Foucault used this phrase to describe his work on archeology/genealogy as a way of critically examining traces of institutional order and power left by the past to tell us how our current situation originated and is motivated by contemporary concerns. I use this phrase to analyze multiculturalism in India the way it was presented and promoted earlier versus the way it is interpreted and retold now.

²⁴² Although multiculturalism in India includes Muslims, Christians, and Dravidians, a critical analysis reveals this “diversity” to be limited. For example, Muslim-Indians look “Aryan” and Dravidians are “Hindus” who almost look like dominant Indians. This is better understood when viewed in contrast to Mongolian-Hindu Indians who are never portrayed as being representative of a “Hindu” Indian identity.

caused a national sensation that called for re-evaluating and re-examining two things: the limitedness of “diversity” that India had upheld in the name of multiculturalism and the socio-political prejudices harbored by majority Indians towards the minority Nepali-speaking Gorkhas. By participating in the “Prashant Tamang drama” unfolding on Sony Television channel, dominant Indians, eagerly waiting to watch and vote for the “Indian Idol” every week, saw and were reminded of Gorkhas, who had been excluded from the definition of an Indian identity. By making “visible” the otherwise overlooked and relegated Mongolian-looking Gorkhas, Prashant Tamang, who looked Mongolian but was not a Nepalese immigrant, called for some serious re-thinking of the rhetoric of multiculturalism in India.²⁴³ Besides, the emotionally charged events unfolding during and after the Indian Idol 3 contest within India’s regional and national political arena under the glare of the media, introduced a heterogenous edge within an otherwise monocultural India. Thus, a wave – small but crucial – was set in motion by the work of the media in re-presenting and incorporating new and different avenues of representing a multicultural India.

Assisting in this endeavor was the flow of ethnoscaples, mediascaples, ideoscaples, and financescaples taking place on a national level. I say “national” because in global terms, I feel India and the world may not be quite ready to transcend the trappings of the dominant Hindu-Aryan ideology for the present.²⁴⁴ The national-level ethnoscaples of moving people, especially tourists and visitors in case of Darjeeling district, the moving image-centric pictures of Gorkhas

²⁴³ Mongolian-looking Indians, be it Gorkhas or other ethnic communities from northeast India, are mostly overlooked by the Indian media such as cable television, Bollywood cinema, etc. State-run television channels now have eleven transmitters for broadcasting in northeastern Indian languages and Hindi. For minority Gorkhas who are left without a regional state to call their own, there are no state-run programs in Nepali except for those on All India Radio, Kurseong. In addition, the identity of Gorkhas also gets conflated within the discourse of Tibetan refugees in India, where Mongolian-looking Gorkhas are often mistaken for Tibetans.

²⁴⁴ Even after 65 years of independence, India has yet to have a President or a Prime Minister from the northeast of India. I would like to underline here that race-wise Muslims, Sikhs, or Christians showcased in the Indian media always look “Indian” – brown skin, sharp features, etc. Likewise, Bollywood has yet to launch an actress from India with Mongolian features, and in the international beauty contests like Miss Universe or Miss World, India completely disregards the northeast because the applicants from that region do not fulfill the criteria of an “Indian look.”

wearing *chaubandi choli-phariya* and *daura suruwal* in India's mediascapes, and discussions of the demand for Gorkha statehood within the ideoscapes of other statehood demands in India have given an impetus to the Gorkha cause in twenty-first century India. As a result, I have observed a slight but a critical shift in integrating Gorkhas, and by extension other Mongolian-looking northeast Indians, within the national media and the discourse of Indianness after 2007. Hence, after Prashant Tamang, there has been a plethora of Gorkha singers like Rajeev Thapa, Kapil Thapa, Prakriti Giri, Karma Sherpa, and Satish Gazmer, and dancers like Hemant Gorkha, Om Chhetri, Pradeep Gurung, and Soumya Rai being highlighted on India's leading television channels such as Zee TV, Zee Bangla, Sony Entertainment Channel, and NDTV.

In addition, during the public voting rounds that decide the winner of the show, the overwhelming response from Gorkhas and northeast Indians begets generous business for the electronic media, which is always welcomed by India's private business sector. To cast votes via mobile phone SMS (short message service), the public has to buy air-time, which easily amounts to crores of Indian rupees.²⁴⁵ Thus, with imagination, media, technology, and finance being closely inter-related with the struggle of identity politics, nation-states and their identities are often brought to crisis. States, therefore, find themselves pressed to stay open to the forces of media, technology, travel, and consumerism in broadening the horizons of national identity as they try to control their own ideas of nationhood and peoplehood set within the ideoscapes of democracy, freedom, rights, sovereignty, and representation (Appadurai 2008: 36-40).

In terms of the Gorkha struggle, myriad connections of media with finance play out in benefiting the Gorkhas by grounding their political identity with the "super-power" of South Asia – India. With India's powerful economic and cultural presence in the sub-continent, locating

²⁴⁵ Crore is a unit in the South Asian numbering system equal to ten million, or 100 lakhs. This system is widely used in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan.

Gorkhas and Darjeeling district within India helps to boost Darjeeling's local tourist and tea industry as part of Indian tourism, the largest service industry in South Asia.²⁴⁶ Thus with Darjeeling district featuring prominently in the media as one of the most desired tourist destinations of India, the flow of visitors, domestic and international, aids in promoting Gorkha identity through music and culture festivals organized by the local Gorkha political organizations. These intricate maneuvers in foregrounding local/regional, national, and global flows to underline the Gorkha connection with India highlight the multifold "social and economic processes that connect even the most isolated of local settings with a wider world" (Gupta and Ferguson 2001:2). These processes are representative of utilizing power relations, local and non-local, for identity building and place-making purposes to represent a political identity from the margins. For Gorkhas, wanting to associate themselves with India, the powerhouse of South Asia, the process has entailed effectively transforming signs/symbols appropriated from the less powerful nation-state of Nepal to give them a "Gorkha interpretation" as emblematic of a distinct ethno-linguistic community of India.

The unfolding of this complex socio-economic procedure is evident in chapter two, where *chaubandi choli-phariya* and *daura-suruwal*, brought in from Nepal and sold in Darjeeling, underwent a kind of transformation in representing "Gorkhaness" as Gorkhas wore them for a month during *Dasai*. The best way I can explain this is by sharing my personal experience at a recent house party for *Teej* in Tampa, Florida, in the first week of September 2012. This celebration is for married women, who adorn themselves in bridal saris and fine jewelry and fast, praying for good health and prosperity for their husbands. Since my good friend Januka Khanal, who is from Nepal, insisted that I attend the festival celebrations at her friend's house, I decided

²⁴⁶ www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEDS/article/download/242/127, last viewed September 12, 2012.

to go and have fun. When we arrived at the party, there was a huge gathering of Nepalese ladies dressed in saris and brightly colored jewelry, singing and dancing to recorded *Teej* music.²⁴⁷ I was also wearing a red sari, but many gathered around me to inquire where I had got it from. I replied, “Darjeeling.” To this, some Nepalese ladies remarked that Darjeeling-made things stood apart in a style of their own. They even requested me to get the same version of my sari when I visited Darjeeling next year. However, what they did not know was that my sari was designed by a Darjeeling-based Gorkha designer who shops in Nepal for her fabrics and then transforms them to give them a new meaning through her “Gorkha” designs. Caught in the midst of loud chatter and festivity, I could not share this information, but I was struck by the incident. Nepalese ladies, very familiar with the typical *dacca*-printed design of my sari, could not relate it with Nepal as they all wanted a sari like mine from Darjeeling.²⁴⁸

On a similar note, when a Nepalese organization called “Himali Sanskriti Samua” (Himalayan Cultural Association) announced in April 2012 that they wanted to honor Bimal Gurung for “upholding the culture of the Nepali community through his culture movement,”²⁴⁹ Gurung underplayed the whole situation. He deflected the matter by saying he would have to seek permission from the Indian Home Minister before he could go ahead and accept the award. Gurung did not visit Nepal, nor did he accept the award, but this episode spoke volumes. It showcased not only the complexities of identity politics where Gorkhas

²⁴⁷ Commercially recorded *Teej* music is set to 4/4 beat and has danceable tunes with lyrics that range from paying obeisance to the husband, to the married ladies missing their parent’s home, to playful mockery between young men and women. However, *Teej* music is also called *sangini* and sometimes performed in a slow, winding 3/3 meter.

²⁴⁸ *Dacca* print is traditionally made from hand-spun thread over a spinning bamboo wheel loom. The *dacca* print is associated with the Limbu and Kirat/Rai communities and womenfolk from these communities continue to make and preserve this art form, which is said to signify their way of life. *Dacca* patterns come in a variety of colors, although red, white, black, and green are the most prominent. Inspired by the mountains, *dacca* prints portray edgy pointed designs that resemble the pointy cliffs of the Himalayas. However, the capital of Bangladesh being Dacca, there are some who relate *dacca* print with Bangladeshi looms, while others strongly oppose any such notions.

²⁴⁹ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1120412/jsp/frontpage/story_15365200.jsp#.UFDS-IQ6KmU, last viewed September 12, 2012.

appropriating Nepalese symbols are engaged in transforming them to make “visible” Gorkha identity in India, but also a new awareness of self-identity arising from the experiences of the ongoing work of resistance. This emerges from the will to live and “to introduce the act of *poesis* into the imagined life of the . . . minority as part of the civic and civil society” (Bhabha 2007: xx) denied to them thus far. This “poesis” calls for understanding resistance not only as a strategy to oppose authority, but also as a way to transform the resisting subject (Foucault 1991: 27, Gupta and Ferguson 2001: 19). In that way, experience through works of resistance then helps to deepen representation by the dominated minority subjects through their changing awareness as to how they remain subject to someone, just as they are tied to their own ideas and learnt notions of identity or identities through self-knowledge.

Changing Perspectives of Self-Identity in Gorkha Literature, 1960s to Present

In the case of Gorkha resistance, subject transformation from their experience of resistance is especially evident in the literary production of Gorkha writers from the 1960s to the twenty-first century. Resisting Bengali hegemony and the “step-motherly” attitude of the Indian government, Gorkha writers in the 1960s -1980s expressed deep despair and anxiety at being “unhomed” in India. This primarily translated as confusion and a longing for a “mother country” that they came to associate with Nepal. Two well-known literary works of this era, *Aaj Ramita Cha* (Today There is a Perspective/Scenery) by I. B. Rai (1964, reprinted 1984) and *Naulakh Tara Udaye* (Rising of Nine Lakh Stars) by Agam Singh Giri (1970, reprinted 1992), reflect this sense of loss and disorientation. Both writers epitomize a double consciousness of minority borderland existence where communal identity and political identity co-exist ambiguously

together. Giri expresses his nostalgia for a Nepali nation with his idea of an imagined “Nepali homeland” and bemoans, “*Sunako sapana aasuma kinapo badhi lyayeu ni, Gharko maya birsera kinapo yaha aayeu ni?*” (Dreaming of gold why did you sacrifice your happiness of the Nepali homeland, Forgetting my love for my motherland, why did I ever choose to move to India?) (1992: 141). However, in *Pahaad ki Rani Darjeelinglai* (To Darjeeling, the Queen of the Hills), he is heard enthusiastically urging all Gorkhas to see the radiant beauty of Darjeeling hills, their lovely homeland, which feeds, clothes, and takes care of them in India (1992: 144-145) .

I. B. Rai expresses the duality of Gorkha consciousness via one of his characters called “Janak” in the well-received novel *Aaj Ramita Cha*. While returning to India after visiting Nepal, Janak is heard lamenting when he finds a peacock following him across the border to India. Janak says, “*Hami ta yesau-yesau swadesh chorera, tyo mujur pani hami jastai posna lageko! Khub chakkar layera khede. Khederai pani pheri Nepal bhitrai hali rakheko chu. Hami manche ta prawas pasyau-pasyau, banko pashu-pakchile le pani yesari swadesh chodna thale, kati din rancha Nepal?*” (We have left the country, but that peacock wants to leave as well! I tried to shoo it away. Not only did I dissuade it, I made sure it was safely in Nepal. We, the people, have moved, but if the fauna too begins to migrate, then how long will Nepal exist?) (Rai 1984: 76). However, as the story proceeds, Janak is found rationalizing his Indian connection by declaring “*Hami Darjeelingka Nepaliharu Bharat ra Nepal duwaika wishwashpatra chau; duwai Bharat ra Nepal hamro prem ra shraddha jitna chahancha*” (We, the Nepalis of Darjeeling, are equally devoted to *Bharat*/India and Nepal, and both these countries wish to win our love and loyalty) (Rai 1984: 108). Hence, both Giri and Rai portray a sense of ambiguous duality that keeps them suspended between India and Nepal in search for a homeland to acknowledge their identity.

However, for contemporary poets like Manprasad Subba and Remika Thapa, there is no place for pondering where the Gorkhas belong. Their works reflect a new-found sense of self-awareness that locate Gorkha identity unquestionably within India from time immemorial. Therefore, rather than wonder whether Gorkhas belong to India or Nepal, Subba and Thapa boldly challenge the accuracy of Gorkha history promoted by the Indian official narrative. Questioning the overriding notion of “migration” propagated by Indian history to discriminate against and marginalize Gorkhas in India, Thapa, in her poem *Darjeeling ko Chitra* (Picture of Darjeeling) (2008: 44), writes, “*Darjeeling puranai wyawyastha ko auta rumani gaau, ramitai–ramita . . . tara aabo Darjeeling ma yo romantic natakho adhyay samapth bhayeko cha. Ramitaeharu aaj aaphnai anuwar herdaichan, samane mai ubheko cha aglo Himal, ayina. Seer uthayera aafnui anuhar na hereko? La herau, chinyo ke ha aafailai?*” (Darjeeling is a romantic village of an old political system, enchanting and fascinating scenes everywhere . . . but now the romantic era of Darjeeling has come to an end. The natives who gawked at Darjeeling’s splendor are left today looking at their own reality, their own reflection. The mighty *Himal*/mountain stand in front of them like their mirror. Haven’t you raised your head to look at your own self before? Okay look now, do you recognize you, yourself?).

By putting forward such questions and urging Gorkhas to look deep within themselves and interrogate their self-knowledge about themselves, Thapa highlights the subjugation of the Gorkha psyche through various structures/systems of power dominating the Gorkhas. She skillfully alludes to the epistemic violence that robbed Gorkhas of their self-identity and sense of belonging and being connected with India. Being silenced and sidelined for centuries by the ruling class and the dominant paradigms that repeatedly categorized Gorkhas as “immigrants”

and “mercenaries” in their own land, they were rendered unable to remember or recall where they belonged. Hence the question, “do you recognize you, yourself?” In my opinion, it symbolizes the new era of Gorkha consciousness where the focus is concentrated on self-awareness to unlearn learnt knowledge and transcend the limitations of a stereotypical identity.

This upcoming keenness towards self-awareness and self-identity is also evident in Manprasad Subba’s work “*Ho Mo Aribahadur Gurung*” (Yes, I am Aribahadur Gurung) (2008: 61). It reads as follows:

Mo Aribahadur Gurung
Hajur, Sangwidhan ko keshra ma chu ni euta hastakshar
A - dekhi - ang samma mero naam ko aksharharule
Jati thau ogo teko cha ni
Tyeti nai ta ho maile dabi gareko
Ti aksharharu ma mo sadhai akshar chu

A bhana ya alpha
Yo deshko warnamala ma sadhai chu
Kahile dekhi thaha cha?
Jahile dekhi om dhvani sunnu thaliye ko ho

Ho, mo Aribahadur Gurung
A - bata yatra hireko aadikaldekhi nai
Devwaniko devnagiri padna aaucha hoina?
Tyehi hernu ma kahanera chu
“Aribahadur Gurung” tyo masaudama surakchit cha
Tara kina Aribahadurharu chai asurakshit ha?
Aba Aribahadur lai hoina,
Tara Aribahadur ko A - lai sodhnu -
Kati prachin ho U yo deshma.

Translation:

I am Aribahadur Gurung
Yes, my signature lies unseen in the pages of the Constitution
From A to Ang all the letters in my name
The place they occupy

That is all I am asking for

Within the letters of my name, I always exist/live

Call what you may, A or Alpha

I exist forever within the letters of this country

Do you know from when?

From the time when “Om” became audible

Yes, I am Aribahadur Gurung

Starting from A, I have sojourned since times immemorial

Do you know how to read the Devanagiri script of Devwani?

See where I exist in there

In that way the name Aribahadur Gurung is secure

But why are the Aribahadurs so insecure here?

Now stop asking Aribahadur

Instead ask the “A” in Aribahadur

How ancient it is in this country.

It is evident here that Subba’s protagonist, Aribahadur Gurung, is adamant about his Indian heritage and his right to be recognized as an Indian citizen. Unlike I. B. Rai and Agam Singh Chhetri, who turn towards Nepal for solace due to discrimination and humiliation in India, the protagonist Gurung does not evoke any relationship with Nepal. Rather, transcending the dominant “immigrant” and “mercenary” discourse of Gorkhas in India, Gurung disputes Indian history by defending his own memory about himself and his connection to India. To justify his point, Gurung asks his fellow Indians to look through the pages of the Indian constitution, where his name lies inscribed within its bygone years. Here, writer Subba skillfully uses the name “Aribahadur Gurung” not only to denote a Gorkha identity, but also to refer to Ari Bahadur Gurung, who was one of the members of India’s Constituent Assembly in 1947 and represented Darjeeling district and Gorkhas in the newly formed Indian Parliament in New Delhi.

By evoking Gurung's presence in the Constituent Assembly, which drafted India's constitution after independence, Subba ratifies the suppressed memory of Gorkhas' self-knowledge about their place of belonging. It is indicative of learning to interrogate imposed identity, self-identity, and examining institutionalized knowledge through history – taught, abused, learnt, and celebrated (Ricoeur 2006: 56-86). Therefore, by summoning memory and recalling his past, Aribahadur Gurung is able to claim his Indianness from ancient times, when the primordial sound “Om” was heard. There is also the reference to the “Devanagiri script,” the script used for writing Hindi, the official language of India,²⁵⁰ and Nepali as well. Thereafter Subba suggests we stop asking “Aribahadurs,” by extension the Gorkhas, about their Indian connection and ponder instead on how the Devanagiri script is able to spell the name of Aribahadur Gurung both in Hindi and Nepali. The linguistic connection between Hindi and Nepali becomes a metaphor to deepen the canvas of re-presenting the layered essence of borderland identity of Aribahadur Gurung, and of and for all Gorkhas, engaged in rationalizing their Indian identity from India's margins.

By comparing the writings of Rai and Giri with those of Thapa and Subba, it is clear that the Gorkha experience of resisting hegemony, dislocation, and misrepresentation from India's margins has definitely catalyzed a change in expressing their self-identity. Far from the melancholic and disoriented Gorkha subjects of the 1960s and 1970s, unsure about their intermediate position between India and Nepal, the transformed Gorkha subjects of this century are sure of their Nepali identity as legitimate citizens of India. Unlike their predecessors, today's Gorkha subjects express a greater awareness of their “Nepaliness” and of structures of control

²⁵⁰ http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Is_Hindi_national_language_of_India_or_official_language, last viewed September 13, 2012.

that have worked towards disassociating the two terms, Nepali and Gorkha, from the domain of an Indian identity. As a result, Gorkhas are seen launching “cross-border” strategies, which, according to Foucault, are designed to create “cleavages in society” for fracturing and disrupting the unities or logic underpinning the established tradition of binaries to recreate regroupings of bodies, minds, and rationales. The production of such societal cleavages or disjunctures causes fractures that help in opening dialogues about borders, notions of belonging, and a homogeneous unified identity. In the case of India, this has allowed for deconstructing and re-thinking Gorkha identity, in terms of not Gorkhas crossing the borders, but of the borders crossing them through vicissitudes of history, sovereignty, place, and time.

Changing Perspectives and Re-Articulating Gorkha Music, 1950s to Present

In terms of music, musical performance, and music production, Gorkha music has expanded its field through successive periods to acknowledge all musics co-existing within the Gorkha ambit. Today Indian classical music, Hindi Bollywood music, Nepali folk music, Nepali *sugam sangeet/adhunik* music, and Western-centric Nepali rock music all form a part of Darjeeling hills’ “borderland music.” Like the newly transformed Gorkha subjects, who have undergone self-realization to transcend book-bound binaries of differentiating and foreclosing identities, Gorkha music from and across the border displays hybridity beyond borders within its folds. Unlike Darjeeling’s music, which could previously be divided into eras such as Gorkha popular band music like the Hillians in 1950s-1960s, modern/*adhunik*/Nepali *sugam sangeet* of the 1960s-1970s, and Western-style Gorkha rock music from the 1980s-1990s, borderland music of Darjeeling hills today does not privilege any one specific genre. Being located at the margins,

a space of constant contestations and thoroughfare, which upsets the slow-paced dialectic of sedimentation and innovation for setting up tradition, Gorkha borderland music since 2003 has showcased swift changes and aggressive makeovers. It went from being Western-centric over 2003-2004, to tribal-centric over 2005-2006, to becoming exclusively traditional-centric from 2008 to 2010, to becoming all-inclusive over 2011-2012.

Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1 (1990: 69-80) explains that tradition in creative arts and music is constituted by the interplay of the dialectic of sedimentation and innovation. Here sedimentation symbolizes the tradition of received meanings through historicized paradigms internalized by the subject in his/her world (Bourdieu's *habitus*), and innovation implies individualistic deviations or changes introduced by subjective works within the set paradigms. In this given situation, the tradition of sedimentation repeated on multiple levels permits change very slowly or even resists it by virtue of tradition establishing itself as an antithesis to innovation via imaginative individual works. However, Ricoeur asserts that there is always a place for innovation through productive imagination with the consideration that innovation is in turn governed by its own rules deployed between the two poles of servile application and calculated deviation. Myth, folktales, and traditional narratives, according to Ricoeur, stand close to the first pole of servility, while the aim of distancing oneself from the dominant narrative leads to deviations becoming the norm, albeit through a slow and a gradual process. In contrast to this explanation, I infer that Gorkha music by virtue of being situated at the borders – a transitional space of cultural, linguistic, and social hybridity – forgoes gradual change or traditional stability to portray rapid transformations and transitions instead (Newman 2006: 143-161).

Geared towards re-writing predetermined paradigms of Gorkha identity, Darjeeling's music in the twenty-first century has not only evolved to resist Bengali hegemony, but also to confront being marginalized and discriminated against in India by other Indians as well. As a result, it has undergone successive makeovers: Western-centric Gorkha music, which mobilized the "West" to counter Bengali domination; tribal-centric music, to encourage recognition of Gorkhas as India's protected subjects; and folk-centric music, to represent Gorkhas as one of India's ethno-linguistic culture groups. The presentation of Gorkha traditional music in 2008 by having Nepalese musicians perform in Darjeeling, along with Gorkhas sporting *choubandi cholo-phariya* and *daura-suruwal* from Nepal, created cleavages within India's culturescape, which had been created by neatly drawn borders between India and Nepal. Accentuating this "traditional" move, the recently concluded Prashant Tamang Indian Idol phenomenon in 2007, which gripped India's attention, led Gorkhas to re-examine their identity beyond Darjeeling hills to realize and re-assess it from the standpoint of an Indian connection as well. Having concentrated solely on resisting regional oppression in West Bengal after India's independence in 1947, the Gorkha movement in this century has expanded to encompass the whole of India.

For the Gorkhas, the new wave of self-realization as Nepali-speaking Indians has ushered in an expansion that is helping to expand and promote the ongoing struggle for Gorkha statehood throughout India. Successive developments in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 therefore led to an increasing emphasis on representing Gorkha music along with India's other ethnic and religious musics such as those of the Bengalis, Marwaris, Bhojpuris, Muslims, Adivasis, and Punjabis. However, living through the uncertainties of borderland existence and the ongoing Gorkha movement that has yet to achieve its ultimate goal of statehood in India, Gorkha music

remains geared towards making its identity stand out by constantly incorporating new and different ways to re-present itself with time. With the experience of resistance and struggle being played out in the national media during the Indian Idol contest, Gorkhas are aware of the power of the media in showcasing Gorkha music and Gorkha identity to a larger audience in India. As a result, the 2011 presentation of Gorkha music in the Tea and Tourism Festival included, once again, Gorkha rock music that had previously been excluded in the month-long music festival in 2008, 2009, and 2010. This helped not only to showcase the gamut of Gorkha popular music, but also to attract young audiences and tourists to Darjeeling hills, who make up a sizable portion of India's population with the means to contribute to Darjeeling's tourist industry.

However, looking at the ever-changing landscape of Gorkha music, one may be left wondering what it essentially represents or whether Gorkha music may even have a specific meaning or tradition it claims to represent. During my fieldwork and as I began writing my dissertation, I often grappled with these thoughts and felt that Gorkha music did not exhibit any particular unity that I could grandly present in my concluding chapter. But it gradually began to dawn on me that the production of a "Gorkha locality" through music performance to represent identity from India's margins, literally and figuratively, was a process fraught with fragility and contradictions. Because borderlands are "bridges" where peoples, ideas, cultures, musics, and neighborhoods "meet" and do not end, the process of recreating and re-staging a specific Gorkha locality becomes an antithesis to the very essence of living at the borders. As Anzaldua brilliantly describes it, borders, as bridges, are "thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primary symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transition, crossing borders, and changing perspectives" (Anzaldua 2002: 1).

Reading the expeditious changes in Gorkha borderland music from Anzaldua's perspective, I came to realize that the ever-constant shifts and makeovers that often seemed "chaotic" to me were in fact the quintessential character of a precarious borderland existence. Chaos reinterpreted in this sense then became less of a problem and more of an indication of "transformations" occurring in "an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries" (Anzaldua 2002: 1). But, although on one hand in this interim borderless space ideas, worlds, and people are always in a liminal zone combating a constant state of displacement, on the other hand, it is also a sort of "home" from where new ideas are launched over archetypal binary structures rigidified through sedimentation. This is to say that the state of being borderless and creating borders *de facto* constitutes two sides of the same coin operating through disparate, yet inter-connected and over-lapping pathways. Admitting that transformations in Gorkha music forces one to step outside learnt values/paradigms of traditional knowledge and embrace inclusivity to garner equal representation, it also highlights the fact that there is indeed no place as a safely defined borderless place. This sheds light on the dilemma that even the act of inclusion is ironically operative upon the very act of differentiation. Thus, caught in this impassable predicament or *aporia*, Gorkha borderland music then becomes a way to remind us to be vigilant at all times and not be carried away by the grand illusions of representation and cultural inclusivity as it is portrayed or perceived in general.

Taking it to be a music performed at the bridges, instead of the borders, I see that Gorkha music's willingness to revise itself continuously then beckons us to loosen our borders, interrogate traditional knowledge, and step into the unfamiliar territory of vulnerabilities, uncertainties, and doubt. Taking the courage to acknowledge susceptibilities and question the

basis of our knowledge – what we think we know, do, and decidedly uphold – will allow for uncharted ways to blend personal and political intimacies and human agency to engender novel perspectives in recoding identity. The social awareness for constantly re-evaluating and re-arranging signs, symbols, and meanings for re-presentations becomes a way of knowing and acknowledging limitations of the very act of re-presentation and representation itself. In this regard, the constant shifts and changes in Gorkha borderland music to better represent itself, I believe, brings about the awareness of living on the edge and cultivating willingness to cross borders to bridge dialogues for re-representing identities, re-evaluating nationalities, re-reading subjectivities, and re-defining performances.

Contributions of this Dissertation

First and foremost, this work aims to initiate discussions about the precarious existence of Gorkhas and their struggle to represent themselves via music and music festivals from India's margins. Unlike normative descriptions of Gorkha music festivals presented by Gorkha and non-Gorkha commentators through online blogs and newspapers exclusively in terms of music, this dissertation presents Gorkha borderland music within a comprehensive socio-political and socio-cultural setting. This is to say, I discuss Gorkha music not just in line with its musical genres – Western-centric, folk, or modern/*adhunik* – but as a sum total of musics that are inter-related as part of the political and cultural movement to achieve recognition for Gorkhas. For that matter, it is not just the “content” but also the “context” of mobilizing music, musical instruments, musical performance, annual festivals, cultural symbols, and communal participation to further a political cause that sets apart my research on Gorkha borderland music in twenty-first century India.

Second, with every Google or internet search for “Gorkhas” or “Gurkhas” irrevocably locating Nepali-Indians within the domain of either Nepal or the United Kingdom, I expect that my dissertation filed at UCLA and my audio-visual materials, which I will donate to the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive, the Archives and Research Center of Ethnomusicology at Gurgaon, (New Delhi), North Bengal University (West Bengal), and Sikkim University (Sikkim), will make them visible within India too. For this to happen I anticipate that my work will open up a space from where Gorkhas and representations of Gorkha music can be discussed, debated, and deliberated from within the parameters of an Indian identity. I also hope that by depositing my research materials in libraries and archives in India and the United States, I will help to keep a record of the ever-changing, evolving, and fascinating developments of borderland music unfolding at the locales of India’s sub-Himalayan northeastern margins.

Future Research

In the years to come, I will continue to closely follow all the annual music festivals and musics that are performed in Darjeeling hills. I shall study both the content and context of the socio-cultural processes that bring about changes within music performances to negotiate Gorkha identity in India. As far as my work on researching subjectivities of Gorkha musicians and singers are concerned, I would like to elaborate chapter four by incorporating future interviews with female Gorkha singers and musicians of Darjeeling hills. In addition, I want to explore gender issues in terms of resistance, popular culture, and minority groups to chart out the position of women within the Gorkha community. Although Gorkha women are said to enjoy relatively more freedom and equal status with their male counterparts than their Indian sisters,

some of my own experiences and accounts from my friends and relatives have proved otherwise. Therefore, exploring the subjectivity of Gorkha women and their contribution to the Gorkha movement remains a topic close to my heart.

Further research on Gorkha music could also involve stepping outside Darjeeling district and focusing on other parts of India where Gorkhas are engaged in forwarding the Gorkha cause by highlighting Gorkha music and culture in their respective regions. I observed music performed by two visiting Gorkha groups in the 2010 Darjeeling music festival. One was from Uttarakhand and the other from Assam. Each group displayed regional differences despite working towards representing Gorkha music in general. For example, the group from Dehradun, Uttarakhand, had touches of Western Himalayan folk elements, while the entourage from Assam displayed Indian classical music-inspired Gorkha Nepali music. Therefore, visiting other regions in northeast India and north India to study regional interpretations of Gorkha music would, I feel, definitely enrich and broaden the study of the way Gorkha identity in India is regionally practiced and represented.

Appendix A

Glossary of Nepali Words

Aaludam – Spicy potato curry.

Adhunik – Modern (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Adhunik geet – A modern rendition of Nepali songs/music that is raag-based, but also uses instruments like guitars, violins, accordions, and keyboards. Some Gorkha musicians like Basant Chhetri preferred to call it *sugam sangeet*.

Adivasis – Tribals (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Akshar – Alphabet (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Anubhav – Experience (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Atma-samman – Self-worth/self-pride (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Assal – Real or true (also in Hindi).

Bahadur – Brave (also in Hindi).

Bana basi – Forest dwellers (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Bhailo – Songs sung by women on the first day of *Tihar*.

Bhajan – Religious songs (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Bhaka – Aesthetic feel or the essence of any particular music.

Bhasa – Language.

Basuri – A transverse bamboo flute.

Bijuwa – Shaman.

Bhasa – Language (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Chaubandi choli – Tailored blouse worn by Gorkha women.

Chiatarey – The seventy-sixth one.

Chinhari – Identity.

Chiura – Flattened rice.

Chya:brung – A barrel drum and dance associated with the Limbu community.

Dalit – Backward/low caste (also in Hindi).

Damaha – Large kettledrum.

Damai – The tailor caste in the Gorkha community.

Damphu – A double-sided disk-shaped drum with the leather hide held together by 30-32 bamboo sticks.

Dasai – The greatest ten-day annual festival for Hindus in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. This festival is also called *Dusshera*, *Navaratha/Navrathri*, *Vijayadashami*, or *Durgotsav* in other parts of India.

Daura-Suruwal – The customary attire of Gorkha men consisting a tailored shirt and fitted slacks.

Deorali – A clearing in the hilly terrain or mountain woods where good spirits and good energy resides. No temples are built, but people gather here on auspicious occasions to pray and connect with the higher spirits. Small stones are arranged to mark the spot.

Deusi – Performed by men in a call-and-response pattern and set to an even rhythm of 2/2 or 4/4. It is both sung and recited in call and response.

Dholak – Drum from central north India (also in Hindi).

Dohari geet – Dialogue/debate song, usually performed between men and women in eastern Himalayan regions of Nepal.

Dholaki – Two headed drum similar to that of *madal*.

Dyangro – Shaman's drum or drum from Lhasa, Tibet.

Gaau – Village (also in Hindi).

Ghar – House or home (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Gora sahibs – Fair complexioned masters (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Jaat – Caste (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Jati – Community (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Jhakri – Shaman.

Jhaurey – A style of Gorkha folk song or dance melodies that are performed in accompaniment with the *madal* drum.

Jhyali – Cymbals.

Kalakar – Performing artist (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Khayali tala – A Nepali folk music time cycle of 8 beats.

Khukuri – A curved knife used as a tool or a close combat weapon by Gorkhas.

Lokgeet – Folk-song (also in Hindi).

Madal – A cylindrical wooden hand drum with two leather heads on either end.

Madesh – Plains (also in Hindi).

Mali – Gardener (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Manipurey madal – Drum from the state of Manipur.

Maruni – A typical dance form from the eastern Himalayan regions of Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, and eastern Nepal.

Mato – Land or home.

Momo – A local made dumpling. It is one of the most popular foods among the Gorkhas.

Mouza – Administrative unit corresponding to a specific land area within which there may be one or more settlements. Earlier in India, the term was used to denote a revenue collection unit in a revenue district, but as villages developed after India's independence in 1947, the concept of *mouza* declined with time.

Murali – A transverse bamboo flute.

Nagara – A large kettledrum.

Nakal garnu – To imitate.

Nautanki – A night-long folk theater of South Asia (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Naumati baja – Nine musical instrument ensemble played by the tailor-caste of the Gorkha community comprising two *sahnai*, two *damaha* or *nagara*, one *tyamko*, one *dolakhi*, one *jhyali*, and two *narsingha*.

Nazrulgeeti – Songs written and composed by the poet Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Okhar – Walnut.

Pachaute jaat – Backward/primitive community.

Panchev baja – Five musical instrument ensemble played by the tailor-caste of the Gorkha community. The instruments are *dholaki*, *tyamko*, *damaha* or *nagara*, *sahnai*, and *jhyali*.

Pangra – Pangra pods.

Pahad – Mountains (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Pahar – Time of the day; hour

Paschimay – Western.

Paschimay madal – Drum from the west.

Phariya – Sari worn by Gorkha women.

Purbeli – Eastern.

Purbeli madal – Drum from the east.

Purbeli lokgeet – Eastern Himalayan folk-song (also in Hindi).

Raag – An Indian classical music scale or mode.

Rabindrasangeet – Songs written and composed by Rabindranath Tagore.

Rodhi – It is a meeting house (*ghar*) constructed at the center of a Gurung village for young men and women to meet and socialize. *Rodhi ghar* singing is dialogic with girls and boys taking turns to sing.

Sahibs – A local term used to refer to the colonial rulers in India (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Sahar – Town (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Sahnai – A double reed conical oboe, common in North India, West India, Nepal, and Pakistan. It is made of wood, with a metal flare bell at the end. Its sound is said to create a sense of auspiciousness.

Sandhi – Treaty/Agreement (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Sangini – Nepali folk music/dance form mainly performed by women during the festival of *Teej* in the eastern Himalayan regions of Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, and Nepal. It is performed in a slow 3/3 meter.

Sankha – Conch (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Sanskriti – Culture (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Sarangi – A four-string bowed folk instrument.

Sawai – Narrative poem.

Selroti – Round fried bread eaten especially during *Dasai* and *Diwali* in Darjeeling hills.

Shakti – The female goddess worshipped during *Dasai* or *Dusshera*.

Shila – Stones.

Sugam sangeet – A modern performance of Nepali songs/music that is raag-based, but uses musical instruments like guitars, violins, accordions, and keyboards.

Swara – Musical note (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Tala – Rhythm (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Tamang selo – A song and dance form usually related with the Tamang community.

Terai – Sub-Himalayan fertile plains of north and northeast India.

Tihar – Also known as *Diwali*, this festival follows *Dasai/Dusshera* celebrations and symbolizes the triumph of good over evil. In West Bengal, another form of female energy, *Kali*, is worshipped, while the rest of India worship *Laxmi*, the goddess of wealth and prosperity.

Tika – A mark worn on the forehead (also in Hindi).

Tungna – A four-string plucked instrument.

Tyamko – A small kettledrum.

Uttam Sanskriti – High culture (also in Hindi and Bengali).

Vidwan – Scholar (also in Hindi).

Wyaktigat – Subjective or personal (also in Hindi and Bengali).

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