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Chokho Pani: An Interface Between Religion and Environment in Darjeeling

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Chokho Pani: An Interface Between Religion and Environment in Darjeeling

Case Study

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This case study examines the relationship between everyday religion and resource management by studying water resources in Darjeeling, India. It uses the notion and practice of *chokho pani* (pure and/or sacred water) as an interface between popular religious practices and the attempt to conserve water in Darjeeling township. Although the link between religion and environmental resource management is widely recognized, it remains a critical area of inquiry in the Himalaya. The complexity of water's social importance is vividly evident in Darjeeling. The town presents a rapidly urbanizing landscape with a diversity of peoples dependent upon a variety of water resources, making it an important Himalayan site for the study of religion and environment.

Keywords: everyday religion, Darjeeling, water, *samaj* (community institution).

Introduction: Why Darjeeling ?

Darjeeling district in West Bengal is part of the eastern Himalayan bio-diversity hotspot. With a long colonial history, it has established institutions which include one of the oldest municipalities in India, founded in 1850. The town's population has grown rapidly from 16,924 in 1901 to 120,414 in 2011.¹ Darjeeling Municipality has evolved inside a limited landscape with very little space for expansion, as it is surrounded by tea plantations and land governed by the forest department.²

The population of Darjeeling is predominantly Nepali speaking. There are also smaller numbers of Lepchas, Bhutias, Tibetans, Bengalis, Marwaris and Biharis. Between them, they follow Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity and share 'religious-ecological vocabularies' and, to a large extent, 'orchestral' actions. The Lepchas are considered as the main indigenous community of the region and are animists in origin.³ The Nepali community is a complex conglomeration of various castes and ethnic groups, with the ancestry of many of them rooted in tribal and animist traditions. Their religious traditions find expression in everyday life.

The rapid growth of the town and the proximity of many different ethnicities within a very limited space has led to the evolution of syncretic cultures, which in many cases have diverged greatly from their historical roots.⁴

Methodology

The authors undertook extensive research in Darjeeling municipality as well as in Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim,⁵ during 2011-12 to study water as a link between everyday religion and sustainable environments. The examination of town zoning based on water flows and distribution as well as access to municipal water supply enabled the authors to focus on specific locations that are quite representative of the town. The authors also undertook semi-structured interviews with key informants, focus group discussions, life histories, and transect walks to generate primary data. The interactions with various self-help groups and local *samaj* (*samaj* in this paper refers to community based organizations that are defined within a specific geography) were very useful in understanding religious connotations of water across various communities living in Darjeeling Municipality, and their implications on sustaining the environmental conservation. This was very crucial as there have not been any published studies based on primary sources. Literature reviews and consultations with a wide range of people brought about further interpretive focus to the study.

Everyday Religion in Darjeeling

Religion has long been a significant part of the varied socio-cultural practices enacted in the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalaya. However, religious practice in daily life is perceptibly different and more diverse than the scripturally and institutionally regulated forms, sometimes even being contrary to them. These “cross-cultural explorations and comparisons of different religious imaginations of nature” (Watling 2009) prevalent in Darjeeling are core issues of inquiry in this study. They are neither strictly outside codes and canons nor within, but are negotiated in terms of observances and practices in the ecological context in which they are carried out. Mostly these are accepted, adopted, and adapted both at the individual and community levels. This is more conspicuous in terms of water usage, as a public good and as a critical ingredient in the day-to-day religious practices.

In recent times, certain castes and ethnic groups that constitute the Nepali community have begun asserting their respective cultural values, practices, institutions and norms, fearing that these are being eroded. More pertinently, they are re-inventing and re-invoking their individual religious beliefs and socio-cultural practices. This is partly a response to the sanskritization⁶ or standardization of the Nepali community under a single Hindu identity. Some of these assertions go hand in hand

with political expressions of community aspirations, such as being constitutionally included in the list of Scheduled Tribes and gaining consequent welfare and political benefits from the state.⁷ In the process, many everyday practices of the past have once again become the focus of community attention in the form of ‘revival,’ ‘reform,’ or even survival.⁸

Water Crisis in Darjeeling

The water supply system of Darjeeling municipality comes from the catchment area of the Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary, located about 15 km away from the main town.⁹ A rapid rise of the population and a huge tourist influx puts tremendous stress on the water supply, especially for drinking water, from December to May. In the last few years the crisis has worsened due to the drastic fall in the volume of water at the catchment area’s natural springs.¹⁰ Dependence on the two lakes, coupled with poor management, have made the water situation vulnerable to all kinds of disputes and conflicts. It is estimated that the water deficit in Darjeeling is almost 1.33 million gallons/day.¹¹

Darjeeling’s annual precipitation is 2350 mm per annum, with most of it occurring in the peak monsoon from June to September. If managed properly, this would suffice for the Darjeeling town. However, even in peak monsoon, Darjeeling experiences serious water crisis (Malla 2004). There are multiple reasons for this, including lack of maintenance of the distribution network. 95% of the distribution network is from the colonial era, as reported by the waterworks department. The irrational distribution network has adversely affected water accessibility. Skewed distribution that mostly favors commercial outlets like hotels, particularly during the lean season, makes the scarcity very painful to ordinary citizens. The households connected to the municipality water provision augment their supply from water sellers, nearby springs, and rainwater. A large number of people, even in the core areas of the municipality, do not depend on the municipal supplies.

There are more than 32 natural springs in Darjeeling town (Boer 2011). The management of these springs range from community managed open access, to individually managed restricted access. Traditionally, these springs were common property resources with a non-codified oral tradition of open access. However, with changing times, community management systems in various locations have evolved. In some cases, individuals on whose land the springs are located have taken complete control over them.

Individuals and families survive with very little water and the same water is utilized for repeated functions. Laundry

water is saved to flush toilets and wash floors; water used to wash vegetables, grains, or meat is collected for the garden. No effort is spared to use as little water as possible. On average, an individual in Darjeeling could be using barely a liter of water per day for brushing their teeth and washing. All houses have rain water collection systems and storage containers of all shapes and sizes, many times outnumbering household members. When municipality water reaches the community or house—which could be once in four days or even as infrequent as once in 20 days for hardly half an hour—water takes precedence over everything else. People often stand in long queues to collect water. This has become a very common sight, which the older generation recalled never having witnessed before the 1970s. There are very striking instances of adaptations as reported by various persons and households to the research team.

The Business of Water

Scarcity of water has led to the marketization and privatization of water and water resources. Darjeeling today has a thriving water business, with a fleet of 105 trucks plying three or four trips a day from April to June, carrying 5500 to 6500 liters of water on each run. Each truck load of water is sold at an average of Rs. 1000 per truck. During the rest of the year, about 60 to 65 trucks are in operation every day.¹²

As mentioned above, springs are owned by communities and also by individuals. In most community owned springs, the water sellers are allowed to collect water only after the community has collected its own share. Invariably, this means in the middle of the night. Thus, in the middle of Darjeeling town at night, water sellers with hand carts can be seen transporting this precious commodity. During the lean season from February to May, the flow in the springs decline and the water sellers have to move further to the outskirts of town (areas such as Rangbul, Sonada and on the Jorebunglow-Teesta road) to collect water. As an ex-water seller explained, though their life is tough, money can be made, “if one starts at a prime age, one can sell water for around ten years before the body gives up.” A few have made money and climbed up the water business ladder and bought their own water trucks.

Individual water sellers occupy the lowest rung in the water business. They carry 40 to 60 liters of water on their head and sell it at one rupee per liter. They supply water to homes and commercial establishments. They do not have open access to springs and are forced to collect water from the nearby springs after the community has already collected its share.

Discourse on water scarcity always occurs in conjunction with the mercurial yet inevitable roles of the ‘water mafia’ in Darjeeling, and how they control water sources and supply. At the same time, this trend is also literally being forced on people due to economic compulsions. One of the truck drivers stated that this brings about a clash in traditions and values:

They say that we are doing *dharma* [duty of all people as emanating from values preached by Hinduism] by providing water at their doorsteps, but I believe we are doing business only. We are forced to do this business as the rich have all the control over supply and distribution of water. Ironically I do not have enough water so I send my clothes weekly to my in-laws’ village to be washed.

This existing system does not recognize the diverse water assets of natural springs dotting the town landscapes and the value of conservation by the communities. More damagingly, this centralized system has also gradually changed community perceptions of water from natural spring sources to a water connection at the household level. This has, in a way, transformed the notion of community assets and sacredness of water and its source to a mere commodity. The stress of obtaining water is now the most important factor influencing people’s opinion and behavior towards water, rather than a sense of water’s importance not only for daily life but also for everyday religious practice. This was never the case before.

Chokho Pani

In all focus group discussions and interviews, different religious and ethno-cultural groups expressed the ever pervasive presence of sacredness of water. These groups include: Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Tamang Boudha Gedung (Buddhist Association), Kirati Khambu (Rai) Sanskritik Sangh (Cultural Association), Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association, Yolmo Association, and Sai Samity (an organization set up by followers of Sai Baba). The sacredness of water is expressed through the concept of *chokho pani*, meaning pure, sacred, or clean water. It usually refers to fresh and flowing water from a spring or a small rivulet. Its sacredness is intrinsically ingrained in oral traditions as well as religious texts and practices, where science is to a large extent secondary and faith is primary. The purity of such water derives from its connection to gods of major religions, to a local deity or spirit, or even to the sanctity of a particular location. The purity can, though not necessarily, be equated with sacredness. *Chokho pani* is used in rituals, prayers, and offerings on a daily basis, and also in the ceremonies related to birth and death.

The concept of *chokho pani* includes an indigenous practice that conserves water sources by planting specific plants and protecting green cover around its source. There is a strong oral code of keeping the water clean by not urinating or defecating near it, making noise, disturbing the bushes and plants and talking loudly, or even keeping a somber mood. *Chokho pani* has other uses too. For instance, in most of the households in Darjeeling and Sikkim, the practice of *sato bolaunu* (literally translated as ‘call back your spirit or soul’ but that often means restoring confidence and fearlessness) is common. This is used to bring back the spirit of robustness in persons who become suddenly frightened as a result of some known or unknown incident, and have lapsed into fear. The oldest person in the family brings a *lhota* (copper container) with *chokho pani* and *titepati*¹³ (medicinal plant) and sprinkles the water on the affected person, repeatedly uttering words and *mantra* to awaken the senses.

In Darjeeling town, people offer *chokho pani* fetched from nearby springs and also from the municipality system. The reverence for this water is so strong that it can be used in times of ritual as a replacement for *ganga jal*, sacred water taken from the river Ganges that is widely worshipped by Hindus, or even holy water used by the Christian population. Over the years, as the scarcity of water in Darjeeling became widely prevalent, people have begun compromising on the quality of *chokho pani*, to now include any potable water. They still call it *chokho*—without bothering to verify the water’s source. This ultimately undermines the value of true *choko pani* collected from Darjeeling’s springs. As an informant stated:

People learn from their own surroundings and communities. Day-to-day social and religious practices have much to do with the conservation of heritage and nature.

Corroborating this, Sikkim University’s “Winter Sojourn Programme” mentions:

When we were children we drew water from a *dharma* (natural spring) at Chilaonedhura, Longview Tea Estate at Pankhabari in Darjeeling. All the villagers were prohibited to climb over to the area where the spring water actually originated. We were told that it is ‘Devithan,’ the abode of [a] Goddesses, so one could not go up at all and do anything that will dirty the area and disturb the plants and bushes. This is how we ensured clean drinking water and *chokho pani* (Sikkim University 2012: 8).

Despite the rapid socio-cultural changes, a traditional community institution known as a *samaj* is working to maintain some of the older practices, while focusing on both social welfare and environmental conservation, including water management.

Samaj: A Community Institution

The *samaj* has a long historical context. Established in 1932 in Darjeeling, the *Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sammelan* (Gorkha¹⁴ Suffering Management Association, GDNS) was the original model of the institutionalized *samaj*.¹⁵ Over time, GDNS expanded its activities to include child welfare, education and the promotion of art and culture. As the town expanded, the community came together to assist people in times of need and provide social support and community sanctions to marriages, births and deaths.¹⁶ The elders also worked towards removing social taboos related to inter-caste and inter-community marriages as well as superstitious practices. These evolved to be the core activities of a *samaj* that was gradually replicated in nooks and corners of Darjeeling hills (Pradhan 2012).

Samaj today are predominantly geographical entities, mostly crisscrossing administrative villages. They come together and serve the community and families living within a *samaj* in times of need: births, sicknesses, marriages, deaths, disaster management, and disputes in need of conflict resolution. It has a fee-based membership and most families of Darjeeling belong to one *samaj* or another. Despite the fact that a *samaj* may have members from many religious and social backgrounds, in times of birth, marriages, and funerals, the members of the *samaj* adhere to the religion and customs of the family concerned. In many instances, these *samaj* have added issues of water, waste management, the creation of a credit union, counselling, socio-cultural functions and even politics to their activities.

There are over 150 *samaj* in Darjeeling town itself, some of them legally registered under various provisions of the government. Many of them are formal institutionalized bodies housed under a specific *samaj ghar* (community home) with elected executive committees and office bearers to run the day-to-day functions. The numbers keep varying as *samaj* constantly merge or split up to form new ones. *Samaj* operate in specific ways in the Darjeeling hills, where diverse and complex socio-economic, religio-cultural realities are simultaneously lived, acknowledged and celebrated.¹⁷

The *samaj* also throw light on the fragile interplay and complex interconnections between everyday religion and environmental sustainability in the Himalaya. These *samaj* have evolved based on the needs of the new environmental situation, where different religious groups, ethnicities, and castes live in relative harmony and have broken barriers and restrictions by reworking traditions. It is easy to see the *samaj* through the lens of everyday religions, not only as a socio-economic organization but as an evolving community expression of everyday religions. The *samaj* exhibit an amalgamation of various religious traditions at the individual family and community levels. The diversity of beliefs is seen in the varied use of *chokho pani* at Darjeeling's springs.

In all the four *samaj* studied, the spring is considered sacred and has a codified management system of access for members and non-members. The *samaj* enforces a usage pattern based on water availability during different seasons. Three of the four *samaj* have installed idols and sacred images at the springs and all four hold religious ceremonies regularly. Every spring is also associated with *naga*, sacred snakes that live in the sub-surface, that in Hindu beliefs are known as *patal*. *Naga* like a clean environment, so it is essential to pray to the *naga* and offer them milk. The association of water sources with *naga* in Darjeeling prevails irrespective of the ethnic community one belongs to. This belief about the *naga* is also present in the *Vajrayana* Buddhist tradition practiced in Darjeeling.¹⁸

At these springs, regular *pujas* are offered to *naga* as well as to the Hindu deity *Shiva* and *Sansari Mai* (Mother Earth). Prior to times of *puja*, people keep these springs clean, as they believe that dirtying them will anger the *naga* and cause the springs to dry up. People also plant specific species of trees and banana plants around the springs to retain water. Two of the *samaj* believe that *naga* are the reason for the perennial flow of spring water. The *samaj* undertake cleaning efforts regularly and expressed fears of upstream contamination.

Hinduism and animism dominate the religious spaces of the springs, yet all members of the *samaj* participate in them, irrespective of their beliefs and faiths. Individuals have even constructed resting sheds along these springs in memory of deceased kin, adding another layer of sacred meaning to the springs.

Sacred and the Profane: Significant Shifts

In interviews and focus group discussions, the sacredness and purity of water (*chokho pani*) did not strongly translate into vocal and openly displayed everyday reverence

towards water. Everyone believes in *chokho pani* as it connects all life, yet it has no demonstrated collective social presence. It is a silent observance and private expression, mostly at individual and household levels. For instance, a dead body is either cleaned or sprinkled with *chokho pani* for forgiveness of sins only in the presence of very close kin of the dead soul. Similarly, to conclude the ritual, when the *lama* (Buddhist priest) performing *puja* in a particular household presents *chokho pani* "thuie" from the small kettle like copper tea pot, it is usually offered exclusively to the family members as a symbol of purity, calmness and clarity.

Interestingly, many of the springs and other water sources are choked with household and commercial waste. Most of the time, the same *chokho pani* is used to wash away the waste of Darjeeling. *Jhora* (waterways) are where people roll their waste down the hill, thereby affecting and polluting springs in low lying areas. Downstream of the springs, temples and houses also have waste flowing in the *jhora*. This contradiction arises as the waste management system is inadequate and unscientific in one of the oldest municipalities of India. In the consciousness of the community, the change in type and quantity of waste generated has not yet registered as being different from the earlier form of waste.¹⁹ Here, *chokho pani* is directly polluted by human actions, yet no one is willing to take up collective waste management action, as even the *samaj* think that it is the exclusive duty of the municipality and other agencies to manage waste. However, some *samaj* outside the Darjeeling town have begun earmarking some specific places for disposing this waste.

This means that the strong belief in the sacredness of waters is gradually waning in the quickly changing urban locale of Darjeeling, thereby compromising on polluted water sources and waterways. The symbols of sacredness and worship of idols, pictures, and prayer flags are still maintained, but both its moral and social meaning has eroded. Religious ceremonies and prayers are offered regularly at the sources by the community, and occasional cleaning efforts are undertaken. Yet the immediate surrounding area and downstream is filled with waste. The co-existence of the sacred with the profane is conspicuous and real.

People explain this contradiction and compromise as being the result of rapid urbanization, failed governance, a lack of space, and increasing negligence of civic duty among the people. This was never the case in Darjeeling before, which was once celebrated as the Queen of the Hills. Our informants also thought this shift is due to the transfer of

people out of nature and into a 'concrete jungle,' where the physical link between everyday life and ecology is effectively disconnected. Piped water delivered at the community level and at the household level has further undermined the community sense evoked by a spring on which the collective sacredness of water depends. They further argued that modernization based on values of individualism and consumerism contributes to this contradiction. A Tamang Buddhist informant commented on this in the following way:

Religious institutions, organizations and people's external religiosity is on the rise but deeper values are eroding due to modernization and urbanization. Cultural values are seen only in rural areas as they are still connected to nature.

Thus with rapid urbanization and modernization, the sacred and pure relationship of the community of Darjeeling with water is rapidly changing. The traditions that evolved through the community's close interaction with nature have been jolted with the intense struggle for space and resources, as well as the locus of decisions and the values on which they are based shifting from the community to the individual. This is a serious challenge to all the *Samaj* and they are striving to protect and conserve as many practices as possible through various means including community rituals and collective celebration of religious functions. The centuries-old communitarian approach to relationships, which were contained to a large extent within the community in this small colonial township, is fast vanishing owing to onslaught of powerful instruments of globalization as represented in KFCs, Pizza Huts and Korean TV serials. Even in a relatively more cosmopolitan Darjeeling, this sudden invasion of these exogenous shocks are both new and unprecedented. There is now extreme and thick density in the built landscape in Darjeeling and expropriations of nearby forests like Birch Hills, Senchal lakes and Jalapahar. The notion of nature upon which the traditions had evolved has changed, forcibly shifting everyday practices out of sync with religious traditions and wisdom. This has brought about visible yet precarious changes in ownership, decision making and practices of *choko pani*.

Silent Adaptations

The lack of water, haphazard waste disposal, and rapid concretization of the town challenges traditional values day in day out. In such a situation, rituals and beliefs are being adapted. As a Lepcha informant commented:

Lepchas use bamboo, banana leaves and spring water for their prayers. But living in Darjeeling access to them is difficult so there has been a debate in my family. My parents want to continue the prayers but I do not see the completeness of the prayers when we do not have access to bamboo, banana leaves and spring water. (Because of this) we still go to the confluence of Teesta-Rangeet rivers once a year to offer our prayers.

The Lepcha community's animistic traditions are deeply rooted in the land and natural resources of the region and are steadily being threatened. The informant, whose family lives in Toongsoong, portrays the flux the two generations are facing. A family prayer where *chokho pani* has been the most essential ingredient dramatically changes from a traditional, daily home-based prayer to an annual phenomenon far removed from the house. Correspondingly, it undermines the attachment to the sacredness of water, making it an annual and symbolic idea. This type of silent yet perceptible adaptation is now common across communities.

As a Bengali respondent who has migrated from the plains to Darjeeling explained:

We are essentially people of the plains where the climate is hot and water [is] not scarce. So our culture evolved daily prayer, which is performed only after a bath. But in Darjeeling with the cold climate and shortage of water we do not necessarily have a bath before daily prayers.

These adaptations to situations emerging out of the ever diminishing availability of *chokho pani* are visibly located in Bengali funerals as well. As a third generation Bengali informant stated:

Bengali funerals end with a bath but since the spring in the crematorium in Darjeeling cannot be depended upon to have continuous flow of water or access to it as communities have started washing their clothes at the spring, a water tanker follows the funeral procession so that we can have a bath at the crematorium after the cremation.

How the rituals themselves are being renegotiated because of a lack of *chokho pani* is further evidence of the changes underway. This extends to funeral practices and rites of mourning. As Sailesh, a third generation resident of Woodland explains:

In our community we require flowing water to cleanse ourselves at the time of mourning, but

since we do not have a spring or river nearby we attach a pipe to a tank uphill and use that water as flowing water to cleanse ourselves during the 13 day mourning.

These comments reiterate how Darjeeling town, with its mix of cultures and religious practice, is adapting to water stress.

Conclusion

Religion plays an important role in people's everyday discourse on water in Darjeeling, and is represented and confounded in the multicultural notion of *chokho pani*. Yet, water scarcity, rapid urbanization, consumerism and contamination have led to adaptations, negotiations and compromise of *choko pani*. As an idea, it co-exists amidst extensive evidence of pollution and contamination. Rituals around it continue, but the cleanliness, purity and sacredness does not necessarily translate into everyday conservation of water.

Amidst these challenges, the *samaj*, with their focus on members' welfare and social support, offer one source of hope. Unique to the Darjeeling Hills, the *samaj* profess welfare to be their main focus; members recognize and participate in the religion of all its members. Their emphasis on the cleaning of springs and the respect of Darjeeling's multiple cultural and religious lifestyles offer a point of promise for long-term and culturally appropriate water management schemes. And yet *samaj* are limited in their ability to effect large-scale change. The centralized water distribution system under the Darjeeling municipality is the result of a colonial legacy, and still fails to recognize the numerous springs that dot the urban landscape upon which communities of the periphery depend. Renewed municipal efforts and rejuvenation of urban governance could be well served in working with the *samaj* in both understanding the varied concerns that people in Darjeeling have for sacred and profane water resources and also effectively harmonizing the governmental and social interventions. Such programming would usefully engage the ongoing relevance of *choko pani* while working to expand the spring conservation and waste management efforts that are desperately needed.

Central to **Mahendra P. Lama's** experience as an economist and professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi is his work in development and cooperation in south and southeast Asia. Lama has done extensive research in the northeast region of India and southwest region of China in trade, environmental, water and energy sectors. He has participated in high-level multi-country negotiations in South Asia and worked as Chief Economic Advisor in the Government of Sikkim and also served as a member of the National Security Advisory Board of Government of India. He was the head of Asian Studies at JNU and became the youngest *vice chancellor* of a national university in Sikkim in India. Lama is also considered to be the main architect behind the reopening of the historic Nathu la Trade route between Sikkim and Tibet Autonomous Region after 44 years in 2006. He is a prolific author, with many books, reports and articles to his credit. Presently, he is India's nominee in the South Asia Forum and also in the Eminent Persons Group set up by the Prime Ministers of Nepal and India.

Roshan P. Rai is a development worker with DLR Prerna, a Darjeeling-based NGO. He works on issues of environment and social equity in the Darjeeling Himalaya. Partnering with marginal communities, models have been initiated resulting in seminal experiences like Darjeeling's first small farmer organic and fair-trade collective, Mineral Spring Sanjukta Vikash Sanstha. With a special interest in participatory governance, his intervention has revolved around inclusions in fair-trade movements in tea, conservation efforts, small farmer collectives and NGOs. He works on waste with Zero Waste Himalaya. Roshan engages at a landscape and policy level through his writings and educational institutions.

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Endnotes

1. The Darjeeling town population rapidly grew and today boasts over 120,000 people. The transitory population, including students, tourists, and migrant workers, includes up to 200,000 people according to the Government of India's 2011 census <www.darjeelingmunicipality.in>.
2. Tea gardens have been given to various tea companies on a long term lease basis, and forests are divided into various categories, the most prominent being the reserved forests. Both tea gardens and forests have a land tenure system and governance different from municipality.
3. Lepchas are spread in Sikkim, Darjeeling, east Nepal and some areas of Bhutan. They refer to themselves as Rongs and have a culture that originated in the ecology of the region.
4. *Mahakal Dara* or Observatory Hill has a Hindu, Buddhist and Animistic representation on the same hill top, with priests co-existing and people paying respect to all the traditions. Darjeeling also has a high level of mixed marriages between ethnic groups and religions. Funerals are attended by a large number of people, with the tradition of the bereaved family being respected and adhered to in the ceremony.
5. Sikkim became a constituent state of India in 1975, prior to which it was an Indian protectorate ruled by a King. The present paper however, focuses only on Darjeeling, making references to Gangtok wherever necessary.
6. 'Sanskritisation' is a term used to describe the process by which people adopt or are enticed into the practices and norms of upper caste Hinduism. The term is also associated with the political and cultural critique from communities that have been sanskritised.
7. This is as per Part XVI Articles 330-342 of the Constitution of India, <<http://lawmin.nic.in/olwing/coi/coi-english/coi-indexenglish.htm>>.
8. For a brief political interpretation of this new trend among the Indian Nepali community see Lama (2015).
9. The catchment consists of two lakes that hold up to 33 million gallons of water which is sourced from 26 springs. The water is distributed by gravity through a network of storage tanks and pipes (35 km of transmission main and 83 km of distribution main pipes). Almost 95 percent of the pipelines and valves were laid between 1910-1915 for a population of about 15000. A third lake (15 million gallons) was constructed by the government in 1978 at Singdhap, but is redundant due to poor quality of the reservoir and leakage.
10. The Darjeeling Municipality Water Works Report 2012 notes that this is partially attributable to the illegal felling of trees, dramatic increase in population, and transmission losses.
11. As against the total demand of 1.86 million gallons/day, the available water is only to the extent of 0.53 gallons/day (source: Darjeeling Municipality).
12. In addition to these trucks, water sellers collect water from the spring and transport it in hand carts to sell it. Each cart holds 16, 18 or 20 liter containers and water is sold at 25 to 30 *paise* per liter.
13. *Titepati*, *Artemisia sp.*, is a popular wild plant used for religious and medicinal practices.
14. The term 'Gorkha' is used to denote the Nepali community in the Darjeeling Hills. The hills and the adjoining Dooars region have a protracted history of seeking a separate state outside the state of West Bengal and within the constitutional framework of India. Darjeeling hills were given an autonomous body of Governance known as Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in 1988 and similar body known as Gorkhaland Territorial Administration in 2012.
15. Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sammelan is referred to by many *samaj* as the mother *samaj* or the apex body that inspired all *samaj* in the Darjeeling Hills.
16. The system of leadership by elders predates this organization and can be traced to the traditional practice of the *pancha*, or group of five elders selected by the community for issues of jurisprudence.
17. The importance of the *samaj* is seen in the fact that the police department recognizes some amount of conflict resolution by the *samaj*, while both the Municipality and District Information Bureau recognize membership of a *samaj* as a form of identity.
18. In our discussions with K. S. Moktan, a theologian, member of the Sai Samity, and writer) elucidated that "majority of Gorkhas are Jan Jatis (animistic, oral, nature worshippers and tribal in nature). However, with the influence of the Hindu culture these *Jan Jatis* have also imbibed and absorbed some Hindu traditions, thus, the general belief on water sources with *naga* in Darjeeling prevails irrespective of ethnic community one belongs to.
19. Over 30 metric tons of solid waste is generated per day in Darjeeling. The average goes up to 45 metric tons in peak tourist season (Rai 2011). All the solid waste and liquid waste flows down *jhora* or waterways of Darjeeling. From 1996 to 2013, the composition of waste has changed

from 95 percent organic to 70 percent organic, showing a dramatic leap in non-biodegradable waste. This has direct implication to the liberalizing economy of India post 1990s and increasing consumerism, consumption and complex packaging material.

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