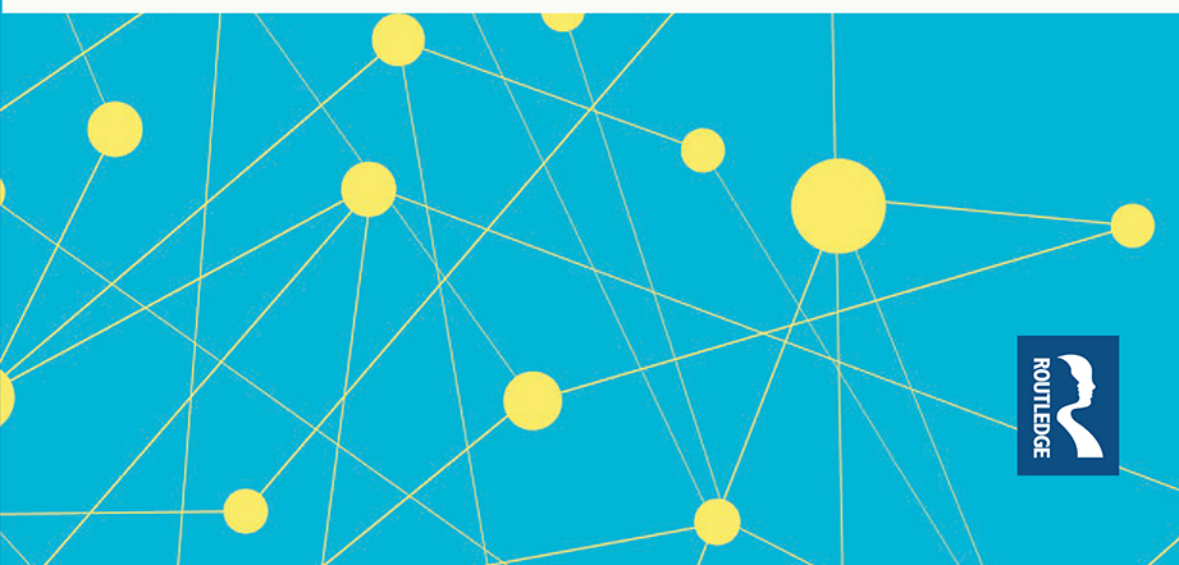
Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series

ETHNIC INEQUALITY IN THE NORTHEASTERN INDIAN BORDERLANDS

SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Anita Lama



Ethnic Inequality in the Northeastern Indian Borderlands

Ethnic Inequality in the Northeastern Indian Borderlands analyses the relationship between symbolic violence, inequality and ethnicity, and addresses the question of unequal integration of small ethnic groups into state structures by using the Limbus of the Northeastern Indian borderlands as a case study.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic violence*, the author argues that the ethnicization of the Limbus has been associated with the devaluation of their cultural identity, which was itself first constructed and naturalized by the same process of ethnicization. The book is a pioneering work in terms of the application of Bourdieu's sociology to Northeast India and the theoretical interpretation of ethnic inequality in Northeast India. In addition, the book contributes to the overall understanding of the constant structural identity of symbolic violence and its varying manifestations.

Exploring the symbolic dimensions of power relations within state structures, this book will be of interest to a wide readership from various disciplines including area studies, global studies, comparative studies, borderland studies, inequality studies, sociology, anthropology and political science.

Anita Lama received her doctorate in Global and Area Studies from Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany. Her research interests include social theory, globalisation and inequality.

Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series

Contemporary Literature from Northeast India
Deathworlds, Terror and Survival
Amit R. Baishya

Land-Water Management and Sustainability in Bangladesh
Indigenous practices in the Chittagong Hill Tracts
Ranjan Datta

Dalits, Subalternity and Social Change in India
Edited by Ashok K. Pankaj and Ajit K. Pandey

Identity and Marginality in India
Settlement Experience of Afghan Migrants
Anwesha Ghosh

Political Transformations in Nepal
Dalit Inequality and Social Justice
Mom Bishwakarma

Fertility, Health and Reproductive Politics
Re-imagining Rights in India
Maya Unnithan

Labour, Global Supply Chains, and the Garment Industry in South Asia
Bangladesh After Rana Plaza
Sanchita Banerjee Saxena

Ethnic Inequality in the Northeastern Indian Borderlands
Social Structures and Symbolic Violence
Anita Lama

Kashmir and the Future of South Asia
Edited by Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal

For the full list of titles in the series please visit: https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Contemporary-South-Asia-Series/book-series/RCSA

Ethnic Inequality in the Northeastern Indian Borderlands

Social Structures and Symbolic Violence

Anita Lama

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2021
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Lama, Anita, author.
Title: Ethnic inequality in the Northeastern Indian borderlands : social structures and symbolic violence / Anita Lama.
Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020037492 | ISBN 9780367561581 (hardback) | ISBN 9781003099864 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Bourdieu, Pierre, 1930-2002. | Limbus (Asian people)--India--Sikkim--Social conditions. | Limbus (Asian people)--Ethnic identity. | Ethnic conflict--India--Sikkim. | Equality--India--Sikkim. | Borderlands--India--Social conditions. | Sikkim (India)--Ethnic relations. | Sikkim (India)--Social conditions.
Classification: LCC DS432.L55 L36 2021 | DDC 305.895/4--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020037492

ISBN: 978-0-367-56158-1 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-09986-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Times
by SPi Global, India

This research monograph is dedicated to my beloved parents for their enduring support despite limited understanding of my world mainly representing dissimilar interests and work.

With gratitude, to my dearest octogenarian father for stepping up in every possible way so that I could find time and space amidst several situational odds to transform my PhD thesis into a book. For this, I feel fortunate.

To my dearest mother who would have done the same or even more, if she were alive.

THANK YOU!

Contents

Foreword

North-east India is a very interesting but understudied region. Most of the existing literature focuses on one state or one ethnic group. Very few studies look at the interaction of groups. Even fewer studies enquire into the interaction of groups across national borders. This book does just that. It studies ethnic configurations in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Nepal with a focus on the Limbus. Thereby, it is not only an important contribution to our understanding of Northeast India but also an addition to the emerging field of cross-border or transnational studies. This field is relevant because the main unit of analysis in the social sciences still is the nation state, which seems to be challenged by globalization. The local configurations below and beyond the nation state are often ignored.

This study also contributes to our theoretical understanding and to social theory in general. By drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, the author studies inequalities between ethnic groups in terms of symbolic violence. This concept has not been sufficiently explored in the framework of Bourdieu's theory – in spite of its potential. The author shows that inequality on a symbolic level is one of the main dimensions of inequality. She develops this argument theoretically and empirically. Whoever is interested in inequality, should read the book for this reason.

Readers from area studies will not be attracted by the theoretical part, while sociologists will not be interested in the empirical study. In addition, the author develops her argument in historical terms by looking at pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial configurations of ethnic and symbolic inequality. This history is a valuable contribution as well but will not excite sociologists or anthropologists. However, all three components – theory, history and anthropology – necessarily complement each other in this book. One should not read one section without the other components.

This integration of theory and empirical material exemplifies new area studies as opposed to the descriptive country or village studies of the twentieth century. Area studies today is informed by high-level theory and contributes to theory. This is not sufficiently acknowledged since appreciation would need to involve some local knowledge and interest, which is usually absent in theorists. A closer look, however, shows that theory also involves local knowledge and empirical facts – but they are usually taken from Europe or North America. We have entered a period of theory generation from and in the global South. This book is an example thereof.

Boike Rehbein

Preface

This book deals with the application of Bourdieu's sociology to the Northeastern Indian borderlands in order to understand and interpret ethnic inequalities persisting in this region. The Limbu ethnic group is a case study to this end. Therefore, it should not be compared to study of ethnic politics as the book mainly concerns symbolic dimensions of power relations as is also apparent from the use of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence.

The theory chapter presented in the book is a bit lengthy. This became essential as it forms the core of the book, the comprehension of which determines the intelligibility of succeeding chapters. This is chiefly because Bourdieu's theory although innovative is also rather complex involving several interlinked concepts, which need to be further explained and elucidated with contextual examples. In addition, this chapter also develops the interpretation of symbolic violence in the given context, which is an important precursor for the following chapters. By applying Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence in the given context, this book aims to study and interpret the transformation of an authentic cultural identity of Limbus in these three settings in order to understand the forms and processes of symbolic violence and its link to configurations of ethnic inequality.

Next, the book examines three historical phases of unequal integration into the state of Sikkim, which are also different configurations of inequality: pre-capitalist, colonial and post-colonial states. However, this historical section should not be read as the ethnic history of the Limbus in Sikkim which is a broader and deeper topic in itself. The objective of these chapters is not to rewrite their history or historize ethnic politics which is another object of study. Rather, these historical chapters aim to explore the link between symbolic and structural inequality based on ethnic configurations.

Although Limbu sources and oral history find mention in this book, it does not form conclusions upon them without critical analysis. The same applies to the relevant oral history of coexisting groups mainly the dominant group. Understandably, Limbu sources are rich in their cultural presentation but rarely do they deal with their subjugation. Oral history, which characterizes Limbu culture and that of other ethnic groups in this region is interesting but it goes beyond the scope of this book and could be the object of study for another book.

In this book, the Northeastern Indian borderlands mainly refers to Sikkim and its adjoining areas of eastern Nepal and Darjeeling but it can be extended to the

eastern Himalayan belt which is home to several smaller ethnic groups with their own distinct identities until the formation of nation-states led to their ethnicization and administrative categorization based on the dominant worldview. State structures in this book mean both federal state and nation-state depending on the context. State also refers to the primordial form of nation-state as in the case of pre-colonial and to a certain extent colonial Sikkim. Darjeeling is a district in the federal state of West Bengal which includes plain areas as well. However, the Darjeeling mentioned in this book mainly refers to the Darjeeling hills that come under Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) within the federal state of West Bengal where Nepali is taught as one of the languages in the school curriculum. Here, I would also like to mention that Kalimpong hills was carved as a separate district from the Darjeeling district following my fieldwork but remains as part of GTA.

The spellings of local terminology are varied, all of which I have attempted to mention in the book while mostly adhering to widely-used spelling.

Acknowledgements

As this book is a research monograph based on my PhD thesis, I would like to begin by thanking my supervisor, Professor Boike Rehbein whose supervision I associate with unimposing and encouraging feedback that provided me with the academic freedom to pursue and develop my research. With his consistent and valuable guidance, which always emphasized on the essential and relevant, this book meant finding a simple, meaningful path, out of several paths, to endless information and knowledge. I would also like to extend special thanks to Professor Vincent Houben for reviewing my PhD thesis and providing constructive feedback. Similarly, I would like to mention that this research became a possibility as "Exzellenzinitiative" scholarship holder, for which I would like to thank Humboldt University, Berlin.

My heartfelt and sincere gratitude also goes to several participants in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Nepal for their valuable time and support, but mainly to the Limbu cultural elites and academicians. I would like to mention a few names for their consistent and unforgettable support: Dr B.L Subba/Dr B.L Khamdhak, Assistant professor at the Department of Limbu, Sikkim Government college, Gyalshing in west Sikkim; B.B Subba/Bal Muringla, Associate professor at the Department of Limbu, Sikkim University at Gangtok and Padma Shree awardee B.B Muringla from West Sikkim. My special thanks to Dr Mahendra P. Lama, Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University for his unforgettable help and support during my fieldwork in Delhi that included timely help with accommodation reservation in the JNU campus guesthouse. In Nepal, my special thanks to the cultural elites associated with Limbu cultural association in Kathmandu, layperson Limbus and particularly to Professor Amar Tumyahang at Tribhuwan university. During my first fieldwork, I met several local and regional experts in Delhi and in Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Duars. To them, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for their valuable time and interesting inputs.

Introduction

Background on the issue under study

The initiating idea was to study the persistent issue of legitimacy among the Gorkhas/Nepalis of the Darjeeling and Duars region. However, further reading and exploratory fieldwork in 2015 led me to research on the Limbus, primarily for a deeper and broader understanding on the issue of legitimacy in the region.

My first fieldwork in 2015 was largely conducted in Darjeeling but also in Delhi, Sikkim and Duars and was insightful in terms of guiding me closer to the core issue of study. Interviews with local and regional experts largely echoed a consistent and generalized worldview linking their marginalization as a Nepali-speaking Gorkha community in India to factors such as demographic minority, immigrant background, geopolitics, and even to their easy-going relaxed dispositions and lack of meritocracy. It was often emphasized that the Gorkhas or Nepali-speaking community were negligible as a minority in the context of India's population thus making the Gorkhas' votes insignificant for political leaders at the centre in Delhi. While these factors cannot be overlooked, they were still relative generalizations that failed to give a clearer understanding on the core issue of legitimation.

In my retrospective understanding, these factors have been shown to be inconsistent in relation to the broader reality in the region. For example, as explored in this book, the dominant group of Sikkim, Nepal and Darjeeling have been minorities and of immigrant background in relation to the people already inhabiting the place. Geopolitics also seems to be an inconsistent factor with Nepal and Bhutan still existing as independent political entities despite being geo-politically strategic countries, while Sikkim has been merged with India. As an asymmetrical federal state within the Indian union, West Bengal, which consists of Darjeeling, also occupies an equally important geo-political location with international borders and a narrow chicken-neck corridor that links mainland India to north-east Indian states. Regardless, Bengalis enjoy symbolic legitimacy within the nation-state while many north-east Indians from its neighbouring north-eastern states including Sikkim still struggle with the issue of symbolic legitimacy within the nation-state. Further, it is also known that meritocracy is a myth[1] (Rehbein & Souza 2014: 18) and is largely used as a tool to justify structural inequalities in a 'formally democratic society'.[2]

Experiential issues of the Nepali ethnic group based on their phenotypes were also varied with the Aryan-looking Nepalis experiencing very little or no discrimination in mainland India in comparison to the Mongoloid-looking Nepali group. Although no ethnic group is homogenous as imagined and constructed, the biracial heterogenous composition of the Nepali ethnic group, if not interracially mixed, is relatively distinct. Therefore, in the context of Nepalis from this region, Nepali as an ethnic group was an ambivalent identity experientially and largely stood in dual opposition to the Bengali ethnic group in Darjeeling and to the Bhutia ethnic group in Sikkim; and their legitimacy within the nation-state also remained unclear, varied and loosely defined.

Therefore, considering the core idea under study, the Limbus as an ethnic group with contentious belonging to the state in Sikkim as indigenous, along with their contentious identification as a Nepali ethnic group, was chosen for a case study. With a relatively old written history to the region such a choice was intended to give a deeper insight into the historical marginalization of the Limbus as an ethnic group since the formation of a nation-state. Moreover, Sikkim was interesting with three different historical phases representing different configurations of inequality: pre-capitalist, colonial and post-colonial states. However, this case study does not differentiate later migrations of the Limbus to Sikkim and should not to be absolutized as with any other ethnic groups, considering the pattern of migration to occur in waves and not as a one-time event as usually portrayed or internalized. On a broader perspective, the case of the Limbus aims to contribute to the study of ethnic inequality in the region based on symbolic order. This is chiefly because the region is home to several smaller ethnic groups with distinct cultural identities, many of which later got subsumed into larger identities but remain dominated whereby their secondary position largely relates to the core issue of legitimacy.

Limbus/Limboos

The origin of the Limbu term itself is subject to debate due to varying interpretations and therefore cannot be established as an endonym or an exonym. However, since it is a Limbu word, which literally means archers in Limbu language (Subba 1999: 32), in all likelihood it is an endonym. Arguably, the Limbu term in its origin may have originated within a non-state time and space as it literally means archers but increasingly existed in relation to their polity called Limbuan/Limbuwan which is known to exist as ten principalities or kingdoms as Limbus like to call it, but not as a single polity as conceptualized by them. Yakthumba, an endonym meaning 'yak herders' derives relatively more consensus from the Limbus in all three settings, possibly because this term does not exist in relation to a polity.

In Sikkim, documented evidence indicates that the Limbus were referred to as monpas or non-Tibeto-Sikimese along with the Lepchas and it becomes clear only from LMT treaty of 1663 that they have been distinctly referred to as Gtsong[3]/Tsong/Chong (Mullard 2011: 86). The LMT treaty clearly indicates that both the terms, Limbu and Tsong were not in use as Limbu signatories

can only be identified by their clan names. This treaty is the first available documented evidence in which the Limbus have been referred to as Tsongs as in Lho-Mon-Tsong (LMT) where Lho means Lhopos or Bhutias, Mon means Monpas or Lepchas, and Tsong means Limbus. In this context, the Tsong term is an exonym given by the dominant group to Limbus in the newly established polity of *Sukyim* or Sikkim.

From a dominant Bhutia perspective, the term Limbu is associated with Hindu Gorkhas and therefore stands in opposition to the Sikkimese Limbus as Tsongs. Referring to the Limbus' oral history called "mundhum", a typescript history of Sikkim (Namgyal & Dolma 1908: 22) mentions that the Limbus followed their Guru, Katog Lama from Tsang in Tibet who was one of the pioneer monks visiting Sikkim from Tibet and settled with him in Sikkim thus deriving their name as Tsong for their tribe 'but the Gorkhas call them Limbus'. However, an historical study of Sikkim indicates that the Limbus' association with the dominant group of Sikkim precedes that of the Hindu Gorkhas and even though LMT treaty of 1663 distinguishes the Limbus as Tsongs, the Limbu signatories in the treaty can be distinguished only by their clan names and not as Tsongs or Limbus. Therefore, it is argued that although the term Tsong was given by the dominant group for Sikkimese Limbus; the conceptualization of terms Tsong and Limbu in relation to Sikkim and Nepal respectively was constructed later possibly in the late eighteenth century when Limbu territories were subsumed into the nation-state of Nepal. It may have become important to emphasize on this distinction even more in the late nineteenth century in order to legitimize and maintain their supremacy amidst the colonial processes involving immigration, capitalism and introduction to the western concept of nation-state. This possibly explains the narration of this distinction in relation to nation-states in the typescript history of Sikkim written during the early twentieth century. The emphasis on the Tsong term as distinctly separate from the Limbu term may have been influenced by the progressive ethnicization of the Limbus as Kirati/Kirats in Nepal, an exonym given by the Hindu Gorkhas. In this respect, the Tsong term exists in relation to Sikkim just as Kirati in relation to Nepal. Therefore, it is more convincing to argue that the Limbu term mainly exists in relation to their conceptualized polity of Limbuan and their collective identity as Limbu based on their script and not in relation to nation-states of Nepal and Sikkim. However, from the colonial period onwards, given the historical particularities, the dominant Bhutia group in Sikkim started associating the Limbu term in relation to Nepal, possibly out of political and cultural concerns as well.

The term Limbus was popularly used in Sikkim and the Darjeeling hills from the nineteenth century onwards (Arora 2007: 200). The British administration recognized and recorded the Limbus as a distinct ethnic group in Sikkim as early as 1891.[4] However, from 1915 onwards, when the land revenue rates were finalized, the Limbus were categorized as Nepalis. The Tsong term gained resurgence in 1960s as indicated with the reservation of the Tsong seat in the Sikkim legislative assembly (1965) until it was abolished in the interim period in 1973 before Sikkim merged with India. Even though this term became irrelevant in post-merger Sikkim, it is still used by a section of Sikkimese Limbus and the dominant group in local discourses.

In post-merger Sikkim, Limbu term is largely associated with the progressive recognition of the Limbu language. However, since their recognition as a scheduled tribe in 2003, the Limbus increasingly switched to writing their surnames as 'Limboo' instead of Limbu thereby drawing a distinction from the Darjeeling and Nepalese Limbus. Many Limbus continue to write their surnames as Subba which mainly relates to the chieftain or headman position granted by the Gorkha rulers. In this sense, the Subba surname can be historically associated with the Hindu Gorkhas. Subba is a popular surname among the Limbus in Sikkim and Darjeeling, which is either inherited, adopted or conveniently imposed due to their categorization as Nepalis. As the Subba surname is based on a prestigious position, it is highly likely many Limbus adopted this term.

The Limbus have been one of the last ethnic groups to be subjugated in Nepal due to their geographical location to the far-east. The Hindu Gorkha king appeased the Limbus by granting them titles and recognizing their kipat system of land administration but the successive rulers gradually disintegrated and dissolved the system that is known to result in the alienation of their ancestral lands by immigrant Hindu Nepalis. In Sikkim and Darjeeling, Limbus have been historically invisible as immigrant Nepalis since the colonial period particularly in relation to coexisting Lepchas and Bhutias.

Kirats/Kiratis/Kirants

In this context, the focus is on the Limbus and Rais as Kirat as there are several other ethnic groups who identify with the Kirat culture and religion in Nepal. According to Schlemmer (2004), Kirant is derived from kirata, a term used in the ancient Sanskrit texts to designate, in an apparently generic and disparaging manner, the hunter peoples of the mountains. The latter seem to have been grouped together because of their common political and geographical situation—the fact of living outside any influence of a state or of the Hindu civilization. The Nepalese would thus seem to have used the word 'Kirant' to designate the populations living on the eastern fringes of their territory. Whereas the populations in the centre and the west of the country had been integrated into the Hindu kingdoms for longer, the eastern populations were characterized by their considerable autonomy with regard to the royal centres (In Culas & Robinne (ed.) Schlemmer 2010: 53). He also writes (in Culas & Robinne (ed.) 2010: 48), 'the northern part of the Vijaypur kingdom region would become, after Nepal had become a kingdom, what would be called the Far Kirat (pallo Kirant); the northern region of the kingdom of Chaudandi would become the Middle Kirant (majh kirant), while the region composing the former region of Dolakha would be called the Near Kirant (wallo kirant). It should be added that the Middle Kirant is principally peopled by the aforementioned Sunuwar, the Near Kirant by the Rai and the Far Kirant by the Limbu'. Therefore, the term Kirat in its origin seemingly existed in relation to a non-state space beyond the jurisdiction or influence of the Hindu kingdoms. The same understanding of the term was seemingly practiced by the Hindu Gorkhas of Indo-Nepalese origin

although by then distinctions as *wallo* (near), *majh* (middle) and *pallo* (far) has been made based on their centre in Nepal. In Nepal, the Kirati term has been largely internalized by the Limbus and Rais of eastern Nepal and stands in relation to their geographical location but also in relation to the dominant group as ethnicized Hindu Nepali. In contemporary Nepal, this term mainly reflates to political discourses, and is used to refer to their indigenous ethnic culture and civilization.

Bhutias

In all likelihood, the term Bhutia is a modification of the Nepali term Bhotia for people from Tibet as 'bhot' in Nepali refers to Tibet. In this respect, the term Bhutia is an anglicized version of the Nepali word Bhotia with the term Bhutia being largely used in the nineteenth century British administrative records. Otherwise, in the LMT treaty of 1663, people of Tibeto-Sikkimese origin have been referred to as the Lhopos. In this book, the term Bhutia is synonymously used along with term Tibeto-Sikkimese,[5] with the Bhutia term distinctly used from the colonial period onwards.

In Sikkim, the term Bhutia also draws a distinction from the later immigrant Tibetans and other categories practising Buddhism. However, The Scheduled Tribes Order of 1978, which recognized the Bhutias as ST also recognized it as a broad generic term to include several other groups.[6] Nonetheless, the distinction of a Bhutia from its subcategories is quite distinct in their dispositions but also in the policies.[7]

Lepchas

The term Lepcha is possibly an anglicized version of the Nepali word Lapche meaning vile speakers. Otherwise, in pre-colonial Sikkim they have been referred to as the monpas particularly following the treaty of LMT in 1663. Lepchas are considered to be the first inhabitants of Sikkim, Darjeeling and eastern Nepal. In Sikkim and Darjeeling, their indigeneity remains undisputed. The traditional history of Sikkim establishes the Lepchas as indigenous to Sikkim. The colonial history of Darjeeling establishes the Lepchas as indigenous to Darjeeling. In 2005, the Lepchas were recognized as 'Most Primitive Tribe' by the Government of Sikkim following the submission of a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Sikkim in 2003 by the Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association and other Lepcha leaders demanding protection of the Lepchas as the Most Primitive Tribe (Arora 2007: 215). In the past, the Lepchas are known to be culturally closer to the Limbus with animistic practices and intermarriages. They are also known to share a common sub-clan name of 'Chilikchom' and 'Luksom' whereby marriages between these sub-clans of two groups are prohibited (Subba, A.B, 2016: 26). Progressively, the Lepchas in Sikkim have been subsumed into the Buddhist Bhutia culture while in Darjeeling they have largely adopted Christianity and speak Nepali language as their mother tongue.

Gorkhas/Nepalis

The term Gorkha finds its origin in the Gorkha kingdom, which expanded to form present-day Nepal. This term takes different meanings in different places and sometimes also overlaps depending on the context. For example, the British colonials are known to refer to them as Hindu Gorkhas thus distinguishing them from the indigenous ethnic groups. However, following the Anglo-Gorkha war (1814–1816), the British are known to recruit them as mercenaries in the British Gurkha army. In this sense, the term Gurkha is an anglicized version of Gorkhas which by then included indigenous groups like the Limbu and Rai, also from Sikkim and Darjeeling. The use of this term in India was largely associated with Nepali cultural activities, with literary and cultural associations being named with Gorkha terms but little is known of people associating themselves with the Gorkha as a political identity. Arguably, in Darjeeling, the term Gorkha, originated as a struggle for distinction in the social world, for legitimation out of fear of ethnic cleansing. It became a predominant term during the sub-national Gorkhaland movement in 1980s with a statehood demand or a homeland for the Gorkhas or Nepali-speaking inhabitants of Darjeeling and Duars. In this context, it is a politicized identity as it emerged and strengthened in the backdrop of victimization of Nepali-speaking people largely settled by the British colonials. Cases of ethnic cleansing of Nepalis on the basis of their immigrant background have been recorded in Assam, other north-east states and Bhutan while unrecorded isolated pockets of violence have also taken place in the Duars area of West Bengal through intimidation, pauperization and organized communal violence using the Adivasis as opponents who were brought by British colonials for tea plantation work from areas like present-day Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Otherwise, the term Gorkha has its origins in the Hindu Indo-Nepalese culture which increasingly took on the indigenous face of eastern Himalayas through militarization as a valiant British Gurkha soldier, epitomized for unfaltering courage in battle and loyalty to the British. In post-colonial times, the legacy has passed on as Indian Gurkhas. In the Darjeeling hills and Duars, the Gorkha term is used for linguistic Nepalis and connotes both Gurkha soldiers and Gorkha origin even though political rhetoric refers to the former case. The origin of the term Gorkha in Darjeeling mainly relates to dissociation from Nepali identity as this Nepali term has been politically misused linking Nepali to the nation-state Nepal. Sikkimese Nepalis are not known to associate themselves with the Gorkha term possibly to maintain their distinction from the politicized identity of the Darjeeling Nepalis. On the other hand, it gives evidence that Sikkimese Nepalis are relatively more secure as Nepalis in Sikkim.

Symbolic violence, social structure and ethnic inequality

The core idea of the book is to explore the concept of symbolic violence and inequality in the context of the Limbus as an ethnic group and its relation to the conceptualization of a nation-state. It primarily deals with two broad questions. First, how symbolic violence has been historically reproduced over a significant

period of time since the construction of a nation-state. The answer to this question has been explored and developed in historical chapters with particular focus on Sikkim as a nation-state and later as a federal state of India. These chapters while providing an insight into the unequal integration of the Limbus within the state structures of Sikkim also analyze the symbolic dimensions of power relations embedded within this unequal structural integration. This book argues that the inclusion and exclusion of the Limbus is based on their ethnicization and to the particular configuration of the state, dominant group and ethnicity. The empirical chapters based on fieldwork aims to validate this argument by focusing on the particularities in Sikkim; and through varying manifestations of symbolic violence in all three settings. In doing so, these chapters deal with the second question on how cultural processes of the Limbus as a dominated ethnic group is shaped differently in different configurations and how it is linked with the power structure, ethnicity and nation-state.

Similarly, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence is introduced and discussed in the theory chapter where the concept of ethnic inequality mainly links to the symbolic dimensions of inequality. Although three historical chapters largely discuss the structural inequalities, the objective is to add to the overall understanding of symbolic inequality that defines, shapes and legitimizes structural inequalities. This book also refers to the concept of social structure particularly in the binary opposing distinction of the dominant and the dominated groups which essentially follows Bourdieu's conceptualization of social structure as a classification of society within the framework of state structures mainly nation-state based on the possession of socially valuable capital. Social structure is therefore linked to capital within the nation-state and in this study largely cultural and symbolic capital, which also gives access to other forms of capital such as the social and political capital. As noted by Rehbein (2007: 21), 'Bourdieu conceives of social structure as the distribution of capital. All social actions require some form of capital and whoever has the greatest amount of socially most valuable capital, has a leading position in society.' In this book, I argue that the dominant groups in all three settings of Sikkim, Darjeeling and Nepal are in possession of symbolic capital primarily based on the value attributed to their culture in relation to that of the dominated groups which has inter-generationally given them access to others forms of capitals conceptualized by Bourdieu.

Fieldwork

As discussed earlier, my first fieldwork was conducted in 2015, which does not find its way into the book in terms of results though it played a crucial role in doing away with layers of narratives that presented a somewhat distorted view of reality. In this sense, my first fieldwork, even though it did not produce concrete results in terms of visible outcomes in the book, was still very significant in guiding me to the core issue of legitimacy that I aimed to study. Therefore, the empirical chapters based on fieldwork mainly relates to my second fieldwork conducted between 2016 and 2017 in Sikkim, Darjeeling and Nepal.

The first focus of my fieldwork has been Sikkim as it forms the core of this book with several chapters based on Sikkim. The contentious belonging of the Limbus as indigenous to Sikkim was equally interesting from a legitimacy point of view, which was evident in almost all the interviews conducted in Sikkim. In this regard, my respondents were mostly Limbu elites but also a few non-Limbus who have established themselves in education, culture, and administrative arenas and who also had some degree of influence over shaping the cultural milieu in Sikkim. Formal settings such as the clan meetings, Limbu language classes; and informal settings such as lunchtime in canteen, Limbu harvest festival known as dhaan naach,[8] allowed me to meet them in group settings as well. Other scenarios include conversing with layperson Limbus in rural areas or from rural areas of West Sikkim selling their produce like oranges near streets or breaking stones on the roadside for road repair or simply layperson Limbus striking a conversation in formal and informal settings. It was also not rare to come across poor and alcoholic Limbus in West Sikkim. I was also invited to stay with two families in West Sikkim, which was a privilege as both these families represent Limbu cultural elites with their contribution towards the preservation of the Limbu culture in Sikkim. One of these places was home to a personal library with a personal collection of newspapers and books dealing with Limbu topics in Sikkim. I also got the opportunity to visit their symbolic spaces such as the two ancient pine trees in Lingbit (Rimbik) believed to be associated with the first settlers of their clan. In the other family, apart from access to an old collection of documents related to the Limbus in Sikkim, I attended events such as the clan meetings and celebrations in a village school in which this Limbu literary figure was invited as the chief guest. In both these places, a typical two-storied Limbu traditional house was still preserved. While one of these houses was mainly used as a kitchen, the other traditional house was used as a sleeping and resting place for two elderly members of the family. The main pillar of the house or *hangsitlang,*[9] which is typical of traditional Limbu houses, distinctly stood out in one of these houses that I was shown around.

The second focus of my fieldwork has been Darjeeling with its shared history as part of Sikkim, as analyzed in my historical chapters. In addition, the Limbus in Darjeeling do not speak the Limbu language and mostly identify with the Nepali identity and Nepali language. Since the revival of the Limbu cultural realm is largely concentrated within the ambit of cultural associations in this configuration, I interviewed Limbu cultural elites from new and old Limbu associations in Darjeeling and Kalimpong who have been associated with the Limbu Tribal Boards as well. The cultural elites from new associations appeared relatively outspoken and confident on the chances of reviving the Limbu culture and language. Although, with some hurdles, I also met a few cultural elites from the All India Limbu Association, which has played a significant role in asserting for ST recognition of Limbus. However, they appeared restrained and distant without being impolite; they finally opened their shabby dusty office for me but avoided being interviewed. Instead they gave me their record files and disappeared for long hours except for occasional interruptions to ask if I needed tea and finally to close the office. Further, I conversed with a few layperson, Limbus in a group