

# Hydro Power Projects Induced Conflict: A Study of Lepcha Community of Dzongu

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**Abstract:** In pre-era, many tribes reside in a small kingdom of Eastern Himalaya. Lepcha or Rong as they like to call themselves are the indigenous inhabitant of Sikkim long before outsiders namely Tibetans, Nepalese came to the land. Sikkim merged with the Indian Union in later half of the 20th century, May 16th 1975 to be precise. Unlike other ethnic groups, Lepcha claim themselves as an indigenous inhabitant of Sikkim. A land in Dzongu is treated as sanctity by Lepcha people but today the same land has been used for other purposes. Major effect of the hydel project can be divided into four sub sections namely, local, state, national, and the impact at the international level. However, the initiation of mega hydel project passed by Government had infringed its own declaration of Dzongu as reserve area. Simultaneously, the impact of modernization agents on Dzongu is bigger and also a complicated issue which led to the debate between insider and outsider in one hand and Affected Citizen of Teesta (ACT) verses state government in the other hand. Similarly, there are various theoretical strands which can lead to understand the basic nature of development conflict.

**Theoretical framework:** There are relative deprivation theory which explains major term like exploitation and deprivation. The line of thought is simple here that deprivation leads to exploitation which again leads to awareness of a group, who in turn mobilize themselves to achieve the set goals of social change.

**Methodology:** The data source for this paper is from both the primary and secondary sources generated during field investigation. Extensive field study with in-depth interview has been carried out, with the help of questionnaire in the region and outside. This present paper highlight on the Lepcha Protest against modernizing agents in Sikkim is a struggle to protect their Lepcha Identity and Conflict regarding Dzongu Reserve is a conflict between the Nature Worshipers and the Global Forces of Development.

**Keywords:** Hydropower development, Identity crises, Dzongu, Lepcha.

## 1. Introduction

This paper discusses the role of the affected citizen of Teesta (ACT) and Homestay on Dzongu reserve which tries to bring down the ways of impact of modernization by controlling the both pull and push factors that promote the impact of modernization in the region. The organization effectively exposes the major issues related to the impact of modernization such as exploitation, deprivation, and dominant identity. Through its preventive process Lepchas youth Association,

CLOS, SOD and ACT organization further actively involves in the efforts to limit the threat toward s the impact of modernization. It also tries to maintain the gap between the insider and outsider Lepchas through its banner of the affected citizen of Teesta. It is evident in the discussion of this chapter that ACT, Homestay has work eradicate the Environmental disaster on reserve land and has proved that the banner of affected citizen of Teesta can play a critical role to addressing the issues on impact of modernization project.

No one, not even the king or the government were to infringe with the sanctity of the region. Lepchas were the first inhabitants of the lands along the Himalayan mountain seam that connects north-east India, Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal (Little 2010: 86). The Lepcha scripts is said to be related to be Tibetan alphabet. To the naked eye, there appear to be flourishes of the Urdu script as well. The Tibetan script appears nearer to the Sanskrit model. According to General Mainwaling, Lepcha was the language spoken by the Adan and Eve and hence older than Sanskrit or Urdu (Awasty 1978: 30). The Lepchas believe their souls go to Dzongu when they die (Little 2008: 239). In Sikkim, Lepcha are recognised as aboriginals and are even granted the primitive tribe status. In the Darjeeling hills, they are labelled as scheduled tribe according to the Indian constitution, while Nepal acknowledges the Lepchas as a minor ethnic group. Impassively, Bhutan is the only country which included lepcha under a general category with the Nepalese population (Lepcha 2007:12).

Lepcha were nature worshiper and behind their each and every cultural practice had some logic like on festival, ceremonies and religious way first Nambun: One major festival of the Lepchas is the Nambun which marks the beginning of the New Year. This occasion celebrated during the month of December and January or it depends on the new moon falls. On August 8, the Lepchas annually worship Mount Tendong, as this mountain offered sanctuary to human, animal, and other living creatures during the deluge caused by the river Teesta. The river Teesta is not merely a source of water, but the very lifeline of Sikkim (Arora 2007: 4).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

There are Relative Deprivation theory, formulated by Merton

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and Runciman. The term relative deprivation refers to deprivations experienced when individuals compare themselves with others that is individuals who lack something compare themselves with those who have it, and in so doing have the feeling of deprivation. Thus, relative deprivation not involves comparison; it is also usually defined in subjective terms. Deprivation is relative. People experience resentment or discontent about their condition not necessarily when they are deprived in an absolute sense, but when they feel deprived relative to some standard of comparison. These are the essential concepts behind the theory of relative deprivation (Anand and shamin 2009: 94).

Sikkimese people had a lots of experiences and the feeling of Deprivation for example, "During the period of maharajah Thutob Namgyal dynasty Sikkim clashed with those of the Indian British Empire and British political officer John Claude White (1853-1918) was a mean, petty and domineering individual who rule over Sikkim during the two decades in which he dominated the state of Sikkim (McKay 2003: 27)". From that statement, we came to know that Sikkimese people deprive in social, political and economic sphere in own homeland.

According to the Lepcha myth, the first Lepcha was created from snow this is why they tend to relate themselves to these peaks (Doma 2010:9). Another example, Lepcha of Dzongu believe that Dzongu is a holy land and according to their myth that mother creator creates human beings from the Mount Kanchenjunga and Lepcha were allotted that Dzongu is a reserve land for them (Little 2008: 230). But, due to the mega hydro project that holy land became infringed and outsider migrated over there for a semi- permanent settlement but most of the important point is that, the land is reserve land for Lepchas. When outsider started to work out there and local people felt deprive, because of the homogenous society, Lepcha people love to live close with each other. Therefore, they were depriving in their own land and exploited by the others.

The Lepchas are at a complete disadvantage in dealing with the Kanya. Neither they nor anybody outside the caste can read the peculiar script of the Marwari; but the Lepchas cannot deal with figures and are unable to calculate the prices they should receive or the debts they owe; when they get receipts they cannot read them nor tell if they are correct. Though they have a strong conviction that they are badly cheated by the Kanya they can do nothing about it; intentional dishonesty in any form is so alien to them that they cannot comprehend or deal with it; the puzzle about the sums that the Kanya say they owe; they are convinced that they are too high, but they cannot dispute them and have to pay. Since the Kanya have the cardamom monopoly and collect the selling tax the Lepchas cannot take their produce elsewhere; and it is questionable if it would pay them to do so, for against the higher prices obtainable in Gangtok and Kalimpong must be set the cost of portage (Gorer 1996:113).

As with many such crops the price is often higher at the end of the season than at the beginning, but the Kanya will not let them wait on the market; at the beginning of the season they send representatives to their debtors claiming immediate payment and threatening court proceedings if the cardamom is

not forthwith handed over. If the Kanya could give cash for the surplus crops the Lepchas would be better off; but it is extremely difficult to get ready money, beyond what is needed for tax-paying, out of them. When the cardamom is brought in the Kanya claim that they have no money to hand and force goods, either metal ware, or china, or cloth, on to the sellers. And if during the rest of the year people come into buy goods, rice seed, or cloth, or salt, they refuse to take cash except for quite small sums (say under Rs. 10). The bully and forced and persuade the Lepchas to take goods on credit whether they want them or not (Gorer 1996:114). Thus being cut off the rest of the civilised world, the people there lived in complete innocence and simplicity; they were completely ignorant of the guiles and tricks, the people outside were used to in their daily life and hence they were easy targets of the business fraternity and anybody who happen to have interred action with them. Further, due to lack of education these people could be conveniently exploited by the Marwari and Kainyas of Mangan (Tamlong 2008:185).

The extortion and exploitation against these people were the order of the day. The Marwaris knew the Lepchas Language and the moment the Lepcha with their cardamom used to arrive at the market, they were treated in all courtesy serving them chi and food and afterward cost thereof would be realised many times over from the cardamom transaction. Even the biscuit and bakery items vendors, who sometimes used to go to the village, carrying their products in big trunks on the head, used to realise the cost of such food items in costly and precious cardamom (Tamlong 2008: 186).

A person experiencing either relative gratification or relative deprivation will also experience a feeling that his deprivation status is different from that of his peers. We will call this "fairness," in the sense that it indicates a belief that there is differential treatment in the in group (Davis 1959: 283).

In the middle of the 17th century Tibetan red hat followers migrated over Sikkim and permanently settle in the valley of Sikkim (Ehrhard 2003: 26), as a result their culture, custom and religious practices dominated over established community. It was the East India Company that, in 1817, with the treaty of Titaiya put on end to the devastating raids. Through this treaty the British Government gained a permanent foothold in Sikkim (Hiltz 2003: 68). Because of this, many Christian Lepcha people have lost their language and have distanced themselves from the old shamanistic rituals and beliefs. This stance occasionally gives rise to tension between Buddhist and Christian Lepcha. As we all came to know that Lepcha has been facing abundant challenges to defend their identity. Like, actually Lepcha know as nature worshiper which is also known as animism. But due to the changing era Buddhism and Christianity came over the Sikkim and influenced the Lepcha community.

That's why in this contemporary period some of the Lepcha people converted in Buddhism and some of the Lepcha converted in Christianity. Since, from 17th and 19th century Lepcha community has been fighting with the established culture and customs. Lepcha community tried to protect their identity and in reality, Lepcha people call themselves

indigenous inhabitant of Sikkim and Dzongu is their Reserve land. But, the changing period created unsafe or insecure towards the Lepcha community and they were exploited by outsiders and felt deprived people.

### 3. Historical Development

In addition to Dzongu being declared a Reserve for the Lepchas, the Lepchas were acknowledged to be Sikkim’s “original indigenous inhabitants” by a Supreme Court verdict on 10th February 1993. The State Government also granted the Lepchas the status of a Primitive Tribe Group in November 2006. The Dzongu is located in the district of North Sikkim. As already mentioned the Dzongu is a Lepcha reserve created to preserve the social homogeneity of this small community with its unique religio-cultural practices intricately related to their pristine natural surroundings.

The Dzongu was created as Lepcha reserve in the erstwhile Chogyal era when Monarchy prevailed over this small state. The Dzongu covers approximately 78 sq km of geographical area and extends between 27°28' – 27°38' N lat. and 88°23' – 88°38' E longitude, its altitude ranges from 700 m to 6000 m above msl (Bashin: 2011: 42). The Dzongu is roughly triangular in shape, bounded by the river Teesta on the south-east, River Talung on the north-east. Towards the west lies the southern part of the Himadri (greater Himalayan ranges) where Mt. Kanchenjunga (8,598 m, world’s 3rd highest Peak) is located (Subrata 2013:20).

The geographical position of Dzongu has accentuated its isolation from the rest of Sikkim. The area has a unique picturesque landscape boasting of diverse snow covered mountains intersected with steep and narrow valleys and gorges that are well drained by swift flowing mountainous streams rich in hydro-power potential. Owing to dense forest cover, the area experiences showers almost throughout the year. The area can be divided into three climatic zones viz. sub-tropical zone, temperate and alpine zones that is extremely rich in bio-

diversity. It borders the Kanchenjunga Bio reserve and has some of the ancient Buddhist monasteries and temples (Subrata 2013: 20).



Fig. 1. Coverage of geographical area under Dzongu Reserve of Sikkim (Source: Google Earth)

The origin of Lepcha community no one can say from where it originated and how it became the mother tongue of Lepcha tribe. Peoples similar to the Lepchas are probably to be found in interior Bhutan (Berreman 1963: 299). The Lepchas believe that the First human Lepcha was created by the idbu dey rum in the mountain of Dzongu. It is cradle of Lepcha civilization as all Lepchas of the world are supposed to have originated from there (Forning 1987: 88). Since Lepchas are originally nature worshippers, all the lakes, peaks, trees are treated as scared; once the Lepcha dies his soul is taken to the peak in Dzongu region where he or she is united with the ancestors (Doma 2010:12).

Since Lepchas are believed to have originated from Dzongu and then migrated to other places. Each and every Lepchas feels that they actually belong to the Dzongu or Lepcha. The most important factor can be attributed for the following.

Table 1

Presenting the chronology of events related to Lepcha protest of Hydel power projects in Sikkim during the period between 2003 and 2008.

Chronology of events related to Lepcha Protest of Hydel Power (2003 to 2008)	
During the year, 2003	The first movement started and Lepchas of Dzongu opposing the project by holding small meeting in the villages.
18 <sup>th</sup> July, 2004	Lepchas of Dzongu fight back the project under the banner of affected citizen of Teesta (ACT)
8 <sup>th</sup> June, 2006	First hearing for Teesta stage III held at chungthang in north Sikkim.
4 <sup>th</sup> September, 2006	ACT seen as an elitist group of educated Lepcha group.
13 <sup>th</sup> September, 2006	Joint inspection team set up of survey at passangdang lower Dzongu.
3 <sup>rd</sup> December, 2006	Affected land owner of Teesta stage III wrote a complaining letter to chief minister about the related for land.
2 <sup>nd</sup> December, 2006	A new association was formed i.e. Concerned Lepchas of Sikkim (CLOS).
12 <sup>th</sup> December, 2006	ACT announced that stage a protest rally at Gangtok.
10 <sup>th</sup> May, 2007	Buddhist Lama formed their group, i.e. Sangha of Dzongu (SOD).
20 <sup>th</sup> June, 2007	Dawa Lepcha and Tenzing Lepcha started hunger strike in front of BL House.
7 <sup>th</sup> July, 2007	West Bengal Lepcha youth was stage a traffic protest nearly two hours.
21 <sup>st</sup> July, 2007	500 strong delegations from Dzongu came at Gangtok to call chief minister.
7 <sup>th</sup> August, 2007	All India Lepchas association in a statement issues.
4 <sup>th</sup> September, 2007	The state government constituted the review committee.
2 <sup>nd</sup> October, 2007	CLOS AND SOD had a joint rally in front of BL house at Gangtok.
16 <sup>th</sup> October, 2007	An official delegation of Dzongu met the chief minister with their demands.
18 <sup>th</sup> January, 2008	Four labourers who work on the Dzongu bank of the Teesta were assaulted and three Lepcha youth were booked for the assault and arrested.
20 <sup>th</sup> June, 2008	Lepcha of Sikkim completed their one year hunger strike.
24 <sup>th</sup> April, 2008	20 pages report of Review committee was tabled and accepted by the state cabinet.
12 <sup>th</sup> June, 2008	The secretary, power & Energy Department, wrote to the ACT president informing him that the state Government had decided to scrap four Hydel projects proposed for Dzongu.

Source: Pema Wangchuk Article “Lepcha and their hydel protest projects”.

Modernization: As the populace become more modernized they started to wear western cloths and other form of attire, started to use more of other languages, dance and music also got changed etc. The designs of the houses have changed, food habit have changed Religious conversion: The Lepcha community got converted to two other religions namely Buddhism and Christianity which result into discontinuation of their old practices. Development; in pursuit of development most of the Lepcha land had been taken over by private companies and government agencies.

The government has now finalised a proposal for executing hydel project in the catchment areas of the river Teesta, which includes considerable areas under Dzongu, under the National Hydel Power Corporation, this is causing great concern to the people who are facing the horns of dilemma (Tamlong 2008:188). In January 2006, when the state government commenced a land survey with a view to acquiring land, the group held a major protest meeting in Mangan, the capital of North Sikkim (Little 2010: 89).

This resulted in loss of traditional form of farming and also infusion of people from other area to the Lepcha habitat resulting into mixed demography. The old ways of life was adjusted with the life style of those who came from other areas. Diminishing growth rate of Lepcha's population in comparison to other communities had also contributed significantly in neglecting the usage of Lepcha language in government office and in private; as a result, Lepcha people receive less importance in political as well as in government system. Threat on the issue of Lepcha identity has been very serious and persistent. It is almost an irreversible process as all the factors are social, economic and political dynamics which keeps changing. Lepcha language can play an important role in preventing the extinction of its identity.

#### 4. Effect of Modernization

When Sikkim merged with Indian union new dimensions or modernization has been emerged in Sikkim like industrial project, Educational system, social and cultural transformation and people started to move from one place to another. Modernization process influences on indigenous community like traditional to agrarian society and created new cultural structural headed for the established structure.

Classical development views nature as a collection of natural resources. In this light, nature, as natural resources, is viewed as an input to production and is value and from an eco-centric perspective, rivers, and nature more generally, have intrinsic value that is independent of human use. From an anthropocentric perspective, rivers have enormous value to those who depend on them for their livelihoods. Yet, the economic analyses underlying large dam projects frequently ignore the value of nature to local people. In particular, difficulties in measuring the informal economy mean that such analyses often do not account for the value nature provides to small-scale economic activities that exist outside of the formal economy. This reinforces the perception that natural resources are underutilized (Smith, Scott W. D. Pearse 2014: vol. 11, no. 1).

The development effects and modernization brought about multidimensional transformation in Sikkim. The standard of living reflects in terms of per capital income, production of primary as well as secondary goods, and spread of health and education services, widening of the network of communication, generation of power, etc. have all shown significant increase. These transformations brought about great impact on the traditional social systems and culture of Sikkim. With the decline of traditional society, hold of religion over the people is also weakening. The attitude of younger generation towards religion is either indifference or for some blind followers.

On the other hand, traditions and culture of a traditional society should be subjected to change and modification according to a need of a situation. They should not remain static but should be dynamic. Than only traditional culture and modernization could be compatible and need not remain poll part of contradictory. Their potential conflict may be diffused through modification and adjustment and their different roles transformed into complementary one. Through skilful management by the leading figures within society, cultural resources could be trapped to be facilitator of the meaningful modernization and development.

Nowadays, due to multidimensional modernization process the land of Dzongu (which is a only reserve land for the Lepchas community) used in various developments project and that development project started to convert human mind from traditional society to agrarian society. Thousands of outsiders now became a semi- permanent resident of Dzongu reserve land. Therefore, the local level conflict occurs between insider and outsider and Lepcha of Dzongu protest the development project under the banner of Affected Citizen of Teesta (ACT).

Sikkim's population is predominated by those of Nepalese origin. They speak Nepali (Gorkhali) and are mostly Hindus. The Bhutias, Lepchas and Limbos are significant minorities. They speak Tibeto-Burman dialects and practice Mahayana Buddhism with large doses of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion. Since 1985, migrants from the other states of India have increased the Hindu population, while a small number of Christians and Muslims are also there. Different communities intermingle freely in Sikkim, and are seemingly inseparable to the visitor.

Migration is a movement of people from one place in the world to another for the purpose of taking up permanent and semi-permanent settlement. In Sikkim outsider migrated because of the pull factor which means May includes something desirable such as nicer climate, better food supply and peaceful state and another reason is because of economic migration which means due to the development and civilization they search for better livelihood and migrated from one place to another place.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, Nepal's migrated in large numbers to British territories throughout northern India to take work in factories and on plantations as well as to reclaim land as colonists at the invitation of Government frontier administrators. Nepalese people start migrated over Assam, Bengal (including Darjeeling District), Bihar and Sikkim (English 1985: 72). Therefore, till today in

Sikkim the majority of Nepalese People increasing high in number and became dominant over indigenous inhabitant of Sikkim. The developmental plans invite new dimensions in Sikkim and actually that was for the betterment and advancement of the people. But side by side development brings new challenges towards Sikkimese people and the recent impact due to the development of mega hydro project which cause conflict between nature worshiper and global forces.

Modernizing agents have played a vital role in eroding the Identity of the Lepcha. Which ultimately lead to a conflict between those who believe in sanctity of the place and original habitat of the Lepchas and those who believe that the only way forward is through bringing project? But, Modernization in itself is much need for development of any society including the Lepchas. However, the Lepchas been relatively docile and God fearing people, who have not been able to sustain the impact of various form of modernization. The carrying capacity of the place and the people are not equipped to face such inroads in their way of life. Moreover, there is also the issue of defining modernization in context of the remote areas.

The Modernization project has divided the minuscule Lepcha community. Largely against the agents, but again large numbers being agent of the government will support globalizing even at cost of their own identity. The effort to prevent the Lepcha culture from vanishing is a continuous process with large number of concerned people working tirelessly towards it. It is the ones who for economic reason who disturb such efforts that have caused more harm. The Lepcha of the world mainly from Darjeeling hills, Nepal, Bhutan and all over the world have supported the natural way of life for the Lepcha. Devastating level, as mentioned earlier large tracts of land have been taken away large number of people from other areas will settle down etc. The ACT has provided free information to the people about the pros and cons of mega projects, which will have a serious impact of the lives of the Lepchas in coming future. ACT has succeeded in awakening the consciousness of the people to deal with such a situation

After initiation of mega hydro project on Dzongu reserve of Sikkim Lepcha of Dzongu organised ad hoc committee under the banner of affected citizen of Teesta on July 18, 2004. ACT started to collecting documents and researching hydel prospects and threats. On December 2, a new association was formed the Concerned Lepchas of Sikkim (CLOS), an association that would play major role in the hydel protests in the ensuing months. Just as CLOS was formed ahead of the rally proposed for December 12, on May 10, Buddhist monks representing monasteries in Dzongu gather at Passanding village in upper Dzongu and formed Sangha of Dzongu SOD (Wangchuk 2007: 34).

The protest reaches the capital, on June 20, 2007, ACT, supported by CLOS and SOD, began a hunger strike at Bhutia-Lepcha house on Tibet road. ACT general secretary Dawa Lepcha and CLOS member Tenzing Lepcha sat indefinite hunger strike while and their hunger strikes announced that their protest would continue till all the hydel projects proposed for Dzongu were scrapped and others in North Sikkim reviewed (Wangchuk 2007: 41). Their core messages of religion,

tradition, culture, environment, and “ownership” prevailed and while they weren’t as explicit as the Sámi with “we came first,” there were several references to Article 371F a law that acknowledges the first rights of the Lepcha and Bhutia tribes endeavour to protect their rights and interests (Little; 2009:48).

On July 11, 2007, Lepcha youth from Darjeeling district of West Bengal, led the Rong Ong Prongzom (Lepcha Youth Organisation) descended on Sikkim’s sole lifeline to the rest of the country – National Highway 31A- and staged a protest there which held up traffic for nearly two hours. The protest was staged on the west Bengal side of the National Highway just beyond the south Sikkim border. On the 250th day of the hunger strike, ACT announced the Lepchas from Darjeeling and elsewhere would be undertaking a pilgrimage march from melli in west Bengal to Dzongu in North Sikkim. Significantly, the opposing arguments have not contested this claim on record, but have only highlighted the Dzongu has never been introduced as a Holy Land in the Past. To this, ACT has argued that the need had never arisen since Dzongu had never been under threats in the past (Wangchuk 2007: 53).

The impact of such development projects on the tribal communities, their lifestyle and identity, socio- cultural and religious, has been simply enormous. In this context, it is pertinent to analyse the recent protests of the Lepcha against the Dzongu- Hydel projects by invoking religion and the religious traditions, in the light of Lepcha reverence to Dzongu as the representation of the Sacred and the hydropower project in Dzongu as the erasure of their socio-religious space (Nepal 2012:110).

Throughout four district of Sikkim, Dzongu which is cones under north district of Sikkim where there are still have a genuine Lepcha who have a more knowledge about their own culture in terms of oral traditions and ritual practices. Dzongu takes up a special place in the discussion of Lepcha culture and preservation of Lepcha traditional life. Therefore, the initiation of development project brought huge modernization impact on Dzongu reserve land of Sikkim. Modernization impact brought dynamic hamper on local people’s way of lifestyles. Because Dzongu is a reserve Land for Lepcha community and the entire resident were Lepcha people and they speak only Lepcha language but due to the development project thousands of outsiders came to that land and mostly they speak Hindi languages.

Table 2  
Issues and Outcome of the Lepcha Protest of Hydel Power Project in Sikkim

Stated objectives	To preserve their holy land, traditional culture or for reserve land.
Additional issues	To protect their identity and preserve their identity
Water related	Mega Hydro power project
Non-water	Impact of environment and 18 <sup>th</sup> sep 2011 earthquake

Therefore, the most and foremost hamper the Lepcha of Dzongu face on conversation with outside people and the changes of in the Lepcha community over the past centuries have left traces on Lepcha culture. Buddhism and Christian religion introduce new values and beliefs, shaking the very foundations of the Lepcha community. Modernization is

needed, but the same time feared, because it brings new ideas and values and forces people to leave the villages in search of higher education and employment.

### 5. Impact of Hydel Projects in Dzongu Reserve

According to the Sikkim's history, Dzongu is a reserve land for Lepcha community which in turn restrain a people belonging outside of Dzongu even Sikkimese people not from Dzongu are required to obtain a permit to visit the reserve land. But, over the year a status of being reserved land for Lepcha have often been ignored or overlooked. For instance, the initiation of mega hydro project has brought thousands of outsiders at reserve land and still they were working out there. Lepcha so love and respect the nature but after the initiation of power project the sanctity of that land have been infringed or destroyed by the modernization project.

Lepcha worshiped the natural phenomenon and after having developmental project at Dzongu reserve the genuine reality and purity of environment turned into development process. The Lepcha of Dzongu faced huge challenges and problem after the initiation of hydro project. Therefore, the Lepchas community first faced the environmental impact and second was on 18th Sep 2011 disaster of earthquake.

### 6. Environmental Impact of Hydel Power Project

Lepchas were an animist people and according to their myth that mother creator create human being from fresh snow ball and after their death their soul will be remain on same place i.e. at mount Kanchenjunga. But that land has to face huge challenges due to the establishment of mega hydro project. First major impact would be the loosing of their land, which is their main source of livelihood and once they lose their land they migrate to other areas and adopt relatively new way of life. Once life style is changed the very essence of one's culture, convention, religion also changes. Particularly, Lepchas in Dzongu are still known as the nature worshiper but due to developmental project like the mega hydro project their trees, land, river and sacred places has been completely obliterated. Religious value system of homogenous society also had to undergo through drastic changes due to these new dimensions which surround them.

Human history has been and continues to be an ongoing relationship between the human race and the natural world, each moulding and remoulding the other. The first precondition of agriculture was the ruthless destruction of native biodiversity and the introduction of new species. Today, human modification of nature continues with the application of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, crossbreeding, genetic modification of plants and the expansion of irrigation (Rudra: 2003: Vol 11 No 1). Sikkim welcomes private developers for developing and exploiting its hydropower potential, which has been assessed to 8000 MW peak with a firm base of 3000 MW. The Sikkim Power Development Corporation Limited has granted permission for 22 different hydropower projects, which will generate 4,924 MW (Dahal 2008:2).

Today as part of the initiative, the government also sponsors

the Lepcha festival of Tendong Lho Rum Faat which is celebrated on 8th August every year. In 2016, when the Khanchendzonga National Park was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO, it was a unique registration for India as this was the first site in India to be ratified as a mixed site which recognized the natural heritage of the region and the communities and their connection with the natural elements like caves, rivers, lakes, etc as a site of Outstanding Universal Value. UNESCO by recognizing the Lepcha reserve as an important part of the core area as well as buffer area of the site has acknowledged these sacred meanings, stories and practices as an integral part of Sikkimese identity (Pezarkar and kritika Sarda 2017:1).

Miss Sonam Doma, a resident of Sudur village at lower Dzongu said that the development project had a connection with environmental impact on Dzongu. Because Dzongu is a reserve land for Lepcha and they were nature worshiper and their emotional attachment with nature has been vanished through the development project. When their land sold out for the project their natural phenomenon also dissolved under the project of mega hydro project.

Each sacred space has a legend attached to it like the aboriginal 'Dreaming'. These legends are stories that are intrinsically linked to the identity of the Lepchas and characterize their perception towards nature and its components. The necessity to preserve the sanctity of a sacred space leads to conservation of the same. The specific sites mentioned below have not been selected on the basis of any criteria but have been chosen for documentation mainly because of the easy access and availability of information through village elders in the limited time and resources available. There are of course innumerable sacred sites within Dzongu, some of which have been documented extensively; all of which point to the intricate link between the Lepcha identity and his surrounding natural environment, efforts to protect and preserve which are driven by not only the fear of irreparable ecological damage to the fragile ecosystem but also by an ever increasing fear of losing their identity with it forever.

### 7. Hydel Power Projects and Earthquake Disaster

As per the government of Sikkim data the magnitude of 18th Sep 2011 earthquake was 6.8 in Richter scale and with focal depth of 19.7kms, the epicentre being at 27.72 N, 88.06 E, in Sikkim-Nepal border region and the timing was 18.10hrs. The most devastating earthquake stuck our state and since the situation at Chungthang the grand zero, and other several affected several affected areas like Bey, Sakong- Pentong in Dzongu, Lachen & Lachung is of complete neglect and utter mismanagement, it became necessary for the affected families to dwell upon the reasons due to which the Saga of suffering has continue. Therefore, the argument that there is no linked between the earthquake and Hydro project is completely wrong. It is proven any doubt that the severity of destruction in chungthang and surrounding areas was compounded by the destructive Mega hydroelectric power project.

Incidentally, it is this factor which imparts to the Himalayas a great deal of 'instability'. The frequent earthquakes in the

north-eastern and northern parts of the country are the result of the unknown convolutions of nature, deep in the bowels of the earth, a major factor being the constant, unrelenting pressure of the erstwhile Indian plate against the erstwhile Asian plate. This point has very great significance for our approach to many aspects of Indian life and development programmes (Ghosh 1992:1455).

Any development project implemented by Sikkim's government such as the Teesta hydroelectric project cannot disregard the indigenous conceptions of the landscape and people's continuing relation with the land as expressed and reaffirmed periodically in rituals in sacred sites. On 3rd December 2001, Tholung temple was the epicentre of the most severe earthquake that has rocked Sikkim in Sacred landscapes in Sikkim / 75 the last century. Thankfully, there were no human casualties although the earthquake triggered severe landslides into the Tholung river and the precarious mountainscape of the Lepcha reserve (Arora 2006: 75).

People are not against the hydel power projects as such. They are against the way these projects are done, the casualness with which the environmental impact assessment is conducted and clearances are given and the way project developers are selected. The location, size and scale of this project, the knowledge and experience of these project developers, the capabilities of project regulating agencies and the way projects have been designed and the technology used have been question all across the fragile Himalayan ecology. Unfortunately, in many cases these issues come up for public discussions only in the aftermath of disasters (Talukdar, S 2011: 1). So, from the above statement we can see the somehow connection of earthquake with Mega Hydro Project.

The recent earthquake in 2011 further suggests that the Dzongu is not suitable for big hydro power projects which envisage heavy construction for damming and tunnelling the rivers through the fragile mountainous terrain of Sikkim extremely prone to earthquakes. Field investigation to this area suggests that the Lepchas are reeling under the losses incurred in Cardamom cultivation whose productivity has fallen. This is the main cash crop of the Lepchas and the Lepchas are looking for other alternatives in order to curb the disorder created in their socio-economic life by the hydro power projects in their area. Some of the settlements located in the vicinity of the existing power plants of Teesta stage V are experiencing reduction in crop production especially oranges. New landslide scars are appearing in the fragile hill slopes and some of houses in the small Lepcha villages are reporting development of cracks due to vibration caused by high power blasting associated with the projects, drying up perennial streams, landslides etc have been reported from this area - Bhasin. Due to tunnelling of the river large quantities of muck has been deposited in the river restricting its flow and increasing the threat to downstream area (Subrata 2013: 22).

The Lepchas feel that the gas used in blasting has adversely affected the productivity of the Cardamom by about 50%. Dust pollution is rampant affecting the flowering and productivity of fruits. The Lepchas residing in the area are aware of the threat associated with the development of hydro-power projects and

at present are concerned for their future and their rights. They have formed a committee called the Affected citizen of Teesta (ACT) to seek redressal for the problems faced by them in the Dzongu, protests are on as the Lepchas are aware of their rights as an indigenous people to be protected by the Indian Constitution, the Supreme court and above all the Human right commission which ensures that the small indigenous communities like the Lepchas have the right to control their resources for their own needs and interest (Subrata 2013:23).

## 8. Displacement and Resettlement

As we have already discussed above that after the initiation of mega hydro project at Dzongu, people has been facing environmental disaster and the trauma of 18th Sep 2011 earthquake. This developmental project has indeed compelled the resident of Dzongu to leave their land either by willingly (selling their land to Hydel project company) or by forcefully (due to 18th Sep. 2011 earthquake and other developmental impact) and had to migrate to other places.

Though, Dzongu has been declared as a reserve land for Lepcha community but the modernization project brought vast changes on homogenous society. Therefore, the term of displacement and resettlement has emerged on homogenous society. This has further been substantiated during my field survey, when I observed that many households in Dzongu sold their land and migrate at Depu Dara near Singtam where they are working in NHPC tunnel.

When mega hydro project established on Dzongu than ACT vice-president (Dawa Lepcha) and Tenzing (Member of CLOS) took initiative to protest the project through Non-violent way. Along with these two Lepcha heroes, the Lepcha youth also joined them and staged a hunger strike in front of BL House of Gangtok. But, the hunger strike itself poses a great challenge before the organizing committee. Since, most of the Dzongu people are farmer and depend on agricultural production for their livelihood, so in the absence of their male member, these families faced a lot of hardship. This has also resulted into the hindrance of their movement from Dzongu to Gangtok.

Tseten Lepcha says that after 1975, Sikkim made a tremendous progress in the field of the transportation, industrialization and modernization also came in Sikkim which simultaneously brought outsider settler in Sikkim. Therefore, due to the modernization impact the indigenous people of Lepcha especially residing in Dzongu suffer more than others residents in Sikkim.

Lepcha of Dzongu worshiped the nature phenomena but after having development project the event of any defilement of a sacred space, there is no organized mechanism to charge penalty or issue a punishment. It is mostly believed that the local deities (of the respective lake, forest, spring or field) will issue the retribution. Locals cite numerous examples of people falling sick because they polluted a lake or damaged a sacred tree etc. The process of collectively drawing a set of rules and regulations to protect the sacred sites has not taken place presumably because the faith in supernatural retribution is so strong. Therefore, the Lepcha of Dzongu said, that after the initiation of developmental project at holy land their sanctity

turns into smog. Due to the push factor some Lepcha of Dzongu migrated over Gangtok and settled for permanently.

Table 3

Outcome of the Lepcha Protest on Hydel Power Projects in Dzongu Sikkim	
2009, Homestay	Tenzing Lepcha established Homestay at Hee-Gyathang lower Dzongu.
2010, Homestay	Gyatso Lepcha established Homestay at upper Dzongu
2008, scrap hydro project.	That is Rangyong, Ringpi, Lingzya and Rukel hydro power projects.
Organic plantation	Cultivate Orange tree and cardamom.
2006, Lepcha community established some active associations.	Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum (RMRT). Renjong Mutanchi Rong Ong Shezum (RMROS). Lepcha Students Associations (LSA) and Mutanchi Lom Aal Shemzum (MLAS).

### 9. Outcome of the Conflict between Nature Worshiper and Modernization

Lepcha of Dzongu were a docile people and shy by nature. They lived in homogenous society with their own customs and culture. But their homogenous society got fractured through the initiation of Mega hydro project. Lepcha protest developmental project under the banner of Affected Citizen of Teesta (ACT) and that homogenous community protest by taking Non-violent movement. Lastly, that movement plays important role into four levels that is from local to state, state to national and national to international level. So, Lepcha people were animism and to protect their identity they fight back with the plan of state government.

During the field visit, one of the respondents Sonamith Lepcha said that their half of the land (which is a reserve land for Lepcha) was sold out for the development purposes and nowadays the remaining land they used on the cultivation of organic plantation. So, from that they want to protect their reserve land and preserve their traditional culture practices. Because Lepcha were a nature worshiper and they had been growing up the emotional attachment with environment. Another respondent, Tseten Lepcha (who is a vice-president of ACT) said that out of six mega hydro project on north Sikkim two projects was scrap through the protest of ACT. Most of the Lepcha of Dzongu belong from the farmer background and they were a traditional minded people and through the political technique Dawa Lepcha would like to promote the environment protest against mega hydro projects.

Out of the total hydro-power projects eight projects are directly or indirectly associated with the Dzongu area where 38 Lepcha villages are located. This area has been assessed to have a capacity of around 2500 MW of electricity. The Teesta stage III, IV, and V projects located in Panam, Rangyong, Rukel, Ringpi and Lingzya are directly or indirectly going to affect the Dzongu. Out of the 38 Lepcha villages located in the Dzongu reserved area the Dzongu village is the holiest place of all which is being directly affected by the Teesta V project (Subatra 2013:21).

The hydro power projects here will take away the holy Teesta from the Lepchas as the projects here are “run of the river”

where the river water is diverted through long tunnels before the water is dropped back into the river at downstream location. This leads to most of the river flowing through tunnels and the river disappears from its original course, thus restricting rituals associated with the river (Subrata 2013:21).

The outcome of the conflict between modernization and nature worshiper is summarised and presented in Annex Table which is self-explanatory.

### 10. Lesson Learned

Today as part of the initiative, the government also sponsors the Lepcha festival of Tendong Lho Rum Faat which is celebrated on 8th August every year. In 2016, when the Khanchendzonga National Park was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO, it was a unique registration for India as this was the first site in India to be ratified as a mixed site which recognized the natural heritage of the region and the communities and their connection with the natural elements like caves, rivers, lakes, etc as a site of Outstanding Universal Value. UNESCO by recognizing the Lepcha reserve as an important part of the core area as well as buffer area of the site has acknowledged these sacred meanings, stories and practices as an integral part of Sikkimese identity (Pezarkar and kritika Sarda 2017:1).

Therefore, Lepchas of Dzongu were learned so many things after having environmental disaster through the process of developmental project. Hydel project occupies the land which was belong for their ancestors. Lepcha of Dzongu will like to utilise their land by established Homestay and through the cultivation of organic vegetables. Lepchas of Dzongu will like to give message to everyone that to bring developmental on society was does not by destroying environmental phenomenon but by using their own land they can bring development on society. Therefore, Tenzing Lepcha who is a president of (CLOS) and Gyatso Lepcha who was recently awarded with the best Homestay award by the state government on World Tourism day they both take initiative to open a traditional Homestay at Dzongu.

Tenzing Lepcha says that the objectives of Homestay is an ensconced in the lush green hills of Dzongu beside the gurgling Rongyung Chu River and commanding a magnificent view of Mt Khangchendzonga, Mayal Lyang Homestay is far removed from the dust and noise of urban existence and promises visitors the magical experience of living in the lap of Sikkim’s pristine natural surroundings. Aimed at promoting sustainable development which does not come at the cost of destroying the fragile ecology, culture and tradition of Sikkim, the Homestay has received much appreciation lately with features in national and international publications.

They always felt that development can be achieved without destroying our fragile ecology, culture and tradition. This is how we came up with the idea of Mayal Lyang. We want that everyone to see how beautiful this place is and how intricately our way of life is linked to the nature. We strongly feel that such a venture can bring sustainable economic development to Dzongu and can empower our community, without affecting the pristine nature around us in any way. This is our opinion is the



best way to move forward and ensure that we pass on this beautiful gift of god to our future generations. We believe that conservation of nature is equally important to all of us because we all live under the same sky and walk the one earth.

Gyatso Lepcha who is ACT activist-cum-entrepreneur and his wife Samsay started Homestay on 2010, their objectives are they believe that to know a place, first we have to its people. The aim of the Homestay is that their guests understand their culture, traditional, the surrounding they live in, and everything else that is so dear to them. They want that everyone to see how beautiful this place is and how intricately our way of life is linked to the nature. Mr Gyatso Lepcha had a website for Homestay and through the help of website Gyatso reaches out to the potential visitors who can also plan their itineraries and make booking online.

The food served to visitors are 100% organic grown in the family's own kitchen garden or collected from the forests and farms of Dzongu. In fact, visitor can even take a tour of the farms where they can sample for themselves the farming and food preparation. Among the recreational activities on offer is a complete tour of Dzongu. Visitor can also visit at the Rongyung Chu River, visit monasteries, go for short hikes, visit the hot springs or simply relax amidst the Home stay's green surroundings and soak in the breathtaking view. Cultural shows are also arranged depending upon the number of visitors. Since it started in 2010, Mayal Lyang has hosted many groups of visitors. But the high point certainly was when the royal family of which was later featured by the popular History channel. This ecotourism venture is being eagerly sought out by those desiring the real Sikkim.

Through the established of Homestay at Dzongu Mr. Gyatso Lepcha and Tenzing Lepcha would like to give message towards Lepcha youth that to preserve and to protect Lepcha identity first we have to practice our traditional way of life. The mottoes of that Homestay are those tourists who went there for their visiting they have a place to stay there that is (Homestay) and Lepcha youth serve them through physically and through moral support. Not only through Homestay the Lepcha of Dzongu want to protect their reserve land but through plantation of orange and cardamom tree they tried to preserve their traditional life (Zulca, M. 2013: 36-37).

The Renchong Mutanchi Ringring Kurzum (Sikkim Lepcha Literacy Association) supported the order Lepcha associations in Gangtok, but was not active at the time. Other associations were previously established, but have since ceased to exist, whereas new ones have been founded since 2006. The large number of associations demonstrates their importance for the community, but the continual fluctuations of associations, fractions and committees are also signs of their weakness. These different Lepcha associations are all involved in activities to try and enhance the social and economic conditions of the Lepcha of Sikkim and they preserve, promote and modify Lepcha culture (Bentley 2007: 73).

The RMRT and the RMROS are strongly active in preserving the various political rights the Lepcha have been granted in the past century and in requesting new protection, such as the primitive tribal status and fifty percent of the BL (Bhutia and

Lepcha) reservation. Mutanchi Lom Aal Shezum (MLAS) was only association embedded in Lingthem village and the Lepcha community of Dzongu and it is often simply called the 'NGO'. The Lepcha community in Dzongu embraces most activities of the MLAS, because they combine cultural enhancement projects with programs for livelihood generation and health improvement (Bentley 2007: 74).

Nowadays, ACT call their protest towards development project is silent protest and with the preservation of own land they tried to protect their reserve land. Homestay is a vigorous and freshly example of silent protest of ACT and Lepcha of Dzongu learned so many lessons after having conflict between nature worshiper and modernization. Development is a needed possession in every sphere and which bring both advantages and disadvantages situation on established value system. Therefore, mega hydro project which was constructed on Dzongu reserve of Sikkim brought so many disadvantages situation among the Lepcha community. Though development project is betterment for the society and which socialised human life in different way. But most of the noticeable point, during the time of Chogyal and democratic set up Lepcha got authority that Dzongu to be their reserve land.

That same reserve land used for the development project and the attachment of Lepcha toward their nature became infringed. Today, Lepcha of Dzongu protest the development project by establishing Homestay (which vision is to portion the visitor through Lepcha's traditional way) and through cultivate organic plantation on remain land. Dams and development conflict brought solidarity among Lepcha of Sikkim, Darjeeling and rest of the world. Nowadays, among Lepcha youth generation the curiosity toward their traditional way of life has been rise up and recently they open new webpage i.e. "U Made Us Proud" where only Lepcha's oral, traditional and modern historical collection are recorded.

## 11. Conclusion

Lepcha of Dzongu were animism by religion and they had a homogenous society and around 7000 Lepcha population reside on reserve area of Dzongu which is located in north-east district of Sikkim. Lepcha clam themselves an indigenous inhabitant of Sikkim and during the time of Chogyal that Dzongu were declared a reserve land for Lepcha community. Therefore, Lepcha of Dzongu try to preserve, promote and modify their traditional way of life. But in Sikkim, a new class of people has emerged who cut across the boundaries of caste, ethnicity, languages and religion. The emergences of this class are facilitated by equality of educational and occupational opportunity. The Lepcha of Sikkim are the inhabitant of the society and had solidarity behind all its socio-economic, educational and political activities. The Lepcha of Sikkim realised the long term harmful effects of the new class of people and have become conscious of the need to preserve their traditional and their cultural practices.

Dzongu is a reserve and holy land for Lepcha community but after the initiation of mega hydro project the purity of that land turned into impurity. Due to the developmental project, the Lepcha of Dzongu faced environment impact and natural

disaster on 18th Sep 2011. The environmental impact creates displacement term among the homogenous society and Lepcha of Dzongu leave their place by willingly and by forcefully. Therefore, Lepcha of Dzongu protest the developmental project under the banner of affected citizen of Teesta.

The initiation of mega hydro project creates conflict between natural worshiper and developmental project and that conflict brought solidarity among Lepcha community. Through the mega hydro project Lepcha of Dzongu learned numerous things and established most active associations within Dzongu that is Renjong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum (RMRT). Renjong Mutanchi Rong Ong Shezum (RMROS). Lepcha Students Associations (LSA) and Mutanchi Lom Aal Shemzum (MLAS). Those organizations were actively preserving their various socio-economic, political and traditional way of life. Within Dzongu people became more conscious and concerned about their identity and they started to preserve their reserved land through Homestay and cultivate organic plantation. They always felt that development can be achieved without destroying our fragile ecology, culture and tradition. Therefore, Gyatso Lepcha and Tenzing Lepcha took initiative and established home stay at upper Dzongu and Hee-Gathang lower Dzongu.

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