

**Stories of the Lepcha
Narratives from a Contested Land**

By

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Kerry Little / 01003831

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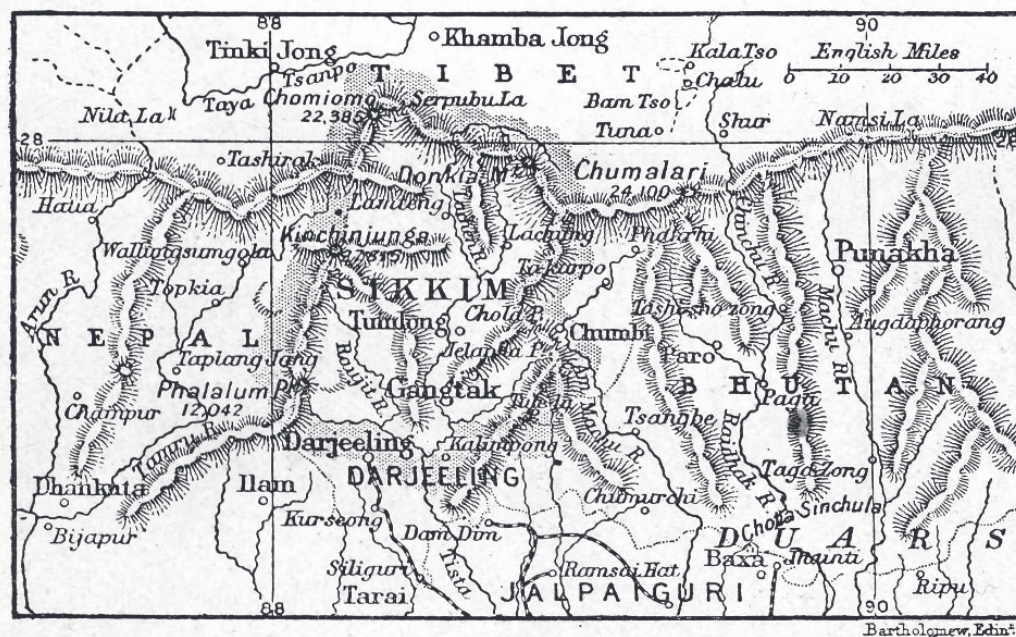
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Maps



Old map of north-east India and borderlands before the Darjeeling tract was annexed from Sikkim.



Sikkim showing Dzongu¹

¹ Map of north-east India sourced from <http://www.facebook.com/Vintage.Sikkim?fref=ts>
 Map of Sikkim including Dzongu sourced from www.weepingsikkim.blogspot.com

Sikkim's power projects²

² Nature magazine, vol 492, Issue 7492, 5 Dec 2012
<http://www.nature.com/news/flood-of-protest-hits-indian-dams-1.11932>

Abstract

In this thesis I explore the impact of modernity on the Lepchas, the Indigenous people of Sikkim, a small state in India's eastern Himalayan region. My focus is on youth from the Lepcha reserve Dzongú, in particular a group of Lepcha protestors, from Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) who opposed the development of mega hydroelectric dams on their land.

I wanted to learn how Lepcha youth absorbed education, global media, technology and global popular culture influences while participating in their culture. At the time I entered the world of Lepcha youth from Dzongú they had been at the tipping point of shifting away from their culture, but were disrupted by a crisis (the dams) that returned them there. I asked: Does their transition to modernity have to be a transition away from their culture?

The answer to this question from the Lepcha youth activists was no. However, without the threat of the dams, which were the catalyst for their protest, and their re-engagement with and reframing of Lepcha culture, it may easily have been yes.

To understand how the Lepchas navigate the changes brought to their society due to globalisation I have recorded Lepcha narratives from the past and the present and, through the lens of the young activists and their protest, (which included a long hunger strike) I examine the role of narrative and place in strengthening Lepchas' connection to their identity.

I have endeavoured to explore the young Lepchas' political and cultural awakening under the light of several fields of scholarship that explore identity, space, place and connections between each of these; and, through the friendships I made during my research period. As this is a non-traditional PhD I have asked and answered the questions in this thesis through the fragments of my traveller's narrative and also, most significantly, in the Lepchas' own stories related here.