

# The Tamang Selo: an Introduction

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Tamangs are a Tibeto-Burman group and one among many ethnic groups that constitute the 'Nepali' community.<sup>1</sup> In India Tamangs live along the Himalayan belt but are found in large numbers in the hills and Dooars of Darjeeling and Sikkim. Tamangs have their own distinct Tamang language, culture, history and traditions.

The Tamang language is not a scripted language and has been written in the Tibetan and Devnagari scripts only relatively recently.<sup>2</sup> A modified version of the Tibetan script has been recently accepted as the script for the Tamang language. The Tamang language is one of the endangered languages of the hills of North Bengal. According to the 2001 census of India, there are 15,00,000 Tamangs in India but only 17,494 speakers of the Tamang language.<sup>3</sup> The Tamang language and Tamang literature are part of the primary education system in schools run by the Sikkim government but the Tamang language is not recognized by the West Bengal education boards.

The repository of Tamang literature is largely oral and without a fixed authorial identity. The belief system and culture of the Tamangs are embodied in the songs and tales that are handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Modified and multiple versions of myths, stories, histories and understandings of the tradition exist. This is

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