

Gorkha Identity and Separate Statehood Movement

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Abstract

The present Darjeeling District was formed in 1866 where Kalimpong was transformed to the Darjeeling District. It is to be noted that during Bhutanese regime Kalimpong was within the Western Duars. After the Anglo-Bhutanese war 1866 Kalimpong was transferred to Darjeeling District and the western Duars was transferred to Jalpaiguri District of the undivided Bengal. Hence the Darjeeling District was formed with the ceded territories of Sikkim and Bhutan. From the very beginning both Darjeeling and Western Duars were treated excluded area. The population of the Darjeeling was Composed of Lepchas, Nepalis, and Bhotias etc. Mech-Rajvamsis are found in the Terai plain. Presently, Nepalese are the majority group of population. With the introduction of the plantation economy and developed agricultural system, the British administration encouraged Nepalese to Settle in Darjeeling District. It appears from the census Report of 1901 that 61

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dynastic histories are interlinked with the Malla dynasty which with its three branches, ruled Nepal Valley "up to the conquest of the country by the Gorkhas, virile group of Brahmanised and mixed Mongoloids." 7 Another group of Malla Kings of Dullu and Jumla ruled in West Nepal from 13th to 17th centuries. "They were not Kirata Origin-they were Aryan speaking Khasas of the Himalayas, strengthened by kshatriya (Rajput) emigrants from India." 8 The descendants of these Mallas submerged among the Khas-Kura or Gorkhali speaking people of Nepal. But majority of people of Nepal spoke language where Gorkhali speaking people formed a small section. According to Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, "after Yaksha-Malla's time C. 1474 A.D. Nepal kingdom disintegrated into four principalities i.e. Bhatgaon, Banapa, Kathmandu and Patan and finally succumbed to Gorkha in 1768. 9 But according to Tanka Bahadur Subba long before 1768 Drabya Shah established the Gorkha dynasty in 1559, after killing the king belonging to 'Chetri tribe'. 10 It seems that taking chances of the weak positions of Malla kings the Gurkha races managed to carve out a niche within the Nepal Kingdom under the Mallas. But the Gurkha dynasty under Drabya Shah did not experience any remarkable achievement until Prithivinarayan Shah who became king in 1742. Little is known about the actual origin of the Gurkhas who are said to be of Rajput origin. It is pertinent to comment that the Gorakhnath sect which had a sizeable number of followers all over Northern India during the 14th and 15th centuries had a strong connection with the Gorkha Community which settled in Nepal.

During the reign of Prithivinarayan Shah apart from Mewari, Gurkha races the "Magars, Khas and Bagale Thapa clans", Pandes clans were also in existence. In "Dibyaupadesh" Prithivinarayan referred about of four castes in his army: Bahun, Khas, Magar and Thakuri. 11 Darjeeling district in the pre-colonial era was under both Sikkim and Bhutan. After the aggression of the Gurkha king a non aggression pact was concluded between king of Nepal and king of Sikkim sometime before 1775. But Nepal violated the pact in order to maximize the earnings from "the custom duty by controlling the Indo-Tibetan trade routes to Chumbi Valley lying through Sikkim". 12 At this juncture the Gurkha incursion took place up to the Teesta River. When the Gurkha army marched towards the headquarters of Panchen Lama at Tashilhumpo monastery, the Chinese Government decided to intervene. The Gurkha army was routed and the king of Nepal asked for peace. But Sikkim and Bhutan had to wait till the signing of Treaty of Segauli of 1815 (signed between king of Nepal and English East India Company) to regain their territories which were previously lost to Gurkha king. According to the Treaty then, Darjeeling hills and plain areas were again attached to Sikkim and the Kalimpong area was restored to Bhutan king. Later on in 1817 when East India Company's insist king of Sikkim was forced to part away with plains area East of Mechi River and west of Teesta, conforming of the present Siliguri subdivision it caused much furor at the Sikkim's court. Soon the colonial Government contemplated of transforming the Darjeeling hill station into health resort and further the prospect of inauguration tea plantations in Darjeeling hill areas also seems to be a lucrative venture.

So these two factors propelled the colonialists to take over the whole of Darjeeling district. It has been aptly remarked that "To grant and Lloyd, Darjeeling indebted for the discovery of the possibility of this bracing climate to reinvigorate the wearied workers of the plains; to Lloyd for the censor of the hill territory, and to Campbell for the introduction of the tea plant?" 13 Finally on 1.2.1835 the king of Sikkim parted away the Darjeeling hill areas to East India Company and by the treaty of Sinchula signed between Bhutan and East India Company, Kalimpong subdivision was annexed to British India. Thus the present Darjeeling district was formed in 1866. 14 After the formation of the district the British declared the whole of Darjeeling District as a non-regulated area i.e. the Colonial laws, regulations applicable in other permanently areas of Bengal presidency will not be applicable in the Darjeeling District.

Soon the Nepali exodus from the adjoin country i.e. Nepal started to vindicate the Colonial objectives i.e. to form the Gurkha military regiment and secondly to populate the Nepali workers in the tea garden areas of the District. The Potentiality of Gurkhas to be military race was first realized by the British. In 1902, in Gorakpur (Bihar) and in Ghoom (Darjeeling) headquarters of military recruitment centres were established with the explicit objective of enlisting Gurkha youths to the army. Although Gurkhas were enlisted as soldiers but Mangars, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus were also counted as the valued soldiers of British Indian Army. It is here interesting to note that Tanka Bahadur Subba categorically states that Mangars and Gurungs were original residents of Central Nepal and Rais and Limbus were of Eastern Nepal. 15 At the outset as neither the Gurungs or Rais, Limbus can claim to be Gurkha origin. Nepal was unwilling to also its people to be recruited by the British, the Colonial Government used to lure away the Nepali youths from Nepal and settle them in Shillong, Darjeeling and Dehradun. After establishment Rana regime in 1846 and after the clearance made through Nepalli Royal notification of 1885 and 1888 there was no hurdle in respect of recruiting Gurkha soldiers.

So, the Colonial policy of Gurkha recruitment and the establishment of Tea Plantation area in the Darjeeling District hill areas begun to displace the Lepcha People; the original inhabitant of Darjeeling. In 1928 Capt Lloyd and J.W. Grant while visiting the old Gurkha station in Darjeeling found few instances of Lepcha houses but not any Nepali house. Further over whiling names in the Darjeeling hill areas indicate their Lepcha origins. The name Darjeeling is clearly a corruption of Dorje-Ling, which means the land of 'Dorje', 'the mystic thunderbolt of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhism'. 16 Col. Wadel writes "the oldest names are found to be of Lepcha origin?" 17 Lepchas who speak language of Tibeto-Burman origin are of Eastern Nepal and the district of Darjeeling and some small territories if Bhutan are claimed to be the original homeland of the Lepchas." 18 That the use of Lepcha language and script was in vogue in Darjeeling hills is being vindicated by the fact that on 12.10.1838 Lloyd as

agent of the Company in Darjeeling circulated an order of the king of Sikkim pertaining to rent collection for the local people and that order was circulated through Bengali, Hindi, Persian and Lepcha languages. Incidentally both Lepcha language and scripts were used in this respect.

In 1840 Campbell estimated the Lepcha population in Sikkim about 3,000. In 1872 the Lepcha population of the Darjeeling district 4% of the total population i.e. 4,952 out of the total population of 94,712. Although in 1941 the Lepcha population rose to 12,470 but it proved to be a paltry figure in comparison to immigrant Nepali population in the Darjeeling District.

The Nepali immigrant settlement accompanied by Nepali language in Darjeeling created separate cultural space in the district. It is to be noted that apart from the Nepali; Rais, Limbus, Tamang, etc. had separate language of its own. Due to smaller presence of Bengali people in the hill areas virtually there was no remarkable influence of plains people culture on hill areas. Further the influx of Chetri and Brahmin migration from Nepal made the presence of Hindu places of worship a common feature. Further the settlement of military personnel in the Darjeeling District helped to solidify the ethnic unity. During the Colonial period the Gurkha identities got currency due to efforts made by ex-military officials i.e. Major Kalu Newar, Subedar Major Harikrishna Gurung, Subedar Dilli Bahadur Gurung, Colonel Pratap Tamang and Chaptain Bam Bahadur Gautam.

Equally it is not clear the actual number of Gorkha community in India. Even about the nationality of Gorkhas either Tanka Bahadur Subba or Prem Poddar are sure about it. While Tanka Bahadur Subba stated "Gorkha" or "Gorkhali" may very much mean the inhabitants of Nepal, India or any other country. There is no reason whatsoever to believe that this term indicated Indian nationality." 19 Prem Poddar a well known literary figure stated "I use the word Gorkha (or the neologism 'Gorkhaness' coined here) as a self-descriptive term that has gained currency as a marker of difference for Nepalese living in India as opposed to their breather and sister in Nepal. Gorkhaness then becomes synonymous with India Nepaleseness but inverts only degrees of differential commonalities with Nepali enclaves and Diasporas Nepaliness." 20 In 1909 on the eve of the Indian Council Act, the leaders of the Hill people pressed to the Colonial Government to maintain the statuesque in the hill areas i.e. the "Scheduled district" status should not be altered. With the establishment of the Hillmans' Union in 1907 under the president ship of S.W. Ladenla, the politics of exclusive ethnic identity got a new lease of life. The Hillmans' Union which proved to be loyal to the Colonial Government; never tried to associate themselves with the nationalist movement. It demanded for the creation of a separate administrative unit comprising the Darjeeling District and part of Jalpaiguri District which was taken away from Bhutan in 1865. The Hillmans' Union even expressed the desire for the formation of North East Frontier Province by joining Assam Duars and hill territories adjoining to the east of Bhutan. The main nationality behind these demands clearly had linguistic, racial and climatic ("the plains are entirely unsuited to the hill people, who are unwilling to go to the plains" factors. 21 The Hillmans' people's organization which had clearly an elitist background represented conservative mentality for its express willingness to remain in a backward state i.e. remaining within the non-regulated periphery. So such an attitude was opposed by Kalimpong Samity under Sardar Bahadur Bhindal Dewan and People's Association led by P.M. Pradhan. Prem Sing, N.P. Kumain, Lachman Singh, Activists of Hillmans' Union (1917) who disfavoured this separatist demand, disclosed that "they were forced to sign on the memorandum at the instigation of Dr. Graham, a noted European educationist settler of Kalimpong region and A. Tshering, a Government agent. 22 The tea planters had vested interest in the nonregulated status of the district so the Darjeeling Planter's Association, European Association and Hillmans' Association combined team, March 1920 to give full support to the Hillmans' Association's memorandum which asked for separate administrative unit. Along with this demand the contributions made by the Gurkha soldiers for Pox Britannica was repeatedly emphasized to gain the Imperial British sympathy. Thud Hillmans' Union which comprised of Nepali, Lepcha, Bhutia origin always proved to be catalyst in fulfilling the British designs. The British on the other hand used this organization to thwart the spate of nationalist movement in the hill areas of Darjeeling District.

Although the actual year of establishment of All India Gorkha League (AIGL) is 1923, but its real beginning was from 15th May 1943. On this date a formal meeting was held at Rink Hall, Darjeeling and D.S. Gurung was made its president. On February 1, 1944 D.S. Gurung sent a memorandum to Viceroy Wavell where he expressed the concern about the uncertain future of the Gurkhas "who have not been recognized a community in India". 23 AIGL's agitational politics which made Hillmans' Association quite irrelevant rallied around two agendas-(1) the recognition of the Nepali language and the conferment of citizenship on the Indian Gorkhas. Along with its proposal for pertaining away from Bengal it was noted that either-(1) Darjeeling Duars and Assam should form a single province or (2) the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Sikkim and Cooch Behar State should form a separate province.

In 1952 the AIGL highlighted three alternatives i) Darjeeling district should be treated as a single administrative unit directly under centre supervision. ii) Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Sikkim should form a separate province. iii) Merger of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri with Assam. 24 The above mentioned alternatives unanimously favoured separation from Bengal.

AIGL was successful in 1961 in getting the Nepali language recognized as the official language in the Darjeeling hills. In 1967 AIGL supported and joined the United front Ministry and at their insistence the West Bengal state Assembly although passed a resolution endorsing for regional autonomy but remained silent on the nature and extent of the autonomy.

In later phase while the emergence of Sikkim as 22 nd state of Indian Union rekindled the hope, on the other hand the Anti-foreigner movement in Assam made AIGL apprehensive of their citizenship in India. Further the death D.P. Rai in 1983 the party became more or less defunct. Another organization which made the presence strongly in respect of demand for Gorkhaland was Pranta Parishad which was established in April 1980. But due to heterogeneous elements in its leadership and supporters this organization failed to make substantial impact. For this reason its tenure was short lived.

At this phase with the erosion of power of AIGL and Pranta Parishad the grant for creation of smaller

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province particularly in North East India during the premiership of Rajib Gandhi and further concessions given to militant ethnic movements in Mizoram and Assam helped resurgence of ethnic militant spirit among the Nepali people who under the Leadership of Subhash Ghising rekindled the issue of Gorkhaland on national platform. Further the expulsion of the Nepali people from Meghalaya in the early months of 1986 created anxiety among the Nepali people in Darjeeling who saw Ghising as the only messiah who could bearing their dream project Gorkhaland.

The militant organization the Gorkha National Liberation Front under Subhash Ghising had some characteristics. Subhash Ghising appealed to king of Nepal and other countries for support. Further the GNLF movement resorted to violent armed confrontation with the state Government and in this clash the main targets were the CPI (M) activists.

"It is noteworthy that Ghising did not put much emphasis on the traditional demand for inclusion of Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule." 26 Ghising was vehemently opposed to Indo-Nepal friendship treaty of 1950 which made Nepalese according to him refugees on Indian soil. He proposed Gorkhaland for all the hills and Terai areas of the Darjeeling District which were ceded by Sikkim and Bhutan to the British between 1835 and 1865. The provocative speeches of Ghising, the use of the Nepali ethnic symbols e.g. Khukri, the procession, meeting helped to enlist the support of Nepali youths and created a distance between the hill people and the people living the plains.

The immediate the cause of the extremist movement in Darjeeling was the expulsion of a few hundred Nepali citizens from Meghalaya where they were working in Jowai hills coalmine, on the ground that they did not possess necessary entry permits. The All Assam Students Union and All Meghalaya Khasi Students Union launched a movement for the deportation of the foreigners from Meghalaya. The results of this movement, the evicted Nepalese were pushed to the border of Assam. Nepal and Sikkim refused to accommodate them. Only the Nepalese in Darjeeling took up their cause and raised strong voice against unlawful eviction and deportation of the Nepalese of Indian origin. To highlight the issue the hill areas of Darjeeling district observed a one day total band on 20 March, 1986. On 13 April, 1986 several processions converged on Mal where Ghising's inflammatory speech roused the passion of the Nepali youths and hinted an adoption of violent means to achieve their end. 27 The processionists came with kukri in one hand and a flaming torch in the other. On 4 May, 1986 a large number of GNLF volunteers drew blood from their thumbs with kukris to write posters in blood on Gorkhaland. This hard line of the GNLF soon captured the minds of the students, youths and a section of the intellectuals. It proceeded with a definite plan and programmed.

The attitude of the State Government towards the GNLF led movement was revealed in the unanimous resolution adopted at an all party meeting held on 18 August, 1986. Almost all the political parties except Gorkha League and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha attended the meeting. As many as 14 parties and 7 ministers including the Chief Minister, Jyoti Bose, attended the meeting. The meeting, "unanimously holds that the Gorkhaland movement led by GNLF is divisive, antipeople, anti-national and anti-state. This movement has done immense harm to the interest of the Nepalispeaking people during the last few months. As a result, the economy of the district of Darjeeling has been very adversely affected. This meeting condemns this agitation in strong term." 28 The GNLF insisted on the formation of a separate state. On July, 1988 all the delegates of GNLF unanimously resolved to abandon the "do or die" struggle, threatening bloodshed and mayhem in Darjeeling. To paralyze the administration the GNLF gave a 40-day bandh call. To combat lawlessness the state Govt. stepped up its repressive measures and invoked the Anti-Terrorist Act. About 2000 people were arrested under this act. Violence and counter violence continued in the hill areas and the common people were disgusted with bandhs and violence.

This bandh in the hills suffered terribly due to the shortage of food, drinking, fuel etc. Moreover, the agitation cost over 300 lives and it caused the loss of about Rs.150 crore worth of property. In this situation everyone wanted the end of this type of movement. 29 Under this socio-economic compulsion the GNLF insisted on a settlement on the basis of its demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland within the framework of the constitution.

After two years (1986-1988) of violent separatist movement with the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). This Council was the outcome of the signing a tripartite agreement on 22nd August, 1988 between the Central Government of India represented by C.G. Somiah, the Union Home Secretary, state Government representative R.N. Sengupta, the state Chief Secretary and Subhash Ghising on behalf of GNLF. The Union Home Minister, Buta Singh and West Bengal Chief Minister Joyti Bose also put their signature on the agreement. By this accord Ghising agreed to "drop the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland." 30 Nevertheless the experiment of creation autonomous District council although praise worth could not function

satisfactorily even at the chairmanship of Ghishin "Practically all developmental functions have been statutorily transferred to the autonomous Hill Council. Any further intervention by the State Government in the "transferred subjects" would be misconstrued as interference." 31 The failure to launch effective developmental measures in the hill areas, the useless expenditures to cater the needs of Ghising and his close associates helped to simmer the discontent of the hill people. Ghising understood at this point realized the necessity of delivering something substantial which would calm the aggrieved hill people.

In the Indian Constitution in articles 244 (2) and 275 (1) there are provisions for Sixth Schedule. By this part or whole of the state could come under Sixth Schedule Status "(2) If there are different Scheduled Tribes in an autonomous district, the Governor may, by public notification, divide the area or areas inhabited by them into autonomous regions." Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram where there are tribal belts, Sixth Schedule Status was given there. But when Subhash Ghising clamoured for Sixth Schedule Status in the hill areas of Darjeeling District it had neither support from demographic pattern of the hill areas or the hill people. Nevertheless after a tripartite accord between West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil and Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Chairman Subhash Ghising there was a centre announcement about granting of Sixth Schedule Status to the Darjeeling Hill Council which would ensure greater autonomy to the governing body in the Darjeeling hill districts. Incidentally through the above mentioned accord the Darjeeling district councils were entrusted with more powers than the autonomous district councils of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. Thus the misgoverned and ineffective part played by D.G.H.C., the public displeasure caused by granting of Sixth Schedule Status already paved the ground for the emergence of Second force in the hill areas. The winning of Prasant Tamang is a T.V. Reality Show and the active role played by Bimal Gurung an andante follower of Subhash Ghising led to the emergence of the former as the mouth piece of hill people.

Bimal Gurung's Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) barring direct military confrontation with state Government followed the path of this mentor's tactics i.e. Subash Ghising in calling sudden bandhs in the hill areas, holding successful huge rallies thus parlaying the economic stability not only of the Darjeeling hill areas but also of Sikkim. A stretch of the national Highway (NH) 31 A that leads to Sikkim falls in the Darjeeling Hills and naturally when indefinite bandhs (strike) are called this lifeline of Sikkim is also blocked and thus "The developments in the hills of West Bengal left the Government of Sikkim with no alternative but to advise tourists to leave Sikkim-otherwise, they were in danger of being indefinitely held up in the state." 33 Although in the previous Association activities i.e. Hillman's Association, All India Gorkha League (AIGL), Pranta Parishad and particularly in GNLF's programmed had implicit ethnic feelings but they were not allowed particularly under Ghising's leadership to degenerate into an ethnic conflict. Bimal Gurung, Rashan Giri's provocative speeches, their demand to include Siliguri town (which is mainly composed of Bengali community) and the whole of Duars in the proposed Gorkhaland helped to fuel the ethnic conflict between the plain and the hill people.

Encouraged but its successful rally at the outskirts of Siliguri on May 7, 2008, the GJM's demanded to hold rally in Naxalbari and when denied they on June 8, GJM supporters blocked the National Highway 31. Members of non-political outfits-the Amra Bangali, Jana Jagaran Manch and Jana Chetana Manch protested and thus there were violent street fights in various parts of Terai i.e., Bagdogra, Naxalbari and Panighata. The ethnic strife got a momentum with the announcement of 48 hour bandh in Siliguri and Doars called by the Amra Bangali in response to GJM's announcement of "60 hour relaxations of the shutdown in the hills to facilitate stocking up on essential commodities." 34 After this there was a direct confrontation between Bengali and Nepali people in the Siliguri town. Such ethnic conflict even spiraled to neighbouring Duars region where along with Bengali people, Adivasi people too taught with the Nepali people in Oodlabari, Malbazar towns.

It is here pertinent to comment that the demand include the whole of Doars in the proposed Gorkhaland created further rupture in the erstwhile amicable relation between the tribal and the Nepali people in the Duars and has led to the emergence of Adivasi Bikash Parishad under the leadership of Rajesh Lakra.

Although at the outset state Government's repeated to appeal to GJM to hold bilateral talks have gone astray who insisted on tripartite talks between the Centre, state and the leadership of GJMM, but finally on June 27, 2008, there was a meeting between GJM Centre Committee member Amar Lama, Assistant General Secretary, Raju Pradhan and the Chief Minister of West Bengal Buddhadev Bhattacharya. Amar Lama after the meeting announced "Our demand is Gorkhaland and nothing short of that is acceptable to us and we will continue our democratic agitation until we get Gorkhaland." 35 At the same time the Chief Minister of West Bengal announced that the state Government had no problem if tripartite talk is held involving the centre. After this two tripartite talks were held in New Delhi involving the Centre, state and GJMM, but nothing tangible Breakthrough was visible.

But certain recent developments caused pressure in the agitation movements of Gurung i.e. the flip flop attitude in respect of sudden announcement and suspension of bandhs causing immense hardship to common people as well the tourism industries, but brutal killing of Madan Taman, Supremo of All India Gorkha League, suppression of alternative voices in the hill areas have caused frustration in the hill areas.

On the otherhand, Adivasi Bikash parishad is in favour of inclusion of the Indian constitution. But Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Bikash parishad opposition to the inclusion of Terai-Duars in proposed Gorkhaland, a large section of Adivasi population has formed a new organization named progressive peoples party which is favour of including Terai-Duars with in Gorkhaland with some reservation. P.P.S. President Mr. Kalindi said "with a view to develop our areas and betterment of the people belonging to our communality still we go with the

G.J.M.M. keeping in mind if the interim setup conserve the purpose. But we do not support their demand for separate Gorkhaland and we do not allow them to claim our land as Gorkhaland.” 36 He was successful to win the Kalchini Assembly seat in the last Bidhan Sabha election.

The G.T.A.

(Gorkhaland Territoria Administration) was the outcome of the signing a tripartite agreement on 18 th July, 2011 at Darjeeling in the presence of Shri P. Chidambaram, Hon’ble Union Home Minister, Miss Mamata Banerjee, Hon’ble Chief Minister and Bimal Gurung, President, G.J.M.M. It is a temporary settlement, after signing the treaty Bimal Gurung said our main objective will be achieved Gorkhaland.

Future will tell whether G.J.M.M. will successful in achieving a separate state. G.J.M.M.’s main achievement is that it has been successful to bring the Terai-Duars in the context of the Gorkhaland movement and at the same time G.J.M.M. has shown its ability to unify the indigenous Indo-Mongoloid people and a section of the tribal workers of tea gardens in favour of Gorkhaland movement.

3 Notes and References

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