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ETHNIC IDENTITY AND THE STATEHOOD MOVEMENT IN WEST BENGAL: A CASE STUDY OF GORKHALAND MOVEMENT

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Abstract: When a group of people shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language and such then that group of people can be termed as ethnic group. An ethnic group is generally a minority group in the larger society. Though the constitution of India has included many provisions to safeguard the interests and entity of the all sections of people living in the country, however, it was seen that many ethnic groups expressed their dissatisfaction over several issues and agitated time and again for the creation of a 'separate state of their own' within the Indian territory what they considered as the latest means to fulfil their aspirations. And in many cases the ethnic groups were successful in getting their demand of separate state fulfilled, such as, Nagaland, Mizoram etc. Gorkhaland Movement was one such movements that aims to create a separate state out of the hill regions of Darjeeling and the Dooars region of Jalpaiguri (the major portion of Dooars region is now in Alipur Duar District) in West Bengal within the Indian territory on the basis of Gorkha ethnic identity that has its genesis long before the partition of India in 1947. The movement was formed in line with the ethnic, linguistic and cultural sentiments of the people who wished to be recognised as 'Gorkha'. The present paper aims to make a case study of the Gorkhaland Movement between the lines on the basis of the facts available.

Keywords: Ethnic, Identity, Statehood, Movement, Gorkhaland, West Bengal.

Introduction

The history of Darjeeling had many twists and turns since its creation in 1835. The English East India Company acquired Darjeeling in 1835 which was previously a part of Sikkim and for a brief period of Nepal. Darjeeling was a part of the Chogyal dominions of Sikkim before the 1780s. The Gorkhas of Nepal from 1780s made several attempts to capture the entire region of Darjeeling and by the beginning of 19th century they had overrun Sikkim as far as eastward as the Teesta River and had conquered and annexed the Terrain. The Nepalese began to settle in Darjeeling and Kurseong after their occupation by Nepal. However, English East India Company came into the way and started preventing the Gorkhas from capturing the whole of the northern frontier that resulted into the outbreak of the Anglo- Gorkha war in 1814. The Gorkhas lost the battle and signed the Treaty of Sagauli in 1815 and according to the Treaty; Nepal had to cede all the territories, captured from Sikkim, to British East India Company. The Company, however, handed over those territories to Sikkim in 1817 through the treaty of Titalya and guaranteed Sikkim's sovereignty. In 1835, through a 'deed of grant', Darjeeling and Kurseong were taken back from Sikkim and after the Anglo-Bhutan War and Treaty of Sinchula in 1865 Kalimpong which was a part of Sikkim and was occupied by Bhutan in 1700, was ceded to the East India Company by Sikkim. Darjeeling acquired its present shape in the year 1866. And the new immigrants were neither declared as permanent citizens nor entitled to any right to suffrage.ⁱ

The entire region became a non-regulated area (the difference between the regulated and non-regulated area is that in case of the regulated area all laws and regulations of the land and land revenues are applicable but such is not the case in case of non-regulated area) of the British Empire. Subsequently, the term 'non-regulated' area was changed to 'Scheduled District' and then to 'Backward Tracts' and then 'Partially Excluded Area' from 1935 to the Independence of India. In spite of the frequent changes of the status of the Darjeeling hills it was kept under the overall jurisdiction of Bengal till 1912. 'The likely objective of declaring Darjeeling as 'excluded area' was insulation of the Nepalese from extraneous influence, especially the influence of the burgeoning nationalist movement from outside and safeguarding the huge capital invested in the tea industry in Darjeeling.'ⁱⁱ

The name of Darjeeling has been derived from a Tibetan word 'dorje' meaning thunderbolt and 'ling' means place or land so, the term Darjeeling stands for 'the land of thunderbolt. However, according to an old record during 1757-1763 Tibetan monks constructed a Buddhist Monastery on the top of the Observatory Hills as a branch of the Pemoinchi Monastery in Sikkim and Dorje in



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the first half of Darjeeling is the name of a Lama Dorje-Rinzing who founded that Monastery and which once stood on the Observatory Hill. So, the Tibetans called 'Dorje-ling' or the place where Dorje lives.ⁱⁱⁱ S O Malley noted-

When the British first acquired the hill territory in 1835, it was almost entirely under forest. It was, in fact, estimated that the whole of this tract, comprising 138 square miles, contained only 100 souls. This state of affairs was soon altered by Dr Campbell, the first Superintendent, whose object was to inspire the aboriginal people of the hills with confidence in British rule, to induce the neighbouring tribes to settle in the territory, and to render Darjeeling the commercial centre of the hills... When in 1869 a rough census was taken of the inhabitants in this hill tract, it was found that they aggregate over 22,000 persons.^{iv}

From the 1860's onwards the British Government of India continuously gave encouragement to the Nepalese to migrate to Darjeeling from Nepal to outnumber the Lepchas and Bhotias who, in British perception, were not likely to shift their loyalty from Tibet with whom they were strongly bound by a common heritage, religion, language and culture. On the contrary, the Gorkhas proved their loyalty to the British during the Revolt of 1857 and thus H.H. Risley commented that 'they were friendly to our government.'^v The British Government was interested to get the Gorkhas settled in Darjeeling as they were mostly Hindus and were considered traditionally hostile to the Buddhist Tibetans and Buddhist Bhotias.

The first regular census of the district in 1871-72 expressed that the number of population was further shot up to 94,712 persons with an average density of 81 persons per square mile.^{vi} And the census of 1901 recorded 249,117 populations that meant that the number of inhabitants was by now 2.5 times as greater as it was 30 years ago.^{vii} There were two main causes behind this phenomenal growth of the population – (a) the development of the tea industries and (b) the entry of the migrants to take advantage of the waste land of the district. It was recorded that in 1876 among the inhabitants of Darjeeling some 34 percent population was of Gorkha or Gorkha ethnicity.^{viii}

The Gorkhas were the disciples of great saint, philosopher and Yogi named Guru Gorkha Nath who lived in Northern India. He had gathered many disciples around him whom he taught and trained. With the passage of time, the Nepalese and others who became his disciples came to be known as Gorkhalese or Gorkhas.^{ix} However, the Gorkhas claim their descent from 'the ancient Hindu Rajputs and Brahmins of Northern India, who immigrated in present day Nepal from the West.'^x

The Nepalese who migrated to Darjeeling hills generally belonged to three sub-cultural stocks- Kiratis, Mewars and Gorkhas. Tamangs, Limbus, Rais, Magars, Gurungs and Lepchas belonged to the Kiratis. Though, they were settling in the Darjeeling hills in considerable number but the number of the Bengalis and Biharis who settled there were few and far between. The harsh winter, the westernised ambience of Darjeeling hills and dissatisfaction over the constant harping on the exclusiveness of the hills discouraged the middle-class Bengalese of the plains to settle in the Darjeeling hills. Thus, the cultural impact of the plains people on the people of the hills was not appreciable. As the number of the Chetri and Brahmin migrants from Nepal to Darjeeling hills gradually increased, the number of the Hindu temples started coming into existence in larger number which eventually outnumbered the Monasteries and Churches. And in course of the time, the Tamangs, the Rais and the Limbus came under the influence of Hinduism and many of them changed over to Hinduism retaining some of the Buddhist customs only. Thus, there arose a composite ethnic unity which was further reinforced by the settlement of the some of the huge number of the retired army personnel in the Darjeeling hills and these people helped to develop a sense of ethnic exclusiveness which in course of the time assumed the shape of a movement.

It was in 1907, an organization named Hillmen's Union, comprised of military pensioners, Government servants, traders and rich farmers belonging to the Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha Communities, came into existence in Darjeeling hills. And on the eve of the Indian Council Act of 1909, the leaders of the hill people submitted a memorandum to the Government of India for separate arrangements for Darjeeling. Consequently, the 'Scheduled District' status remained unchanged. The Hillmen's Union sent a Memorandum to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal in 1917 for the creation of the separate administrative unit comprising the present Darjeeling district and the portion of Jalpaiguri district. A suggestion was also placed before the Government for the creation of North East Frontier Province by joining Assam Dooars and hill territories lying to the east of Bhutan and whose people have affinity with the people of Darjeeling hills. And the separation was sought on the grounds of racial, linguistic and even climatic as the hill people were unwilling to go to the plains which was entirely unsuitable to them. Thus, the Hillmen's Union tried to create a separation between the people of the hills and plains on political, cultural and ethnic grounds. They kept themselves away from the ongoing national movement on the pretext of the ethnic and cultural dissimilarities with the rest of the people of India. The British hand also played its part behind this separatist move as in the wake of the Montague Chemsford Reforms of 1919, the Darjeeling Planters' Association, the European Association and the Hillmen's Association supported the memorandum of the Hillmen's Association at a joint meeting in Darjeeling in March 1920 and on ground of the backwardness of the area asked for the



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creation of separate administrative unit outside the representative Government as envisaged by the Reforms Act of 1919. The Government of India Act of 1919 made Darjeeling a ‘Scheduled Area’ and did not approve the demand of a separate province.

In the meantime, the National Movement against the British Government climbed the apex and it forced the British Government to concede another round of constitutional reforms in 1935 but this time also the Hillmen’s Union tried its best to keep Darjeeling away from the operation of the new reforms to protect the identity and the way of life of the Gorkhas. In October, 1930, the Hillmen’s Union submitted a memorandum to Sir Samuel Hoarse, Secretary of State for India which pleaded that the Gorkhas predominate the Darjeeling District and hence, it should be excluded from Bengal and be treated as an independent administrative unit with the Deputy Commissioner as an administrator, directly under the Imperial Government. However, Darjeeling was made a ‘Partially Excluded Area’ by the Government of India Act, 1935 and only one member could be elected to the reserved seat from there.

With an attempt to strengthen the unity among the Gorkhas, Lepchas and Bhutias, an initiative was taken to form the Hill People’s Social Union and accordingly on 23rd December 1934, a public meeting of the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis of Darjeeling was held where the Hill People’s Social Union pledged to foster brotherhood among the Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas. Under the patronage of Hill People’s Social Union, a Nepali periodical known as ‘NEBULA’ where NE stands for Nepali, BU for Bhutia and LA for Lepcha, was launched for promoting a sense of brotherhood among the three hill Communities and Nepali was made the medium of communication with the other non-Nepali people. Furthermore, the Nepalese, Lepchas and Bhutias agreed to accept the common ethnic term ‘Gorkha’ and Nepali Language and this was no doubt a great achievement the Hillmen’s Union attained. So, the Hillmen’s Union, on the one hand tried to keep the hill people aloof from the people of the plains by projecting their distinct solid ethnic ‘Gorkha identity’ and bargained with the British for attaining special safeguard for Darjeeling by drawing reference of their loyalty and services rendered to the British Government. The callousness of the Indian leaders to bring the common people of the hills to the mainstream of the Indian National Movement made the work of the Hill men’s Union easier in doing so.

The communists from the 1940 onwards started stressing the issue of Gorkha identity. And in pursuance of that they developed the plan of a separate state of Gorkhastan and using this as a propaganda plank they created a popular base especially among the tea plantations workers of Nepali origin in the hill areas. Ratanlal Brahman and G.L.Subba, Nepali Communist leaders from Darjeeling became very vocal in the demand for regional autonomy and thus they along with some junior activists formed the district committee of the Communist Party. In 1944, the District Committee passed a Resolution asking for regional autonomy for the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling. After the Resolution was approved by the State Committee of the CPI, Brahman and Subba received encouragement to formulate the ‘Gorkhastan’ plan and made stern attempt to get the plan accepted by the All-India Gorkha League (AIGL), which was established on May 1943 by Dambar Sing Gurung, a representative from the hill in Provincial Assembly with the objective of securing the future of the Gorkhas, in case India attained freedom. The league built up its political agitation on two important issues- (a) the recognition of the Nepali language and (b) conferment of the citizenship on the Indian Gorkhas. The rapid spread of AIGL in Darjeeling and even outside made the Hill men’s Association irrelevant and in due time useless. At the same time, the members of the AIGL planned to ‘merge the district of Darjeeling with the province of Assam’^{xi} or ‘preferred making the area a union territory under the national government’.^{xiii}The plan of the CPI was to form a ‘Free Gorkhastan in Free India’ by joining the ‘three contiguous areas of Darjeeling district, Southern Sikkim and Nepal.’^{xiii}The AIGL, however, consistently opposed the idea of separate Gorkhastan as the AIGL leader Deoprakash Rai explained his refusal to hold up the ‘demand of the CPI’^{xiv} by telling that ‘the people are already waiting for the bugle call not for creation of any ‘sthan’ but for the onward march in the struggle for survival as equal human beings.’^{xv}

After the Independence of India on 15th August, 1947, Darjeeling got merged with West Bengal and a separate District of Darjeeling was formed out of the hilly towns of Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong and some portions of Terrain region. When in 1950, Tibet was annexed by the People’s Republic of China, thousands of Tibetan refugees settled across the Darjeeling District.^{xvi} However, the Independence of India couldn’t put an end to the demand for a separate state for the Gorkhas of Darjeeling. Rather, the movement came to be known as Gorkhaland Movement assumed fierce shape under the leadership of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) and the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJMM).

II

On 29th April 1952, the AIGL submitted a memorandum to the Government of India which presented three alternatives for Darjeeling- (a) to build Darjeeling separate administration unit straightly under the Centre; (b) a separate province with Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Sikkim and (c) amalgamation of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri with Assam. And the common point in all those three alternatives was the separation of Darjeeling from West Bengal.^{xvii} This, however, could not be materialised in fine. However, in 1957



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the Communists in collaboration with the Congress and AIGL submitted a representation to the Prime Minister of India with a view to attaining regional autonomy for Darjeeling.

After the publication of the census report of 1961 which shot the percentage of the Nepali speaking people in Darjeeling to 60 percent, the Nepali language was given the official status of the lingua franca by the State Government in the three hill subdivisions of the Darjeeling district. In 1967, the AIGL joined the United Front Ministry in West Bengal with the expressed objectives of persuading the Government for- (a) Autonomy of Darjeeling district within West Bengal and (b) the recognition of Nepali language. The State Assembly, supporting the claim for regional autonomy, passed a resolution. However, the resolution was quiet on the disposition and extent of the autonomy. To agitate for the Constitutional recognition of Nepali Language in 1972 the All India Nepali Bhasa Samity (AINBS) was formed. Eventually, in 1992, the Nepali Language was incorporated in the Eight Scheduled by the 71st Amendment of the Constitution.^{xviii}

As time rolled on, the AIGL started losing its organizational strength. And with the death of the AIGL supremo D.P. Rai in 1983 the party more or less became non-functional. However, when the AIGL was counting its last days by then (in April 1980) another organization under the name of the Pranta Parishad came into being which appeared to be the first organization to claim in a bold and uncompromising way for a separate state and nothing less than that. Madan Tamang, formerly an AIGL supporter, broke away from that and took the leadership of the Parishad. The first notable task of the Parishad was that it unambiguously submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India in April 1980 for the creation of a separate state of Gorkhaland, consisting of Darjeeling and the Doors of Jalpaiguri, outside west Bengal. But the Parishad could not have an easy passage. It became inconsequential when many of its members assembled under the banner of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), a party formed by Subhash Ghising, an ex-army man on July 24, 1980. The GNLF highlighted many issues and the main issues were:

- (a) Creation of separate homeland for the Nepalese in India;
- (b) Recognition of the Nepali language in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution;
- (c) Abrogation of the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950 with view to removing uncertainty in the Nepalese minds;
- (d) Employment of the ‘son of the soil’, with emphasis on more recruitment in the army; and so on.

After the formation of GNLF, Ghising wanted to test the political situation by boycotting the Municipal Assembly and the Lok Sabha election from 1980 to 1984 but it went unnoticed. Then he wrote a letter to the Prime Minister of India pleading for a separate state of Gorkhaland outside west Bengal. And after few months he sent a telegram to the Chief Minister of West Bengal with the same objective in mind. However, neither the Prime Minister of India nor the Chief Minister of West Bengal did give any ostensible response to these communications.^{xix} By July 1985, Ghising mobilized adequate number of students and youths toward GNLF. On June 2, 1985 he delivered a speech at Kursong that stridently raised the demand for Gorkhaland. His speech at Kurseong was widely circulated in audio cassettes in the hills and attained instant popularity. The reason was that according to treaty of 1950 those who had come to Nepal were not Indian citizens and thus India could disown them at any time. And Ghising succeeded in touching the correct chord by stocking the basic fear in the mind of Nepalese in India through his speech.^{xx} Though Ghising was telling again and again that he was willing to continue the movement for separate state within the frame work of the Indian Constitution in a peaceful way yet very soon GNLF movement took a violent turn. Long term bondhs and severe disturbances became common features of the Darjeeling hills. Even there was a call for 40-day bandh (shutdown) by GNLF that started on 10th February, 1988. D. P. Patra noted, ‘... the mounting tension and the sudden spurt in number of violent incidents gave rise to a grave sense of insecurity accompanied by fear... Evenings were rocked by blast all over... Economic activity reached an all time low... injuries, casualties, destruction of properties, disruption of services and general suffering reached an all time high’.^{xxi} In those days this had become a popular saying that ‘one can be merciful with a snake but not with those who oppose Gorkhaland.’^{xxii}

In the face of near standstill situation in the hill a tripartite agreement was signed by the State Government, Central Government and the GNLF at the resplendent Banquet Hall of the Raj Bhavan in Calcutta on August 22, 1988 which resulted in the creation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). Furthermore, the GNLF, in the overall national interest and response to Prime Minister Rajib Gandhi’s call, agreed to discard the demand for separate state what GNLF called as Gorkhaland^{xxiii} and agreed to issue a call to its cadres to surrender all unauthorised arms to the district administration.

Accordingly, the ‘Arm Surrender’ programme started on 2nd October, the birthday of the worshiper of non-violence. Finally, the poll was held on 13th December, 1988 without major incident and when the result was declared it came to light that the GNLF candidates attained an overwhelming majority. Out of 28 seats, the GNLF captured 26 while the CPI-M could manage only 2 seats. The elected councillors took oath in the last week of December, 1988 and Subhas Ghising became the maiden Chairman of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council.^{xxiv} Though in the Gram Panchayet election that was held in the hills on 26-03-1995, the GNLF



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refrained itself from fighting the election under the banner of the party, yet it set up independent candidates and out of 629 constituencies where the election took place the independent candidates won 577 seats. Out of the remaining seats CPI (M) won 47, Congress won 4 and CPI won 1 only. In the General Election of 1996, the GNLF participated in the Assembly election and won all three seats from the hill sub-division. And again, in the DGHC election held on March 17, 1999 the GNLF won 27 out of 28 seats, the remaining one won by Akhil Bhartiya Gorkha League (ABGL) and thus the CPI(M) was drawn blank. In the Municipal Election, held soon after the DGHC election in May 1999, the GNLF became an undisputed victorious in Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. Ghising, however, in the Parliamentary Election of October 1999 ensured CPI-M's victory in the Darjeeling Parliamentary seat by not setting up any candidate or not giving support to the Congress Candidate.

III

The last Election of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council held on March 17, 1999 and its term was going to expire on March 2004. But Ghising was not in a mode to hold election and he was avoiding election on the pretext of one or other specially on the pretext of Sixth Schedule Status to Darjeeling where only 31 percent residents recorded to be Scheduled Tribe. The Central Government of India was keen to grant Sixth Schedule Status to the Darjeeling hills and accordingly, it signed a Tripartite Agreement with the DGHC and the Government of West Bengal on 6th December 2005. According to the Accord of that Agreement election could be held in the Darjeeling hills only after the implementation of the Sixth Schedule Status. As per the Accord of 2005, Darjeeling Hill Council would have 33 seats out of which 10 seats would remain reserved for the tribal communities, 15 seats would be reserved for the non-tribal people, 3 seats would remain open and 5 members would be nominated by the Governor of West Bengal from the unrepresented communities of whom 2 members must be women. Thus, Ghising sensed a chance of winning more seats in the Council as in 2005 Ghising's own community the Tamangs along with the Limbus were recognised as the Scheduled Tribes. Through the implementation of the Sixth Schedule Status in Darjeeling hills Ghising wanted to perpetuate his reign in the Council.

The proposal of granting Sixth Schedule Status to Darjeeling hills was made in the winter session of the Parliament in 2007. The aim of granting Sixth Schedule Status to Darjeeling hills was to form an Autonomous Hill Council and provide more power and jurisdiction than the present Hill Council. Thus, Ghising's gradual shift from the demand of Gorkhaland to Sixth Schedule Status created discontent among few of his former close associates. So, on the issue of separate Gorkhaland state another round of movement started in the Darjeeling hills under the leadership of GJMM (Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha), formed in October 2007 spearheaded by Bimal Gurung. Bimal Gurung was a former member of the Gorkha Volunteers Corps who fought under the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) for the creation of Gorkhaland State during 1986-1988. He became a councillor from Tukver Constituency under Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) after the murder of the previous councillor Rudra Pradhan. Gurung was also a close aide of Subhash Ghising but he turned hostile to his mentor Subhash Ghising to launch the second agitation. He expressed that the claim of the Sixth Schedule Status for Darjeeling hills is against the popular sentiment of the hill people.

The GJMM started a strong agitation as a part of protest movement against the decision of the Government of India to grant Sixth Schedule status to the hill region of Darjeeling. The GJMM gave a call for an indefinite bandh (shutdown) in this regard. The Bharatiya Gorkha Bhutpurba Sainik Morcha, an organisation formed under the aegis of the GJMM with roughly 40,000 Gorkha Ex-Servicemen, played the key role in the ongoing agitation. In the face of the popular agitations, Ghising resigned as the caretaker administrator of DGHC in March 2008. But his resignation couldn't restore peace as the demand for a separate state including not only Darjeeling Hill but also the Doars attained pace. The proposed Gorkhaland state has 6450 square km and comprises Banarhat, Bhaktinagar, Birpara, Chalsa, Darjeeling, Jaigaon, Kalchini, Kalimpong, Kumargram, Kurseong, Malbazar, Madarihat, Mirik and Nagarkata. Whereas, GNLF demanded an area of 2,256 square miles with 14 lakh people including whole of Darjeeling and much beyond.^{xxv}

The murder of Madan Tamang, leader of Akhil Bhartiya Gorkha League on 21st May 2010, allegedly by Gorkha Janamukti Morcha, created a highly tensed political environment in the hills. This led to a spontaneous shutdown in Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong and many GJMM leaders also resigned from the party on that point. The Government of West Bengal, following the murder of Madan Tamang, threatened strike against Gorkha Janmukti Morcha. The names of many senior leaders of the GJMM came in the FIR and thus the Government of West Bengal hinted discontinuation of ongoing talks over interim agreement with the GJMM on the presumption it has "lost popular support following assassination". However, the victory of GJMM candidates in the three Darjeeling hill assembly seats in the West Bengal State Assembly Election, 2011 held on 18th April 2011 proved that the demand for Gorkhaland was still strong in Darjeeling. The Gorkha Janamukti Morcha Contestants who won the election are Trilok Dewan won from Darjeeling Constituency, Harka Bahadur Chhetri, won from Kalimpong Constituency and Rohit Sharma from Kurseong Constituency. GJMM also extended its support to Wilson Champramari who won as an independent candidate from Kalchini Constituency in Doars.



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After three years of continuous agitation for a separate state of Gorkhaland, on 18th July 2011, a memorandum of agreement was signed at the Pintali Village near Siliguri among the GJMM, Government of India and Government of West Bengal, for the creation of the Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA). A bill was passed in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly on 2nd September, 2011 for the creation of GTA. On 14th March, 2012 the Government of West Bengal issued Gazette notification for the GTA Act. The GTA was to get administrative, executive and financial powers but not legislative power. On 29th July 2012, election was held in the GTA and the GJMM candidates won from 17 constituencies and remaining 28 seats unopposed.

Even after the creation of the GTA, the demand for Gorkhaland did not die down. The creation of Telengana state in 2013 ignited the Gorkhaland Movement afresh and the GJMM gave a call of indefinite bandh (shutdown) from 3rd August. However, as soon as the Calcutta High Court ordered the bandh (shutdown) as illegal the Government of West Bengal sent 10 companies of paramilitary forces to Darjeeling to tackle any violent protest and arrested many prominent leaders of the GJMM.

The Gorkha Janamukti Morcha intensified its agitation in the subsequent period for making Gorkhaland a reality. The Morcha urged the hill people to replace ‘WB’ with ‘GL’ on vehicle number plates. It also asked the shopkeepers of the hills to write Gorkhaland on the signboards of their shops. Under the dictates of GJMM majority of the hill people stopped paying electricity and telephone bills and changed the number plates of their cars and two wheelers.^{xxvi} However, the move of changing number plates of ‘WB’ with that of ‘GL’ met with severe consequences as the vehicles with ‘GL’ on number plates were attacked in the plains and police also seized those vehicles.

In the meantime, Pramila Sharma, a Morcha activist, was reportedly killed by a bullet allegedly fired from the house of GNLF leader Dipak Gurung. As a result, houses of GNLF leaders were destroyed in the hills. Understanding the gravity of the situation, Ghising left the hills and took shelter in Jalpaiguri.

In 2017, the Gorkhaland Movement again attained momentum when on 16th May the Government of West Bengal made Bengali language compulsory in all Schools across the state. The GJMM opposed the decision of the Government and started agitation against it. Thus, in the face of severe agitation, the Government of West Bengal on 8th June declared that Bengali language would be optional in hills. But, the GJMM tried to hold the spirit of the agitation by reviving its old demand i.e., Gorkhaland. Finally, the Government called the paramilitary forces to control the situation. When the situation became hostile and violent clashes took place between the agitators and the security personnel the GJMM gave a call for strike for an indefinite period. During the agitation a total number of 11 persons were reported to have lost their lives. In June 2017, Bimal Gurung stepped down from the post of Chief Executive Officer of the GTA.^{xxvii} Protesters reached Delhi on 9th July and staged a March from Rajghat to Jantar Mantar. Lest the situation should go out of the control the West Bengal government called a meeting with hill parties. After the failure of the first round of talks, a second round of talk was held and there was a consensus to call off the strike. On 19th September, the supporters of Gorkhaland met the home minister and accordingly, on 27th September, the GJMM headed by new chairperson Binay Tamang finally called off the strike after 104 days.

Bimal Gurung had been in hiding since 2017 for fear of being arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act as he and his aides were allegedly held accountable for commotion in the hills. However, recently Bimal Gurung made his public appearance and in October 2020^{xxviii} and he and the GJMM broke their ally with the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) and came under the umbrella of All India Trinamool Congress. This move is considered significant on the eve of West Bengal Assembly Election 2021.

Conclusion: The Gorkhaland Movement have had so many turns and twists since its genesis. The main achievement of the movement till date are first the formation of the Darjeeling Hill Council (DGH) and then the Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA). The leaders and the supporters of the Gorkhaland Movement are demanding a separate state in Indian territory on basis of Gorkha ethnic identity. However, in northern part of Bengal another movement named as Kamtapur Movement has also been demanding a separate state out of West Bengal within Indian territory on the basis of the ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity of the Rajbanshi Community living in that region. At the same time, Tamangs are one of the major groups among the Nepalese and follower of Buddhism. They have also become very active over the last few years to preserve and protect their cultural identity. They are being noticed to revive their traditional attire and celebration of Lochar or New Year. Once Subhash Ghising warned the Tamangs of dire consequences if they remained adhere to their old cultural practices. However, the Tamangs did not pay heed to Ghising’s warning and continued celebrating the Lochar. The potential conflict between the Tamangs and Ghising ultimately assumed an ethnic character. During the time of GJMM too, the Lepchas are being dictated to put on Gorkhali traditional dress instead of the traditional dress of the Lepchas. However, the Lepchas opposed the dictation vehemently and they opted to put on their own traditional dress. Simultaneously, an



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organization named Amra Bangali, is against any move of Partition of Bengal on ethnic or linguistic lines. Very recently, Dooars Sadbhawana Mancha has raised the demand for the creation of an Autonomous Council in the Dooars region for the socio-economic development of the people of that region. So, the ethnic and cultural diversities of the hill and foothill regions of West Bengal are also acting as hindrance in the way of the Gorkha statehood movement. The attempt of the leaders of the Gorkhaland Movement to impose Gorkha identity on all the ethnic groups in the hills, especially on the Tamangs, has put the ethnic identity of other ethnic groups at stake. The fate of Gorkhaland state will be fixed by the time to come. However, the examples of the formation of states on ethnic or linguistic identities have proved that this is not a solution to address the dissatisfactions of the various ethnic groups. Rather, problem lies somewhere else that is to be addressed with utmost importance and at the earliest.

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