

GORKHALAND MOVEMENT: GENDER, IDENTITY AND MARGINALIZATION

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Gorkhaland Movement: Gender, Identity and Marginalization**” is bonafide work carried out by **GUNJAN RANA** under our supervision and guidance for partial fulfillment of the requirement for M Phil in Women's Studies during the academic session 2019.

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All information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct.

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Introduction

Context

Gorkhaland movement is an ethno-regional movement in the Hilly terrain of Darjeeling district in West Bengal. The movement from its inception has tried to formulate arguments to make Darjeeling a separate state outside West Bengal but within India. The leadership of the movement which does not consists of working class men and women is indeed the 'new' middle class, who give the argument of difference, cultural-lingual and socio-economic specificities between the people of Hills and Plains, or in other words, between Bengali speaking people of plains and Nepali speaking Gorkhas of Darjeeling. The main and central point of the movement since its inception has been to create a state within India for the Nepali speaking Gorkhas. There are many different approaches that have been made over years to understand the movement. Fuelled by the pride of 'owning' a supposedly beautiful land constructed by the British which quenches the thirst of the eye to see the 'European country-side' as described in the English curriculum, the 'chauvinistic' Bengali calls it 'secessionist' and claims the movement of Gorkhaland to be illegitimate. The other part of the same story was revenue, calling the movement illegitimate and forcefully denying the creation of Gorkhaland made sure that revenue from tourism continued coming to the state's treasury. Some researchers call the Gorkhaland movement one of 'self-rule' (Subba, 1999), they substantiate the claim by bringing forth the element of democracy, where every group of people should be able to decide for themselves. Others (Besky, 2015) call it 'sub-nationalist movement', a 'small' Gorkha nationality under the 'big' mainstream Indian nationality. And some prefer calling it 'ethnic separatism' (Samanta, 2000). All the above connotations and perspectives of Gorkhaland movement constitute their own matrix of legitimacy and truthfulness. But almost all these perspectives take for granted the Gorkha identity, how it was constructed, and how it became the central issue in Gorkhaland movement. Gorkhas are taken for granted as the 'martial' race, with the *khukuri*, fearless and warrior who can kill people at one blow, sidelining the nuanced construction of 'brave-ness' by the colonial power, which is outrageously racist, supremacist and derogatory in the first place. The scholarly work which fails to study the multiple

narratives that has fuelled the construction of Gorkha identity, how it was shaped by the hegemonic colonial discourse, how it has changed its meaning in the Indian context and how people came to vouch for the derogatory identity handed over by the colonial power, simplifies the complex phenomenon of identity/identities and marginalization within the Gorkhaland movement that is spatially, culturally and politically located in the Hindu majoritarian Indian politics¹.

Literature Review

The consideration of origin of Gorkha identity in the colonial discourse of martial race, the hegemonic Indian polity and the paternalistic behaviour of Bengal's government gives us a clearer picture of the movement and how identity is constructed and ways in which it functions in a political field and how it in turn controls the political field. The political field according to Raka Ray is a "structured, unequal, and socially constructed environment within which organisations are embedded and to which organisations and activists constantly respond." She further writes that the "political field includes different actors such as the state, political parties, social movement organisations, connected to each other in friendly and antagonistic ways, some more powerful than the other, but tied together by a particular culture, where the culture is not a monolithic whole." She argues that movements emerge from being embedded in political fields which decide the shape, substance and range of possibilities of actions as well as the outcome of a movement. The Gorkhaland movement can be seen as being embedded in political fields which included different political parties and civil society organisations. While there were regional parties such as Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League (ABGL) in the political scene, there were national parties such as Congress and CPI(M) as well. There had been many civil society organisations which were operating in Darjeeling with *Darjeeling Chiya Kaman Shramik Sangha* (Tea Garden Worker's Association of Darjeeling) formed by Deo Prakash Rai, who was an ex-army man turned politician. Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sammelan (1923) and Himalaya Kala Mandir (1950) were other important cultural organizations which operated in the political field of

¹ Within as in the movement is already a movement of 'marginalized' ethnic identity, and within the supposedly movement of marginalized, how further marginalization occurs.

Darjeeling which nurtured the Gorkha kinship. While different civil-cultural organization operated in the foundation of Gorkha kinship, the trade unions were also actively organizing the tea garden workers in post-independent India. Before 1986 with different organizations working in Darjeeling, the political field of Darjeeling can be called heterogeneous. According to Raka Ray, “heterogeneous political culture are more flexible and thus allow the co-existence of multiple or even oppositional discourses. They readily incorporate new ideas too. Homogenous cultures, on the other hand, are seen having one dominant discourse. Thus they are rigid, monolithic and also intolerant of difference.”

In the post 1986 movement of Gorkhaland, the political landscape in Darjeeling has sunken and has inevitably become homogenous and hegemonic, since the demand of Gorkhaland has eliminated other identities and movements. The violent crackdown on the CPI(M) trade union members by the GNLF cadres and the attack on the *Bhasa Andolan* by Subhas Ghising can be regarded as the effort of the GNLF to become one and only political outfit in the hills, and that is what has exactly happened. Ghising stayed as the chairman of DGHC for almost two decades. A heterogeneous political field can nurture a political landscape for democratic movements whereas a homogenous political field will have one dominant political party which controls the political landscape and hinders the fostering of democratic movements.

The *Bhasa Andolan* for the recognition of Nepali language in the 8th schedule of Indian constitution was going on in the early 60s as an effort by the elite Gorkhas to solve the identity puzzle and to be recognized as Indian Gorkhas living in Darjeeling. Most of the people depended on Tea Gardens for livelihood and the new opportunity of modern education was also expanding the horizons for economic betterment. Most of the leaders of the trade unions, civil society or political parties were elites and influential people. The political field was heavily saturated with identity question of the people living in the hills without ‘motherland’. In a few tea garden pockets, the CPI(M) had its strong foothold. Three decades before the Gorkhaland movement of 1986, on June 25th, 1955, police had shot dead six workers including a juvenile in Margarate’s Tea Garden, few kilometres from Kurseong. The workers were organising a rally for few basic demands including maternity leave and amendment in the *hatta bahar* system. *Hatta bahar* was a colonial practice which ostracized a worker away from her family at the whims of the manager. We can therefore say that

in Darjeeling, before the violent agitation of 1986, the political field was heterogeneous and fragmented. Women of the tea garden actively organized in many tea gardens and some of the politicians belonging to CPI claimed that the movement was a success because of the pressure built after the shooting of six people when the management had to agree to all the workers' demands. The workers even got the bonus for the first time that year. Few of the CPI trade union leaders were Bengalis. Dr. Abanirajan Talapatra, doctor of the Margerate's Hope, who is said to have influenced the workers significantly to organize and fight for their rights was a Bengali. It is said that he used to meet workers and organize small meetings with them in the pretext of other things. Soon the management got the hint of it and he was sent back to Jalpaiguri, his home. Can we assume then, that the antagonism between Bengali and Gorkhas of the hills in the political field of today's Darjeeling was in fact initiated during the 1986 agitation? Can we further assume that the antagonism and hostility between the two groups is a desperate political construction to sabotage the heterogeneity of the political field? As Sen (2012) writes:

Women plantation workers' public support for their 'home-grown' movement, necessitated by the search for greater respect for Nepalis as Indian citizens, also created a silence around labour issues in general and women's labour issues in particular, which were not seen as this movement's priorities or were regarded as a distraction.

There is a complete dearth of data when it comes to understanding the subjectivity of a Gorkha woman. Besides few instances of utterances in colonial texts, words like, illiterate, sexually exploited, promiscuous, vulgar, quarrelsome and indecent are used to describe a hill woman. There is no substantiating and contemplating work to study women's life in the hills, how it was and what changes has occurred over time. Talking about the majority of women of the hills who are/were tea garden workers, the sole area to understand the subjective experience of Gorkha women is to understand the dynamics tea garden workers in general and women tea garden workers in particular in the intersectional framework of sub-nationalist movement, ethnicity and gender. Within the essentialist image of Gorkha created by the colonial discourse and the overwhelming endorsement of the same by the people of Darjeeling the working of gender becomes multi-layered. The fact that women participate in the Gorkhaland movement in overwhelming numbers make the matter more complicated.

Gorkha is a 'masculine' idea and Gorkhaland is the agenda of Gorkha men. It is men who have given leadership to the movement and their main agenda is creation of Gorkhaland (although the leaders have been settling for autonomous bodies), there is no agenda of equal representation of the people, the worker's issue and the gender issue. Hence, the participation of hill women in the movement cannot be simplified to women's 'empowerment' neither can it be reduced to 'erasure of gender related issues from the Gorkha community'. Then where are women positioned in the Gorkhaland movement? The *Naari Morcha*, women's wing of Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha (hereafter GJMM) has a huge participation and they play vital role in political programs, especially in rallies and *dharnas*. The role of women in GJMM becomes clear from what follows.

During the agitation, on most mornings, a whistle would blow at 3 or 4 am, alerting women leaders to start preparing the family meal of the day because the GJMM rallies and meeting would continue throughout the day. The *Naari Morcha* is invited for every event of GJMM, but they are there just to parrot slogans. And the one who shouts loudest is considered the leader." (Rai and Rai, 2012)

The obvious question then becomes, how are roles gendered in the Gorkhaland movement? Although there is a clear lack of solidarity for feminist politics among the working class women in Darjeeling, it does not imply reducing this to the absolute absence of resistance of the Gorkha women against the 'bravery' induced patriarchy of Gorkha society. Like many societies the Gorkha community in general celebrates brave 'masculinity' in its daily social interactions. A man acting in a certain 'non-masculine' way is ridiculed by suggesting him to wear bangles; the tone of course remains demeaning. Women too have no hesitation in ridiculing 'unsuccessful' men with feminine metaphors. Nevertheless, the women workers of the tea plantations in Darjeeling do have agency over their life. And to understand this agency we must not forget the multi-layered marginalisation at play. Sen (2012) writes:

.... a feminist understanding of women's agency in Darjeeling's plantations must acknowledge that women are not only marginalized as labourers within tea plantation; they are also stereotyped and sexualized as untrustworthy subjects within the middle-Indian discourse of femininity and the patriarchal

Nepali community. Additionally, women are also part of the Nepali community, which is itself culturally marginalized within the Indian nation. Therefore women are marginalized in complex ways resulting from ‘multiple patriarchies’ (Chatterjee 2001) and their ethnic, economic and political manifestations.

The current phase of the movement erupted in 2017 out of West Bengal Government’s decision of compulsory Bengali language in schools, which in fact excluded the educational institution in Hill region but nevertheless the movement grew out of this juncture and spread quickly with agitation flaring every passing day.

There has been significant scholarship on the movement dealing with its several aspects. T B Subba (1999) is perhaps the first scholar to work on the Gorkhaland movement followed by A. C. Sinha, who wrote several books in collaboration with Subba on ethnic identities in the North East India. S. S. Sarkar (2013) treats Gorkhaland movement as ethnic conflict and presents the study of how the state as machinery has responded to end the conflict. Amiya K. Samanta (2000) has presented an ethno-regionalist study of the movement, where he claims that the Gorkhaland movement is an ethno-separatist movement. There have been some writings on the unwritten and scattered history of the land which in turns serves to legitimize the demand of separate state. Given the centrality of gender in constructing the national/regional identity and its pivotal role in the very formulation of ‘distinct’ culture of the Gorkhas, there is hardly any scholarship which uses the gender lens to study the Gorkhaland movement. The popular rhetoric of male leaders of the movement to protect the women and the (mother)land has been successful in mobilizing the mass. However, this has not been the focus of scholars working on this issue; it is instead the Ethnic identity and legitimacy of the movement which gets more attention. Hence, there arises a necessity to understand the movement with a feminist perspective. The hyper-masculine formulation of the Gorkha man in the Gorkha movement is ‘constructed’ with enmity and contrast to Bengali masculinity repeatedly assumed as effeminate in discursive constructions. A distinct *pahadiness* was constructed in the Gorkhaland movement of 1986. Sen (2012) writes that “It is not a simple class-, race- or caste-based difference, but implies personality type, with characterizations such as ‘simple’, ‘hardworking’, and ‘loyal’ and ‘honest’. It implies a particular kind of personhood.” The unique ‘personhood’ which is ‘hardworking’,

‘loyal’ and ‘honest’ is also ‘brave’ and masculine. The celebrated ‘distinctness’ of a Gorkha, which sets him apart from people of plains is that he does not fight with his mouth but with his hand. Perhaps, the turn of events in 1986, when thousands of Gorkhas took up arms to fight each other was to re-establish the fact that Gorkha solves any issue with his *khukuri* (a distinct short sword of the Gorkhas). *Haamro Maanche* (our people) is the common frame of reference to call any Nepali speaker. The class line, which inevitably dissects the Gorkha community as every other society, seems to vanish under the heavy narrative of *haamro maanche*. In fact, in the recent Lok Sabha election of 2019, BJP (which has consecutively won two LS elections) fielded Raju Bishta, supposedly a Gorkha from the state of Manipur, and many people welcomed him as it was after many years that a national political party fielded a ‘native’. Many also lamented over the fact that he could not even speak Nepali fluently. Raju Bishta is the Managing Director of a national company worth INR 4000 crores.

A participant of my research who happened to be a tea garden worker said, “We are different than the people of the plains, we are helpful. You go to their place and ask for help, they don’t help. On the other hand if someone comes here and ask for help, we help. We are just different, you know right? (Translated from Nepali)” She ended her opinion with a question hinting at me with the expectation that ‘being’ a Gorkha myself I knew the difference already. But can we consider ‘being good’ a Gorkha trait, it is indeed the essentialized image of the Gorkha, to be good and hard working. Goodness is no virtue possessed by a community, and in the case of people of Darjeeling who inevitably live in different circumstances, context and space, ‘goodness’ cannot be a virtue of all of them, given that culture itself is sometimes a pressured behavioral manifestation. This ‘goodness’ flaunted by the locals, which was mentioned by the research participant in the interviews as well, is also somehow iterated in the urban middle-class Bengali circle. The remarks such as ‘people of Darjeeling are sweet and good’ is what I personally have heard whenever I mention my place of origin. I am certainly not sure why and how this imagination stays in the mind of the middle-class Bengali living in Kolkata but it does surely translate to the extension of the essentialized image of the Gorkhas in the ‘elite’ circle, although I do not claim it to be true for every middle-class Bengali. Sen (2012) mentions the pride in the distinct *pahadiness*, my participant too did not hesitate to show her pride while

she mentioned the difference. Sen (ibid) writes, “Women desired to present themselves honorably, to outsiders like me, and also to respectability against which their popular images were formed.” Only difference in my case was that the participant added *haina* (Isn’t it) after the iteration of the difference and claiming the pride. Perhaps, she was trying to know if I knew how different ‘we’ were, or maybe it was just out of habit. But she did not point out one difference between ‘we’ (Gorkhas) and ‘they’(people from the plains) as relevant and in use as ‘loyal’, ‘faithful’ and ‘hard working’, and the difference is the masculine violent nature of the Gorkhas. In the cultural milieu of Darjeeling it is believed that a Gorkha fights with his hands and not with his mouth. Being born and brought up in one of the villages of Darjeeling, which looked almost same as the village of the participant, I am well versed in the difference between ‘we’ and ‘they’. Growing up I also tried to induce the ‘true’ nature of the Gorkha, who solved issues by ‘punching in the face’ unlike the Bengalis (‘they’) who do not fight but only rant. The tough ‘man’ concept for Gorkha reaches an extreme with the societal acceptance and even provocation of violence. The present day distinct Gorkha identity seems to be essentialized, beyond any logic, for political interest of the few who want administrative power over Darjeeling. Sen (2012) rightly observes the peculiarity of the essentialized image and writes, “In regular conversation workers always related their hard work to the quality of the tea produced, as if their labour were of a different kind, like their ethnicity, climate and environment.” Although the Gorkha identity with all the above mentioned connotations is internalized and embodied with pride by the working women of Darjeeling, they do harbor the undercurrent of distaste for the state of affair where a Gorkha man is always at the top. The coherence of Gorkha identity, the one-ness reflected in the collective owning of the ‘difference’ and the pride that everyone takes in calling themselves Gorkhas is somewhat shaken by the unexpressed detestation of the women tea garden workers against the male hierarchy in the work place. A research participant said, “The upper positions in all the social and political organisations, ranging from the local village associations to the major parties, all are men.” Another participant who was an active member of CPI(M) affiliated trade union said, “Men are not as hardworking as us, we do all the work and they sit at one place and give us orders.” She was referring to the men who work as *chowkidars*, ones who are responsible to look after workers (who are generally women) to make sure they work well without slacking. A woman cannot be a *chowkidar*, only men are eligible for the

post and also most of the higher posts in the factory hierarchy are held by men. Women occupy the lowest rank, which is the tea plucking worker. British planters recruited women for tea plucking keeping the intricate nature of the work in mind. Since then the women in plantation are engaged in the most strenuous work. The majority of tea pluckers are women. Men are *chowkidars*, office *babus* and in the lower rung they are engaged in pruning and spray of insecticides. In some of the tea gardens the terminology used for categorizing the labour force are *marad*, *aurat* and *chokada*. *Marad* is the man, who does the pruning, spraying of pesticides and disciplining of women; *aurat* is the woman, who does the plucking along with pruning but not spraying; and *chokada* is the child of age ranging from 12 to 16 years, who is not permanent and engaged only in the monsoons when there is huge production of tea leaves and when the available worker force is not sufficient. The division of labour is strictly on the basis of gender and rarely a male worker plucks tea leaves. This is not to trivialize the amount of work that a male worker of the lower rung does but to understand the gendered nature of the structure in the tea plantation sector of Darjeeling. This hierarchal structure of the workforce is in practice since the inception of the plantation in the mid 1800s. We can ask the question that why there are no repercussions from women workers against the stagnant hierarchy in the structure where she cannot occupy any positions higher than that of a tea plucker. They did register their resistance during the movement of 1955 for maternity benefits along with other demands against the management who ignored welfare of workers². Although the political construction of the distinct Gorkha identity veils the condition of tea garden workers in general and the gender disparity in plantation hierarchy in particular, the women do feel left out and express their resentment. One of the participants said “the union leaders and the party leaders who are all men, are busy with Gorkhaland, no one thinks about us, what if Gorkhaland is achieved and our situation remains the same?” But because of the fact that the Gorkhaland movement is omni-present in the political field, no other collective whatsoever is allowed and accepted. Hence, there is hardly any significant political consolidation on any issue other than Gorkhaland. Recently, Chai Bagan Sangram Samiti (henceforth CBSS) is working in few tea gardens in the hills and Terai to mobilize the workers for the issue of minimum wage. Although Indian government has a law which prescribes minimum

² A movement in the Margarate’s Hope Tea Estate led by left trade unions and other organizations which will be dealt in details in the following chapters.

living wage for the workers, the tea plantation management has been paying the wages which is arbitrarily set in the tri-partite meetings between Government representatives, union leaders and owners³. CBBS has been mobilizing workers for the said minimum wage. Currently, the workers in the tea plantation sector in Darjeeling are entitled to Rs. 176 per day. CBSS claims this to be slavery wage. CBSS is a civil organisation and it is run by few left activists, students, youths of the tea garden and some prominent figures of the in the Gorkha community. As I have a cordial relationship with the activists of CBSS and I follow the literature they produce, the major regional party GJMM keeps a tap on the organisational activity. The activists shared the feeling that the major political party of the region is always on alert to check if CBSS affect their vote dynamics. The fear came true when the workers of the tea garden where CBSS is active, passed a resolution recently in the their local committee that the workers of the said tea garden will not vote as their demands for minimum wage has not been heard⁴. As soon as they made their statement public, the leadership of one of the factions of GJMM went to meet them and assured them of action in future with respect to their demands. This vigilance by the major party might be true in any other region, but will GJMM (any faction) take up the worker's demand if it comes to power after the LS 2019 elections? The possibility is close to nil; the union of the GJMM is only active to mobilize workers for the Gorkhaland rally. To quote Lachmi, one of the participants in Sen (2012), "Are the unions of any use? They are only interested in Gorkhaland and *partybazi*." Gorkhaland has become an imaginary solution to every issue on hand and Gorkha leaders have become intolerant to any issue other than Gorkhaland, but ironically they always settle for some sort of autonomy. Hence, it has become very important to understand the Gorkhaland issue outside the narrative of the oppressed-nationality and right to self-determinism. The marginalization of women tea garden workers within Gorkhaland movement and erasure of multitudes of post-colonial identities and expression from the political scene of Darjeeling have to be acknowledged in the academic understanding of Gorkhaland. The oppressed-nationality discourse where the identity itself is fractured at several points has to be replaced with more critical and gendered approach,

³ Minimum Wages Act, 1948 which sets the minimum wages that must be paid to the skilled and unskilled workers. It has defined a 'living wage', a level of income for a worker which will ensure a basic standard of living including good health, dignity, comfort and education.

⁴ The local committee of a tea garden passed a resolution that they will not vote in the 2019 Lok Sabha election if their demands for higher wages are not addressed.

although not sidelining the ‘oppressed-nationality’ all together, since in the majoritarian democracy of India with the mainstream ‘Indian’ nationalism at work, there are many sub-nationalist identity which are neglected if not oppressed.

Gorkhaland movement has defined and redefined gender relations among the community to build a homogenous cultural-political identity under the masculine diktats of ‘brave warrior’ which is followed by the whole of community. The ‘commonness’ which is reproduced within the movement to construct the idea of ‘Gorkha-ness’ in contrast with Bengali culture revolves around the ‘Brave’ gorkha man, and the image of the women as an ally. The middle class women who were/are active in the movement set forth different roles for women in the community, which is sometimes unequivocally celebrated and sometimes detested by the working class women of the tea gardens. A particular scene in a play written and directed by LalitGoley generates a lot of laughter among the audience when the ‘drunk’ actor imitates a woman in one of the Gorkhaland rallies⁵. The actor is a drunkard from the hills in a local bar; he is describing his wife and her *morcha*’s behaviour in a rally. In one of the dialogues, the actor says that the women of *naari morcha* cannot stay silent; they shout ‘this is our silent march’ even in a silent rally. This particular dialogue in most of the shows of the play is followed by a roar of laughter from the audience. The actor also makes a subtle gesture as how ‘now’ (after the formation of GJMM) the women are hard to shut. In the course of describing his dynamics with his wife in the course of the movement (Gorkhaland), he says that he cannot even ask why she has not been doing the household chores. On asking, she gives a loud answer by focusing on her new political engagements and warning him by saying, ‘don’t touch the *naari morcha*’. Apparently, in the play the couple resides in one of the main towns of Darjeeling. The participation of women in recent movements (2007 onwards) has been crucial. There are several high rank leaders of *naari morcha*. But there is hardly anyone in the decision making body of the party. The laughter (from the audience of the play) generated by the situation of a woman from Darjeeling who now has a voice has many facets. It is the acceptance of the society in general of the fact that women now have a voice and they articulate their voice politically. The laughter might be targeted to the ‘poor’ husband whose household routine has been disturbed as his wife now has many other engagements, as in the play the husband complains of his wife

⁵ *Bhanurapaala*, a play written by Lalit Golay which got huge response in Darjeeling.

coming home late, and when asked why, he sometimes gets kicked as an answer. However, subtly enough the laughter is also targeted towards the woman, whose 'stupidity' and political 'ignorance' is ridiculed by the husband. The role of the middle-class women being politically active in the women wing of the party has many responses from the society in general and working class women in particular. There are repercussions as to why the women are neglecting their first duty as wives and there is also an overwhelming participation and acceptance of their political engagement. A participant sharply remarked, "why not, women are equally Gorkha and it is their duty to participate in the movement". The women (few middle class women) have joined the local leadership of the party and work in the grassroots but they do not question the patriarchal hierarchy, instead they have joined the ranks of *daju* following the patriarchal values and practices. Neither do they talk about the women workers and their problems⁶. Deepa Joshi (2014) talks about how the top leaders of the women's wing of the party do not talk about the water crisis which is faced by the people of Darjeeling in general and women of Darjeeling in particular. When women leaders do not talk about the harsh reality of women facing extreme water crisis, then feminist solidarity on behalf of the leaders is a long way to go. The *naari morcha* is mocked for its stupidity in the play mentioned above, remains far from talking about the women and their issues, let alone questioning the problematic patriarchal nature of Gorkha identity and the equally disturbing all male composition of the top leadership. The question then arises, is the participation of women in the Gorkhaland movement being effective? Who are these women and who do they represent? What are the silences and gaps in their participation in the movement? The Gorkha identity is masculine and fractured to its core, the Gorkhas living in faraway places dream of a home and the Gorkhas at home joins the movement for their own small interests. Sen (2012) has observed how some women from tea garden areas participate in the movement to ensure placement for their sons, brothers and other male members of her family. The image of women in the community has been continuously and rapidly shifting with politically active women workers in the ground but their clear absence in the leadership (leadership of women is restricted only to the women's wing of the party). The absence of women leaders within the movement needs to be documented to understand the relationship between nationality movement

⁶ Male leaders are generally called *daju* in Darjeeling.

and women's question. In the creation of the political identity 'Gorkhas', various other social factors are frozen and made invisible. It becomes imperative to understand the shifts of identity from 'working women' which is rightfully an organic, real situation based identity to an inorganic 'Gorkha', if we are to understand the identity politics of Darjeeling and also the intricate political processes that is involved in these conversions.

The underpinning of every nationalist movement is masculine in nature and the movement arises out of interaction between men of two or more community, but it also impacts the gender relation and shapes and reshapes it. Hence, the purpose of the study will be to understand the position of women in the movement, the hyper-masculine connotation of the Gorkha identity and gender relation and hierarchies within the movement.

Research Objectives

The prime objective of this research is to look into the Gorkhaland movement with a critical perspective. There is a need to understand and analyze the movement with a gender lens, so as to understand the layers of marginalization within the movement. In the academic discourse of Gorkhaland, the Gorkha identity, its construction over the years by colonial power is often taken for granted. The masculine character of the Gorkha identity with 'brave' connotation handy is rarely questioned and critically looked upon. There is a need of juxtaposing the workers of Darjeeling vis-à-vis the Gorkha identity, as many Gorkhas of Darjeeling are the tea garden workers. The research will try to look into the construction of the Gorkha identity and the brave connotation it carries. In its course, the research will try to locate working women of Darjeeling in the Gorkhaland movement, how they posit themselves in the masculine agenda of Gorkhaland and how they negotiate with the masculine Gorkha identity. The objective of the research is also to understand how gender, as an important social factor, interacts with patriarchal hegemonic national (sub-national) identity.

Research Questions

1. How has the masculine connotation of 'Brave Gorkha' been an inherent part of the Gorkhaland Movement? How have the political and ideological deliberations on different issues of the movement constructed the Gorkha masculinity in the movement?
2. How has the Movement (1986 Movement) dealt, if at all, with women's question? What are the gaps and silences regarding women's issues in the movement?

Research Methodology

The lives of the women in Darjeeling have hardly been discussed and their lives, experience and stories lay under the debris of Gorkhaland movement. They are neither the victims of outrageous movement which erased and manipulated their subjectivities nor the champions of their own issues. They lie in the multiple-layer of marginalisation, be it ethnic, lingual or gender. The working women in the tea gardens operate and live in a more vulnerable position. But regardless of their position, women do search for a way to add meanings in their life and uplift their life from the heavy shackles of economic marginality, gendered division of labour and lingual-ethnic exclusion from the mainstream.

The main resource for this research has been the working women of the tea garden themselves. The fact of I being a 'native' of Darjeeling and being born and brought up in one of the tea gardens has helped a lot to understand and hear properly the responses of the respondents. The understanding of the language being spoken in the field has also helped me to give attention to the minute details of the responses. The respondents were working women of four tea gardens. The four gardens were selected randomly in terms of available access. However, I ensured that I visit at least one tea garden with a history of communist trade union movement. Margarate's Hope tea estate has a history of trade union movement. In June, 1955, the state police shot five workers and a young boy, the police fired on the protesting workers. The workers were demanding maternity leaves and abolition of *hatta bahar* among many other things. Among the interviewed, I made sure to interview women who were active in

local level for organizing other women along with those who did not participate in meetings and rallies because of sheer dislike or because of their work and domestic obligations. I have tried my best to stay true to the narratives of marginalized women, their aspiration, resistance and disgust. Witnessing the plight of the tea garden workers and especially women tea garden workers while growing up had an unending effect on me. As I moved out of the village for further studies, the outside world and the stagnant village did put up a contrast. The workers and village looked like people and place that was stuck in time, both literally and figuratively. The masculine management hierarchy and the colonial style master-slave dynamics between the management and workers was something the city trotted eyes could not see. But there was nothing that I could do to set things right. I am not ignorant of the power imbalance that was/is existent between me and the researched, after all I am privileged enough to walk away from the situation. And I also acknowledge the fact that sharing the cultural and structural similarities with the researched does not guarantee that I know them better. Hence, I do not claim to produce 'true' know-how of the working women of Darjeeling. I mentioned the above narrative only to point out that being an 'insider' helped me to navigate the problem and select the respondents. And importantly it eased the tension between me and the participant, it helped to make the conversation more casual and relaxed. And at the same time I do not claim to remain neutral and unbiased in a way that I believe that I talk and speak for the marginalized women of the tea gardens of Darjeeling. Lastly, all my 'selves'; a student, a Gorkha, a gender fluid person, Nepali speaker, a tea garden resident with a lower middle-class background has inevitably shaped the flow and narrative of this research.

The interviews were carried out in the month of May 2018 and within the time span of one month. The participants were selected randomly and an interview guide was used. I took the permission of the respondents to record the interview and explained as explicitly as possible the motive of this research.

Four tea gardens were visited namely Margarate's Hope Tea Garden, Goomtee Tea Estate, Jungpana Tea Estate and Sivitar Tea Estate. The method used was unstructured interview with an interview guide. A total number of 12 women were interviewed, four each from the above mentioned tea gardens.

Chapter divisions

There are four chapters in this thesis as follows:

The first chapter, 'Gorkha Identity and Gorkhaland Movement' will delve into the history of Gorkha identity. It will look into the history of the formation of Nepal to locate the origin of Gorkha identity. The chapter will also focus on how Gorkha identity was later re-constructed and stereotyped by the colonial power via its vast and meticulous knowledge institution. The later part of the chapter will look into the early phase of Gorkhland movement.

The second chapter, 'Gorkhaland, New Shift and Ethnic revivalism' will focus on the second phase of Gorkhaland movement (2007) and how *Indian Idol*, the reality show on television fueled it. It will also look upon the revival of ethnic identity in the cultural-political landscape of Darjeeling.

The third chapter, 'Gender and Gorkhaland' will try to look into the Gorkha working women, their aspiration and identity in the masculine agenda of Gorkhaland. The chapter will also try to look into the theoretical underpinning of Nationalism and gender.

And the final chapter, 'Conclusion' will summarise the findings of the research and lay down future scope of research, if any.

Chapter One

Gorkha Identity and Gorkhaland Movement

The chapter will focus on Gorkha identity, its origin and sustenance over the years. While we try to navigate the trajectory of connotation of what is meant by a Gorkha, it becomes inevitable not to touch colonialism. After all, colonialism is the main force which shaped and reshaped the history of the community now known as ‘Indian Gorkhas’. The first section will try to navigate the trajectory of Gorkhas in the historical event of formation of Nepal under the leadership of the king Prithvi Narayan Shah, the period in the history of Nepal when the imposition of Hindu values was at its highest. The new administration under the Gorkha king imposed a ban on cow slaughter and it also emphasized the use of Nepali as the national language. Hence, this part deals with the early instances of Hinduization of the diverse population of ‘unified’ (Or more precisely greater) Nepal. This section tries to locate the realpolitik situation in Nepal post 1800s, which turned out to be helpful for the colonial power to bring wage laborers to the tea plantations that they were expanding in the hills of Darjeeling. Next section tries to navigate across the knowledge base of the ‘brave’ connotation that came as a parcel from the colonial power which is celebrated even now. In fact it is the significant part of identity for the body of a deterritorialized Gorkha. The celebration of the ‘brave’ attribution and the place for the people of the community with military background in the social hierarchy substantiates the fact that the deterritorialized body of Gorkha has inherently absorbed the ‘superior’ and ‘unquestionable’ diagnostics of the master race. Although, the colonial construction was based in what the scholars called ‘scientific racism’ or more aptly ‘self-interest driven determinism’ with the self at the top, the Gorkha body in today’s political-scape in Darjeeling doesn’t feels demeaned when he calls himself a Gorkha. The wide appreciation of Gorkhas for being a ‘warrior’ was/is perhaps the only anchor which held/s the identity of the community, the diverse and heterogeneous identity, which

was otherwise on the verge of collapsing. The ‘anchor’ provided by the British still plays an important part in the identity politics of Darjeeling. While the colonial power created the knowledge base of the ‘warrior’ and ‘savage-like’ ethnic races in the detailed journals which was then published in volumes, from the same racial groups and from more-or-less the same region they also started bringing in the people who became the wage laborers in the newly established plantation regime, where they were paid slave-wages. The torn people (both figuratively and literally) who were trying to build home amidst the torn jungles and imported English machines did find the offensively flattering Gorkha ‘brave-ness’ soothing, well-grounded and ‘respectful’. The later part of the chapter will try to look into the genesis of Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling.

Identity is not static and it is same for the Gorkha Identity. The history of Gorkhaland movement tells a lot about the Gorkha Identity, its construction and nature. Although the affluent of the society have the resources to control the ideological tool that substantiate an identity, the marginalized also constantly negotiates. The marginalized that always thrives for a better and dignified living negotiates with popular identity constructed by the ruling class.

History of Nepal and Gorkhas

To understand the continuously shifting identity of the people of Darjeeling and its manipulation by the leaders of Gorkhaland movement, it is imperative to understand the history of making of Nepal kingdom. Nepal before the consolidation by the Gorkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah was a cluster of more than 50 small kingdoms. Nepal was a conglomeration of varied caste and ethnic groups. In the mid-18th century, king of the Gorkha district in Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah set out to conquer all of Nepal and after nearly three decades he had converted the small petty kingdoms into one expanded Gorkha kingdom, it was bigger than the present-day Nepal. The erstwhile Gorkha kingdom was a tiny hill state north-west of the present capital city of Nepal, Kathmandu. It was a state ruled by Gorkha family. Prithivi Narayan Shah was the young king of Gorkha, who envisioned the expansion of his kingdom. He set out to expand his territory and one after the other he defeated the neighboring kingdoms. And ultimately after many years of perpetual war, he captured the Kathmandu valley,

which was then ruled by the Malla Kings. But after the consolidation of the new Gorkha Empire spanning about 200,000 square kilometers with river Teesta in the east to Yamuna in the west, the monarchy didn't had any definitive plan to run the empire. Often the history of this consolidation of Nepal by Shah is considered as the instance of utmost valor and bravery. But in this narrative of valor, the complexities of how the tiny hill principality expanded its area of control so vastly is not looked upon. What motivated the hundreds of Gorkhas under Prithvi Narayan Shah to fight a long war? It is one of the pressing questions if one seeks to understand Gorkha Identity. Were Gorkhas inherently 'brave' to fight the war for decades and actually win it? It is another question that follows the first. These questions inevitably gets skipped when narrative at play is the 'brave Gorkha's conquest of Nepal'. Several recent works on history of expansion of Nepal and Gorkha identity sheds lights on newer perspectives to understand the above two subjects. Prithvi Narayan Shah made sure that the thought process of the Gorkhas in his small hilly state corresponded with his vision of expanding his kingdom. In the small kingdoms of Nepal the allegiance of the subjects in generally and the fighting men in particular was with people who ruled the state. This already had caused splitting of small kingdoms into smaller ones. With every shift of allegiance, a new smaller kingdom was born. This shift in the pattern of allegiance of Gorkhas has been captured by Mahesh Chandra Regmi, a historian, in his work *Kings and Political Leaders of the Gorkhali Empire, 1768-1814*. He writes:

The Gorkhali rulers devised the principle of allegiance to the *dhungo*, which literally means a stone, but used metaphorically to denote the state. The concept of *dhungo* implied that the Gorkhali state was a permanent entity that transcended the person of the ruler. In other words, allegiance to the state superseded personal loyalty to the ruler.

This explains the change in the dynamics between ruler and the ruled. Although the control and manipulation of the subjects would be the same but the change of allegiance pattern to the *dhungo* instead of the ruler significantly changed how the Gorkhas perceived state. *Dhungo* became the symbol of the state which superseded the mortal kings and other male heirs. This perhaps can be called the shift from a clan-like social system with immensely strong allegiance to the leader towards a belief in the abstract structure which was superior to them. Regmi further explains:

The traditional principle of allegiance was based on kinship or personal loyalty to the ruler, which pre-Gorkhali states in the Himalayan region had used at the risk of frequently releasing fissiparous forces. These states were, consequently, subject among the king's sons and relatives by the king himself, or else disputed succession.

On the other hand land was the currency of the war of expansion. The Gorkha king promised piece of land to the everyman fighting for him, even to the cadres from the lowest rungs of his army. The soldiers were basically peasants and every inch of land was controlled by the royal families. And the land was given in rents as *jagirs* to aristocratic families and close relatives of the king. Exploring the currency of the war of expansion, Amish Raj Mulmi (2017) in his four part essay on the expansion of Nepal writes:

Land tenure systems across the hill states were based on a few pre-existing principles: all land was 'understood' to be the state's property; free-hold ownership of land was the only means of increasing prestige and social standing; and land, as the primary source of wealth, could not be left idle. Add to this the primary systems by which the state awarded land holdings: the *jagir* grant, by which the rulers granted noblemen (they were inevitably men) a tract of land the latter could farm or lease out as long as long as they were in service; and the age-old *birta* grant, which was similar to the *jagir* except it was interminable without royal orders, and at times a mortgage in lieu of funds borrowed from the individual. While the *birta* was often awarded to high-ranking Brahmins and politically influential groups, such as members of the royal family and the nobility to retain their loyalty, *jagir* grants were awarded to "civil or military employees and government functionaries." Rarely did the empire pay its civil servants in cash. Land compensated the costs of the campaign, while appeasing "the land-hunger of an army that was composed, for the most part, of peasant."

The land hungry peasant in the time where the land was the property of the state was motivated enough to fight any war to get a piece of land. Beside land to farm, the Gorkha king also promised a home for every soldier. The "brave conquest of Nepal by the 'brave' Gorkhas" narrative cloaks the underpinnings of the war economy. Every

war has its currency. It is believed that Prithvi Narayan Shah stood on the Chandragiri's summit and surveyed the Kathmandu valley with an immense desire to conquer it. The point that Mulmi (2017) makes is that before Prithvi Narayan Shah many kings of the small kingdoms might have thoughts of conquering the Kathmandu valley, which was nevertheless the commercial hub. Hence, what made it possible for Prithvi Narayan Shah to conquer it was indeed the change he made sure that it occurred in how the Gorkha perceived the state and the ruler, and definitely the promise of land to every cadre of his army played a significant role in motivating the soldiers to wage the war. Mulmi (2017) again writes:

The Gorkhali campaign was built on these two conditions: the *dhungo* at the centre of the Gorkhali universe, and the land the *dhungo* conquered, which could be owned by the *bhardars*. That singular motivation was adequate to push the Gorkhalis and the thousands of men and women in their territory, to the battlefield.

Hence, with the two significant underpinnings of the war of expansion explains the 'inherent' desire and 'instinct' of the Gorkhas to fight wars in general and war of expansion of Nepal in particular. The warrior 'instinct' of the Gorkhas based on the eugenic propositions is hence questionable. The warring attitude is forged and manipulated by the ones who are in power, for their own interests. Nonetheless, the warring capabilities that Gorkhas showed in the war of expansion of Nepal awarded them the racial categorization of 'Martial race' by the voluminous thesis and reports by the British colonial power. The colonial power also capitalized on the very categorization that they themselves made.

But before we delve into the nuances of categorization of the Gorkhas as the martial race via the imperial discourse and knowledge creation, we must discuss what happened in Nepal after the consolidation. The Gorkha army under Prithvi Narayan Saha was able to occupy a large mass of land. The captured land is said to be till Bhutan in the east and till present day Punjab in the west (Mulmi, 2017). The expansion spree of the Shah king culminated in the Indo-Nepal war of 1814-16. On one side was Prithvi Narayan Shah and on the other were East India Company, Garhwal Kingdom, Patiala State and Kingdom of Sikkim. The war resulted in the infamous Treaty of Sugauli. Treaty of Sugauli (1815) was signed between East India

Company and king of Nepal where Nepal agreed to give away portion of lands that it had acquired during the expansion. The land that Nepal gave to East India Company included Kingdom of Sikkim and the hilly region of Darjeeling. The East India Company handed over the Kingdom of Sikkim to the Chogyal of Sikkim and kept Darjeeling to quench the immense nostalgia for home, where later they would create a home away from home (Mulmi, 2017). If one accesses the old photographs of Darjeeling town, the bungalows, the manager quarters of the tea gardens etc, one would be able to gauge the immensity of nostalgia of the whites and longing for the homely countryside with cool weather.

Kingdom of Nepal after settling all the border conflicts was left with the present-day Nepal. The people of the conquered land was heterogeneous, there were many ethnic groups with their own language and cultural practices. The recent government of Nepal has categorized all the Himalayan ethnic groups as *Janajati-hill*. The different ethnic groups, some closely related to each other and some entirely different counts to approximately fifty in number and accounts for 27.28% of the total population according to the 2001 census⁷. After the Indo-Nepal war, the Gorkha kingdom to efficiently rule the nation introduced several efforts to homogenize the mass. It can be said that the Gorkha King converted the land into a Hindu kingdom which further enforced the orthodox Hindu caste hierarchy developed in accordance with Divya Upadesh (Divine Dictates) formulated by Prithvi Narayan. Nepal was thus forced to become a Hindu kingdom under the Shah rule (Mulmi, 2017). As a result, Nepali language as it is known today replaced languages of many ethnic groups. Nepali language was called *Khas Kura*, which means the language of the Khas community, the Hindu community with the caste hierarchy.

The kingdom under Rana rule introduced Mulki Ain in 1854 which popularized the slogan of “one language, one country, one attire”, which meant that all the people had to speak Nepali language, wear Nepali dress and most importantly had to follow Nepali code of conduct. Among many things the law (Mulki Ain) also banned cow slaughter. Moreover, the 1854 Muluki Ain (Tamang & Sitlhou 2018) reconstituted the ethnic groups of Nepal as impure castes thereby reinforcing a rigid caste hierarchy which made discussions around ethnic inequality an illegal task. Several ethnic

⁷Demographic and health survey. 2001. Conducted by Family Health Services, Department of Health Services, Ministry of Health, His Majesty's Government, Kathmandu, Nepal.

communities were brought under the broad classification of the Mulki Ain. The classification nonetheless followed the Hindu mode of hierarchy. The classification is as follows:

1. Wearers of the holy thread (*tagadhari*) or the twice-born: Brahmin, Thakuri, Chhetri, asectic sects.
2. Non-enslavable alcohol-drinkers (*namasine matwali*): Magar, Gurung, Sunuwar, and some Newar castes, etc.
3. Enslavable alcohol-drinkers (*masine matwali*): Cepang, Hayu, Tharu and the general category of Bhote including Sherpas, the group now known as Tamang and other groups with close Tibetan cultural affiliation, etc.
4. Impure but touchable castes (*pani nacalne choi chito halnu napanne*) (castes from whom water could not be accepted but whose contact does not require aspergation of water): Newar service castes -- butchers, washermen, tanners – Europeans (Mlecch) and Muslims (Mussalman)
5. Untouchable castes (*pani nacalne choi chito halnu parne*) (castes from whom water could not be accepted and whose contract requires aspergation of water for purification): Parbatiya (blacksmiths, tanners, tailors) and Newar (fishermen and scavengers) service castes.

This overarching categorization of the ethnic groups placed the ethnic groups in the lower rungs of Hindu hierarchy. The ethnic groups were in no way erstwhile structured in the caste system. They were ethnic groups with their own language and culture. But rights and privileges by the kingdom were given according to the caste. Hence the ethnic group had to get themselves incorporated in the Hindu hierarchy. Rajendra Pradhan (2005) writes:

Rights, privileges and obligations were to a great degree linked to ‘caste’ categories. Brahmins, for example, were exempted from capital punishment and providing corvee labour. The Brahmins and other upper castes were the privileged recipients of land grants and controlled most of the fertile land and other economic resources – there were some exceptions such as the Limbus

who controlled the ever decreasing communal land (kipat) in eastern Nepal, and several ethnic groups such as the Thakalis who operated the trans-Himalayan trade. Most of the ethnic groups and the lower castes provided the bulk of the labour and services, often forced, as tenants and cultivators, artisans, porters and general labourers.

Thus, all cultural differences were being violently silenced and legitimately masked under the theme of homogenization, with Nepali language becoming the signifier of the national community and Hinduism becoming the national religion. The outcome for the stringent new code of conduct was newer for the ethnic groups in the newly formed Nepal. The ethnic groups had their own culture and their own set up for every social happening, ranging from land ownership to marriage. *Mulki Ain* set forth different set of ethics and moral code for the society (Hachhethu 2003). Many scholar terms the process a strategy of Hinduisation (Hachhethu 2003) whereas few are optimistic and tries to manipulate the *Mulki Ain* as an attempt to built a “theocratic state by bringing together the pluralistic cultures and religions of pre-modern Nepal into a single legal framework in which a modified Hindu caste system and some explicit Hindu elements – which deviates vastly from the classical Brahmanical orthodoxy – were principally dominant.” (Khatiwoda, 2017). But the optimistic rendering does not fit with the historical fact of displacement of numerous people as laborers and army cadres from their homeland, some for a better home and some for yet more years of hardship. On the same account, Mulmi (2017) writes that the “a legal code, based on the principle of Hindu law and local customs, was introduced in 1806 under the infant king Girvan Yuddha’s name.” He further cites other historians and points out that the Hindu code incorporated the local custom and allowed it to be practiced but with a hefty fine, so hefty that “such penalties constituted a considerable source of emolument.” (Kirkpatrick, 253)⁸ Hence, the building of systematic structure of oppression by the rulers came into effect nearly 5 decades before the *Mulki Ain* of 1856. The historical data shows that majority of the official ranks were occupied by *khas* (Brahmins) and other higher castes. As Mulmi (2007) writes:

Although Jung Bahadur’s *Muluki Ain*, known for its distinctive adherence to the caste code, has been considered by some as an attempt towards

⁸ Kirkpatrick’s *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul 1811* and M C Regmi’s *Imperial Gorkha*.

“integration,” its discriminatory nature based on caste status violated this notion by rendering certain groups unequal to others. In any case, the judicial system was overtly in favor of the *bhardars* themselves, for law gave the *jagirdars* and *birta* owners judicial authority as intermediaries between the peasant and the state. This entitled them to extract judicial fines from the peasantry and keep it as their incomes.

Jagirdar, *bhardars* and *birta* owners being the noble men, high ranking army officers and inevitably the higher castes such as khas, the entire agency between the kingdom and the people rested with them.⁹ They acted as the intermediary between the state and the people. As the kingdom already had the code of hierarchy with Brahmins at the top, the Brahmins and other higher castes acted as their own when they dealt with the people. Historian (Mulmi, 2017) writes that the state was an “extractive state” which was “divorced from the need of the people”.

Colonial Prowess and Reconstruction of the Deterritorialized Gorkha

It can be said that Gorkha identity is a colonial construct, Gorkhas inevitably even in the present times are considered ‘brave’ and of the martial class. A lot of colonial effort has been put to the construction of the braveness of the Gorkha community (Golay, 2006). But fortunately or unfortunately (I shall discuss the lack of clarity later) the most significant contribution of the Colonial power in the construction of the Gorkha community is the conflation of Gorkha with every other ethnic identity of the hills. Golay (2006) writes:

The discourse on martial race and the subsequent enlistment of the Gorkhas into the British Indian Army changed the entire course of the Gorkha history. At the discursive level, the colonial state firmly placed its control over the hill societies by ‘civilizing’ and ‘normalising’ the ‘frontiers’. It also collapsed multiple identities and fluidities, typical of the Gorkha society then, and represented them as a single identity – the martial identity.

⁹ They were the aristocrats and army officers who were granted land rights by the king.

For another instance the *Namasine Matwalis* (“the non-enslavable alcohol drinkers” as categorized by *Mulki Ain*) and some of the *Masine Matwalis* (“enslavable alcohol drinkers) by joining the Colonial Indian Army inevitably became the Gorkhas and were placed in the Gorkha Regiment. Colonial power needed ‘non-questioning’ ‘natives’ who worshipped the military hierarchy to facilitate more smoothly the ever expanding British Empire in India and elsewhere. The British first witnessed the Gorkhas in the Indo-Nepal war of 1814; they were hugely impressed by the military capabilities of the Gorkhas. The cadres in the Nepali army who were not fighting any war post Indo-Nepal war of 1814-16 in general and the people who wanted a means to better livelihood in particular were recruited by the East India Company and were placed in Gorkha regiments. The recruitment process was not like how it is now in the modern times. Some historical work also suggests that the recruitment was clandestine as the Gorkha kingdom did not want the ‘highly eligible’ Gorkhas to join the hostile British military force who in the recent past had taken a huge portion of land from the kingdom. The reluctance of the Gorkha Kingdoms to ‘give away’ Gorkha cadres was legitimate and understandable but the Gorkhas for British were not only appropriate fighters to wage the wars of the masters but they were also immune to the race riots and ‘mutinies’ of the like that happened particularly in India. Contextualizing the decision to recruit the Gorkhas in the political requirements of the colonial state, Golay (2016) in his paper *Rethinking of Gorkha Identity: Outside the imperium of Discourse, Hegemony, and History*, writes:

The imperatives of Empire building had prompted the British into thinking that it would be better and cheaper to dominate the world if the natives could be induced to shoulder much of the Whiteman’s burden. But to attribute the decision to the political exigencies alone is to over simplify the issue. Furthermore, Lionel Caplan argues that ‘the theory of martial race did not emerge *sui generis* to meet specific military needs, rather it was a deeper manifestation of the wider European doctrine of biological determinism or scientific racism’. Hence search for the best “fighting material”.

Hence the Colonial power under the doctrine of biological determinism, considered Gorkhas only as an inherent warring race with no cultural universe. The discourse on Gorkhas as martial race occupies a large section of the colonial knowledge about the natives. The narrative is still as lively in the cultural milieu of the ‘Gorkhas’ living in

Darjeeling as it was in the past. Although deteriorating, the ‘brave’ and the ‘martial race’ tag is a significant part in the present-day Gorkha identity. The British Colonial power engaged many Gorkha cadres over the years in different place. As many young ‘brave’ sons of the soil started to leave his motherland and fight someone else’s war in a foreign land, the employer (British) made sure that the Gorkhas who had joined the ranks in their army was treated well back home. Golay (2006) writes “In 1899, Field-Marshal Lord Roberts revived a dormant order granting soldiers precedence in hearing of the civil suits.” The retired Gorkha army men were felicitated in different social gathering. In around 1904 one of the British Lord even persuaded Prime Minister of Nepal to exempt Gorkhas from the *corvee* work (Golay, 32). Also keeping in mind the economic prosperity that would follow if one joined the army, society’s recognition was very likely. The retired Gorkha cadre of the British or Indian (now) army finds a respectable place in the society, he finds a community who celebrates his valor and listens to the numerous stories of braveness.

The ‘Gorkhas as mercenary’ narrative was so widespread and adhered to that the Gorkha soldiers once recruited for the British crown was allowed to take their families with them but the administration strictly prohibited interaction of the Gorkhas with the natives of where they were posted. They made sure that the masculine ‘martial’ capabilities of the Gorkha stayed pure by making special arrangement for ‘ghettos’ for their settlement and prohibited cultural exchange, so as to avoid ‘adulteration’ of the martial class (E.Y Low, 2015). British Colonial power was so convinced of their scientific racism that they themselves didn’t wanted to recruit second generation Gorkhas, claiming that true warrior instinct can only be found in the Gorkhas staying in the cold-difficult-hill territory, their original home. In the ‘scientific’ racism hierarchy, the British themselves were obviously at the top. The entire mass of knowledge that substantiated the masculine warrior instinct of the Gorkhas also contained the subtle hint and sometimes blatant indication towards the supremacy of the white race over any other race in general and Gorkha martial race in particular since they were the mere mercenaries. Golay (2006) writes “In a strange way, the British admiration of the ‘Gorkhas’ was reserved to the ordinary soldiers only and not to the Gorkha officers.” The colonial power hardly considered Gorkhas as capable of anything other than fighting. And they always kept the ‘master and subordinate race’ dynamics by not letting the Gorkhas climb the military hierarchy. There was a ceiling

obviously approved by the Crown which made sure that the Gorkhas remained in the lower rungs of the army as the foot soldiers. Golay (2006) further writes that “it was a common belief that the Gorkhas could realize their enormous potential only under the tutelage, supervision and leadership of British officers. Eden Vansittart, one of the illustrious recruiting officers, is supposed to have remarked that “without a strong hand they [the Gorkhas] would very soon deteriorate and become slovenly”.

And the Gorkha soldiers kept their loyalty towards the Crown and worked well under the British official. They acted as the fine neutral war machine under the whites, who believed that the non-white races were mere ‘savages’ who lacked the ‘minimum’ understanding of the sophistry of modern etiquette and who also immensely lacked the ‘knowledge’ of themselves, others and their surroundings. In the infamous Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, General Dyer who ordered to shoot the innocent people had 2nd/9th Gurkha Rifles with him (IRISH, 2009). The Gorkhas also proved their loyalty to the Crown in other regions where they were posted. Hence, for the British, the Gorkhas became the apt ‘neutral fighters’ capable of carrying out orders (whatever it may be) without questioning, let alone revolting against the master’s sense of judgment. Post World War II when the British gained control over Singapore once again, the first Gorkha contingent of Singapore Police force was assembled in 1949. In the present day, the said Gorkha contingent recruits eighty Gorkhas annually. The contingent is led by Gorkha officers and now it protects the residencies of top politicians. Writing about Gorkha diasporas in South East and South Asia E.Y Low (2015) writes:

Gurkhas and their families reside in Mount Vernon camp in central Singapore, which serves both as a training and a self-contained residential complex that is out of bounds to Singaporeans and other non-Nepalese. In order to remain as a neutral force, Gurkhas are discouraged from integrating with the locals and are not allowed to marry Singaporean women. It is for these reasons that they are permitted to bring their wives and family from Nepal to Singapore. Most of the children, however, are born and educated in Singapore. The wives and children are not allowed to seek employment in Singapore. Upon the Gurkha father’s retirement from service, the whole family would have to be repatriated to Nepal.

This segregation of the Gorkhas from the natives of the places where they were posted and from the employer race was/is true in other regions as well. The Colonial force considered the Gorkhas to be strictly ‘mercenaries’ and to retain the mindless ‘mercenary’ attitude of the Crown defenders (Gorkhas), they had to be kept with their own kind without any cultural exchange whatsoever. Appeasement and ‘boasting’ of the Gorkhas as ‘bravest of the brave’ on the other hand was the other side of the same coin. The ‘braveness’ which was ‘legitimately’ recognized by the more ‘superior’ master race did give the Gorkhas a sense of pride back home, where many of them settled after the service. And the regularized salary also made them economically sound. Although now a Gorkha soldier in British Army can opt to live in the UK after completion of his service, most of them settle back in Nepal or Darjeeling for the respectful acceptance in the society and low cost of living.

Within the same colonial spectacle of expansion of rule and industries, the colonial power on the other hand was also expanding the tea plantation in Darjeeling and along with the ‘brave’ Gorkhas for fighting; they also required docile laborers for the newly built tea plantations. To contextualize the scene, one should mention the accession of Darjeeling in the present India. Darjeeling with small population of various hill tribes was originally the part of the Kingdom of Sikkim. In 1706, Bhutan, a small kingdom across river Teesta and bordering present state of Arunachal Pradesh won Darjeeling from Sikkim. Then in the mid-18th century, the part of land was accessed to Nepal. And the British took Darjeeling after the Indo-Nepal war, a war mainly between the East India Company and the kingdom of Nepal¹⁰.

Some local legends read that the colonial power had a difficult time searching for laborers. The indigenous Lepcha tribes who inhabited the Darjeeling hills were with laid back attitude and denied working in the plantations. The colonial power had to gather the cheap working force for the plantation and what would be better than to lure the people of the laboring country who were struggling hard under the oppressive Gorkha regime. Mulmi (2017) in his essay writes “the Gorkha Empire was not notable for its rule over the new colonies. Peasants in Kumaon regularly deserted their fields and left the Gorkha territory”. Citing another historian he further writes:

¹⁰ Indo Nepal war of 1814-1816.

The Gorkhali rule in Kumaon, Regmi writes, “was congenitally marked by such malpractices as extraction, torture, abduction and rape of the wives, daughters and daughters-in-law of the people, collection of unwarranted payments, fines and penalties, forcible appropriation of property, and enslavement.”

As Gorkhas were being recruited in the British Indian Army in the clandestine recruiting centers in India, the oppressed ones were also being recruited as cheap laborers for the tea plantation. The landless people of Nepal after the ‘unification’ of Nepal were in search of stable income and wanted to skip the regular harassment by the Gorkha soldiers. The town built by the Company (East India Company) became famous among the possible migrants. Oral history says that they were lured by the employers by saying that the tea bushes gave gold¹¹. The plantation owners (who were inevitably British) along with the British administration, paid men (who were called *sardars*) to bring laborers. The *sardars* were the local people who knew how to lure people for slave wages and hard work. Golay (2006) writes, “Immigration was encouraged by the colonial state, as it required cheap labor for building infrastructure for its ‘hill station’, and most importantly for its teeming tea gardens.” He further writes, “Just as the ‘Gorkha’ soldier, simple and free of religious prejudices was better suited to serve in the British Indian Army, he was also thought to be a useful plantation worker as he was casteless, docile and hardworking hill-man.”

As Bahuns, the upper castes of Nepal were the economic and political hegemonic power they had little concern for the ones who were evicted from their lands and who bear the brunt of the new Gorkha Kingdom. This led to the displaced ethnic to migrate to Darjeeling in British India where they were cheap labor in the colonial-capitalist industries. The majority of today’s population of Darjeeling migrated from Nepal to work in the tea plantation area set up by the British in Darjeeling.

As discussed earlier Nepali was made the official language of the monarchy and the slogan of the era was ‘*Ekbhasha, ekbesh, ekdesh*’ (one language, one dress, one nation) signifying the objective to create a homogeneous nation as pointed out by Tamang (2018:34).

¹¹*Chiya ko bot ma sun falcha harey*, meaning ‘tea bushes gives gold’. A famous line continuously reiterated in the migration history of Gorkhas.

In the process of homogenisation of the nation several communities were silenced and given a lower caste identity which affected them economically and socially. Ethnic groups such as the Tamang, Gurung, Limbu and Rai were subjugated under the Hindu caste structure, leaving no space for ethnic mobilisation, and some of these groups were not even allowed to write their surnames.

Many ethnic identities were being erased for the cause of a homogenous Nation. The ethnic identities in Nepal generally stayed in closely knit houses with their own kinds. They stayed in the cluster of houses of the same ethnic group. The ethnic identity, its rituals and practices were oppressively erased in the Gorkha kingdom and when the landless people travelled across mountains to Darjeeling for work, they brought just their surnames as the sole proof of their ethnic identity. The recruitment was sporadic across Darjeeling, and the recruiters (immigrants also?) didn't bother about which community they belonged, the immigrants were haphazardly settled in different Tea gardens. Several groups spread over Darjeeling and they settled not according to their tribal identity but as according to the whims of the owners.

Gorkha Women? Isn't Gorkha Always a Man?

The recruitment of Gorkhas in the tea plantation witnessed a major change in the history of Gorkhas. Unlike the recruitment of the Gorkha Army cadres, where only men were recruited, in the plantation the women were also recruited. In fact women tea pluckers were central in the advertisements for the tea leaves. This perhaps can be discussed as the only point in the history of Gorkhas where Gorkha women comes into the purview of the state and women interacts with the state power. Gorkha identity as we know it, which came through the discursive injustice of the colonial power, was inevitably a male identity. The subjectivity of a Gorkha woman cannot be found in the academics. Who they were, how did they live and most importantly their story of surviving the oppressive rule in Nepal and migrating for work to Darjeeling is something we will not find anywhere.

The British plantation owners were not free of patriarchal prejudices and they did not employ women in the tea gardens to help the women to better their situation. The women were cheap laborers and the intrinsic work of plucking delicate tea leaves and

buds was considered apt for women. Besides the colonial power and the plantation owners were undoubtedly the most cunning business people alive at that time, hence they knew that bringing the women would ensure the future labor forces that will be as cheap as the present ones. But bringing in single women must not have felt right for the prudish Victorians. As the migration to the tea plantation was random, many single women did come for employment. Historian suggests that the plantation owners favored married couples over single women and single men, as the single ones could anytime marry someone and leave the work¹². Consistent labors were of utmost importance for the owners as they were becoming the largest producer and exporter of fine quality tea. It is also said that the single women and men were coupled and married in the recruitment camp itself. The marriage of single men and women to each other was made a pre-requisite to get the job. Regarding the paternalistic control of women by the recruiters, Piya Chatterjee in her book *A time for Tea: Women, Labor and Post/Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation* writes:

By the early 1920s, the policy of family migration and a paternalistic control of women were formalized through the TDLA's bureaucracy¹³. At the coolie depots, only married women were to be registered, and no woman was to "bind herself by a labor contract if her husband or guardian would object." In 1930, the TDLA reported to the Royal Commission on Labour the "a number of married girls were coming up who were running away from their husbands. Now, no married women are allowed to come up without their husbands, and no unmarried women without the permission of their fathers and mothers. This is an entirely voluntary restriction."

The migrated laborers settled in the plantation area where they work for the slavery wages. The lowest possible wage, degraded living condition and very little to no services made them vulnerable. The 'brave' Gorkha identity vouched by the masters and the vulnerable worker's identity generated by the situation meticulously scripted by the same masters, the deterritorialized Gorkha was sandwiched in the Colonial spectacle.

¹² Piya Chatterjee in her book *A Time for Tea: Women, Labor and Post-colonial Politics on an India Plantation*.

¹³ Tea District Labour Association.

The Erasure of Intersections

In 1955, seven people including women and children were shot dead by police forces in Margarate's Hope Tea Garden, Darjeeling. The police opened fired on the people who were demanding maternity benefits, they were workers of the Margarate's Hope Tea Estate. The funeral was attended by people from across the Hills, from other tea gardens. A huge network of solidarity was built by the left and the Worker's identity was strengthened.

The CPI (Communist Party of India) and (later CPIM) made a good foothold in the trade union scene of Darjeeling tea garden workers. Although the trade union activities started later than that of Terai, Darjeeling witnessed the killing of six people by the police called by the then British Manager of Margarate's Hope Tea Estate, Okhelen. Chettri (2017:68). The communist political party capitalized on the fact that most of the people in Darjeeling were lowly paid workers. The party had a good reach in the remotest of Tea Gardens. The CPI and Gorkha League played an important role in organizing the working class of Darjeeling. While the Communists organized the workers, the elites were haunted by the indecisive nature of their own existence. The college educated elites who could read and write Nepali, most of whom were writers themselves had initiated a movement which was later called *Nepali Bhasa Andolan*. The demand of the Nepali Language movement was to include Nepali language in the 8th schedule of the Indian constitution. It started in the 1960s when Darjeeling Government college dropped Nepali from their collegiate curriculum. Although many civil society organizations had mushroomed in the hills since 1924, the *Bhasa Andolan* in particular gave the ultimate push to the formation of new self-identity of Nepali *daju-bhai* (Nepali Brotherhood). Golay (2006) writes:

A flurry of civil society organizations like the *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* (1924), *Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sammelan* (1923), *Himalaya Kala Mandir* (1950) and many others emerged which were actively involved in redefining and creating a new self identity based in the idea of kinship – Nepali *dajubhai*. Another major factor in this amalgamation was the standardization and universalisation of Nepali language. The efforts of these organizations and many other factors led to a pluralist synthesis of the myriad groups that together

constituted the Gorkha *jati*, secured and sustained by a pluralist culture and imagination.

Under the elite leaderships of *Bhasa Andolan*, many people and students of schools and colleges joined the movement which pressed on the one basic point, to recognize Nepali language in the Indian constitution. When this demand reached the respective state and central governments, they sidelined the request claiming Nepali being a foreign language. This fuelled the movement further. The stalwarts of the movement claimed that language was the main component of Identity, and not recognizing Nepali language meant not recognizing the whole of Indian Nepali speaking community. “*Bhasa haamro pran ho*”, “language is our soul/life” was the famous slogan of the movement. What was happening in the mean time was, the working class politics in Darjeeling was facing a downward trajectory as the main focus of the decade was language movement. There were magazines in Nepali being published and the activists were enthusiastically organizing camps in the remotest of places. Although the majority of people depended on the tea industry, and when most of the workers of the tea gardens received below poverty wages, the *bhasa andolan* spoke nothing about the plight of the workers. The phenomenon of the death of working class movement and the rise of the *bhasa andolan* sheds light in the multitudinal aspects of identity. The real life situation of the working class in Darjeeling which even in the present day is grimly - did not forged and strengthened the working class movement in Darjeeling. Rather, movement for recognition of Nepali language in the Indian constitution gained support of people over time. Why did this happen, why the real life situation of the workers didn't get reflected in the politics of that time, and above all why people chose to rally for language and not for bread? These are pressing question that comes up when one tries to contemplate Gorkha identity and history. The answer might be the insecurities that inhabited every deterritorialized Gorkha body, the insecurity of not having a home. Golay (2006) writes:

There was a certain sense of lack that kept haunting him (Gorkha) as he left his home and hearth. His subjectivity was bitterly torn between the calling of the home and the hard reality of never returning to see it again. There was optimism and hope when he said ‘*sunako lingo, chandiko ping, ek jieu khana launa lai thikaichha Darjeeling*’, meaning Darjeeling will take care of me. But

there was also a fear of the uncertain. This liminality of the deterritorialised subject was clearly reflected in the cultural production of those times.

The movement gathered its momentum in various anecdotal events, one of the main events was when an elected MP from Darjeeling was not allowed to speak in Nepali in Rajya Sabha. The political cleansing of Nepali speaking people from Assam during the Assam Movement (1979-85) was another instance which filled the community with more material fear of not having a place of their own. '*Haamro Bhasa ley maanyata paayena bhaney haamilai Bharat bata pani nikaalincha*' (If our language is not recognized by the constitution then we will be exiled from India) became the rhetoric of the language movement.

The Gorkha was searching for a home far away from his home. When Bhupi Sherchan, a poet of Nepal wrote '*aljhey chha kyaarey pacheuri timro chiyako bottei ma*' telling the people of Darjeeling (who have migrated from Nepal) that they were held by the tea bushes in Darjeeling and have forgotten the real home. There is a tint of melancholy of longing for someone who is gone. Interestingly enough, Agam Singh Giri, a poet born in Darjeeling replies with another poem, '*maatoko maaya birsera yaha baachera keko saar, paahar ki raani Darjeeling lai maya cha baraambar*', which roughly translates as 'what is point of living when one forgets the love of his soil, much love to Darjeeling, the queen of hills time and again. There are other literatures which in some way or the other deal with this tension and insecurity of not having a home, the melancholy of inability to return and the proud decision to stay back and call Darjeeling home. It is uncertain whether the working class quarters also cried the same way, did they have anything at all to long for. Did they have time to contemplate about their existence? But for the leaders of the language movement, the recognition by the Indian constitution was a matter of pride. They had proudly stated their decision of staying back in Darjeeling and being an Indian, and thus India too had to show its 'motherly' love for 'her' sons. There was a swift space for cultural transaction between Nepal and Darjeeling, which is why dialogues in the form of poems were possible in the first place. The literature produced in either place travelled across the border. But the literati of Nepal considered Nepali spoken in Darjeeling as language of the *coolies* (workers), not necessarily a slur against the workers but the literati considered it to be downgraded version of Nepali. Hence, many factors propelled the language movement, the elite gave the leadership and the educated

people and workers alike gave the support. The language movement was active for almost three decades until the Indian Government recognized it under the 8th schedule. But when the movement was in its second decade, Subhas Ghising came in the political scene with his political outfit 'Gorkha National Liberation Front' and several turn of events took place in the socio-political scene of Darjeeling. Subhas Ghising, the leader of the Gorkhaland movement of 1986 made the popular slogan, '*Bhasha Bhandha maato thulo*' (Land is greater than language) which said that the movement for the land was more important and sacred than the movement for the Nepali language. Another slogan which resonated in the Hills was '*Nepali Bhasa maangney harulai Nepal khed*' (Send those to Nepal who are asking for recognition of Nepali Language). Ghising said nothing other than Gorkhaland can secure political rights of the people in the Hills. He was born in a tea garden and had to join the Indian army before matriculation because his father died when he was young. He left the army and started teaching in a school. He soon left the school and enrolled himself in the Darjeeling Government College where he was arrested for participating in a political programme protesting the poor condition of the hills. When he spearheaded the Gorkhaland movement of 1986, he remarked that "Nepali is the language of Nepal, those who want to get it recognized in Indian constitution should go to Nepal." He claimed that the language spoken in Darjeeling was Gorkhali language and it should be rightfully called Gorkhali language because Nepali is 'feminine' and Gorkhali is 'masculine'. During the violent agitation of the 1986, the *Bhasa Andolan* offices were ransacked and the activists were harassed.

Ghising claimed that the recognition of Nepali language would jeopardize the identity of Nepali speaking (hereafter using the term Gorkha) since Nepali is the language spoken by people of Nepal and the term 'Nepali' is also used for people who live in Nepal, Nepali being the citizens of Nepal. He advocated for recognition of Gorkhali Language and started the two long year violent movement of 1986-88. According to Ghising, other than ambiguity that recognition of Nepali language would create, Nepali term also sounded feminine. In contrast with the term Nepali, he said Gorkha was masculine and it will rightly represent the people who were by birth 'warriors' (Gorkha). The 1986 version of Gorkhaland movement demanded a complete autonomy of Darjeeling as a separate state in the union of India. Many people died, however, more people died in the clash between the GNLF (Gorkha National

Liberation Front) and the CPI(M). Subhas Ghising detested CPI(M) so much that he once remarked, “if you see a snake and communist at the same time, kill the communist first’. The antagonism between GNLFF and CPI(M) was because of the fact that CPI(M) was in power in West Bengal and it denied the formation of Gorkhaland movement. But GNLFF’s hatred for the state government’s denial of formation of Gorkhaland was more directed towards the ideology the CPI(M). In analogy of ‘communists’ and snake he desperately used communists rather than state government or Bengalis¹⁴. This sharp antagonism with communists must have been born out of the fact that Subhas Ghising was born in the Tea Gardens and encountered the same deteriorated conditions of the tea garden first hand even after ‘workers friendly’ CPI(M) came into power in West Bengal¹⁵. And for the record neither CPI(M) nor the *bhasha andolan* activists were talking about the poor economic conditions of the Nepali community as a whole. He (Ghising) garnered a huge support from almost all tea gardens (except few which had deep communist influence) when he weaved the livelihood question of the toiling masses with the creation of Gorkhaland. He claimed, Gorkhaland would solve all the problems and the administration of Gorkhaland would understand its people unlike the CPI(M) who talked about the workers and did nothing for them. Being an ex-army, Subhas Ghising boasted again about the bravery of the Gorkhas and resorted to taking up arms for the movement. One may wonder why Darjeeling did not end up like one of the North Eastern states where still armed militancy is a reality. The fight of the GNLFF perhaps was the fight to re-define what it meant to be a Gorkha rather than to protect already ‘well-defined and believed’ identity. And the fact that the violence by the GNLFF cadres were basically targeted on the CPI(M) cadres of the hills and not on the state machineries tells us that the antagonism, somehow was between the working class identity of a Gorkha worker with the ‘pure’ Gorkha. While the worker’s movement was ‘politics of equality’, the Gorkha identity was substantiated by the ‘politics of difference’. Although in the superficial layer the Gorkhaland that was visualised by the GNLFF was supposed to bring happiness for everyone, it did the opposite by culturally producing a Gorkha identity which did not oppose the tyranny of owners. They (GNLFF) hardly worked in the tea gardens and did not demand any wage increment and neither complained against the degrading living conditions of the workers. Thus the construction of

¹⁴ Tea District Labour Association.

¹⁵ Even after when CPI(M) came in power in 1977.

Gorkha identity was a masculine and hierarchal phenomena which didn't served the marginalized at any point of time. The important issues of daily lives of the workers, wage and other benefits that were supposed to be provided by the owners was not provided to them and no real political action was taken by the trade unions. In the Gorkhaland movement of the late 1980s, there was a dichotomy that was being created between the agitated worker (who will choose to fight the management) and a 'true' Gorkha who will fight for Gorkhaland and work hard in the Tea gardens. This dichotomy can be found in the words that are used to distinguish the Gorkhas from other (who live in the plains). Words such as, loyal, sincere, brave and hardworking is what describes a Gorkha. There were several clashes between the CPI(M) and GNLFF cadres across Darjeeling, the communists ultimately lost its foothold in Darjeeling. Since CPI(M) had also failed in fulfilling the worker's desire of better livelihood, the general people of the Tea Garden started supporting the GNLFF. Debabrati Sen (2012:138) has viewed this shift of identity and actions by the plantation laborers as something which helped the deprived plantation workers to interpret their otherwise mundane daily life into something meaningful. She writes:

The use of *paahaadiness* was therapeutic as this provided plantation workers a chance to reinterpret their work life in meaningful ways. The investment in seeing oneself as hardworking, sincere and skilled was psychologically gratifying in the climate of intense disciplining within plantation and male domination at home.

Nepali workers could now freely express their pride in being Nepali which was not possible within CPI(M) dominated unions. The management also strategically engaged in meeting the ethnic needs of their workers by building Nepali Buddhist temples holding Hindu ceremonies and involving workers or sending out text messages in order for a Nepali boy to win the *Indian Idol* contest. Sen (2012)

Beside the economic crisis, monotony of the work life and the failure of the CPI(M) government to make any significant change in the lives of the plantation workers, the reason for this shift towards the Gorkha identity and Gorkhaland was also to find solace in the new and meaningful interpretation of their daily work life which was otherwise mundane, derogatory, abusive and tiresome. They took pride in being the

hardworking hill people. But, if the 'psychological gratification' for being a proud hardworking hill people really compensated the abusive, low paid work life of the plantation workers is the question that needs further contemplation, analysis and research. Amidst the making and remaking of the Gorkha identity, the marginalized negotiated between seeking workplace justice and desiring ethnic recognition, Sen (2012). With all the nuanced connotation of desiring better lives, education and employment, the major political demand of Gorkhaland was to create a separate state outside West Bengal but within India. Gorkhaland never opposed the hierarchical Indian nationalism which only considers north Indian Hindu males as Indians. Rather, the leaders of the movement always kept their alliance alive with the central Government. It even supported the BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, making S SAhluwalia MP from Darjeeling. The several key political parties in different time frame of the movement were hopeful of the Central Government that it would help in the creation of Gorkhaland. Thus, the distinct regionalism was antagonistic of the pan-Indian nationalism but it was to assert Indian-ness for the fear of ethnic cleansing.

The Gorkhaland movement of 1986 boiled down in the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), a semi-autonomous body. After the formation of DGHC, since Ghising also dropped the demand of inclusion of Gorkhali language, the language activists who were displaced from political scene again started organizing themselves. They again started organizing meets and this time their case was strong because Sikkim was already included as a new state in the Union of India. Sikkim being majorly Nepali speaking state, the Union Government on 20th of August 1992 included Nepali along with other two languages (Manipuri and Konkani) in the Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution. It was after 36 years, that the demand was met. Even though the language that people speak in Darjeeling is called Nepali, Government to please Ghising, wrote in the amendment that Nepali language was also called Gorkhali, Gorkhey in many places.

Conclusion

Hence the contours of Gorkha identity in the historical context gives us the rough sketch of its trajectory from the small district in Nepal to the small hilly district in Darjeeling. The fight put up by the Gorkha army in the conquest of Nepal and in Indo Nepal war (1814-1816) under their king Prithvi Narayan Shah rightfully gives them

the brave title. But the other reason for the Gorkhas to join the Shah army as discussed in the first section of this chapter demystifies the absolute nature of the brave quotient. It partly cleared the fog and helped us to locate the other factors which motivated the Gorkhas to fight the war of expansion of Nepal, one significant factor being the granting of land lease to the soldier along with a house by the king. The 'brave' connotation was amplified by the colonial institution of power. The colonial power also conflated the Gorkha identity with anyone who spoke Nepali or who joined the British Indian army. British not only recruited Gorkhas in the army but they also recruited wage laborers for the tea plantation. The 'brave' identity was in contrast with the Gorkha workers who were living as slaves in the newly built tea gardens of Darjeeling. In contrast with the men (Gorkha) who were recruited in the army, the plantation management favored Gorkha women for the plucking of tea leaves, thus finally bringing the invisible Gorkha women into the discourse. Darjeeling saw the organizing of left trade unions and later the consolidation of the working class movement organized by the CPI faced the wrath of Subhas Ghising, who furthered the Gorkha identity politics in Darjeeling, sabotaging the workers' movement and *bhasa andolan*, and inevitably fuelling the heterogenization of political field in Darjeeling. Subhas Ghising's party GNLF successfully resurrected the identity of brave Gorkha along with other connotations, such as 'hardworking' and 'loyal'. 'Hardworking' and 'loyal' attribution actually worked well in distancing workers from the left politics. He remarked Gorkhas are hard working workers who do not complain. The working class movement died a fatal death when the GNLF gained huge mass support even from the tea garden, as GNLF posited Gorkhaland as the panacea for the people of Darjeeling. Other research also showed as to why Gorkhaland was appealing than workers' rights movement and Gorkha identity soothing than the working class identity. But the failure of the DHGC (Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council) to address the public issues, nepotism and rampant corruption heated the political landscape of Darjeeling again. A particular event brought back the issue of Gorkhaland in the political scene and everyone was again chanting Gorkhaland, as enthusiastically as the people did in the 1986 movement. We shall discuss it in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Gorkhaland: New shift and Ethnic Revivalism

This chapter will look into the revival of Gorkhaland movement in early 2000s and how *Indian Idol*, a reality television show in India built the momentum for this phase of the movement. This chapter will also delve into the phenomenon of participation of the people in the broadcast media which was relatively a new phenomenon in India after the series of reality shows by different broadcasting houses. The chapter will also look into the complexity of how the people of Darjeeling tried to re-construct their image in a different mold in front of the pan-Indian audience by massively voting for Prashant Tamang, the first Nepali (Gorkha) contestant in the said reality show. The ‘Prashant wave’ soon ended in the revival of the demand of Gorkhaland once again. In the later part, the chapter will deal with the formation and rejuvenation of different ethnic organizations in Darjeeling, a phenomenon of ethnic revivalism, which started happening when the Gorkhaland movement of 2007 failed at carving Gorkhaland.

Context

The violent movement for Gorkhaland, which was led by Subhas Ghising boiled down to the formation of an autonomous body, namely Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (henceforth DGHC). Gorkhaland was not realized and Subhas Ghising settled for DGHC. After the formation of DGHC, the issue of creation of Gorkhaland took a back seat in the political landscape of Darjeeling. Subhas Ghising was voted chairman of the said council unanimously. But the DGHC could not fulfill the people’s aspiration, it did not solve the basic issues of the people of Darjeeling. Water crisis, sanitation and most importantly the wages of the tea garden workers, instead DGHC became a “storehouse of corruption, political highhandedness and nepotism” (Sarkar, 2014). In early 2001, the five vehicle convoy of the GNLFC chief and DGHC chairman Subhas Ghising was ambushed near Kurseong. Subhas Ghising was injured seriously and

Gorkha Liberation Front (GLO) was the main suspect¹⁶. There were other organizations as well who blamed Subhas Ghising for sidelining the Gorkhaland issue¹⁷. More than two decades after the formation of DGHC, Darjeeling saw no other major movements. GNLF remained the single major party of the hills and Ghising was the chairman of DGHC till 2005, when he signed a Memorandum of Settlement with the Government on December, 2005 to set up a Sixth Schedule tribal council called the *Gorkha Hill Council* in place of the DGHC. This move was opposed by many other organizations in the hills. The effort came after Ghising's negotiation with the state and central government to transfer more powers to DGHC failed.

In the midst of all political and administrative cacophony, in the year 2007, Prashant Tamang participated in *Indian Idol*, which revived the Gorkhaland movement in the political landscape of Darjeeling. As soon as Prashant Tamang appeared on the reality show, several fan clubs were organized in different parts of Darjeeling. Soon a new political party was formed by Bimal Gurung which led the Gorkhaland movement once again with the same fervor as before. The second(2007) phase of the movement too failed in its entirety to achieve Gorkhaland, instead it settled for another autonomous body called Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, supposedly with more powers than the erstwhile DGHC.

Reality Shows, participation of the people and Indian Idol

Broadcasting media all over the world underwent a major shift with the advent of reality shows. The flow of the content in broadcast media was unidirectional with no structure for feedback from the audience. The audience was at the receiving ends in the linear model of information flow. The audience too on the other hand did not want to participate, after all its contents were something that we “simply wanted to sit back and watch television rather than interact with it.” (Jenkins, 2006) Reality shows such as American Idol and Pop Idol massively changed the idea of broadcasting media. Pop Idol, was the first of its kind British music competition television series created by

¹⁶ A militant organization led by for GNLF man, Chattrey Subba, who had issued a warning to Subhas Ghising to withdraw his councilors from DGHC.

¹⁷ <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/states/story/20010226-gnlf-leader-subhash-ghising-balances-trouble-in-darjeeling-with-his-indispensability-775691-2001-02-26>, a report published in India Today on February, 2001 claims that there were other organization who were 'haranguing' Ghising for the dropping the Gorkhaland issue.

Simon Fuller which ran on ITV from 2001 to 2003. The main aim of the show was to decide the best young pop singer in the UK based in the viewer voting and participation. The show became an international T.V franchise spawning many *Idol* series worldwide. The *Idol* series became instant hit all over the world. The people got to participate in the making of the pop star of their respective nation. Various *Idol* series, such as Indian *Idol*, Arab *Idol*, American *Idol*, Latin American *Idol*, Canadian *Idol*, Australian *Idol* and many more came up in respective countries. The series started making huge profits as it attracted a lot of viewership globally. As the series also involved text messaging in favor of respective contestant, the telecom companies also profited a lot.

“*Forbes* ranked *American Idol* as the most profitable of all reality series, estimating that it had netted the network more than \$260 million in profits by the end of its third season.” (Jenkins, p.60) The reality show engaged the people of respective nations like never before, it encouraged the people to participate in a creative way. “*American Idol* commanded two of the top five time slots throughout the important May 2003 sweeps period. More than 40 million people watched the final segment of the final episode of *American Idol's* second season.” (Jenkins, 2006) The nature of these series has certainly surpassed the criterion of a television show and it is rightfully a ‘trans-media franchise’ (Jenkins, 2006), as it involves financial transaction in the form of text messages outside the economic transaction involved in production and dissemination of television series.

Indian *Idol* as one of the many *Idol* series across the globe started its journey in Sony Entertainment Television since 2004. The show was aired regularly till season 6, after which the seventh and eighth season was dedicated to *Junior Singers*. After the two *Junior Indian Idol* seasons, the show was aired again as *Indian Idol* in ninth and tenth season in 2016 and 2018 respectively. The show started with the preliminary selection in the major cities of the country, those selected in these preliminary rounds were taken to Mumbai where the participants would have to perform each week, usually on a weekly theme. Each season lasted many months with several episodes. The participation of the audience was via vote that they gave to their favorite contestant. Each week one participant who got the least vote was ousted from the show. The number of the participants reduced each week and ultimately, in the final round, the

one with most votes among the three finalists wins the title of Indian Idol. There were other musical television shows prior to Indian Idol, one being *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa* which was aired on Zee T.V since 1995. In its inception years, the participants were mentored only by the judges of the show with no voting for the participants by the public. Later with the airing of Indian Idol in 2004, *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa* also introduced the voting system, the judges were then made the mentors and scoring was primarily done the votes that each participant received.

The Idol series capitalized on various factors to motivate the viewers to vote. Region, ethnic-lingual and other identities of the participants became very important to get the votes. As the show escalated, meticulously crafted videos were broadcasted as an introduction prior to the participant's performance, where the personal life, economic condition and the region from where the participant belonged was explicitly told, so that the voters get to know the participants. Although Indian Idol was hypothetically aimed at selecting an idol singer of India, it did strengthen the various sub-identities that strongly reside within the broad Indian identity. This strengthening of sub-identity was strongly witnessed in the third season of the show aired in the year 2007. The two finalists were Amit Paul, a Bengali from Shillong and Prashant Tamang, a Nepali speaking native (Gorkha) from Darjeeling. The particular season saw the probably the highest voting ever witnessed by the reality show. Prashant Tamang, winner of the season got a whopping 70 million votes. Amit Paul was said to unify the differing ethnic groups in Meghalaya, and was even declared the 'brand ambassador of peace, communal harmony and excellence' (Shillong Times, 2007) by the then chief minister D. D. Lapang. Prashant Tamang on the other hand had indirectly propelled the Gorkhaland movement, a movement which was staying under the DGHC's carpet for more than three decades.

Prashant Tamang, Recourse to Build a new Gorkha Identity?

When we revisit the several edgy contours of Gorkha Identity, we cannot certainly leave the Prashant Tamang episode, which gave rise to the 2007 phase of the movement. Bimal Gurung ousted the then supremo of the DGHC, Subhas Ghising and the political atmosphere of the hills again was heated with the demand of Gorkhaland, after almost three decades. It was 2007 when Prashant Tamang, a constable in Kolkata

police and a native of Darjeeling decided to try his luck in Indian Idol, a singing reality show. He was working as a constable in Kolkata police after his father's death and he used to sing in the police orchestra. Later, it was made public that his colleagues and senior in the department had motivated and supported him to take part in the reality television show. As soon as he appeared on the reality show and cleared the first audition, entire Darjeeling was engulfed in the gripping episodes of the reality show that followed for months. A massive exuberance was felt across Darjeeling, many fan clubs were formed, voting booths were organised and people donated huge amount of money to vote for the local boy. It was the first time that someone from Darjeeling was on national television. It is estimated that he received nearly 70 million votes, ten times higher than the other finalist Amit Paul. Not only Darjeeling, but Gorkhas living in other countries, people from Sikkim, all voted for him. The judges in the entire sessions of episodes gave him a mixed kind of reviews. Although it was an accepted fact that his singing abilities were not outstanding, nevertheless he won the show with such a huge margin. An anonymous *Ama* (mother) in Sen (2012) says, 'We have to make Prashant win, we know he might not be the best singer out there but he is *our* boy, he made us proud.'

I remember the enormity of support that was being poured from every corner. We were in school one day and were told that Prashant Tamang, then the Indian Idol finalist was coming and we have to line up in the road to welcome him. Nearly every school was told the same and numerous students had lined up in the national highway that connects Siliguri and Darjeeling. Nearly every inch of the road was filled by happy people welcoming their 'Champion'. It was supposedly a great moment for everyone living in Darjeeling, a moment which also had a significant affect in the Identity politics of Darjeeling. For it would revive the dormant Gorkha identity politics again in the political scene of Darjeeling. We, then school students cheered for him to our fullest. The visit of Prashant Tamang was a huge thing in Darjeeling, people were regularly watching the third season of Indian Idol, and everyone in the villages, towns would watch the reality show undisturbed by any errands however necessary it may be. Slightest fluctuation in electricity and cable lines was not tolerated. After watching the night's show, people would gather in groups to vote for Prashant. Prashant fan clubs were organised by Bimal Gurung and his associates, who later turned this fan clubs into GJMM offices when he floated the new party of the

same name. It can be said that the participation of Prashant in the Indian Idol gave the people of Darjeeling a new hope and pride in being a Gorkha which also fuelled the 2007 Gorkhaland movement under the leadership of Bimal Gurung. Punathambekar (2010:242) writes:

.....residents of Darjeeling and viewers in other cities and towns of West Bengal, Sikkim and Nepal were rallying behind Prashant Tamang, the other finalist of *Indian Idol-3*. Tamang, who had taken time off his job as a police officer in the city of Kolkata to participate in the contest, was able to capitalize on support from ethnic Nepalese across India and even Nepalese working in countries such as Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, and UAE who financed a “Save Prashant” SMS (short message service) voting fund. During the final stages of the contest, 600 people were reportedly hired to send SMSes round the clock to secure Tamang – dubbed the ‘pride of the hills’ – a spot in the finals.

The author in the same work also talks about ‘mobile public’ which is a public having access to mobile technology. This ‘mobile public’, with the participatory format of the *Indian Idol* could participate in the making of the Indian idol. The participatory format was very new in Indian television. This overwhelming participation of the people of Darjeeling to help Prashant Tamang win was a new form of socio-political articulation of the people to redefine the boundaries of Gorkha identity. Punathambekar (2010) brings the term ‘mobile publics’ “as a way to draw attention to the centrality of mobile media technologies to the formation of publics, highlight the fluid and ephemeral nature of these publics, and suggest that the transient nature of mobile publics allows for the articulation of new cultural and political possibilities that might not be possible in more formal institutional settings.”

At the times when Gorkhaland issue was at the back seat, making Prashant Tamang win the national television show was in some way to prove the existence of Gorkhas as well as to break free from the *chowkidar* narrative of Gorkhas¹⁸. The people felt proud to see Tamang amidst other participants (Indians). The people got their chance to paint the image of themselves in the pan-Indian canvass. The people of Darjeeling

¹⁸ As along with the brave connotation, Gorkhas are also stereotyped as *Chowkidars*(guards). This is sometimes reflected even in bollywood when they unnecessarily put ‘Gorkha guards’. In fact, Prashant Tamang was called a *Chowkidar* by an RJ after he won the title of Indian Idol.

not only supported their Champion but vigorously participated in the process of making him the Indian Idol. The people were not passive recipients of the ideological contents of being a Gorkha but they all participated this time in making their own meaning of being a Gorkha. As Prashant Tamang also contested in a national pan-Indian competition, people took it as a moment of pride with a strong determination to make him win as it was the first time that a Gorkha was in a very new space, claiming for something that was not considered his. The same kind of support was pouring in for another finalist Amit Paul from Meghalaya and which has been described by scholars as an incredible phenomena where people of different ethnicity was coming together to support their lad. People apparently forgot the long standing difference and violence. The ‘mobile public’ with new meaning of participation generated a newer sense of participation in the national mainstream, redefining their existence and identity. Punathambekar (2010:243) writes:

While some fans set up websites and blogs to generate interest and support from the rest of the country and abroad, others formed a fan club and facilitated efforts by a range of groups and organizations to sponsor and manage public call offices (PCOs) in different parts of Meghalaya, distribute prepaid mobile phone cards, and set up landline voting booths. Recognizing the ways in which these activities were beginning to transcend long-standing ethnic, religious, linguistic, and spatial boundaries, state legislators and other politicians soon joined the effort to garner votes for Amit Paul.

As Amit Paul was ‘uniting’ different ethnic people of Meghalaya by making them ‘forget’ the differences and by supporting the cosmopolitan ethos of living with diversity, Prashant was reviving the dormant Gorkha identity. The production houses of the mentioned show also fully tried to evoke the ‘regional identity’ element by dramatically scripting the ‘reality show’. In an episode, after Prashant had finished singing “*Bhigey hoonth terey*¹⁹”, there was Udit Narayan²⁰ saying that he felt like the sound (Prashant’s voice) was coming directly from Kanchenjungha. Now, how a musician felt that “*Bighey Honth terey*” was coming from Kanchenjunga is a matter of deeper musical contemplation, which also on the other hand substantiates the fact

¹⁹A very popular Hindi film song.

²⁰Singer and Judge of the season 3 Indian Idol.

that this reality show capitalized on the regional identity politics by scripting the whole show.

Gorkhas in the modern space was/is experiencing ontological insecurity. The dead cause of Gorkhaland must have caused a deep remorse and insecurity of not knowing who they were anymore. The belongingness was fading, and Prashant Tamang revived the thought of having an identity. As Bauman suggests, the thought of ‘having an identity’ will not occur to people as long as ‘belonging’ remains their fate, a condition with no alternative. Prashant Tamang made the whole of Darjeeling proud. But the source of this sense of pride was different this time. The Gorkhas, otherwise proud of their ‘brave’ blood and unquestionable loyalty, were proud to see one of them in the Indian reality show. Perhaps their exuberance regarding the participation and the determination to make him win the title was motivated by the emotion of ‘showing’ the pan-Indian mass the existence of Gorkhas. But it was also about seeing themselves on national television every time Prashant performed, the forging of a modern image of Gorkhas in the pan-Indian canvas. It was a foothold for the deterritorialized Gorkha in his new nation to assert his presence and existence.

After a few days of Prashant winning the Idol title, a radio jockey made a derogatory remark by saying, “if watchmen start winning singing competition then who will secure home.”²¹ In many ways it reinforced the mainstream ideology of the North Indian Hindus being the real representatives of Indians, who are capable of competing and winning national competitions while all others are fringe identities. The remark caused a huge uproar in the hills, public gathered in town areas to protest the outright analogical statement of the radio jockey who tried to stereotype and freeze the Gorkha Identity. There were protests against labeling Gorkhas as *Chowkidars*. The protest was only able to register the grief and anguish locally and it had no effect on the mainstream media and politics. Soon the people forgot the Indian Idol and the comments.

After this episode, the same year (2007) saw an upsurge of Gorkhaland movement under the newly formed GJMM (Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha), under the leadership of Bimal Gurung. Bimal Gurung capitalized on the situation and floated his own new

²¹ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/books/when-indian-idol-prashant-tamang-was-called-a-chowkidar-darjeeling-erupted/story-kePVIGUrMA0LmM9gudUpjL.html>

party, GJMM. He had actively organized voting booths and fan clubs for Prashant Tamang. The Gorkhaland movement was again started. He accused Subhas Ghising of not helping Prashant Tamang and questioned him (Subhas Ghising) on his silence. The people who were enthusiastically voting for Prashant and trying to help him win the title were offended by the silence of their *Appa*²², who was supposed to help his son (Prashant). GJMM gained an overwhelming support from the hills. People joined the party in huge numbers and soon the Gorkhaland issue was revived again as Bimal Gurung claimed to create Gorkhaland within three years. The movement continued for many years with mass participation. The people of Darjeeling again fought for Gorkhaland. But the movement boiled down to the setting up of GTA (Gorkhaland Territorial Administration) in 2011, after five years of intensity. In the mean time the West Bengal state government, under Mamata Banerjee, capitalized on the already growing sense of tribal identity among the people of Darjeeling by setting different Tribal development Boards which indeed weakened the Gorkhaland movement.

Politics of Reservation and Ethnic Revivalism

As in 1988, Subhas Ghising, after two years of violent movement settled for an autonomous body called Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council under West Bengal. The failure of Gorkhaland movement to achieve Gorkhaland and setting up of autonomous body generated remorse. But the political scenario started changing when DGHC became a corrupt, autocratic administrative body. Promises of better livelihood for all vanished in thin air and the mundane, monotonous and hard daily lives of the plantation workers remained the same. This political situation gave rise to the revival of ethnic politics in the Darjeeling hills, which till now was sidelined by the 'homogenous' Gorkha identity and Gorkhaland movement. Tamang (2018:36) states:

The movement that demanded separate statehood for Gorkhaland in the 1980s stands at the crossroads of tribal identity and pan-Gorkha identity today. Over time, the identity movement has been reduced to the politics of reservation. Two important historical moments determine this trend of identity transition

²²Pet-political name of Subhas Ghising in the hills which means 'father'.

and ethnic politics in Darjeeling. First is the failure of the Gorkhaland movement and the formation of DGHC in 1988, leading to a new political scenario in the Darjeeling Hills. Second, the beginning of the global decade for ethnic politics, induced by the Indian government's moves to implement Mandal Commission recommendations to increase reservations for minority communities as well as the United Nations declaration of the Decade Indigenous Peoples.

As Gorkhaland was not created and the DGHC did not fulfill what was promised, different ethnic community and their organisations started asserting their tribal identity to be identified as STs (Schedule Tribes), which would ensure better possibilities for employment in public enterprises. Tamang (2018:36) writes:

Associations like the All India Tamang Buddhist Association (AITBA) and Tamang Buddhist Gedong have been existence since the beginning of the 20th century, but the predominance of the Nepali language and culture and the push towards a homogenous Nepali or Gorkha identity in India had made them less active. The 1990s provided opportunities for these ethnic associations in Darjeeling to reclaim their position in society. They emerged as a new platform for the ethnic movement to re-establish its rhetoric parallel to the demand for Gorkhaland. Such associations began creating awareness among people on the benefits of becoming a reserved category in India.

The already established associations were fast to make demands for recognition of their Tribal status by the Indian government. And other smaller *jaats* (different communities such as Rai, Mangar, Gurung) also started organising themselves to reactivate defunct associations and start new associations. It can be safely said that this revivalism was search for alternative options to demand benefits from the Indian government. It can indeed be rightfully said that this revivalism was for the search for better lives which also disturbed the ideological basis of Gorkha Identity. It can be aptly said that Gorkhaland movement is propelled by the politics of recognition whereas the ethnic identity is fuelled by the politics of reservation. As a result of the Gorkhaland movement, the homogenous strong Gorkha identity was put into scrutiny by the people who were still toiling even after a long struggle for dignity and better livelihoods. The people chose their forgotten identity which they thought could help

better their lives. As a result of mobilisation of different communities for ST status, Tamang and Limbu were included as Scheduled Tribe in 2003. As many other associations started mobilising, Subhas Ghising in an attempt to capitalize the growing demands of tribal affiliation signed a memorandum between the state and central government which would facilitate the implementation of Sixth Schedule, which would ensure tribal status for everyone living in Darjeeling²³. Tamang (2018) suggests that Subhas Ghising took a U turn when he signed the memorandum for Sixth Schedule. For he thought Gorkhas were proud modern citizens and not Tribals. This can be seen in an interview published in *Frontline*, 1986:

Those provisions (Sixth Schedule) are applicable only to Assam's backward tribal population. But we are not tribal. We are civilized. Look at me; I wear a three-piece suit and shoes! We are advanced people.

Gorkha identity was supposedly modern, masculine and civilized. In the process of its making, it was something that was different than the people living in the plains in the other parts of West Bengal but it nevertheless was 'civilized' and modern as India. As the Gorkha identity was unable to bring in the benefits, people took recourse in the forgotten tribal identity. Tamang (2018:37) further writes:

This oscillating nature of identity in Darjeeling Hills from pan-Nepali or Gorkha identity to tribal identity, reflects the flexibility of a community's boundaries and the capability of community elites or leaders to manipulate ideology. Ethnicity reflected in this way would allow us to argue that "ethnic identity" in the modern political domain is little more than a strategic instrument for the state and political leaders to gain resources for power and authority.

Although, the working class identity and politics which also dominated the hills at some point of time is missing in the above paragraph, the author rightly points out that the elites of the community plays an important role in appropriating and manipulating the ideology that substantiates the making of certain identity. The marginalized in the

²³ A tripartite Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) was signed between the Centre, West Bengal Government and the Subhas Ghising-led Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) on 7th December, 2005. The agreement was signed by Union Home Secretary V. K. Duggal, West Bengal Home Secretary AmitKiran Deb and Subhas Ghising in the presence of Union Home Minister ShivrajPatil and West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya.

Darjeeling hills hence continue to lie in the multilayered marginalization, marginalized as Nepali language speakers, as workers in the plantation and as women.

On the other hand the state government, to 'stabilize' the situation in the hills, started fuelling the formation of several 'cultural' and 'development' boards. By the end of 2016, more than fifteen such boards were formed. In 2014 West Bengal Government cleared and placed before the Centre for approval - the resolution to bring 11 sub-communities of Gorkhas, namely Gurung, Mangar, Bhujel, Newar, Jogi, Khas, Rai, Sunuwar, Thami, Yakha and Dhimal – into the Schedule Tribe category. After the failure of DGHC and GTA to cater to the immediate needs of the people, these sub-communities has already been moving forward and consolidating themselves for the approval of their community to be recognized as Schedule Tribe. This sudden but also a longed recourse of the people to ethnic/tribal recognition is politics of reservation at play. After the dismissal of the 'sixth-schedule' move by Subhas Ghising in his later years in politics, the failure of GTA again fuelled the resentment among the people. And this time the West Bengal state Government came for the rescue. It not only passed the resolution but also funded different development and cultural boards for several Gorkha sub-communities. This move of the state Government was vehemently opposed by several activists and also some political outfits. Some even loathed the people of several sub-communities who were asking for boards. A piece in a local digital platform called the people 'seasonal insects' who were making noise for the development board, and who were disregarding 'the larger collective Gorkha aspiration of separate state'²⁴. Several people resented over the fact that people were forgetting their 'age old' demand of separate state and falling for development boards only because of the flow of money from the state government to these boards.

The state government's resolution of forming the boards reads in length the motive of formation of such boards. It mentions the 'profound' intention of the state government to 'protect', 'promote' and 'safeguard' the culture and language of the concerned sub-community. It also made claims to protect and preserve the 'true' identity of the sub-communities. In the times of intense cultural exchange over the years and the intervention of strong colonial presence, the 'true' identity, whatever that means, cannot be predicted let alone preserved. The over ambitious resolution of the state

²⁴ *Darjeeling Chronicle*, an online news platform which specifically deals with Gorkhaland movement.

government is very suspicious and it looks like it is capitalizing in the long standing ethnic question of the hills to divide, calm the people and rule. The loathing of the people and the state government for forming the boards and warm welcoming of the same boards, both were/are equally visible in the hills. Although the loathing of the state government is understandable, the name-calling of the people who are forming the board is somehow outrageous. The Gorkha nationalist digital platform mentioned above, in the same web article, claimed that people were acting greedy and for some economic benefits they were forgetting the demand of pristine and almost godlike 'Gorkhaland'. What the 'attack' decides not to see is the vulnerable position of the people who are desperately looking for ways to better their life. People now know that the recognition of tribal category can fetch so many benefits for them and their children. Starting from admission in higher educational institutes to reservation in the government services, the recognition can give people a chance to better their lives, which the autonomous body has not been able to do. Can the high length and breadth of nationalist movement accuse the people (of the said nation, in this case Gorkhaland) of betrayal when the people are thriving for better opportunities and living? The tribal status for 11 sub-communities somehow can be questionable as almost all the sub-communities in some way or the other practices several version of Hindu practices and rituals. But considering their arduous journey in the past century; the history of forceful erasure of their cultural capital in the oppressive regime of Prithvi Narayan Shah in Nepal (who is ironically called the Gorkha king), the colonial manipulation of their labour, and the present socio-economic condition of the majority of people of Darjeeling who lives/works in the tea gardens with below minimum wages and no land rights, the case for the status of Schedule Tribe does make a case.

Conclusion

In the political landscape of Darjeeling, muddled by Gorkha identity (majorly), ethnic, working class and other identities, the marginalized has always put effort for a better life, sometimes by asserting Indian-ness and to be Indian for political security and sometimes by forming respective ethnic boards with the help of the otherwise 'antagonistic' state government²⁵. The synergy between the leadership of the

²⁵ As in the case of Prashant Tamang.

movement and the people's aspiration and interest has over the time seen huge ruptures. The possibility of creation of Gorkhaland and setting up of a democratic state without the oppression of majority nationality, whatever that means, has come to nil. The people are taking recourse to the long forgotten ethnic identity in the hope of securing tribal status, so that they secure better facilities and reservation. The ambitious vow of the state government to protect the 'true' identity and culture of these ethnic identities is dodgy to its core. The GTA continues to function with the TMC backed faction of GJMM, and it does not talk about the workers of the tea plantations. The condition of the workers remains to be the same and social issues such as water crisis and environment issues remains outside the political discourse. In such situation, one cannot do anything but wait for the unfolding of future events and hope if something better comes by.

Chapter Three

Gender and Gorkhaland

Gender as a category of analysis was omitted in the erstwhile social sciences research. Feminists have introduced the gender perspective into existing disciplines in an effort to transform their assumptions and analysis to make gendered ideologies and practices visible in social lives. Feminists have contributed actively to the discourse on nationalism (Sinha, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Jayawardena, 1986). In the discourse of nationalism in colonial India, it was the figure of the ‘modern Indian woman’ who bore the burden of representing the inner and spiritual realm of the nation. She was however distinct from the lower caste and working class women in the Indian society. The cultural-nationalist project of colonial India was a gendered discourse which included “some limited emancipation of, and even self-emancipation by, women within its own gendered logic” (Sinha 2000: 625). The discourse is expanding and varied across different contexts and there have been various finely researched scholarships (Banerjee 2003; Sinha, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Jayawardena, 1986) which brings into attention, the gendered and changing political, social and cultural expressions of a community where national identity is the core part of popular politics.

Gorkhaland movement, often understood exclusively in the ‘oppressed nationality’ framework often undermines the intricate gender dynamics that is interwoven in the nationality discourse. This chapter will use gender as a category of analysis to study the Gorkhaland movement in order to understand the gendered relations and the role of Gorkha women in the movement. The first part of the chapter will try to place Gorkhaland movement in the broader ‘nation – nationality - nationalism’ discourse to understand the movement as a political action which sought to carve a state within the Indian nation state by politically engineering a ‘imagined community’, which was inevitably fractured to its core. The chapter will also try to understand the theoretical underpinnings of gendered nationalism in the broader perspective to be able to navigate the course of gender in the said movement, so as to analyze the subtlety of the space, culture and politics of Gorkhaland movement with the understanding of gender as an important factor in the socio-political and economic exchange. The later

part of the chapter will try to understand the intersecting gender and class dynamics in the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling. It will assess how the movement has negotiated with and has itself been influenced by the intersections of class and gender in the community. An objective will be to look at how the marginalized women perceive the movement and ways in which they relate to it in a political situation which does not consider them as important and relevant actors.

Nation building - Nationalism- Gender

Benedict Anderson in 'Imagined Communities' states that any community bigger than a village is an imagined community since "...the member of even the smallest nation will never know the most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." (Anderson, 1983, p.6) This imagined identity and its proponents, the myths-heroes-symbols, builds up the apparently coherent subject of a modern nation-state. As Anderson puts it, even though the people do not meet each other or share life with each other, they share the coherent identity of being inside a marked territory. It is supported by shared beliefs, stories, way of life, so on and so forth. However, Chatterjee (Whose Imagined Community? Check reference) critiques scholars such as Anderson and others to say that nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa have not followed the 'modular forms' made available to them by Europe and he places the discourse of the 'material-spiritual' divide in Indian nationalism, discussed above.

We know how the standardization of language with the advent of print capitalism in Europe had propelled the creation of modern political geography with corresponding national identity. In contemporary times, with the advent of social media, newer processes of creation of national identity are surfacing and ways in which an individual entity or a group of individuals accepts the most often 'fabricated identity' is becoming more complex and intriguing. Fabricated, because the test of if the identity is organic or not is debatable. There are without any doubts, multiple identities. Individuals and collectives alike are constantly drifting and shifting across various identities and the meanings of the particular identity. The identities that an individual or a collective shifts through can be of varying nature: professional-sexual-regional etc. There is always a choice of how an individual wants to situate different

pieces of their understanding of the self to build a coherent identity of themselves inside as well as outside of their bodies. Beside this, more strict and stringent are the identities based on region-race-religion and gender. Within the mosaic of identities (and its varying meanings) that people live in, the national identity is an overarching pan country phenomena which often denies the existence altogether or patronizes other identities within or outside the body that embodies the national identity. The national identity is stringent as well as romantic. It is sometimes so stringent that it is indifferent towards more organic and pressing identities, such as caste. The national identity most often rejects the Dalit identity under the rubric of the 'proud' Indian identity. It can be oppressive to other marginalised identities and can become dominant irrespective of the willingness of an individual to romanticise it.

The inevitable need of constructing a national identity comes with the process of nation building and more inevitably it comprises of construction of an enemy (enemies are sometimes real and sometimes not). A 'we' needs to be fostered to defend the land (read nation) from being robbed and destroyed by 'them', the enemy; the building of national identity most often fulfils this equation. This, in modern times, translates into the race of economy, military superiority, etc. However, the process of how this 'we' is built is very complex and various factors come into play. To build a nation requires a homogenous allegiance towards the nation and its interests. 'We' should bear the broader national interest, even though it sometimes is not clear if the national interest is the interest of all the people residing in the particular nation. Without the 'other', 'we' cannot be created. However, the theoretical understanding of nationalism and nation building has only applauded the community's ability to build an inter-subjective identity. It is only very recently that the feminist analysis of gendered (Nagel, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1997) nature of imagined political identities have made visible the various interplay of gender in the process of nation building. Feminist researches (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Sarkar 1992) even show how inherently nationalism uses-shapes-reshapes the gender dynamics of the particular community involved. This interaction of nationalism and gender identity yields various consequences which sometimes can be benevolent for the broader feminist politics and sometimes can regressively sabotage it. Kuttab (2009) explores the Palestinian Liberation Movement and the participation of Women in the movement. She writes "We place the Palestinian women's movement as an extension and part of the national

democratic struggle, or a movement that has evolved with the different stages of the national struggle to express aspiration and respond to national needs. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Palestinian women's activism has influenced by its relation to, and identification with, the national liberation struggle". She further analyses how the need of activism by every citizen overruled the strong verdict of the local patriarchs who opposed women's activism. The acceptance of women's political involvement by and large by the people also came out of the dire need of political activist and within the national democratic movement grew the women's movement²⁶. In 1921, the first Palestinian Women's Union was created in Jerusalem, which came to exemplify the organic link between national struggle and social struggle (Kuttab, 2009). The form of participation of women in the national struggle against colonial domination can take various forms. Banerjee (2013) explores how Hindu women in India carved a niche for themselves in the apparently public-political-masculine domain by taking up masculine traits to become citizen warriors. Eileen Kuttab in the second half of the same essay states that the acceptance and building up of women's union and its participation in the national movement was possible because of the pervasive destruction of all sectors, classes and institution of Palestinian society which gave rise to broad-based Palestinian resistance.

If we come to a different context with colonial presence and where the colonial force is persuasive along with its coercive tactics the nationalism-gender equation changes drastically. Banerjee (2013) further talks about how Hindu nationalism is a masculinised idea and how Hindu women are adjusting within this masculine idea of nation and nationalism. On the other hand Vishwanathan (2010) analyses the conflation of the idea of a nation and body of a woman using lithographs prints in India in the Raja Ravi Sharma Press and The Calcutta Art Studio. The prints visualized Hindu representation of national identity with colorful mythological scenes. The prints were circulated throughout India and it was the cultural capital that was outside the control of British. Vishwanathan (2010) further writes "The Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press, which started production on the outskirts of Bombay in 1894 and the Calcutta Art Studio spread a specifically Hindu visual representation of

²⁶Expanding Israeli occupation of Palestine which started in the mid 20th century has resulted in a conflict between the two nations. The conflict is often cited as world's 'most intractable conflict' which has been going on for more than 50 years. The result of the occupation was a resistance and Liberation movement spearheaded by Palestinians.

national identity.”The map of the nation was overlapped by the body of the Hindu women; Ramaswamy (2008) uses the word “bodyscapes” to characterize these representations. This show how volatile is national identity and how it is appropriated and manipulated by patriarchal power. In Banerjee’s (2013) words the women is made the “repository of culture”, and in the case of Indian anti-colonial nationalism, specifically in Bengali anti-colonial nationalism, women were considered to be ‘untouched’ by the colonial power, hence the elite men believed they (women) represented ‘true’ Indian-ness which needed protection and nurture, (Chatterjee, 1993). If we see some of the lithograph prints, then we will be able to see how men freedom fighters were characterized as warrior sons who are trying to protect the land (read Motherland). The icon-ization of the national identity was first witnessed in the Abanindranath Tagore’s ‘Bharat Mata’ where he sketched *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) as a saffron clad fair woman with four hands for the first time. Further bazaar cheap paintings exorbitantly furthered this idea of Mother India and produced numerous prints where a fair woman stood with a faint political map in the background and a flag in hand, (Vishwanathan,2010). The woman, wearing jewellery and *sari* strongly suggests that she is a Hindu woman. One such print²⁷ shows a kneeling Bhagat Singh, who is offering his severed head to the woman, blood oozing from his neck while she receives the offering with a smile. The woman is undoubtedly representing the nation, while Bhagat Singh is a worthy male freedom fighter and hence a worthy son of the nation. It is not true that the icon-ization was happening outside the political space of colonial India and only in the realm of Bazaar painting prints. Several other scholars have interestingly studied the underpinning ideas and motivation behind the rhetoric of freedom movement. Niranjana has sought to find answer to how women of the third world in general and India in particular ended up becoming the cultural repository of the national identity. It is interesting to note that women who were ‘untouched’ by the supposedly external/material (British) culture were the ones considered to be ‘Indian’ in the complete sense and in several instances the Bengali women is abhorred for becoming *Memsahibs*²⁸. Chatterjee (1993) suggests that a dichotomy was created between men and women. On one hand were men who were exposed to the culture of the British and who worked and acted in the

²⁷*Shaheed Bhagat Singh* (Rising Art Cottage, Calcutta ca. 1940).

²⁸Kundamala Devi writes in *Bamabodhini patrika* in 1870, "Oh dear ones! If you have acquired real knowledge, then give no place in your heart to memsahib-like behavior."

public-political sphere and on the other hand were women who were not exposed to the British culture and who acted and moved within the private space. The neo-traditionalist Hindu cried for the protection of these women from being exposed to the British Culture, for them it was the only way to retain the lost 'Indian' culture. The nationalist movement was forged with this underpinning idea of protection of the body of women (can also be read body of the nation) from the British hands. Perhaps, without using the interlink between the idea of motherhood and nation, a coherent national identity cannot be constructed. Hence, nation and nationalism cannot be understood without bringing in the category of gender and feminist research dealing with nation and nationalism has revisited the issue and has made visible the underlying gender dynamics deeply involved in the ideology of nationalism²⁹.

Raja Puniani, a poet from Darjeeling, had published a visual poetry on youtube in October 2017. The poetry was published after the split of GJMM and formation of second GTA panel with Binay Tamang as the chairman. Bimal Gurung was sidelined by Binay Tamang and his associates and with the help of West Bengal State Government, GTA 2 was formed. The people believed that it was a move by the state government to sabotage the 2017 phase of Gorkhaland movement. The visual poetry³⁰ referred above starts with the sound of melancholic siren which is used in tea garden factories to call the staffs in the background, with hills enveloped by clouds in the screen, after which the poet himself is seen struggling with a painting and smoking cigarettes. With marvelous jugglery of words and cinematic genius, the visual poetry links the territorial land of Gorkhaland with that of the body of a Gorkha Mother. The poet, who is apparently very upset with the formation of GTA 2 and the leaders who took charge of the administrative body which was created by West Bengal government, metaphorically uses term '*Aama*' which means mother in English to imply Gorkhaland and '*Chora*' (Son) implies the allegedly 'betraying leaders'. In the poem, the son (Chora) places a revolver in the neck of the mother signifying the betrayal of the leaders for the movement's goal that is Gorkhaland and leader's settlement for second version of the autonomous administrative body. The 'we' that the poet wants to create here is synthetic and is not coherent with the reality. Class, gender and caste difference which is visible and existent in the social milieu is not

²⁹ Sinha, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Jayawardena, 1986; Vishwanathan, 2010; Niranjana; Ramaswamy, 2008.

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyvEe5l3Dw>

considered in the synthetic 'we' created by the poet. The 'we' that is the 'Gorkhas' have a heterogeneous identity which the poet here is desperately trying to freeze with the collective notion of motherhood that is positively respected in the society. By doing so, the poet reinforces the metaphoric representation of the nation as 'Mother India'. In the changing context, the land which comprises Gorkhaland is conflated with the body of *Aama* (mother). The analogy of the leader as the son and Gorkhaland as the mother is not free of the socially consented and accepted relationship between a mother and son. A son is generally expected to look after his mother and he certainly should not point his gun towards his mother. Another moral code of the community expects the son to revere his mother, let alone kill her. Hence, the poet by changing the political situation³¹ to the imaginary scene in his visual poetry of the son trying to kill his mother also evokes this hatred for people who do not revere his mother. This brings back the notion of the 'motherland', which the son is bound to protect and if required he should be willing to sacrifice his life or if required take someone else's life. Thus, reverence and violence are mutually constitutive in this discourse of nationalism.

The conflation of the body of a woman with the territorial land in the nationalist movement is not new. In the nationalist discourse the nation is often described as a fragile woman in need of protection and her son should always protect her. The nation enters the body of the woman in several cultural deliberations in order to serve the seemingly masculine interest of appropriation and politics of power. For a similar type of conflation between the body of a woman and the nation in the context of broader Indian nationalism, where a body of a woman occupies the map of the nation, Ramaswamy (2008) uses the term 'bodyscapes' to define the body of the woman which is also 'understood' as map of the nation. She argues, these 'bodyscapes' "transform abstract territory into lived nation" and "they personalize the nation-space and present it as an entity worth dying for...". Gorkha nationality movement for the creation of Gorkhaland also imagines Gorkhaland in the image of a mother which is reflected in the consideration of Gorkhaland as homeland, and it inevitably overlaps the contours of Gorkhaland with the body of a woman. Many people have died for

³¹ The political situation of Darjeeling changed post 2017 phase of the movement, when the GJMM was split into two factions, one with Binay Tamang as a leader and one with Bimal Gurung as the leader. The Binay Tamang's faction was supported by Mamata Banerjee's TMC government to form the GTA-2. Binay Tamang was made the chairman of the Board.

Gorkhaland, most recently in 2007, 6 people died in the clash with the police in the 2017 phase of the movement, all in order to protect their motherland.³² Ramaswamy (2008) further writes, “Such gendered bodyscapes, along with the poetry on these goddesses which frequently accompany them, encourage the male subject-citizen to view the national territory as a vulnerable woman who needs their protection and as a mother who had to be rescued through heroism and sacrifice.” The mother-son dynamics in the Gorkhaland movement may not appear in the cultural surface as frequently and as strongly it did in the context of Indian nationalist movement, which was in the form of the revered Mother India, nonetheless, Gorkhaland does conflate the body of a woman with the landscape of Gorkhaland. But who is this woman who is qualified to represent ‘Mother India’ or who can legitimately represent *Aama*? And in the realpolitik Darjeeling, who are the *Aamas* situated distantly from the ‘legitimate’ *Aama*? Does this ‘ill-qualified’ *Aama* figure anywhere in the movement as a legitimate political actor? Does she raise her voice in the movement as a political actor?

To understand the nuanced answers to these questions and to situate gender within the ongoing movement of Gorkhaland, I spoke with working women from few tea gardens and few women who were working in SHG (Self Help Group). Although all women who were interviewed fell into the broader category of ‘working women’, the responses were different. The aspiration for Gorkhaland, the motivation of political participation and experience varied which in a way painted a faint sketch of various intersections of different identities colliding with the omnipresent national Gorkha identity.

Tea gardens which are characterized by below poverty wages and deplorable health, education and employment opportunities had an overwhelming tinge of economic progress in their aspiration for Gorkhaland. The workers explained that they participate in the movement with the hope that if Gorkhaland will be created, their living condition will be better and their children will get jobs. While the otherwise ‘important’ part of the Gorkhaland Movement, the Identity Crisis was substantiated by the experience of ‘othering’ when they visit Siliguri³³. ‘Insecure identity’, which is the

³²This however, is not to reduce the issue of violence in Indian democracy to ‘bodyscape’ alone as Das (2015) argues, “violence is embedded in democracy as much as democracy is embedded in violence”.

³³Nearest town and major economic hub of North Bengal.

often iterated rhetoric of the Gorkhaland movement did not come up in the worker's response when asked about his motivation for participation. Few respondents could not come up with anything when asked about how according to them Gorkhas are mistreated. Some of them responded with a vague second hand account of mistreatments faced by Gorkhas in the marketplaces of Siliguri, a treatment that every rural/small town people face in bigger cities and towns. It is ironical that a poor working class member of our society is mistreated and humiliated in their daily lives all the time. Her regional or national identity becomes redundant in such cases. While few more educated women working in SGHs tried to enter into the sophistry of West Bengal administration's employment policies and the discrimination that Gorkhas face, nevertheless they provided no further arguments that substantiated the claim. It also was somehow a very general account in a country where employment rates are not spectacular. Nonetheless, even with the apparent absence of discrimination strictly faced by the Gorkhas in the region, we cannot deny the existence of multi-dimensional Gorkha identity which arises from the shared language, region, food and other cultural expressions and practices. The Gorkhaland movement channelized these similarities for forging the grandeur Gorkha identity, emphasizing more on the brave army connotation.

A 57 years old woman tea garden worker exclaims, "I don't know what Gorkhaland is, we are the workers, we are given orders to do things and we have no other option other than doing what is told. We are told to participate in the strikes and we have to participate, even out of fears sometimes. But there are never any demands for increment of our wage." There was a sense of despair and resentment in her voice when she described her powerless-ness in the whole hum-drum of Gorkhaland. The misnomer trade unions have only furthered her vulnerability. She further asks why there is no strike for the demands for increment of the wage.

A respondent who is a 42 year old woman tea garden worker from a different tea estate, with no minimum education, had no words to explain the 'second class' position of Gorkhas. Instead she admitted that she does not think Gorkhas are mistreated. To understand her context, she was born in a remote village and got married in her teen years and now is a mother of three daughters. She did not complete her school education and she has hardly visited any cities or places other than the nearby town, Kurseong. Perhaps, the political division and dynamics of the

‘other’ (which in this case is the Ruling Bengali) and the definition of the ‘we’ is not ‘real’ for her or it does not correspond with her daily life. She acknowledges that it is often iterated that the Gorkhas are mistreated but she does not think that the mistreatment is a real happening. But at the same time she also could not materialize into words her sufferings as a woman and as a tea garden worker. When she was asked about the experience, she merely gave a blank look and did not utter anything. With a complete absence of trade union activities, with no historical memory of movements other than Gorkhaland movement, and with no scope of political interactions in her daily life, the silence on her part makes sense. Nonetheless she had an immense hope for Gorkhaland, and more with the hope of ‘prosperity’ that it would bring. For her, Gorkhaland would bring better employment opportunities for her daughters. In almost every interview the primary ‘prosperity’ that Gorkhaland would bring was overwhelmingly economic in nature. This is not to delegitimize the oppression of Gorkha identity in mainland India, and neither an effort to erase the experience of several migrant workers and students in other parts of India and other Gorkha people who have faced discrimination and a second class citizen treatment¹. But to understand the gendered and marginalised character of nationality movement it is important to delve into the narratives of the marginalised.

Why do the people of Darjeeling need Gorkhaland was unanimously answered, and the common answer was that the Gorkhas are discriminated. One participant, an educated woman, working in SHG said that whenever she leaves Darjeeling and visit other places, she are asked if they are from Nepal, she further added that she feels as a second class citizen every time she faces such question and remarks. Another participant, a housewife evoked the West Bengal government’s arbitrary notice of making Bengali language compulsory and said, in every sector, Gorkhas living in West Bengal are discriminated. Other instances of discrimination voiced by the participants were flimsy as they claimed that they were treated differently in the city spaces of West Bengal. But this different treatment of one community by another is universal as within two communities there is always the cultural-political process of othering, also keeping in view the obvious differences of rural-urban dichotomy, the different treatment cannot be exclusive to Gorkhas. And hence a home of their own with their own people in administration would check and act on the discrimination. The unique ‘personality’ of Gorkhas (see chapter 2) heavily substantiated the narrative

of difference and discrimination narrative. The Gorkhas are ‘inadvertently’ simple and hardworking people, and the people from the plains make use and abuse their simplicity. Somehow, as discussed earlier, this ‘simple’, ‘loyal, and ‘hardworking’ personality which sums up in the *pahadiness* of the Gorkha also gave the sense of pride in being so. Sen (2012) argues as how this *pahadiness* is both empowering and disempowering. The everyday triviality is compensated by the respectful self-perception as a distinct *pahadi*, enabling women to ‘imagine an existence in a context of respect.’ But the proud self-interpretation as hardworking and good workers also enables the male leaders of Gorkhaland movement to appropriate “their labour and influence, to push for a more masculinist political agenda” (Sen, 2012). Another research participant said, “we are dependent on the tea garden, we have to manage our homes with meagre wages, we attend political meetings and participate in the movement so that our wages increase, increased wages is our number one priority.” But Gorkhaland movement has never held this demand, the sole demand being the separation from Bengal. The tea garden workers do not even have ownership documents of the land where they live. Officially the owner of the plantation is owner of the worker’s homes and the land they live in. This insecurity has never been politically acknowledged in the movement. Hence, when TMC (Trinamool Congress) promised *parja-patta* (land rights) to the workers of tea gardens, it won the municipal election in Mirik. The masculine political agenda of appropriation for administrative powers has never recognized these insecurities that marginalized faced. Rather, it has manipulated and appropriated the ‘labour and influence’ for their own masculinist interest in the most possible deceptive way.

Being a Working Woman in the Tea Garden

Being a woman can have different connotations in different contexts with differing identities. A Hindu woman is different from a Muslim woman, a white and a coloured woman, a woman in the city with a job and a woman who is a tea garden worker. We cannot deny that gender discrimination and exploitation exists everywhere but the degree of marginalisation varies with context, some of which are cited above. The work in the tea plantation is very laborious and painstaking. Majority of the workforce are women. A strong economic push for migration and employment (irrespective of

gender) is felt across the tea belt of Darjeeling. Due to the wages which is much lesser than the minimum wage, youths in large number migrates for better paying jobs. Women working in tea gardens have to work in the tea gardens as well as in the home. Daughters are of great help, it assures no work at home. The wage is so minimal¹ that it is impossible to sustain a family out of it. Hence, kitchen garden and animal husbandry has become an inevitable part of daily life. And most often, for a bit more income, households (women basically) also sells homemade liquors. The deplorable livelihood forces the parents to send their sons and daughters to far away cities for work. A women worker from Ringtong Tea Estate sent her son and a daughter both to work in two different states of India. Her daughter is working in Uttar Pradesh as a school teacher and son in Kerala. She brews liquor, works in the tea garden and she is also the president of local unit of the GJMM. She completed her studies till class ten. While she was studying, the agitation of 1986 started and she could not study further. She says that her brothers were active members of DYFI³⁴ and they would take her along and others to store and throw stones at the GNLFF cadres. She says that she was not aware of what actually was happening and renders it trivial now.

She was preparing the utensils to brew wheat when I visited her on an early February morning. She was first annoyed to see another person trying to take her time. Fortunately enough when I introduced myself and started asking questions she went with the flow³⁵. She had always kept alive the anger that brewed when her home was set ablaze by the GNLFF cadres in the 1986 movement. As soon as a new party was floated in Darjeeling to further the demand of Gorkhaland in 2007, she joined the local unit and has been active since then. The only good effect that has happened after taking politics as one of her chores is that the Tea Estate that was closed for many years was reopened in 2014. She, with a smile on her face, says that this (Ringtong Tea Estate) is small Gorkhaland for her and for many others, since they got back the job of wage labourer. Sen (2012) writes, “I argue that women’s agency within Nepali sub-nationalism has to be understood in terms of place-based meaning-making that attends to their everyday work and household practices of negotiating patriarchy.” She was un-employed for a good number of years and opening of the tea garden was an

³⁴ Democratic Youth Federation of India, youth wing of the CPI(M).

³⁵ As she had recently entertained another researcher and was very annoyed at first to see me approach.

enormous victory for her. Her participation in the movement always had the agenda of pushing the issue of closed tea garden in the political meetings. With a strong anger for the situation which did not allowed her to complete her education she burst with the sad ordeal of a Tea garden woman worker when asked about the discrimination that a working woman faces in a Gorkha village. She says, discrimination is visible all along and to only talk about few, one has to start with the daily chores that a woman handles along with the labour that she renders for the tea production. She said, 'Perhaps, women, from time immemorial are buried under the debris of household work. That's why still everyone thinks that household chores are the sole responsibility of a woman.' She posed several straight questions while trying to describe how women are treated different in Gorkha society. She asked why it is not so that a husband washes wife's clothes when she returns from a hard day's work in the tea garden. What will happen if he cooks and washes his own clothes, when he knows that she is already tired? Instead of any help, she says a woman worker after a hard day of physical labour also has to tend the animals, make food, brew alcohol (if one has a side business of selling homemade brews), make food, do the dishes, anything and everything in the kitchen and outside. She searched for the reason for this, the gendered division of labour and immediately concluded without any further contemplation that perhaps it was because it has been so from a long time and every parent teaches their sons and daughters their respective duties, with the division. When we delve into the issue further, she continued to talk about how in village committees all the office bearers are male. And if a woman is in the committee and makes opinions regarding various issues, she is ridiculed in her absence. The committee is usually an all-male committee. When questioned as why she thinks the setup of the society is like that, her opinion was, "हामी घरको बुडो भन्दा चै बुडी अलिक फर्स्ट भएर गोयो भने चै, एल्ले कतै केहि पो गरिहाल्छ की भन्ने एउटा संखा क्यात्.....औरत मान्छे संखालु हुन्छ भन्छ, संखालु हुदैन औरत]" (If we wives move ahead of our husband, then the husbands grow suspicious if we do anything wrong and people say women are suspicious!). The suspicion can sometime become so 'enormous' that it is followed by a physical fight. However, the reason for the *unnecessary* suspicion remains ambiguous. The network of patriarchal control partly operates through this shaming. She was very straightforward to locate the core of the inequality, cite its space of operation and she also roughly speculated its reason/s. But interestingly enough, she

did not make any antagonistic relationship between the men of the society and women's oppression. Men were cited as lazy and alcoholic who does not give any efforts in the household works. Her words "पुरुष हरू चै पैला देखि नै रक्शी खायो बस्यो" (Men since a long time are alcoholics), portray men as lazy and alcoholic, but not as somebody who perpetuate oppression and control. Rather, according to her the main headquarter from where the control mechanism runs are the elderly of the society. She says that as long as the old people with 'old' way of thinking are in the society the naming and shaming will continue. Although men's bodies are the site of perpetrators of oppression, she somehow does not make this connection. Perhaps, it is because of the Gorkha identity movement, and its interaction with other identities. Gorkha identity is so masculine that it is sometimes unwilling to acknowledge other identities if it threatens the 'coherent' character of the Gorkha identity.

Another participant, a 57 years old tea garden worker from Margarate's Hope Tea Estate, whose elder son is in Indian Army and youngest in Bangalore (working in a hotel), gives a fierce answer to substantiate the marginalising character of Gorkha Identity. She is a Nepali speaking women from Manipur, who in her late teens married and settled in Darjeeling. She says, "Well, I cannot say anything about Gorkhaland Movement, some party says this and some says that, we are workers so we cannot say anything, we have to go wherever they tell us to go. If they tell us to do strike, we have to do it." She further says that again such strike will happen and in the demands there will be nothing about them and their wage. When asked if she feels discriminated being a woman, she said "...in the tea gardens, a woman has to do lot more than the man. A woman does a lot of work and still she gets scolded by the *Baidaar*³⁶. On the other hand, a man does half of the allotted work and no one says anything, not even the *Baidaar*. Women are kept under men's feet.

Conclusion

The brave masculine Gorkha occupies every inch of space in Darjeeling, the identity of the people living in the Hills is immensely built up of the brave army Gorkha

³⁶ Also called *Chowkidars*, are the men who look after group of women tea pluckers.

content. The Ex Army association and its village units hold a prestigious place. The organisation also played a major role in the Gorkhaland movement.

A respondent from a small village with no road connectivity walked many kilometres to the political rallies. She said, “my two children are small and they need a good future, if I attend the meetings, I remain in the good books of the leaders and in the future I can vouch for them.” The participation of women in the movement is often to be in the good books, so that later they can vouch for their brothers, sons, and husbands for jobs. In fact when asked about the motivation of participation, many of the participants said that they participated for better future for their children and to be in the good books.

The masculine Gorkha is surprisingly also embodied by the working women, and all the aspiration for a better livelihood is bundled up in the single political movement. Although one of the respondents separated the sexual division of labour from the demand for Gorkhaland by saying that even when Gorkhaland is created the situation and the division will not vanish. Many of the respondents aspired for a better society with better livelihood in Gorkhaland. Beside the overtly masculine connotation, Gorkhaland will not be a utopian egalitarian society but will be like one of the many State’s administration with all the modern day administrative sophistry, with its masculine perspective of women’s ‘empowerment’.

The internalization of the masculine Gorkha identity although hinders feminist consolidation but at the same time it also provides some sort of ‘therapy’. The overtly masculine Gorkha agenda of Gorkhaland does overshadow marginalized identity, but women, ethnic identities and workers do always strive for better life and they do harbor abhorrence for the homogenous and forcefully ‘all-encompassing’ Gorkha identity and we can only hope for progressive politics emerging out of this abhorrence in future.

Conclusion

After looking into the history of 'brave' connotation of the Gorkha identity, we cannot deny that Gorkha identity is masculine to its core and Gorkhaland movement is certainly a masculine agenda for appropriation of administrative power by the upper-class elite Gorkha men. The fact that there is no representation of women in general and working women in particular in the movement, makes the aforementioned claim more grounded. 'Gorkha' in its entirety is a man, who is also a 'brave' warrior. Hence, Gorkha in Gorkhaland is masculine entity. There is no imagination of a Gorkha woman in the cultural space of Darjeeling which is in equal footings with the Gorkha man. In the Gorkhland movement, the only iteration of a Gorkha woman in the political space is that of the Gorkha mother, as discussed in the last chapter, whose body sometimes replaces the territorial map of Gorkhaland in the masculine agenda of transforming 'abstract territory into lived nation' (Ramaswamy, 2008). Other than invoking the vulnerable motherland narrative – the male leaders engineers – manipulates the socio-political space in such a way where the motherland or the Gorkha mother has to be saved from the 'Other', the Gorkha woman, her subjective experience, her struggles and the possibility of greater consolidation lies largely under the carpet. The underpinning of the masculine agenda of Gorkhaland is solely the creation of a state within Indian Territory but outside the state of West Bengal, which certainly looks like the attempt of the Gorkha elite men in the pursuit of larger administrative power. There is an absolute dearth of literature when we try to locate the historical trajectory of Gorkha woman vis-à-vis Gorkha identity and Gorkha man. It makes the task of imagining and understanding Gorkha 'femininity' and the society in the historical context difficult. The only available and reliable resource to understand Gorkha woman historically and within the Gorkhaland movement were the women themselves. The unavailability of literature concerning the Gorkha women also proves that history-writing has been gender-blind and patriarchal, which unfortunately also contributes to the gaps in this research. Going through the discourse of Gorkha identity, one will realize that Gorkha woman is not the constituent of the Gorkha identity, Gorkha identity and all its connotations is masculine which erases the

‘feminine’ experience and perspective. The enormous ‘contribution’ of the colonial power in the making of this masculine Gorkha identity is also clear due to the habit of meticulous bookkeeping of the colonial administration. The Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling rejuvenated the colonially constructed Gorkha identity. “Nepali is a feminine word, whereas on the other hand Gorkha sounds/is masculine” (Sotang, 2016) remarks Subhas Ghising, in one of his rallies in the 80s when the movement was accelerating towards its peak. The remark explains the position of the ‘feminine’ in general and Gorkha women in particular in the socio-political and cultural milieu of Darjeeling and Gorkhaland movement.

‘Gorkhaland movement is not the movement for maternity benefit³⁷’, remarks Madan Tamang³⁸, another leader of the Gorkhaland movement from a different political party. He makes this remark in an interview by the local journalists. While trying to emphasize on the ‘repute’ of the Gorkhaland movement, he signals that it is not like a movement for maternity benefit, which for him is a movement of lower stature with a non-significant demand. Demand for maternity benefit holds a significant place in feminist politics of the past as well as in the present, and without any shade of doubt it should hold the central place in feminist politics. The mentioned leader must have been referring to the CPI led workers movement³⁹ in Darjeeling where maternity benefit was one of the many demands. The belittling of the demand which is/was of enormous significance for the women sheds more light in the masculine nature of the Gorkhaland movement, which has always been indifferent and more precisely intolerant towards the subjective experience and concerns of women. The male leaders have put all their efforts to erect the issue of Gorkhaland as of supreme significance for the people of Darjeeling, by invoking the ‘oppressed nationality’ narrative and ‘politics of difference’. And they have succeeded in their mission to set Gorkhaland as a panacea for all the social issues. In this omnipresence of Gorkhaland in the political landscape of Darjeeling, every other movement, resistance and concerns has been erased. The only political issue in the region is Gorkhaland, and the politics is decided by the state government and the elite, middle-class Gorkha men.

³⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FttCjvQJe8>

³⁸ He was murdered allegedly by the GJMM in 2010.

³⁹ Discussed in the chapter one.

The president of the women's wing of GJMM is Asha Gurung wife of Bimal Gurung who was the president of undivided GJMM. This tells the tale of women's participation in the movement and their political activity. The women participants are basically only the ally of the Gorkha men, and the women leadership is the close relatives of the men leaders. And most importantly the women leaders of the movement only furthers the masculine agenda of the movement, there is no feminist solidarity whatsoever. Joshi (2012) writes about how the women leaders are even not concerned about the water crisis in the region which hits the women of the region hard. She further adds that the gap in the middle-class women leadership and the working-class women (who forms the majority of the women in the hills) is huge, they (women leaders) do not even bother about the water crisis. The participation of the women in the women's wing of the party does not translate into the induction of women's issues in the movement, the questioning of the masculine character of the movement remains further in the distant. The participation of middle-class women, the close aide of the male leaders cannot be considered as osmosis of feminist politics into the Gorkhaland agenda, as the women leaders, irrespective of their gender serves the masculine agenda.

The scenario changes a little bit when we look into the local women leaders of the movement, most of whom are tea garden workers or women working as SHG members. As working women and coming from underprivileged political background, they come to the political space with self-interest. Sen (2012) in her study concludes that the women in the grassroots join politics to remain in the good book of the leaders and ensure job for their son, brother and husbands. My interaction with the women tea garden workers have in a way substantiated the claim when a worker says that she goes to the political meetings and organizes the women of her area so that her children get a job. I have tried to narrow down the political process of creation of the *pahadiness* by dealing exclusively with Gorkhaland movement, 'sub-nationalist movement' in Sen's word. And it has helped me to understand the broader picture better. Although this self-interest driven political participation in no way expresses any sort of feminist consolidation, it does tell the story of working women's resilience and negotiation with the hierarchal and masculine power structure in the Gorkhaland politics, all in order to better their lives.

The workers (women workers as well) of the Darjeeling participate overwhelmingly in the Gorkhaland movement, although the movement does not speak about their issue and problems. This overwhelming participation of working class men and women of Darjeeling muddles the class-gender-Gorkha identity dynamics, but the reason for the participation surfaces in the voices of the marginalized. Sen (2012) says that the women workers of Darjeeling find it therapeutic to identify themselves as Gorkhas, they find pride in calling themselves Gorkhas, which in turn gives meaning to their monotonous and mundane work life. They internalise the exclusive *pahadiness* in order to give meaning to their existence. On the other hand, the workers in general participate in the movement, in hope to better their lives. As Gorkhaland in Darjeeling's politics stand as solution to each and every issue, the workers hope that their issue too will be addressed if Gorkhaland is created. But if Gorkhaland will be a reality or even if it does, will the leaders fight with the owners of the plantation to increase the wage? The answer to this question remains hidden in the unforeseeable future of Darjeeling. An upset women worker participant said "खै हुन्छ होला"(It may happen), when asked if she thinks Gorkhaland will solve her problems of low wages, diminished living and multilayered marginalisation. With the omnipresent Gorkhaland movement, erased working class politics and normalized gender disparity, the women workers of Darjeeling can only say "खै हुन्छ होला"(It may happen) to themselves when they contemplate their future.

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