

Mirroring the Past into Future : Analysing Self-Rule in Darjeeling Hills

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Abstract

The aspiration to usher in self-rule in Darjeeling has been a century old phenomenon beginning from 1907. The movement has gone through several stages raising various expectations for the 'people' in the region. From being referred as 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas in Government of India Act in 1919 and later in 1935, Darjeeling and its people have travelled a long way in the process for the 'creation' of a space of their own. With the aspiration of self-rule expressed through memorandum submitted in 1917 to the inclusion of Nepali Language in the Constitution of India, the movement has added new dimensions over the years. Later on, the upheaval under the leadership of Subhash Ghising in 1980s, who for the first time coined the term '*Gorkhaland*' in the history of Darjeeling, provided some breathing space to the struggling masses in the region which seemed to have been fulfilled with the signing of Accord granting Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988. The regime change in West Bengal politics has created a new administrative arrangement through another Accord called the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in 2011. The region and its people are at crossroads today, the question remains, where is it heading towards in the emerging future? This paper will throw light on the historical continuity of the aspiration of the people of Darjeeling for self-rule and the emerging contradictions in the contemporary times by attempting to analyze the perspectives of different stakeholders- namely the Government at the Centre and the State, the present leadership of the movement in the hills, the people there in general and Nepalis in particular- in fulfilling the aspiration of the people. The paper will also deal with the concepts of identity based spatiality and geographical imaginaries associated with the movement in Darjeeling.

Keywords: Gorkhaland, Self-Rule, GTA, Development Boards, Darjeeling

It is being widely accepted that the most compelling issue which influenced the perpetuation of the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland has been the 'crisis of identity.' Meaning thereby, when the Nepali speaking people from Darjeeling travel beyond the Darjeeling Hills, they are termed as '*Nepalese*', meaning in other words, citizen from Nepal. In addition to that, it has also been acclaimed by the discourse across the spectrum that the struggle for self-rule in the hills has been a century old phenomenon and this struggle, with the passage of time, has transmitted into a larger aspiration of getting a separate state called Gorkhaland. The areas comprising the movement stronghold had surpassed the stages of being kept as 'excluded', 'partially excluded', 'scheduled' and 'non-regulated' by the Britishers, which ultimately set the motion for separatism from Bengal/West Bengal.¹ From the beginning of this struggle, the people of this region has been adhered to the dictum of self-rule whereas the leaders of the movement like Subhash Ghising and Bimal Gurung played with the aspirations

¹ A K Samanta, *Gorkhaland Movement: A Study in Ethnic Separatism* (New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 2000), 23.

of self-rule for their own sake. On the other hand, the successive Governments of West Bengal and the Government of India also played safe by containing the statehood demand through various politico-administrative arrangements.

Firstly, it set-up a politically tottering body called Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988, later it also established a legislatively and financially more or less un-empowered body called Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in 2011 and thereafter it created newer fault lines through the creation of the "Development Boards" within the GTA. It seems that the formation of such boards is an on-going phenomenon. So far, more or less twelve "Development Boards" have been created in the hills and it adds on to each passing day. Thereby, the region and its people are at crossroads today, the question remains, where is it headed in the emerging future? The paper will throw light on the historical continuity of the aspiration of the people for self-rule and the emerging contradictions in the contemporary times by attempting to analyse the perspectives of different stakeholders- namely the Governments at the Centre and the state, the present leadership of the movement in the hills and the local authorities.

A Brief History of the Gorkhaland Movement

Although the ethnically induced movement for Gorkhaland is said to be one of the oldest in the country², the initial goal of this movement was primarily related to securing an Indian identity³ for the Nepali speaking people in India, who were notified by the Indian Gazette notification 1988 as *Gorkhas*. The necessity to recognise the people of Darjeeling by the Gazette notification arose because of the confusion over the terms *Nepalis* and *Nepalese*. According to Subba, the Nepali speaking people of India are called as *Nepalis* and that of from the neighbouring sovereign Nepal as *Nepalese*.⁴ This dichotomy for the sake of academic and social discourse was devised due to repeated intermingling of the Nepali speakers of Darjeeling with that of Nepal. Historically, the original inhabitants of Darjeeling were the *Nepalis*, *Sherpas* and *Bhutias*. But according to Wenner, a large section of the population of Darjeeling is also composed of *Nepalese* immigrants.⁵ Darjeeling is the place where the ancestors of today's Gorkhas once migrated from Nepal and now they emphasise that they are genuine Indian citizens.⁶ Such complexity of population influx further re-emphasises the necessity for determining means to deal with this identity confusion.

To do away with this identity confusion, the Nepali speaking people specially the academia and political leadership from Darjeeling started advocating the *Gorkha* terminology and identity. While doing so, they even tried to bring all the existing

²S Sarkar, *Gorkhaland Movement: Ethnic Conflict and State Response* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd, 2013).

³T Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, 1992).

⁴Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development*.

⁵M Wenner, "Challenging the State by reproducing Its Principle: The Demand for Gorkhaland between Regional Autonomy and the National Belongings" , *Asian Ethnology* , (2013): 199-220.

⁶M Wenner, *Challenging the State by reproducing Its Principle*.

ethnic groups (*Sherpa, Lepcha, Bhutia, Tamang* and others) of Darjeeling under the 'Gorkha' banner.⁷ The efforts of identity assertion were tamed by the inclusion of Nepali language into the Constitution of India in 1992. Prior to that, the Nepali speaking people from Darjeeling was recognised as *Gorkhas* by the Government of India Notification No. 26011/6/88-ICI dated 23 August, 1988. Later on, the subsequent formations of politico-administrative units in Darjeeling in the form of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (1988), Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (2011) up to the creation of "Development Boards" for different ethnic groups have added varied dimensions in the politics of Darjeeling hills. In the next section, we will discuss about the stakes of different stakeholders (Centre, State and Local Civic authorities in Darjeeling) of Gorkhaland movement in brief by examining their role from the historical past up to the present manifestations.

Stake of the Colonial Administration

It is well known fact that the British East India Company came to India for the sake of their mercantile aspirations and to establish their monopoly over the market. The British Administration had varied response according to the requirement of aggrandising the interest of the colonial state. The movement for a separate politico-administrative unit and recognition of the Gorkhas was also dealt with similar purpose. Thereby, the movement for separate territorial space also received colonial attention. However, the response of the colonial state towards this movement had been analytically questionable. They created the false division of 'hills versus plains' to portray the Darjeeling hills as a separate administrative and linguistic zone to fulfil their mercantile aspirations of exploiting the hill people economically.⁸ The creation of division of 'hills versus plains' might be the outcome of the aftermath of realization by the British that Darjeeling as a tea-growing estate has great potential, as it is evident by the 'deed of grant' episode which is pointing towards this direction. The 'deed of grant' episode does not mention Darjeeling being the tea-growing estate. It has just simply talked about the granting of Darjeeling to British East India Company by the Sikkimputteh Rajah in 1835. But the commentators like Subba, Datta, Sarkar had interpreted the event as British mercantilist aspiration.

Similarly, Darjeeling was added to Bengal, but in large part it remained 'excluded', in the successive Government of India Acts in 1919 and 1935 so that the rules and regulations regarding landownership and taxation were unique in order to safeguard the interest of the tribal people from the 'outsiders'.⁹ However, the exclusionary policies of the British had another dimension to fan the people of Darjeeling, it added some beneficial respites too for the Darjeeling dwellers. For example; the item no. 4 of the 1930 memorandum talked about some benefits enjoyed by the hill people by giving Darjeeling the status of 'excluded.' Those benefits were in terms of minimising their feeling of alienation by providing 'preferential treatment' for them. But, the item

⁷ Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development*.

⁸ Sarkar, *Gorkhaland Movement: Ethnic Conflict and State Response*.

⁹ A K Samanta, *Gorkhaland Movement: A Study in Ethnic Separatism*, 23.

no. 8 of this memorandum asked for complete exclusion of Darjeeling from Bengal by creating an independent Administrative unit.¹⁰ In addition to that, the Government of India Act, 1935 by retaining certain provisions marked the area as 'partially excluded' under section 92 of the said Act.¹¹ So the literature suggests that there is some difference between 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' and it should be taken into consideration very carefully while analysing the Gorkhaland movement. The literature on the colonial period suggests that the British administration desired for an excluded domain for the Darjeeling Hills in order to suit their mercantilist interests. So, a question can be raised here- did this exclusionary domain lead to an exclusionous demand by the 'hill-people' or were there other compulsions as well? We should search for the answer of this question.

Movement to Recognize Nepali Bhasa

After India's independence in 1947 the Nepalis (Indian Nepali speaking people) felt insecure as they were branded as foreigners in Indian soil. Their fear further got entrenched when a section of the Assamese started a drive to push the Bahiragatas (the outsiders) out from Assam¹² and the 'Nepalis' were also a constituent of what the Assam dwellers had termed as 'Bahiragatas'. Simultaneously, the then Chairperson of the Language Commission, B.G. Kher, characterized Nepali language as 'foreign' language in 1956. In this situation, the 'Nepalis' started demanding the inclusion of Nepali language into the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Scholars had argued that at the root of the demand for inclusion of Nepali in the Eighth Schedule was the understanding that no government machinery will be, despite its best wishes and efforts, able to effectively implement or enforce the safeguards preserved for minorities (religious, cultural and linguistic) in the Constitution to Indian Nepalis, unless Nepali is given constitutional recognition.¹³

When the demand is to recognise Nepali language as the medium of instruction in the hills, the Government of West Bengal engaged itself in the process of bargaining with the hill people in order to tame their demand. In several occasions State had turned down their legitimate demand to introduce Nepali as the medium of instruction in the hills. Even there was a discontent over the percentage of Nepali speaking population in Darjeeling District. Bidhan Chandra Roy, in 1961, denied the demand to make Nepali as language of instruction as the Nepali population in Darjeeling was only 19.98 per cent in 1951 and rather advised to wait for 1961 Census.¹⁴ Here, Subba had raised an important question: how come the figure came down to 19.98 per cent in 1961 from 59.09 per cent in 1941? To this, we could say that every nation-state produces data/information for its interests but it never

¹⁰ WG, *Why Gorkhaland? A Case for the Formation of a Separate State* (Kalimpong: Ajambari Press, 1986), 57.

¹¹ Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development*.

¹² B.P Misra, "Behind Gorkhaland Agitation", *Mainstream* 25, No. 7 (1986): 15-20.

¹³ S Munshi and T.K.Chakrabarti, "National Languages Policy and the Case for Nepali", *Economic and Political weekly* (14 April 1979): 701-709.

¹⁴ Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development*, 94.

Sarkar, *Gorkhaland Movement: Ethnic Conflict and State Response*, 54.

produces data on such lines which could harm its image in the world. For example, hardly there is any country which produces data on human-rights violation as it has the potential to hamper the image of the concerned nation-state worldwide.¹⁵ Finally, in 1992, after much contestation, Nepali was recognised by the Constitution of India.

The Struggle to Arrive at Different Politico-administrative Formations

The historical transformation of this ethnic movement got reshaped in the form of demand for a separate politico-administrative institution in the hills. The leadership and the masses in the hills felt the need of such arrangements to carry forward their demands for self-rule. After a long struggle, a legislatively and financially least competent body called Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was formed in 1988. Despite much anticipation from the Council (DGHC) pattern of development, the GNLFF and DGHC hardly succeeded to actualize the dreams of the masses. Basically, DGHC was empowered to economically, socially, culturally and linguistically develop the areas under its purview. However, it failed to meet the expectation of the masses to a large extent. At the same time, it was charged with irregularities, favouritism in the case of employment, nepotism, autocratic leadership, highhandedness by the members of DGHC. In addition to that, Ghising was unwilling to accommodate or listen to other leaders from the hills who also aspired for the creation of Gorkhaland.

The mass-appeal for achieving the goal of Gorkhaland under Ghising's leadership started bearing many question marks while simultaneously the popular discontent of the masses swelled further. Ghising tried every trick to stay relevant in hill politics. But when his 'pet slogan' of conferring 'Sixth Schedule status to DGHC did not get desired support from the residents of Darjeeling; Ghising's days were thus numbered. Final attempt was hammered when his undisputed leadership got challenged by Bimal Gurung. His emergence as the new leader of the hills and the formation of GJM was preceded by the Prashant Tamang¹⁶ episode. Gurung arranged support for Prashant Tamang during popular Television programme called Indian Idol in 2007. Within two weeks of Tamang becoming champion of that show, Gurung formed his party GJM. He portrayed himself as the new messiah of the hill people, who felt alienated and victimized by the State in their struggle for self-rule and preservation of their unique-identity. He, like Ghising earlier, was successful in unifying different section of the hill people under the Gorkha identity. This earned him support in the hills apart from his anti-Ghising and anti-DGHC campaigning. He thereby became the undisputed leader of the hill people and with his style of functioning he provided an opportunity to the State to co-opt his leadership also.

Gurung, who figured in the hill-politics after hard pressing the demand of Gorkhaland, was also made to sit in for negotiation. As an outcome of repeated negotiation with the Government of West Bengal, the GJM accepted the formation of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) which did not have specific legislative

¹⁵ M.S. Gill, "Politics of Population Census Data in India", *Economic and Political Weekly* (20 January 2007): 241-249.

¹⁶ Prashant Tamang of Darjeeling won the Indian Idol, a popular Television singing show, in September 2007

and financial powers, although it was empowered to frame some rules and regulations over the subjects handed over to it. GTA has administrative, financial and executive powers over 57 subjects transferred to it. Although the GTA Act provides 'autonomy' over the transferred subjects to frame rules and regulations under Section 30 (1), the tether is always in the hands of the Government to control GTA. Clause 1 of Section 30 says,

The Gorkhaland Territorial Administration shall have power, *subject to the provisions of this Act, and the rules made thereunder by the Government*, to make, regulations to be applicable within the region with respect to all or any of the matters enumerated in section 26 [list of transferred subjects] for the regulation and control thereof.

(Emphasis added) (GTA Act 2011: 15)

The quoted material (specially the emphasised ones) clearly talks about the kind of restrictions and powers the Government has entrusted upon itself to control the functions of GTA. Another example of interference of the Government of West Bengal in the affairs of GTA can be noted as written in the Section 32 of the Act. The Act reads as follows:

Subject to such restrictions or conditions as the Government may think fit to impose, all properties specified below and situated in the region shall vest in and belong to the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration with all other properties which may become vested in the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration and shall be under the direction, management and control of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration and shall be held and applied by it for the purposes of this Act (Emphasis added) (GTA Act 2011: 15)

Apart from that, there are provisions of collecting and levying taxes by the GTA under Section 33 (1) subject to other provisions or laws made by the Government at that time. Moreover, GTA is also prohibited from registering any vehicle if such vehicles otherwise are registered by any other authority under any law prevalent at that time. Moreover, the newly formed body has the power of supervising the municipalities, Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samities and Gram Panchayats falling under its jurisdictions as it was in the case of DGHC as well. The GTA can examine or depute any officer to examine the functioning of the PRIs under its territory in relation to immovable property, utilization of funds or any other departments within these PRIs. It is interesting to note here that, although such powers have been extended to GTA over the PRIs, but the final decision regarding any disputes with the three tier arrangements or a municipality should be the discretion of the Government of West Bengal. The encroachment is clearly visible here (GTA Act 2011). A brief comparison of functions and functionaries between DGHC and GTA is presented below:

Table 1: Difference of Functions and Functionaries between DGHC and GTA

Functions and Functionaries	Gorkhaland Territorial Administration	Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council
Number of Subjects	57 subjects transferred to it	19 subjects were provided to it
Land	Land and Land Revenue are under GTA. It can also allot, occupy or use for agricultural, grazing and non-agricultural purposes such lands which are otherwise out of the purview of reserved forest [under Indian Forest Act, 1927].	Land and Land Revenue was not the subject under it. It can, however, allot land or a part of the same for agricultural, grazing or other non-agricultural purposes provided that the land should be out of the purview of reserved forest.
Construction Works	Maintenance of national highways subject to responsibility entrusted by the Government of West Bengal and all public works departments related to state highways.	Construction and maintenance of all roads except national and state highways.
Agriculture	Power# over food processing, horticulture and floriculture to promote agricultural research and education.	No clear demarcation of such avenues and has some executive powers over agriculture only
Education	Primary, secondary and higher secondary education [including vocational training] including Government Schools. Wings or cells of Government colleges; information technology, medical, engineering, etc. to be created by GTA.	General power## over primary, secondary and higher secondary education. Vocational training was inserted as a separate subject.
Industries	Micro and Small scale cottage industries [handloom and textiles]. Khadi was a new insertion here	Only small scale and cottage industries.
Cultural Affairs	As the GTA Act, 2011 asked for cultural development by expediting Gorkha ethnic identity, Information and Cultural Affairs# department was transferred to it.	Although the DGHC was entrusted to socio-economically, culturally and educationally develop the region under it, the Information and Cultural Affairs## department was not transferred to it.
Forest	Management# of any forest other than reserved ones.	Management## of any forest other than reserved ones.
Development	Panchayat and Rural Development including District Rural Development Agency.	No such provision

#It means administrative, financial and executive powers.

It means executive powers only.

N.B: GTA has means administrative, financial and executive powers over the subjects transferred to it but DGHC only had executive powers over its subjects.

Aspiring Alternative Arrangement in the Darjeeling Hills

The demand for Gorkhaland is also a reflection of the demand of the hill-people from the State for their security as they have been victims of various atrocities and 'push back' movements, especially in North East India in general and Meghalaya in particular that resulted in the mass exodus of the Gorkhas from these areas. Basically, the hill-people pleads for a territorial identity for the Indian Gorkhas which they feel will make their citizenship status in India more secure. But this may give rise to a counter question - what will be the future of the Gorkhas living outside Darjeeling? Can the dream of Gorkhaland secure the interest of Gorkhas living outside Darjeeling? Searching for an answer to this question, C.K. Shrestha, a novelist and the founder of Gorkha Bharati Vichar Manch, has devised a unique solution about the national security issue of the Gorkhas residing outside Darjeeling. This is his brain-child and the people including leadership of the Gorkhaland movement are least bothered about it. According to him, more Gorkhas are living in Assam than West Bengal. It is equally true that the Gorkhas are scattered throughout India and World. Shrestha asked; the creation of Gorkhaland will give territorial identity to the Gorkhas living in Darjeeling and similarly it will provide a symbolic identity to the 'Gorkhas living outside Darjeeling. But, the problem related to national security and identity will continue to be a problem for the Gorkhas.

For this, he proposed the formation of Gorkha National Satellite Council (GNSC) which will be basically a national level body to look after the Gorkhas scattered throughout India; just like the working of a satellite or a tower of a mobile network provider. This body will have the representation of members elected across the communities (including Bengalis also) and the benefits of such bodies be provided to such Gorkhas who are enlisted under the Representation of People's Act, 1950. It means that, there will be non-territorial arrangement for the Gorkhas residing outside Darjeeling. Here, it will be interesting to look upon- whether the Government of West Bengal or the Government of India will entertain such arrangement? When the Government (Centre and Regional) is hell-bent to contain the demand of Gorkhaland, Shrestha is hoping for such arrangement called GNSC which is possible only after the actualization of Gorkhaland.

Present Political Scenario in Darjeeling

The responses of the state so far were directed only towards the creation and maintenance of Gorkha identity but however, the movement which talks about bringing people from all corners of the region, somehow failed to incorporate other ethnic groups [Lepcha, Sherpa, Limbu, Tamang etc.] who had their own ethnic assertions from the early days of this movement and even before that.¹⁷ The creation of 'Nepali ethnicity' is also a post-1920s phenomenon, according to Subba, when the linguistic movement started taking its course in the hills. The creation of such umbrella ethnicity was possible only after bringing together all the existing ethnic groups of Darjeeling under a single consolidation. This action was basically to strengthen the total Nepali

¹⁷ Sarkar, *Gorkhaland Movement: Ethnic Conflict and State Response*.

speaking population so that they can bargain collectively and more vigorously.¹⁸ The necessity to consolidate the Nepali speaking population was felt as the Gorkhas are less in number in West Bengal to bargain for their demand in the Legislative Assembly as well as in the Parliament of India. When the leadership in the hills were 'busy once again in consolidating' the ethnic groups, the Government of West Bengal hammered a 'divide and rule' policy by creating several 'Development Boards.' But we can only list here five boards created by the Government of West Bengal accessed through an official document.¹⁹ The creation of these boards by the TMC led government is as follows:

- i. Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board in 2013-14.
- ii. Tamang Development and Cultural Board in 2014-15.
- iii. Sherpa Cultural Board in 2015-16.
- iv. Bhutia Development Board in 2015-16
- v. West Bengal Limbu Board in 2015-16.

After that the West Bengal Government has promised to create more 'Development Boards' for *Khas, Newar, Bhujel, Gurung* and Minorities etc. It is being reported that the Government so far has created near about twelve 'Development Boards' in Darjeeling. The proposed structure of the newly formed Development Boards is more or less identical. All of them will have General and Executive bodies and the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of both the bodies of all development boards will be nominated by the Government of West Bengal from among the respective communities according to the name of the Boards. It is to be noted here that the Member Secretary of both the General and Executive bodies of all Development Boards will be nominated by the Government of West Bengal except²⁰ the Board for the Lepchas. In the case of the Executive body of Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board, the Member Secretary of this body will be a Senior IAS officer deputed by the Government of West Bengal whereas in rest of the cases, s/he will only be a senior officer nominated by the state government. A close look at the structure of these boards will reveal that structurally there is no difference between these boards. All are being fashioned in the same way. But it is beyond any speculation, as to why the Government did practice leaning towards any particular set-up. The structure of different development boards is provided below.

¹⁸ Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development*.

¹⁹ This information was sought through a reply of an RTI No: 292-TDD/RTI-01/2016 dated March 11, 2016 filed with the Tribal Development Department, Government of West Bengal on February 29, 2016.

²⁰ No specific reason was enlisted by the Government of West Bengal for doing so for the Lepchas as far as the official document is concerned.

Table 2: Structure of Different Development Boards

Item	General Body	Executive Body
Chairperson	To be nominated by the Government of West Bengal from respective communities/ethnic groups.	To be nominated by the Government of West Bengal from respective communities/ethnic groups.
Vice-Chairperson	To be nominated by the Government of West Bengal from respective communities/ethnic groups.	To be nominated by the Government of West Bengal from respective communities/ethnic groups.
Member Secretary	One officer to be appointed by the Government of West Bengal on deputation.	One officer [and a senior IAS officer in case of Lepcha Board] to be appointed by the Government of West Bengal on deputation.
Ex-Officio Members	District Magistrate, Darjeeling or his/her representative; District Welfare Officer [DWO], Darjeeling; Director CRI, Darjeeling.	District Magistrate, Darjeeling or his/her representative
Other Members	Other members to be nominated by the Government of West Bengal from among the respective communities/ethnic groups.	Seven members to be nominated by the Government of West Bengal from among the respective communities/ethnic groups.

Source: This information was sought through a reply of an RTI No: 292-TDD/RTI-01/2016 dated March 11, 2016 filed with the Tribal Development Department, Government of West Bengal on February 29, 2016 (Date of filing the RTI).

Conclusion

If we mirror the past into future it becomes apparent that from the inception of this autonomy movement till the contemporary times, there has been a tug-of-war between the State and the other stakeholders in the hills. The colonial administration kept this place excluded from the plains mainly due to their mercantilist interests. Is this exclusion in geographical terms that subsequently led to the demands for exclusive identity of the people in the Darjeeling Hills?

Next, when there was the movement for the recognition of Nepali *Bhasa*, the role of the post-colonial State was also questionable. While the leaders and the movement sympathisers were busy in bringing together all the existing ethnic groups under single banner to consolidate their numerical strength to make Nepali as the language of instructions in the hills, the State imposed the politics of Census enumeration until the language was recognised by the Constitution of India in 1992.

In the hindsight, it seems that the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in 1988 followed by Gorkhaland Territorial Administration in 2011 created politico-administrative units which were far from autonomous both in terms of its legislative powers as well as financial independence. This lack of autonomy in the name of granting of self-rule to the hill people helped in perpetuating the movement in the

long run. Creation of Development Boards within the territorial jurisdiction of the GTA has generated new fault lines in the hills. This not only put a question mark on the question of ethnic solidarity of the hill dwelling population groups but also gave rise to institutions which were in fact more toothless in terms of legislative and financial provisions like the GTA.

State Cabinet cleared the bill on February 3, 2013 to form a Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board under the direct supervision of Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal. But, the *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* member S.K. Giri, raised his apprehension about the future of the Development Board as they lacked Constitutional guarantee. What will be the future¹ of these boards, if there is a change in the government in West Bengal?

Meanwhile, Lyang Song Tamsang, chairman of West Bengal Lepcha Development Board, asked the Government of West Bengal to incorporate the Boards under Government Act rather than Societies Act. Hence, the creation of several 'Development Boards' are raising serious questions about the direction of this movement. It can be questioned on following lines. Whether the movement failed to incorporate these ethnic groups for which more or less twelve Development Boards are formed so far within Darjeeling? Whether the ethnic identity called 'Gorkha' is a kind of superimposition over these groups and they are now realizing their self-rule and unique identity through their own ethnic assertions in the name of Development Boards? In these circumstances, where is the movement heading now?

On the one hand, there is a continuous effort by the state government to win over various small population groups, who were fellow participants in the Gorkhaland movement, through Development Boards and on the other the leadership of the movement seems to fall short in securing politico-administrative arrangements with legislative and financial powers. This results in a stalemate situation where there are only sporadic sparks that reminds us of a movement by the name of Gorkhaland. In a nut shell, it seems that the movement has always fallen short of the realisation that the demand for political autonomy and the quest for highest common denominator of one humanity are the two sides of the same coin.²¹ This realisation perhaps can go a long way in fulfilling the aspiration for self-rule of the population groups in the Darjeeling Hills.

²¹ P.S. Datta, *North East As I See It* (New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1994).

