

CHAPTER VII
STATE VERSUS ETHNIC MINORITIES: UNION AND STATE
GOVERNMENTS RESPONSE TO MOVEMENTS FOR
GORKHALAND AND KAMTAPUR

In Multiculturalism, the corollary of the domination of the majority community has been the identification of the state symbols with its way of life. It assumes that minorities are marginalized even in a polity where political rights are given to all persons in the public arena. Promotion of legal equality in no way ensures equal treatment of the marginalized community. Liberal democracy may itself establish the hegemony of the majority within the polity by providing the majority the maximum share in political representation and institution.¹ To Multiculturalism, a neutral state free from moral and cultural biases is a utopian idea. Every state with its laws and policies coerce those not sharing the underlying values of its constitutionality. Institutionalization of values as liberty and equality by state can itself be a source of concomitant disapproval by communities viewing it against their communal interest or practices. Thus no state can be altogether free from cultural biases making the aim of a non-coercive state practically unattainable.²

According to the multiculturalists, the amicable co-existence of different communities in social domain is no reflection of their same status in the public domain. Inequality in the public domain is virtually existent together with legal and social pluralism. This is possible with the capturing of the exclusive control over public spaces expressed in political and symbolic terms. It is found that the majority culture achieves legitimacy owing to its continued presence in national and public life. Its practices are accommodated in the public sphere as symbol of the state and not those of a specific community. The customs and practices of the

¹ See Gurpreet Mahajan, **The Multicultural Path : Issues of Diversity and Discrimination in Democracy**, Sage Publications, 2006, pp. 12-18

² Bikhu Parekh, **Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory**, Palgrave Macmillan Publication, United Kingdom, 2006, pp. 207-213.

majority appear to be neutral and inherent in the state that tends to reinforce these through its policies on language and education. Minorities as such are disadvantaged whose practices on the other hand are not identified with the state and therefore not accommodated in the public sphere as norms.

The majority culture is reflected in every dimension of the public life such as the choice of the official national language, declaration of public holidays, curriculum of educational institutions, norms pertaining to the preparation of food in public institutions, accepted dress codes in public life, rituals of the state, etc. The cultural orientation of the state thus directly or indirectly discriminates the ethnic and cultural minorities in the public arena. For instance, every state is to have an official language to carry out its official proceedings. The adoption of a language for official proceedings which is usually the one spoken by the majority ethnic group instinctively accords its dominance over all other languages spoken in the state. Since no language is culturally neutral the language chosen by the state as its official language leads to the dominance of the speakers of that language and their community. The state thus fails to give equal public status to the languages of the minorities. The selection of official language that reflects the majoritarianism however can be a result of either design or due to ignorance of the existence of minority groups and their culture.

Besides the choice of the official national language also has an impact on the distribution of resources and opportunities between the majority and minority in society. The recognition of English as the national language in Canada places the French population in Canada at a disadvantage as they have to learn English if they are to avail job opportunities in Canada. The representation of the nation's history in school curricula is another source of a sense of alienation of the minorities whose anthropological study is exempted from textbooks. Thus the language and education policies of the state marginalise and disadvantage the minorities with its invariably majoritarian cultural biased language and education policies.³

³ See Gurpreet Mahajan, **The Multicultural Path : Issues of Diversity and Discrimination in Democracy**, Sage Publications, 2006, pp. 26-30

The attempt of the state to furnish equality to all the communities through equal civil and political rights failed to incorporate minority communities as equals in the public and political domain. The policies of the state directly or indirectly perpetuate discrimination on cultural grounds. The perpetuation of the discrimination within the state reflects not just in its laws and the policies but also the ways in which the minority communities are represented if at all in the public arena. For instance, the wearing of *hijab* by Muslim girls in schools as a religious symbol was disallowed in educational institutions in France by the state authorities. While the wearing of cross, a religious symbol for the Catholic community was exempted with the same censure. Thus, in similar cases and others, minority communities suffer discrimination by state policies which privileges the practices of the majority which is intrinsically coiled with the states framework of thinking and practice.

LIBERAL STATE AND ETHNO-CULTURAL NEUTRALITY

According to the assimilationist, equality entails a culture-blind approach. It views the recognition of the differences as obverse to the principle of equality which requires that all the fellow citizens be treated in a same way irrespective of their differences. It does not take into account the cultural diversity to privilege a minority community for accommodating their special needs. Accordingly it holds that the state is not obligated to recognise its societal cultural diversity. The state can wilfully exercise its authority and power to bring about the integration of the minority communities into its broader recognised uniform culture.

The aim of the assimilationist is to build a stable and cohesive nation state with all its members sharing a common national culture, values, moral beliefs and social practices. The state as a custodian of the national culture is to ensure that its members assimilate into the existing prevailing national culture forgoing their distinct cultural practices. While a minority in order to be treated like the citizens should not insist on retaining their separate cultures, rather embrace the prevailing national culture. It is only then that they would not be viewed as outsiders and subjected to discriminatory treatment.⁴

⁴ Op.cit.no.2

In contrast to the assimilationist a liberal state restrict the practice of culture to the private life of the individual. It treats culture in the same way as religion whereby it prefers to maintain a neutral stance. So long as the pursuit of culture does not compromise the rights of others the state is unconcerned with the affairs of the ethnic communities. A sharp divorce between state and ethnicity is thus an intrinsic feature of Liberalism. It refuses to endorse or support the cultural way of any ethnic group maintaining a neutral stand with respect to their language, history, literature and practices. It stands above all ethnic and national groups in the country and defines national membership in terms of adherence to democracy and the rule of law.

However the idea of a neutral liberal state with no attempt to reproduce an ethnonational culture and identity is false. Various nation building policies aimed at integrating different cultures into a common societal culture⁵ are integral to a liberal state, for instance, the idea of a Uniform Civil Code incorporated in the Indian Constitution as a Directive Principle of the State Policy (Article 44). Such policies have been resisted by minorities seeking special rights for the survival of their ethnocultural identity. They have challenged the ethnocultural neutrality of the liberal state and refused to identify with the societal as well as political institutions reflecting the majoritarian biases. Thus the minorities demand for special rights and privileges is viewed as a radical departure from the traditional ethos of the liberal state.⁶

THE IDEA OF A MULTICULTURAL NATION STATE

According to the Multiculturalists, nation-building is not about building a unified identity around the majority ethnocentrism but about organising public institutions as a source of equal economic opportunity, political power and social prestige for all. It associates identities and interests whereby recognition of the minority identity is complementary to economic opportunities, political power

⁵ According to Kymlicka, 'societal culture' means a territorially-concentrated culture, centred on a shared language which is used in a wide range of societal institutions, in both public and private life (schools, media, law, economy, government, etc).

⁶ See Will Kymlicka, **Politics in Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship**, Oxford University Press, USA, 2001, pp.20-26.

and social status to the bearers of that identity. Multiculturalists are assertive that nation building policies need not necessarily promote one societal culture. That it is possible to encourage the co-existence of two or more societal cultures in the same country.⁷ The status of different cultural communities within a polity is thus central to the establishment of Multiculturalism. Equality in private as well as public sphere is an idea that multicultural as an approach tries to achieve for itself.⁸ It attempts to establish a working relationship between states and ethnic groups.

The Multicultural approach does not make multiculturalism antithetical to nation-building in order to establish a link between ‘identity’ and ‘interests’. Although it repudiates the model of homogeneous nationhood it does not reject the ideology of nationalism altogether. Multiculturalism through its policy of ‘recognition and redistribution’ transforms nation building policies and not replaces it. Multiculturalism seeks to adopt policies to develop nationalism such as compulsory teaching of the nation’s history and institutions in schools and language tests for citizenship. However they supplement these nation building policies to include marginalized minorities by giving them special rights and privileges to maintain their culture so that they are less likely to be marginalized or stigmatized. It does not coercively assimilate immigrants or undermine the self-government right of the indigenous minorities. Thus a zero-sum relationship does not exist between multicultural and nation-building policies. Multiculturalism and nationalism are not inherently contradictory ideologies and can successfully be complementary. Multiculturalism cannot be reduced to a single principle or dimension. It is an umbrella approach with multidimensional group-differentiated policies and practices of nation-building.⁹

The multicultural states have restructured its institutional framework to accommodate the rights of the minorities through providing them regional autonomy, official language status and freedom to pursue their customary laws. It

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Op.cit.no.1

⁹ See Will Kymlicka, **Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity**, Oxford University Press, USA, 2009, pp. 80-81

attempts to address issues not only of symbolic recognition in public sphere but also redistribution of power and resources. New political units have been created to enable genuine power sharing so as to provide non dominant groups increased access to state institutions and minority self-government. A transformation in the assimilationist model as such can be found in all western states that recognise the existence of different ethnic groups within its boundaries.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REALM: A MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Most states in order to peacefully accommodate majority and minority communities within its manifold separate the public realm with the private. The state attempts to construct a public realm based on a shared political culture. All the citizens irrespective of the majority or minority community they belong to should agree on the state's structure of authority and share common political values, ideals, practices, institutions, mode of political recruitment and political discourse and understanding. The state asserts that it is only through the establishment of a unified political community that different communities can engage in a meaningful dialogue and thereby resolve their differences and pursue common goals. While the public realm represents uniformity; the private realm involving family and the civil society represents diversity. The state ensures that the citizens should be free to pursue their self-chosen lives in the private realm and thus abstain from subjecting it to any constraints. The state thus tolerates and even welcomes deep differences in the private realm.

However the separation of private and public realm is elusive as the two cannot be coherently compartmentalized. For example, the school as an institution that inculcates values in future citizens through education is also an important agent of political socialisation. However, since children are also members of cultural communities the education imparted in the schools has important cultural dimension too. If school is treated as a public institution it is to be subjected to the control of the state. However school if viewed as a part of the private realm the state is to abstain from controlling its structure and functions. Thus whether to compartmentalize school into public or private realm becomes a complex question as it tends to influence both the public as well as the private realm of an individual.

In addition to this, state insists that while cultural communities are free to lead their self-chosen lives within the private realm, they should share the political culture of the wider society. The established political culture however fails to give public recognition to the history and contributions of the minority communities in the collective expression of its national identity. The minority community is bereft of recognition which confers public legitimacy on their presence as the valued members of the wider society. Thus the established political culture of the state is to be revised if it is to be willingly accepted by the minority communities.

Moreover the culture which is institutionalized by the state enjoys greater dignity and access to power, resources and political patronage and set the tone of the rest of the society. Consequently the minority cultures exist under the shadow of the institutionalized structure of the majority culture although they are free to flourish in the private realm. They continue to remain marginalised and vulnerable to the assimilationist pressure of the dominant culture. The youths of the minority community in particular adopt the practices of the dominant culture particularly language so as to reap the benefits that comes with it like employment in public domain. Thus tolerance in a multicultural society is not sufficient to sustain cultural diversity in the private realm. It is only when public institutions including the state play an active and supportive role that monocultural public realm can peacefully collate with a multicultural private realm else the former works against the latter.

Most multicultural societies encompass different culture and different cultural communities have different histories and traditions. Consequently each minority community demand to develop its own appropriate political structure. According to the minorities diversity is viewed by the state as a fact to be accommodated than a value to be cherished. They allege that the dominant culture enjoys considerable economic and political power relative to the minority communities who are dependent on the state for structural and economic support for their sustainability. The minorities in order to restrict the influence of outside culture have to depend on state restrictive policies with regard the migration of people into their territories that bring with them their own distinct culture. This however

is not just restricted to the cultural sphere. The movement of people also entails increased competition in the economic sphere with the flow of capital and man power into their territories. The minorities accordingly demand powers of autonomy and cultural self-regulation from the state so as to maintain their distinct way of life. Thus the attempt of the state to build a satisfactory relationship between unity and diversity and create a climate conducive to cultural diversity has met with challenges in multicultural society.

It is important to note that the ability of the state to treat all the cultural communities is intrinsically limited. The state although has the duty to accommodate the cultural structure of the minorities, it cannot do so beyond a certain point. The cultural minorities are likely to suffer unequal treatment in certain areas in spite of the best attempts of the state to avoid the same. For instance, in all multicultural societies Sunday is a day of rest. This works in consonance with the cultural and religious practice of the Christians who visit church to offer prayers on Sunday. This puts Muslims at disadvantage as, unlike Christians, they offer communal prayers on Friday which is their holy day. The accommodation of the Muslim practices to have Friday as a day of rest has the possibility of unravelling the prevailing cultural structure as well as incur social and financial cost. It is difficult for the state to eliminate such inescapable inequalities which occur in other areas of life as well. It is disputable as to which inequalities are to be eliminated, at what cost and who should bear it. State however tries to overcome such disputes through discussion, negotiation and compromise.¹⁰

Moreover every society has a historically inherited cultural structure which informs its public life and as such cannot be modified without causing incoherence, disorientation and resistance. The state therefore adopts mechanisms to accommodate minority interests and sustain cultural diversity. Provision of public funds for the survival and development of the minority cultural institutions, establishing bilingual medium of instruction in educational

¹⁰ Bikhu Parekh, **Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory**, Palgrave Macmillan Publication, United Kingdom, 2006, pp. 207-213.

institutions, incorporating minority history and culture in the school curriculum, encouraging peaceful intercultural dialogue, providing group specific welfare policies and institution of self governance are the mechanisms through which the state attempts to accept them as part of the community's collective heritage, nurture self-confidence of the minorities, draws them into the mainstream and helps create a rich and lively community of different but equal citizens.¹¹

MULTICULTURAL STATE AND IDENTITY POLITICS

A multicultural state in order to safeguard the minorities from culture identity-based discrimination in its majoritarian cultural structure adopts a dual approach. **First**, the state provides the minorities group differentiated rights like separate representation, rights claiming exemption, assistance and recognition in the public domain and, **second**, the state also provides individual rights as citizens. The condition for fairness is established by the state by upholding the basic rights of all its citizens and punishing those who violates them. Thus discrimination faced by the minorities cannot be dealt by isolating cultural group rights and individual rights of citizenship. Both the rights are complementary. While cultural group rights given to the minority communities can overcome majoritarian biases of the nation-state enabling minorities to retain their identity; individual rights are essential for protecting minorities from the discriminatory treatment by majority groups in the society.¹²

However the state policy of giving special rights to officially recognized minorities gives fillip to the identity politics. In multicultural countries like India, scarcity and subsequent competition for limited public resources has given impetus to the majority-minority framework creating a scenario of patrons and beneficiaries. Political parties in power co-opt with the leaders of the minority community to win their electoral support by offering concessions such as public holidays, benefits for minority educational institutions, special schemes for loans, reservation of seats in public offices and legislative bodies, etc. The minority leaders themselves manipulate the ethnic sentiments of their community members to strengthen their individual political position by appearing to be the saviour of

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Gurpreet Mahajan, op.cit.no.1, pp.202-204.

the minority communities. This however leaves minorities vulnerable and susceptible to political manipulation. While the political leadership identifies some communities as possible beneficiaries of their sponsorship; the communities competing for limited public resources try to get ahead by consolidating their identity. As more and more communities employ the same strategy; it is the organized, economically or politically powerful groups that manage to corner benefits. As a result, the politics of identities leave the most marginalized communities unattended. They continue to remain disadvantaged within the majority-minority framework. Consequently, extending special rights to the identified few is not sufficiently adept in strengthening structures that could ensure equal treatment to all minorities resolving the issue of minority discrimination and marginalization.¹³

Cultural identities partly define an individual and therefore constitute an important element in an individual's life. Most often when the cultural identity of the individual is challenged or reviled by the state, members of the cultural community coalesce together and challenge the state's policies. The community members question the alleged interference by the state as an attempt to redefine their identity and control community institutions. They aim to check attempts by the state to marginalise a community's membership in the public domain seeking respect for their group identity and equal space in the public arena.¹⁴ Thus the multicultural spirit of a state is challenged by the ethno-identity based autonomy demands like that of the Gorkhaland and Kamtapur in West Bengal. The response as well as the strategy of the West Bengal and the Union Government to deal with these ethno-identity based autonomy movements and their counter effects have been discussed under:

DARJEELING UNDER THE BRITISH COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION

Darjeeling during the colonial rule enjoyed a special status under the non-regulated scheme adopted by the British for the preservation of indigenous system of simple natives. It was a part of the British administrative policy known

¹³ Op.cit.no.1, pp. 152-153

¹⁴ Op.cit.no.1, pp. 193-195

as the “Scheduled District” Act (1874), whereby the conquered territories were categorised into regulated, non-regulated areas on the basis of location, character and importance. The districts declared as scheduled districts were kept outside the purview of general laws in operation throughout the rest of India. Laws could be introduced in scheduled districts in part or with modifications with the assent of the Governor-General in council in consultation with or on the recommendation of local authority. Acts such as relating to land-revenue, land-transfer and sale of land, inheritance, perpetual settlement etc. were kept out of the scheduled districts. Darjeeling was under this non-regulated scheme since 1870 which continued unabated even under the Indian Councils Act of 1909.

The Government of India Act, 1919 replaced the term ‘Scheduled District’ by a new nomenclature ‘backward tract’. Article 52A (2) of the aforesaid Act stated that the Governor of a province under directions of Governor-general-in-Council shall have the sole responsibility of administering the backward tracts. The Governor was to determine whether any law of the provincial legislature would be given effect in such areas. Darjeeling under the Government of India Act, 1919 became a backward tract from a scheduled district. Section 92 (1) of the Act stated that no Act of Federal Legislature or of the Provincial Legislature, shall apply to an excluded area or a partially excluded area, unless the Governor by public notification so directs, and the Governor in giving such a direction with respect to any Act may direct that the Act shall in its application to the area have effect subject to such exceptions or modifications as the Governor thinks fit. Section 92(2) further added, “The Governor may make regulations for any area, or which is for the time being an excluded or a partially excluded area, and may repeal or amend any Act of the Federal Legislature or of the Provincial Legislature, or any existing India Law...”

Darjeeling, under the Government of India Act, 1935, lost its status as a Scheduled Districts, but retained some amount of special treatment as it became a “Partially Excluded Area.” The differences between ‘excluded’ and ‘partially excluded’ areas were narrow. In the case of latter, the Governor was to consult the Council of Ministers while the ‘excluded’ areas were kept under the sole reserve of the Governor. The British Government thus maintained the special

status of the District in one form or other. It was a Scheduled District (1834-1919) or a Backward Tract and Excluded area (1919-1935) and finally a Partially Excluded Area under the 1935 Act. The Darjeeling District was however always kept under the overall jurisdiction of Bengal since 1912.

The British Government argued that the Darjeeling District was kept isolated for the protection of cultural identity of backward people and preservation of indigenous system. It was alleged that the domiciled tribes would not be able to adjust to the administration of non-regulated areas. A simpler system of governance was therefore advocated to administer these areas. The real motive of segregating the district was however military consideration. It was a part of the British Frontier Policy to keep the Indian Frontier away from the idea of self-governance. Its objective was to place it under the unfiltered control of the Imperial Government avoiding any contact with foreign frontiers. In addition to this, it was in the economic interests of the European Tea Planters to keep the district outside the ambit of the regular political set up in Bengal so as to maintain the monopoly of the British merchants over the tea gardens in Bengal. The Imperial Government thus maintained the special status of Darjeeling under the non-regulated scheme and kept the movement for a Nepali Homeland alive. Through its non-regulated scheme the British Government injected the idea among the Hill leaders that the future of hill people rests in a separate administrative arrangement.

Consequently with the enactment of Govt. of India Act, 1935 the Hill Men Association demanded the retaining of the status of the Darjeeling as a Scheduled Area segregating it from the Bengal Province. The memorandum of Hill Men Association dated 6. 8.1934 to Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India and Sir John Anderson, Governor of Bengal, appealed that the reforms in Darjeeling should be implemented with proper safeguard for the hill people. Its primary demand was that the privileges and reservations made for the minority communities should also be extended to the hill people in Bengal. It further demanded that the preferential status of Darjeeling be maintained. In case the permanent safeguards being not granted, the District of Darjeeling should be totally excluded from Bengal. An independent administrative unit directly under

Union Government should be set up for the district of Darjeeling with an Administrator as the Head assisted by an Executive Council. Thus the British imperial Government succeeded in inculcating among the hill people in Darjeeling a feeling that the identity of simple folk people of the hills would lay endangered sans the protective system of special district status. The mechanism of Scheduled District thus planted the first seeds of segregationist attitude in the minds of the Hill people which culminated into various movements demanding autonomy of the Darjeeling District.

STANCE OF COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA ON DARJEELING
DURING EARLY POST INDEPENDENCE ERA

With the independence of India, the special position of Darjeeling as a partially excluded area came to an end. Darjeeling became one of the general districts of newly constituted West Bengal. Contrary to the principle of linguistic reorganisation of provinces passed by the Indian National Congress at its Nagpur session (1920), the Communist Party of India (CPI) favoured the Soviet concept of right to self-determination for the nationalities in India. It put forward the suggestion of forming a 'Greater Gorkhasthan' covering a large tract of Himalayan and sub- Himalayan zone. The Memorandum of the Darjeeling District Committee of the Communist Party of India submitted on 6th April 1947 to the Constituent Assembly insisted that the district of Darjeeling belongs to the Gorkhas. It further asserted that the Gorkhas living in Darjeeling District, the adjoining state of Sikkim and Nepal constitute a distinct nationality. Accordingly it suggested that the only way to further the national development of the Gorkhas was by granting them their right of self-determination. The Communist Party of India demanded that after making necessary revisions of the existing boundaries, the three contiguous areas of Darjeeling District, Southern Sikkim and Nepal should be formed into one single zone to be called 'Gorkhasthan'. The Communist Party further advocated that till the realisation of 'Gorkhasthan', special representation be granted to the Gorkhas in the state legislature. The demand for administrative autonomy in Darjeeling became assertive with the setting up of State Re organisation Commission (1955). The Gorkha League

proposed formation of centrally administered unit or a separate state comprising of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch-Bihar districts, or merger with Assam.

The West Bengal Government led by Congress strongly opposed the suggestions of separation of Darjeeling from West Bengal, either as an autonomous unit or its merger with Assam or Bihar. Its memorandum to State Re-organisation Commission, stressed that separation from Bengal would fail to solve the problem of homeland for Gorkhas. It further expressed the likelihood of the merger of Darjeeling with Nepal on ethnic lines. The Left Front government that later came to power in West Bengal in 1977 favoured regional autonomy to address the longstanding demand of the Gorkhas in Darjeeling for a separate state of Gorkhaland. With the partition of India in the post independence, the CPI revised its earlier stance on self determination and instead advocated complete regional autonomy and regional government for national minorities. The resolution of the Central Committee of the CPI on State Reorganisation in April 1954 advocated that the tribal areas in linguistic state or the other must be administratively divided into tehsils, districts or regional units so as to exercise local and regional autonomy. Henceforth, the communist viewpoint including that of the CPI (M) has veered around this notion of regional autonomy.¹⁵

GOVERNMENTS' RESPONSE TO GORKHALAND MOVEMENT LED BY GNLF

The occurrence of the GNLF-led agitation for the creation of a separate state of “Gorkhaland” was at a time when the Communist Party of India, Marxist [CPI (M)] was firmly in power in the state of West Bengal. Under the organized political movement led by GNLF, the statehood agitation turned violent and transformed Darjeeling into a battle zone between GNLF activists and CPI (M) cadres and security forces. Hundreds of people died in the violence; several thousands were maimed or rendered homeless; and the loss to the local economy from work stoppages, closure of tea gardens, loss of tourist revenue and infrastructural damage was substantial. The violence drove a deep wedge

¹⁵ See Dyutish Chakraborty, ‘*Gorkhaland: Evolution of Politics of Segregation*’, **Special Lecture**, Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal, April, 1988

between the majority Bengali and the minority Gorkha communities in West Bengal.¹⁶

The West Bengal government adopted confrontational as well as diplomatic approach to quell the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling. It enacted the Anti-Terrorist Act to deal with the eruption of violence in the hills by the GNLF activists. While the use of diplomacy was a direct by-product of the Gorkha aspiration that demanded nothing short of a separate state of Gorkhaland. The Gorkha sentiment of alienation subsequently achieved a mass-appeal on account of prolonged apathy of the West Bengal government on matters of autonomy and language of the Gorkhas in West Bengal.¹⁷

Amidst the agitation led by Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Darjeeling on December 20, 1986.¹⁸ Rajiv Gandhi during his visit to Darjeeling for the first time, publicly assured that only those Nepali settled in India before 1950 would be Indian citizens and would not be governed by the 1950 treaty, while post 1950 Nepalis would be given all protection to live and carry on their vocations in India. He held economic backwardness and negligence of the Darjeeling hills caused by the mismanagement of the CPI (M) as the major factor behind the Gorkhaland Movement. Rajiv Gandhi, however, announced that West Bengal would not be divided and no new state would be formed.¹⁹

Thus, both the Union and the West Bengal government unanimously opposed the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland. This was further illustrated during the joint visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu to Darjeeling when both stood together in agreement that there can be no separate state of Gorkhaland.²⁰ The Union Government in tune with the West

¹⁶ See Rajat Ganguly, *Poverty, Malgovernance and Ethnopolitical Mobilization: Gorkha Nationalism and the Gorkhaland Agitation in India*, **Nationalism and Ethnic Politics**, Routledge Publications, 2005, pp. 468.

¹⁷ 'Secrecy in the Hills?', **Statesman**, Calcutta, op.cit.no.3, August 12, 1987, pp.167

¹⁸ 'GNLF Organizations and Agitations since September', **Gorkhaland Agitation: Facts and Issues, Information Document II**, Government of West Bengal, January, 1987, pp.10

¹⁹ 'Getting out of Hand', **Times of India**, Delhi, op.cit.no.3, January 2, 1987, pp.100

²⁰ 'Hills Are Hotting Up', **Economic Times**, op.cit.no.3, April 25, 1987, pp.137

Bengal Government was opposed to complete segregation of the Darjeeling district from West Bengal. However the point of difference between the Union and the West Bengal Government was on the nature of the Gorkhaland Movement. While the West Bengal described the movement as fascist, secessionist and anti-national; the Union Government maintained silence on the same.

GORKHA HILL ACCORD

Eventually to the West Bengal as well as the Union Government autonomy in some form or the other appeared as the only solution for the Hill people of Darjeeling. Accordingly, the Government of India and the Government of West Bengal agreed to enter into a tripartite agreement with the GNLF to establish an autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC); in return the GNLF agreed to drop the demand for the separate Gorkhaland state.²¹ On August 22, 1988 the Gorkha Hill Accord was signed in Kolkata's Raj Bhavan by Subhash Ghising (GNLF Chief) on behalf of Darjeeling Gorkhas, C. G. Somiah (Central Home Secretary) on behalf of the Indian Union and Rabindranath Sengupta (Chief Secretary of West Bengal) on behalf of the West Bengal State in the presence of Home Minister Mr. Buta Singh, and West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu.

In addition to this, the West Bengal government under the tripartite agreement agreed to review all cases registered by the police during the Gorkhaland agitation and to release all detainees except those charged with committing murder. The West Bengal government further agreed to withdraw all cases of disciplinary action taken against local government personnel who were suspected of aiding, abetting and participating in the Gorkhaland agitation. On October 2, 1988 following the signing of Gorkha Hill Accord a thirteen-day arms surrender programme was initiated at the Gymkhana Club, Darjeeling by the West Bengal government. The arms surrender was provisionally concluded on November 6,

²¹ See Rajat Ganguly, *Poverty, Malgovernance and Ethnopolitical Mobilization: Gorkha Nationalism and the Gorkhaland Agitation in India*, **Nationalism and Ethnic Politics**, Routledge Publications, 2005, pp. 468.

1988 with more than 10,000 GNLf men surrendering their arms to the West Bengal government.

A pact of citizenship was also signed in New Delhi a day after between C.G. Somiah and Subash Ghising while Mr. Buta Singh was present during the conclusion of the historic deal. The Union Government of India clarified the issue of citizenship of the Gorkhas through a notification in the Gazette of India on 23 August 1988. It promulgated that 'every Gorkha who was domiciled in the territories that on 26 January 1950 (the day the Indian Constitution came into force) became the territory of India as defined in Article 1(2) and who was either born in that territory or had been ordinarily resident in that territory for not less than five years before the commencement of the Indian Constitution shall be a citizen of India as provided in Article 5 of the Constitution of India'. The Nepali language, however, was not incorporated in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution as demanded by GNLf since the Government of India alleged that the incorporation of more languages in the Eighth Schedule would lead to adverse repercussions and reactions. It was also perceived to be unnecessary in the context of the Indian Government's constant efforts to develop the cultural and literary heritage of all languages irrespective of their inclusion in the Eighth Schedule.²²

The peaceful conclusion of the election for the forty-two members of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council formed under the tripartite agreement on 13th December, 1988 marked the return of democratic process in Darjeeling. The GNLf won twenty six out of twenty eight seats while the CPI (M) won two seats from the Bijanbari-Palbari Block. On January 7, 1989 the West Bengal government named the thirteen nominated members of the DGHC.²³ Out of these thirteen nominated members, three were ex-officio member of the Union

²² See Rajat Ganguly, *Poverty, Malgovernance and Ethnopolitical Mobilization: Gorkha Nationalism and the Gorkhaland Agitation in India*, **Nationalism and Ethnic Politics**, Routledge Publications, 2005, pp.490.

²³ See T.B.Subba, **'Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling District, West Bengal'**, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1999, pp.155-157.

Parliament, three were members of West Bengal Legislative Assembly from hills (Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong), three members were Chairmen of the Municipalities of hill areas and remaining members were from minority communities such as Lepcha and Bhutia. Ghising maintained that the inclusion of term 'Gorkha' in the Hill Council successfully addressed the question of identity of the Gorkhas in India. He further asserted that the separate statehood would have given to the Gorkhas just a political status and nothing more. In an interview with the 'The Telegraph' dated December 18, 1988, Ghising said, "There is no difference between Gorkha Hill Council and Gorkhaland as such. Even if there is any difference, it is in the political status only." Thus both the Union Government as well as the West Bengal government was successful in meeting the political aspiration of the GNLF chief who was taken to be the sole representative of the larger Gorkha community in Darjeeling. The Gorkhaland Movement led by GNLF was suppressed by the political intelligentsia of the Union and the West Bengal government.

GOVERNMENTS' RESPONSE TO GORKHALAND MOVEMENT LED BY GJMM

The Gorkhaland Movement was resurrected when the proposal to grant Sixth Schedule status to Darjeeling was tabled in the winter session of Parliament (2007). The proposal that would grant more powers to the present DGHC led to the eruption of the suppressed discontent among the Gorkhas in Darjeeling who perceived the proposal as a political conspiracy to permanently seal the aspiration of the Gorkhas for a separate state out of West Bengal. Moreover, the fact that the Ghising was in favour of the proposal was viewed by many as Ghising's strategy to strengthen his reign in Darjeeling through DGHC. All this sparked massive unrest among the Gorkhas which was given an organized structure by Bimal Gurung who formed the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJMM) on 7th October, 2007 and gave a renewed call for a separate state of Gorkhaland.

GJMM criticized Ghising for not keeping his promise of reviving the demand of Gorkhaland and accused him of mishandling the funds of DGHC which he claimed had become a mouthpiece of the Union Government. Ghising ultimately succumbed to the pressure of the GJMM by stepping down as the Chairman of

DGHC on March 10, 2008. The ouster of Ghising from DGHC gave boost to the activities of the GJMM as the Darjeeling district and the adjoining areas once again scuffled with the State and Union governments with regard to their demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland. However, contrary to the violent agitation of the GNLF, GJMM decided to follow the Mahatma Gandhi path of non-violence and non-cooperation in the form of indefinite *bandhs* and relay hunger strikes as its strategy to organise Gorkhaland Movement.

The West Bengal Government of Buddhadev Bhattacharjee (2007-2011) unlike that of Mr. Jyoti Basu did not call the ongoing Gorkhaland Movement led by GJMM as “separatist”. It mainly accused the mismanagement of DGHC and the misappropriation of development funds by Ghising as the primary cause for the present unrest in Darjeeling. In spite of the intense pressure from GJMM, Buddhadev Bhattacharjee ruled out every possibility of a separate statehood. It tried to convince GJMM to accept more powers and development funds for Darjeeling hills under special status. A certain amount of flexibility could thus be witnessed in the approach of both Union and the West Bengal Government as they agreed to undergo dialogue process so as to reach an amicable solution to the GJMM demand for Gorkhaland. This was particularly visible in the third round of tripartite talks on August 11, 2009 between the Government of India delegation led by the Union Home Secretary, Shri G.K. Pillai, the West Bengal Government delegation led by the Chief Secretary, Shri A.K. Chakrabarty and the GJMM delegation led by Shri Anmole Prasad. It was agreed that:

- 1) The proposal for establishment of Hill Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution would be dropped.
- 2) It was agreed, in principle, to the repeal of the DGHC Act, 1988. The repeal of the Act would be processed as soon as an alternative administrative setup/framework is finalized through mutual consultations and agreement.
- 3) The Government of India announced the appointment of an Interlocutor to carry forward the discussions held during the third round of tripartite talks and both the State Government and the GJMM welcomed the same. The GJMM assured that a peaceful and conducive atmosphere would be

maintained and all the parties agreed to work in a spirit of constructive cooperation to carry the talks forward.

- 4) The Central Government would also send a team to Darjeeling to review the development works in the District.
- 5) The Government of India and the Government of West Bengal proposed that as an interim measure and to restore the democratic process, the elections to the Panchayat Samitis, Gram Panchayats as well as Municipalities be allowed to be held. The GJMMM stated that they would consult and revert back to the State Government
- 6) It was informed by the Government of West Bengal that portions of the CRF and special Central assistance amounting to Rs.70 crores were lying unutilized. It was agreed that a team of State Government officials would be sent to Darjeeling to discuss the utilization of these funds.
- 7) It was agreed that the next tripartite meeting would be held on December 21, 2009 at Darjeeling.²⁴

Thus in response to the agitation for the separate state of Gorkhaland led by GJMM, a bill for the creation of Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA) was passed in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly on 2nd September 2011. In consonance with the tripartite agreement the Government of West Bengal repealed the DGHC Act, 1988 and constituted the GTA by an Act of the legislature. The GTA is an autonomous body, formed through direct election. The area of the GTA comprises the areas of the entire sub-divisions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong with extended areas of Kurseong. The agreement empowered the GTA with administrative, financial and executive powers in regard to various subjects transferred to the GTA for the development of the region and restoration of peace and normalcy.

POWERS OF GTA

GTA is empowered to frame rules / regulations under the State Acts. It can control, regulate and administer the following departments / offices and subjects transferred to the GTA: Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, Information and Cultural Affairs, School Education, College Education including

²⁴<http://www.darjeelingtimes.com>

Agricultural and Technical Colleges, Fisheries, Irrigation, drainage and embankments, floods and landslide protection, Food and Civil Supplies; Consumer Affairs, Management of any forest, Cottage & Small Scale Industries, Cinchona plantation, Woman and Child Development and Social Welfare, District Sainik Board, Health including Public Health and Family welfare, Irrigation, Water Resources Investigation and Minor Irrigation, Labour and Employment, Land & Land Revenue, Municipal corporation, Panchayat and Rural Development including District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Planning and Development, Public Health Engineering, Public Works Department, Sericulture, Social Welfare, Soil conservation, Sports and Youth Welfare, Statistics, Tourism, Transport, Urban development – town and country planning, Welfare of Minorities, Minor Minerals and Mineral development. The GTA is also empowered to create Group B, C and D posts with the approval of Governor.

In addition to above mentioned powers the Union as well as the West Bengal Government agreed to provide all possible assistance to the GTA for the overall development of the region. Accordingly the Government of India assured to provide financial assistance of Rs. 200 crore per annum for 3 years for projects to develop the socio-economic infrastructure of GTA administered region over and above the normal plan assistance to the State of West Bengal. The Government of West Bengal agreed to provide formula based plan fund for executing development works to overcome area backwardness in hill and border areas in two equal installments every year. The Government of West Bengal further agreed to provide Non-plan grant including provisions for bearing the additional Non-plan expenditure for existing employees payable in two installments in respect of the offices / departments transferred to GTA. The Government of India/ State Government are to also provide financial assistance required for development of administrative infrastructure viz., GTA Sabha House, Secretariat Complex and the residential quarters for the elected members of GTA and the senior officers. The GTA, once established, was authorized to separately take up the issues relating to grant of incentives, subsidies, waiver of taxes and tariff and other benefits as appropriate to the region's backwardness, with the Union and

State Governments. Thus a hill council armed with more powers than its predecessor Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was formed in Darjeeling.²⁵ Both the Union and West Bengal Government again by the dint of their political diplomacy successfully manipulated the GJMM to agree to its settlement of GTA in Darjeeling bringing the Gorkhaland Movement to temporal rest.

STANCE OF TRINAMOOOL CONGRESS AND BJP ON GORKHALAND MOVEMENT

The Trinamool government of West Bengal led by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee strongly opposes the bifurcation of the state declaring that Darjeeling is an integral part of West Bengal. The West Bengal Government although agree to grant more powers and funds to the GTA has clearly denied granting separate statehood to the Gorkhas. On her first address to a public meeting at Darjeeling Mamata Banerjee said, “I am ready to give up my life. But I am not ready to give up Darjeeling”.²⁶ Trinamool Congress accused GJMM of trying to play divisive politics disregarding the development of the hills. It also accused GJMM of frequently negotiating with the Union Government at Delhi with their demand for a separate state rather than concentrating on the development of the hills. It held out that GTA was the state’s answer to the GJMM’s demand for Gorkhaland and that the GTA was a testing ground for the GJMM ability to self-governance.²⁷ Yet the GJMM welcomed the proposal of GTA notwithstanding the unwillingness of the West Bengal Government to succumb to the separate statehood demand of Gorkhaland.

In the 16th Lok Sabha elections, 2014 GJMM extended its support to BJP candidate S S Ahluwalia representing Darjeeling Lok Sabha constituency in West Bengal. The BJP candidate S S Ahluwalia received 488,257 votes against Baichung Bhutia pitted by the Trinamool Congress which later criticised GJMM for supporting an “outsider”. The populace of the Darjeeling hills had also voted

²⁵ See Swatahsiddha Sarkar, *Autonomy, Self Rule and Community in Darjeeling Hills: A Review of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration*, **Occasional Paper VI**, Department of Sociology, North Bengal University, 2012.

²⁶ www.darjeelingtimes.com

²⁷ Ibid

for the BJP candidate Jaswant Singh in 2009 Lok Sabha election. The Lok Sabha candidates for Darjeeling whether under UPA or NDA have always harped on the Gorkhaland issue to garner support for themselves in the region. BJP accused the West Bengal government of confusing the Lepcha, Tamang and other communities in the hills as distinct from Gorkhas in Darjeeling. It also criticised the West Bengal government for failing to provide solution to the economic backwardness of the hills expressing the desire of a new development model to develop West Bengal and the Himalayan states. However unlike the state government; the Union government led by BJP declared the demand for a separate state in the Darjeeling hills to be legitimate and constitutionally valid.

The granting of DGHC and GTA to the Gorkhas in Darjeeling clearly shows that the government has strategically dealt with the Gorkhaland Movement. The political manipulation of the government can be understood as Subash Ghising at the height of the Gorkhaland Movement in the 1980s was unwilling to settle for anything other than the separate state of Gorkhaland. But eventually gave up his demand for Gorkhaland seen as the only answer to the question of Gorkha identity in return of DGHC armed with autonomous powers and huge funds. GJMM which earlier criticized Ghising for breaching the faith of the Gorkhas by giving in to the proposal of DGHC seemed to follow the same footsteps by signing the GTA agreement. The GJMM failed to note the strategic planning of the West Bengal disguised in GTA agreement to silence the Gorkhaland movement. On 22 August, 1988 the CPI led West Bengal Government quelled the Gorkhaland movement led by GNLF by granting autonomous DGHC to the Gorkhas. Similar tactics was adopted by the present West Bengal Government headed by Mamata Banerjee with GTA agreement. The West Bengal Government although agreed to grant more powers and funds to the GTA clearly denied granting separate statehood to the Gorkhas.

COOCH BEHAR PRINCELY STATE UNDER BRITISH COLONIAL ERA

From 1765 to 1783, the interference of the Bhutanese in the affairs of Kamata Kingdom and their frequent attacks on the Kingdom became prominent. To get rid of the Bhutanese intrusion King Dharmendra Narayan signed a defense treaty

with East India Company on April 5, 1773. As a consequence of this treaty, Cooch Behar became a native state of the British India and continued to remain so till 1947. Cooch Behar as an Indian State was ruled by the Maharaja of Cooch Behar who had been a feudatory prince under the British Government. By a document dated 28th August 1949 Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan of Cooch Behar ceded his territory to the Dominion of the Government of India. With the transfer of the administration to the Government of India on 12th day of September 1949 Cooch Behar was ruled as a Chief Commissioner's Province by a Chief Commissioner appointed by the Government of India. By an order under section 290A of Government of India Act of 1935, Cooch Behar was transferred and merged with the Province of West Bengal on 1st January 1950. Since then Cooch Behar is being administered as a district of West Bengal.²⁸

STANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT ON COOCH BEHAR DURING EARLY POST INDEPENDENCE ERA

Post independence political situation in West Bengal underwent revolutionary change. Cooch Behar was merged with West Bengal in 1950 as a district against the will of local people of Cooch Behar. With the partition of Pakistan, there was a huge influx of refugees from East Bengal to the border districts of North Bengal pressurizing the land based rural economy. Moreover with the abolition of Privy Purse and Zamindari system by the Union Government led by Congress the major portion of landed property owned by the Rajbangsi jotedars were vested to the landless people belonging to both Rajbangsi and non-Rajbangsi ethnic groups. The merger of the princely state of Cooch Behar with the West Bengal also led to the influx of the Bengal nationals into the land of the Rajbangsi. The indigenous Rajbangsi populace subsequently lost their land to the affluent Bengalis with the implementation of the land ceiling acts enacted by the West Bengal government. This developed feelings of deprivation among the Rajbangsi

²⁸ Arup Jyoti Das, **Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbangshi Imagination**, Montage Media Publication, Assam, India, 2009, pp. 56

landed aristocracy against the West Bengal government as its policy affected their economic interests.²⁹

The under development of the Rajbangsi due to the loss of land and non-availability of employment opportunities culminated into feelings of alienation among the Rajbangsi. Consequently the Rajbangsi landed aristocracy mobilized the public opinion against the West Bengal government by drawing the attention of the Rajbangsi populace to the underdevelopment of the region. Eventually the neglect of the Rajbangsi dominated region by the West Bengal government gave rise to the demand for a separate state of Kamtapur mainly articulated by the Rajbangsi landed aristocracy.³⁰ The leaders of the Kamtapur movement considered merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal as a conspiracy of West Bengal government and placed it as one of the main arguments in support of the demand for Kamtapur state. The misrule and negligence of the state and Union government towards Cooch Behar was also cited to be the reason behind the movement for a separate state of Kamtapur.

STANCE OF THE WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT ON KAMTAPUR MOVEMENT

With regard to the movement for a separate state by Rajbangsi the Govt of West Bengal led by Left Front used two different strategies to counter the Kamtapur Movement. **First**, it used strong-arm tactics, and **second**, it concentrated on the economic development of the region. The first strategy included the use of police force in order to counter the mobilisation by the KPP/GCPA. The government of West Bengal alleges that the KPP has links with the KLO and that it is the militant wing of the later. ‘Operation Kamtapur’ as such was launched by the West Bengal government in November 2000 to counter the terrorist activities of

²⁹ Sukhbilas Barma, ‘*Social And Political Tension In North Bengal Since—1947*’, in Sailen Debnath ed **Social and Political Tensions in North Bengal (Since 1947)**, N.L. Publishers, Siliguri, West Bengal, 2007

³⁰ Ashutosh Kumar, **Rethinking State Politics in India: Regions Within Regions**, Routledge, 2012, USA, pp. 183

the KLO.³¹ However the CPI (M)-led Left Front government in West Bengal took up a programme to rehabilitate the surrendered militants of KLO. Five such militants, including Madhusudan Das, who had surrendered following former Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's appeal were reported to have been given Rs.12, 000 each and the license to start trade in river bed materials.³² The second strategy included greater funds for the region. The government of West Bengal attempted to uplift the economic plight of the Rajbangsi populace by implementing various policies such as Rural Development Schemes, Welfare Scheme for SC and ST, etc. The government of West Bengal also constituted a developmental agency, i.e., the Uttarbanga Unnagan Parshad especially to remove the economic backwardness of Cooch Behar.

However the development policies pursued by the governments in West Bengal failed to alter the economic backwardness of Cooch Behar and so the economic condition of the Rajbangsi. According to the West Bengal Human Development Report (2004), the rate of the rural poverty in the central districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar was as high as 35.73 and 25.62 per cent respectively. Incidentally, these are the two districts which have high concentration of Rajbangsi. Atul Roy, President of KPP in an interview published in *The Week*, 16th November 2003 opined that the economic condition of the Rajbangsi in Cooch Behar has deteriorated tremendously during the 26 years of Left Front rule in West Bengal. Lack of irrigation facilities has reduced agriculture to a single crop a year. There has been no major development with regard to the Teesta Barrage Project launched by the Left Front government.³³ Even former Left Front leaders like Kamal Guha, belonging to the All India Forward Bloc, admitted that the region including Cooch Behar suffers from the problem of under development. To him, this was one of the reasons for the political and social

³¹ Alok Kumar Gupta and Saswati Chanda, '*Kamptapur Liberation Organisation: The New Face of Terror*', **Third Concept**, Volume XVI No. 191, January, 2003, pp. 56-58.

³² Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay, '*A Ruthless Hit Squad*', **Frontline**, Volume 21 - Issue 01, January 03 - 16, 2004.

³³ Jaydeep Mitra, 'Lack of Development gives rise to Separatist Sentiments', http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2001/February/06%20special%20report.Html

unrest in the region. Buddhadev Bhattacharya, former Chief Minister of West Bengal conceded that dispossession of land and large-scale unemployment lie at the root of the grievances of the Rajbangsi populace in West Bengal. Similarly the CPI (ML) Liberation State Committee in West Bengal noted that the discontent and separatist sentiments of the Rajbangsi people is due to the continued neglect and deprivation of North Bengal. The West Bengal government led by the Communist Party thus viewed Kamtapur Movement as the desperate effort of the 'dispossessed landlords' to re-assert themselves as the dominant class in West Bengal.³⁴

The present government of West Bengal considering the Kamtapur Movement as a law and order issue has spoken of stern action against the KLO after the Jalpaiguri blast (26th December, 2013). The ruling Trinamool Congress Party led by Mamta Banerji had also taken a public posture in early January, 2014 of confronting the KLO politically in 72 blocks where the latter is active. Though not in a denial mode on the backwardness of this community it is still to effectively take up a plan for rejuvenating the affected area. The West Bengal budget (2013-14) does not have an appropriate area development sub-plan covering the areas inhabited by Rajbangsi while the developmental schemes adopted earlier appears to be inadequate with regard to the economic upliftment of the Rajbangsi who continue to remain backward and deprived.³⁵ The area inhabited by the Rajbangsi in North Bengal continues to be marked by underdevelopment owing to which they suffer from economic backwardness.

STANCE OF WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT ON LANGUAGE

DEMAND OF KPP

With regard to the language demand of the KPP, the government of West Bengal asserts that the Kamtapuri language is only a dialect of the Bengali language and hence denies it an official status in West Bengal. The government of West Bengal held several public meetings with linguistics from the capital

³⁴ Op.cit.no.30

³⁵ Gautam Sen, 'Need for action plan to counter KLO', Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, February 28, 2014, http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/Needfor_actionplantocounterKLO_gsen_280214

campaigning that Kamtapuri was not a language but a dialect of the Bengali language and desisted people from recording it as their mother tongue. It held that many colloquial languages have contributed to the development of the Bengali language including the Kamtapuri which remained a dialect of the local ethnic people. The CPI (ML) for a resolution of the debate on whether Kamtapuri is a dialect of Bengali language has called upon the government of West Bengal to appoint a commission comprising noted historians, literary persons and linguists.³⁶ On the distinct ethnic identity of the Rajbangsi although the government of West Bengal has observed that the Rajbangsi belong to the Bengali nationality.

KPP however has been able to enlist the support of several organisations that operate in the region like the CPI (ML) Santosh Rana faction, CPRM, Samajwadi Jana Parishad, Uttar Bengal Jharkhandi Sangarsh Samiti, etc for its demand for the recognition of the Kamtapuri language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Though all these organisations do not support the demand for a separate state; some of these organisations have endorsed the claim of the KPP for the recognition of the Kamtapuri language to be one of the official languages of West Bengal. The KPP leadership's association with the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in present times raise doubts about its real objective. KPP president Atul Roy has gone on record saying that, "Mamata Banerjee's aim is to banish the CPI (M); we also hold the same view. As such we need to have an alliance with Mamata".³⁷

WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE GREATER COOCH BEHAR MOVEMENT

The separate state demand of the Greater Cooch Behar people Association (GCPA) has been criticized mainly by the Cooch Behar Zilla Left Front (CZLF). The members of the Zilla Left Front of Cooch Behar refute the 'C' category state demand of the GCPA on the ground that the Constitution through the 7th Amendment Act, 1956 substituted 'C' states with the category of 'Union

³⁶ See Girindra Narayan Ray, 'The Rajbangshi Identity Politics: The Post Colonial Passages', in Sailen Debnath, ed **Social and Political Tensions in North Bengal (Since 1947)**, N.L. Publishers, Siliguri, West Bengal, 2007

³⁷ Op.cit.no.30

Territories' which were to be similarly administered by the Union Government. Moreover the State Reorganisation Act, 1956 merged the part 'C' states of Ajmer, Bhopal, Coorg, Kutch and Vindhya Pradesh into other adjoining states. The Cooch Behar Zilla Left Front further argued that the 7th Amendment Act cancelled the status of Cooch Behar as a 'C' category state in the Indian Union in 1956. Accordingly Cooch Behar too like other states of Ajmer, Bhopal, Vindhya Pradesh, was attached with the adjoining state of West Bengal.³⁸ The CPI (M) also asserted that there was no demand for a separate state of Cooch Behar during the time of State Reorganisation Commission in 1956.

The West Bengal Government under the Left Front as well as Trinamool Congress has always denied support to the Kamtapur Movement. This is because the partition of Bengal for a second time is tantamount to losing vote bank in the whole of West Bengal dominated by the Bengali ethnic majority. Consequently no state level or national level political party extend support to the Rajbangsi demand for a separate state of Kamtapur. Moreover the Government on nationalistic considerations refrain from the very idea of a separate state of Cooch Behar for it would be a vulnerable state with sizeable Muslim population along the borders of Bangladesh, an Islamic state.³⁹ Thus consideration of GCPA's or KPPs demand for a separate state of Cooch Behar or Kamtapur respectively by the Union as well as the state government appears to be a far cry. In fact the West Bengal government view the Kamtapur Movement as unreasonable and unhistorical and condemns the activities of KPP and GCDP as terrorist and secessionist activities. Thus calling the Kamtapur Movement as a separatist movement, the West Bengal government vehemently opposes the demand of a separate state of Kamtapur.

³⁸ Kamal Chandra Barman, *Ethnic Movements in North Bengal: A Review of Kamtapur and Greater Cooch Behar State Demand in Cooch Behar*, unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of North Bengal, 2007.

³⁹ Anirban Biswas. 'Destination Kamtapur', **Frontier**, Volume 35 Number 20, 2002, pp. 9-10

KAMTAPUR MOVEMENT AND STATE APATHY

The state as well as the Union government has been more responsive to the Gorkhaland Movement relatively to the Kamtapur Movement. This is because the Gorkhaland Movement has been more organised and articulate in its statehood demand and strategies than the Kamtapur Movement. The violent mass uprising during the Gorkhaland Movement led by Subhash Ghising in the 1980s and the mass participation of the Gorkha populace in candle rallies during the present phase of the Gorkhaland Movement led by Bimal Gurung clearly illustrates that the Gorkhas as an ethnic community are conscious and participative in their collective struggle for Gorkhaland. While the socio-economic backwardness of the region of the Cooch Behar results into the lack of political consciousness and apathy among the Rajbangsi populace with regard to the Kamtapur Movement. Moreover the Rajbangsi are not upfront and participatory on a mass level with regard to the Kamtapur Movement which can also be the result of the alleged linkage of the KPP with the terrorist outfit KLO. The Rajbangsi intelligentsia also withdrew support or extends only passive support to the KPP. While they feel passionate about the plight of the Rajbangsi ethnic community in Cooch Behar they refrain from linking themselves to the organizations leading Kamtapur Movement. Owing to such display of political apathy and poor assertion of their demands on the part of the Rajbangsi, the KPP's efforts to exercise their collective bargaining power against the state have failed.

The idea for a separate homeland for the Koch Rajbangsi has been spearheaded by various organizations in West Bengal. Uttarkhand Dal (UKD) demanded the formation of the Kamtapur State in 1969, but did not make much political headway and was first replaced by the Kamtapur Gana Parishad in 1987, to be followed by Kamtapur Peoples' Party (KPP) in 1997. At present, it is the KPP which is a North Bengal based political organization, which is spearheading the demand for separate Kamtapur state for the Koch Rajbangsi community. KPP's demand is only statehood, not sovereignty. Besides statehood, KPP is also demanding the inclusion of the Kamtapuri (Rajbangsi) language in the Eighth Schedule and the propagation of the Kamtapuri language and culture through the state controlled radio and television. However the Kamtapur Movement marred

by split in Kamtapur People's Party owing to ideological and political difference failed to emerge as an effective and organized ethno-autonomy movement in West Bengal. Consequently the West Bengal government considered the Kamtapur movement as merely a law and order situation showing political apathy towards the same. For long the CPI (M) led government by Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee refused to even hold talks with the KPP leaders.

BJP: A NEW HOPE FOR GJMM AND KPP

During the 16th Lok Sabha elections BJP reiterated in its election manifesto that it will sympathetically examine and appropriately consider the long pending demands of the Gorkhas together with the Adivasis and other people of Darjeeling district and the Dooars region; of the Kamtapuri, Rajbangsi and other people of North Bengal (including recognition of their language) and will take initiatives for the permanent solution of the long pending issues of these neglected regions. The ethnic communities thus find the response of the Union Government to the autonomy movements in the region to be passive. The Union government according to them has always been apathetic to the demands of the Gorkhas and Rajbangsi. However compared to the UPA government they find NDA Government to be more favourable to the concept of granting of separate statehood to the smaller region as its election manifesto covered the issue of smaller states. Consequently both GJMM and KPP supported BJP in the 16th Lok Sabha elections which in its election manifesto assured to consider the demands of the ethnic minorities and to bring about their development. Thus the victory of BJP in the 16th Lok Sabha elections gave a renewed hope to ethnic minority communities of Gorkhas and Rajbangsi for the redress of their grievances.⁴⁰

STATE AND MULTICULTURALISM

The state of West Bengal is as such confronted with the onerous task to determine the range of permissible diversity, mechanisms to accommodate differences without losing its social cohesion, policies to reconcile the apparently conflicting demands of equality of treatment and recognition of cultural differences so as to

⁴⁰ This is the opinion expressed by the members of the GJMM and KPP during the interview conducted the interview undertaken as part of the field work conducted for the present research.

create a spirit of common citizenship among its culturally diverse members. Accordingly the state of West Bengal appears to adopt the following mechanisms over the years to maintain its Multicultural framework:

Divide and Rule -

Strategy of 'divide and rule' was adopted by the British colonizers in their colonies to maintain its imperial powers. Colonial officials deliberately encouraged distrust between minority and majority groups, so as to inhibit common struggle against the colonizer. They developed in the minorities a feeling that they were more secure under European colonial administration than under the rule of some larger neighbouring ethnic group. To this end they granted the minorities special privileges like communal electorate, reservation in education and civil service employment and forms of self government. Thus, following the lines of British imperialist the West Bengal government in order to contain separatist demands tend to interplay the internal minorities against the national minorities in Darjeeling. The West Bengal government readily formed the Development Boards for the internal minorities like the Lepcha and the Tamang communities in Darjeeling with the autonomy powers to undertake activities to maintain their distinct culture, traditions, language and practices. This is clearly to weaken the ethnic composition of Gorkhas as the Lepcha and the Tamangs earlier constituted part of the larger Gorkha community. The Govt. of West Bengal asserts that these ethnic groups registered themselves as the Nepali speaking populace and united under the umbrella identity of Nepali ethnic community so as to strengthen their claim for a separate statehood to be formed on the linguistic lines by the State Re-organisation Committee.

However later anthropological information revealed Lepcha to be the aboriginals of Darjeeling and not the Gorkhas. Nepali, it describes is a lingua franca that brought within its manifold several distinct dialects like that of Lepcha, Tamang, Sherpa, Magar, etc to establish Nepali or the Gorkhas as a major ethnic group in Darjeeling with the rightful claim for a separate state on the linguistic lines. This strategy of the Govt. of West Bengal to weaken the separate statehood demands of the Gorkhas has proved to be successful as there is an upsurge of demands for Development Boards by ethnic groups like Sherpa following the establishment of

Lepcha Development Board in Darjeeling. Such ethnic groups are now highlighting and stressing their cultural distinctiveness to further their demand for a separate Development Board with autonomy and powers to preserve their identity as distinct from Gorkhas. Thus, the identity of Gorkhas as a major ethnic group in Darjeeling is being challenged by the internal minorities who are readily granted autonomous administrative bodies by the Govt. of West Bengal so as to weaken the claim of the Gorkhas for a separate state of Gorkhaland along the ethnic lines.

Sixth Schedule -

The Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) dated 06.1.2005 providing for the Sixth Schedule status to the Darjeeling hills was another diplomatic strategy adopted by the Union Government and the West Bengal Government as a final solution to the autonomy movement in Darjeeling. The MoS of 2005 was propagated by the GNLFF together with the Union Government and the State Government of West Bengal. The GNLFF Chief Subhash Ghisingh advocated that during the pre-independence period Darjeeling with the Garo, Khasi, Jaintia and Mizo hills in the Northeast region enjoyed the special status of 'backward tract', 'non-regulated area', 'excluded area' and 'partially excluded area'. However post independence while the Garo, Khasi, Jaintia and Mizo Hills were accorded the Sixth Schedule status under the Constitution of India, the Darjeeling Hills was excluded from the same. The traditional custom, culture, dialects and ethnic identity of the twenty-two major hill tribes of Darjeeling thus continue to remain in jeopardy with no protection as was earlier granted by the British colonial government.

Subhash Ghisingh insisted that the Union Government and the State Government of West Bengal should provide constitutional guarantee to the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) under Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This is because the government limited the powers and functions of the DGHC by setting up three autonomous multi-administrative systems in a small area of Darjeeling namely, DGHC, Municipality and the Panchayat. The status of DGHC as such was reduced to a development agency with no autonomous authority or physical jurisdiction and territory except certain portion of land of Tourism Department

transferred by the West Bengal government as landed property. Besides the land and territory of the Municipality and Panchayat areas remained under the State Government. GNLF therefore proposed the Sixth Schedule Status for Darjeeling with more autonomous powers and authority than the DGHC. Ghising viewed Sixth Schedule as an appropriate and lasting political solution to the problems of the Gorkhas in Darjeeling.

After a series of review meetings in Kolkata the final agreement granting the Sixth Schedule status was adopted on 6th December 2005 in Delhi. As per the agreement the Govt. of West Bengal transferred the Municipality and Panchayat along with forty- five departments to the DGHC for its up gradation under Sixth Schedule. Ghisingh further demanded abrogation of the Municipality election which was to be held on 11th December, 2011 in Darjeeling on the grounds that it amounted to the violation of the MoS of 2005 resulting into administrative deadlock in Darjeeling.

The proposal met with resistance spearheaded by the GJMM that demanded scrapping of the tripartite MoS with regard to Sixth Schedule. GJMM regarded Sixth Schedule to be a divisive policy dividing different castes as it focussed only on tribal giving to them Land Acquisition Rights and failing to cater to the needs of the General Castes who equally comprised an important part of the collective 'Gorkha' identity. The GJMM mobilised the Gorkha population against the Sixth Schedule depicting it to be the policy of the Govt. of West Bengal to suppress any further agitation for a separate state of Gorkhaland. They alleged that it would divide the people in the Hills on the basis of caste dissolving the common Gorkha identity and permanently sealing the demand of Gorkhaland. The CPI (R-M) in Darjeeling too resisted the imposition of Sixth Schedule in the Darjeeling hill area on the grounds that Darjeeling is composed of only 31.4 per cent of Tribal and seventy per cent of non-tribal population. Under the Sixth Schedule a rule of thirty per cent tribal against seventy per cent non-tribal was engineered so as to deprive the people of the region for having a separate state within India as per the constitutional provision by distorting the very spirit and basic character of Indian constitution. Thus, it criticised Sixth Schedule as an endeavour by the West Bengal state to keep the region under West Bengal.

The view of the internal minorities in Darjeeling with regard to the Sixth Schedule was similar to that of the GJMM. They were of the view that the Sixth Schedule was a loose arrangement which was primarily meant to divert the attention of the masses from Gorkhaland demand. According to them the Sixth Schedule would have favoured only the Tribal section of the Darjeeling which constitutes only a part of the Darjeeling population. The General Category would be deprived under the Sixth Schedule status in Darjeeling. While the Lepcha community appeared to be unsure as whether the Sixth Schedule would have been specifically beneficial for the Lepcha community which is one of the tribal minorities; the Marwari community propositioned that they do not support the Sixth Schedule status for Darjeeling as the Gorkhaland statehood would be a better arrangement. Thus the attempt of the state to provide solution to the socio-cultural and economic aspiration of the Gorkhas in Darjeeling through Sixth Schedule was criticised by different sections of ethnic community as well as regional political parties alike and instead gave way to the renewed movement for Gorkhaland.

Autonomous Council-

The Govt. of West Bengal however has also adopted diplomacy to contain the Gorkhaland Movement. Instead of a fully fledged state of Gorkhaland the political aspirations of the Gorkhas have been attended to by granting them autonomous administrative agency in the form of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) and Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA). The Nepali language was also included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in 1992. However, such diplomacy on the part of the Govt. of West Bengal although was successful to simmer down the Gorkhaland Movement but failed to restrain it completely. The Gorkhaland Movement continues to challenge the multicultural framework of the West Bengal.

The failure to fully contain the separatist movements can be attributed to the apathy of the Govt. of West Bengal to effectively address the growing political aspirations of its ethnic communities. It has either completely denied its ethnic communities self government rights as in the case of Koch Rajbangsi or have given the same in piecemeal as in the case of Gorkhas in Darjeeling. The primary

demand of both the Gorkhas and the Koch Rajbangsi for a separate state of Gorkhaland and Kamtapur respectively has been constantly denied by the government. The setting up of DGHC proved to be an interim solution to the statehood demand of the Gorkhas in Darjeeling. It was largely viewed by the GJMM as a conspiracy of the Govt. of West Bengal to contain the Gorkhaland Movement with no intention to grant the Gorkhas real self government rights. DGHC clearly displayed One Man rule of its Chairman Subhas Ghisingh who kept himself aloof from the masses and discouraged political enthusiasm. It was an undemocratic arrangement as Ghisingh withheld any elections for the Chairmanship of the DGHC. DGHC thus betrayed self-government aspirations of the Gorkhas in West Bengal as it was apathetic to the needs of the people, misused public grants, suffered from disparity between the formulation and execution of the policies and lacked real decentralisation of power. Moreover it was undemocratic with no exercise of adult franchise.

The mismanagement of DGHC with no supervision from the Govt. of West Bengal encouraged the Gorkhas to renew their demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland under Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM). DGHC was subsequently abolished by the Govt. of West Bengal to give way to a new administrative arrangement of Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA). However, the GTA like DGHC is failing to meet the aspiration of self governance of the Gorkhas in Darjeeling. Members of the GJMM view the GTA to be only an interim solution providing them with an administrative experience. They do not see the setting up of GTA as a dilution to their demand for a separate state rather they view it as a stepping stone towards that demand. Expressing dissatisfaction with the GTA it was pointed out that no real power lies with it. The West Bengal government continues to interfere in the subjects like education which lies with the jurisdiction of the GTA. Moreover, the proposed subjects to be transferred to the GTA as per the GTA Act continue to remain outside the purview of GTA. Besides the dependence of GTA on State government for funds makes it vulnerable to the political manoeuvre of the Govt. of West Bengal. The Gorkhas as such believe that the self-government rights have been denied to them as their demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland continues to remain unattended. That

arrangement like the DGHC and the GTA are mere eyewash in the name of right to self-government without any autonomy.⁴¹ Under such circumstances one can hold that the mechanism of autonomous institutions adopted by the Govt. of West Bengal although successful in withholding the autonomy demands for a time being fails to eliminate feelings of alienation among its minorities. It therefore needs to come up with more concrete policies so as to maintain the richness of its multicultural set up.

Symbolic recognition to Minority history-

Mainstream institutions in a culturally diverse society appear to privilege the majority's culture and identity in ways not intended. Multiculturalism sees such suppression or exclusion of minority cultural practices in the public domain of the state to be tantamount to cultural discrimination of the minorities. It maintains that by providing symbolic expression to the minority culture in the national symbols of the state, they would be able to protect their identities, make their cultures secure and be included as equals in the polity. Attempts have therefore been made by the Govt. of West Bengal to give equal recognition to the contribution of the ethnic minorities to the history and cultural richness of the West Bengal. Maintenance of archaeological sites of the ethnic minorities and the naming of streets, town squares after the legends of the ethnic minorities by the Govt. of West Bengal exemplifies its attempts to accommodate cultural diversity in the national symbols of the state as seen in the pictures below.

⁴¹This is the opinion expressed by the members of GJMM during the interview undertaken as part of the field work conducted for the present research.



Figure 3 Statue of Nepali poet Bhanu Bhakta Acharya near ISBT Siliguri, West Bengal



Figure 4 Statue of Ratanlal Brahmin-the first Nepali Member of Parliament



Figure 5 Bus stand in Darjeeling on the road named after Dambar Singh Gurung



Figure 6 A Town Square in Darjeeling named after Dambar Singh Gurung



Figure 7 Auditorium in North Bengal University named after Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore and Nepali poet Bhanu Bhakta Acharya



Figure 8 Statue of Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma in Siliguri, popularly known as 'Thakur Panchanan' by Koch Rajbanshi community in North Bengal.



Figure 9 Coochbehar Royal Palace now maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the framework of Multiculturalism tends to counter pose the perceptions of the state with those of the minority community. The two are presented as binary opposites to each other. Accordingly while the West Bengal state on the one hand rejects the calls for further partition of Bengal on the other hand the ethnic communities claim that the land that they demand historically never belonged to West Bengal. The ethnic communities of Gorkhas and Rajbangsi find the state of West Bengal to be antagonistic to the autonomy movements in West Bengal as both the TMC and Left Front governments used carrot and stick policy to squash their movement for a separate statehood of Gorkhaland and Kamtapur respectively. The present government of West Bengal views the problem of autonomy movements mainly as that of law and order. Accordingly it has adopted both carrot and stick to control the separate statehood demands both of the Gorkhas and the Rajbangsi. Both from the security perspective and development angle, conscious intervention in concert with the state governments of West Bengal have been initiated by the Union Government too with regard to the separate statehood demands in West Bengal.

However it is important to note that Multiculturalism so as to be successfully established requires that all the constituent cultures have equal share in the public as well as the private realm. While cultural diversity is often promoted in the private realm it is the public realm in which ethnic minorities lack adequate representation. State represents the public realm as it has the legality to secure justice in society. As such it can play a key role in eliminating feelings of alienation and fostering a sense of common belonging among the ethnic minorities. It is only when the state is seen as an impartial institution rising above narrow communal prejudices that it can emerge as a source of unity and shared life. Absence of equal share in the public realm involving state symbols and governmental structures makes the ethnic minorities vulnerable to discrimination from the majority ethnic community that finds representation in every realm of public sphere. Accordingly the state should ensure equal rights and treatment of the ethnic communities not only in the private but also public realm such as such as employment, criminal justice, education and public services. Decision making

process by the institutionalised public agencies should be bereft of all forms of direct as well as indirect discrimination. Direct and deliberate discrimination occurs when decision-making are guided by prejudices against certain groups of people. While indirect discrimination is the result of the rules and procedures that contain unnoticed discriminatory biases and work to the systematic disadvantage of particular communities or groups.⁴² The state which is taken to represent the voice of the majority and symbolize only the sentiments of the majority must take utmost care to accommodate the interest of the ethnic minorities by granting them special rights ensuring them adequate representation in the public sphere.

⁴² Bhikhu Parekh, **Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory**, Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom, 2006, pp. 209-210