

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **CONCLUSION**

The present study titled 'Multiculturalism and Identity Politics: A Study of Gorkhaland and Kamtapur Movements in West Bengal' mainly aimed to study ethno-identity based autonomy demands for a separate state of Gorkhaland and Kamtapur in West Bengal. Accordingly it attempted to explore the issues of Gorkha and Koch Rajbangsi identities. Central to the issue of identity politics is a sense of alienation caused by some external force, which triggers autonomy movement by an ethnic community at the receiving end. These external forces may be a dominant ethnic group in the region, migrants from across the border or the Government reflecting the majoritarian biases unwilling to succumb to the demands of autonomy so as to maintain its zone of authority. In the case of Gorkhas and Rajbangsi in West Bengal it was all the above external forces that posed threat to their distinct ethnic identity.

The identity of the Indian Nepalis/Gorkhas has been diluted mainly due to the large immigration of Nepalese from Nepal post Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty, 1950. Due to similarity in their cultures and facial features it is often difficult to recognize the difference between the two. Consequently the Indian Nepalis are looked upon as foreigners and thereby suffer ethno-identity based discrimination questioning their Indian nationality. The eviction as seen during the time of anti-foreigners movement in Assam and other North-eastern states by the dominant ethnic group in those regions clearly illustrates such discrimination. The Gorkha populace as such feels isolated in the mainstream Indian society and deprived of their identity as Indian nationals. Thus in order to assert their ethnic identity against the Nepalese from Nepal, the Gorkhas launched the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling and the adjoining areas. To the Gorkhas, a separate state Gorkhaland would give them recognition as Indian Nationals and they would no longer be treated as foreigners amidst the immigrants from the neighbouring country. In addition to this, the Gorkhas as a distinct ethnic community would be able to maintain their distinctive ethnic identity outside the dogma of the dominant Bengali culture in West Bengal. The issue of ethnic identity as such

largely contributed to the generation of the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland.

Kamtapur Movement on the same lines is marked by the desire to establish the identity of the Rajbangsi as a separate ethnic community distinctive from the majoritarian culture of the Bengalis in West Bengal. The fear of assimilation into the majoritarian culture and losing their distinctive ethnic identity is foremost among the Rajbangsi as they hold immense pride and conviction in their rich unique history, traditions, language and practices. They detest any claim made by the majoritarian Bengali ethnic community that Rajbangsi form a part of the larger Bengali ethnic culture. Instead they trace the history of the Rajbangsi settlement to ancient Kamta Kingdom in 16<sup>th</sup> century. They insist that the culture of the Rajbangsi is much older than the dominant culture of Bengalis in West Bengal and that the Bengali as a language emerged from the ancient Kamtapuri language. The inspiration for the present Kamtapur movement thus has been drawn from the historical Kamtapur or Kamta Kingdom, which became a princely state of British India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and later merged into West Bengal as a district post-independence. In addition to this, the fear that the Bangladeshis patronized by various political parties for the sake of vote bank will reduce the Rajbangsi into a minority ethnic group in their own land endangering their distinct ethnic identity has further deepened the feelings of ethnic unrest among the Rajbangsi. Accordingly the Gorkhas and the Rajbangsi view the separate state of Gorkhaland and Kamtapur as the only solution to their identity crisis respectively. Both the Movements are thus ethnocentric in character.

One however cannot ignore the instrumental aspects of these Movements. The socio-economic factors are also responsible for the emergence of Gorkhaland and Kamtapur Movements. The much needed development of Darjeeling and Cooch Behar has come to a standstill as no effective attempts to further enhance or even maintain its infrastructural facilities were made. This has largely affected the local population in Darjeeling and Cooch Behar as tea and cinchona plantation which are income generating units suffered a setback due to low productivity, marketing mismanagement, inadequate technical training to the workers and bankruptcy. This has led to the closure of many such plantations rendering the

workers jobless. Thus the West Bengal Government and the mechanism of self governance such as DGHC failed to harness the economic potentialities of the region which is rich in biodiversity and geographical features. The administration failed to provide even the basic amenities like proper roads and adequate water supply to the people in Darjeeling as well as Cooch Behar. Thus in the absence of an effective implementation of a viable economic strategy a sense of socio-economic deprivation started brewing in the Darjeeling hills and the plains of Cooch Behar erupting into the renewed movement for separate statehood in West Bengal.

Politically too, the administration proved to be inefficient as the West Bengal Government kept itself aloof from the political developments in the hills of Darjeeling as well as plains of Cooch Behar. Gorkhaland and Kamtapur movements as such emerged out of the desire for self governance. The desire to have the power to frame their own policies has led to the movement for separate statehood in West Bengal. The right to governance is viewed as the political right by the ethnic minorities like the Gorkhas and the Rajbangsi who want to get out of the Bengal political dominance so as to frame all the policies for a region with different culture, history, language and tradition. They view mechanism of self governance such as DGHC granted to the Gorkhas to be inadequate as it suffered from structural lacunae with no real powers. Moreover no measures to supervise the proper utilization of development funds and exercise of administrative powers granted to DGHC were under taken by the Government. Accordingly they demand true decentralization of power in the form of separate statehood.

Moreover, apathy of Government with regard to the history, cultural practices and language of the Gorkha and Rajbangsi ethnic minorities further deepened feelings of alienation among them. Morarji Desai on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1979 called Nepali a foreign language before a delegation of All India Nepali Bhasha Samiti (AINBS) and representatives of political parties. While Rajiv Gandhi at the height of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) Movement for Gorkhaland opined, "If the Nepalese of Darjeeling wanted Indian citizenship, there was no harm if they write to their King". Such statements by political leaders clearly indicate their perception with regard to the ethnic identity of the

Gorkhas. Likewise the ethnic culture and language of the Rajbangsi is refuted by the Government to be distinct from the larger Bengali culture in West Bengal. It is largely seen to be the very part of the Bengali culture with no ethnic individuality whatsoever. Rajbangsi culture as such has been denied recognition as even their language continues to be bereft of Eighth Schedule status. Consequently such ignorance of Gorkha and Rajbangsi ethnic history and culture on the part of political leaders largely contributed towards the feelings of alienation among them culminating into demands for separate statehood in West Bengal.

Another important dimension of the present study is to examine the reconciliation between the Gorkhaland and the Kamtapur Movements so as to analyse the prospects of Multiculturalism in West Bengal. Both the Gorkhas and Rajbangsi ethnic minorities are demanding a separate statehood to be carved out of West Bengal. However the same areas of Dooars and Siliguri are demanded by both the Gorkhas and Rajbangsi communities for their proposed states of Kamtapur and Gorkhaland respectively. GJMM claims that the Siliguri is a part of Darjeeling and so should be within the jurisdiction of the proposed Gorkhaland state. GJMM however accepts Rajbangsi to be the aboriginals of the Cooch Behar. KPP too opined that the settlement of the Gorkhas in Darjeeling is of more than 100 years old and are the citizens of India. The possibility of a mutual agreement with regard to sharing of the territory was further accepted by both the GJMM and KPP leaders. On March 27, 2009, the Greater Kamta United Forum and GJMM resorted to dialogue to reach a common solution to their entire problem. The Greater Kamta United Forum sympathizing to the plight of the Gorkhas expressed full support to their demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland. Eventually, both the parties came together as a united force to fight against their so called common enemy seen in the West Bengal Government. The GJMM also assured that the Gorkhaland once formed it will adopt a policy which would protect the culture and also cater to the all-round development of the minority communities within its fold. The Gorkhaland and Kamtapur Movements as of now appear to reconcile their differences over common territories bringing

together two seemingly opposing communities thereby ushering unity and solidarity between both the communities.

While the territorial boundary issue between Gorkhas and Rajbangsi over their demands for the same areas of Dooars and Siliguri seems to be subsided for a while one cannot overlook the possibilities of boundary dispute between the two if either of one is granted the separate statehood. Moreover the presence of internal ethnic minorities in the areas demanded by the Gorkhas and Rajbangsi further contributes to the dynamics of cultural diversity in West Bengal. The granting of autonomous bodies like Lepcha Development Board by the state has also resulted into increased sense of political consciousness among the internal minorities in these regions who are now assertive of their rights and ethnic identity. The majoritarian Bengali community on the other hand through organizations like Amra Bengali and Bangla O Bangla Bhasha Banchao Committee has time and again expressed their protest against any dialogue or discussion between the Government and the ethnic minorities on their demand for separate statehood. They have openly condemned the idea of the further partition of Bengal as a means to accommodate the demands of the ethnic minorities in West Bengal. Accordingly accommodation of the interests of the ethnic as well as the internal minorities against those of the majoritarian community is no less a challenge to the vibrant Multicultural set up in West Bengal. Thus in view of such complexities Multiculturalism is a viable alternative to maintain and moderate identity politics in West Bengal as it encourages cultural diversity and facilitates intercultural interaction.

The West Bengal state as such has made strides to establish Multiculturalism by providing symbolic recognition to the ethnic minority culture in its national heritage. However mere symbolic recognition in the form of naming of street or building of statues of heroes of ethnic minorities falls short to eliminate feelings of alienation among the ethnic minorities. This is mainly because the territorially-rooted ethnic minorities desire respectful recognition and acceptance of their unique identity through the means of decentralization of power and autonomy to decide their own affairs. This in turn is possible only when they have an adequate share in the decision making process. Accordingly the Gorkhas and the Rajbangsi ethnic minorities demand not merely the symbolic representation of their ethnic

culture. Instead they demand separate state for the protection of ethnic identity as well as development. Both the communities have their own distinct culture, language, customs and traditional practices different from dominant ethnic community of Bengalis in West Bengal. As a result both find their inclusion within West Bengal as unjustified and unfair. Added to this is the alleged negligence of the region by the Government in planning its socio-economic development.

To conclude, decision making process in West Bengal should thus be inclusive that brings together both Gorkha and Rajbangsi ethnic minorities particularly on matters pertaining to their welfare. It is to be ensured that their voice is not lost amidst the clamour of the majoritarian community. Equal civil, political, economic rights are to be also accompanied with cultural rights. However while the state grants to its citizens all these rights it fails to create an appropriate conditions for one to enjoy these rights. Ethnic minorities like Gorkha and Rajbangsi can fully enjoy their cultural rights as guaranteed by the Constitution of India when their distinctive culture is given due recognition and respect together with a sense of security in public and private realm. Failing which, Multiculturalism would continue to remain a rare possibility in West Bengal.