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Gorkha Ethnicity and Issue of Gorkhaland**Priyankar Datta***Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Kalyani, Kalyani, (W.B.) India***Abstract**

As is well known all over the world that India is a land of unity in diversity - often it is boasted. Rightfully, India is a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-lingual area. The society in the area is made up of various elements drawn from diverse origin. The social diversity is perhaps the most powerful materialization of the area. The social groups with diverse ethnic and linguistic origins representing several racial stocks and social status have found places for themselves at various points of time adapting themselves to several ecological niches offered by the Physiographic and climatic setting of the area. The waves of in-migration have drawn the ancestors of the majority of the present population of the area from the surrounding territories and across the Himalayas. Their dissemination has ensued in a creation of a social mosaic with ethnic disparateness. With such diversity in the area in terms of ethnicity, culture and language, the region is made up of groups and sub groups with varied and diverse demands and needs. The chief responsibility of the State as an agent of development and planning is, thus, to take heed of the diverse demands of social groups, not only of the majority social groups but also the groups in minority, residing within the length and breadth of its territory. It is argued that ethnic expressions are in one way or the other related to development schemes adopted by a State and therefore the failure and disparity in development strategies makes the association with the State less worthy and generates a multiplicity of different cultural expressions.

Key Words: Multicultural, Ethnicity, social Diversity, Territory, Development, Decentralization.

Introduction

Over the years, the failure and disparity in development schemes (i.e. development planning) in India has led to the generation of multiplicity of separate ethnic expressions like Gorkhaland movement and many others. And often it is celebrated that the agitating ethnoses are in minority, have a distinct culture, language; they are geographically isolated, socially, economically and

political unsafe and have a low self-sensing equated to those occupying the state berth.

Furthermore, sociologists believe that the ethnic movements in India are basically based on the perceived demand to overcome poverty as against the conventional sociological arguments that the prospects of progresses enhance the utilization of ethnic identity.

Careful scrutiny of the ethnic

expressions in India reveals the significance of planning for development in ethnic and linguistic lines. There is a need for development plans to address cultural and linguistic elements besides economic aspects. This becomes especially true and relevant in a nation like India where we talk of unit in diversity. The popular phrase that India is a land of unity in variety itself suggests identification of diversities and giving due respect to them - which we, in fact, have misapprehended over the years.

The district of Darjeeling belonged to the non-regulated province before 1861; that is to say, Act and Regulations did not come into force unless they were particularly extended to it. Under the system, the Governor General possessed the power of taking on legislation for the non-regulated states by means of executive orders.

Issue of Gorkhaland

Gorkhaland is the name given to the area around Darjeeling and the Duars in North West Bengal in India. Residents of the area, mostly Gorkhas have long demanded a separate state for themselves to preserve their Indian-Nepali/Gorkha cultural identity and to improve their socio-economic conditions.

Historically, Darjeeling and its surrounding terai areas formed a part of the then Kirat kingdom known as Bijaypur. After the disintegration of the Bijaypur kingdom, it annexed with Sikkim and Bhutan. After the Anglo Nepalese War (1814-1815), the Treaty of Sugauli was

signed between Nepal and the East India Company. Darjeeling was taken from Nepal by the British and returned to the Sikkimese after the Treaty of Titaliya. In 1835, Col Lloyd became the representative of East India Company for Darjeeling. During his tenure Darjeeling was leased by the British Indian Empire from the Maharaja of Sikkim for an annual amount of Rs 3000. However the original map of Darjeeling came into existence only after the induction of Kalimpong and Duars area after the Anglo-Bhutanese war of 1864 (Treaty of Sinchula). Darjeeling as we know of today was organized in 1866. The term Gorkha is used by the people of Darjeeling to separate themselves from the Nepalese (citizens of Nepal). The term Gorkha encompasses all the three original inhabitants of the Darjeeling Hills viz: Nepali, Lepcha and Bhutia.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, Gorkhas made socioeconomic advance through government service, and a small fraction developed among them as literate people. Following this in 1907, the first ever demand for a separate administrative setup for the District of Darjeeling was placed before the British government by the leaders of the hill people. Their main reason for doing so was to assert their identity, which was entirely different and separate from those who lived in the plains. In 1917 the Hillmen's Association came into being and petitioned for the administrative separation of Darjeeling in 1917 and again in 1930 and 1934. In 1923 the Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League

(All India Gorkha League) was formed at Dehradun. It soon spread to Darjeeling. On 15 May 1943, All India Gorkha League came into existence in Darjeeling. On 19 December 1946, the party's heart and soul, D.S. Gurung even made a supplication in the Constitution Hall before the Constituent Assembly for recognition of Gorkhas as a minority community "Sir, the demand of the Gorkhas is that they must be recognized as a minority community and that they must have adequate representation in the Advisory Committee that is going to be formed. When the Anglo-Indians with only 1 lakh 42 thousand population have been recognized as a minority community, and Scheduled Castes among the Hindus have been recognized as a separate community, I do not see any reason why Gorkhas with 30 lakhs population should not be recognized as such."

But leaders within its own ranks such as Randhir Subba were not satisfied with this meagre demand. Soon after the death of D.S. Gurung, Randhir Subba raised the demand for a separate state within the framework of the Indian Constitution known as Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand could be composed one of the following ways.

- Darjeeling district and Sikkim only or
- Darjeeling district only or
- Darjeeling district, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar or
- Darjeeling district, Sikkim, Jalpaiguri, Dooars and Coochbehar

Initially Randhir Subba was in favor of a

militant movement. The movement never gained momentum as its leaders were mobilized to other purposes by apt politicians of Central Govt. and leaders of the West Bengal government.

On April 6, 1947, two Gorkhas Ganeshlal Subba and Ratanlal Brahmin members of the undivided CPI (Communist Party of India) submitted a Quixotic memorandum to Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Vice President of the Interim Government for the creation of Gorkhasthan - an independent nation comprising of the present day Nepal, Darjeeling District and Sikkim (excluding its present North District) in the line of Pakistan.

Throughout the 1940s, the Communist Party of India (CPI) organized Gorkha tea workers. In presentations to the States Reorganization Commission in 1954, the CPI favored regional autonomy for Darjeeling within West Bengal, with recognition of Nepali as a Scheduled Language. The All India Gorkha League preferred making the area a union territory under the Central government. In all from the 1950s to the 1985, first the CPI (1954), then the Congress (1955), then the triumvirate of Congress, CPI and AIGL (1957), then the United front (1967 & 1981), then again Congress (1968) and finally CPI (M) 1985.

Then throughout the 80s Subash Ghising raised the demand for the creation of the state of Gorkhaland to be carved out of the hills of Darjeeling and areas of Dooars and Siliguri Terai contiguous to Darjeeling, with a large population of

ethnic Gorkhas.

The Gorkhaland movement took a violent turn in 1980s when Subash Ghising lead Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) entered a violent demand for statehood, which lead to the death of over 1200 people (official figures). This movement culminated with the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988. Over the years the state government allowed a free reign to Subash Ghising and GNLF, there was a tactical understanding of West Bengal government not meddling in DGHC affairs as long as the demand for Gorkhaland was not brought up again.

After 20 years of GNLF rule the people of Darjeeling revolted against the tyranny, atrocities, high handedness, and corruption of GNLF and prevented Subash Ghising from entering Darjeeling hills. Since then the people of Darjeeling and Doors have restarted their fight for right to self assertion and development of the region by demanding the formation of Gorkhaland.

Since late 2007 the demand for a separate state within the Indian Union has been started more intensely by the Gorkha leader Mr. Bimal Gurung, under the newly formed party known as Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM). He

has known as for a more non violent form of protest by refusing to pay state taxes to the government including electricity and phone bills. People have resorted to changing vehicle numbers from WB (West Bengal) to GL (signifying Gorkhaland). Currently the administrative machinery in the hills of Darjeeling seems to have broken down, with most of the Government offices non functional, and even the police unable to maintain law and order in the district. The scene became particularly violent when a woman GJMM supporter was shot dead allegedly by GNLF supporters during a protest. Chaos and lawlessness reigned supreme while the administration was nowhere to be seen.

The situation became normal after GJMM leaders known as for restraint. The center and the West Bengal government have known as for a tripartite meeting with the GJMM leaders to resolve the issue. However break through seems unlikely as both the GJMM leaders as well as the West Bengal government seems to be taking a hard stance, where the former has refused to consider anything less than Gorkhaland while the later has been adamant in claiming that they would not allow further division of Bengal.

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