

# SIGNIFICANCE OF GORKHALAND MOVEMENT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Srishtee Bhitri Kothi\* & Mr. Abhiranjan Dixit\*\*

\*5<sup>th</sup> year student B.A.LL.B.(Hons.) Law College Dehradun, Uttarakhand University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

\*\* Assistant Professor, Law College Dehradun, Uttarakhand University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

**Abstract:**



*Political objective in the name of statehood means people assert their aspirations in terms of 'linguistic heterogeneity' and 'distinct culture' at a regional level. Demand for statehood to different areas in various states marks second level of assertion of political yearnings by divergent groups. In the first phase of reorganizing of states was primarily on linguistic lines in immediate post-independence time. But, the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland region of West Bengal has been raised fundamentally on the issue of 'distinct culture' of the hill areas which can be seen as second level of assertion. Accordingly, demand for formation of new state began with more noteworthy enthusiasm. The research article is divided in five parts: first part deals with introduction of this movement. Second part examine the tracing of this movement and third part studies the failure of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), fourth part describe the statehood during gorkhaland movement with its anthesis and finally, it concludes that . In a nutshell, the demand for a separate small state of Gorkhaland is may be justified from ethnic views. However, it must ensure that the areas under the proposed new state only include dominated areas of Gorkhas and not Bengalis.*

### **Key Words:**

State autonomy, Statehood for Gorkhaland and Creation of new states in India

### **Introduction**

The present agitation for the formation of a separate state of Gorkhaland has picked up a new force now. It has been triggered by the Gorkhas in the hill areas of sub-divisions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong in West Bengal. The inherited sub-regional patterns within the existing states have paved the way for demanding state autonomy. There are some of causal variables which have been identified as contributors to separatism, including the sense of deprivation or exploitation, feelings of neglect, recognition of cultural differences, unequal economic development, historical wrongs committed against the people of the area, and so on.

Dissatisfaction with continued absence of development of the vast majority of the domain, the dominance of people from other parts of the state, and the failure to fully implement prior agreements keep the potential for a separatist movement alive over the resulting. Yet, the factors such as 'cultural differences' and 'linguistic heterogeneity' contrast with Bengalis appear to be more grounded driver in demanding a separate state of Gorkhaland.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the people of the region began fight for their 'separate identity' by claiming the right to be recognized. They often feel sense of obliviousness to the degree that they are constantly regarded as Nepali wherever they go.<sup>2</sup> In this context, the current rounds of protests have been provoked by a state government announcement on the introduction of Bengali language in schools in the Gorkhaland region.<sup>3</sup> The ongoing agitation for statehood in the troubled region appears to suggest that the 'strategy of addressing ethnic concerns through autonomous councils' like GTA may have failed to meet the aspirations for self-rule in the hills.

### **Tracing the Movement**

During 1930s, the Nepali speaking people became conscious of their language as a symbol of identity. The newly emergent bourgeoisie class of small shopkeepers, businessmen, contractors, clerks, teachers and intellectuals took the lead in organising a forum for articulating their interests. The outcome of this was the formation of All India Gorkha League (AIGL) also known as Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League (ABGL) which was founded in 1943 by Damber Singh Gurung. AIGL as a movement was an upshot of union and communist movements among tea garden workers. The initial demand of AIGL was that Darjeeling should become part of the neighboring state of Assam so that Gorkhas have larger population share than in Bengal. In addition, it demanded that the districts of Jalpaiguri, Sikkim, Cooch Behar and Darjeeling should form a single province. In 1948 two more demands were added by AIGL along with the original protection of Nepali language; and, India for Indian Nepalis. When AIGL framed its constitution it declared Nepal as the motherland of all the Gorkhas (Article 1) with the purpose to protect of cultural and political rights of the India Gorkhas (Article 2). When the process of linguistic reorganisation of states was initiated in 1956,

<sup>1</sup> Amiya K Samanta, *Gorkhaland Movement: A Study in Ethnic Separatism*, 57 (APH Publication Corporation, New Delhi 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Swatahsiddha Sarkar, *Gorkhaland movement: Ethnic conflict and State response* 47 ( Central Book Publishing, New Delhi, 2013)

<sup>3</sup> Samanta, Amiya K. 2000. *Gorkhaland Movement: A Study in Ethnic Separatism*, APH Publication Corporation, New Delhi.

AIGL requested State Reorganisation Commission to declare Darjeeling as a separate state or centrally administered unit. Its demands were, however, not accepted by the Commission. Further, during the period of ongoing militant activities in Darjeeling, AIGL presented a memorandum to Home Minister of India in 1981 asking for separation of Darjeeling on the ground of national security and justice to linguistic minority. Despite continuous efforts, all efforts of AIGL remained futile.<sup>4</sup>

AIGL is currently part of the Democratic Front and stands for peaceful democracy in the hills and is against setting up of an interim authority like DGHC, GTA in Darjeeling in place of a fullfledged state of Gorkhaland. Another movement that made its present felt in the region was Pranta Parishad established on August 8, 1980 at a convention held at Sukhipokhri. This extremist organization was made with the efforts of ex-congressmen of the district that included I. B. Rai, Madan Thapa, Madan Tamang, Gajendra Gurung, Kumar Bhatia, Prem Thapa, and others with the purpose to demand formation of Gorkhaland that would comprise of the Nepali speaking areas of Dooars of Jalpaiguri district and Darjeeling district within the provision of Indian Constitution. The party made a call for vote boycott in 1982 Assembly Elections by raising slogan „No State No Vote“. Though this organization could not win support of Nepalese in the state but it was successful in creating a secessionist movement. The movement tried to mobilize Gorkhas through plays, meetings and powerful writings in its weekly called „Aba“. The movement was, however, short lived as leaders of the movement could not form unanimous view point on several issues and even its supports failed to make a substantial impact.<sup>5</sup>

Currently the demand for Gorkhaland is led by Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha (GJM), a registered political party launched Bimal Gurung on 7th October 2007 as a disagreement to the Sixth schedule status for the Hills. The supporters of GJM showed their aggression towards Sixth Schedule and burnt the copies of „1988 Memorandum of Settlement“ in which GNLFF had agreed to give up its demand of Gorkhaland. GJM led by Bimal Gurung resorted to bandhs, hungerstrikes, and rallies to carry on their demand for separate statehood of Gorkhaland.

## Failure of GTA

The tripartite agreement to Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) held between the Central Government, State Government and the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) to usher in a) normalcy b) peace and c) development in the slope area of the region of Darjeeling, West Bengal. A bill for the making of GTA was passed in the West Bengal legislative assembly on 2 September 2011. The memorandum of agreement for the formation of a Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), a semi-autonomous administrative body for the Darjeeling hills, was signed on 18 July 2011.<sup>6</sup>

Earlier, during the West Bengal assembly elections campaign in 2011, Mamata Banerjee had told that the Darjeeling is integrated part of Bengal. While Mamata inferred that this would be the end of the Gorkhaland movement where as Bimal Gurung reiterated that this was just another step towards statehood. It was amply clear that the adhoc-based arrangement at any point of time would be failed. Later on, Gurung resigned from the GTA citing both interference from the West Bengal government and the renewed agitation for Gorkhaland. In this manner, the experiment of constituting GTA has been fizzled out and led for renewed demand in the name of full-fledged Statehood.<sup>7</sup>

## Politics of Statehood

As of now the demand is still undergoing in the form of several strikes, rallies and so forth. The movement for Gorkhaland has gained momentum and intensified in the line of an ethno-linguistic-cultural sentiment of the Nepali language speaking Indian people who yearning to distinguish themselves as Indian Gorkhas.

<sup>4</sup> Amiya K. Samanta, *Gorkhaland Movement: A Study in Ethnic Separatism*, 56 (A.P.H Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 2000)

<sup>5</sup> Available at : <https://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/08/the-battles-for-gorkhaland/> ( visited on 28<sup>th</sup> march, 2020)

<sup>6</sup> Nilamber Chhetri , “Gorkhaland movement: Ethnic conflict and state response by Swatahsiddha Sarkar” 63 ILR 490-493 (2014)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

Two mass developments for Gorkhaland have occurred under the Gorkha National Liberation Front (1986-1988) and Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) 2007- present.

In the context of present political scenario the Gorkhaland demand can be widely seen as a pipe dream. The demand has existed in some form for years ago and now, culminating in a violent agitation in the 1980s led by the Gorkha National Liberation Front. The agitation paved the way to the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, a local government body to which the state government transferred some administrative powers. In later stage, since 2007 agitation led by a new (present) party the Gorkhaland Janmukti Morcha (GJM). The intense fight of GJM led to the creation of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, and with its powers expanded vis-à-vis the earlier Hill Council. It has gradually become reluctant to West Bengal Government to let go of Darjeeling completely since it is generating more revenue from the tea and tourism industry located in the Darjeeling hill areas. The state government used to escape by citing that the final decision to create a new state rests with the Union government. As it well known fact that based on the tiny population of Darjeeling, no ruling party in Delhi would wish to antagonize Kolkata. Thus, the political support from Darjeeling is not enough to carving out the state.

To mobilize the Nepali-speaking minority of the Darjeeling hills, the proponents of Gorkhaland used complaints from the Gorkhas over a feeling of disregard, domination by the Bengalis and emphasizing their common Gorkha identity. It is also noted that the Bengalis own most places of business in the hills main towns. The Nepali-speaking locals, however, often perform menial jobs and resent the success of the Bengalis, whom they consider outsiders in the hills. By blaming the government of West Bengal for their underdevelopment, the Gorkhas are altogether united under Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) party and its leader Bimal Gurung. Eventually, they want nothing less than an independent Gorkhaland within India.

Later on, the former radical

Subash Ghisingh has dropped that idea in favor of a more feasible solution and called for more prominent self-governance in the hills.<sup>8</sup>

Language has dependably been a hostile issue in the slopes of Darjeeling. To depict Nepali speakers as minority in these regions despite the fact that they happen to be in a lion's share the state has utilized the census as an apparatus. The Nepali dialect development of the 1960s in the slopes has been an appearance of this social pattern. The West Bengal government, along with the central government, played the politics of census enumeration in recognizing Nepali as a non-majority language with the goal that they could abstain from making Nepali the medium of the guideline in schools in Darjeeling.<sup>9</sup>

### **Antithesis**

The demand for Gorkhaland likewise includes a portion of the negative factors in the proposed region. The map proposed for Gorkhaland exhibits the incorporation of the slope regions of Darjeeling area, Kalimpong region and parts of Dooars of Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri areas and whole Terai and Siliguri which are dominated by Bengalis.

It is foreseen that it would lead repetitive trouble when individuals tend to move around. Alongside that the proportion in populace involves variety in the statistic profile, for example, Gorkhas constitute just 35%, while the rest include Bengalis (15%), Rajbangsis (25%), Adivasis (20%), and Totos, Mech and others (5%). There are other ethnic groups who don't share the Gorkha's vision of self-rule. Contention likewise emerges at whatever point the Sikkim Democratic Front and the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha broaden their help for the development of Gorkhaland and the merger of Darjeeling with Sikkim. Both perspectives are established in their mutual history, since Darjeeling had initially been a piece of Sikkim.<sup>10</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In India socio-cultural sub-regions have existed for a genuinely long time even before the Indian Constitution came into being and before the British came to India. There were more regions in India and began demands for separate identity within the existing states. By and large they were at that point identified like Bundelkhand, Malwa, Saurashtra, Kutch, Marwar, Awadh, Konkan, Ladakh and so on. In this setting Scholars and academicians clarify that there is a need to constitute further State Reorganization Commission to look upon every one of these issues since better administration with smaller states would

<sup>8</sup> Prabhat Datta, *Regionalisation of Indian politics*, 456 (Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Gorkha National Liberation Front (1986), Gorkhaland is a must, why? Leaflet. India Today, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1980.

<sup>10</sup> Anil Kumar "Gorkha Identity and Separate Statehood Movement", 14 GJ H SS 34 (2014).

likewise mean connecting the creation of states with decentralization.

Ramachandra Guha contends that “regions which have a cultural, ecological and historical coherence are affected by their present status as a major aspect of a bigger unit could be conceded statehood”. While reacting to smaller states he says that at the time of independence, in 1947, India chose to be a federal state, with significant power to the state governments in response to the diversity in socio-economic conditions across the country. While the main real revamping of states was done in 1956 on linguistic lines, the economic rationale for the existence of a state was broadly debated about at that point. In this manner “the linguistic states were essential at one phase of Indian history however it might now be the ideal opportunity for a rearrangement of states for better social comprehensiveness” he clarified. In a nutshell, the demand for a separate small state of Gorkhaland is may be justified from ethnic views. However, it must ensure that the areas under the proposed new state only include dominated areas of Gorkhas and not Bengalis.

