

**THE NEPALIS OF DARJEELING :  
SEARCH FOR IDENTITY**

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled, 'THE NEPALIS OF DARJEELING: SEARCH FOR IDENTITY', submitted by ALINA PRADHAN, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (M.Phil) degree of this University, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University and this is her own work.

We recommend this to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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*A. Pradhan*  
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## **Introduction.**

Ours is a world of nation states, but in recent decades, the numerically significant ethnic groups, who have developed or are in the process of developing self awareness have posed a challenge to the nation state, and have demanded formal recognition of their distinct identities. India, a multi-lingual and multi religious country, seems to be no exception.

A social group develops its identity through a process called consciousness of a kind. It is this that unites individual minds, which responding to common stimulation, act upon one another, through suggestion and imitation to produce a social mind. Identity of a group as such has no meaning. This is so because it is only in respect to some other groups, that a particular group distinguishes itself and thereby asserts its own identity. Various socio-economic and political situations stimulate this process. The identity of an ethnic group or its members is not only a case of self identity but at the same time, it is also an identity which others concede vis-a-vis their own.

The 'Nepalis', a distinct ethno-linguistic community, residing in various parts of India, but concentrated mostly in Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills, (north-eastern parts of West Bengal) have a history of their own. Their distinct culture, tradition, history and language mark them as a distinct ethnic group. But the presence of Nepalis in the neighbouring country of independent Nepal, have created a great deal of confusion regarding the identity of the Indian Nepalis. )

Many people, when told that certain people are Nepalis and are from Darjeeling, ask the question, Isn't Darjeeling in Nepal? How come the people here speak Nepali inspite of being a part of Bengal? Is Darjeeling a small tea estate, which produces the world's finest tea? These and various other confusions have seriously made us look back and think about the real identity of the Nepalis, residing in India especially those in Darjeeling and Sikkim. This reflection involves issues of genesis and growth. It further involves a focus on various factors, e.g. their migration from Nepal, their socio-economic conditions, their acquiring of political consciousness and the demands they made to assert their real identity. This finally resulted in the

demand for a separate state, i.e. Gorkhaland.

**Purpose of Study :**

The purpose of study, <sup>is</sup> ~~would be~~ to see, whether social, political and economic factors, together with the important issue of identity crisis, played their parts in re-kindling the problem of the Nepali community in India. Moreover, the Nepalis, a linguistic minority community in India are bound together through the Nepali language, which has become the symbol of their ethno-nationalism.

The issue of the Nepali language and its inclusion in the VIII schedule and role played by various organisations raise much interest. <sup>we will study</sup> ~~We want to know further,~~ how far the aspirations of the Nepalis have been accommodated in the politics of India.

We hypothesise that movement for Nepali linguistic identity, like any other movement of cultural identity, is led by sections of the middle class and get more or less adequate response in enhancement of democracy.



## **Methodology :**

The work is mainly a descriptive and analytical study. Relevant materials have been collected from various primary and secondary sources. A field work study was also conducted in Darjeeling District, to get a clearer idea of the state of affairs and to have a first hand knowledge about the real situation in the Hills. Around 150 persons, (comprising of teachers, intellectuals, politicians, students, tea garden workers and others from various professions) were interviewed, through use of a prepared questionnaire and random sampling methodology has been applied to analyse the various queries.

The field work done, proved to be quite useful since not much published articles are to be found in the various libraries. It has also greatly helped to understand the real problems of the Nepalis and their sense of deprivation and alienation.

Being a Nepali and from Darjeeling, it was quite convenient to meet various eminent figures and to get genuine and relevant

information. But however, the work that proceeds, has been an effort to put forth the ideas and views as they are, without any sense of bias or prejudice in favour of or against any community.

### **Chapterization :**

In Chapter I, 'Ethnicity - A Theoretical Perspective', various theories of ethnicity have been laid out, which can broadly be divided into two categories, namely the Modernization theory, which was greatly influenced by Karl Deutsch. This theory lays down that, with the influence of modernization in transportation and communication, various ethnic groups would forget their distinct ethnic identities and assimilation between them will take place, thus resulting in a homogeneous group.

But however contradicting this theory, are other theories like Internal Colonial theory, language theory, elite theory, prejudice discrimination theory, relative deprivation theory, which support the view regarding the resurgence of ethnicity or the politisation of

ethnicity. Infact, ethnic symbols like language or religion can be used as a factor, by various ethnic groups, in order to obtain their various aims and objectives, sometimes even to opt for separation or to carve out a sovereign state.

The following chapters would be an attempt to show, how the ethno-linguistic group in India-the Nepalis, have used language, to rouse the political aspirations of the people, in their urge for a separate state.

In chapter II, 'Historical Perspective : Darjeeling' an attempt has been made to trace the original inhabitants of Darjeeling and history of Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim has also been outlined, to see how the Nepalis came to be the dominant population in Darjeeling and Sikkim, outnumbering the other communities, the Lepchas and Bhutias. Some census reports are also given to show the gradual increase in their numbers. It was no wonder then, that the Nepali community, consisting of various sub-communities like Rai, Limbu, Damai, Chettri, Bahun and others, most of them having their own

dialects, were bound together through the Nepali language, which soon was to be the lingua franca in the hills, further strengthening their bonds as a distinct ethnic community.

In Chapter III, 'Nepali Language Identity : Historical Dimensions', the origin and development of the Nepali language has been laid out. As the people became more socially, economically, and politically more conscious with the spread of education, they strongly felt the need to make Nepali as the medium of instruction in schools. Their success in implementing this demand, further acted as an incentive to have Nepali recognised as one of the official languages in the District and lastly to have it recognised as one of the language in the VIIIth Schedule, thus giving the speakers of the language a solid base to claim for their Indian identity.

The next two Chapters, IV and V are entitled 'Nepali Language Identity : Political Dimensions- Part I. Pre Gorkhaland Agitation' and 'Nepali Language Identity : Political Dimensions- Part II. Gorkha National Liberation Front'. The Nepalis as a distinct linguistic

minority, residing in Darjeeling, but made a part of Bengal, different from the former in all ways - geographically, culturally and linguistically have clamoured for their own distinct identity. They have been making demands for a separate administrative set-up since the beginning of this century and in fact, is one of the oldest of such demands in India.

In Part I, an attempt has been made to show, how the various political parties in the hills functioned. Each of these political parties seeking a separate administrative set-up. The Nepalis had been promised autonomy and freedom from exploitation but their conditions had been left dejected and alienated as ever.

Part II of Chapter V, shows how and why the GNLF was successful in capturing the imagination of the Nepalis and the final signing of the Accord, which resulted in the autonomous Hill Council, the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council.

India's tryst with destiny was a beckoning to all its

communities to participate in the freedom movement. Before India achieved independence, there was the demand to redraw the state boundaries on linguistic basis, which was reiterated in the Constituent Assembly. But however in 1948, the Dar Commission, appointed by the Constituent Assembly, to examine the formation of linguistic states, recommended against this creation, laying down that it would harm national unity. But the Framers of the Constitution knew that as democratic messages spread, it would become inevitable, that each cultural and linguistic group would seek to determine itself, thus sharing in the common destiny.

Article 3 of the Constitution is one of the innumerable highlights, reflecting the wisdom and foresight of the Indian Constitution Framers. Article 3 states - Parliament may by law

- (a) form new states by separation of territory from any state or by unifying two or more states or parts of states or by unifying any territory to a part of any state
- (b) Increase the area of any state
- (c) Diminish the area of any state

- (d) Alter the boundaries of any state
- (e) Alter the name of any state

It was following this Article, that various states were carved out. Bombay was split into Gujarat and Maharashtra in 1960, the Assam Tribal areas and Khasi states which were parts of state of Assam became Nagaland and Meghalaya under the state of Nagaland Act of 1962 and North East Area Reorganization Act 1971 respectively. Punjab was demarcated into Punjabi speaking state of Punjab and the Hindi speaking state of Haryana in 1966, further increasing the number of Indian states on linguistic lines.

India is formed on linguistic boundaries no doubt, but there is also a varying degree of linguistic minority groups, demanding further demarcation of state boundaries. But for India, having a huge diversity of 1,652 languages, it becomes quite difficult for the government to accept their demands, which would result in the formation of many micro states and also to give constitutional recognition to their various languages.

This is exactly the case of the Nepalis, a linguistic minority group, numbering about 10 million in the total Indian population of 950 million. The Nepalis or Gorkhas residing in Darjeeling hills, numbering 1,299, 919 (1991 census) which is a District of West Bengal (Total population of West Bengal 68,077,965) heads the movement for the creation of 'Gorkhaland' apart from Bengal. Here, they themselves will participate in the decision making process, in the exercise of power and authority, in the ushering of the process of democracy and where they can establish their identity as the Indian Nepalis or Gorkhas.

The study is an attempt to study these very conditions of the Nepalis, residing in Darjeeling Hills and their search for real identity. But the Dissertation has been conducted under limitations of time and resource, of which I am aware.



## **Chapter I**

### **Ethnicity : A Theoretical Perspective**

The word 'ethnic' is derived from the Greek word, 'ethnikos'. It refers to (a) Nations not converted to Christianity (b) Races or large groups of people having common traits. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ethnicity means heathendom, ethnic means a gentile nation. So originally, we can say that the term was used to mean, belonging to a nation especially a pagan one. But there is a striking lack of unanimity regarding the concept of ethnicity.

Though race and ethnicity may at times overlap, synonymous use of these two concepts was abandoned. It is now used by sociologists and cultural anthropologists, to denote membership of a distinct people, possessing their own customary ways or culture. The term 'ethnic' is generally taken to refer to cultural rather than to biological attributes. There is also no unanimity about the word 'culture'. In its inclusivist sense, it implies social structure and in the

exclusivist sense, it excludes social structure.

An ethnic group is a segment of a larger society, whose members have a shared culture, history, language, religion and geographical location and have a distinct identity. which is rooted in some kind of distinctive sense of its history. It is therefore, a collective aspect of the identity of whole persons. We can thus say that an ethnic group is a group of individuals, 'with a shared sense of peoplehood based on presumed shared socio-cultural experiences and/or similar physical characteristics'.<sup>1</sup> Membership is believed to be passed from generation to generation, from parent to child, so that biological continuity is an element in the definition of an ethnic group. Ascription is the key characteristic that distinguishes ethnicity from voluntary affiliation - 'It is a primary collective aspect, concerning the identity of whole persons, not of any particular aspect

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<sup>1</sup>. Arnold Dashefsky, Ethnic Identity in Society, Rand Mc.Nally, College Publishing Company, Chicago, 1976, pp.3.

of them'.<sup>2</sup>

Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan have argued that i) as occupational identities have declined as a source of self-esteem, ethnic identities have increasingly taken on this function. ii) While ethnic loyalties are no longer as likely to be mobilised by international events, involving old homelands, they are likely to be affected by domestic political events, that may put one ethnic group against the other. 'Thus there is some legitimacy to finding that, forms of identification based on social realities as differences in religion, language and national origin all have something in common, such that a new term is coined to refer to all of them-ethnicity'.<sup>3</sup>

There can be competition for the scarce resources among the various groups, which may lead to conflict and the most advantaged

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<sup>2</sup>. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Identity in Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (ed). Ethnicity : Theory and Experience, Harvard Univ.Press, Massachusetts, 1978, pp.57.*

<sup>3</sup>. Nathan Glazer & Daniel Moynihan (ed.). Ethnicity : Theory and Experience, Havard University Press, Massachusetts, 1978, pp.10.

group gains the most. There is a feeling of identification with persons, sharing similar circumstances. Frustrations, personal failure and thwarted goals may lead people to seek a new answer, in the warmth and comfort of their respective ethnic groups. The term, identity, means a state of being identical, it is an individual's sense of who, he or she is. A person's identity is always with reference to a social group, with which he identifies himself and they act upon each other through imitation and thus develops a common consciousness, which in turn, develops its identity. The identity of an ethnic group or its members is not only a case of self identity, but at the same time, it is also an identity which others concede, vis-a-vis their own. Even in terms of Heidegger, the individual is identified in terms of 'the other'. Only in the classical liberal world, the individual sans other, is considered as the ultimate reality. In the communitarian critique, tradition, practice and linguistic community comes in to define self identity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>. Quoted in Dittmer Lowell and Kim S. Samuel (ed.), China's Quest for National Identity, Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca London 1993.

## **Approaches :**

Broadly speaking, there are two approaches to the study of ethnic groups. Objectivists like Frederick Barth, lay down that cultural markers like race, language, descent are main determinants of an ethnic group. This view also corresponds to the primordial view, which emphasizes on the ascriptive or primordial nature of ethnic group membership. It explains ethnic identity from a cultural and psychological point of view. The individual shares identity symbols and are emotionally attached to these symbols.

The subjectivists, maintain that cultural markers are only the manifestation of ethnic identity distinctiveness and its recognition by others. In this connection, we can bring in the classic definition by Max Weber, 'an ethnic group is one whose members entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs of both, or because of memories of

colonisation and migration'.<sup>5</sup> This also corresponds to the circumstantial approach, which says that ethnic identity emerges and continues because of dynamic socio cultural change, which is brought about by new cleavages and new alignments of power. Structural conditions determine which ethnic symbols are to be taken into account and are to be neglected or abandoned, so as to maximise group interest.

Syncretists are for a proper linkage between the subjective and objective view points. R.A. Schermerhorn lays down that an ethnic group is a collectivity existing within a larger society, having 'real or fictional common ancestry', memories of a shared historical past and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood'.

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<sup>5</sup>. Max Weber, Economy and Society, University of California Press, Los Angeles. 1968, pp.389.

## Theories of Ethnicity :

A great deal of debate is going on today, as to whether modernization brings about the resurgence of ethnicity or the wiping away of it. Anthony Smith lays down that since the 70's, 'there has been a surge of ethnic sentiments and movements first in the West and latterly in East Europe and former Soviet Union, followed by Asia and Middle East too'.<sup>6</sup>

But before going further, let us look at the meaning of modernization 'It refers to the dynamic form that the age old process of innovation has assumed as a result of explosive proliferation of knowledge in recent centuries. It stems initially from an attitude, a belief that society can and should be transformed, that change is desirable'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>. Anthony Smith, 'Chosen People : Why Ethnic Groups Survive', Ethnic and Racial Studies, 3rd July, 1992, 15(3), pp. 436-453.

<sup>7</sup>. Black Cyril, A Dynamics of Modernization - A Study in Comparative History, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1966, pp.7.

Modernisation can be seen in various spheres - political (highly organised bureaucracy and close rapport between state and citizens), economy (which is the central and determining force in this process), social (a phenomenal migration to the cities) and extension of literacy and psychological opportunity for upward mobility are available to a large proportion of the population.

Keeping these in mind, it is often said that, with modernisation, ethnic consciousness of various groups will disappear and that assimilation of various groups will take place. This theory was very much influenced by Karl Deutsch. Efficient methods of transportation, communication and information transmission, it is said, promotes assimilation. Karl Deutsch was of the opinion, that in spite of the fact, that linguistic and cultural differences may be there, science and technological improvements will bring them together. He says that, assimilation of various groups must take place before mobilization takes place because people will be separated into politics with their old language, customs and old ways of thinking and thus lead to unstable government. 'Assimilation among



people firmly rooted in their own communities and their native setting usually proceeds far more slowly than it would among the mobilised population, but it does proceed even though it may take many generations'.<sup>8</sup>

### **Modernization Theory :**

Assimilation can be defined as a 'process of inter-penetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments and attributes of other persons or groups, and by sharing their experience and history incorporated with them in common cultural life'.<sup>9</sup> Arnold Rose lays down that, assimilation is the adoption by a person or group of the culture of another social group to such an extent that the person no longer has any characteristic

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<sup>8</sup>. Karl Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication : An Inquiry Into the Foundations of Nationality, John Wily & Sons, New York, 1953, pp.162-163.

<sup>9</sup>. Robert E. Park and Earnest W. Burgess, Introduction to the Science of Sociology, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1921, pp.735.

identifying him with his former culture.<sup>10</sup>

Eric Leifer talks about two models i) Developmental model, which says that since ethnic identities have no role in the mechanics of market, they should lose their meaning in the orientation of individuals. Thus it lays down that, ethnic attachments will diminish with the progress of economic development. But however, this came under attack in the 70's under Reactive ethnicity theorists, who laid down that the other model was unable to account for the profusion of ethno-regionalist movement in recent times.

Analysts such as Gellner, lays down that, with the rise of nationalism and industrialism, local cultures will be replaced by a policy of unitary high culture and popular ethnic cultures will eventually fade away. He further says that all cultures and sub-cultures in contact should change and in some social 'survival of the fittest' scenario.

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<sup>10</sup>. Arnold Rose, Sociology : The Study of Human Relation, New York. 1956, pp.557-8.

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Fukuyama also lays down, that the emergence of universal homogeneous state from the prevailing material civilisation, which according to him, will exert a levelling effect and will increasingly sideline ethnicity within states'.<sup>11</sup>

On a similar note, the Marxists lay down that ethnicity will wither away with the supremacy of the proletariat. Marxists often dismiss these ethnic conflicts as a form of false consciousness, that disguises the real class tensions'.<sup>12</sup> The Marxists lay down 'that ethnicity is bound to wither away in the face of genuine socialist revolution'.<sup>13</sup> But contradicting their view are the neo-Marxists. It is said that the development of Capitalism, particularly uneven development, accentuates ethnic consciousness rather than diminish

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<sup>11</sup>. Quoted in S.L. Sharma, 'The Saliency of Ethnicity in Modernization : Evidence From India', Sociological Bulletin, New Delhi. 1990, vol.39, pp.33-49.

<sup>12</sup>. Myron Weiner, Sons of the Soil : Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India, Oxford Univ. Press, Delhi. 1978, pp.3.

<sup>13</sup>. Clifford Geertz (ed.), Old Societies and New States, Free Press, London, 1963, pp.105-219.

it.<sup>14</sup> It is said that, conditions for arising of ethnic consciousness may be there, when the bourgeois divide the working class on ethnic lines.

Thus the Modernisation theory laid down that, 'greater political and economic interaction among people and widespread communication networks, would break down people's parochial identities with ethnic groups and replace them with loyalties of larger communities'.<sup>15</sup>

#### The Other Theories :

The modernization theory is often considered by others as misleading and has produced reactions from various writers. It has been seen that, conflicts based on ethnic identities and interests have sharply increased, especially in the decades of the 70's and 80's.

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<sup>14</sup>. C.A.Smith, 'Towards a Theory of Ethnic Separatism' Ethnic and Racial Studies, London, 1979, 2(1), pp.21-37.

<sup>15</sup>. Ted Robert Gurr and Barbara Harff, Ethnic Conflict in World Politics, Westview Press Inc., Colorado, Oxford. 1994, pp.78.

One of the main groups, who do not agree with the above theory, i.e. the modernization theory are the Internal Colonists, among whom, the chief proponent is Michael Hecter. According to this theory, relationship between members of peripheral communities are characterised by exploitation. Commerce, trade, credit are all monopolised by members of the core. The nation state can be compared to the metropolis and the various ethnic regions under it as 'internal colonies'. The former uses its economic and political power, to maintain its superior position and thus creates an atmosphere of frustration among the peripheral groups. The discrimination made, being on the basis of language, religion and others, the distinction becomes cultural and may form the basis of demonstrations and separatist agitations.

This exactly was the case of the Nepalis in Darjeeling. They were politically and socially more conscious than Nepalis elsewhere. Their demand for greater participation in administration, politics and equality in developmental activities have always been there since Darjeeling became a part of British India in 1835. But however

remained politically and economically backward because of their docile nature. West Bengal's attitude seemed to be that of Centre-periphery nature and Darjeeling suffered because of internal colonialism.

Another view that is opposed to the modernization theory are the new ethnicists. Walker Connor, Daniel Moynihan, Nathan Glazer and others can be put in this category, who draw strength and endurance of ethnic and cultural loyalties. Connor lays down that, 'since the 70's, ethnic consciousness is definitely in the ascendancy as a political force.'<sup>16</sup> He argues that increased transportation and communication add to the cultural awareness of nations and individuals thereby, reinforcing their cultural identity. It has been laid down, that the various advances in communication and transportation, tends to increase the cultural awareness of minorities, the distinctions between themselves and the others. The individuals not only become more aware of themselves but also become more

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<sup>16</sup>. Walker Connor, 'Nation Building or Destroying', World Politics, New Jersey, April 1972, vol. 24, no.3, pp.327.

aware of those who share his identity.

Urmila Phadnis also lays down that 'ethnicity daunts nation building in South Asia'<sup>17</sup> Today what can be seen thus, is that with modernization, urbanisation and industrialization, ethnic groups have become more conscious of their identity, recognises others who belong to other groups and distinguishes themselves from 'the others'. Moreover, the principle of self determination gives political legitimacy to ethnic groups, deserving to rule over themselves. Various studies have shown that, social mobility and economic advantage encourage ethnicity. Science and economic rationalization had been expected to reduce, if not eliminate man's attachment to ancient ties of common ancestry.

Glazer and Moynihan point out that, ethnic group is an interest group and that ethnicity can be used to defend the powers, ethnic groups are enjoying or to overcome obstructions towards

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<sup>17</sup>. Urmila Phadnis, Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia, Sage Publications, New Delhi 1990, pp.32.

development. T.B.Subba says that a common interest may be developed, only when it is threatened by another group. 'Ethnic groups also can use ethnicity to make demands in the political arena for alteration in their status, in their economic well being, in their civil rights, or in their educational opportunities are engaged in a form of interest group politics'.<sup>18</sup>

Anthony. D.Smith points out that each community has its unique cultural ties and on this basis, demands political separation. This theory of cultural distinctiveness helps in explaining many ethnic movements in India, but however it can be added that ethnic groups becomes ethnic community when it becomes conscious of common identity and community becomes a nation, when it also makes political demands. 'A nation, therefore may be seen as a particular type of ethnic community or rather as an ethnic community politized with recognised group rights in the political

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<sup>18</sup>. Paul Brass, Ethnicity and Nationalism : Theory and Comparison, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1991, pp.18.



system.<sup>19</sup>

The language theory is another theory, which can also be put in the group as above. The language theory, developed by Sagarin and Moneymaker stresses the importance of language for mobilising ethnic groups. Language is even more important in India, being a federation, has different dominant linguistic groups and various marginalised linguistic minority groups. Language is not only a symbol to unite groups, but 'its effective use or abuse can catapult an ethnic movement'.<sup>20</sup>

The Communitarians criticize the liberals for ignoring linguistic communities. However, Jurgen Habermas thinks of a possibility of linguistic consensus and communicative action in

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<sup>19</sup>. Arendt Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies : A Comparative Exploitation, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977, pp.25.

<sup>20</sup>. Tanka Bahadur Subba, Ethnicity, State and Development : A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement, New Delhi. 1992, pp.106.

modern political theory.<sup>21</sup>

Language is the best means of expression of the emotional life and culture of a people. Being a cultural institution, it gives identity and solidarity to the people that speak it as a birth-right and therefore constitutes a strong factor of ethnicity. Often, language can be used as the lethal weapon in the achievement of political power. According to Herder, 'Language expresses the collective experience of the group and every nation has its own centre of happiness, as every sphere has its own centre or gravity'.<sup>22</sup>

It has also been laid down that, when language is linked to a specific territory, it provides basis for a common life style and communication pattern. Language provides a bond of unity among its speakers and defines a line of separation, marking off one speech community from another. During the freedom struggle in India, there

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<sup>21</sup>. Richard J. Bernstein (ed.) With an Introduction, Habermas and Modernity, Polity Press, Cambridge. 1985, pp.177-191.

<sup>22</sup>. Quoted in Anthony Smith, op.cit, pp.436-453.

were demands to replace the colonial language with the national language, i.e. English to be replaced by Hindi, as a symbol of nationalism. There are other levels where demands were made for the recognition of regional language, as a medium of instruction in schools and as an official language, thus giving more prestige, privileges and job opportunities for speakers of that particular language.

Dankwart A. Rustow says 'when no one can read and write, it makes little difference in what language, the introduction of universal education, however makes the choice of a language of instruction imperative and this will have inexorable consequence in directing the further quest of identity'.<sup>23</sup>

In India, various linguistic groups have laid forth various demands based on language or ethno-linguistic upheavals, asking for

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<sup>23</sup>. Dankwart A. Rustow, Language Modernization and Nationhood - An Attempt at Typology, in Joshua A. Fishman, Charles A. Ferguson and Jyotindra Dasgupta (ed.), Language Problem of Developing Nations John Willy & Sons, New York. 1968, pp.104.

linguistic re-organisation of states. The Nepalis, a linguistic minority have been, for many decades asking for the creation of separate 'Gorkhaland', so as to assert their distinct Indian Identity. There was also the demand for the inclusion of the Nepali language in the VIII Schedule, which was raised in the 1950's itself. There is an undertone of economic aspiration in the language movement. The leaders thought that, with the constitutional recognition of their language, there would be better job opportunities for the Nepalis. Some Indians fight for the right to speak their own language, from fear that others will attain unfair advantage. For most people, there is a vague apprehension that their cultural heritage would be lost, once another language becomes official.

Coming to another theory, the elite theory, it can be said, that elite consciousness is a pre-condition to mass consciousness. This theory, lays down the cultural forms, values and practices of ethnic groups, can be used by elites as political resources in competition for political power and economic advantage. Elites who are trying to mobilize ethnic groups against the other groups or against the

centralizing state, lay down various cultural symbols, which distinguishes them from the others. The common man is seldom conscious of his ascribed status and it is only, when the affluent class of a particular community try to show their deprivation, do they get provoked. They may use language or religion for differentiating their group from the others.

In multi-ethnic societies, where 'overlap has existed between religious and regional identities and economic functions, issues of economic insecurity and class contradictions are very conveniently transformed by the elites into issues of ethnic, caste and religions issues'.<sup>24</sup> A disadvantaged tribe or linguistic group may lay down that the dominant group is ultimately different and that, they alone are the true and indigenous culture. Middle class nativist movements tend to emerge in those communities, where the local population has recently produced its own educated class that aspires to move into jobs held by others, e.g in the civil services, as teachers in local

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<sup>24</sup>. Rajni Kothari, *Ethnicity*, in David Kumar and Kadirgamar Santasilan (ed.), *Ethnicity : Identity Conflict Crisis*, Arena Press, Hongkong. 1989, pp.36.

schools, as clerks, managers and technicians. 'An additional potential explosive situation exists, when the new power elite is economically and socially subordinate to the ethnic group, that dominates the urban centre, in which the capital is located, i.e. when the geographical core and the political 'core' are held by different ethnic groups'.<sup>25</sup>

During the British colonial rule, it was the English educated Indian elite class, who made the Indians, conscious of their past, rich, cultural heritage and brought national consciousness amongst them to rise against the British. In Darjeeling, British missionaries flocked in great numbers and played a very important role in imparting education to the local people. Soon, an English educated elite emerged among them and made them conscious of their ethno-linguistic identity as Nepalis. Mr. Subhas Ghising too, represents those elite, who brought about consciousness amongst the Nepalis and marked them as a distinct ethnic group, on the basis of the

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<sup>25</sup> Myron Weiner, Sons of the Soil : Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India, Oxford University Press, Delhi. 1978, pp.9.

Nepali language, arousing their passions for the creation of 'Gorkhaland'.

R.A. Schermerhorn, George Simson, Milton Yinger and others, who support the prejudice discrimination theory lay down that, the minority is held in prejudice by the majority and hence, minority movements are a result of majority discrimination. In India, almost all federating states are ruled by one dominant majority and number of minorities are prejudiced against the former. In West Bengal, the minority group, the Nepalis, are prejudiced against the majority community, the Bengalis.

The relative deprivation theory, explains the politisation of ethnicity or the development of ethno-nationalism and tries to show the inequality in the distribution of available resources, social benefits and opportunities between distinct ethnic groups. It is laid down that, in the simplest form, 'nationalism arises because of the objective exploitation of an indigenous group by an alien group or one

social class by another.<sup>26</sup>

But however, it is not objective inequality but a feeling of frustration or relative deprivation, in relation to another group, that a particular group feels, in relation to goods, they feel, they are entitled to, can also help to initiate nationalist movements.

Yet another theory is the theory for competition for environmental resources, which was first developed by Frederick Barth. Whenever there is scarce availability of various resources, there can always be competition between two ethnic groups, which can result in conflict because of the living in the same environment and using of the same resources. The Nepalis living in Darjeeling compete with the plainsmen to have control over the various resources.

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<sup>26</sup>. Chong Do Hah and Jeffrey Martin, 'Towards a Synthesis of Conflict and Integration Theories of Nationalism', World Politics, Princeton Univ. Press, New Jersey. April 1975, vol. XXVII, no.3, pp.361-386.



From the various theories given above, it seems that, opposed to the assimilation and modernization theories, which seem quite convincing, there are other theories, which try to show the resurgence of ethnicity or the politization of ethnicity. Ethnicity or a sense of peoplehood or the 'we' feeling shared by the members of the group persists, even if certain common elements like common territory common scale of values, some distinctive political organisation and others disappear. Ethnic identity rather than being opposed to modernity and the modern state are reactions to the process of modernisation. There has been an increasing tendency to re-discover ethnicity for personal identifications, emotional security and communal anchorage.

Moreover it is felt that, there are certain factors which encourage ethnic minorities to bring about political agitation. Willingness of the democratic regimes to bear the growing political importance of the various groups and to give them various concessions be it students, women or ethnic groups. It can also be said that technological developments and evolution of Television.

news programmes in societies, especially in the advanced industrial societies, have helped to bring the nationalist movements of the ethnic groups.

When people go to new places, when we ask the question, 'with whom does a person, away from his home and relatives form groups with or establish relationship with? It can invariably be seen that, he does so, with people of common language, region or perhaps religion.

What can be seen today is that there has been created a heightened sense of ethnic consciousness, a more assertive sense of specific identity in every community, involved in a modern ethnic conflict. 'It is a sharpened and heightened ideology created by recent, sometimes bitter events.'<sup>27</sup>

In the following chapters, we are going to see how the Nepalis, a distinct ethno-linguist community living in Darjeeling and Sikkim became politically, socially, economically more conscious, aroused by local elites and the gradual spread of education and seriously questioned themselves about their identity.

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<sup>27</sup>. David Kumar and Kadirgamar, *Santasilan op.cit*, pp.13.

## Chapter II

### Historical Perspective : Darjeeling

The Himalayas, with its panoramic and picturesque scenic beauty, its snow capped peaks, evergreen pine and birch trees, milky, white, everflowing gushing streams, is a cynosure to the viewers eyes. Indeed, Mother Nature has been kind and generous to it, offering new vistas and avenues to the ever curious adventurers and explorers.

But the people here, especially the Nepalis, who are the main subject of this study and who have been inhabiting the Darjeeling hills or 'Dorje-ling', meaning the Land of the Thunderbolt, about 833 sq. miles, with a varying height of 500 feet or more than 1000 feet and Sikkim, nestled away in the Himalayas, from time immemorial have been cruelly subjected to the whims and fancies of varied people like the Britishers, the plainsmen, the shrewd politicians and leaders, thus putting a question mark on their identity. In order to know

more about this, a closer examination, needs to be done about the historicity of Nepal, Sikkim and Darjeeling, the causes which led to the immigration of Nepalis to these areas and how they came to be the dominant community in these areas. Nepal, a Himalayan country of the Kirat tribe, in the Bagmati valley was under the rule of the Licchavis from the 1st half of the 4th century to the 8th century A.D. It was during the rule of the Guptas in India, that the Licchavis were reduced to a vassal.

During that time, Nepal was divided into four sovereign principalities, namely Kathmandu, Lalita Patan, Bhatgong and Gorkha. It was the powerful King, Prithvi Narayan Shah (1742-75) of Gorkha, who brought about their unification. He is remembered for his efforts to unite the people with a new Nepali consciousness and is also known as the founding father of the Nepali Gorkha kingdom. He also occupied the middle kingdom of Nepal and thus, hindered British trade with Tibet, as his conquests cut off the main trade route

to Lhasa from India through the Kathmandu valley.<sup>1</sup>

But various political thinkers feel that the *raison d'être* for the conquest of Prithvi Narayan Shah and his 'secession was personal ambition and dynastic supremacy'.<sup>2</sup>

Others say that, it was mainly because of the personal ambition of Prithvi Narayan Shah, that made him bring about the conquest of the whole of Nepal. But the generally accepted view in Nepal was that, the king 'infused a feeling of nationalism into the minds and hearts of the Nepalese'.<sup>3</sup>

It was during the years between 1803-1809, that full Western Sikkim in the East, long strip of the Terai and Gorakhpur in U.P. in the South, Garhwal and other hill principalities, further to the West

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- <sup>1</sup>. A.C.Sinha, Politics of Sikkim - A Sociological Study, Thompson Press (India) Ltd, Faridabad. 1975, pp.17.
  - <sup>2</sup>. Amiya. K. Samanta, Gorkhaland : A Study in Ethnic Separation, Khum Publishers, New Delhi. 1996, pp.18.
  - <sup>3</sup>. Asad Husain, British India's Relations with the Kingdom of Nepal, London 1970, pp.30.

were conquered. The Gorkha encroachment upon the low lying lands within the British dominion in India, brought on a conflict between Nepal and the East India Company. Purnea, Sarai, Gorakhpur and Barailly districts were also the contested lands.<sup>4</sup> It was in order to expand their territories further, that the Nepal rulers encouraged migration to the areas.

### **Anglo - Gorkha Wars - 1814-1816 :**

It can be said that the history of Darjeeling began from 1816 onwards. Before 1816, Nepal had conquered the whole of British Sikkim. It was mainly because of some disagreement with the Gorkhas, that the British had declared war with them. It was in the Second Gorkha war, that the Gorkhas were defeated by the Britishers under General Ochterlony.

But inspite of the fact that the Gorkhas were defeated, they

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<sup>4</sup>. Ram Rahul, The Himalayas as a Frontier, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. Delhi. 1978. pp.63-64.

proved their prowess and bravery. It was mainly because of the superiority that the Britishers had over men, money and weaponry, that the Gorkhas were forced to accept the Treaty of Segauli in 1816, according to which, Nepal had to give up the territories conquered from Sikkim, between Mechi River as far as the Tista, to the British East India Company in 'perpetuity'. Mr. Brian Hodgson, who was a long time British Resident in Nepal says 'In my humble opinion, they (the Gorkhas) are by far the best soldiers in India and if they were made participatories of our renowned army, I conceive that their fallout spirit, emphatic contempt to madhesias (people residing in the plains) and unadulterated military habit might be relied on fidelity'.<sup>5</sup>

It was after the wars between 1814-1816, that the Britishers started enlisting the Gorkhas in the army of the East India Company and used clandestine methods, as there was no formal approval of the Nepal Durbar. It was only after the elimination of Maharaja Ranadip

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<sup>5</sup>. Bharat Ch. Kalita, Culture of Friendship and Militarism of the Gorkhas in Nepal in K.C.Mahanta (ed.), People of the Himalayas - Ecology, Culture, Development and Change, Kamla Raj Enterprises, New Delhi. 1997, pp.126.

Singh by Bir Samsher family, that the recruitment in the British army of the Nepalis were eased.

According to the Treaty of Titalia, signed on 10th February 1817, the territory, which Nepal had won from Sikkim and was handed over to the British, was again handed to the Rajah of Sikkim. The importance of this treaty, is that, it infringed on the sovereignty of Sikkim, restructured the size of her army and also curtailed her freedom to establish relationship with other foreign powers.

### **Discovery of Darjeeling and the Formation of the Darjeeling District :**

While making their inroads to Sikkim, the Britishers - Col. Lloyd and Grant had come across an 'old deserted Gorkha military station- Darjeeling' in 1829 (which proves that it had been under the Gorkhas.) Capt. Lloyd sent a report to the East India Company, saying that Darjeeling was a place conducive to good health and also because it was the border area between Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan.



Darjeeling, being so appropriately located became a cynosure to the British eye. History has it, that the place was gifted away by the Sikkim Raja to the British as a form of friendship. This presentation has been documented and entitled as a 'deed-of-grant' (February 1st, 1835). It reads as follows :

"The Governor -General, having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of this Government suffering from sickness to avail themselves of its advantages, I, the Sikkimputte Rajah, out of friendship for the said Governor-General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, that is, all the land south of the Balasun, Kahail and little Ranjit rivers and west of Rungpo and Mahanadi rivers'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1841, the Company granted the Raja, an allowance of Rs 3000 per annum as compensation in lieu and this was further

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<sup>6</sup>. Arthur Jules Dash, (ed.) Bengal District Gazetteers : Darjeeling, Bengal Govt. Printing Press, Alipore. 1947, pp.37-38.

increased in 1846 to Rs. 6000 per annum. Another treaty, the treaty of Sinchula, signed between Bhutan and British India in November, 1865, according to which, Kalimpong sub-division and Bhutan Dooars (now parts of Jalpaiguri district and Assam) were ceded to the British in return for an annual subsidy. In 1891, Kurseong was made a sub-divisional headquarter and the Terai Sub-division was merged in it. The existing district of Darjeeling was created in 1866. In 1907, Darjeeling was added to the Bhagalpur sub-division and in 1912, it was added to Bengal and became a district. The organisation of the four sub-divisions was completed in 1916.

#### **Administrative History of Darjeeling District :**

From the very beginning, the British administrative policy was to divide the conquered territory into various categories like regulated and non-regulated areas on the basis of location, character and importance of the territories. From 1870-74, it was mainly for the preservation of the indigenous system of simple natives, that the area was formed into a non-regulated area. Thus it was under the

Governor General's responsibility. From 1874-1919, it was a scheduled district, according to which the areas were kept outside the purview of general laws, operating throughout the country.

It was a backward tract from 1919-1935, under which 'the Governor of a province under the direction of Governor General in Council, shall have the sole responsibility of administering the backward tracts and the Governor was to determine, whether any law of the provincial legislature would be given effect in such areas'.<sup>7</sup>

From 1935 till the end of the British rule in 1947, Darjeeling remained a 'partially excluded area', for which the Governor was to consult the Council of Ministers'.

**Ethnic History of Darjeeling :** (brief)

At the time of the cession of the greater part of Darjeeling

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<sup>7</sup>. Dyutis Chakrabarti, Gorkhaland : Evolution of Policies of Segregation, Special Lecture 10, North Bengal University. April, 1993, pp.7-9.

Sadar sub-division, comprising 357.4 Sq. miles by the Raja of Sikkim to the British in 1835 A.D., the tract was wholly covered by forests and it has been said that there were not even 20 resident families or households in that area.<sup>8</sup>

It can be said that the original inhabitants of this area were the autochthonous Lepchas or as they call themselves, Mu-Tan-Chi-Rong Kups - meaning, sons of the beloved Mother Nature. They led a semi-nomadic life, subsisting mainly on collection of roots and tubers, fishing and hunting. Apart from them, there were also some Limbus and Magars who today are included in the whole Nepali heterogeneous community. According to various sources, some of the Limbus trace their origin to Kashi or Benaras in India and some of them consider themselves as having origins in Tsang in Tibet. But no matter what ever their claims were, it proves that they were there in Sikkim, when the Bhotias or the Tibetans came downwards from Tibet and finally established the Namgyal Dynasty in 1642 and

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<sup>8</sup>. L.S.S.O' Malley, Bengal District Gazetteer : Darjeeling, Calcutta. 1907, pp.35.

Phuntsog Namgyal was consecrated as their first king. Sources further prove that 'Sikkim is derived for the Limbu word, 'Su-Khim' meaning new house, which was later anglicized into Sikkim. The Magars are also known to have settled in South Western Sikkim under their own chiefs since at least the 17th century.

The development of Darjeeling can be attributed to the efforts of Local Agent, General Lloyd (the real founder of Darjeeling), assisted by Dr. A Campbell, Sir. Joseph Hooker and Lt. R.C. Napier, who carried on with great dexterity and patience to develop the inaccessible hilly region. The Britishers soon realised that the Nepali population were slowly coming to these areas from neighboring Nepal and were willing to work in difficult conditions. In 1839, the road connecting Darjeeling to the plains was built, which till today can be seen as the old Military Road. Fred Pinn correctly writes that, 'although the planning and money were British, the sweat and labour were Indian'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>. Fred Pinn, The Road of Destiny : Darjeeling Letters 1839, Oxford University Press, Oxford. 1986. pp.4.

brief (overline)

**The Flow of the Nepali Community to Darjeeling and Sikkim:**

It was following the Treaty of Segauli in 1816, that the Nepalis had been pouring to northern parts of India, especially to parts such as Garhwal, Dehradun, Darjeeling, Sikkim and Assam. Moreover, the boundary line demarcating Nepali's southern territory from the British Indian jurisdiction fell largely in the Terai area.

Before the Britishers had established their stronghold in India, the movement of the people from Nepal to India were perhaps limited only to pilgrimage, drought, famine, trade or commerce. But the movement of population took a different shape, once the Britishers had established themselves well in india.

The Britishers soon found out that the Nepali people were sincere, loyal hardworking and more thrifty than the Lepchas, who were interested in hunting and jhum cultivation, were mild and carefree people and very fond of drinking the 'chi' (a local drink) But the Britishers did have a soft corner for the Lepchas because they

were a gullible race and also because they could convert them easily to Christianity. Englishmen have spoken favourably of them saying they are children of nature, who knew all about nature's gifts. H.H.Rishley feared that this interesting and attractive race would soon go the way of the forest.

The Bhotias were an aggressive lot who descended down to these areas with a much civilized culture. Their Lamaist Buddhism was soon to be embraced by the Lepchas, who were animists. The Britishers wanted to make Sikkim look towards India for guidance and direction and not towards Tibet. So they encouraged the Nepalis, who were orthodox Hindus and who were already being recruited in the army in large numbers, to Darjeeling and Sikkim. Besides these, there were other reasons, which acted as push factors for them immigration.

#### **Factors for Immigration :**

The social, religious, political and economic conditions in

British India were much better when compared to the condition in Nepal. In the former, slavery, caste rigours, customs like Sati were being abolished or being reformed. But in the latter, throughout the 19th century, there was little change in the social and religious customs.

It can be further seen that the Kirats (the Rais and Limbus can be put in this category) were assigned the status of Sudras and were vulnerable to Brahmin - Chettri tyranny. If there was any non conformity to Hindu scriptures, there would be serious punishment known as panchakhat and also confiscation of property, degradation, punishment, mutilation and death. 'People realised that escape was the alternative to opposition'.<sup>10</sup>

With the increase in population in the Nepal hills, the pressure on available land resources became acute, which further brought

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<sup>10</sup>. Kumar Pradhan, The Gorkha Conquest : The Process and Consequences of Nepal with Particular Reference to Eastern Nepal, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, pp.170.



about their movement towards some parts of Darjeeling and Sikkim.

Another factor was the Gorkha recruitment into the British Indian Army, which had already started after the Anglo Gorkha war of 1814-1816. Whether the soldiers came from Gorkha, Kathmandu, or any part of Nepal, they were invariably termed as 'Gurkhas' by the Britishers. Apart from the martial races among the Nepalis, like the brave, loyal and hardworking Chettris and Thakkuris, Magars and Gurungs and after 1857, the Rais and the Limbus were also recruited into the British Indian Army. It was mainly because the Britishers were very impressed by the fighting capabilities of the Gorkhas, that the 1st Gorkha Rifles had already been formed (originally called the 'Nusuree Battalion') soon after the Anglo-Gorkha Wars and consequently, 2nd Nusuree and Sirmoor Battalion were formed, which later became the 1st Gorkha Rifles, 2nd Gorkha Rifles and the 3rd Gorkha Rifles.

The soldiers were attracted to the British armies, where they were paid in cash and not in kind and were also given other incentives. Since they were not allowed to be recruited in their

country (Nepal) the Britishers encouraged them to settle outside their borders. It was in the army, that they were exposed to the Nepali language and were forced to learn the language even though they belonged to the large conglomerate of Nepali endogamous sub-groups, as the Britishers were conversant only in the Nepali language.

Moreover, the Sikhs had also started recruiting the Gorkhas because of their fighting prowess. Infact, the Nepali word, 'Lahure', meaning soldier, who serves in a foreign country, is derived from 'Lahore', the main recruiting centre of the Sikhs. Gorkhapur and Ghoom (in Darjeeling Sardar) were also adopted as recruiting depots in 1887 and 1902 respectively.

Yet another factor, for the coming of the Nepalis was tea cultivation. It was Major Bruce in 1821 and Mr. Scott in 1824, the two British officers, who discovered the wild tea plant in Assam. The discovery of Tea in Bengal dates from 1826, when Major Bruce

brought from Assam some plants and seeds.<sup>11</sup> Dr. Alexander Campbell's (who had then become the Superintendent of Darjeeling) proposal of setting up of a committee in 1834, to introduce tea culture in India, was also supported by the then Governor General, Lord William Bentick. The year 1856 saw the placing of the tea industry on a solid footing of commercial enterprise. In Darjeeling District, Darjeeling Company Limited was the largest tea concern, which owned 4 gardens. It was established between 1860-64 : Ambutia, Ging, Takda and Phobserang, with the Headquarters in London. 'By the end of 1866, there were about 39 gardens with 10,000 acres under cultivation and by 1895, 186 gardens, area under cultivation in acres, 48,4692'.<sup>12</sup>

The workers in these tea-gardens were mostly of Nepali origin, with slight racial mixture and the rest were Lepchas and Bhutias. In Darjeeling, cheap local labour was easily available, recruiting men,

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<sup>11</sup>. Mahendra P. Lama and R.L. Saakar (ed.), Tea Plantation Workers in the Eastern Himalayas : A Study in Wages, Employment and Living Standards, Atma Ram and Sons, New Delhi. 1986, pp.1.

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid., pp.2.

women and children as the labour force. Workers were subject to a great deal of suffering and exploitation, got a low wage policy, lived a doleful existence, with little or no social security benefits. But still they continued staying in these areas, reluctant to go back to Nepal, may be because of pressure on land, slavery in Nepal and also because they saw lots of job opportunities in the tea gardens, road building, construction and other such work in Bengal and Assam.

As the tea plantation became more successful in Darjeeling, business deals were carried with Sikkim and Bhutan. 'Besides some slave traders saw that collecting labourers on contract for tea estates and public works in Darjeeling District was a more prosperous business than slave trade'.<sup>13</sup>

With great courage, zeal and strength in their bodies and vitality in their hearts, a throng of young men and women began

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<sup>13</sup>. D.B.Gurung and K.S. Bhattacharya, Political Socialization of the Indian Nepalese in the Early 20th Century, Occasional Paper, North Bengal University. May 1988, pp.193.

pouring into Darjeeling, where they believed that money grew in 'tea bushes'. The Nepalis carried on their customs and traditions as they settled in Darjeeling and Sikkim. The Tamangs still danced to the tune of the 'Chyabrung' and the 'Madal'. The 'Sola Sharad' and the 'Nao Ratha' were still ardently observed as the religious rites of the Nepalis. Many spots were marked with the colours of the 'Sindoor' and the holiness of the 'Trishul' as places of worship. The people would still turn to the 'Bijuwa' or the 'witch doctor' to free themselves from the evil spirits. To each his own and in this way, did each community of the Nepalis carry on protecting and preserving the roots they were born with.

Most of the people who migrated from Nepal to Darjeeling and Sikkim belonged to the Tibeto - Burman dialect groups. 'The Brahmans, including not only Nepali Brahmans, formed about 2 percent of the total Nepali population in 1901, while the Chettris constituted a little more than 1 percent of the total Nepali population in 1941'.<sup>14</sup> This might be attributed to the fact that the Brahmans

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<sup>14</sup>. Ibid. pp.194.

and Chettris occupied the dominant positions in the social, economic and political spheres when compared to the Mongoloid or Tibeto - Burman groups, who were often made to face the wrath of the caste Hindus in Nepal.

In Nepal, caste relations were very rigidly followed mainly because they would get royal patronage. Marriage and death ceremonies were attended only by one's caste groups, commensual rules were strictly followed and violation of rules resulted in social ostracization. But however when they came over to Darjeeling and Sikkim, various caste groups had to live together. Their living together with the other non-caste groups like Lepchas and Bhutias resulted in various changes in their caste system. Thus their kind of Hinduism had its own traditional hue and colour, very different from the Hinduism followed by mainland Indians, giving them a strong feeling of 'we' (the Nepalis) and 'they' (the Britishers or the plainsmen, who had come in large numbers for business and trade purposes). Moreover, the absence of domination by any group over the others, also strongly contributed to the social unity amongst the

Nepalese.

The Nepalese who came to 'Mughlan' (many Nepalese referred to India as 'Mughlan' because earlier on, the Nepal kings had fought against India, which was then ruled by the Mughals) were bilingual, speaking their own dialects and also the Nepali language. But very soon, the Nepali language became the lingua franca, bridging the gap between the various communities. It was the Nepali language, which fostered a sense of oneness and an inescapable association with their land of origin. In India, language became the symbol of unity and consequently, a symbol of Nepali consciousness.

The steady increase in the growth of the Nepali population was also because they practiced polygamy, a man marrying several wives and given various nomenclatures like 'jethi' (for the 1st wife) and 'Kanchii' (for the 2nd wife) and were a fertile race. But in comparison, both the Lepchas and Bhotias practiced polyandry, thus giving way to the dominant Nepali community.

It may be worthwhile to quote, what H.H.Risley wrote in the Gazetteer of Sikkim in 1894 about the Nepalis, "The Lepchas are rapidly dying out while from the west, the industrious Gurkhas of Nepal are pressing forward...Here also religion will play a leading part in Sikkim as in India, Hinduism will assuredly cast out Buddhism and implement of the Brahmin. The land will follow the creed. Thus race and religion ...will settle the Sikkim difficulty for us in their own way."<sup>15</sup>

The Nepalis came to explore new lands, perhaps, some had in them, a sense of adventurism. Many of them came with the hope of acquiring lands and were even willing to work in the infertile lands and difficult conditions as agriculturists. It is to their credibility, that the introduction of terraced system of cultivation goes, as against the 'slash and burn' system of agriculture practiced by the Lepchas. It was the Nepalis again, who introduced a very important cash crop in this region, 'cardamom' which yielded a great deal of revenue.

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<sup>15</sup>. H.H.Rishley, (ed.) The Gazetteer of Sikkim, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1894 Report, Manjushri, New Delhi. 1972, pp.21.



But perhaps, it was the great success of tea gardens that lured the Nepalis into Darjeeling. By 1874, number of tea gardens had increased from 56 to 113, in 1891, there were 177 tea estates. According to the census of 1901, tea garden labourers and their dependents accounted for more than two-thirds of the total population of the Darjeeling District. In 1931, the same category of labourers formed about 42.25%. In the hill sub-divisions, in 1971, they formed 31.52% of the total working population.

The Britishers greatly provided them incentives to settle down in the Company's gardens permanently, by giving them plots of lands, unsuitable for tea, for the cultivation of maize, millets and other crops. So the Nepalese came in thousands knowing they would be handsomely rewarded, to give their sweat and labour for the development of the area and their 'land', which they began to know as their very own.

The Newars, an industrious and the most advanced of the Nepali community, having their distinct culture, tradition and

language, had started increasing in Sikkim after a Newar named Lachhmidas Pradhan obtained the right to mint copper from Tukkhani, above Melli in South Sikkim in 1867. He and his brothers were also made 'Tikkadars' (or estate owners) and occupied some status with the Bhutia-Lepcha Kazis or landlords. Together with them came the Kamis (blacksmiths), Damais (tailors), and Sarkis (cobblers).

The Lepchas and Bhotias obviously felt a jealous pang or as T.B. Subba writes, 'negative solidarity' against the latter immigrants, the Nepalis,<sup>16</sup> and they were often made to feel as second class citizens. But they zealously adhered to their caste and tribal groupings. Moreover, with J.C.White appointed as the first Political Officer of Sikkim in 1881, the infiltration of the Nepalis to these areas greatly increased to work as sappers, miners, soldiers, landless labourers and agriculturists. White fully encouraged the settlement of Nepali migrants 'in pursuance of the policy of replacing the

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<sup>16</sup>. Tanka Bahadur Subbha, 'Inter ethnic Relationship in North East India and the Negative Solidarity Thesis, Man in India, 1992, 72(2), pp.153-163.

Buddhist prayer wheel, the symbol of Sikkim population of Tibetan stock with the Khukuri (dagger) the badge of the Martial Hindu oriented Gokha.<sup>17</sup>

Even there were some amongst the Lepcha-Bhutias themselves, who were against the theocratic rule of the Chogyal and encouraged the influx of the Nepalis for their own private gains. Prominent amongst them, were two Lepcha brothers, Khangsa Dewan and Phodung Lama. The Sikkimese rulers knew about the increase of the Nepali population and even drew a line from east to west, a few miles north of Gangtok, which forbade Nepali settlement, north of this line. But even then, the growth of the Nepali population could not be contained.

Moreover, there were also the mercenary soldiers known as the Gorkhas, who settled in these areas after retirement. Only about one-third of the 11,000 Gorkhas discharged from the British and Indian

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<sup>17</sup>. Nari Rustomji, A Himalayan Tragedy, Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi. 1987, pp.15.

armies after the 1st world war opted to return to Nepal.<sup>18</sup>

### Census Studies :

In the census of 1891, 88,000 persons were recorded, having been born in Nepal. But in 1931, the trends were changing as can be seen in the following data :

**Table 1 :**

Born in Bengal (including Darjeeling Dist.)	- 2,18,935
Born in Bihar	- 24,540
Born in Sikkim	- 5,321
Born elsewhere in India	- 8,277
Born in Nepal	- 59,016
Born elsewhere in Asia	- 2,052
Born in Europe, outside UK and Ireland	- 130
Born in UK and Ireland	- 486
Miscellaneous	- 878
Total	<hr/> 3,19,635. <hr/>

Source : Arthur Jules Dash (ed.), Bengal District Gazetteer, Darjeeling, Bengal Government Press, Alipore. 1947, pp.50.

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<sup>18</sup>. M.J.Hutt, Early Nepali Periodicals in India, Nepali - A National Language and its Literature, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi. 1988, pp.37.

In the field work study, it was revealed that the majority of the Nepalis settled in Darjeeling and Sikkim today, are the third or fourth generation and many of them have relatives across the border in Nepal, but they have not met them nor have many of them ever been to Nepal.<sup>19</sup>

In 1941, the population had increased to 376,369. There was an increase of about 56,734 persons or an increase by about 18%.

In 1951, the population was recorded as 459, 617 or decadal growth of 83, 248 or 23%.

#### **Census of 1961 :**

In 1961, among the Indo-Aryan languages, Nepali speakers numbered the most, as can be seen in the following table :

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<sup>19</sup>. Interviews conducted with a large section of Nepalis in Darjeeling District between February to April 1999 confirmed this.

**Table 2 :**

Nepali speakers	-	369, 130 or 59% (191, 206 males & 177, 924 females)
Bengali speakers	-	1,15, 172 or 18.4%
Hindi speakers	-	47,842 or 7.7%
Oriya speakers	-	8,522 or 1.4%

**Austic Group**

Santhali	-	7,993 or 1.2%
Monda	-	5,638 or 0.9%

**Dravidian Language :**

Oraon speakers	-	17,860 or 2.8%
Malpahariya	-	1,216

## Tibeto-Burman Group

Lepchas	-	8,171 or 1.3%
Tibetans	-	7,679 or 1.2%
Bhotias	-	2,388 or 0.4
Sherpas	-	2,113 or 0.3%

Source : W.B. District Gazetteer, Darjeeling, 1980.

In India, it can be seen that the maximum were Nepali speakers (59.1%). It can be due to the fact that the various Nepali linguistic groups like Newars, Rais, Limbus, Gurungs, Magars, Tamangs, Yakhas and others had forsaken their own dialects in preference for the Indo-Aryan, Nepali language. There is a preponderance of the Nepalis in the Hill sub-division over the other hill-tribes, about 94%. In 1971, population of Darjeeling was 781,777 and in 1981-10,06,434.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>. Colated on the basis of Census Reports of different years -Census of 1931 & 1941 - Arthur Jules Dash.(ed.), Bengal Dist. Gazeetter : Darjeeling, Bengal Govt. Press,

In Sikkim too, the Nepali population is about 75%, the Lepchas and Bhutias 25% and others include Marwaris, Biharis, Oriyas and plainsmen.

**Table 3 :**

In 1891 - Total	-	30,458
Lepchas	-	5,762
Bhutias	-	4,894
Lumbus	-	3,356
Nepalis	-	15,458
 In 1911 - Total -	-	80,000
Nepalis	-	50,000
Lepchas, Bhutias, & Others	-	30,000
 In 1931 - Total	-	109,808
Lepchas	-	13,060
Bhutias	-	11,955
Nepali	-	84,693

Source : A.C.Sinha, Politics of Sikkim - A Sociological Study, Thompson Press, Faridabad. 1975, pp.10.

The increase in Nepali population in Sikkim can be attributed to the encouragement by the Britishers and the high fertility rate of the Nepalis.

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Alipore, 1947, 1951 - Census of India, 1971. 1961 - W.B. District Gazetteer of Darjeeling, 1980, 1971 - Census of India, 1981.



In 1981, census report further reveals that the total Nepali speaking population in Sikkim is 1,92,891, Bhutias, 21,548, Lepchas, 1,92,891. The total population of Sikkim in 1981 was around 596,954. In 1991, the population there numbered 403,612. The Lepchas and Bhutias have been outnumbered by the Nepalis, whereas the Lepchas and Bhutias have been clubbed together now, the Nepalis still maintain their separate identity, not getting absorbed into the other communities. They dress differently, follow their own religion, have their own food habits and speak the Nepali or Gorkhali language.

The field work further proved that, the younger generation (especially) in Darjeeling, belonging to various Nepali sub communities, cannot speak their own dialects. The use of the different sub-community Nepali words can be seen only while addressing different relations. e.g. in Newari language, Aja (for grand father) Aji (grandmother), Nini, Chama, Maleju (for aunty), Tata (for elder sister). The Tamang use Nana (for elder sister), Mam, (grandmother), Meme (grandfather) and such other words.

In Nepal, it would have been possible for each of these various Nepali sub-groups like Newars, Gurungs, Magars, Rais, Limbus, Tamangs and others to maintain their own language and culture because of living in close proximity with their homogeneous linguistic and cultural traditions. But in Darjeeling and Sikkim, each of these groups are comparatively small in size and are spatially dispersed. Hence, all of them are grouped under the term 'Nepali'.

The Lepchas and Bhotias have their own distinct languages and script. But though retaining their own languages, they have adopted the Nepali language as an additional language. The study conducted, revealed that, also the Bengali, Marwaris and Biharis and other such plainsmen who are referred as the 'madhesias' can speak fluently in the Nepali language. The Nepali language, being more simple when compared to other languages and its close affinity with the Hindi language and scripts definitely has given it the edge over the other languages, thus becoming the lingua franca of Darjeeling and Sikkim.

## **Conclusion :**

The original inhabitants of these areas were Lepchas, no doubt, but various studies also reveal, that Magars and Limbus have been living here since time immemorial. Names of various places like 'Nagari', 'Gorkha-Thum' 'Mallaguri' all have Nepali connotations.

Nepalis have their origin in Nepal but they have adapted India as their homeland and have been toiling and sweating for the development of their lands. Shri Subhas Ghisingh, President of Gorkha National Liberation Front said, 'Darjeeling was ceded by Nepal to the British Government in 1815 under the Treaty of Segauli. So historically, the Gorkhas of these ceded territories automatically became Indians since they came with the land.'<sup>21</sup>

When the various territories between Mechi and Teesta river were ceded to the Britishers by Nepal, under the Treaty of Seguali,

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<sup>21</sup>. Subhas Ghisingh in Forward to Study of Gorkhaland Review No. 2. on the Information Documents of Govt. of West Bengal, 21st February, 1987.

these territories automatically became a part of British India and the people living here also became subjects of British India. It cannot be denied that a bulk of the Nepali population did migrate to Darjeeling and Sikkim in the mid-19th century. But there was indeed a negligible number of Mangars and Limbus too, inhabiting these areas together with the Lepchas.

But in 1912, Darjeeling, which was so linguistically, socially, culturally, so different from Bengal, was made as administrative part of Bengal by the Britishers for their own colonial interests. The humble and meek people of Darjeeling did not have the slightest idea of what was going on. But it was already a known fact, that they would now become victims of circumstance and soon were to demand a separate state, on the basis of the Nepali language.

## Chapter III

### Nepali Language Identity : Historical Dimensions

In pluralist societies like India, which is culturally diverse, having multitude of religions and culture, attainment of a nation state is only a temporary phenomena. There are several cultural nations within the Indian state and 'they inevitably force their way out of the unilavy structure of delving into their ascriptive consciousness'.<sup>1</sup> In such societies the issue of language becomes very important because the language which is adopted as an official language and medium of instruction, determines which group can get access to the best jobs. It may be sometimes, that a minority may be the disadvantaged group. It is under such conditions, that the elites demand the use of the regional language as the principal language of administration in the area. They will also call for some type of

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<sup>1</sup>. Dipankar Gupta, The Context of Ethnicity : Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspectives, Oxford University Press, Delhi. 1996, pp.3.

political administration or development or decentralization of political power or sometimes for session. As it succeeds in any of these aims, it becomes a nation or nationality.

Language becomes not merely a means of communication but a priceless heritage of group culture. Jyotindra Das Gupta writes, 'that among the many marks of ethnicity, language plays a very important line of separation, marking off one speech community from another.'<sup>2</sup> People from the same linguistic group have a particular way of identifying themselves with their language, rather than region and speakers of different language are called 'outsiders'. A situation of conflict may take place between two language speaking groups and it may be said that it is mainly because of the insecurity or fear that may crop up of losing one's linguistic and cultural identity, that conflicts take place.

Ethnic movements and leadership in India were to deploy

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<sup>2</sup>. Jyotindra Das Gupta, *Ethnicity, Language Demands and National Development in India* in Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (ed.) op.cit., pp.470.

linguistic ethnicity as one of the first strategies in their competition for greater access to power and resources through structural change. Language has assumed a very important place in today's political situation and is one of the most important marks of identification. The very identity of a nation or a race is closely associated with its culture, at the root of which lies the language.

### **Constitutional Provisions :**

Regarding the language issue, Part XVII of the Constitution deals with it entitled 'Official Languages' under Articles 343 to 351 contained in Four Chapters. Chapter I Language of the Union (Article 343,344), Chapter II - Regional Languages (Article 341-347), Chapter III - Language of the Supreme Court and High Courts - Special Directives (Articles 350-351). To the Article 344 (1) and 351, the VIIIth schedule of the Constitution has been appended. Article 345 clearly allows the legislature of a state to adopt any one or more languages in use, in the state (or Hindi) as the language or languages to be used for all or any of the official purposes of that state in place

of English. According to article 351, the object of recognizing these languages is to promote the spread of Hindi language to develop it, so as to serve as a medium of expression for all elements of composite culture of India.

Originally, in the VIIIth Schedule, there were only 14 languages, namely Assamese, Bengali, Gujrati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu. It was only in 1967 that Sindhi was included in the VIIIth Schedule. In 1992, Nepali, Konkani and Manipuri were added thus taking the number to 18. India is a country having a huge diversity of languages but the VIIIth Schedule does not cover this linguistic complexity.

‘The Ideology of assimilation permeates the VIIIth Schedule. India is a linguistic giant and each of the linguistic groups have various aspirations and one day or the other, may use the language factor to carve out their distinct identity and also to achieve their ends’.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>. Sadhna Saxena, ‘Language and the Nationality Question?’



## **Language groups in India and the Linguistic Re-organisation of States :**

In a vast country like India, there was never a time, when only a single language was spoken. It has been laid out that, the language spoken in Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, the cities of the Indus Valley Civilization was Dravidian. Many of India's tribals of today are Austro-Asiatic in origin (sub-family-Munda), their languages related to the Mon-Khmer languages such as Vietnamese that stretch from Chotanagpur eastward to Indo China. It was around 1500-500 B.C. that sanskrit was spoken in large parts of northern India. Prakrit, the oldest form of the Middle-Indo Aryan language emerged in 487 B.C.

In Dravidian India, Tamil goes back to the 2nd Century B.C., Kannada to the 4th century A.D., Telugu dates from the 7th century A.D. and Malayalam from atleast the 10th century A.D. The earliest

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'Economic and Political Weekly, Bombay. 8th February, 1997, pp.270.

written records of English and German date from about the 5th Century A.D. Sanskrit, together with regional vernaculars were used for the purpose of administration in Hindu India, but with the coming of Islam, it shifted to Persian. But when the British reign stood on the ruins of the Mughal empire, English soon become the language of administration by the 3rd quarter of the 18th century.<sup>4</sup> India has witnessed linguistic co-mingling in which people's language gave a resilience to a language; e.g. Prakrit in ancient times and Urdu in pre-colonial period.

The vernacular languages, which had been lying dormant, under the domination of Sanskrit and Persian also had the opportunity for renewal and rebirth, as more and more Englishmen cared to learn the regional languages and wrote various grammars on them.

The demand for linguistic re-organisation was made during the

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<sup>4</sup>. Robert. D. King, Nehru and the Language Politics of India, Oxford University Press, Delhi. 1998, pp.10.

freedom struggle itself. Infact, the earliest intimation of an Indian sentiment, for re-drawing administrative boundaries, reflecting linguistic differences came from Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who wrote in 'Kesari' on 17th November, 1891, 'that if the present administrative units, created on linguistic basis, each of them will be to some degree, homogeneous and will facilitate the development of the people and the language of the respective languages'.<sup>5</sup> In 1920, Congress meeting in Nagpur laid that provincial boundaries should be drawn on language lines. In 1927, the Simon Commission also reported in favour of the same principle and by 1936, a general consensus was there in favour of linguistic states.

The Dar Commission, which submitted its report on 10th December, 1948, laid out that linguistic provinces should be postponed for 10 years. But however, demands for linguistic re-organisation of states was already being made. The Telugu speaking people wanted the creation of Andhra Pradesh out of Madras Province and it was on 16th December, 1952, that it was announced

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<sup>5</sup>. Ibid, pp.59.

by Nehru, that Andhras could have their state, which came into existence on 1st October, 1953. Soon there were demands for the creation of linguistic states, which resulted in the formation of States Re-organisation Commission, that would 'examine objectively and dispassionately, the question of the re-organisation of the states of the Indian Union, so that the welfare of the people of each constituent unit as well as the nation as a whole is promoted'.<sup>6</sup>

Various linguistic states have been created between 1956 and 1995. e.g. Kerala (Malayam language), Karnataka (Kannada language), Tamil Nadu, (linguistically homogeneous Tamil speaking area) in Dravidian India. In Northern and Central India are Madhya Pradesh (Hindi language), Rajasthan (Hindi, Rajasthani language) U.P. (Hindi language), Bihar (Hindi), West Bengal (Bengali), Assam (Assamese), Orissa (Oriya language), Jammu & Kashmir (Kashmiri language also Punjabi). In 1960, Bombay was partitioned into Marathi speaking Maharashtra and Gujarati speaking Gujarati. In

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<sup>6</sup>. Report of the SRC, 1955 Manager of Publications, Delhi, pp.1.

1966, Punjab was divided into Punjabi speaking Punjabi and Hindi speaking Haryana. In 1963, Nagaland was formed, but this had nothing to do with linguistics, but just to satisfy the aspirations of tribal people in North-East.<sup>7</sup> In 1972, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura were created on the basis of satisfying people's welfare aspirations.

### **The Case of the Nepali Language : Its Origin and Development**

Nepali is known by different nomenclatures, Khas Kura, Parbatya Pahari and Gorkhali. It is said that it is known as Khas Kura because it was the language of a particular community living in North-Western parts of India namely the Khasas (a warrior race), who were an Aryan speaking tribe. Perhaps it was during the earliest centuries of the Christian era, that they made their entry into Central Nepal, where lived the Magars and Gurungs.

The living together of Aryan Khasas and the Tibeto-Burman

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<sup>7</sup>. Robert. D.King, op.cit., pp.121.

Magars and Gurungs resulted in a slow and gradual process of acculturation. The Khasas also spread themselves to the Kirati and Limbuan territories in the East of Nepal. The close proximity of various tribes resulted in the absorption of the Khasa language, an Indo Aryan language, having its origins in Sanskrit, by the Tibeto - Burman tribes, as the various dialects were virtually unintelligible to each other. Amongst the Magars themselves, there were about three different dialects and the Rais had about ten. So it was only natural for them to adopt the Khas language, about which. Brain M. Hodgson, one of the eminent Oriental philologist and ethnologist writes 'the language is terse, simple, sufficiently copious in words and very characteristic of the unlettered and energetic race of the soldiers and statesman who made it what it is'.<sup>8</sup>

The consolidation of the Kingdom of Nepal, under the mighty Gorkha King, Prithivinarayan Shah, also resulted in the adoption of the Khas language, being simple and having a large vocabulary as

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<sup>8</sup>. Quoted in Gokul Sinha, A Treatise on Nepali Language, Uttaranchal Prakashan, Darjeeling, February, 1978, pp.21.

the court language but was now known as the Gorkha language. The ruling House however belonged to the Rajput clan of India and 'not only did the Khasas and Rajputs share fighting traditions, but even their languages had many affinities, both being Sanskrit in origin.'<sup>9</sup> The language was mixed with the Khas language, which had already been mixed with the Magar and Gurung languages and took a new form. The migration of many people, having their origins in Nepal, to Darjeeling and Sikkim and the assimilation of with the various sub-communities there, gave it yet another shape. But, whereas in Nepal, it became the National language, Nepali, in Darjeeling and Sikkim became the 'jatiya bhasa', the language of a sub-nationality in the Indian nation which was a plethora of so many languages.

The origin of the Nepali language can be traced to the Indian soil. It was J.A. Ayton who published 'A Grammar of the Nepali language' from Fort William (Calcutta) in 1816. Amazuddi, an Italian Philosopher (Rome, 1771), records Nepali as one of the vernaculars

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<sup>9</sup>. Lal Bahadur Basnet, Nepalese or Gorkhas? A Pamphlet. Sikkim - Nepalese Unity , Namchi, Sikkim. Nov. 1997, pp.9.

prevalent in India. The Serampore Missionaries published the Nepali Bible in 1822. The first Missionary of Serampore, Rev. William Carey came to India in 1793. He along with Rev. Joshua Marshman and W. Ward in 1816 had given a detailed report of the languages in India and mentions thirty-two languages, of which Nepali is one.

In 1887, Rev. Turnbull had brought out his, 'Nepali Grammar' 'English - Nepali and Nepali- English Vocabulary'. Rev. Ganga Prasad Pradhan, one of the first Christian converts under the influence of William Mcfarlane, of the Scottish Missionary, who had come to Darjeeling in 1869 has also worked ardently for the cause of the Nepali language. His 'Gorkha Khabar Kagat'<sup>10</sup> (the first Nepali periodical in Darjeeling in 1901 and continued till 1932), even though its main intention was to spread Christianity had contributed to the growth of socio-political consciousness among the Nepalis in India. He also deserves a rightful place for contribution to the growth of Nepali language. He published the 1st and 2nd text books for school

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<sup>10</sup>. Historical Importance of Gorkha Khabar Kagat'- Even preceded the publication of the prestigious 'Gorkha Patra' by a few months.



children, some short stories and the book of Proverbs in the Nepali language. He also translated the Bible into Nepali, which was published in 1914.

Kumar Pradhan, in his work 'Pahilo Pahar', writes 'the language, Ganga Prasad Pradhan has used, is the language spoken in Darjeeling. When he wrote, perhaps, there was no grammatical rules and that is why, he wrote in the way, he spoke the language'.<sup>11</sup> This was in response to the criticism, evoked earlier regarding the grammatical inconsistencies about the language used by Ganga Prasad Pradhan.

1908 saw the publication of the journal, 'Madhavi' by Ram Mani Acharya Diksit, from Benaras. It was through this, that the vastness of Nepali literature was made known, to the intellectuals of Nepal and India.

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<sup>11</sup>. Kumar Pradhan, Pahilo Pahar (in Nepali) Shyam Publishers, Darjeeling. 1982, pp.67.

A whole lot of magazines and journals started after this. From Calcutta, there was 'Gorkha Sathi' (1907), whose main aim, was to foster a love for their country amongst the Nepalis, from Kurseong, there was 'Chandrika' (1917-18), 'Chandra' (1914) 'Gorkhali' (1916-1917) from Benaras. From Kalimpong - 'Adarsa', (1930) 'Nebula' (1935-36) (Whose main intention was to highlight the problems of the Neplais, Bhutias and Lepchas), 'Gorkha', (1945-55) and others. From Darjeeling, 'Nepali Sahitya Sammelan Patrika' (1932-1937), 'Khoji' (1940), 'Sathi' (1949), 'Bharati' (1949-58) and many others were circulated, which greatly aroused the literary consciousness amongst the Nepalis. In Dehradun, Thakur Chandan Singh had established the Gorkha League in 1921. Two Nepali Journals were published from here, namely 'Gorkha Samsar' (1926) and 'Tarun Gorkha' (1928), which tried to bring social reforms.

The Gorkha League, as a political body, inspired the Nepalis all over India, to stand up and fight for their rights. It wanted to lay emphasis on the fact, that they are Nepalis, an ethnic community of India, having Nepali as their mother tongue, having its own literary

culture and arts and have their past, present and future in India.

In 1931, Professor Ralph. L. Turner another renowned linguist, published 'A Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language'. In this book, Turner has shown about five thousand words, having its origin in Sanskrit and how it was gradually formed into the words of the Nepali language.<sup>12</sup>

An institution in himself, Dr. Parasmani Pradhan (1898-1986), has worked devoutly for the cause of the Nepali language. His many works include text books for school children, poems, novels, stories, dramas, journals and Nepali Grammar books. These include, 'Nepali Grammar' (1920), 'Nepali Hamro Matri Bhasa' (1953), (Nepali our Mother Tongue), Nepali Muhawara (1954), 'Nepali Rachna Bharati' (1956), 'Nepali Chalti Ukhan (1956) (Nepali Proverbs)', Nepali Byakran Ko Choto Itihas', (1968) (A short History of Nepali

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<sup>12</sup>. Quoted in Radha Krishna Sharma, Nepali Bhasa Ko Utpati in All India Nepali Bhasa Sammellan Document. Bhasa Manyata Prishtabhumi Sandharva ; Nepali Bhasa, Gangtok. 1990, pp.11.

Grammar), 'Bhasa Prawesh Nepali Grammar', 'Nepali Bhasa ko Utpatti Ra Bikash' 1961 (The Origin and Development of Nepali Language), 'Nepali Sahitya Ko Sao Akshar' (1969) (The Hundred Alphabets of Nepali Literature), English - Nepali, Nepali-English Dictionary. and Nepali-Nepali-english Dictionary. He has been awarded various honararies including Tribhuvan Purashkar (Nepal), Madan Purashkar, D.Litt title from North Bengal University and Abinandan Grantha (1984-85) from Sikkim. He greatly played a very important role, regarding the standardization of the Nepali language and later made great efforts to obtain official recognition of Nepali, as a major literary language from the Government of India.

Suryabikram Jyawali, another Nepali literary activist , also greatly contributed to the development of the Nepali language. He was the publisher of the weekly, 'Gorkhali' from Beneras and like 'Chandra', its predecessor, saw in the development of language, an all round development in social, economic and political spheres. Jyawali, through his writings, wanted to arouse nationalist consciousness amongst the Nepalis in India. This was also reflected in the patriotic

writings of another literary intellect, Dharnidhar Koirala, who wrote in 'Udbodhan' (Awakening) :

Jaga jaga aba jagana jaga, laga unnati  
vishe aba laga

Ghora nida abata parityaga, bho bhayo  
ati sutyau aba jaga

Awake awake, now you wake,  
waking up the path of progress take

Deep slumber now forsake  
its enough you slept long,  
now awake<sup>13</sup>

The great efforts of the Trio-Suryabikram Jyawali, Dharnidhar Koirala and Parasmani Pradhan, 'Su-Dha-Pa' as they were known , resulted in the formation of the literary association, 'Nepali Sahitya

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<sup>13</sup>. Kumar Pradhan, A History of Nepali Literature, Sahitya Akademi, Delhi. 1984, pp.77.

Sammellan' in 1924 in Darjeeling. The institution functions till today and has been working arduously for the Nepali language development. Its journal is still being published under the name, 'Diyalo' or 'lamp'.

Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, a colossal figure in linguistics, and who had also been the President of Sahitya Academy, has always supported the Nepali language. In a pamphlet, published in London, 1942, 'Languages and Linguistic Problem of India', he has recognised Nepali as one of the 15 major literary languages in India.

The origin of the Nepali language was indeed on Indian soil, but however, it took different forms in different places. So it becomes quite difficult to assume, which is the standard Nepali language. The Nepali language spoken in Darjeeling and Sikkim has a sweetness of its own, quite different from the ones spoken in Nepal, where there has been more infiltration of words from Sanskrit or the language spoken by the Nepalis of Dehradun and Bakshu, who till today, have to study the regional language of the area. Thus, colloquial influences

are seen in the Nepali language.

### **Role of Christian Missionaries in Imparting Education :**

Christian Missionaries have played a fair role in imparting education to the backward people in the hills. Thus, also bringing in the political, social and economic consciousness. Darjeeling, the summer Capital of the Britishers, was steadily growing in importance. Christian Missionaries flocked to this region and it soon became the centre of the Christian faith. Rev. William Start (an English clergyman) and C.G.Niebel (a German missionary) had also started learning the Nepali language, so as to make their task of proselytising easier and also to give them elementary education in their own native language.

Some Lepcha primers were prepared and a primary school was also opened. But till then, education was imparted through the Hindi language.

1869 - was a very important year for the history of Darjeeling because it marked the arrival of William Mcfarlane of the Scottish Mission, who was a pioneer in the field of education. It was because of his efforts that, many primary schools were opened. By 1872-73, there were 25 schools, including the ones in Dhotre, Chungthung, Gel, Mongpoo and Sitang Tea Estates.<sup>14</sup> In 1907, there were 70 primary schools and 2,420 boys and 300 girls were getting education.<sup>15</sup>

In about 1944, there were 6 High Schools, and 12 middle English schools for boys and 4 high schools and 4 middle English Schools for girls.

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<sup>14</sup>. Kumar Pradhan, 1987, op.cit, pp.25.

<sup>15</sup>. Rahul Sanskritayan, Darjeeling Parichai, Manik Pustak Bhawan, Calcutta. 1950, pp.132.



**Table 4 :**

	Total	Hill Boys	Hill Girls
Boys High School	2122	1297	0
Boys Middle School	1629	1123	72
Girls High School	1266	28	733
Girls Middle School	570	92	245

**Note :** Year 31st March, 1944.

**Source :** Rahul Sanskritayan, Darjeeling Parichai, Manik Pustak Bhawan, Calcutta. 1950, pp.134.

The contribution of Christian Missionaries in imparting education to the ignorant people was immense but, the work of the Scottish Mission was unparalleled. Mcfarlane worked with great zeal

and enthusiasm, but he believed in giving education through the Hindi language partly because he had studied the language and also because he had seen the affinity between Hindi and Nepali. His sister, Miss Mcfarlane has also played a leading role to spread education amongst the females in the hills. In spite of the fact, that there were many obstacles like difference in language, customs, mentalities, poor socio-economic conditions in the hills and parent's interest in sending their children to work in tea gardens, to earn a few rupees and rough hilly terrain, with scattered population, making establishment of schools difficult. Yet there was the spread of education amongst them and they became conscious of their ethnolinguistic identity as Nepalis.

#### **The Demand to Make Nepali as a Medium of Instruction :**

As was mentioned in the beginning of this Chapter, that the medium of instruction determines which group can get access to the best jobs and can also give them a sense of security, so also the Nepalis living in the hills wanted Nepali to be the medium of

instruction. Dr. Parasmani Pradhan's name comes first in this regard, who had also been made the first Nepali sub-Inspector of schools. Dharnidhar Koirala and Suryabikram Jyawali's contribution too, cannot be overlooked. The Nepali Sahitya Sammellan started the arduous task of publishing text books in Nepali.

There were some foreigners who supported the cause like Rev. W.S. Sutherland of S.U.M.I.,(Scottish University Mission Institute) Kalimpong and Percival Griffith who had come as a Sub-Divisional Officer of Kalimpong in 1926, under whose able guidance, Nepali text-books were written, revised and published. But there were others among them, who still favoured Hindi as the medium of instruction like father Oog of S.U.M.I., a Catholic father, Father Truan and others. The demand to make Nepali as the medium of instruction was also opposed by the Lepchas and Bhotiyas, who had their own language and script. The Lepchas were represented by Dr. Yen Singh Sitling and the Bhutias by S.W.Ladenla. They feared that since the Nepalis had already taken much of their lands, they would also impose on them their Nepali language. But the Nepali leaders had

argued that, majority of the population, including Lepchas speak Nepali and there is no reason why Nepali cannot be made the medium of instruction. Hari Prasad Pradhan, another pioneer in support of Nepali language, is noted to have quoted, 'what was decided in London in Imperial Education Conference on 21st - 30th June 1927, Primary Education should be given in one's mother tongue. The District's lingua franca is Nepali. So education should be in Nepali'.<sup>16</sup>

Finally (in 1935, the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department issued the following order :

- 1) Nepali should be recognised as one of the vernaculars for teaching and examination to all Primary schools in the District of Darjeeling, provided that the majority of the pupils in the schools concerned are Nepalese.
- 2) Non-Nepalese should not be compelled to learn Nepali.
- 3) Primary Examinations should be conducted in Nepali and

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<sup>16</sup>. Quoted in Shiva Pradhan, Dr. Parasmani Abhinandan Grantha Parishistank, Gangtok Prakashan, Sikkim. 1985, pp.105.

Hindi.)

By 1924, Nepali or the Khas Kura was already taught as a vernacular subject till Bachelor of Arts level and had got recognition by the Calcutta University. On 30th July, 1929, it was mainly because of the efforts of Rai Saheb Hari Prasad Pradhan, Suryabikram Jyawali, Dharnidhar Koirala and Parasmani Pradhan, that they could ask the Bengal Government to change the name from Nepali Pahariya or Khaskura to simply Nepali. On 30th May, 1932, Calcutta University accepted 'Nepali' from 'Parbatye'.

The demand for the inclusion of Nepali language in the middle schools which according to the order taken in 1935, was to be taken after three years, was not very difficult because by that time, Education Department's District Inspector of schools was a Nepali.

To make Nepali as the medium of instruction till the Matriculation stage was a great necessity which was finally accepted in 1957. It is a thing of pride to say that today, Nepali as a

vernacular subject is recognised by the Central Board of Secondary Examinations, Delhi, Indian Certificate of Secondary Examinations, Delhi, Indian School Certificate Examination Delhi, West Bengal Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary, Boards of Secondary Education of Guwahati, Chandigarh and Meghalaya. It is taught as an Honours subject, Post Graduate and Doctorate subject in North Bengal University and Benaras Hindu University.

#### **Official Recognition of the Nepali Language :**

The demands to make Nepali as the official language in Darjeeling was only natural, because it would give them a greater sense of security-socially, politically and economically. It can be said that, it had more an economic connotation against the Bengalis and other plainsmen and the official recognition of Nepali at the state level, would open up more economic and educational opportunities for the Nepalis.

The movement became more intense after the Indian

Independence, probably because they wanted also to establish their strong identity as Indians. Moreover, the Nepalis of Darjeeling have always been more politically and socially conscious than Nepalis elsewhere. But however had been made to suffer under the 'internal colonialism' of the Bengal Government.

Their aspirations were further boosted up after the state Reorganization Commission of 1953. The Commission Report, published in 1955, saying that, 'if 70% or more of the total population of a district consists of a group which is a minority in the state as a whole, the language of the minority group and not the state language, should be the official language in the district'.

Dr. B.C.Roy, the Congress Chief Minister of West Bengal, on 23rd February, 1961, however laid down that the Nepali population does not confer to the required percentage laid down by the State Reorganisation Commission, saying that the number of people speaking the Nepali language in the hill districts, according to 1951 census is only 19.98%. He further said that if only Darjeeling, Kurseong and

Kalimpong are taken, excluding Siliguri, percentage is 25.32% only. It was a great disillusionment on the part of the Chief Minister because in the 1941 census, the Nepali speaking population was given as 2,54,708 or 67.6%. But in 1951, the Census reported only 88,958 as Nepali speaking. 'May be in the control of population, the Nepalis have succeeded than any other community',<sup>17</sup> says Bir Bikram Gurung with a hint of sarcasm.

N.B. Gurung, the Deputy Minister, Labour Department, had replied on 27th February 1961, that the 1951 Census Report was erroneous. The various Nepali sub-communities like Newars, Tamangs, Rais, Limbus, and others were categorised differently but in actual fact, they can be put under the category of Nepalis. In the three sub-divisions, Nepalis constitute about 85% of the population. Theodore Manaen, Congress M.P. from Darjeeling said, 'on what data did the Commissioner base his calculation that the Nepalis form only 25% of the population of the Darjeeling District? Is this the product

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<sup>17</sup>. Bir Bikram Gurung, Gorkha League Dekhi Gorkhaland Samma : Beishalu Publishers 1987, pp.46.



of his distorted imagination or did he base his calculation on the information of some irresponsible officer'.<sup>18</sup>

The making of Nepali as an official language in the District contained the policy of national integration of the Nepalis living there. But however, since it was not given importance by the ruling party - the Congress in Bengal, various opposition parties made it their main propaganda to get the support of the votes. Jyoti Basu, who was then the leader of the opposition had said 'If you talk of justice, then as far as Nepali people in Darjeeling are concerned, power should be given to them to administer their own affairs in their own language, to see that their education expands, to see that their economy not only expands but, in order that the Nepali people who are inhabitants there may advance'.<sup>19</sup>

There were pressures from all sides on the Bengal Government.

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<sup>18</sup>. N.B.Gurung, Darjeeling, Darjeeling Dist. Printing Society, Ltd. Kalimpong, 1972, pp.60.

<sup>19</sup>. Quoted in N.B.Gurung, Ibid., pp.26.

for the official recognition of the Nepali language. The procession taken out on 21st May, 1961 was a memorable one, under the leadership of Indra Bahadur Rai and Ganeshlal Subba (an eminent Communist Leader). Various parties like All India Gorkha League, Congress, Socialist Parties and students joined in it giving support to the demand. Finally on 25th December 1961, the West Bengal Official Language Act was passed, recognising Nepali and Bengali as the official languages in the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling namely Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong and elsewhere, the Bengali language.

It may also be mentioned here that, since the majority population in Sikkim consisted of the Nepalis - 75%, (25% -Lepchas and Bhutias) and since it was the lingua franca there, it was accepted as the official language in 1978.

## **Demand for Constitutional Recognition of the Nepali Language :**

The Nepalis in India are found in various regions like Himachal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura but mostly concentrated in Sikkim and Darjeeling District of West Bengal. It has been the aspiration of the 10 million Nepalis living in India to have their language recognised in the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution as a very important prerequisite for the establishment of their Indian identity. Their identity as Nepalis of India was somewhat not distinct but blurred because of the existence of the independent kingdom of Nepal - with similarity in language, traditions and culture.

The language movement for the Constitutional recognition started in 1950's itself, when the editor of Jagrati Gorkha, Dehradun, Ananda Singh Thapa wrote to the then President, Rajendra Prasad, voicing the demand. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, the noted linguist, had always supported the cause of the Nepali language and was

optimistic of the inclusion of Nepali and the Sindhi language in the VIIIth Schedule. Moreover, it seems that the main objective of Article 351 is to bring about the growth and development of the Hindi language but when the various scripts are examined, Nepali and Marathi languages are the only two languages having similarity with the Hindi language. But however it was a rude shock for the Nepalis living in India for centuries, not to have their language recognized in the Constitution, when it finally came into force on 26th January, 1950.

While contemplating the fact, it seems that the Indian Government had a prejudice against the Nepalis, whom the Britishers knew as 'Gorkhas', (irrespective of the fact, whether they came from the Gorkha Kingdom of Nepal or not, to be recruited in the British army). It is a fact that the Nepalis or Gorkhas were used as 'mercenary soldiers' to fight for the Britishers, not only against India but against other countries in South Asia, South Eastern Asia, fighting against imperialism and elsewhere. But it can only be said that, they were carrying out their duties as loyal, hardworking and

courageous soldiers, armed with their mighty Khukuri.

But at the same time, it cannot be denied that many of them took part in the freedom struggle against the Britishers. As many as 50,000 Gorkhalis were enlisted in Subhash Chandra Bose's 'Azad Hind Fauj', amongst whom, the names of Lt. Col. Durga Malla, Capt. Dal Bahadur Thapa comes to mind, (both faced the guillotine in the end), Major Puransingh Khawas, Capt. Gambhir Singh Thakuri, Platoon Commander Babulal Pradhan, Capt. Nar Bahadur Thapa and many others.

There were many Gorkhas, who genuinely fought for their motherland India, amongst whom we can name Dal Bahadur Giri, Pritiman Singh Lama, Raisaheb Pratap Singh, Harish Chettri, Bhakta Bir Lama and many others. All the above points really point out to the fact that, the Nepalis considered India as their 'motherland'. They wanted to nurture her and to protect her and also to be given the identity as Indians.

The inclusion of the Sindhi language in the VIIIth Schedule in 1967, further harped on their enthusiasm for the inclusion of their language. At the end of 1967, Nepali Bhasa Sangarsh Samity was formed under Presidentship of Guman Singh Chamling and Secretary Dharma Shamsher Basnet. In 1969, under Prem Sherpa and Haren Allay, Nepali Bhasa Prayog Gara Abiyan Samiti was formed. Both associations fought for the same cause.

But however, it was with the All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti, (AINBS) which was established on 31st January, 1972, that gave it an all India character, (under Presidentship of Khadga Bahadur Singh and Secretary, Prem Kumar Allay). The Samiti's first meeting with the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi was on April 1st, 1972. Thereafter, meetings with her were held on 23-29th October, 1972 and 21st November, 1975. A ray of hope for inclusion of Nepali was shown by the Congress Prime Minister.

When the Janata government was formed in 1977, under Morarji Desai, AINBS led a delegation and laid forth their

memoranda on 29th September, 1977 which made the following points :

1. The non-inclusion of Nepali in the VIIIth Schedule has created a sense of deprivation amongst the Nepalis and the Nepalis are made to suffer from a sense of insecurity. Many priveleges accruing from the Constitutional recognition of Nepali will help the development of a linguistic minority and will go a long way to bring about a deep emotional integration in our nation.
2. The demand is supported by various political and cultural leaders.
3. Nepali already enjoys the status of an official language in West Bengal and is spoken as the mother tongue by the majority in Sikkim.

The Left Front Government had always lent good support for the Nepali language cause. The Bengal State Legislative Assembly had also passed a resolution to that effect on 2nd July, 1977.

The formation of Sikkim, from protectorate state to the 22nd state of India in 1975, with Nepali as the lingua franca, further boosted up the aspirations of the Nepalis living in India. The Sikkim Vidhan Sabha also passed a resolution on 11th October, 1977, supporting the same cause. The Tripura and Himachal Government passed unanimous resolution to accept the Nepali language on June 28, 1978 and September 13, 1991, respectively.

The sentiments of the Nepali people were greatly hurt when on 29th May 1979, the Janata Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, had the audacity to call the Nepali language a foreign language. Such a statement from the respected seat of the Prime Minister inflamed the Nepalis and thus they even observed 'Black-day' in protest. The Nepali language, having its origin in India, recognized by noted linguists of both India and abroad, recognized as one of the 22 modern, Indian languages by the Sahitya Academy indeed received a cultural shock.

In the Constitution, it has been written that, 'Demand based on



language and culture will be accommodated but the demands which are explicitly based on religious differences will not be accepted'.<sup>20</sup> The Nepalis were making a demand on the basis of language, but however in spite of various efforts by social, cultural and political organisations, it can be assumed that the language movement did not succeed mainly because it was supported by the Communist Government in West Bengal, against which was the Central Government (The Ruling Congress).

The language movement received a back seat during the period of the 80's mainly because of the volatile political atmosphere in the Darjeeling Hills, when the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) under the charismatic leadership of Mr. Subhas Ghisingh, put aside the language issue in favour for a separate state of Gorkhaland. (More of this will be discussed in the next Chapter).

But the language movement was carried on unabated by the

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<sup>20</sup>. Paul Brass, Language Religion & Politics in North India, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, Delhi. 1975. pp.16-19.

Sikkimese Nepalis under their Nepali Chief Minister, Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari. An organisation was also formed under his leadership, 'Bharatiya Nepali Rashtriya Parishad' in June, 1990. It is on the issue of Nepali language inclusion that, as many as nineteen Private Member's Bills have been passed. But it was the Bill passed by the Sikkim Sangram Parishad M.P., Mrs Dil Kumari Bhandari on February 28th, 1992, that finally led to the inclusion of Nepali in the VIIIth Schedule on 31st August, 1992 together with Manipuri and Konkani and was accorded its rightful place, according to the 71st Amendment.

The Constitutional recognition of the Nepali language has armed the Nepali speaking population to give various examinations conducted by the Centre and States in their own language, thus opening up more employment opportunities. Nepali can be spoken in the apex bodies like the Parliament, the Language Commission has to submit its various reports in the languages mentioned in the VIIIth Schedule including Nepali and it has helped the Nepalis of India to carve out their distinct identity as Indians.

The inclusion of Nepali in the VIIIth Schedule has given the Nepalis in India, a moral and psychological boost of being thoroughly accepted as citizens of India. 'It has removed all kinds of suspicions that lingered around us regarding our Indian identity.'<sup>21</sup>

### **Controversy between 'Nepali' and 'Gorkhali'**

The controversy between 'Nepali' and 'Gorkhali' seems to be mainly because of the search of the Nepalis settled in India, for an appropriate term, which will denote their 'Indianess' and will clearly distinguish them from the Nepalis of Nepal. In his letter, submitted to the Prime Minister, Mr. Narsimha Rao, on 26th January, 1991, Mr Subhas Ghisingh had said, that the recognition of Nepali, instead of Gorkhali by the West Bengal Act of 1961, not only has deprived the Gorkhas of their right over their mother tongue, but has also contributed to the stabilization of the greater Nepal Movement. He considered Nepali as a foreign language and all Nepalis as foreigners and instead, prefers to call them 'Gorkhas' and their language,

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<sup>21</sup>. N. B. Bhandari, in an interview to Himalaya Today, September 1992 - February . 1993.

'Gorkhali'. he also dubbed those who supported 'Nepali' as foreigners and threatened to evict them.

Those who favour the term 'Gorkha' lay down that 'Nepali' is a recently new term when compared to 'Gorkha'. It was the Britishers who first used the term 'Nepal' and 'Nepali' in the 1920's. It was the Nepali Sahitya Sammellan, (Nepali Literary Association) Darjeeling, which was the first institution to use the word 'Nepali' in 1924. It was in the 1930's only that 'Nepal' for the whole kingdom and 'Nepali' for its principal language was officially adopted. In 1930, the word Gorkha was replaced with Nepali.<sup>22</sup>

Prof. L.K.Sharma, a strong protagonist of 'Gorkha' term, said that Nepali is already a national language of Nepal and hence cannot be the language of those Nepalis settled in india. He further clarified his point by saying that even though Bengali and Urdu are recognized as national languages of Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively, the nationalities of the people there are Bangladeshis

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<sup>22</sup>. M.J.Hutt, Being Nepali without Nepal : Reflections on a South Asian Diaspora in David. N. Gellner, et al. (ed.), Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu kingdom - The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal, Harwood Academic Publishers, Netherlands. 1997. pp.114.

and not Bengalis and Pakistanis respectively. In order to distinguish the people of Nepali origin settled in India must be called Gorkhas.<sup>23</sup> Moreover they also show disdain over the term 'Bharati Nepali' saying that people cannot be citizens of both Bharat and Nepal.

But the pro-Nepali group does not agree to the stance of the pro-Gorkha group. Nepali Bhasa Samiti and Ten Party Front, comprising of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League, the Gorkha Democratic Front, Communist Party of India etc. supported the cause of the Nepali language.<sup>24</sup> They expressed the view that, it was the Nepali language which was introduced as a vernacular subject by the Allahabad University in 1911 and by Calcutta University in 1921. All schools and colleges in Sikkim, Darjeeling, Dooars and many such institutions in the North East and Northern regions have Nepali as their medium of instruction. They also lay down that it is Nepali as a subject is

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<sup>23</sup>. Interview with Prof. L.K.Sharma, Nepali Department, North Bengal University, 27th February. 1999.

<sup>24</sup>. B.B.Kumar, Small States Syndrome in India, Ashok Kumar Mittal Concept Publishing Company, Delhi. 1998, pp.93.

offered in the undergraduate and post graduate courses.

Mr. C.K. Shreshta, a renowned dramatist and journalist in the Hills, said he would rather prefer to call himself a Nepali, than a Gorkha. He just believes in 'Gorkhaism' it is within me, he said. He further clarified his point by saying that, there is Nepali literature, culture, music, but no such thing as Gorkha literature, music or culture. By 'Gorkha' we come to understand a Gorkha hat, a Gorkha rifle, a Gorkha soldier, or may be bravery. Nepalis have won fame world wide as the 'Brave Gorkha', armed with their mighty 'Khukuri' and their clarion call of 'Aayo Gorkha' (Here come the Gorkhas) often causes a tremor to the enemies. He believes, he said, that Gorkha is only a small part of the broader Nepali perspective.<sup>25</sup>

Their point was further strengthened by saying that 'various Sahitya Academy awardees in Nepali literature, painters, scholars, scientists, professionals sports persons of repute from Darjeeling, have talked about non-existence of Gorkha Bhasa.<sup>26</sup> It was further

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<sup>25</sup>. Interview with Mr. C.K.Shreshta, Kalimpong 12th February 1999.

<sup>26</sup>. Why Nepali? A Case for the Recognition of Nepali Language in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution, A Document, issued by Bharatiya Nepali Rashtriya Parishad,

said that in India, the term 'Gorkha' is used to denote the ethnolinguistic group which speak Nepali language.<sup>27</sup> But on the contrary, the Gorkha protagonists led by Ghisingh had said that Nepali is a nationality, whereas Gorkha is the name of a race or community.

Mrs. Dil Kumari Bhandari, a strong Pro-Nepali supporter said, 'Gorkha is also related to British colonialism, I am opposed to describing my mother tongue as Nepali.'<sup>28</sup> It was also laid down that the Nepali language would mean the recognition of a language as a semiotic system in its wholeness and not simply of some dialectic part there of<sup>29</sup>

Both the pro-Gorkha and pro-Nepali groups seem justified in their own ways. In the field work report, question asked was, 'Why was there a controversy between 'Nepali' and 'Gorkhali'? 19.33% said that cause was genuine (There was need to call the Nepalis of India- 'Gorkhas' and their language, 'Gorkhali') 75.33% felt it was just the

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Gangtok August 1992. pp.6.

<sup>27</sup>. Ibid, pp.20.

<sup>28</sup>. Sikkim Express, 24th May, 1992.

<sup>29</sup>. Sailesh Shreshta, (Special Supplement) - Sikkim Express, 26 April, 1995, pp.xv.

pressure tactics of the various parties (here especially meant the GNLF). It also seemed to be an ego clash between the GNLF President, Mr. Subhash Ghisingh and Sikkim Sangram Parishad, former Chief Minister of Sikkim, Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari as, who would be the pioneer of the ten million Nepalis of India. Some of them also praised the Centre for including 'Nepali' in the VIIIth Schedule, instead of Gorkhali because it justified the claims of all the Nepalis living in various parts of India, instead of only satisfying the wants of the Nepalis living in the Darjeeling Hills.

But however, the controversy between 'Gorkhali' and 'Nepali' language seems no longer to exist after the inclusion of Nepali in the VIIIth Schedule and the demand seems to be focussed on the creation of 'Gorkhaland'. Even though some of them still prefer to be called only either as a 'Gorkha' or 'Nepali'.

It can be concluded by saying that, in the terminological sense, it was basically a pressure tactic of the party concerned, when the time had come to give recognition to the long fought battle of the Nepali language issue. Naturally, when other leaders like Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari and Mrs. D.K. Bhandari were gaining limelight,



Ghisingh did not want his share of cake to be eaten by the others - therefore, the issue of the Gorkha language. But contextually, it was a genuine problem. Even long time Nepali residents in Assam and Meghalaya were being evicted, not distinguishing them from the hundreds of other Nepalis who had come to India from Nepal, to eke out a living.

So, it seemed necessary to distinguish the Nepali people of Nepal and India and hence the name of 'Gorkha', so as to give a clear identity to the latter. What Lal Bahadur Basnet suggests is 'let us call ourselves Gorkhas, and our language is Nepali'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>. L.B.Basnet, op.cit., No.9.pp.23.

## Chapter IV

### Nepali Language Identity : Political Dimensions. Part I

#### Pre-Gorkhaland Agitation

Darjeeling, strategically located surrounded by Nepal on one side and Sikkim and Bhutan on the other side, provided a fatal attraction to the British imperialist designs. It was mainly to isolate the people of the hills from the freedom movement, going on in the plains, that the status of Darjeeling had been under constant change from non-regulated area from 1870 onwards, scheduled district from 1874, from 1919 a backward tract and finally, into a partially excluded area till India achieved independence in 1947, after which it became a general district of Bengal.

But the spread of education amongst the people had brought about socio-political consciousness of some kind. The Nepali speaking people, having derived the maximum benefits of education, soon produced an English educated elite and became conscious of their

ethno linguistic identity as 'Nepalis'.

### **The Apprehensions of the Nepalis of Darjeeling :**

The ethnic demand of the Nepalis for a separate administrative set up can be considered as the oldest of its kind in India. In 1907 itself, a memorandum had been submitted for such a demand but it was only the beginning. In 1917, an eight member delegation, consisting of S.W.Ladenla, Yen Singh Sitling, K.B. Chettri and others, submitted a memorandum to the then Secretary of State for India and Lord Chelmsford asking for a separate arrangement for Darjeeling District and a portion of Jalpaiguri District, which was annexed from Bhutan in 1865. They even suggested the formation of North-East Frontier Province 'to include in addition to this district, the Assam Dooars and the hill territories, which lie in the East of Bhutan whose people have affinities with our people'.<sup>1</sup>

They also laid that, historically, religiously and linguistically,

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<sup>1</sup>. Nar Bahadur Gurung, op.cit., pp.8.

'we have no alliance with the rest of Bengal'.<sup>2</sup> What can be seen, is that the hill people - the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis, very much wanted to form their identity, as distinct from the plainsmen)

In 1919, the Darjeeling Planters Association, European Association and the Hillmen's Association, in the wake of Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, at a joint meeting in Darjeeling in March, 1920, also asked for the creation of a separate administrative unit.)

Meanwhile, Gandhi's Non Cooperation Movement had also reached the hills and a section of the people of the hills were involved in the freedom movement, under the leadership of Dal Bahadur Giri. [D.B.Giri was one of the bravest Gorkhas who fought for the independence of India. Gandhiji had also paid homage to the young freedom fighter who died when 36 years old, saying he was a cultured Gorkha and was doing good work among the Gorkhas.] of Darjeeling,

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<sup>2</sup>. Why Gorkhaland, A Pranta Parishad Document. Published on the Occassion of the 6th Annual Conference of the Pranta Parishad, Ajambari Press, Topkhana, Kalimpong 8th August, 1986, pp.52.

Jangbir Sapkota of Kalimpong and Prithiman Lama of Kurseong. But since the Britishers did not want the hills people to get involved in the freedom movement and the influence of the Indian National Congress, were trying desperately to promote the growth of a separatist tendency amongst the gullible people of the hills. It can also be said that the Britishers did not accept their demand for autonomy because they were afraid of giving power, in a specific land area on the border of Nepal.

In 1934, the Hillmen's Association submitted another memorandum to Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India and Sir John Anderson, the Governor of Bengal, which reads thus, 'that your memorialists represent the hill people of the district of Darjeeling in the Province of Bengal consisting of Gorkhas, Bhutias and Lepchas, who form the majority of the population of the district and are its original inhabitants'.<sup>3</sup> The sequence also shows that by this time, the Gurkhas had arisen to the political and numerical predominance in the district. From the memoranda, it can be seen

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<sup>3</sup>. Ibid., pp.57.

that the people in the hills were not happy under Bengal domination. The Bengalis, being better qualified educationally and politically, often showed an air of superiority and it cannot be ignored that they were a ruling race against the minority Nepali population in the province. The local services in the hills may also be swamped by the people from the plains for want of adequate representation of the hill people in legislatures and administration in the district',<sup>4</sup> also shows the antipathy of the hill people against the plainsmen and their sense of insecurity. They further said, 'that, so far the Gurkhas have been able to evolve on their own lines of civilization under the protection of the British Government, but unless some special reservations are made for the Gurkhas in the new Constitution it would be extremely difficult for them to preserve their social solidarity.. That as the new Constitution for India is under consideration of the Parliament, the Gurkhas...suggest that the district of Darjeeling, where the Gurkha population predominate, should be excluded from Bengal and be treated as an independent administrative unit with the Deputy

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<sup>4</sup>. Nagendra. Gorkha, 'Gorkhaland Andolan - The Indefinite Struggle for Identity of the Gorkhas' - A Compilation of Memorandum Statements and Correspondences.

Commissioner as an Administrator vested with much more powers<sup>5</sup>

In 1934, Hill People's Social Union was formed, mainly to bring about fraternity between the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis. Its mouth-piece was its journal, Ne-bu-la (Ne for Nepalis, bu - Bhutias and la for Lepchas). S.W. Ladenla's ambition to be elected as the representative of the Hills in the Provincial Legislature also withered away when he died in 1936. In the elections which were held later, Dambar Singh Gurung became victorious and became the first Nepali legislator in the Bengal Assembly and fought for the cause of the Nepalis alone. On 11th December, 1938, Hari Prasad Pradhan, President of Hillmen's Association had written, that 'they (the hills people) are now apprehensive that their social solidarity and their very existence as a community is being threatened with "serious disruption owing to various factors coming to place chiefly the realisation by many of them that their welfare is now dependent on the exigencies of party politics in the Bengal Assembly and their

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<sup>5</sup>. Mahendra P. Lama, Gorkhaland Movement : Quest for an Identity, Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, Darjeeling, 1996, pp.6-7.

utter helplessness to make their voice heard'.<sup>6</sup>

Associations like Hillmen's Association did try to show the apprehensions of the Gorkhas and their feelings of alienation and deprivation. But however, the movement was limited only to the elite class. Infact, the peasant and middle class were not even aware of it and hence could not arouse much interest.

### **Birth of All India Gorkha League :**

While the Nepalis of Darjeeling were busy demanding Nepali, to be the medium of instruction, the Gorkha League had already been formed in Dehradun by Thakur Chandan Singh in 1921. It was in Darjeeling Rink Hall, that All India Gorkha League (AIGL) was born on May 15th, 1943, with D.S. Gurung as the President. Its main aims and objectives were :

- a) To organise and consolidate all the Gurkhas spread throughout India and elsewhere into one organic whole,

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<sup>6</sup>. N.B. Gurung, op.cit., pp.10.



- b) To make every one realise that the Gurkhas belong to the great martial race,
- c) To preserve the civilization, tradition and culture of the Gurkhas,
- d) To further the development of the Nepali language,
- e) To establish the political rights of the Gurkhas in India.<sup>7</sup>

The AIGL also allowed members of other organisations and parties to become its members. Ratanlal Brahmin and Ganeshlal Subba of the CPI were also its members in the beginning. Its journal, 'Gorkha' was instrumental in spreading the ideas to other parts of the country too and to mobilize the Nepalis through the organ in their own language, in order to safeguard their rights and interests in the future Constitution of the country. Branches of AIGL were also opened in Shillong, Guwahati, Tezpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Digboi.

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<sup>7</sup>. Nahar Singh and Kirpal Singh, History of All India Gurkha League 1943-49, Nirmal Publishers and Distributors, Delhi. 1987, pp.1.

The AIGL look up the deprived condition of the Gorkhas genuinely. The idea of 'Gorkha' had almost become a homogeneous entity and everyone linked through the Nepali language. All these helped to create a more articulate and organised movement. Moreover, in its Second Constitution, adopted in 1948, two important issues were added -

- 1) Conferment of citizenship on Indian Gorkhas and
- 2) Recognition of the Nepali language.

Randhir Subba, one of the most prominent leaders of AIGL, laid forth the creation of Uttarakhand. He laid down the problem of the Nepalis is that, they are an ethnic minority, numbering about 6 lakhs in a state having 2 crore 25/30 lakhs Bengalis and 'they have insufficient representation even in local bodies like the Darjeeling District Board which has only 3 hill members out of 20'.<sup>8</sup> He suggested that the problem can be solved only through the formation of Uttarakhand which could be formed of the following areas :

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<sup>8</sup>. T.B. Subba, Ethnicity, State and Development : A Case Study of Gorkhaland Movement, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi. 1992, pp.87.

- a) Darjeeling district, Sikkim, Jalpaiguri, Dooars, and Coochbihar,  
or
- b) Darjeeling district, Jalpaiguri and Coochbihar or
- c) Darjeeling district and Sikkim or
- d) Darjeeling district only.

But the plan never materialised probably because the lack of enthusiasm expressed and also because many leaders including Randhir Subba left Darjeeling for Nepal, to join in the democratic movement against the Rana Autocracy.

AIGL had some very good leaders and was victorious in various elections. In 1952 and 1957 when the Congress was able to form government in West Bengal, it was the AIGL that won in all the four constituencies in Darjeeling. In 1967, the United Front Government was formed in West Bengal and Mr. Deo Prakash Rai of the AIGL was made a Cabinet Minister. In 1969, like in 1952, AIGL won in all constituencies. In 1971-72 in the 5th General Elections, AIGL won in Darjeeling and Jorebanglow and Congress in Kurseong and Kalimpong constituencies. Bengal Government was headed by the

Congress with Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray as the Chief Minister. Mr Gajendra Gurung (Congress) became Deputy Minister and Mr. D.P.Rai was made the Public Accounts Committee Chairman.

The disturbing factor in Darjeeling has been that the political wind has always blown in the opposite direction. In 1971-72, Lok Sabha elections, when the Congress government was formed in the Centre and State, it was the Communists who were victorious in Darjeeling and sent as its M.P., Mr. Ratanlal Brahmin. 'It can be because of this that progress has not been able to come about in a faster pace in Darjeeling'.<sup>9</sup>

In 1977, Janata Government was formed in the Centre with Morarji Desai as the Prime Minister, in West Bengal the CPM emerged with the largest share of votes and Jyoti Basu as the Chief Minister. In Darjeeling, the Congress won (Mr.K.B.Chettri as M.P.). In the Vidhan Sabha elections, Mr D.P. Rai and Ms. Renulina Subba were victorious from Darjeeling and Kalimpong constituencies and

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<sup>9</sup>. B.B.Gurung, op.cit., pp.370.

H.B.Rai and Biren Bose - both Communists from Kurseong and Siliguri won. In 1980, Congress came back to power in the Centre with Mrs. Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister. The Communists were victorious in Bengal and in Darjeeling, Mr. Ananda Pathak (CPIM) defeated Mr.K.B.Chettri of the Congress.

It was a great loss to the AIGL when it lost the 'uncrowned king of politics, Mr. D.P.Rai, when he died on 5th January, 1981. He had consecutively won in six Vidhan Sabha Elections and had been three times, Cabinet Minister. The 1981 Elections were fought in his absence. The 1982 elections saw the victory of Tamang Dawa Lama of the Communist Party.

But by this time, the Gorkha League was becoming weak and losing its base in the hills. A political vacuum had been created after the departure of Mr. D.P.Rai and even other prominent leaders like Theodore Manaen [Theodore Manaen was later elected as the Congress M.P. from the hills and became Secretary of AICC] and Bal Bahadur Chettri had left the party to join the Congress. The

personality clashes and intra-party factions were also other reasons for its weakening. But the AIGL, too like other political parties had always wanted that the district and its neighbouring areas should be given the status of a separate administrative unit or a 'separate province'.

The discrimination against the Hills' people can also be seen in the fact, which AIGL made in their memorandum of 29th April, 1952 to Jawaharlal Nehru, that 'the Ministry of Dr. P.C.Ghosh abolished the system of nomination of members of District Board and Municipality throughout West Bengal save and except in the district of Darjeeling'.<sup>10</sup> Knowing they (the Bengalis) would lose out if elections were held on basis of adult franchise. They invariably felt that they, a linguistic minority, occupying a strategic location, had been ignored as a community and also resolved to fight to obtain the objective of Autonomous District Council within West Bengal. From another memorandum of 13th April, 1981, address to Zail Singh, Home Minister of India, they laid that they were for a separate statehood

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<sup>10</sup> ← → Why Gorkhaland, op.cit, pp.14.

outside West Bengal to ensure administrative efficiency and convenience. 'We will be more secured as we find today in the case of contiguous Sikkim, the 22nd state of the Indian Union having similar peculiarities and linguistic groups'.<sup>11</sup> The creation from protectorate status to state of India-Sikkim, indeed encouraged the aspirations of the people in Darjeeling. But the party soon began to lose ground, its moderate, outlook and democratic functioning giving way to the more militant organisations.

### **The Communists and Regional Autonomy :**

The Communist Party of India had been formed in Darjeeling in 1943 itself and one of its pioneers had been the inevitable, Ratanlal Brahmin or 'Maila Baje' ( as he was popularly known). He together with another colossal figure and a true Marxist, Ganeshlal Subba, had been greatly instrumental in spreading Communism in the hills, especially amongst the tea-gardens, which eventually became the bastion of the Communists.

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<sup>11</sup>. Ibid, pp.16.

In the pre-independence days, one of the basic ideas was to form India on the basis of the linguistic principle. But however, when India achieved independence, the Congress changed its views and Nehru was of the opinion that, to organise the country on the linguistic and cultural principle, would be to go against the unity and stability of the country.

On the other hand, the Communists supported the principle of the 'right to self-determination'. A resolution had also been adopted by the Central Committee which said, 'Every section of the Indian people, which has a contiguous territory as its homeland, common historical tradition, common language, culture, psychological make up and common economic, life would be recognised as a distinct nationality with the right to exist as an autonomous state within the free Indian Union or federation and will have the right to secede from it, if it may desire'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>. G.Krishnan (ed.), National Unity for the Defence of Motherland, People's Publishing House, Bombay. 1943, pp.7



It was on the basis of this, that the Communists in Darjeeling had submitted a memoranda, favouring the creation of 'Gorkhasthan', to be comprised of Darjeeling District, Sikkim and Nepal in 1947. The call for autonomy echoed in the hills and the Communists tried to woo the vulnerable Gorkhas into their fold and promising them freedom from the clutches of the exploitive 'Bengalis' of Calcutta. Brahmin, himself a Nepali, genuinely fought for the cause and the CPI of Darjeeling unit knew that the Gorkhas could never be treated at par with the Bengalis, as long as they remained under it and could be brought into the national mainstream only through 'self rule'. The split in the party, saw Brahmin with the CPIM but the party continued fighting for the same cause.

The Communists used all sorts of propaganda to improve their support base in the hills. They had also endorsed in favour of the Nepali language, as the language of administration and as an essential first step, to associate the people in the exercise of their rights of autonomy. Moreover the State Re-organisation Committee upheld the idea of unilingual state with various safeguards for

minorities. 'The urge for linguistic states has now gone deep down into the minds of the masses and refusal to create such states at this stage would lead to a widespread sense of frustration which might have grave consequences.<sup>13</sup> The Communist party in West Bengal was also instrumental in recognizing Nepali as one of the Official Languages together with Bengali in 1961. (Already discussed in the III chapter).

The demand for regional autonomy was further put forward by the Communists and the Regional Council which could make all laws relating to social, cultural and economic aspects. But it would have to work in conformity with the laws and enactments of West Bengal, on a number of important matters. They knew that such a demand would not be accepted by the Congress Government in the centre. A solution to such demands, could be accelerated only if the 'Nepalis' and the 'Bengalis' worked together. The Communists had not forgotten their promise of granting regional autonomy to the Hills. It was in 1977, when they came to power in West Bengal, that they

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<sup>13</sup>. The Report of SRC 1955, para 134, pp.88.

dutifully passed a resolution in their Assembly, firstly in 1978 and then in September 1981, urging the Centre to grant regional autonomy to the three sub-divisions.

Mr. Ananda Pathak, CPIM M.P. from Darjeeling, moved a Constitution Amendment Bill in 1982 and 1985 for the same demand. The Bill was introduced on August 9th 1985, in the Lok Sabha and debated on December 6th 1985, February 21st and March 7th, 1986. He was of the opinion that, the Constitution allowed autonomy within the framework of a state under Article 244 and various states like Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram already had elected councils. But what he did not realise was that, this was applicable only to tribal or Scheduled areas. According to their own claims, Nepalis are not tribals. As accepted, the bill was rejected in the Lok Sabha, inspite of the pleas that the Gorkhas had not been able to enter the process of development and integration so far, and that 'they wanted to participate in national reconstructions in their own way : culturally, socially. economically, educationally and mentally,

they were different from the majority nationalities'.<sup>14</sup>

The acceptance of their demand, it was felt, would bring forth similar demands from other parts of the country and formation of regional autonomy would only be a springboard for the creation of statehood. But the rejection of the proposal was accepted without a murmur of protest. The Nepalis felt summarily dejected, their quest for their identity - still unfulfilled.

#### **Pranta Parishad and the Congress :**

Pranta Parishad, another Political Party did not agree to the concept of 'regional autonomy' put forth by the Communists. Pranta Parishad was formed in April 1980. In its Meeting held in Sukhiapokhri (in Darjeeling District.) in April 1980 and attended by various eminent personalities like Mr. Indra Bahadur Rai, Mr Bharat Thapa, Mr. Madan Thapa, Mr. madan Tamang and others, they

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<sup>14</sup>. M.J. Akbar, 'Season of Discontent', Illustrated Weekly of India, 31st Aug. 1986, pp.26-29.

resolved to form an ad-hoc committee, in order to fill the political vacuum. The Party was in favour of the formation of a separate state (Gorkhaland) comprising of the Nepali speaking areas of the Dooars in the District of Jalpaiguri and the whole of Darjeeling District, in accordance with Article 3(a) of the Constitution'.<sup>15</sup> (Article 3(a) has been discussed in the Introductory chapter).

The Pranta Parishad felt that the people of the hills, were politically misrepresented in the Legislative Assembly in Bengal, having the opportunity to send only three representatives in a House of 294 members, who could in no circumstances be able to place the problems of the people they represented. Moreover it would be too small a number to help form the government or to collapse the Government. Pranta Parishad felt that only a full fledged statehood was capable of solving their problems.

Like the other political parties functioning in the Hills asking for separate administrative set up, the Congress too favoured

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<sup>15</sup> Why Gorkhaland, op.cit., pp.1.

Darjeeling to be a Union Territory. But unlike the Communist Party, who supported separation even at the party level, the proposal of the Congress in the Darjeeling unit was never adopted by the Congress High Command. Mr. Theodore Manaen and Mrs. Mayadevi Chettri, two prominent Congress leaders could never deliver the promises of language recognition and autonomy. In 1981, the resolution for autonomy was passed in the Bengal Assembly but, the same resolution in the Parliament, evoked criticism of having a sessionist tone. The Congress was known to be changing tactics frequently in the hills.

#### **Analysis :**

From the above, it can be analysed that all political parties functioning in the Darjeeling Hills were in favour of a separate administrative set up, even though the degree varied. The suppression of the Nepalis as a linguistic minority, by the dominant group in the state, the 'Bengalis' was apparent in various social, economic, political and educational fields. The Gorkhas, an innocent

and naive population had been made victims of their own innocence. The various political parties had tried to win them over, promising them autonomy and freedom from exploitation, only to get their vote banks and leaving the conditions of the people as it were - alienated, deprived, as ever, sometimes even being dubbed as refugees, second class citizens and foreigners.

In the field work conducted in Darjeeling District, various questions were asked. 'Being a Nepali from Darjeeling do you think that the problem of identity ever existed? Was the problem real? 60% of the sample gave the answer in the positive. The reasons given varied - 44.4% laid down that, inspite of the fact, that they were of Indian origin and being the third or forth generation living here, were considered as Nepalis from Nepal. The linguistic, cultural and physical similarities between the Nepalis of Indian origin and Nepal origin indeed makes it difficult, to differentiate between the two groups. (The Nepalis of Indian origin enjoy all the rights and priveleges as Indian citizens, but inspite of this, many amongst the sample said that a large number of Nepalis were evacuated from

Meghalaya and Assam, mistaking them with the Nepalis of Nepal. Moreover in the North-Eastern states like Meghalaya and Mizoram, the need for Restricted Area Permit causes Indian Nepalis, many problems, perhaps because most were assumed to be Nepalese from Nepal, unless they could prove otherwise. Throughout this century. Indian Nepalis have struggled to forge an identity for themselves, that distinguishes them from the Nepalis of Nepal and emerge as a distinct ethnic group within India.<sup>16</sup>

It is true that the Nepalis of both countries are very akin to each other. But inspite of this, it must be said that the Nepalis of India, to go and settle in Nepal, to get employment opportunities in Nepal, requires Nepal citizenship. Many expressed the view that they have a great sense of belongingness to Nepal, but lamented that sometimes, they are not accepted as their own people by either Nepal or India. 16.6% were of the view that they were not considered either of India or Nepal and 16.6% said that they were considered as second class citizens.

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<sup>16</sup>. Michael. J.Hutt, op.cit, pp. 125.



On the other hand, 40% felt that the problem was not a real problem, 33.3% of them, even then, were of the opinion, that it was just a created political issue and 66.6% said that it was basically an emotional or a psychological problem, arising out of a sense of differentiation and subjugation of the Indian Nepalis in Darjeeling by the Government (both Central and State). Seen from both angles, Nepalis in Darjeeling did suffer a crisis of identity. The insecurity problem of the people entered the politics of Darjeeling.

Dr. Harka Bahadur Chettri, a well known educationist of Kalimpong, said that identity problem, is very much connected to the economic deprivation of the people of the hills. The air of superiority of the Bengalis, gave a blow to the already existing feeling of insecurity amongst the Nepalis in Darjeeling. He further went on to say that, the Nepalis are a microscopic community in India, their economic conditions are not well-off, but the once hardworking race, who got the praise of the British, has become an excuse seeking race, more interested in having fun and entertainment. He further elaborated that the Nepalis, who are a microscopic community were

being suppressed under the most supernationalist race'.<sup>17</sup>

The reason why Nepali people feel the problem of identity is because they have been tagged with Bengal and they have nothing in common with it, geographically, linguistically, culturally or ethnically'.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, Mr. Madan Tamang, the former General Seceretary of Pranta Parishad, felt that the problem of identity was a created problem ~~and said that~~, the real problem was the small strength of the Nepali population. 'Number is our curse', he said 'and they are the worst sufferers in a democracy'.<sup>19</sup>

Another view expressed was that, since the Nepali people could

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<sup>17</sup>. Interview with Dr. Harka Bahadur Chettri, Kalimpong, 14th February, 1999.

<sup>18</sup>. Interview with Brig. N.K.Gurung, Kalimpong, 13th February, 1999.

<sup>19</sup>. Interview with Mr. Madan Tamang, Darjeeling. 12th April, 1999.

not get as much education, could not bring development in various spheres, could not open factories like the Bengalis in Bengal, they developed a sense of inferiority complex. They felt they were given second class citizen status and were called a 'coolie race'.<sup>20</sup> From the various interviews conducted, it can be concluded that the Nepalis, were undoubtedly looking for their separate identity from the majority Bengali community and saw the solution of their various problems - social, cultural, economic and political, only in the creation of a separate state.

Darjeeling, the domain of the Nepali speaking population (comprising of about 80%) were on the cross roads, in search of their identity. But do the Nepalis of Sikkim suffer a similar crisis? 25.33% answered in the positive but the majority view, was that, they did not i.e. 74.66%. Sikkim, smaller than Darjeeling in area, having a population of 403,612 (1991 census) only, but having similar cultural and linguistic affinity, had already been granted statehood, as the

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<sup>20</sup> Views expressed by Mr. Karna Thami, Sahitya Academy Winner, 1989. Interview - Darjeeling. 13th April, 1999.

22nd state of India in 1975. They might have the feeling of 'relative deprivation' but definitely not identity problem like the Nepali people, in Darjeeling. There were other problems troubling the Nepalis of Sikkim, when it was included as the 22nd state of India on 21st April, 1975. Around 300,000 people (mainly of Nepali origin) had failed to get Indian citizenship. This was mainly because only those people, who had their names registered in the Sikkim Regulations Act, 1961, could become Indian citizens under the Sikkim Citizens Order of 1975. Therefore, many persons who had their domicile in Sikkim, but who had not registered themselves in Sikkim Regulation Act of 1961 for various reasons, like ignorance and administration lapses became stateless.

Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari desperately fought for the cause because any election to the Legislative Assembly would be a farce, if the problem was not solved. He finally succeeded in this objective. 'I had to fight for ten years to taste success',<sup>21</sup> he said, thus greatly

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<sup>21</sup>. Interview with Himalaya Today, Sept. 1992, February, 1993.

reduced the citizenship problem of the Sikkimese Nepalis. Since they have a state of their own, their identity is clear, i.e. they prefer to call themselves Sikkimese rather than Nepali. [Interviews with some Nepalis of Sikkim confirmed this proposition].

But however another problem eludes the Nepalis of Sikkim. It was for the satisfaction of the people of Nepali origin, that arrangement had been made earlier to keep some seats reserved for them in the Sikkim Assembly until 1979. But during Mrs Indira Gandhi's regime, an Act was passed, the People's Representative Act, 1980, which took away the separate representation of the Nepalis. Thus the new arrangement was 6 seats for the Lepchas, 6 for the Bhutias 1 for the Buddhist Sangha, 3 for the Nepali Scheduled Caste group and leaving the remaining 17 seats open for all communities, including the Nepalis. The Sikkim Sangram Parishad and the Sikkim Democratic Front are trying to make this their main issue and to make the positions of the Nepalis in Sikkim secure. The Nepalis in Darjeeling indefinitely compare their positions to their counterparts in Sikkim, who are politically, culturally and economically more

dominant.

The Nepalis in Darjeeling, at least the majority of them, suffer from a genuine identity problem in India. 'All Nepalis do not face it, but some do. And what is relevant is to see the point that, prima facie, among Nepalis, even if not all, may be suspected and humiliated as being a Nepali of foreign origin'.<sup>22</sup> The similarities in language, culture and physiognomy between the Nepalis of India and Nepal often makes others to bracket them together and the open - border between India and Nepal, also has acted as a big obstacle to create a specific identity to this deprived ethnic minority living in India.

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<sup>22</sup> B.P.Mishra, 'Behind Gorkhaland Agitation', Mainstream, Delhi. 1986, vol. 25, no.7. pp.15-20.

## **Chapter V**

### **Nepali Language Identity Political Dimensions. Part- II**

#### **Gorkha National Liberation Front**

#### **The Gorkha National Liberation Front - The Demand for Linguistic Identity :**

The demand for a separate administrative set up and to form a distinct linguistic identity in the hills had been there ever since the beginning of this century. But their demands had always been brushed aside, thinking that the docile and meek people would always accept the conditions as it were. The ruling Bengalis had failed to notice the undercurrents, that had been building up gradually amongst the Darjeeling people, craving to be separated from Bengal and wanting a distinct Nepali identity.

Before India achieved her independence she wasn't exactly a

nationality and consisted of more than 600 princely states. Various communities took part in the freedom struggle, but as the dream of independence drew near, all of them grew anxious to preserve their distinct identities. This was more visible amongst the Gorkhas. Till the very last days of the British rule, they had been loyal to them, but at the same time, they could be found in various parts of the country protecting the frontiers of their homeland and wanting to be accepted as true Indians. This feeling of anxiety could be seen in D.S.Gurung's last speech on 15th August, 1947 in Kalimpong, 'I am proud of India's Independence, but together with it, looking at the condition of the Gorkhas, I feel depressed'. But undoubtedly, the problem of identity became more prominent after Indian Independence. The field work report shows that 26.66% felt that the problem existed before independence and 50% expressed the view that it became more so after independence.

Why had various political parties inspite having dynamic leaders failed to arouse much interest among the masses, why had they been unsuccessful to fulfill their aspirations for separation?



Uttarakhand, Gorkhasthan, District Autonomous Council, Union Territory, had been proposed but had not been accepted. The Communists had been vociferous in their demand for regional autonomy. The proposal for this had been raised in the Lok Sabha twice but had been rejected. They did not care to raise the matter again because they knew that, the Centre would not accept the demand.

It was during the same time that, around 7,000-10,000, Nepalis were evicted out of Meghalaya in February-March, 1986. Even before this, in 1982-85, 6,683 Nepalis were detected as foreigners and 6,481 were expelled from Meghalaya. Infact, it was in Assam, that the AASU, AAGSP who were 'the first to raise the bogey of a large scale influx of Bengalis from Bangladesh and Nepalis from Nepal to Assam'.<sup>1</sup> The floating population of Nepalis, who had come to India in search of employment were evicted together with the many Nepalis living there for many decades. Moreover, Article VII of the Indo-Nepal Treaty, 1950 lays down that 'the Governments of India

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<sup>1</sup>. B.P.Mishra, op.cit, pp.15-20.

and Nepal agree to grant on a reciprocal basis the nationals of one country, in territories of another, the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation of trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature'.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this privilege, they were evicted and deposited in trucks in the Assam-Bengal border.

Meanwhile a voice reminded the Nepalis in Darjeeling, that they would meet the same fate as their brothers and sisters in the North-East and they could be assured of their security only if they followed him. The voice was of Mr. Subhash Ghising, who had a short stint in the 1/8 Gorkha Regiment from 1954-60. He had formed the 'Neelo Jhanda' or the Blue Flag, had been a member of Tarun Sangh, the youth wing of AIGL, and in 1980 had formed the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) or the Gorkha Rastriya Mukti Morcha., that promised to give the people their distinct 'Gorkha' identity and a land of their own 'Gorkhaland', separate from Bengal.

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<sup>2</sup>. A Document, 'Full of Confusion and Doubt Regarding Legal States of Darjeeling Land and the Lands of Kalimpong, Western Doors and Assam Dooars', pp.45.

He had already spoken to the people about the deteriorated condition of the Nepalis through his many novels. [He had published about 22 Novels namely 'Nilo Choli', 'Lunkham Camp', 'Alo Chihan', 'Anjali', 'Jawaniko Hatya', 'Phool Maya', 'Mane', 'Akhiri Raat' and others]. He went from place to place visited tea garden telling the people about their deprived conditions and their lost identity. Even the simple folks understood his language. Moreover, being a good orator and a glib speaker, he soon gathered a huge mass following and 'of course, no weapon is more valuable than a selective past'.<sup>3</sup> Ghisingh knew that to attract the attention of the Centre to their demand, the economic deprivation alone could not do so, only the scratching back into the historical past of the country could arouse much interest. It too cannot be denied that he was very much influenced by the follow up actions in Mizoram, Assam, and Punjab, where violent encounters had resulted in successful signing of Accords.

### **Growing Importance of the GNLF :**

The GNLF formed in 1980 was completely democratic in the

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<sup>3</sup>. M.J.Akbar. op.cit., pp.26-29.

beginning and non-violent till 1986, when it turned violent, wherein it was believed that the 'khukuri is mightier than the pen'. The Pranta Parishad and the GNLF fought simultaneously for the creation of a separate state but eventually, the Pranta Parishad gave into the leadership of the GNLF. In the field work report,

- a) It was reported that 8% of the population felt that it had gained predominance because other political parties focussed solely on the demand for a separate state.
- b) 10% said GNLF brought the issue of citizenship,
- c) 26.6% said that GNLF gave concrete shape to the problem of identity crisis and
- d) 40% were in favour of (b) and (c) and 20 % were in favour of all the answers.

Apart from the above answers, there could be other reasons why there could not be massive movements in the hills earlier. The reason for these were many, the leadership was entirely in the hands

of the Nepalis and therefore other minority groups felt reluctant to join in the movement. Nepali leadership was always a multiple leadership and a definite leadership pattern had not been built up in the hills. Each leader would start from scratch and eventually get buried in his own debris.

Moreover, other political parties had been promising various dreams, but lacked genuine sympathy and sacrifice for the deprived Nepali speaking linguistic minority - their major objective would more often be, to get a seat in the State Legislative Assembly or the Parliament. When the GNLF separatist propaganda invaded the tea gardens, CPIM found it difficult to hold on the slogan of proletarian solidarity in the face of upsurge of ethnic homogeneity'.<sup>4</sup> The most important hill regional party, the AIGL, which had got political support of the Gorkhas, had often formed a coalition with the ruling party in Calcutta and therefore, in the long run, could not speak much for their community. It was Ghisingh's appeal to the people,

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<sup>4</sup>. Amiya K. Samanta, Gorkhaland - A Study of Ethnic Separation, Khum Publishers, New Delhi. 1996, pp.117.

through powerful use of emotions and sentiments, that won him a huge following and also he dextrously blended the issue of citizenship and identity issue with the demand of statehood.

People, young and old became conscious of their social, economic and political non-existence and started questioning themselves of their identity. The articulate speeches of the eloquent Ghisingh echoed through the Hills. Poems, dramas and songs too him came out, which made the Nepalis think seriously about themselves. The name 'Gorkhaland' too rang a patriotic sentiment amongst the Nepalis because they have always attached a special importance to the concept of 'Jamin' or 'Mato' or land.

'Arka ko ladhai ladhe ra Aab ke

Garchoi Gorkha Dai

Parayo ko Nimti Jindagi Dinchoi Khoi

Timro chinari

Aphnoi yo gharma Baniyo Chihan

Ke Thaha Timi Lai

Naladha Aaba Kasai Ko Yudha Byartha

Cha Tumi lai

Arko Ko Ladhai...

Ladnu Cha Sata mato Ko lagi Nagara Aaber

Jati ko Gaurav Rakhnu Ko lagi bachchu ladhera

Arko Ko Ladhai...

Nabhaa mato Bachdhaina jati Thaha cha

Ki Timi Lai

Nagara Aab Byartha Ko Ladhai

Bachao Yoe jati lai

Aiko Ko Ladhai...<sup>5</sup>

**Translation in English :**

Where are you heading for dear Gorkha

brother, fighting some one else's war?

Sacrificing your life for a stranger,

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<sup>5</sup>. A Song in 'Bhisphot Cassettee, lyrics - R.P. Waiba, Music, Binod Syangden.

why - where is your identity?

Don't you know that it's your own grave

you are digging at?

Stop fighting these wars for they lead

to nothing but futility,

Don't waste your time since what you

have to fight for now is your own land,

For the pride of our own community we have

to live and fight

Are you oblivious of the fact that without

this land our community cannot survive

Forget the useless wars you fight for

others

Fight for your community, your own land

protect.

The growing importance of the GNLFF could also be attributed to the definite structure of the party. There were around 10,000 ex-servicemen in his party, his four main lieutenants were all ex-



servicemen, women too were beckoned to lead the movement, students also contributed a great share to the agitation. It was also well furnished with a very good information network, which could transmit messages quickly.

The GNLF had also a well worked out strategy. An Eleven Point programme had already been worked out in March 1986. On 13th April, 1986, Black Flag's Day was observed with slogans for non-tax payment and a 'do or die struggle'. While the other political parties like Pranta Parishad had emphasised on language, culture and economic activities, GNLF focussed mainly on the identity issue, which was a more sentimental one and therefore could draw a huge following. It restricted its demand to the political aspect and used other demands as supplementary. 'The Gorkhaland movement is avowedly not for economic emancipation but for political identity and due status of the Gorkha community.'<sup>6</sup> The Bengali Government was made to look like Frankenstein, devouring the Gorkha identity and

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<sup>6</sup>. Tapash Mukherjee, Another Khalisthan, Sunday, 29th June - 5th July, 1986, pp.20-23.

GNLF was meant to be the guardian angel which would allow the Gorkhas to fulfil their various political, social and economic aspirations. The various front organisations like Gorkha Volunteer Cell (GVC), Gorkha National Students Federation (GNSF), the Gorkha Welfare Organisation, Gorkha National Youth Federation (GNYF) became active in the movement.

### **Demands of GNLF and their Cry of Deprivation :**

It was laid down that the Gorkhas living in India had been made to face innumerable indignities because of the ambiguities created by Clause VII of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950. The word 'reciprocal' in the treaty had put both the Nepalis of Nepal and Nepalis of Indian origin into a single basket of illusion. It said that it made the Indian Nepalis 'reciprocal citizens' and not bonafide citizens of India. GNLF called for the abrogation of this Article and also called upon the 'Government of India to issue or declare an official notification to the effect that all aboriginal and the settled

Gorkhas are Indian Nationals, with full right of citizenship.<sup>7</sup> They also asked for the setting up of a separate Indian Gorkha Regiment, to distinguish the Gorkhas of India from the 'Agreement troops' raised from the Kingdom of Nepal under the agreement between India and Nepal earlier. It was further laid down that the victimised Gorkhas of Darjeeling and Dooars must be immediately liberated from the communal and colonial domain of West Bengal by creating a separate state of Gorkhaland, within the framework of the Indian Constitution. They also pledged for the inclusion of Gorkha language in the VIIIth Schedule of the Indian Constitution by an immediate Act of Government of India.

The Bengal Government, was rebuked to have done nothing since Bharat Independence for hill areas of Darjeeling and Dooars. Darjeeling has an area of 3,075 sq. km and a total population of 1,299,919 (according to 1991 census). (In 1981 population was 10,06,434). 33% of the land is under forest, having forest cover of about 18% of

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<sup>7</sup>. Letter written by GNLF to the Honourable PM. Sri Rajiv Gandhi on 22nd July, 1987.

the total area, whereas 44% land are not available for cultivation'.<sup>8</sup> No effort had been made to improve through scientific methods. In fact, Darjeeling was considered to be more developed than many states in the North East, when the Britishers left. The Nepalis complained that the Darjeeling Hill Developmental Council set up in 1972 for development in the hills failed to do its homework and scarcely meeting to draw up plans. Even if plans were made, they were done from the Writer's Building in Calcutta, being not actually aware of the local problems. 'Hill divisions of Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and even our very close neighbour Sikkim boasts of greater productivity, primarily due to the respective State Government's genuine concern',<sup>9</sup>

Unemployment was one of the biggest problems and jobs, apart from fourth grade, were denied to the local inhabitants, the white

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<sup>8</sup>. R.L. Sarkar and M.P. Lama (ed.) The Eastern Himalayas - Environment and Economy, Atma Ram & Sons, Delhi. 1986, pp.11.

<sup>9</sup>. Study Forum, Darjeeling, Study on Gorkhaland, Review No 1 on the Information Document of Government of West Bengal, Bulletin, January. 1987, no.3, pp.2.

collar jobs, invariably being occupied by the plainsmen. It was also felt that the Nepalis take a longer time to get promotions, despite having the same qualifications as the plainsmen, local Nepali gazetted officers easily could be counted on one's fingers. Moreover for the hills people, knowledge of the Bengali language was considered compulsory to get into various State services. But knowledge of Nepali language was not made compulsory for the plainsmen, coming to occupy various posts in the Hills.

On the other hand, the Government of West Bengal said, that it was taking avid effort to preserve and promote the language and culture of the Nepali community. They laid that they had implemented the Act of 1961, which makes Nepali, the second language in the three sub-divisions. They further said that they had set up a Nepali Translation Cell and Nepali Press and the Meeting Hall had also been constructed in the name of Bhanubhakta Acharya, the great Nepali poet and giving away of literary awards in his name. But this was countered by saying that he was a poet from Nepal.

Darjeeling earns its income through its three T's-Tea, Timber

and Tourism. But even here, the situation appeared grim. Darjeeling produces the finest tea in the world, producing 11-12 million kgs of tea but 30-40 million kgs of tea is sold by mixing with other spurious variety. This shows the special selling capacity of Darjeeling tea, but no efforts being made to improve its production. Only about 76 tea gardens in 1981 (101 in 1951) and nearly half of them are sick or uneconomic. It is mainly because of this that many are becoming unemployed. Some of the tea - bushes are 70-80 years old and waiting to be replaced. Ranen Dutta, Secretary of Darjeeling Planters Association, mentions that, '60% working in the tea gardens are women, 52,000 souls on a permanent basis, whereas '30,000 are engaged during the plucking season which lasts from March to November'.<sup>10</sup> The tea garden labourers are provided by the local Nepalis but the posts of Superintendent, Manager and Assistant Managers are invariably held by the plainsmen. A study of the 77 tea gardens in Darjeeling showed the following results.

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<sup>10</sup>. Darjeeling Planters Association, 6th August. 1996. (mimeographed).

**Table 5 :**

Posts	Nepali	Plainsmen	Total
Superintendent/ General Manager	1	10	11
Manager	11	51	62
Senior/Assistant Manager	28	55	83

Source : Study Forum Darjeeling, Study on Gorkhaland, Review No.I on the Information Document of Government of West Bengal, January 1987, Bulletin No.3, pp.4.

Soam Tea - Estate produces a glaring example of dominance of plainsmen in the Managerial Posts :-

1. Manager - A Permanent resident from Assam
2. Senior Assistant Manager - Resident from Assam
3. Junior Assistant Manager - From Calcutta

#### 4. Junior Assistant - From Uttar Pradesh

Source : Field Work.

No tea estates are owned by a Nepali, and they being owned by plainsmen, it was felt that they did not plough back the profits into the industry for its development. In 1984-85, Darjeeling had an income of 23 crores from tourism, 7 crores from Timber and 32 crores from tea. But however it was alleged, that the benefits were always carried away to the plains, the locals remaining deprived as ever. It was felt that the West Bengal Forest Development, had extracted revenue worth over 38,000 crores from their forest wealth. There was the acute problem of deforestation, thus bringing with it, other problems like denudation, soil erosion and landslides. Other problems felt were shortage of drinking water, bad roads, transportation and communication. Darjeeling, despite boasting of the oldest hydro-power station in Sidrapong (built in 1896) in Asia, producing only 45 MW, though potentiality in 2000 MW.

Darjeeling, also the grower of various medicinal plants, but



however, they were whisked away to the plains for the development of phytochemical industry.

The Hills people felt more and more alienated with the establishment of Himul Dairy in Matigara, North Bengal University, Medical College, head offices of various departments, other manufacturing units, supermarkets, Kanchanjunga Stadium in the plains of Siliguri. Only the Television and Radio stations are located in Kurseong sub-division.

There were no quotas for the Darjeeling Hills people in the various medical, engineering and other institutions, the facilities being enjoyed by minorities.[On the other hand, Sikkim is benefitted with quotas from Ministry of Human Resource Development and Students are selected according to merit basis. They are divided into 4 categories - general, backward classes SC/ST and businessmen and employees].

People were not allowed to participate in the various socio-economic and political decision making process. They further felt that the Darjeeling Hills Area Developmental Council, though represented by MP's, MLA's and nominated members, their function was just to inspect and report, a mere advisory role without any statutory role. 'Whole affair is purely a bureacratic exercise with political patronage and participation denied is development denied'.<sup>11</sup>

The minority Nepali community felt grossly misrepresented when, for nearly 50 years of Indian Independence, not a single tableau was given to them to represent their culture and tradition in the Republic Day celebrations. Moreover, the list of freedom fighters of West Bengal brought out in the height of the agitation did not mention a single Nepali, who had on the contrary, contributed a great deal to the freedom struggle. D.B.Giri, D.B.Thapa, Durga Malla, to name a few, some of whom faced guillotine in the end for fighting against the British imperialists cannot be forgotten. Ram Singh Thakuri, the famed Music Director of the I.N.A. who has given tune

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<sup>11</sup>. Study Forum Memoranda, 7th October, 1986.

to 'Sare Jaha Se Aacha,' is a living legendary, who till now, goes from place to place, telling about the vivid story of the struggle.

The Gorkhas, having developed socio-political consciousness and having formed a definite Nepali nationalism, had realised the 'centre periphery' attitude of the Bengal Government. Ghisingh said, 'If the Centre can give separate state, Bengal for Bengalis, Rajasthan for Marwaris, Assam for Assamese, why we the Nepali - Gorkhas cannot get separate state, Gorkhaland within Indian Union.<sup>12</sup> This shows the Nepali quest for identity and the desire for re-organisation of states on the basis of ethno-linguistic identity.

### **Activities of the Gorkhaland Andolan : An Inter-Play of Various Parties :**

The Gorkhaland agitation was both a political and ethnic

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<sup>12</sup>. From the Speech of Subhash Ghising, dated 2nd June, 1985. in Gorkhaland Agitation : The Issues, An Information Document, Government of West Bengal, 9th October, 1986. pp.34.

movement. But as the movement unfurled, the ethnic dimension became more prominent. As the democratic and constitutional methods had failed to bring any result, the GNLF movement added a special fervour through its militancy.

It was felt that all parties functioning in the hills were out to hoodwink the simple minded Gorkhas. The Congress had not been able to do much and the coming into power of the Left Front Government still kept the hill people dejected and alienated. From the June 2nd 1986 speech of Subhash Ghising, 'we have every right to claim for a separate state of Gorkhaland, we being citizens of India... we don't want to get separated from India, we want to remain within Indian Union being its loyal citizens', shows that the aspirations of the GNLF were not anti national. But the Left Front Government<sup>s</sup> called it anti-national and secessionist mainly because Ghisingh, when he had not got response from either the Indian Prime Minister and Nepal Prime Minister on their grievance regarding the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950, had sent memorandas to look into their matter to the UN Secretary General, International Court of Justice and heads of various countries like USA, UK, China France and

others in 1983. But it was said that it had done so openly and not clandestinely.

On the other hand, Congress said the movement was not anti-national. The Bengal Government laid down that the Congress was encouraging the disgruntled group either to embarrass the non-Congress ruling party or a rival faction within the Congress. The Congress also had in mind the March 23rd, 1987 election, which it would lose if it called the movement anti-national. Instead of leaving the demand of a separate statehood by the Gorkhas to the Centre, West Bengal Government intervened to quibble over the distinction between regional autonomy, it had supported for so long and statehood demand of the Gorkhas. But it did intervene and brought about the much avoided ethnic conflict.

GRLF protested through strikes, lockouts demonstrations and processions from 12th-14th May, 1986, a 72 hour strike was called and it revealed for the first time, the total support to Ghisingh's demand of separate statehood. On 25th May, 1986, police opened fire

on GNLF procession in Kurseong, resulting in five deaths. On 28th July, 1986 the GNLF called a 108 hour bandh in the hills in protest against the CRPF firing, whilst burning Article VII of the Indo-Nepal Treaty on 27th July, 1986, killing thirteen men, women and children. July 27-August 2nd 1986, CPIM offices were demolished. labourers bustees burnt down and supporters chased out. CPIm too tried to build up a counter offensive attack against the GNLF.

The non-interfering administration and the CPIM's offensive 'turned Ghisingh into a bitter enemy of the CPIM but at the same time softened his attitude towards the centre and the Congress'.<sup>13</sup>

On January 28th 1987, Centre was to talk with Ghisingh regarding citizenship issue and he was likely to accept 1950 as the cut-off year for determining citizenship of the Gorkhas. But the Nepalis in Assam had 1971 and Sikkim 1975 as their respective years for determining their Indian Citizenship. On June 23rd 1987, TADA was invoked by the State government and by July 1988, people

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<sup>13</sup>. Amiya K.Samanta, op.cit., pp.128.

arrested under the act reached 500.

It was felt that settlement could be brought about only through tripartite agreement between the Centre, State and GNLF. Eventually, in September 1987, a political package was sought to give a solution to the Gorkhas, There would be the creation of Darjeeling Hill Council, which would exercise jurisdiction over the three hill subdivision of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong in all matters except electricity, tea gardens, law and order, justice and management of reserved forests. But GNLF wanted the Council to be fully elective rather than having two third of its total membership to be nominated and preferred it to be called 'Gorkha Hill Council' or 'Gorkhaland Council' to give it an ethnic fervour. On the other hand, Ghisingh was pressed by hardliners not to accept anything less than statehood.

The demand for more territories in the Council i.e. Siliguri and Dooars area in Jalpaiguri District was also not accepted, laying down that there was a minority Nepali community living in these areas. Another tripartite meeting was called on January 25th 1988 but even

if things looked right, solution was not in sight. A 40- day strike was called from February 10th, 1988 to March 20th 1988, deteriorating the crippled economy of the hills and further accelarating the frustration of the Gorkhas.

On June 29th 1988, another tripartite meeting was called in Delhi. A few more Nepali majority villages adjacent to the three hill-sub-divisions of Darjeeling and the name Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council were to be considered, together with withdrawal of CRPF, stoppage of arrests under TADA and release of arrested persons. Inderjit Khuller, the Delhi based journalist had played the successful role of mediator between Ghisingh and Delhi and was instrumental in making Ghisingh accept the DGHC.

But on the other hand, not all his followers were convinced. Chattrre Subba, Kalimpong Gorkha Volunteer Corps unit boss who contributed 6000 militants said, 'Ghisingh has let down the community. I will continue 'do or die' battle to achieve



Gorkhaland'.<sup>14</sup>

With party-men of CPIM, GNLF, police killed, innocent children victimized, rape and murder of women, arson, raids, the fun loving and peaceful people in the hills were indeed looking forth for situation to their problems. By end of 1988, 283 people were billed and 615 injured - which inclined 47 (killed) and 76 (injured) of the CPIM 140 (killed) and 231 (injured) of the GNLF, 29 (killed) and 70 (injured) of the police force and 70 (killed) and 148 (injured) others.<sup>15</sup> There was immense loss of public and private property. The three T's were headed to a major collapse. In Tea, there was a loss of more than 8 crores, from which more than 50% of the population draw their living, the forest department had ceased functioning and also tourism was badly hit. The worst sufferers had been the Gorkhas themselves.

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<sup>14</sup>. Sunday, 24-30 July, 1988, pp.14-21.

<sup>15</sup>. A.K.Samanta, op.cit., pp.130-131.

## **Negotiated Settlement : The Formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council and Further Developments :**

On 22nd August, 1988, the accord was signed between Mr. Subhas Ghisingh Mr C.G. Somiah, Union Home Secretary, (on behalf of the Central Government), Mr. R.N. Sengupta, Chief Secretary (on behalf of the Government of West Bengal) for the establishment of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (D.G.H.C.), in the presence of Chief Minister Mr. Jyoti Basu and Home Minister of India, Mr. Buta Singh in Calcutta. The jurisdiction of this autonomous Council spreads over approximately 2,695 sq.kms. Apart from the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong, it will have jurisdiction over a thin strap of land in the plains and over a few Nepali majority villages. (For areas under DGHC, see Map 3). The Council was to have 42 members, out of which 12 are nominated, which would include local legislators and members of the minority community. Powers of the Council would include amongst others. Tourism, Public Health and Sanitation, Public works, and others (19 subjects in all) (For details, see Appendix A, Memorandum of Settlement).

On 23rd August, 1988, a Gazette Notification was also issued in Delhi, to determine the citizenship of the Gorkhas, taking-26th Jan,1950 as the cut off date. (See Appendix B).

Violence of 28 months ended in the Darjeeling Hills. A regional autonomous council was given to it on the lines carved out by the West Bengal Government. The Centre's decision of not having another partition of Bengal, not amending the Constitution and not giving into the demand for statehood had been met successfully. The DGHC was created not by an Act of Parliament, but through merely a Gazettee notification of the West Bengal Government.

It was difficult to appease the hardliners or the extremists, who wanted nothing less than Gorkhaland but Ghisingh, by his own acclaim said that the identity of the Gorkhas had been solved 'Now we have our own Hill Council. A land of our which will give the community a greater sense of identity'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>. The Illustrated Weekly of India, 2nd Oct, 1988, pp.8-17.

The elections which were held in December 1988 were swept by the GNLF. Out of 28 seats, 26 seats were taken by the GNLF and 2 by the Communists. Their victory showed the anger outburst against past regimes whether the Congress or the Left. The 1994 elections again saw the victory of the GNLF, winning 25 seats and three were won by the CPIM.

But however the identity of the DGHC has not been able to solve much of the problems. The Home Affairs, law and order are all controlled from Calcutta and there still lurks a feeling of uneasiness and suspicions amongst the hills people. 26.66% were of the view, that the Gorkhaland agitation was productive with DGHC acceptance. 7.5% said that economic conditions have improved, 25% said that locals have a greater say in political decision. 30% said that it has given political identity to Indian Nepalis and 37.5% agreed on all answers. But however the vast majority, 73.3% feels that the DGHC has not been able to solve much of their problems 10% said that there hasn't been much change in economic conditions, 25.45% were of the view that only a handful of people have gained, 1.8% said that there

has been loss of innocent lives and property and 8.1% said that social conditions have deteriorated.

With people having tasted the terror of power and violence, indiscipline has come to stay in the hills and it was expressed, that it would be quite difficult to bring them in line with law and order. 54.54% agreed on all points. What can be said thus, is that, the political aspirations of the Nepalis have been fulfilled to some extent with the formation of the DGHC and provides a framework for the realisation of their Indian Nepali identity. Mr. Subhash Ghisingh also deserves credit for showing the plight of the Gorkhas to the whole of India and the rest of the world. But it is also felt that there is bueracratization in the administration and power concentrated only to a handful.

It was also expressed that the DGHC has not really explored the major areas, which requires genuine handling. Some of them were of the opinion, that they still suffer tremendously on account of water shortage, frequent power cuts and bad communication. The

regional administration must think beyond tea and tourism. The area's immense potentiality in horticulture, floriculture, pisciculture, animal husbandry, to name a few, must be hauled to get the maximum benefits. Some of the locals also expressed the view that, the GNLFF has not been able to get to the people of the hills, various benefits of scholarships and quotas in various institutions and employment arenas.

Moreover, the comparison to Sikkim, having similarities with Darjeeling Hills always remains. Sikkim's ( Sikkim made into the 22nd state of India on 26th April, 1975 according to 36th Amendment Act), Annual plans for 1995-96 was 192.00 crores. From the 10th Finance Commission, it was to receive 698,89 crores for a period of 5 years, beginning from 1995-1996 and a large number of State departments annually receive funds under Centrally sponsored schemes.<sup>17</sup> All this despite having a less population and area than Darjeeling, which gets less comparatively (42 crores annulled in 1989 by West Bengal Government) and with its constant dependence on

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<sup>17</sup>. Sikkim Express, April 1995.

the State Government funds.

Many seemed unhappy with the exclusion of Siliguri subdivision in the DGHC jurisdiction. Siliguri, the plains area of the district, having a strategic location and being the gate way to the entire North-East, having a vibrant population, enterprising businessmen, medical and educational facilities and its formation into a Corporation are all looked upon by the hills people, with a shade of admiration and envy.

The Nepali people's identity crisis in Darjeeling seemed solved to some extent with the Gazette Notification, but in order to have a clearer and a firmer identity, 70% of the population opined in the formation of separate state- 'Gorkhaland'. What was further expressed was that, there was a need in change in the mentality and attitudes of people and greater change was to be brought about in the working of the institutions. Autonomy was given to them, no doubt and DGHC was to be the first such model to solve the identity problems of ethnic groups, which otherwise was to be applicable to

the tribal and scheduled areas only.

However 16% felt that statehood was not the entire solution. Geographically and economically, it would not be ready for statehood. There would be need to improve the infrastructure and also to include some other areas too.

Some form of autonomy was given to the DGHC, but the mood of separatedness remained. People in the hills, saw the formation of the DGHC only as the preliminary round to the formation of Gorkhaland. They felt that the development aspirations remained unfulfilled 7.3% said that better job opportunities for Nepalis would be possible only if separate statehood is granted. Only if Gorkhaland was granted, 10% said that there would be greater say in political decisions for Nepalis. 18.66% said that a more stable identity of Nepalis would be formed as Indian citizens and 64% agreed on all the above points.

Disadvantages would undoubtedly be there. 32% opined that it



might give rise to regionalism, but that was the trend everywhere, 28.66% were in view that only a few powerful would gain and 12.66% said it would not be economically viable. 30% agreed on all points. Still others said that the disadvantages ought to be seen only if the Gorkha state is formed. 'Let us form Gorkhaland first' they said.

### **Revival of Gorkhaland Demand and the Present Political Scenario in the Hills :**

Prime Minister Deva Gowda's announcement on 15th August, 1996 on the creation of Uttarakhand greatly encouraged activists demanding statehood in Darjeeling hills. Not satisfied with the working of the DGHC and having failed to bring satisfaction to the hills people, Mr Subhash Ghisingh brought out yet another issue to clamour upon. The refusal of holding the middle tier Panchayat Samiti elections in April 1994, inspite of repeated appeals by the State Government in accordance with the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution (Panchayati Raj Act 1992), Ghisingh threatened instead with a 1,000 hour strike in the hills and said that elections could not

be held here, without the incorporation of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and adjoining Assam and Bengal Dooars in India.

It was laid down that Article VIII of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950, says 'so far as matters dealt with herein are concerned, the Treaty cancels all previous treaties, agreements and engagements entered into on behalf of India between the British Government and the Government of Nepal',<sup>18</sup> which shows that it also cancels the treaties of Segauli (1815) and Treaty of Sinchula (1865), according to which Darjeeling and Kalimpong were given by Sikkim and Bhutan respectively to British India. It was laid that, Darjeeling and the leasehold land of Kalimpong, Assam and Bengal Dooars had become a 'No-man's land', as there was no formal absorption of these territories into India and the future remained jeopardized of those inhabiting these areas. In fact, Ghishing also filed the petition in this regard in the Supreme Court under Article 32, but the Court

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<sup>18</sup>. Rukesh Mani Pradhan, 'Continuous Political Struggle for the Separate Identity of Darjeeling Land', Department of Information and Cultural Affairs. DGHC, Darjeeling. 1995, pp.117-118.

dismissed it, saying it is a political issue.

In the 3rd DGHC Elections, <sup>various parties</sup> contested on March 17, 1999, the 'pro-Gorkhaland' but anti-GNLF, United Front coalition led by CPRM (Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist) and having as its constituent members - Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League, the Gorkha Democratic Front, Bharatiya Gorkha Jana Sakti, Bharatiya Nepali Bir Gorkha, the Sikkim Rashtriya Mukti Morcha, the Trinamul Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party, was checkmated by the GNLF. They promised to the hills people, the grant of statehood through the blessings of Sai-Baba, (who apparently has wide religious following here) and also laid down that the Nepal Supreme Court would decide the Status of Darjeeling Hills.

In spite of various allegations against the GNLF, it was victorious, winning 23 out of 28 seats, United Front won two seats, GNLF dissidents three, but not a single seat was won by the CPIM. All the parties except CPIM had as their election manifesto, the creation of 'Gorkhaland' rather than the perennial problems, which

continues to haunt the hills people like shortage of water, electricity and bad communications.

While many in the hills, especially the intellectuals and specialists in history, feel that Ghisingh and the GNLF has muddled up their identity, through new and changing issues. Like Mr. Harka Bahadur Chettri, who said that identity crisis in the real sense has begun. Our identity today has become a confused identity.<sup>19</sup> The elections revealed that GNLF still has a major following and some, like the simple rural folk adhere to Ghisingh, who they think has given them a new Gorkha identity and is considered as a demi-god. The victory of GNLF can also be because of its huge electoral machinery and the absence of a towering leadership in the opposition. But the statehood demand still looms large over the Darjeeling hills and people look up to Ghisingh and the GNLF for nothing short of 'Gorkhaland'.

As of the period after the Darjeeling Accord, the GNLF

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<sup>19</sup>. Interview with Mr.H.B.Chettri, Kalimpong, Feb.14th, 1999.

leadership came to power in the Council, after which elections were held. The movement has subsided. This proves the point, that linguistic integration is possible within democracy. Our finding is closer to the Ted Robert Gurr and Barbara Harff thesis. They believe that ethno-political conflicts like those of Turks in Germany, Kurds in Turkey, Indians in Nicaragua and Chinese in Malaya, have shown that, wherever democracy has been extended (like in Malaya), ethno-political agitations have receded. It shows that restraint and accomodation can be more effective than policies of co-option and repression. Political Leaders of all democracies are obliged by the basic rules of their political systems to create compromises among the rights, interests and demands of both majorities and minorities.<sup>20</sup>

### **Remaining Obstacles in Darjeeling and Sikkim :**

The Indian Nepali community consists of various sub-castes with their own distinct dialects, culture and social lineage. In spite of this, they have always projected themselves as one Nepali ethnic

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<sup>20</sup>. Ted Robert Gurr & Barbara Harff, op.cit., pp.74.

community. But a major problem eludes the Nepalis in ~~both~~ Darjeeling hills ~~and Sikkim~~ today because of the much talked about Mondal Commission Report on 'Other Backward Classes'.

The Government, after the establishment of West Bengal Minorities Commission in 1994, seeks to provide special facilities to Nepalis in education and employment fields. But the unfortunate thing which has happened is that, inspite of the similarities in socio-economic backwardness of the entire Gorkha community in the hills, only a few Nepali-sub-communities (like the Newars, Chamling of the Rai community and others) have been identified as 'backward classes. The backward classes have been identified according to criteria that are arbitrary to say the least'.<sup>21</sup> Aware of the facilities enjoyed by the ethnic groups, other Nepali ethnic groups are fighting too, to be included in the OBC category.

In Sikkim also, the Sikkim Democratic Front, led by Chief

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<sup>21</sup>. Mahendra P.Lama, 'Backward Tales from the Hills', The Telegraph, 1st September, 1994.

Minister Mr. Pawan Chamling is critical of Sikkim Sangram Parishad, led by former Chief Minister, Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari, of dividing the Nepali community into OBC (Gurungs, Rais, Tamangs, Magars and other such Tibeto-Burman speaking groups) and NBC (Newars, Bahun, Chettri, Jogi and Sanyasi), though the economic and political conditions of all Nepalis of Sikkim are of the same status.

Ghisingh and the SDF Government are demanding that the whole Nepali community be included in the OBC category because the 'unity in diversity' created through the coming together of the various Nepali sub-communities, may collapse, if each of those sub-groups turn away to establish their own ethnic identity, which may be advantageous to other political elements, waiting to bring about the division amongst the united Nepali community.

The CPIM Central Committee member, Ananda Pathak had said, 'we will not support anything that will create division among the people. Though normally, especially at the national level,

minorities are selected on the basis of religion, State Government is likely to treat Nepali as exceptional case. We will try to declare them as linguistic minority'.<sup>22</sup>

Other problem is regarding the possibility of merger of Darjeeling and Sikkim. The former Chief Minister, Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari, had refused the merger of Darjeeling and Sikkim earlier but his ouster from the Chief Minister by SDF leader, Mr. Pawan Chamling in 1993 brought him closer to Mr. Subhash Ghishingh. Mr. N.B. Bhandari also supports the demand of Gorkhaland, but it is feared that this will gear up the Nepali sentiments for a Nepali dominated government in Sikkim and that communism will have their full play with the Bhutia-Lepcha counteraction.

The merger of Darjeeling and Sikkim looks definitely attractive and geographically and economically viable. The fruit of development that Sikkim has achieved in various fields and sectors can also filter to Darjeeling faster and the cultural and educational advantages that

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<sup>22</sup>. Sikkim Express, 26th April, 1995, pp.xv.



Darjeeling has, can be enjoyed by both.

But problems lie here too. After Sikkim became a part of India in 1975, the end of feudal regime and the beginning of the democratic wheel opened a vast spectrum of opportunities in various fields. This attracted a lot of plainsmen from mainland India to the various varieties of job sectors - trade, business and commerce and also the educated unemployed Nepalis of neighbouring Darjeeling hills. Many got jobs in State Government services without even the asking for Sikkim Domicile Certificates.(till 1977-78). But as the people in Sikkim started becoming politically, socially and educationally more conscious and employment opportunities getting saturated, there were cries for 'sons of the soil' policy.

Demand for reservation of seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly for the Nepalis is constantly being demanded, so that the indigenous Nepalis of Sikkim can have advantages at par with the Lepchas and Bhutias. Moreover, they fear the dominance by the politically articulate Nepalis of Darjeeling, who have learnt the ropes

of politics through cunning and hard ways, by living for so many years under the Bengali dominated state of West Bengal. Infact in 1973, the Bhutias and Lepchas had suggested the merger of West and East Sikkim with Darjeeling and carving out a Bhutia-Lepcha dominated state and 'which would satisfy the aspirations of Nepalis on one hand and preserve and protect the indigenous culture of Bhutia and Lepchas on the other.'<sup>23</sup> But however, such situation, it was felt would bring the end of Sikkimese multi-ethnic identity.

The Nepalis of Darjeeling and Sikkim have many cultural affinities and indeed many may point to Sikkim, as a Nepali speaking state and that Nepalis have their own region there. But however, it is fiercely argued by the Nepalis in Darjeeling, that in order to go and live there, inspite of being Nepalis, requires the production of Sikkimese domicile certificates. It is widely felt that, only a separate state, 'Gorkhaland', will solve their problems.

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<sup>23</sup>. B.S.Das, The Sikkim Saga, Vikas Publication, New Delhi. 1973, pp.112.

## Conclusion

India, a diversity of religion, language and culture has to be admired in her efforts in bringing the process of linguistic integration to democratic conclusions. It can be said that today, various ethnic groups, with the process of modernisation and development are becoming more and more conscious of their distinct basis. This leads to social movements, generally under the leadership of lower middle class members. They use cultural symbols upon which people choose to base their claim for group rights. Ethnic identity system, generally incorporates political aspirations of a group and are effective in mobilizing members for political goals. Language has played a stronger role in the formation of European nation states.

'Naturally, 'says Dipankar Gupta, 'India as a nation state seems unfinished in this light, what with the many diversities of religion and language'<sup>1</sup> In India, the process of linguistic integration

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<sup>1</sup>. Dipankar Gupta, op.cit., pp.14.

has been slow. The process of necessity, is slow, arduous and protracted. As and when new social groups emerge in linguistic communities, e.g. the middle class, the struggle for identity begins or resurfaces.<sup>2</sup>

The Nepalis, an ethno-linguistic community have been living in the foothills of the Himalayas, especially concentrated in Darjeeling and Sikkim from time immemorial. The meek and docile Nepalis had been kept away from the freedom struggle going on in the plains by the Britishers, who always encouraged them to ask for a separate administrative status. However, the main intention of the 'divide and rule policy', followed by the Britishers and the game, they were so good at playing, was to have hold over the Darjeeling hills and the tea-gardens, which were capable of bringing out so much revenue through tea plantations and timber.

The Britishers, in their bid to convert the people over to Christianity, did some service for the hills and were instrumental in

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<sup>2</sup>. Robert. D.King, op.cit., pp.73.

opening many schools and bringing about the spread of education.

This soon resulted in an English educated elite, which became socially, politically and educationally conscious and started questioning themselves of their ethno-linguistic identity as Nepalis.

Moreover, the negligible population, consisting of Lepchas, Bhutias, Magars and Limbus, had grown tremendously with the influx of Nepali population, which became more prominent with the setting up of tea-gardens.

The Nepali community, a super structure consisting of various sub-communities having a multitude of dialects, culture and traditions like Newar, Rai, Gurung, Tamang, Bahun, Chettri, Kami, Damai, to name a few, because of their common living together and facing of similar hardships, soon were bound together through the Nepali language, which became a symbol of the Nepali ethnic identity and the building of Nepali nationalism. Whereas in Nepal, the Nepali language was the national language, in Darjeeling and Sikkim, it became the 'jatiya bhasa', or the community language. The close

affinity of the Nepali language with Hindi had also made the learning of the language much easier and soon became the lingua franca and was also adopted as the medium of instruction in schools.

The linguistic minority group in Bengal, the Nepalis, had always felt a sense of insecurity when compared to the majority community i.e. the Bengalis. It was under such conditions, that the elites of the Nepali community started demanding Nepali to be the language of administration in the Hills, with the fear that they would have to give in to the Bengali community. They were successful in having the West Bengal Government pass the Official Language Bill in 1961 which was implemented only in 1971, declaring Nepali as one of the official languages in the three sub-divisions of Darjeeling.

Big names in linguistics like Sir George Grierson, R.L. Turner, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee supported the cause of the Nepali language but the Nepalis were taken for a rude shock, when the Constitution enforced on 26th January, 1950 did not recognise Nepali as one of the 14 languages in the VIIIth Schedule.

Ever since then, there had been constant demand to have the Nepali language included in the respective Schedule. The Indira Gandhi Government gave hopeful promises of getting its Constitutional recognition but in 1979, Nepali language was dubbed as a foreign language by the then Prime Minister, Morarji Desai. Such a statement from the honoured chair of the Prime Minister, greatly hurt of the sentiments of the Nepalis, who always considered India as their 'Motherland' and had always been defending her frontiers loyally. But the work was carried out unabatedly by the then Chief Minister of Sikkim and leader of SSP, Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari. The BNRP had also been formed to perform this herculean task. Eventually, the Bill demanding the same was passed in August 1992, accepting Nepali, Manipuri and Konkani in the VIIIth Schedule according to the 71st Amendment. This has greatly boosted up the morals of the deprived Nepali community and helped to bring them into the national mainstream and also giving them firmer basis for Indian identity.

The Nepalis had always craved for a separate identity, away from the hegemony of the Bengali dominated community. They incessantly felt that they were different from them geographically, culturally, historically and linguistically and thought that they would be able to solve their various aspirations only through a separate administrative set-up. The Hillmen's Association, European Association, Planters Association, the AIGL, also supported the same demand. The Congress suggested for formation of Union Territory and the Communists for regional autonomy. In fact, they had also moved a Constitutional Bill in 1982 and 1985 for the same demand. But it had been rejected and the Communists had accepted it without a murmur of protest.

The rejection of the Communist proposal for regional autonomy in the hills by the Centre, coincided with the eviction of thousands of Nepalis from Meghalaya and Assam and dumping them in the Assam-Bengal border. No political party took up their cause. It was also felt that the word 'reciprocal', in Article VII of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950, had created a confusion between the Nepalis of Nepal



and Nepalis of India and put them together in a single basket of illusion.

Meanwhile, the GNLF had been formed in April, 1980 and its leader, Subhash Ghising asked the people to question themselves of their lost identity. Other parties were there before in the hills, but the reasons why GNLF gained a huge following was because it concentrated more on the political aspect and used other demands as supplemantry. Moreover, Ghising succeeded in blending the issue of <sup>language</sup> identity and citizenship with the statehood demand. The democratic way, through talks and memorandas had failed to attract much attention from the Centre or the West Bengal Government. But what they failed to notice, was the undercurrents that had already been built up in the hills, which were inflamed through the deligent use of emotions and sentiments. The Gorkha passion was quickly aroused with the clarion call of the blood stained 'khukuri'.

Sense of insecurity about their identity, coupled with the sense of deprivation in all fields, social, economic, political and the feeling of being dominated by the majority community, further inflamed the

simple minded Gorkhas. Darjeeling boasted of the three T's, Tea, Timber and Tourism, but the benefits, it was felt, were all taken away to the plains. Moreover, the accelerated pace of development in all fields in neighbouring Sikkim, having similar cultural and linguistic trends, after its merger with India, despite having less population, was an eyesore to the Nepalis of Darjeeling.

The nearly 28 months violence in the hills ended with the Accord on 22nd August, 1988 and the DGHC was formed through a Gazette Notification passed by the West Bengal Government and not by an Act of the Parliament. The acceptance of the DGHC, an autonomous hill council by Ghisingh was looked upon by some, as a sign of betrayal and who pledged to continue with the 'do or die struggle' till the creation of Gorkhaland. But on the other hand it was laid down that the Gorkhas have been truly accepted as Indian citizens and that their identity problem has been solved. Even though their developmental aspirations in the various fields still remain unfulfilled, Ghisingh deserves credit for opening the eyes of the people and telling the rest of India and the world about the sad

plight of the Indian Gorkhas.

But the demand for 'Gorkhaland' still remains. Today, all parties functioning in Darjeeling, except the CPIM has made this the main issue in their manifesto, to win the elections instead of the perennial problems which continue to trouble the hills people, i.e. shortage of water, bad communication and power cuts. A breakaway group of the CPIM - the CPRM, consisting of hardcore Communists, also supports the demand, thus bringing about anxiety to the State Communist Committee of the CPIM.

The concept of 'land' or 'Mato' or 'Jamin' holds a special place of importance to these Nepali folks. After all, it has been this land, which has sustained them through the severe hardships. It is here that they have grown the world famous tea, giving in their sweat and blood for its prosperity. But it is these same tea bushes, which tell of their story of agony and deprivation. Only the achievement of a separate state, 'Gorkhaland', it is felt, will help to solve the many problems and their quest for identity on a firmer basis established.

Darjeeling initially was a part of Sikkim and the possibility of Darjeeling and Sikkim merger looks economically viable, with various people opining in favour of 'what it was, it should be'. But the chances look quite slim. Language binds people together as imagined communities, sometimes even cutting across boundaries. This is true about Nepalis of Darjeeling and Sikkim, with the Nepali language binding them together. But inspite of various cultural and marital similarities between them, the Nepalis in Sikkim have developed a 'Sikkimese' nationality. The Nepalis of Darjeeling, because they have had better political, social and educational facilities in the past, display some superiority over their Nepali brethren in Sikkim.

But when Sikkim started developing in all fields after the merger and the opportunities for employment started, the Nepalis of Sikkim showed their indignation towards them and started demanding for employment on the basis of 'sons of the soil'. This together with other factors make the Gorkhas in Darjeeling crave for 'Gorkhaland' to establish their identity on a firmer basis.

Undoubtedly, the Nepalis or the Gorkhas living in Darjeeling are very different from the people of mainland India, culturally, linguistically, historically and in physiognomy. Of course, racial, cultural and religious co-mingling makes a Gorkha a Bengali, a Punjabi, a Bihari of today, different from that of yesterday. Modernization and development bring him nearer to the other groups in the region and India. Yet, their local specificity and attitude towards life, differs from the others and it needs greater sensitivity for the Indians outside the region to understand their problems. This regional sensitivity is necessary in a Tamil for a Telegu, a Bengali for a Punjabi, the so called mainland for other peripheries.

But, if Nepalis are really very keen to establish their Indian identity on a firmer basis and if they wish to be successful in their endeavour, to form the separate state of 'Gorkhaland', what is needed, is a change in their mentality and attitude and to have a greater sense of belongingness with the rest of India. This is a conflict of middle class aspirations, as the linguistic agitations in India show even in the 1950's.

What is also required is genuine consciousness amongst the masses, to be aroused by tactful leadership, who with genuine care and farsightedness, can look beyond the real problems of its people and further help the Nepalis to establish their identity, as true citizens of the Indian Motherland.

Moreover, as the Nepalis are living in the borders of India, to maintain peace in these strategic areas is a very important prerequisite, which can harbour troublesome water for the whole of the country, if not tackled properly.

In their search for identity, the Nepalis want to be accepted as true Indians and want to be liberated from the so called 'Kancha' 'Durban' or 'Bahadur', the nomenclatures with which, they are so much associated.

To conclude, we make the following points :

Linguistic integration of Nepali speaking people of Darjeeling

is slow, arduous and protracted, like the linguistic integration at an All India level.

Assertion of linguistic identity reflects demands of the middle class, that dominates the linguistic community and which uses cultural symbols for political purposes.

The response to such assertion, has to be democratic, i.e. devolution of power that goes a long way, in assuaging the social needs and political aspirations of the people and their elites respectively.

Since the process is incremental, a fringe of extremism emerges, or a next stage of the movement surfaces, which has happened since the DGHC was granted.

This concession helped to douse the violent protests and the same leadership came to power in the DGHC.

The leadership now faces new spate of demands, both for statehood and for merger of Darjeeling with Sikkim. Only time will tell, what happens to the new demands.



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## **Appendix A**

### **Memorandum of Settlement**

The demands of the GNLFF having been considered by the Government of India and the Government of West Bengal and consequent upon the tripartite meeting between Shri Buta Singh, Union Home Minister, Shri Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister of West Bengal and Shri Subhash Ghisingh, President, GNLFF at New Delhi on 25th July, 1988, It is hereby agreed between Government of India, Government of West Bengal and GNLFF as below:

#### **1. Separate State of Gorkhaland**

In the overall national interest and in response to Prime Minister's call, the GNLFF agree to drop the demand for a separate State of Gorkhaland. For the social, economic, educational and cultural advancement of the people residing in the Hill areas of Darjeeling district, it was agreed to have an autonomous Hill Council to be set up under a State Act. The salient features of the Hill Council would be as follows :

- (i) The name of the Council will be 'DARJEELING GORKHA HILL COUNCIL'.
- (ii) The Council will cover the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling district, namely, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong, plus the Mouzas of Lohagarh T.G., Lohagarh Forest, Rangmohan, Barachenga, Panighatta, Choto

Adaipur, Peharu, Sukna Forest; Sukna Part-I, pantapati Forest-I Mahanadi Forest, champasari Forest and Salibari Chhat Part-II within Siliguri sub-division.

- (iii) The State Government agrees to lease to the Council after it is formed, or acquire for it the use of such land as may be required and necessary for administrative and developmental purposes, anywhere in the State and in particular in or around 'Darjeeling More' in Siliguri sub-division.
- (iv) The executive powers of the council will cover the following subjects subject to the provisions.

#### **Central and State Laws**

1. The allotment, occupation or use, or setting apart, of land than any land which is a reserved forest, for the purpose of agriculture of gazing, or for residential or other non-agricultural purposes, or for any other purpose, likely to promote the interest of the inhabitants of any village, locality or town:
2. The management of any forest, not being a reserved forest :
3. The use of any canal or watercourse for the purpose of agriculture:
4. Agriculture :

5. Public health and sanitation, hospitals and dispensaries;
6. Tourism;
7. Vocational Training;
8. Public works - development and planning
9. Construction and maintenance of all roads except national highway and state highways
10. Transport and development of transport;
11. Management of burials and burial grounds, cremation and cremation grounds,
12. Preservation, protection and improvement of livestock and prevention of animal diseases, veterinary training and practice;
13. Ponds and the prevention of cattle trespass;
14. Water, that is to say, water supplies, irrigation and canals, drainage and embankment, water storage;
15. Fishries;
16. Management of markets and fairs not being already managed by Municipal authorities, Panchayat Samiti or Gram



Panchyats;

17. Education-primary, secondary and higher secondary;
  18. Workd, Lands and Buildings vested in or in the lawful possession of the Council;
  19. Small scale and cottage industries;
- (v) The Council shall exercise general powers of supervision over Panchayat samities, Gram Panchayats and Municipalities falling within the area of the Council's Jurisdiction.
- (vi) The General Council will have a total of 42 Members out of which 28 will be elected and the rest nominated by the State Government.
- (vii) There will be an Executive Council and the Chairman and Vice-chairman of the General Council will be ex-officio members of the Executive Council with the Chairman of the General Council functioning as the Chief Executive Councilor. The Chief Councilor will nominate 5 members to the Executive Council from out of the elected members of the Council and the State Government will nominate 2 members to the Executive Council from out of the non-official nominated members of the General Council.

(viii) The Chairman of the General Council cum Chief Executive Councillor will have the ex-official status and privileges of a Minister in the Council of Ministers in the State.

(ix) The Bill for setting up the Hill Council will be introduced and passed in a special session of the State Legislature which has been summoned. The election to the Hill Council will be held by the 15th December, 1988.

## **2. Restoration of Normalcy :**

(i) Review of pending criminal cases:

It is agreed that review will be done by the State Government of all the cases registered under various laws against persons involved in the GNLF agitation. Action will be taken, in the light of the review, not to proceed with prosecution in all cases except those charged with murder. Release of person in custody will follow with withdrawal of cases. This review will be completed within 15 days of signing of this agreement.

(ii) Action against Government servants:

The State Government agrees to withdraw all cases of disciplinary action taken against employees in the context of the agitation. There will be no victimisation of Government servants.

(iii) The GNLF agrees to issue a call to its cadre for the surrender of all unauthorised arms to the district administration. It will be made clear in the call that such surrender made voluntarily within the prescribed date will not attract any prosecution.

(iv). The GNLFF hereby agrees to withdraw all agitational activities and to extend full cooperation to the administration for the maintenance of peace and normalisation of the political process in the hill areas of Darjeeling.

Sd/-

Subash Ghisingh  
President, GNLFF  
(On Behalf of GNLFF)

Sd/-

C.G.Somiah  
Union Home Secretary  
(On behalf of the Central Government)

Sd/-

R.N. Sen Gupta  
Chief Secretary  
(On Behalf of the Govt. of West Bengal)

In the presence of Union Home Minister & Chief Minister  
Government of West Bengal

Place : Calcutta

Date : 22.8.88

## **Appendix B**

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Government of India

Dated 23rd August,  
1988

Ministry of Home Affairs

New Delhi

### **Notification**

Whereas it has come to the notice of the Central Government that there have been some misconceptions about the citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution of India of certain classes of persons commonly known as Gorkhas, who had settled in India at such commencement.

And whereas it is considered necessary to clear such misconceptions; it is hereby clarified as follows:

1. As from the commencement of the Constitution, that is, as from 26.1.1950, every Gorkha who had his domicile in the territory of India, that is in the territories which on 26.1.1950 became part of or constituted the territory of India as defined in article 1(2) of the Constitution of India, and -

- (a) Who was born in the territory of India; or
  - (b) either of whose parents was born in the territory of India; or
  - (c) Who had been ordinarily resident in the territory of India for not less than five years before such commencement shall be a citizen of India as provided in Article 5 of the Constitution of India.
2. No such person as is referred to in paragraph (1) above shall be a citizen of India or be deemed to be a citizen of India if he has voluntarily acquired the citizenship of any foreign State, as provided in Article 9 of the Constitution of India.
3. Every person who is a citizen of India at the commencement of the Constitution as aforesaid shall continue to be such a citizen subject to the provisions of any law that may be made of Parliament as provided in Article 10 of the Constitution of India.
4. The provisions of the Citizenship Act, 1965 and the Rules and orders made thereunder shall apply to the persons referred to in paragraph (1) after the commencement of the Constitution.

Sd/-  
Indira Misra  
Joint Secretary to the Government of India

**THE NEPALIS OF DARJEELING :**  
**' SEARCH FOR IDENTITY**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE (1)**

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1) Name:

2) Residence:

3) Profession:

❖ Business

❖ Trade

❖ Worker

❖ Others

4) If Worker :

❖ Tea Garden

❖ Transport

❖ Others

5) Who were the original inhabitants of Darjeeling and Sikkim?

a. Only Lepchas

b. Lepchas, Magars, Limbus

c. Both (a) and (b)

d. Don't know

6) (i) Did other Nepali Caste groups (like Newars, Rais, etc.) come from Nepal to Darjeeling & Sikkim?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Don't know

6) (ii) If yes for what purpose did they come?

a. Economic conditions were deteriorating in Nepal

b. For better job opportunities

c. Both

6) (iii) If they did come for job opportunities, was it:

a. Due to work in tea gardens

b. For construction work

c. Both

7) How did the Nepali community gain predominance in Darjeeling and Sikkim vis-à-vis other communities like Lepchas and Bhutias

- a. Britishers encouraged their migration to work in tea gardens and construction work
  - b. Retired Nepali soldiers of the East India Company settled in these areas
  - c. Both
- 8) How did Nepali come to be the language of communication and commerce in Darjeeling Hills though there are other language speaking communities in large numbers like Lepchas, Bhutias and others?
- a. Nepalis are the dominant society
  - b. Official language of Darjeeling District since 1961
  - c. Cultural dominance
  - d. Other languages are less developed
- 9) (i) Nepali language assumes significance in Darjeeling. Is it because of :
- a. Economic prosperity of Nepalis
  - b. Cultural dominance of Nepalis
  - c. Demographic condition in their favour
- 9) (ii) Nepali language assumes significance in Sikkim. Is it because of
- a. Economic prosperity of Nepalis
  - b. Cultural dominance of Nepalis
  - c. Demographic conditions in their favour.
- 10) In spite of Nepali being included in the 8<sup>th</sup> schedule, why is there a controversy between Nepali language and the Gorkha language? Is the cause :
- a. Genuine
  - b. Pressure tactics of various parties

## QUESTIONNAIRE (2)

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- 1) (i) Being a Nepali from Darjeeling do you think that the problem of identity ever existed? Was the problem real? (any further comments are welcome)
- a. Yes
  - b. No
- 1) (ii) If yes, why?
- a. Considered as Nepalis from Nepal
  - b. Considered as Indians in Nepal
  - c. Not considered either of India or Nepal

d. Considered as second class Indian citizens

1. (iii) If no, why?

a. The problem was just a created political issue

b. It was basically an emotional or a psychological problem arising out of a sense of differentiation and subjugation of the Indian Nepalis in Darjeeling by the govt. (both Central and State).

2) Do you think that the Nepalis of Sikkim vis-à-vis the Nepalis of Darjeeling suffer an identity crisis?

a. Yes

b. No

3) Was the problem of identity of the Nepali people prior to Independence or after it?

a. Before

b. After

c. Don't know

4) When did this cause reach its peak?

a. Before the coming of the G.N.L.F

b. With the coming of the G.N.L.F

c. Don't know

5) Why did the G.N.L.F gain predominance inspite of the fact that there were other political parties?

a. Other political parties focussed solely on the demand for a separate state

b. The G.N.L.F leader brought the issue of citizenship

c. G.N.L.F gave concrete shape to the problem of identity crisis

d. Only (b) and (c)

e. All

6) What do you think were the causes of the Gorkhaland agitation in the '80's?

a. Insecurity among the Nepali Hill People

b. Better job opportunities – economically, politically and educationally were given to communities other than the Nepalis

c. Nepalis wanted to remove the label of "Nepalese from Nepal"

d. Wanted to be accepted as Indian Nepalis or Gorkhas

e. Prosperity of Nepalis in the creation of Sikkim as the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of India

7) (I) Was the Gorkhaland agitation productive with the formation of the D.G.H.C?

a. Yes



b. No

(II) If yes, how?

- a. Economic conditions have improved
- b. Greater say in political decisions
- c. Gave political identity to Indian Nepalis
- d. All the above

(iii) If no, why?

- a. Not much change in economic conditions
- b. Only a handful of people have gained
- c. Loss of innocent lives and property
- d. Social conditions have deteriorated
- e. All the above

8. Is Statehood a solution to the problem of identity crisis?

- a) Yes, we will be recognized as the Gorkhas of India
- b) No, there will be further sub-division within the Nepali community in Darjeeling

9. Is the Nepali community in Darjeeling and Sikkim being divided again on the basis of language, caste and creed?

- a) Yes, the various sub-communities (like Tamang, Newar, Rai, etc.) are becoming more conscious and demanding a separate identity for themselves
- b) No, the various sub-communities still consider themselves as one, bound by the common language, Nepali or the Gorkha language

10. If Darjeeling merges with Sikkim will it then be a proper state?

- a) Yes, it will be more economically viable
- b) No, will give rise to conflicts

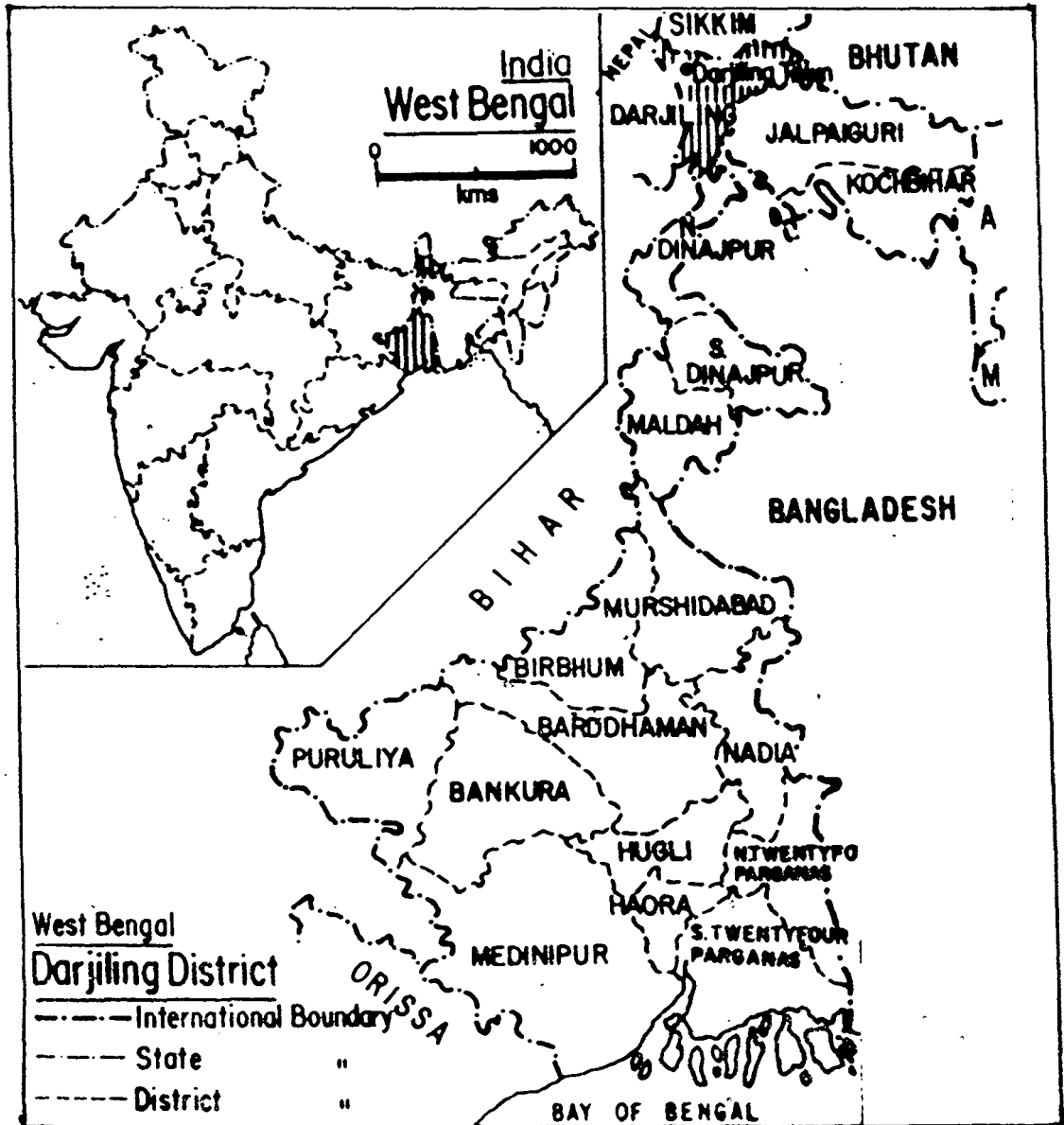
11. What advantages do you see if a Gorkha State is formed?

- a) Better job opportunities for Nepalis
- b) Greater say in political decisions for Nepalis
- c) Stable identity of Nepalis as Indian citizens
- d) All the above

12. What are the disadvantages?

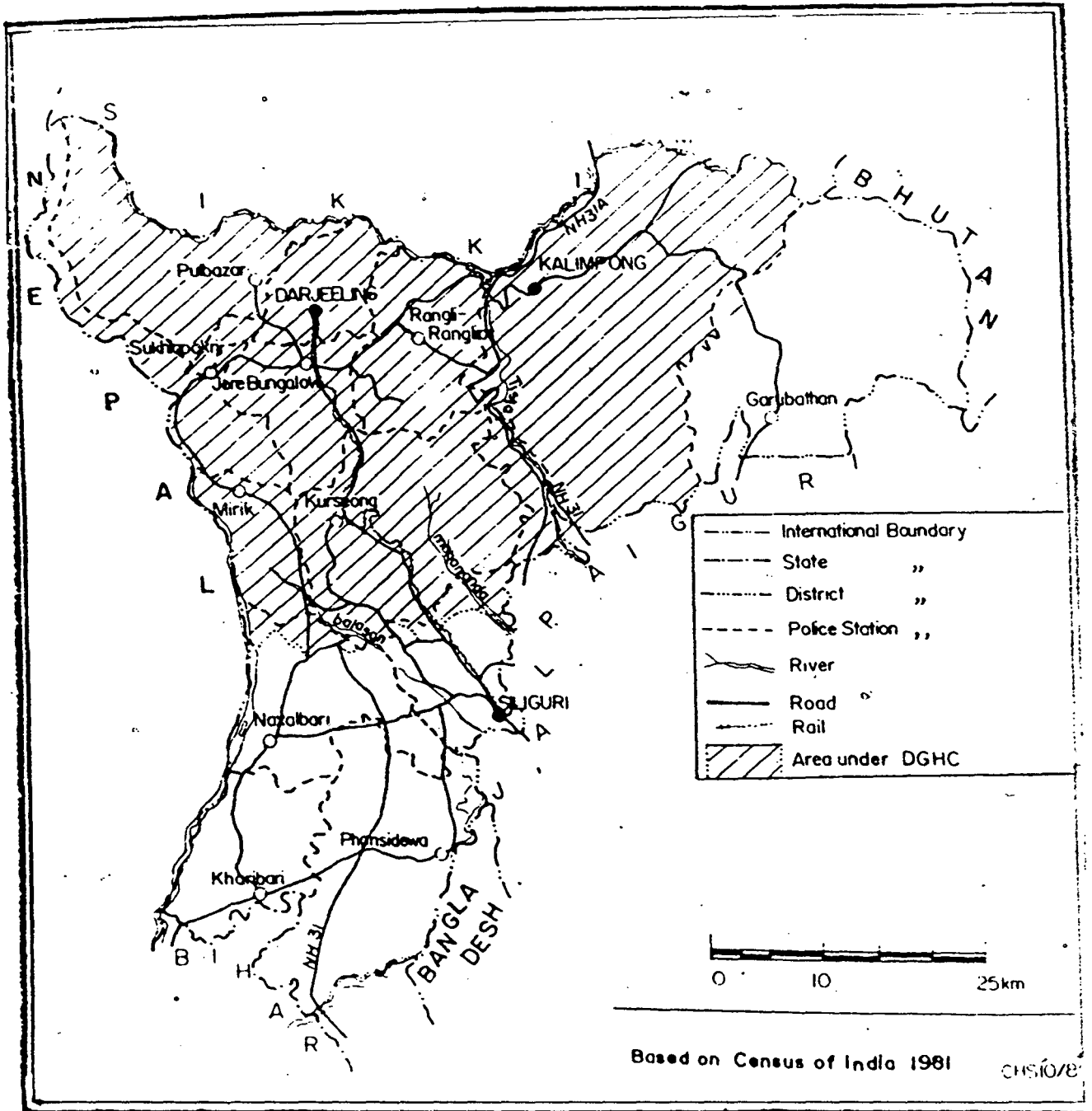
- a) Will give rise to regionalism
- b) Only few powerful will gain
- c) Not economically feasible

# 1. MAP OF WEST BENGAL



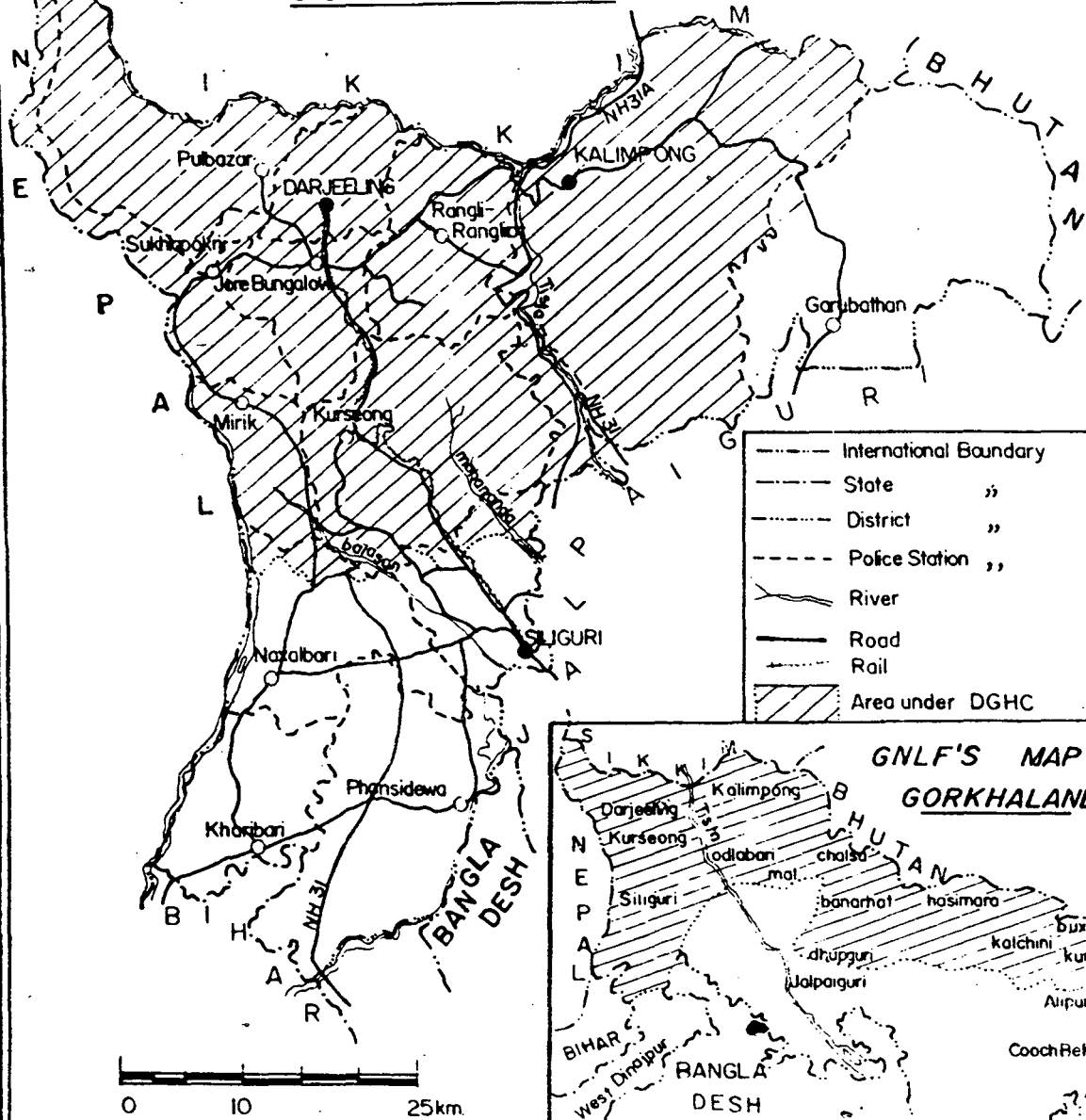
Source: Darjiling Municipality, NATMO and Survey of India.

## 2. MAP OF DARJEELING DISTRICT

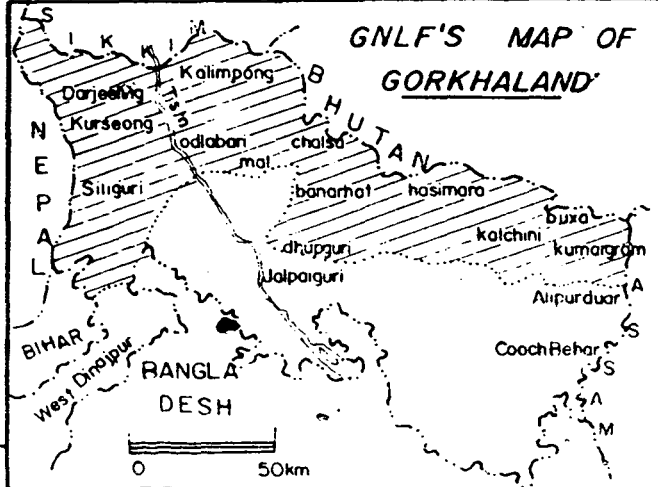


Based on Census of India 1981 CHS/078

### 3. DARJEELING GORKHA HILL COUNCIL MAP



- International Boundary
- State " "
- District " "
- - - - - Police Station " "
- ~~~~~ River
- ==== Road
- Rail
- ▨ Area under DGHC

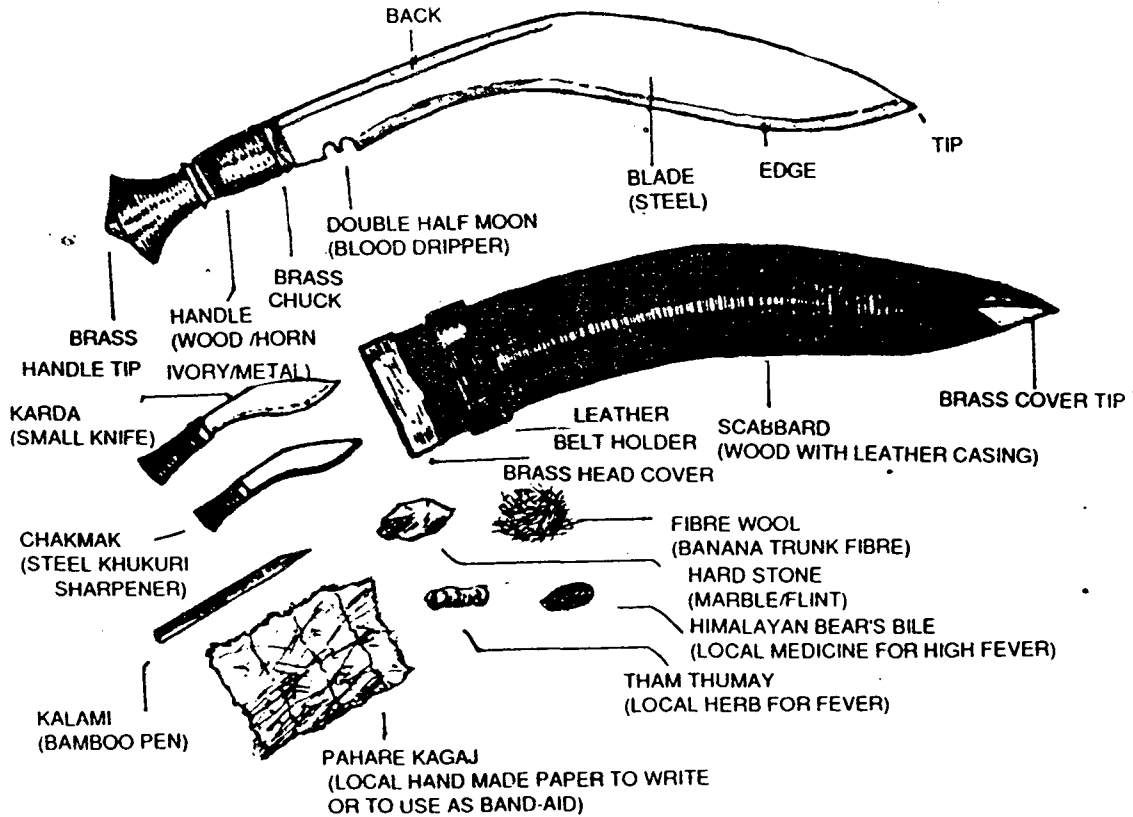


Based on Census of India 1981

CHS10/89

Source The Telegraph

# KHUKURI



# KHUKURI

The Khukuri is a traditional and religious weapon of the Gorkhas and every Gorkha is dextrous in handling it. Be it at war, or in preparing a wild or domestic game, or chopping vegetable the Khukuri is a handy weapon. Some use it even as a shaving instrument. It is made of fine steel with a slight curve with the weight centered around the end of the blade. The Khukuri is an inalienable part of the culture of the Gorkhas.