

ETHNICITY, STATE AND DEVELOPMENT

A CASE STUDY OF
GORKHALAND MOVEMENT
IN DARJEELING

Darjeeling
1991
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Preface

Writing this book for me, like similar works by others, is basically an ego-trip. As the Gorkhaland Movement gained momentum I was approached by many people to write something about it, some in favour and some against. I thought I would not go for cheap and instant popularity, for my life or my family members would be in danger. But in one occasion I was forced by the circumstances to write a leaflet in English entitled "The Gorkha Diary" which was a matter of much speculation by intelligence officials. I did not know of its impact till I read *The Times of India* dated August 26, 1986.

This leaflet being anonymous did not correct my image in the Darjeeling hills as an anti-Gorkhaland intellectual—an image created by my about six years (1971-1975) of active association with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and an article I had written against this Movement for *Sikkim Express* of October 1981 entitled "Darjeeling and Statehood." Nor did my CPI(M) background and this article correct my image in my University campus as a Gorkhaland ideologue, and hence 'dangerous.'

I have taken here an opportunity to bare myself to the bone. Let the misgivings about me be based on the knowledge of what I am rather than on assumptions of what I could be.

Some of my well-wishers, who include a good number of Bengalis, advised me not to publish this book now. One of them even suggested me to keep the manuscript for my daughter to publish. I appreciate their concern and understand the situation very well but not publishing it now would be cowardice.

Whether I liked it or not, the consequences of this Movement on my family members and myself were many and never for the better. But I have no regrets about it; I am rather happy that the incidents have made me much wiser than I could ever be in my life. And I always thought that I should share my little but hard earned experiences with my fellow countrymen. I also thought that I was best suited to do this job as I had over eight years' research experience in Darjeeling and regular contacts with the people there. My being a faculty member of the Centre for Himalayan Studies also put me at a very advantageous position regarding collection of materials required for this book.

The freedom which I enjoyed at the Centre was very congenial for the early completion of a rather voluminous work. I must, for this and many other concessions allowed to me, thank my ex-boss, Professor Bani Prasanna Misra. I should also acknowledge here the financial help extended to me by the Centre and by Professor D.B. Dutta, ex-Vice Chancellor of our University from his Establishment Fund.

For collecting materials and/or discussion I owe a special gratitude to the following persons: Karubaki Datta, Laxmikanta Sharma, Ghanashyam Nepal, and Mohan P. Dahal of our University; C.K. Shrestha, editor of *Aba* and later *Himali Bela*; Harka Bahadur Chhetri of St. George's High School, Pedong; Kamal Kumar Sharma of Workers' Education Centre, Siliguri; Rudramani Pradhan and Amrit Khaling of Kalimpong; and my co-brother, Squadron Leader N.K. Taneja. I am also grateful to my friends like Amit Mitra, Preym K. Po'dar, Anmole Prasad, Dorji Tshering Lepcha, Nirmal Sengupta, and Bengt G. Karlsson for their intellectual support lent to me directly or indirectly. I am especially obliged to Ghanashyam Nepal and Preym K. Po'dar for seeing the entire manuscript meticulously and making many valuable comments and corrections. For documentational help, J.M. Majumdar and for drawing the maps, Debi Prasad Boot have obliged me greatly. And for cooperating with my unchartered interviews, numerous students, teachers, agriculturists, businessmen, tea garden workers and managers, hoteliers, taxi-drivers, etc. are lovingly remembered.

There are many others whose help I may have certainly taken but not acknowledged here. They are all gratefully remembered. But no author forgets to put in record the sacrifice of his/her spouse and children. I am indeed thankful to my wife, Roshina Gowloog Lepcha and my daughter, Tarona, for allowing me to work almost undisturbed. But I must state that the views expressed herein are exclusively mine and none of my friends, family members or colleagues at and outside the Centre for Himalayan Studies is in any way responsible.

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I

Introduction

1986-88 was a nightmare; a phase of utter confusion, chaos and lawlessness; if for some it meant a loss of career, academic years, etc. it also meant training in civil war; for others it was political investment; also a phase of literary activity and revolutionary action; but certainly a time that took away everything from the weak, the silent and the hapless and gave a lot to the powerful, the uncouth, and the unscrupulous.

These are only a few of the varied experiences that the people in the Darjeeling hills and Dooars had out of the turmoil—the Gorkhaland Movement for the creation of a separate state from West Bengal for attaining Indian national identity. This situation had to occur, sooner or later, in the history of Darjeeling and Dooars. For this was only one of the various attempts made by the people of these places to attain similar goals in the past. One event bred another—each time larger and more encompassing than the one before.

Like in most allopathic treatment today, the real issue was never treated to the roots. Not that the roots were not identified or recognized but the potentialities of a people simmering with dissatisfaction for decades was underestimated by the state. They were sometimes given false assurances, some other times simply ignored and at times even rebuffed by the party in power. Of course, they were also instigated, aroused, and even misled by vested interests and political parties.

The geo-political importance of Darjeeling is hardly justified

by the few inches it occupies on the map of India. Despite its importance as an international tourist resort the people of that region are seldom known to be respectably placed in the occupational hierarchy: they are either known as labourers, watchmen, peons or jawans in the army. And this impression is largely true despite their being part of the growing, stable, marching-towards-twentyfirst-century India. It is also precisely this that has compelled them to look for ways of coming at par with their fellow Indians. And under the given socio-political framework there is no surer way to achieve this than by arresting power.

Few Indian politicians could have imagined that such people, who are religiously believed to have come from Nepal only the other day, could hit the headlines of every national newspaper and some overseas papers. These people have for long pleaded that their history is misrepresented, that they are Indians and would like to be recognized so, and have shouted from their hill-tops that they have sacrificed so much for the nation both before and after Independence. Unfortunately their neighbouring communities seldom heard them. Even when they did their voice was lost in the wilderness of apathy and distrust.

The rehearsal for such a movement was going on for the last eighty years or so. Yet this could have been avoided, which is a shame on Indian scholarship and political ingenuity. We have learnt practically nothing from the Naga Movement, the Mizo Movement, the Khasi Movement, the Garo Movement, the Assam Movement, and we shall not learn from the Gorkhaland Movement too. We shall also refuse to learn from the Bodo Movement, the Jharkhand Movement, the Uttarakhand Movement and many more to come. We shall deal with them as and when situations demand but we have other more important things to bother about now such as national integration, technological revolution and development. Such is our thought process. The environmental pollution seems to have impaired not only our eyes and ears but also our cerebrum. God help us!

We seldom realize that one such event means hundreds of displaced persons or families and gutted houses; the creation of

orphans, widows or widowers over-night; years of mutual trust and goodwill destroyed in seconds; age-old institutions of family, marriage and kinship shaken if not shattered; murder, rape, arson, looting, goondaism, vandalism, etc.; fear and pain of torture and rampage by the police; production affected, business hampered, and revenue fallen; and above all, national integration threatened(?).

What I have been trying to drive at all this while is that any event is multi-dimensional but is mostly viewed unidimensionally. It is not surprising if a tea-garden or factory worker views such a movement differently from how a farmer does, or, if a policeman thinks (or is trained to think) differently from a youth involved in such a movement. But it is indeed sad if the so-called intellectuals also indulge in what I may call 'chorussed thinking' as it has been witnessed in the wake of the Gorkhaland Movement. If the high command—whether of Congress(I), the CPI(M), or the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF)—says something the followers seldom dispute among themselves and seldom allow others to dispute the sacred truth.

Indeed there was hardly any 'solo' thinking in the entire period of the Movement from any quarter of our country. At least it was not articulated strongly. There is no denying the fact that such 'chorussed thinking' is often helpful for arriving at decisions, which are at times badly called for. But such thinking seldom enables us to understand and appreciate the problem at hand correctly.

One may question here if at all a multi-dimensional viewpoint is possible on the part of any individual, group or society. The relevance of this question lies in the fact that at any given point of time each person, group or society occupies a particular space. The space may change but for that one has to wait for the time to change too. Unfortunately, it has often so happened that even when time changed the space did not. For many eighty years seem to have passed like a single moment in our history.

Of all themes for historical or sociological enquiry, the most slippery is perhaps the study of ethnic movements. In such studies there is always a high risk of mistaking the forest for

trees or trees for forest. This is primarily because any person in a given situation belongs to or is identified with one ethnic group. Even a truly objective scholar (if there can be one) may be biased. He may have placed himself in the shoes of the person standing at a crossroad and watching different vehicles pass by, as Roland Barthes did, but he may jolly well be mistaken as the policeman controlling the traffic, as Jean Paul Sartre did. This is inevitable as long as we subjectively judge a scholar's objectivity. Until we evolve objective criteria for judging 'objectivity' our efforts towards this cherished goal are also bound to be appreciated subjectively.

Objectives

The main objective here is to unveil as many dimensions of the Gorkhaland Movement and as systematically as possible. For doing this, I have addressed myself to the following questions:

- a. What are the roots of this Movement?
- b. How has the Gorkha identity evolved over time and what were the factors contributing to or inhibiting its development?
- c. In what way have the earlier ethnic movements in the region been connected with the present movement for separate statehood?
- d. What led to the emergence of this Movement?
- e. What were its major demands?
- f. What did it achieve and at what cost?
- g. What was the nature of the Movement?
- h. Who were its supporters?
- i. What were the impacts of this Movement on economy, education, cultural activities, ethnic relations and interstate and international relations? and
- j. What were the 'expected' and 'actual' roles of the media about the Movement?

These ten questions exhaust almost all that a movement study should ideally cover (*Rao 1974:14*). But I have no pretensions

about my coverage or capacity and I believe that in any such study the more important thing is if one has addressed oneself to the right questions and if one has explored one's full propensity to answer them honestly.

I hope that the present study will throw some light on some of the hitherto dark areas of movement studies. This may help at least those interested in this field to understand a movement better. Even if they have missed the opportunity of studying movements in the past they shall certainly have such an opportunity in future. Given the growing degradation in the intellectual standards of our politicians and moral standards of some academicians multiple epicentres of such movements may emerge all over India. This, I believe, is no pessimism. And I implore to the intellectuals not to brush it aside as such. Devolution of powers to the grassroot or change of governments may delay the process but will not prevent it. Ignoring it may bring the failure of the Nigerian Constitution of the Second Republic to our country as well!

Ethnicity, State and Development

Before I lay out the theoretical relationship between these three concepts the two more controversial concepts, viz., 'ethnicity' and 'development' may be briefly elaborated. 'Ethnicity' is a term first used by David Reisman in 1953 (*Glazer and Moynihan 1975:1*) but the concept itself is not new "nor was the phenomenon new or unrecognized previously; it was merely labeled differently" (*Ronen 1986:3*).

'Ethnicity' has been generally understood in an objective or subjective sense. Those who emphasize its objective criteria are mainly Harold Isaacs, who defines it as "primordial affinities and attachments", and Clifford Geertz, who sees it as an "activated primordial consciousness." Though van den Berghe strongly argues in favour of combining the objective and subjective approaches, most other scholars have taken the second approach. For instance, Max Weber defines it as a "sense of specific honour"; Fredrik Barth as a "subjective process of status identification"; Sandra Wallman as "perception of group

difference"; Glazer and Moynihan as "interest groups"; Daniel Bell as "interest plus affective tie"; etc.

Now 'development'. This is a concept which people from all walks of life use frequently but even the economists by profession have seldom defined it in very explicit terms. The element of 'growth' in Gross National Product and Per Capita Income is however fundamental in their view of development.

The Marxists and non-Marxists are also divided on this concept. The Marxists use this concept to mean an egalitarian order where the proletariats have a greater control over the resources. The non-Marxists like Streeten, Warner, Gerth and Mills use this term to mean "better quality of life". The United Nations also have taken the non-Marxist definition of the term 'development.'

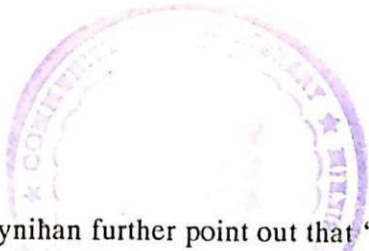
What appears common in both Marxist and non-Marxist definitions is that they tend to view 'development' as a goal or a desirable state of affairs and not as a process. We view it here as a 'process'—a planned and directed upward movement in the direction desired by the government and formally approved by the planning commissions. This is the nature of 'development' at least in the Indian context. Hence the need to explore the theoretical link between ethnicity, state, and development.

Not many sociologists have worked on this connection which I consider vital. I present here some of the contentions made by noted scholars in the field to show the viability of my stand.

In the "Introduction" to *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (1975) Glazer and Moynihan write:

The strategic efficacy of ethnicity as a basis for asserting claims against government has its counterpart in the seeming ease whereby government employs ethnic categories as a basis for distributing its rewards (p. 10).

Thus, it is the government that sustains ethnicity, to sustain itself, by channelizing development or distribution of "rewards" along ethnic lines. This contention finds more meaning under Indian states which have mostly been formed along ethnic



divisions. Glazer and Moynihan further point out that 'ethnicity' is also guarded by the various ethnic groups either to "defend" the privileges they have been enjoying or to "overcome" obstructions towards development (1975:15). In either case the state is either pressurized to intervene or it intervenes itself in its own interest.

Naomi Chazan, the well known scholar on African ethnicity, also finds a close association between ethnicity, state and development (1986:137-57). Examining the patterns of ethnicity at different phases of economic deterioration in Africa he shows how the ethnic expressions are related to development strategies adopted by the state. According to him, the theoretical link between ethnicity, state and development was most marked during the post-independence period in Africa. He writes:

The centrality of government as purveyor of development and distribution of social goods meant that state intervention contributed heavily to the sharpening of the social realities of ethnicity and class. The rhythm of ethnic politics was largely a function of state actions and of the fluctuations in the composition of state officeholders (1986:149).

This contention is also shared by Michael Banton on the basis of his study on the ethnic movements in Northern Ireland (1986:11-23). In India, open market has developed fairly well but it is yet to threaten the monopolistic position of state regarding development opportunities. On the contrary the state control is increasing every day. Hence the situation in India cannot be found different from what have been obtained in African states or Northern Ireland. To quote Chazan again:

The failure of development strategies made association with the state less worthwhile. The context of these policies differentially influenced various facets of state coherence. The loss of specific elements of statehood has generated a multiplicity of separate ethnic expressions (1986:151).

This citation reveals yet another dimension of ethnicity, state and development relationship. It shows that the state, even when it loses its significance directly, contributes to ethnic resurgence indirectly. The need for social security, for instance, which earlier used to be fulfilled by the state is now sought in ethnic solidarities. Ethnic groups, therefore, persist under any circumstance because, as Robert Bates says, "of their capacity to extract goods and services from the modern sector and thereby satisfy the demands of their members" (1983:161). When such a capacity of ethnic groups is proved ineffective within the framework of a state, Chazan says, "the ethnic community, variously defined, becomes a substitute for the state and assumes many of its characteristics" (1986:138). Such exactly was the situation in Darjeeling, if not Dooars equally, during 1986-88.

In this context, Rajni Kothari, a humanist, has also made some very incisive remarks in a recent book. On the relationship between ethnicity and state, he writes:

When each community or caste or religious group interprets its insecurity as a result of the privileges of a competing group gained through 'favours' and 'patronage' from the State, the resulting conflict and violence does not aim at fighting another community but rather fighting the State which is presumed to be dominated by or be preferential to the other community. The other community is perceived as a surrogate State (1988:200).

And about ethnicity and development, he writes:

The more rapid the development of a region, the more modernized its infrastructure, the ethnic identities seem to deepen, and ethnic conflicts seem to intensify ... ethnicity becomes a ground for reassessing the cultural, economic and political impacts of developmentalism (*ibid*:214).

The most comprehensive work on the relationship between ethnicity, state and development is perhaps that of Dov Ronen,

Ronen in the following words:

There is a propensity to interact with human beings who speak the same language, share common religion and historic memories, and so forth—all of which are commonly considered to be the attributes of ethnicity. Such groups provide certain specifics needed in the circumstances of development, such as a sense of security, a need for familiarity, a sense of continuity, which nation *intends* to provide within the framework of the state if and as development proceeds (*emphasis in original*) (1986:7).

Thus Ronen does not view 'ethnicity' as an obstacle to development: rather he treats it as a "potentially useful factor in the process of development" (p. 7). And he hopes that this attribute of ethnicity can be proved useful either by "administrative decentralization" or "structural reorganization into a federal system" (1986:8).

It clearly emerges from the above discussion that ethnicity, state and development form a vicious triangle from which it is difficult to isolate any one of the three. This triangle may be translated here into simple but categorical statements.

- a. Ethnic groups always pressurize the state for greater share of developmental allocations.
- b. State allocates developmental rewards on ethnic lines, primarily to the majority group which decides who should stay in power, and obligatorily to the scheduled castes and tribes, who are otherwise numerically, and hence, politically insignificant as far as the state is concerned.
- c. Development of the majority ethnic group takes place by depriving the minority ethnic groups of their democratic rights and opportunities.
- d. Development provides a communication system between asymmetrical or symmetrical groups and thereby facilitates stronger, more viable, ethnic solidarities.

- e. **Regional and sectoral disparities in the development plans and programmes further accentuate ethnic disparities because each region or sector is dominated by a particular ethnic group.**

In most peripheral and backward areas of India it is observed that regionally and sectorally imbalanced plannings have resulted in significant redistribution of population. Intra- and international migrations go hand in hand with the spread of education and industrialisation (mainly labour intensive) due to limited distribution of skills in the less developed areas. Within decades a new ethnic stratification takes place in which the 'local' people are often found at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. In some places which are scarcely populated or which required more labour force than what could be availed locally even the menial jobs are occupied by the 'outsiders', threatening the demographic balance of the region in favour of these people.

The development process is also found to impinge upon the traditional, cultural and ecological systems of a region. The 'outsiders' serve the 'locals' as 'reference group' only for a short while after which a reversal of their value-system—from assimilation to the quest for identity—occurs. This is capitalized by the new middle class—the only vocal class among them. Culture, language, religion, etc. are used by this class as reinforcing forces for the redistribution of 'power' and 'authority' rather than the 'means of production.'

The Himalayan border areas, which were neglected all through, began receiving attention of the government only after the 1962 War with China. It was not coincidence that ethnic movements began to occur in the north-eastern region from around the same time. The development of infra-structure, education and economy provided the once feud-stricken, rival clans and groups with an opportunity to unite and fight against the 'outsiders' whose claims as 'harbingers of civilization' were seldom acknowledged in political platforms though perhaps not so in their hearts.

One of the major contributions of development—educational

spread—has been fortunately or unfortunately the awareness that redistribution of power and authority is the most important, if not *a priori*, condition for development. The relationship between the ethnic group holding power and authority and the ones without these are therefore always strained. Both the groups feel threatened of each other's positions—privileged and unprivileged. One always tries to ensure its privileges and the other to overcome its handicaps. The former's sense of insecurity is deeper in bordering areas as the unprivileged have the privilege of acquiring extra-territorial help.

There are many more reasons as to why ethnic disruptions are more rampant in the bordering areas. One of them is certainly the fact that the people in such areas often see no difference between nationalism and ethnicity. And actually the difference is insignificant except for those who belong to the 'mainstream' school of thought such as Miglani (1989) and Vidyadharan (1989). Or those who are trapped in the 'orientalist' framework of concepts and thoughts. An 'orientalist' here represents, both culturally and ideologically, the European material civilization and culture in everything that he does, sees, and interprets. (For details see *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said and *Society Against the State* (1977) by Pierre Clastres.)

Source of Information

Most informations presented here are obviously collected from various newspapers, magazines, leaflets, etc. published in the English, Bengali, Hindi, and the Nepali languages from all over India and even abroad. The unpublished articles and reports have been acquired and used here with full acknowledgement. Historical informations have been collected from various libraries in India and Nepal during my doctoral research on the Nepalis of Darjeeling and Sikkim.

The various letters I received from the hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim after 1986 June are some of my most precious sources. I also made a trip to my home in Kalimpong every month or so to see my parents and friends and update myself continuously. I made a number of trips to Kurseong and Darjeeling during the

Movement and after and met and spoke to many about it. Besides I interviewed fairly large number of students, teachers, businessmen, agriculturists, tea garden workers, managers, lawyers, and others in the entire region. And my stay in Siliguri provided me with the opportunity to understand how the majority community reacted to this Movement.

Plan of the Book

I have arranged this book in eleven chapters including the introduction and conclusion. In the introductory chapter I have expressed my objectives, elaborated upon my theoretical model and informed about the sources of information. In the second chapter, I have discussed the political, ethnic and economic histories of Darjeeling with special reference to some of the biggest controversies between the state and the pro-Gorkhaland people. The third chapter traces the origin and evolution of the Gorkha identity, discusses the changing boundaries of this identity, and the latest development about it. The fourth chapter is also historical in the sense that it briefly recapitulates the various ethnic movements in Darjeeling in a chronological order, beginning in 1907 and ending in the statehood demand of 1980.

The first part of Chapter V deals with some of the major macro theories available in order to see to what extent are they helpful in understanding the Gorkhaland Movement. And the second part of this chapter assesses the various theses put forward with special reference to this Movement.

Chapter VI is on violence and counter-violence between the GNLFF on the one hand and the CPI(M), the police, the Gorkha Volunteer Corps, and rival GNLFF factions on the other. It also provides the reasons for such violence or counter-violence by the various groups involved.

In Chapter VII, I have described the strenuous path towards conciliation, the factors contributing to it, and the strains of this conciliation. In Chapter VIII, I have discussed the politics of expediency.

Chapter IX is on the impact of the Movement. The selected fields on which the impact has been shown are economy, ethnic



II

History of Darjeeling

Most ethnic movements in India and elsewhere have given birth to controversies over the history of the regions where such movements have occurred and of the ethnic groups which participated in them. Their demands are justified on the basis of their own version of the history of the region and the peoples. The same demands are condemned by the ethnic group(s) holding authority over the states, or groups having some kind of alliance with such groups, by presenting another version of the history of the same regions and the same peoples. The various demands may sooner or later be conceded but the viewpoints seldom change.

Such has happened in the wake of the Gorkhaland Movement too. The Gorkhas or Nepalis have propagated a history of Darjeeling and its peoples while the state government, which is controlled absolutely by the Bengalis, has presented another history of the region and the peoples. Thousands of audio cassettes carrying Subhas Ghisingh's version of Darjeeling's history were circulated. Probably even greater number of the copies of the "Information Document" in two volumes were circulated by the West Bengal Government and the party functionaries of the CPI(M). An information war, rather disinformation war, or at best a propaganda war, overshadowed many political activities in West Bengal in 1986 and 1987.

One cannot dismiss such wars as trivial. The same issues have been raised by both the communities earlier and the same may

continue to appear at different levels and places in the future as well. I do not seek to find here the middle path but the incorrectness in the arguments of both the GNLFF and the West Bengal Government need to be pointed out. In the process will emerge I hope a more balanced history of the region and the people.

This is indeed a difficult job that I have assigned myself to. The difficulty lies, first of all, in answering questions such as: should ideology be totally silent in the quest for truth? Can there be history for the sake of history alone? Are the documents themselves not ideologically tuned?

I believe that one can write a fairly authentic history if one does not lose sight of the association between 'text' and 'context'. The situation can be further improved if one relies less on the 'history of aggregates' and gives due attention to the specifics. With regard to the history of Darjeeling I can hopefully operationalize it by keeping track of the changing political and ethnic boundaries of the region and the people respectively.

It should also be borne in mind that the history of Darjeeling we read today is not written by trained historians. Most of what goes in the name of the history of Darjeeling was written by botanists, travellers and administrators. But a botanist's account may well be prejudiced by those who helped him collect the plants or accompanied him in the thickets swarmed by wild animals; a traveller could not have moved around every nook and corner of the region and could not have but included only his experiences along the route he took to some destination; and an administrator's version could not have been unprejudiced by his interaction with his 'subjects'.

I would not cast doubt on such 'historians' but for the labourious work of Fred Pinn (1986), which compels me to do so. Not that a trained historian can always be expected to do a better job of it. A lot depends on his own cultural background, his linguistic capabilities, or "competence" to use Chomsky's term, and above all, his familiarity with the region and the people he is writing about.

It may be further said that the history of a region should not be mixed up with the history of a people. The former is often space bound but the latter is seldom so. It is a lack of such understanding among some pro-establishment scholars that have given rise to unnecessary debate over what length of time a people requires in order to be eligible to claim a region it inhabits. For instance, one of my colleagues writes:

It (Darjeeling) had belonged to one, acquired to India by another, and is claimed by groups (Nepali castes) which have only a century-long association with it (*Chakrabarti 1988:5*).

If the Nepalis had more than three centuries' association with Darjeeling would they be considered eligible for claiming it?

It is indeed unfortunate that such questions have to be raised, the answers to which lead us nowhere. They neither solve our problems nor enlighten us in any way. Yet we have to live with them?

Political History

A strange controversy over the political history of Darjeeling has sustained over the years. The GNLF and its predecessors have always ascertained that Darjeeling was never a part of Bengal and the West Bengal Government equally emphasized that it was never a part of Nepal. The implied questions that arise are: what if it was never a part of Bengal? Should it never be a part of it? Similarly, what if it was a part of Nepal once? Should it go back to Nepal? Let us first deal with the central controversy here.

On May 1, 1947 in a memorandum submitted to His Excellency Lord Mountbatten, the then Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Dambar Singh Gurung, the legendary leader of All India Gorkha League (AIGL), wrote:

... So it is only for less than a century that the whole of Darjeeling District has been under the British Government. Hence, historically, it is not a part of Bengal (*SMB 10.4.86*).



III

Evolution of the Gorkha Identity

Evolution of the Gorkha identity in India is an interesting story which few people in India have ever heard in full. Like most folk stories, the complete story has not been written nor told to people belonging to non-Gorkha family members. An inquisitive guest may have overheard a part of this story but that is about all.

The story is rather long, interspersed with personal anecdotes of the narrators. Part of it is forgotten since it is not told always. Part of it has also been cut short due to the lack of adequate vocabulary of some of the narrators who passed it on down the generations. Again, part of it is tuned to the local settings of Darjeeling, Sikkim, northeast India, Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Dehradun, Bhagsu, and so on.

Constructing a single story out of such a situation is not an easy job. I doubt if I have been able to do justice to this story. But mine is a humble attempt to give it a fuller form, to concretise it. For it is a lack of this that makes it elusive and ambiguous.

This story spans over a couple of centuries during which many kingdoms fell and many emerged on the face of this earth. Because of its broad time-frame some interpolations could certainly have taken place. Certain episodes of this story are still being debated and it becomes a premature act to conclude on certain other issues as well.

The narrators of this story begin at different points of time: in

early nineteenth century when the Gorkha regiments were established, in late eighteenth century when king Prithivinarayan Shah consolidated the whole of Nepal, or in the sixteenth century when the foundation of the Gorkha dynasty was laid in Nepal. I should like to begin it from the earliest possible period.

Who were the Gorkhas?

The Gorkhas, who have ruled in Nepal for over four centuries, were a little known people until the consolidation of Nepal by Prithivinarayan Shah, the eleventh ruler over the kingdom of Gorkha. The Gorkha dynasty was established in 1559 by Drabya Shah whose ancestors are said to be of Rajput origin. In this regard, one of the most authoritative sources may be quoted here:

The Gorkhas, or Gorkhalis, so named from the former capital of their country, are the dominant race. They formerly occupied the district around the town of Gorkha, which is about forty miles west of Kathmandu. They are said to be of Rajput descent, and to have been driven out of Rajputana on the occasion of an invasion by Musulmans. They first settled near Palpa, having passed through the Kumaon hills, and gradually extended their dominion to Gorkha (*Wright ed. 1877:25*).

This is corroborated by another well known scholar on the Gorkhas:

Little is known of the Gorkhas as a nation prior to their **invasion of the valley of Nepal, but ancient legends point to the fact that their royal family was descended from the Rajput princes of Udaipur, their connection with this place being traceable from the early history of India** (*Morris 1933:16*).

Colonel John Morris traces their origin to Udaipur on pages 16 to 18 of his book. It clearly emerges from those pages that the forefathers of Drabya Shah had ruled over many parts of central

Nepal before one of their successors captured Gorkha. Drabya Shah is known to have seized the 'city of Gorkha' after himself slaying its king who belonged to the 'Chetri tribe' (*Morris 1933:16-18*). The Chhetris, however, were not wholly confined to this kingdom: they were there in Palpa, Batauli and other places also (*ibid:56*).

The Gorkha kings succeeding Drabya Shah are not known to have made much impact on the history of Nepal until Prithivinarayan Shah became the king of Gorkha in 1742. Ram Shah, who ruled from 1606 to 1633, had however introduced some weights and measures some of which are still in vogue today (*ibid:18*). The kingdom did not expand until 1744 when Nuwakot, then ruled by the Malla kings, was conquered by Prithivinarayan Shah (*Stiller 1973:11*).

After this first ever victory of this great king at the age of 14 he gradually conquered other kings and chiefs ruling other parts of Nepal. Of course, there were some major and minor setbacks but by 1774 he had consolidated the whole of Nepal.

It should be noted here that the Gorkha forces of Prithivinarayan Shah included the "Magar, Khas and Bagale Thapa clans" (*Stiller 1973:102*) though elsewhere Pandes are also mentioned (*ibid:109*). But in "Dibyaupadesh", Prithivinarayan himself has talked of four castes in his army: Bahun, Khas, Magar, and Thakuri (*Pokhrel ed. 1974:176*). Besides, the Gorkha army could not be complete without the Kamis to manufacture the *khukuris* or the Damais to play the band for the army.

After the death of Prithivinarayan on January 11, 1775 at Devighat, near Nuwakot, Singh Pratap Shah became the king. But he ruled for barely three years. He was succeeded by Rana Bahadur Shah who ruled upto 1799. It was his successor, Girvan Juddahbikram Shah, who gave a new turn to the history of the Gorkhas by declaring a war with the East India Company on November 1, 1814. The great power that this Company was was humbled by a smaller and ill-equipped Gorkha force. It was only after General Ochterlony took the command in late 1815 and expertise in mountain warfare was adequately gained that they could conquer the Gorkhas (*Morris 1933:24*).



IV

History of the Ethnic Movements in Darjeeling

This case is especially strong for cutting out the mountainous tongue of Bengal in which Darjeeling lies, inhabited as it is by primitive Mongolians of the Buddhist faith... The thing can be done now with a stroke of the pen. A generation hence it may only be done at the cost of a violent controversy. Effect can be given to this policy by inserting in Clause 12, subsection 2, line 2, the word "frontier" between the words 'backward' and 'tract'.

L. Curtis in 1920

Ethnic movements in Darjeeling have an over eighty years old history. The various turns and twists that such movements have taken make an interesting maze. The absence of unilinear progress of these movements is primarily because the people of Darjeeling were always experimenting with this and that demand, this and that strategy. What is most notable of their long history is that they were absolutely non-violent until mid-1986. Violence was probably unavoidable when the state refused to understand the language of memoranda, plays, poetry and songs.

The same has happened in Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Manipur. The various ethnic movements in those places turned violent only after the people there were pushed to the wall.

Arunachal Pradesh.

It is clear from the memorandum that its signatories were inspired by the movement for "home rule" in India, which the British had accepted as a goal towards which India should move gradually. The grounds which this demand was based on were: (a) geographical, (b) racial, (c) historical, (d) religious, and (e) linguistic. For the NEFP in particular they had given three additional grounds: (a) health considerations, (b) educational development, and (c) defence interests of the country (*WG 1986:51-53*).

Whether or not such grounds were justifiable from the national point of view may be debated. But it is beyond doubt that the hill leaders had a common perception of their position *vis-a-vis* the Bengalis. An ethnicist probably cannot ignore such perceptions because it is these which actually decide the action of those sharing them. That this demand was reiterated in 1929 when the Simon Commission visited India, however, shows that it did not materialize.

Hillmen's Association

It is evident that there was no common forum for interaction between the three main hill communities of the Darjeeling hills until the establishment of the Hillmen's Association. But it is also evident that an informal association of these three communities had already come into existence in 1907 itself, if not earlier.

According to Bagahi and Danda, the Hillmen's Association came into being in 1921 to "safeguard and advocate the legitimate interests of the hill people in the sphere of politics" and under the leadership of "Bahadur Rai, Hari Prasad Pradhan and Eaden La" (*1982:342*). But a memorandum of this Association submitted to Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State for India, on October 25, 1930 shows that this Association existed in 1919. For instance, the memorandum of 1930 says that "an attempt was made in 1919 by the Hillmen's Association of Darjeeling to..." (*WG 1986:55*). Besides, Nar Bahadur Gurung writes that in March 1920, the Hillmen's Association, in collaboration with Darjeeling Planters' Association and the

European Association, had resolved in a joint meeting to fight for the exclusion of Darjeeling district and Dooars from Bengal (1971:6-7).

Thus it appears that this Association had come up sometime after 1917 but before 1919 and certainly not in 1921.

On October 25, 1930 this Association, in collaboration with other local associations, sent a memorandum to Sir Samuel Hoare. This memorandum was jointly signed by the following: (i) H.P. Pradhan, President, Hillmen's Association, Kalimpong, (ii) Lt. Gobardhan Gurung, President, Gorkha Officers' Association, (iii) P.M. Sundar, Secretary, Kurseong Gorkha Library, (iv) N.B. Gurung, Secretary, Hillmen's Association, Kalimpong, and (v) P.P. Pradhan, Secretary, Hillmen's Association, Darjeeling.

This memorandum makes no pretension about the "hill people" and clearly highlights the problems of the "Gorkhas" only. It reflects their deep fear of losing their "solidarity" under the new Constitution. As a measure to resolve this, the signatories, all of whom were Nepalis, suggested 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 Commissioner as an Administrator vested with much more powers than that of District Magistrate assisted by a small Executive Council (like the Provincial Governor's Executive Council), representatives of all interests, in the administration of the Area (*WG 1986:55*).

And for the areas where they were in appreciable number "they should have special representation (as provided for minority communities), in the respective Provinces where they are" (*ibid:same page*).

In a marked deviation from the stand of the Hillmen's Association expressed earlier the above memorandum firstly concerns only with the interests of the Gorkhas, and secondly, it shows no concern with the Dooars area of Jalpaiguri district. These indicate that by 1930 the Gorkha dominance in this



V

Emergence of the Gorkhaland Movement

Not much success seems to have been achieved by social scientists in evolving a general theory of ethnic movements anywhere in the world. Theories based on western situations are often not found useful in the east and *vice versa*. A major difficulty in theorizing about ethnic movements has perhaps arisen due to variation in the nature of such movements themselves and the socio-economic and political situations giving rise to them.

But the difficulty is also there because most social scientists who have attained the level of theorizing are bogged down with one or the other ideological camp. Thus they often try to see sense within the domain of their ideology and pick up only those data that fit into their preconceived notions. Those data which do not fit in or which contradict the same are in a fit of rationalization excluded or ignored. Some such ideologues do not even care to do fieldwork and theorize sitting miles away on the basis of informations reaching their desks. Of course, it is not possible sometimes for such people to conduct fieldwork even if they sincerely want to.

Thus, there are genuine difficulties in theorizing ethnic movements and genuine disinclinations to do so. Thus what we often come across as 'theories' are nothing but propaganda disguised in rhetoric. This is true of the Marxists as well as the non-Marxists amidst us.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to review the myriad of macro and micro theories here. 'Macro' theories here refer to those which have an indirect relevance to the case in Darjeeling while 'micro' theories refer to those which have a direct reference to the Gorkhaland Movement. In the second case, the term 'theory' has been used rather loosely: these are more than hunches or intelligent guesses and may strictly be called theses rather than theories.

The Macro Theories

There is indeed a plethora of macro theories of ethnic or nationalist movements in social science literature. It is not possible to deal here with all the existing theories or with every theory in detail. Thus I have taken up only those theories which are currently being discussed by academicians in our country and presented my comments on each of them.

A. Relative Advantage-Disadvantage Theory: This theory is advanced by Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan in the edited book entitled *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (1975).

They see an "ethnic group" as an "interest group" and, to them, the "interest" of living as a group is common to both the advantaged and the disadvantaged groups. The latter's interest lies in overcoming its disadvantages and the former's in consolidating itself to protect its advantages. Otherwise, they ask: "why on earth would one wish to be a Pole when one could be a worker?" (1975:15).

Their theory is indeed well founded and may well be extended to any situation indeed. But it seems to have certain weaknesses which may be brought out here. First, apart from excluding the possibility of having "conflicts of interests" they have not explained how holding a common interest brings the members of a group together. Can individuals act like vultures who gather from all around the sky as soon as they spot a dead body on the ground? How is an interest articulated in an ethnic group? Is it 'instinctive'?

Second, being a Pole, a Sikh, or a Gorkha not only means advantages or disadvantages as two extreme choices but often

combines the two. Being a Sikh in Punjab may be advantageous but not always so in Delhi. Similarly, being a Gorkha may be advantageous in Darjeeling but not equally so in Dehradun or not at all in Calcutta!

Indeed, the interest of an ethnic group in any given situation may be same, varying or conflicting. A common interest may be developed in a group only when it is threatened by another group. I say 'may be' because the interest of the threatened group may not necessarily be properly articulated and therefore shared by all its members. When an ethnic group is heterogeneous and relatively large such as the Gorkhas a common interest may seldom evolve and unite its members.

B. Cultural Distinctiveness Theory: The main exponent of this theory is Anthony D. Smith. Drawing examples from the nineteenth century ethnic upsurges of the Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Rumanians, he concludes:

Ethnic separatism...is based upon the reality or myth of unique cultural ties, which serve to demarcate a population from neighbours and rulers; and, as a result, separation became not only an end in itself, but a means of protecting the cultural identity formed by those ties. The uniqueness of each ethnic community demands political separation, so that it can run its own affairs according to inner laws of the culture community, uncontaminated and unmolested by external influence (1981:13).

This theory does help us to explain many ethnic movements in India, if not in Asia as a whole. However, there are three points which apparently make Smith's theory not fully acceptable. One, 'culture' is a vague concept and still more so for the toiling masses whose immediate concern is, more often than not, making the two ends meet. This is not to underestimate their cultural consciousness but to emphasize that activities centring around 'food' are still of primary importance in the third world countries.

Two, which is a corollary of the first. What are the factors

that make a 'culture community' transform into a 'political community'? Every community shares the sense of cultural distinctiveness but every community does not herald an ethnic movement. Smith is silent about the extra-factor that makes only some culture communities turn 'political' and not others.

Three, spatial distribution of a culture community has an important role to play in this context but Smith does not incorporate this aspect also. The spatially dispersed culture community may be culturally conscious but may seldom grow into a political community. On the other hand, another culture community inhabiting a compact geographical area has greater chances of growing into a political community. Thus mere distinctiveness, whether real or mythical, is not enough.

Minus these three limitations, Smith's theory is interesting in the sense that it successfully combines the primordialists and subjectivists into a single thread, which is a rare accomplishment indeed.

C. Language Theory: This theory is developed by Sagarin and Moneymaker but the foundation of it was laid by Max Boehm in 1933 when he wrote:

A people not only transmits the store of all its memories through the vocabulary of its language, but in syntax, word sound and rhythm it finds the most faithful expression of its temperament and general emotional life. The rare cases wherein a people has retained its individuality despite the loss of its language do not disprove the conviction of a people or national group that they are depending in language the very cornerstone of their national existence (*quoted in Sagarin and Moneymaker 1979:19*).

The importance of language is perhaps even more in India than anywhere else because here the different federating states have different dominant linguistic groups and a number of marginalised linguistic minority groups.

The role of language in ethnic movement is sharpened by Sagarin and Moneymaker who regard it as an important rallying



VI

Violence and Counter-Violence

The period between May 1986 and December 1988 was characterised by a series of violence and counter-violence in the hills of Darjeeling, parts of the terai, and the Dooars area of Jalpaiguri district. There were, of course, sporadic violence and counter-violence before and the same continue even today but the most intense and extensive were in this period.

The violence and counter-violence have occurred mainly between the GNLF and the CPI(M) supporters, and between the GNLF and the police and paramilitary forces. The clashes between the GNLF and the GVC (Gorkha Volunteer Corps), and rival factions of the GNLF itself were relatively fewer and less extensive. I shall discuss in this chapter the causes, nature, and scope of such violence and counter-violence. While I deal primarily with the period outlined above I should also like to cover related incidents before and after this period too. These may help us, in whatever small way, to understand the intensity of violence and counter-violence in this period.

I really need not discuss here what violence means. Everyone knows that it is an application of physical force defying the existing laws of the land and effecting great losses to the public or private properties, lives, or immense anxiety and inconvenience to everyone in the area thus affected. The distinction between violence and counter-violence is indeed difficult to make. The same act may be called 'violence' by one and 'counter-violence' by another. Hence the difference is often that of perspective

while the nature of the act may be very much the same.

Besides, violence continued over a long period of time often becomes counter-violence. The setting of a government office on fire by the GNLF, for instance, is an act of violence. The arrest and beating of the people by the police or the raid by them following that incident is counter-violence. Ambushing of the police van following that becomes a counter-violence rather than violence simple. Similarly when a group of the GNLF activists kill some CPI(M) supporters it is violence. When the CPI(M) supporters kill some GNLF activists in retaliation it is counter-violence. When the GNLF strikes back again it is counter-violence. Only the first act of violence is actually violence: all the violence that follow subsequently are better called counter-violence.

But officially, whatever violence the CPI(M) and the police indulged in is counter-violence and all that the GNLF and the GVC boys did is violence. There is an implied value-judgement involved here: that violence is bad and undesirable while counter-violence is inevitable and hence not as bad and undesirable. But such a value differentiation is for the administrators to make, not the solemn duty of a social scientist. His job is to see why the violence or counter-violence has taken place, not to decide which is good and which is bad. As a citizen, both violence and counter-violence are undesirable but as a social scientist there is perhaps a limited scope to choose one as desirable and another as undesirable.

The distinction between violence and counter-violence being subjective and value-loaded I do not intend to make here any distinction between the two. For the sake of brevity, I shall use the term 'clash' and sometimes 'violence', but it very much means 'counter-violence' also.

GNLF versus CPI(M)

The goriest violence in the Darjeeling hills and the Dooars area of Jalpaiguri district was between the supporters of the GNLF and the CPI(M) but ethnically belonged to the same group—Nepalis. By December 1987, more than 500 houses had

been set on fire, and over 65 persons killed, in the series of clashes that occurred between these two groups of Nepalis (*Stat 21/12*). The private sources put the figures much higher than those declared by official sources. Besides, thousands of people were forced to flee from the Darjeeling hills and take refuge in Siliguri, Sikkim or Nepal. The CPI(M) Nepalis mostly took shelter in Tilak Maidan or the Kanchanjanga Stadium of Siliguri while the GNLF or the non-CPI(M) Nepalis overwhelmingly took refuge in Sikkim and Nepal.

Kalimpong did have a number of agricultural and forest villages dominated by the CPI(M) until the Gorkhaland Movement broke out. But such Nepalis either surrendered in due time or fled before it was too late. Hence there was hardly any clash between the two groups there though a few stray incidents did occur, as described herein. Almost all the fratricidal clashes occurred in the Sadar and Kurseong subdivisions—the tea belt of the district—where the CPI(M) had a stronghold in most of its 62 odd tea gardens.

It should be pointed out here that the CPI(M) had already made the tea belt its bastion by 1977 when the Left Front Government was voted to power in West Bengal. The Marxist influence in the tea gardens would have been extensive and much deeper but for the charismatic leader of the AIGL, Deo Prakash Rai, who besides his charisma was assured of the Rai support which indeed mattered. The Rais singularly form one of the largest groups in Darjeeling, followed by the Tamangs. But after his expiry the CPI(M) got the opportunity to break the AIGL control and spread fast in the tea gardens. He died in January 1980 undefeated and without completing his fifth consecutive term as a member of the State Legislative Assembly. The vacant seat was for the first time filled in by the CPI(M) candidate, Tamang Dawa Lama.

The personality of the CPI(M) cadres changed particularly after 1977 for obvious reasons. The CPI(M) cadres, who were looked down upon as “illiterates” and “idiots” and even jeered at by the Congress(I) and the AIGL supporters until then, began to treat the latter in similar terms. The disrespected lot which the



VII

Towards Conciliation

It is really difficult to point out exactly when does the process of conciliation begin or say whether this process is even complete. The exact date of its beginning may be of great interest to historians and political scientists but a sociologist is perhaps more interested in knowing why and how has the conciliation come about. What are the situational factors that helped or compelled the conciliation? What are the roles of the key individuals involved? And so forth.

It is also important to see to what extent has the conciliation been a complete one. What strains does the conciliation have and what new strains are developing? How do the different parties and groups involved look at the conciliation reached in August 1988? What degree of permanence or stability can it claim?

I attempt here to answer these and many other related questions which haunt me and many others like or unlike me. Such questions bother almost every conscientious Indian and particularly those living in West Bengal. For no one wants the nightmare, which the movement years were, repeated. One can only wish; one cannot preclude possibility of another nightmare.

But if one knows that such a nightmare may be repeated one can choose not to sleep at all. Or if one knows how to avoid it one can try one's best to do just that. Hence, I consider this chapter rather important.

The Conciliation

The conciliation was a strained process that was procrastinated

unduly. The whole of 1986 saw only signs of the widening divide between the GNLFF and the State Government on the one hand, and the Centre and the State governments on the other. The Movement caught the Centre and the State governments unawares. The situation was characterised by one clash after another and each was keen to harm the other as much as it could. Interestingly, there was no effort whatsoever to arrive at any conciliation. Open condemnation and confrontation of the other party's stand was thus inevitable in such a situation.

The situation was not different in the beginning of 1987 also. Saroj Mukherjee, the chairman of the Left Front, like Jyoti Basu himself, was still calling the GNLFF "agitation" as "anti-national" (*Tel 3/1*). "Nationalism", when translated into Bengali, stands as 'Jatiyatabad' or in English 'racism'. In Nepali, as also in Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages, "nationalism" means 'Rastriyatabad'. 'Anti-nationalism' therefore is a serious attack if translated into these languages but in Bengali the literary meaning of this, as understood by non-Bengalis, would be a compliment rather than a condemnation because 'anti-racism' is welcome everywhere as an ideology. But the connotative meaning of 'anti-nationalism', and the way the Bengalis understand it, are very much the same as the non-Bengalis would translate it. Hence, the sense of hurt.

It was on January 14, 1987 that apparently the first ever step towards conciliation was taken. The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu, held a talk with the Prime Minister, in which both agreed to pursue a "negotiated settlement" (*Tel 15/1*). But four days later, Basu ruled out talks with the GNLFF or the withdrawal of the CRPF if the GNLFF did not withdraw its "Anti-Bengal Day" programme and violence (*FPJ 19/1*). But the Centre, and not the State, invited the GNLFF, on January 22 for talks on the "question of citizenship", and the very next day the "Anti-Bengal Day" programme was withdrawn by the GNLFF (*TI 23/1*).

Consequently, on January 28, 1987 a talk was held in New Delhi between Subhas Ghisingh and the then Home Minister, Buta Singh. Others present at this talk were Chintamani

Panigrahi, the Union Minister of State for Home and C.G. Somaiah, the then Home Secretary (*IE 29/1*). As per the "wishes" of Buta Singh, Subhas Ghisingh suspended the Movement on February 3, for two months (*Hindu/IE 4/2*). Meanwhile, the then Prime Minister categorically rejected the Gorkhaland demand (*HT 8/2*). The West Bengal Government also brought out the "White Paper II" on this Movement in which Jyoti Basu criticized the Centre as well as the GNLF for "spreading canards based on fictitious and motivated figures to malign the State Government" (*Tel 11/2*). The GNLF, in turn, declared its decision to boycott the assembly election due in March that year (*IE 14/2*) and indulged in "violence" (*Tel 20/2*). The GNLF called bandhs on February 21, 23 and 25 and heralded a month-long alternate day bandh from March 3 demanding the removal of R.K. Handa and the CRPF personnels (*HT 4/3*).

Frustrated by the absence of any result even after 23 days of the alternate-day bandh Ghisingh sent ultimatum telegrams to Zail Singh, the then President of India, and the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. He threatened to launch an indefinite mass movement on April 21 if the statehood demand was not conceded (*FPJ 27/3*). Between frequent bandhs and violences, he met Buta Singh on May 15 to express his desire to take a 42-member GNLF delegation to New Delhi (*Tel 16/5*).

Jyoti Basu met Buta Singh on June 8, 1987 to discuss the latest situation in Darjeeling (*HT 8/6*). But having not received any invitation from the Centre till June 10 Ghisingh called a 13-day bandh (*FPJ 11/6*). During this bandh, there was a lot of violence and the Anti-Terrorist Act was enforced for the first time in the three hill subdivisions on June 24 (*HT 25/6*). On June 26 the Centre agreed to hold talks with the GNLF but asked Ghisingh to restore peace in the hills as a precondition for talks (*TI 27/6*). The GNLF decided on June 28 to withdraw the 13-day bandh on the ninth day to pave way for their talks with the prime minister on July 22 (*Tel/HT 29/6*).

One day before the scheduled talk between the Prime Minister and the 49-member (not 42 as decided earlier) delegation led by



VIII

The Politics of Expediency

Everyone knows that politics is a game of expediency. Whenever a movement takes place, a lot is believed to depend on the leaders. This belief is largely true because a movement is, more often than not, what the leaders make it. They can exalt one issue at the cost of another, fix priorities, and even sort out the policies by themselves. The cause may be forgotten but they have to survive, no matter how.

The leadership is found to be important particularly in ethnic movements (*Phadnis 1989*). A movement itself is often judged by the leader(s) it has: it is denigrated for his folly but if it succeeds the credit goes to him. It is he who is called for negotiations, given due recognition by the government or by the media. The self-sacrificing workers below him seldom get any recognition, often not even from their own leader.

Whether a leader is self-styled or duly elected he acts in much the same way. Very responsible he may otherwise be, but he soon learns to walk, talk and act like the leader before him. He is the source of inspiration and hope for some and indignation and disgust for others. The bigger he is, the more are his obsessions and more unapproachable he becomes. More comforts and worries are heaped on him more paranoid he grows,

It is from such a situation that expediency grows and gradually becomes the rule. He forgets the point where he had begun nor does he bother to look back. 'A leader always looks ahead', he tells the people around. He gradually becomes

experienced in holding the supporters to his ideas and even whims, which may but change every now and then. After all he has to be on the top, come what may. A messiah of yesterday becomes the conjuror of tricks today.

This chapter is mainly the story of three such conjurors—Rajiv Gandhi, Jyoti Basu and Subhas Ghisingh—who kept the people wondering every moment what they would do next. And like all magicians they had a forum to perform their acts—the party organization. Though it is finally the leaders who matter, the overall principles and structures of their parties cannot be ignored. These often determine, though not dictate, what kind of performances the leaders can make. Hence, the leaders are better placed in their context or the party through which they perform.

The Congress(I)

The Congress(I) is well known for its internal squabbles and contradictions, which are partly due to the fact that it is almost always the largest single political party in India. Such squabbles and contradictions are noticed not only at the Centre but also at the state and district levels. In short, there is a fair degree of consistency in its contradictions.

I would like to describe here briefly how the Congress(I) leaders have often contradicted its earlier stands depending on the expediency of time. In 1955, when the Congress was in power both in West Bengal and the Centre, the District Congress Committee (DCC) of Darjeeling openly criticized the ethnic movements in Darjeeling spearheaded by the AIGL. Theodore Manaen, the then president of the DCC, said on May 21, 1955 that:

All that the people of Darjeeling can demand and desire is the safeguard and development of Nepali language and culture and an all-round development of the district.

He added:

If we have grievances against the State of West Bengal we

should not threaten to go out of Bengal but fight and agitate for the redress of our legitimate grievances (*HT 22.5.55*).

By 1968, when the United Front was in power in West Bengal, the tone of the DCC was slightly changed. On August 25, 1968 the DCC unanimously passed a resolution demanding an "autonomous administrative set-up" for the Darjeeling hills. It dawned upon them that:

Geographical condition of the area, racial, cultural and linguistic background of the people and the backwardness of the area and the need for the security of this sensitive border area amply justify an autonomous administrative set-up for the hill areas (*WG 1986:21*).

It was also resolved in that meeting to draw up the details of this set-up even before hearing anything from the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (WBPCCC). The WBPCCC's reply dated September 21, 1968 and signed by P.C. Chunder was vague and non-committal. Yet a detailed outline was drawn by a group of Congress members consisting of N.B. Gurung, T. Manaen, I.B. Rai, K.B. Chhetri, and Govind Chatterjee.

By 1986, the stand of the DCC(I) had changed in favour of the Gorkhaland Movement. In a letter to the Prime Minister dated May 21, 1986 and signed by nine Congress(I) leaders of Darjeeling it is clearly mentioned that the demand for a "Separate State or Union Territory" had been inevitable in case of Darjeeling.

The Times of India dated May 31, 1986 further reported that "Darjeeling Congress Unit backs GNLF" but as one reads the report it is discovered that the news title was misleading. Some DCC(I) members had attended a meeting of the Pranta Parishad and not the GNLF. Though the most important demand of both these organizations was statehood, there were significant differences between the two and there never was any understanding between them. And it should be pointed out that the Pranta Parishad was formed of the ex-Congress(I) members mainly.

The WBPCC(I) leaders like Priya Ranjan DasMunshi and Subrata Mukherjee had been condemning the Gorkhaland Movement in as strong terms as the CPI(M) leaders like Jyoti Basu and Saroj Mukherjee. The WBPCC(I) was also reported to have asked the DCC(I), Darjeeling to chorus their slogans against the GNLFF. But the DCC(I) under the presidentship of R.T. Ali refused to 'obey' the WBPCC(I) command. In its meeting held on August 8, 1986 the DCC(I) "not only condemned the police firing at Kalimpong on July 27 but also ruled out cooperation with the CPI(M) in combating separatists" (*Tel 12/8*). Probably on the basis of the report by the WBPCC(I) general secretary, Apurbalal Majumdar, who was present at the above-mentioned meeting, the WBPCC(I) president, Priya Ranjan DasMunshi, later dissolved the DCC(I) and inducted P.P. Rai in place of R.T. Ali. Ali died in Kalimpong without knowing that he was thrown out for not obeying his state high command.

On August 21, 1986 the newly appointed DCC(I) president, P.P. Rai, "strongly condemned the GNLFF agitation" describing it as a "secessionist movement" (*ABP 22/8*). This was perhaps negotiated before Rai was inducted. But as soon as he had pleased his boss he was in for a shock. Dawa Norbula, Secretary of the DCC(I) was removed by the WBPCC(I) chief, an act which Rai protested against (*Tel 23/8*). Rai always held Norbula in high esteem and considered his being in the party as a great asset but his removal was justified by none but Prasanta Nandi, the DCC(I) general secretary from Siliguri.

The Congress(I) is not a cadre-based party like the CPI(M) or the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) yet the control of the state committee over the district committee seems almost absolute. Such a control may be desirable for the functioning of this rather disorganized political party. But dictating terms for the DCC(I) leaders in Darjeeling from over 500 miles away in Calcutta is not only foolish but also undemocratic. The hill people alone knew what it was or it meant to oppose the GNLFF, specially during the second half of 1986. Even the cadre-based party like the CPI(M) with such a huge following in Kurseong and Darjeeling could not thwart the GNLFF onslaught excepting in



X

The Media and the Movement

A movement has enormous news value everywhere in the world. The media people throng a place the moment it turns hot due to the launching of a movement. This is because they know that the news will sell. Riots, communal clashes, mob violence, etc. also arrest their attention but these do not essentially last for long. There is often no time to send special correspondents or reporters to cover them specially when these occur quickly and at far-off places. But a movement is more enduring, has wider socio-political implications, and invariably provides enough time for the reporters to reach the spot and report more leisurely. Hence, the role of the media in any movement cannot be overestimated.

My interest in the role of the media developed particularly after I attended a symposium in Bhubaneswar on "The Role of Free Press in a Democratic Society" in August, 1984. The symposium was intended principally to promote a dialogue on this theme between journalists and academicians. Accidentally, Hotel Konark, where we were placed, was stoned heavily on the second evening by some Oriya boys who were reportedly angry with the Marwaris for the latter's alleged involvement in getting some engineering students murdered there. The owner of our hotel being Marwari from Bombay, the attack was apprehended. Our journalist friends disappeared in the city to trunk call their respective offices and report the incident. On the third day, a daily from Calcutta reported that the entire Hotel was damaged,

which it was not and we teased our journalist-friends about the exaggeration. Actually only the ground floor glass doors and some first floor window panes on the facade were damaged. No one was hurt, though some of the delegates were stuck inside the lift as power was switched off in panic.

This was the first incident in my life when I had met so many journalists some of whom were editors of our national dailies. The lesson I learnt was that all that came out in newspapers was not true. Until then I was too naive not to take the newspapers very seriously.

The degree of freedom which the press enjoys today in India is thought to have been possible largely because we had a person like Jawaharlal Nehru as the first prime minister. His letter to Tushar Kanti Ghosh, dated March 4, 1940, clearly shows his vision of what a press should be and how it should balance between freedom and responsibility. But his high expectations of the press seem slightly changed in his address to the All-India Editors' Conference in New Delhi on August 13, 1954. He said:

Of the dominating features of the age we live in, one of the most noticeable is that people are gradually losing the art of thinking. They often take other people's opinions for granted.... They are not allowed to think, and the person who does not fit in with the majority opinion has a very unfortunate time of it. There is no law against him, but the facts are against him. In this matter the newspapers can perform a very valuable service, although newspapers too inevitably have become more like pocket digests than something that will enable people to think.... (Tel Jul 7, 1984).

Nehru here is talking more of the world situation than the Indian experience alone. In the western democratic countries the media have proved to be the Fourth Estate, with almost direct access to the government. According to Girilal Jain, ex-editor of *The Times of India*, the same trend is becoming more and more visible even in India (Stat 7.11.88). But until now, the media seem to have proved more effective in the west than in the east,

if the west-east classification is valid. The American media were, for instance, able to pull down presidents Johnson, Nixon and Carter. Similar examples in the east are still wanting, if we leave out Japan. Commenting on the growing "obstinacy" of the media in the west, however, Michael A. Ledeen writes:

They decide what constitutes evidence, they protect (or expose) the nature of their sources and methods, they decide when to pay for information, and they carefully control the declassification procedures to suit their own interests... they want the government's secrets to be accessible to them, but their own secrets are to be withheld from the public (1983:114).

Ledeen also points out that the leading media practitioners have considerable "ideological coherence", and whether it is television news or that of newspapers and magazines "it is one big fraternity" (*ibid*:115). While there is still competition between network news organizations "this is competition for viewers and is based on style; the content does not vary as much as one would predict" (*ibid*:115). My own experience of seeing five Indian national dailies, as a part of my assignment at the Centre I am attached to, for the last 10 years or so, does not allow me to conclude otherwise.

According to Gour Kishore Ghosh, a veteran journalist, the press has to depend a lot on the "government and big business" and this is specially so in India. The dependence is not only for newsprint and advertisements but also for the news. He points out that "they are now dependent for 70 per cent of their news on All India Radio and the news agencies", which "give only official, doctored versions of events". He also makes a special mention of West Bengal in these words:

The State Assembly was the first to condemn the Bihar press bill but simultaneously the government ordered that no officer below the rank of district magistrate or superintendent of police could talk to the press (1984).

Apart from such dependence, he however also points out that pressure is often created through labour unions, "to change editorial policy".

Girilal Jain's confession about the role of press is more candid than those of many. He has pointed out that "a newspaper is essentially a commercial proposition, and is governed by certain material constraints". He further remarks "a newspaper's independence extended only up to the point that the proprietor was able and willing to withstand governmental and financial pressure" (*Stat 7.11.88*).

The new role of the editors is probably best pictured by Salil Tripathi in the following lines:

The line dividing editors and managers, until now considered as sacrosanct as the division between church and state, has got blurred. And in the new environment, editors find themselves cast in the role of managers with readers as their consumers (*1988:145*).

Indeed, a media-house not only looks like any other business house but also functions in much the same way. The problems which the business houses have to deal with are often faced by the media houses as well. And the editor is really a paid employee, no matter how well, and therefore has most of the limitations of any employee. Similarly, the reporters, like employees elsewhere, must learn to keep their jobs going.

Ethics of Journalism

It is only after we understand this situation in which the media exist and operate that we can do justice to the question of the "ethics of journalism". Most would agree that the ethics of journalism are imperilled but many will not understand why compromises are made so often. And it would be a gross injustice to the journalists if we expected high ethics from them without creating a situation in which such ethics can work or ignoring whether other groups in our society are having any ethics or not.

The First Press Commission held in 1952 did not say much about the ethics which the journalists should conform to. This Commission appreciated the need for selection and presentation of news and views in view of the limited space. But it underlined that:

A newspaper should, as far as possible, reflect the opinions of as large a sector of the community as it can but it should also see to educate and influence the public (*Chowla 1984*).

But this was considered more as desirable effort that journalists should make than a code of ethics as such. The first such code was formulated at the meeting of All India Newspaper Editors' Conference held in 1968. It called for news which were restrained and free from attacks against any leader or community. This was elaborated and made into a 10-point code of ethics by the Press Council of India in 1969. These guidelines, most of which are still not amended, are as follows:

1. Distortion or exaggeration of facts or incidents in relation to communal matters or giving currency to unverified rumours, suspicions or inferences as if they were facts and base their comments on them.
2. Employment of intemperate or unrestrained language in the presentation of news or views, even as a piece of literary flourish or for the purpose of rhetoric or emphasis.
3. Encouraging or condoning violence even in the face of provocation as a means of obtaining redress of grievances whether the same be genuine or not.
4. While it is the legitimate function of the Press to draw attention to the genuine and legitimate grievances of any community with a view to leaving the same redressed by all peaceful, legal and legitimate means, it is improper and a breach of journalistic ethics to invent grievances or to exaggerate real grievances, as these tend to promote communal ill-feeling and accentuate discord.
5. Scurrilous and untrue attacks on communities, or



XI

Conclusion

The Gorkhaland Movement, like many other ethnic movements in Asia and Africa, was born out of colonial and neo-colonial rule. The Gorkhas or Nepalis were first subjects of the British and later of the Bengalis. For decades, they had experienced political voicelessness, cultural insecurity, and economic deprivation. Even their history, cultural heritage, and demographic figures were either suppressed or tampered with. They groaned under the suffocation of the closed horizons. They were often taunted, evicted, humiliated by their neighbouring communities. Developmental resources were doled out to them sparingly, after weighing their loyalty to the masters.

There never was any attempt by the government to allow them to grow self-reliant, confident, and at par with others. They were made accustomed to a dependency culture that never seemed to go. The developmental rewards being controlled by the government, which in turn being formed by the majority, they were seldom treated as equals by the majority community. The resources being limited, the majority community had the enormous challenge to keep its own people happy and satisfied. There were more of them to be fed and employed after 1947 and 1971 when Bangladesh was created. Any one would look after one's own people first. This is very much human.

Apart from such specific compulsions of the Bengal Government to help their own kith and kin, it depended on the majority vote always. It was thus quite normal that they ignored the hopes and

aspirations of the minorities who are now demanding separation from Bengal.

The social composition of Bengal being what it is, there was the need to form a group large enough to draw the government's attention. It was the fear of losing their identity as an ethnic group and as Indians that compelled the Nepalis to fight for a 'home' within 'home'. Despite dissimilar racial, cultural, linguistic, and historical backgrounds a "negative solidarity" could develop within them due more to the fear of being swamped or wiped away by the majority community than the challenge thrown by the Lepcha-Bhutia combine. The literature on the evolution of the Gorkha identity amply shows this.

Furthermore, the marginalisation of the peripheral groups provided enough grounds for the Nepali leaders to voice the need for separation, for self-rule, and for ethno-development. They wanted to have control over their own resources, economic or cultural, and negotiate with the state on equal terms. The delay in fulfilling this aspiration only helped in the snowballing of their demands. The leaders were either wooed away or made to flee but each new leader promised the same dream to the people—a 'home' for their children to play and run about freely, not a rented house.

With the spread of education, greater competition for jobs was there. When jobs were not easily available they moved out to Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and other places. But there was a limit to this. There appeared a clash between the aspiration of the educated youth and the rationed distribution of resources by the state. They could only see the various offices in the hills officered by the 'Brown Sahibs' but could not know about thousands of unemployed Bengali youths strolling around the streets of Calcutta. One Bengali officer left and two came but they could hardly see any Nepali officer in the last one hundred and fifty years or so. A Nepali officer? Most would not believe until they saw one, which they rarely did.

Thus a situation had developed, which was congenial for the growth of ethnic dissatisfaction and gradually mature into an ethnic movement. The ethnic stratification had become too

evident to be missed by any observer.

Like most other ethnic movements, the Gorkhaland Movement also began in a humble way. There were respectful and prayerful memoranda, peaceful and humble representations, and the youths were often kept at abeyance lest they spoil the whole idea. But the long and patient waiting after each open or tacit promise by a national or local leader had to go. Their endurance was temporarily prolonged by Siddhartha Sankar Ray, the ex-Chief Minister of West Bengal, who faced sharp criticisms from his partymen and others in Calcutta for having showered a lot of developmental rewards on Darjeeling. Those who believed that they had no future in Bengal had given a second thought. Their conviction was shaken but after five years it was the same old tune again. It is for these reasons that S.S. Ray is the only chief minister whom the hill people remember fondly. No one else.

The sporadic expressions of ethnic dissatisfaction and demands for self-rule were ignored not only by the chief and prime ministers of the country but also by the media. The fog of discontentment was not 'news' for them until it transformed into the smoke of fire, of gunshots, burnt vehicles and buildings, etc. They also often forgot about the fog and tried to find explanations only to the smoke.

The political parties, regional as well as national, had an important role to play in this transformation. They did not seem able to do anything without raising the people's ethnic aspirations openly or in closed-door meetings no matter what ideology they professed or claimed to profess. But when the same people came to power they always retracted from their promises which were always bigger than they could hold. Yet people voted for this or that party in each election, not because they still had some faith in their leaders but because they considered voting more as a 'civil duty' rather than a 'political right'. Not voting, it was feared, would mean no citizenship, no rations, and probably no employment too.

The opposition and often intimidation by the CPI(M) to the Gorkhaland Movement (as also to the Uttarakhand and Jharkhand movements in Bengal) seemed paradoxical in view of its

revolutionary ideology. Instead it proved to be an anti-revolutionary party which championed the political demands of the Nepalis and used all its executive, legislative and judicial machineries to curb their demands afterwards. Hence, the declaration by the CPI(M) politburo on August 15, 1989 that the fight against China's occupation of Tibet was an 'imperialist design' did not come as a surprise.

Such a paradox was seen not only in the CPI(M) ruled state but also in the stands of the Centre and the GNLf. After all, even the GNLf was another government in the process of becoming. Hence, it must carry all the virtues and vices of its parent bodies which the Centre and the State governments were.

Despite over 80 years of ethnic movement in Darjeeling, most scholars seemed ignorant of the history and culture of the Nepalis. They put forward weird theses and strange solutions, none of which was based on proper understanding. Most such scholars being Marxists by claim, ethnicity was just a 'false consciousness'. It had no basis and no rationale. It was an act of external instigation: the Nepalis of Darjeeling had actually nothing to grumble about. They were actually misguided and needed to be brought back to the road no matter how. This strategy had such a staggering consequence that the possibility of any constructive/progressive movement in future would be difficult to visualize.

The media too often played a nasty role, ignoring even the bare ethics of journalism. Most of the journalists for national newspapers and magazines, including the PTI and the UNI reporters, being Bengalis they not only played into the hands of the state government but also the ethnic interests of their own group. Even a revered figure like Satyajit Ray was dragged into the filth once. One really did not need to know who the reporter was: just the language used in the report would be enough to indicate his or her ethnic background. Years of cultural conditioning could not certainly be washed away by a few months' training in the arts and crafts of journalism.

The legitimacy which was overused by the state was another sad thing. The GNLf activists suffered from the disadvantage of

