

Chapter V

Summary and Conclusion

The present thesis entitled ‘Participation of Women in Social Movements: A Sociological Study of the Hill Region of Darjeeling District’ was intended to bring out the participation of women in social movements in the hill region of Darjeeling district. The rationale behind the present endeavour was to fulfil the research gap in the context of social movements in the region. Darjeeling Hills attracted a large number of international, national and local scholars but it seems that they failed to realise women as an analytical category in the social movements. These scholars made serious interventions from different dimensions and perspectives in social movements and produced ample literature in the context. However, gender/women’s perspectives have been largely ignored. The relative invisibility of women in the pioneering works in the region is not a coincidence but it is one of the many ways in which perspective remains gendered. It has been argued by the feminist scholars that there exist androcentrism and male-centric bias in the study of social movements. Such attitudes devalue their presence in the movement. Against this backdrop, the present thesis carefully examined the emergence and participation of women in social movements that have erupted in the hill region of Darjeeling district. It shows the public political participation of hill women of Darjeeling in various arenas of hill society and social movements in general and nature and dimension of their participation in the Gorkhaland movement in particular.

I

The present study was carried out in Darjeeling Hills because it has been considered as *Kipat* of the Gorkhas and became the epicentre of several movements based on Nepali/Gorkha ethnicity and identity. Darjeeling district lies in the Northern part of West Bengal and it was established by the British as one of the famous hill stations. Darjeeling mainly developed as a colonial frontier in the Eastern Himalayas with the successful establishment of the sanatorium, plantation economy, and place to rest for the Indian and European elites. Historically the present-day Darjeeling district belonged to the Kingdom of Sikkim and Bhutan and for a short period, it remained with Gorkhas as well. It was

annexed to British India by following the deeds of grants with Sikkim kingdom and the treaty of Sinchula with Bhutan. The major developmental activities had taken place during the British Raj. It received huge colonial migration from the kingdom of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and other parts of India during the colonial period. Many schools were established by the Christian missionaries which greatly enhanced the socio-cultural and educational development of the hill people. It was kept under the strict surveillance of the British government by the various administrative mechanisms like Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Act. Nepali nationalism in Darjeeling developed as a result of the development of Nepali literary associations and other social organizations and the development of print media in the colonial and post-colonial era. Participation of Nepalis/Gorkhas in freedom struggle is also another factor that produced the feeling of Indian nationalism among them. Since the first half of the twentieth century, Darjeeling became the epicentre of several movements. However, there is no such movement that had erupted in the region which could be categorized as the women's movement in the region. On the other hand, whatever may be the movement women constituted the major actors and role players.

II

The history of social movements in the region shows that the contribution of women in the making of social movements in the region is not a new phenomenon. What is new is to rediscover their participation and rewrite their contribution in the making of history, society, and culture of Darjeeling Hills. However, their participation, roles, and contributions have been mostly put behind the curtain in both academic and non-academic writings. On the other hand, there is little work available in vernacular language regarding the women activists and their participation in various movements in the form of memorial, newspaper article, biography, family history and few research articles. However, there is not even a single comprehensive work available in the context of women's participation in social movements in Darjeeling Hills. In the recent past women in Darjeeling Hills became the part and parcel of the nationalist movement, plantation trade union movement and identity movements (Nepali language movement and Gorkhaland movement). The emergence and participation of women of Darjeeling Hills in the contemporary movement

in the name of Gorkhaland is not new because they actively participated in the various types of social movements that erupted in the region. The nature and dimension of these movements were different from one another but historically women have been playing active roles in their own capacities.

In light of the existing literature the present thesis not only carefully examines the visibility of women in different types of movements in Darjeeling Hills but it brings forth their agencies apart from the victimhood agents in the movements. It argues that women in the movement and post-movement situations are not always the passive victimhood agents but at the same time they possess strong agency of their own. Women in the gender integrative social movements like that of the present case (Gorkhaland movement, Nepali language movement and plantation movement in Darjeeling Hills) have a greater role to play both in the private and public domain as they constitute a larger part of the same society. However, the present work argues that their participation may not be the same as that of men because of the social construction of the public and private sphere of the Gorkha society. The participants in the movement in general cannot be categorised as homogeneous because they seek their own expression, inclusion and redress from the authority within and outside the movement situations. They have their own choices and preferences and their perceptions and actions differ according to their class, caste, educational qualification etc. Thus, the present work in the light of the existing works of literature tried to fulfil the research gap and rewrites their narratives of public-political protests in the making of social movements in the hill region of Darjeeling district.

III

The present thesis has been divided into five chapters including introduction and conclusion. It tries to fulfil the following four broad objectives: firstly, an attempt has been made to trace out the historical emergence and participation of women in social movements in Darjeeling Hills. It argues that the participation of women in contemporary ethnic movement in Darjeeling Hills is not new. They historically maintained a rich heritage of public-political participation in the region. Secondly, it studied the nature and dimension of women's participation in separate statehood movement in the name of Gorkhaland movement. It brings out how their participation differed based on their gender

identities and how their gender roles transgressed in movement and aftermath of the movement. Thirdly, it aims to cultivate women's invisible role and their agency both in the public and private domains of the Gorkhaland movement. Fourthly, the present study analyses the gender discourse in the movement in Darjeeling Hills in general and Gorkhaland in particular. It tries to seek how women had been placed in the overall context of social movements in Darjeeling Hills in general and Gorkhaland in particular.

The present thesis tries to seek the answers to these research questions to fulfil the objectives: I. What is the nature and what are the causes of women's participation in social protest/movement in Darjeeling Hills? II. What is the genesis of Women's collective identity that contributed to the mobilization process in the movement? III. What are the gender discourses underlying the movement in Darjeeling Hills? IV. What is the nature of the political socialization of the Hill/Gorkha Women? V. How are women placed in the overall context of social movements? VI. What is the nature of gendered power distribution in the organization of a movement? VII. What is the impact of movement on the everyday life experiences of women?

As a movement study, it is basically a qualitative research based on both primary and secondary data. The field was purposefully chosen and field work was carried out at Margaret's Hope tea garden in Kurseong sub-division, one revenue village (Upper Neoang Mairung) in Kalimpong and urban center (Singmari) in Darjeeling. Initially, the data was collected through intensive field work for one month each in the year 2015-17. However, no complete and intensive data were received from the respondents for which another set of field work was carried out following the snow ball sampling during 2018-19. This method greatly enhanced the present work. Meeting and informal communication with the different sets of people; young, old, students, local vendors etc. had been one of the methods that has been used in the field work. The field work was started with semi-structured questions but quite often the respondent felt uneasy with the method of interviewing. So, the informal interview was carried out with the movement activists and members of the civil society, general participants and counter movement activists.

It used the various concepts and theories from feminist/women's perspectives and methodology. From the theoretical and a conceptual parlance, the present research is a part

of the feminist way of looking at critical research. The feminist scholarship argues that the mainstream theories on social movements do not consider women as a separate analytical category. There exist androcentrism or male-centric bias in the study of social movements which devalue their presence in the movement. The conceptual framework had been drawn from third world feminists like Chandra Talapadha Mohanaray, Kumari Jayawardane, Rita Manchanda, Judith Butler, Kimberle Crenshaw and several others. Their concepts had been used as a conceptual lens in the light of existing theoretical tradition on social movements.

IV

The present thesis broadly looks into the historical emergence and women's contribution in the making of social movements in the region to argue that the participation of women in the contemporary movement is not sudden. On the other hand, the participation of women in the contemporary movement in the name of Gorkhaland has been discussed in one chapter. The third chapter is a descriptive study on the participation of women in various types of movements. Since inception of social movement in the region i.e., nationalist movement, women were at the forefront although few. It is unjustifiable to argue that the emergence of women in the public political domain in the hill society of Darjeeling is a recent phenomenon. Several women leaders emerged in the nationalist movement in Darjeeling, the most notable among them were Halen Lepcha (Sabetri Devi) who became the symbol of a nationalist leader in Bihar, UP and North Bengal. Putalimaya Devi Tamang (Poddar) was widely known for her participation in the national movement in Darjeeling Hills. She opened up Night school, Harijan Samaj and women's organization to bring consistency in the nationalist movement. Maya Devi Chhetry was another influential leader of the nationalist movement who became the president of the Kurseong branch of INC. On the other hand few women also actively participated in Jhanshiki Rani Regiment under the Indian National Army.

The most remarkable contribution of women was their participation in the trade union plantation movement since the 1940s. The formation of Darjeeling district CPI(M) did tremendous work to bring class consciousness among the tea garden labourers. They brought out many demands concerning working class by forming Darjeeling Chai Kaman

Mazdoor Union as a common platform. They demanded the eradication of *hatta bahar* (forceful eviction of workers from garden/colony), *sutkari bhatta* (maternity leave and benefits) and equal pay for both men and women and others. A large number of women came out of their private domain to participate in the movement because even after independence colonial laws were enforced in tea gardens of Darjeeling and Dooars. The working class struggled for a long time under the leadership of the Communists and later was joined by All India Gorkha League as a result of which an uprising took place in Margaret's Hope tea garden in the year 1955. Six movement activists were killed by the police among them two were women. In this movement, a large number of women leaders emerged in different gardens of Darjeeling and made notable contributions.

In terms of ethnic movement, the women of Darjeeling Hills made notable contributions in two important movements. These were the Nepali language movement and Gorkhaland movement both at the national and regional levels. There were two types of Nepali language movements which emerged in India. Firstly, demand for the recognition of Nepali language as an official language for Darjeeling district during the 1950s. When the West Bengal Official Language Act was passed Nepali language was not recognized as an official language of the district. The intellectuals of Darjeeling launched a movement for the recognition of the official language of the district because according to the principal of the state reorganization commission 'if 75% of the total population of a district speaks the same language then that would be considered as the official language of the district'. It was accepted as the official language of the three sub-divisions of Darjeeling Hills in the 1960s where many prominent women leaders played important roles. The second was the movement for recognition of Nepali as the national language of India under the 8th schedule of the Indian constitution. Various organizations had been formed since the 1960s like Bhasa Manyata Samiti, Nepali Bhasa Samiti, Akhil Bharitya Nepali Vasa Samiti (ABNVS), and Bharitya Nepali Rastrya Parishad (BNRP). All these organizations had a good number of women representatives, leaders, and participants. The Nepali language got its recognition in 1992 where the women played the most important role. Many women have contributed to the language movement by participating in the rallies, giving motivational speeches and writing in various popular newspapers and magazines. On the

other hand, there were women MPs and MLAs from Darjeeling and Sikkim who tirelessly worked for the cause of the Nepali language in India.

The participation of women in the nationalist movement, trade union movement, and Nepali language movement has been very important to understand the contemporary relevance of the ethnic movement in Darjeeling Hills. It has been evident that their participation in the freedom struggle of the country led to the growth of Indian nationalism among them. The issues raised in the present context of ethnic movement in Darjeeling Hills relate to nationalism, citizenship, and language. Tea gardens also have been the important segment of the hill society of Darjeeling and the contemporary movement in Darjeeling Hills raised the issues related to tea in a region where women have been the active participants at the various levels.

V

Like all other movements that had erupted in Darjeeling Hills; women have significantly contributed to the separate statehood movement in the name of Gorkhaland. The most important feature of the Gorkhaland movement after the 1980s was the emergence of women and children and their active participation in various dimensions for the ethnic collectivity. Their visibility as leaders, participants, opponents, and supporters of the movement show that they were the major building force of the movement. However, their participation did not receive much academic or non-academic attention among hill people of Darjeeling. It was not only the political parties that influenced or motivated the women activists but a larger part of the civil society without any political affiliation also actively participated in both the phases of the movement. The individual women activists, poets, writers, musicians, columnists, had their ways of supporting the movements. However, the women activists affiliated to GNLF during 1980s and GJMM in post-2007 led the movement at the structural and organizational domain. The women wing of CPRM after 1997 strongly supported the statehood movement from their perspectives. The nature and extent of participation of the women activists varies in both the phases of the movement.

The participants in general and women participants in particular in Gorkhaland movement can be categorized into different types depending on their social locale. They

belong to the different intersection of society. Different types of participants and their perception on Gorkhaland movement had been witnessed during field work. The present work does not consider women participants in social movements in Darjeeling Hills in general and Gorkhaland movement in particular as a homogeneous category as 'women' drawing from the third world feminism and field work. The identity, positionality and everyday life experiences/practices of the movement participants in Gorkhaland movement differed based on their class, caste, social structure, ideology, educational background, etc.

The 'role performance' and 'gender relation' and 'Motherist frame' are the most helpful concepts that have been drawn from the feminist methodology used in the present context. The men and women activists in the Gorkhaland movement can be differentiated based on their role performance. The role performance of women activists in a movement is largely based on the gender relation of the private domain of Nepali/Gorkha society. Gender relations of the Gorkha society largely impacted their public-political participation as well as most of the movement. The women activists have been deeply motivated by the role of caring and protecting mother, motherhood and maternal identities of the private domain. Their participation in the various form of movement mobilization like hunger strikes, rallies, protest marches, gherao etc were based on the strong sense of belongingness of 'hami Gorkhay nari', 'gorkhay ama'. It reflects a collective sense of Gorkhay womanhood in the public political domain. Such collective identity in the public domain based on caring and protecting the mother of the private domain challenged the state patriarchy and also provided the opportunity to speak against the anti-social elements from the structure of the movement itself like anti alcohol and anti Ram Rahim mobilization. However, they are relatively silent on the burning women's issues of contemporary Darjeeling like women trafficking, missing cases of women, domestic problems concerning women.

The women activists in both the phases of movement had played the dominant role which often transgressed their gender roles and identities in the public and private domain of the movement. Most importantly they were the bearer of painful aftermaths as a result of the movement. During the 1980s the ethnic movement took a violent turn that caused sacrifice of lives of hundreds of people belonging to both pro and anti-Gorkhaland outfits.

Thousands of people became homeless and several were arrested by the police. The same situation was witnessed in the second phase of the Gorkhaland movement as well. In such a situation the responsibilities of taking care and protecting the family rest on the shoulders of women. Such situations of transforming gender roles in the absence of male members had been witnessed by the women. In many places the funeral pyres were lit by women themselves during the 1980s in the absence of male members. Such activities had challenged the basic private-public dichotomy of the Nepali/Gorkha society in Darjeeling Hills. Despite their collective participation in the entire course of the movement with their male-counterparts, the Gorkha women are yet to be free from patriarchy both at private and public domains.

The women participants have participated and contributed in diverse roles in the Gorkhaland movement. Their participation in the public-political domain is not well known or acknowledged. There have been the private domains in the movement where the contribution of the women is greater than the men.

The Gorkhaland movement gave ample opportunities to both men and women to be leaders but their significant contributions can be found in the private domain of the movement. Such roles are called movement housewifery and domestic roles. The women activists in the Gorkhaland movement since the 1980s have been playing an important role from the private domain of the movement particularly from their personal network which remains invisible in the eyes of the general participants. Such activities and roles include informing about the upcoming meetings and preparing a plan of action. Many of the women activists and family members of the male participants have been involved in such activities which include the family dimension of a movement. Women activists were also involved in the collection of membership fees, taking care of party office, selling party flags, taking minutes, preparing food during meetings, etc. At the political domain, women fought collectively for the Gorkha identity, on the other hand, they were playing the vital (dual) role of looking after the family and domestic affairs at the private domain. Such women's leadership at the private domain remains invisible to the larger part of the hill society.

VI

The emergence of women in Gorkhaland movement was largely a result of rising self-consciousness among them; although the historical gender consciousness has been missing on them. It has to be understood that women were actively participating in the Gorkhaland movement since beginning but the formation of women's wing brought them under one umbrella. Their public participation has been supported by their male counter-parts by framing 'subsidiary units for them'. As argued by the third world feminist, this has been a common phenomenon in the entire South Asian countries (Yuval-Davis 1997). However, on the other hand, there has been a strong 'women's agency' that encouraged them to come out of their private domain for the Gorkha collectivity. The Gorkha women became part of every action across the length and breadth of the movement mobilization but the major decision-making activities have been dominated by the phallogocentric attributes both at the structural and organizational domain. Mostly they have been mobilized as the peace keeping force at the forefront of the movement mobilization. Since 1986 almost all the negotiation processes and post movement arrangements (bipartite and tripartite talks and agreements held in Kolkata and Delhi) were represented by the male or few elite women leaders. Their presence has been seen largely at the ground level mobilization processes but they do not hold real decision making and negotiation power. There was no Gender development agenda in DGHC and despite having Women and Child Development provision in GTA agreement nothing has been done for women's development.

One of the major problems for women participants in Gorkhaland movement like all other social movements is the social construction of 'public and political sphere with the male and private sphere with the female' and they are particularly excluded from the 'public political and nationalist discourse' (Yuval-Davis 1997). The role assigned to the participants in the movement situation has been based on the 'public-private dichotomy' of the Gorkha society. It seems that the relationship between the women participants and the Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) remained paradoxical in the history of social movements in India in general and Gorkhaland in particular. The men have been always placed in a position higher than that of women in an official leadership position. Such

attitude relegates most of the women to mere supportive roles in both the phases of Gorkhaland movement.

It seems that despite strong women's agency there has been the neutralization of gender dimension of the Gorkha society and at the individual level women are not always aware of their own/individual identity which helps their husband and family members to maintain a gender based politics. As argued by the feminist sociologists it is because of the societal gender role segregation and structural constraints that women have to face in their everyday life. There is no gender development agenda in both GNLFF and GJMM because the issues that have been raised by them are 'gender integrative' where both males and females have the common agenda and objective to achieve i.e. Gorkhaland.

The emergence of Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling Hills gave opportunities to women to be leaders at the local levels and to search their own voice. On the other hand, the nature of their participation has found many similarities with the nationalist and anti-racist movements of Asia and Africa where,

“Women activists themselves became submerged in the political struggle, women being lauded for being good Satyagrahis, but the real issues which concerned them as women, being regarded as secondary” (Jayawardena 1982: 97).

Similarly in the context of Gorkhaland movement also being Gorkha in the Indian nationalist discourse became important where gender based identity became less significant. It is because of the exclusionary nature of the Indian nation-state towards the Gorkhas. The Gorkhas in India have at least 250 years old history and their contribution in various fields but within the Indian nationalist discourse, they are treated as outsiders, foreigners, immigrants. The collective identity as Gorkha became important in the realm of large community interest as a whole. Through ethnic collectively and its manifestations in the movement they wanted to establish their identity of being Indian. In such processes, women's identity as 'Gorkha women' has been historically missing. The Gorkha identity grew along with the masculine narratives of *bir Gorkha* (brave Gorkha) where neutralization of women's identity as submissive has been historically inculcated in their society. They are often being the subject of identity crises based on both community and

gender in mainstream India. In conclusion, it can be said that despite their collective participation in public-political discourses they have a far way to go to attain gender equality on the one hand or to attain the same as a Gorkha subject within the exclusionary nature of the Indian nationalist discourse on the other.

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