

Abstract

The present thesis entitled ‘Participation of Women in Social Movements: A Sociological Study of the Hill Region of Darjeeling District’ intends to bring out the participation of women in social movements in the hill region of Darjeeling district. The rationale behind the present endeavour is 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 movements. 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. It 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 greater role to play both in the private and public domains as they constitute the 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 role and participation of movement participants largely based on the gender division of labour where one can locate women in both private and public domains of the movement. The participants in the movement in general cannot be categorise 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. Despite being gendered nature, the social movements in Darjeeling hills provided opportunities to women to be the leaders at the local levels and provided platforms for the women self. The victimhood agent is one dimension of their participation in social movements in general and Gorkhaland movement in particular but at the same time they seek their agencies through participation in the movement.