

CHAPTER - V

POST COLONIAL URBAN POLITICAL HISTORY OF DARJEELING

Four problem areas might be identified in the study of political institutions, organization and processes in the urban context. Firstly, there is the formal political structure, municipal or corporation government where national, regional and local political parties compete for positions of power. Besides formal structures of power, informal political organizations operate through caste, religious, and sectarian groups, and occupational categories. Associations formed on these lines acquire political dimensions insofar as they act as pressure groups, and in some cases they even form part of organized political parties. A third aspect of politics in the urban context, refers to what is generally called the small town politics where elite, factions or ethnic groups, more than political parties, are significant in understanding the power structure.¹ The study of post colonial polity of Darjeeling falls mainly under the third category.

Literature so far reviewed on urban studies since 1950 suggest that urbanization is a multidisciplinary approach involving sociology, economics, geography, history, political science demography and social anthropology. It may be pointed out that social scientists began to take real interest in urban studies only after the 1951 census, which revealed a high rate of growth in urban population. At

first the emphasis was on identifying the dimension of urban population through descriptive studies based on census information as well as collection of first hand data. Such studies resulted in cumulating of a large body of facts but not in commensurate with the growth of theoretical knowledge. ²

Post-colonial studies in urbanization have been varied, and social historians have studied the modern transformation of Indian traditional society, over the years. In the sixties the studies were mainly descriptive in nature revealing only the magnitude of the phenomenon concerned. They did not aim at explaining the problems or make generalizations. Important studies were carried out by urban researchers for the preparation of a national report. The report, based on ten cities, was presented at a special session in Istanbul. Similarly the Government of India established the town and country planning organization to encourage studies in urbanization. The National Urban Observatory has developed urban databases at the city level as part of the local urban observatories. All these efforts and the preceding analysis reveal the overall development and trends of urban studies in India during the early two decades.

Therefore urbanization is one of the major forces of our times changing and restructuring social reality in its own characteristic forms and throwing up social problems stamped with its own peculiarities. Different approaches in urbanization need not be mutually exclusive but their effectiveness shall depend upon the

degree to which they enable us to better understand the problem under investigation. In general therefore urbanization represents a process of growth. On the positive side, growth could lead to development economically, politically and socially. On the negative side it may degenerate "into a dangerously alienated form of mal development". While fully recognizing the valuable contributions of studies and theories in Indian urbanization – the study of hill station in India as urban centers has been sadly neglected and no literary discourse has been able to provide an adequate theoretical framework which could be applied to the process of urbanization in the hills or to Darjeeling Hills in particular and hill towns of trans-Himalayas in general. By all standards, the status of Darjeeling as an urban space, is no more a 'minor town' it has infact tuned into a 'city (as per 2001 census)' marked by essential, economic, political and social characteristics.

The interests of scholars grew unabated during the seventies and the study of urbanization attracted the attention of many sociologists like (Desai and Pillai 1970, 72 Wiebe 1975 D'Souza 1978 Amit Bose D'Souza 1979.) The studies during this period were based mainly on census data. The important feature of this decade was the absence of city surveys. Studies were not based on primary data but through problem – oriented and analytical approach. During the eighties where here many studies on urbanization patterns and trends. Migration studies were undertaken and all India as well as

regional trends were explored. Contribution in the field were mainly theoretical statements about urban impact on traditional institutions, (Misra and Gupta – 1981 Rao and Rao 1984 Jha 1956) During the eighties studies were mainly based on sample surveys, interview schedules and questionnaire. Like the eighties urban studies became attractive for scholars during the nineties too. The National Commission on Urbanization (NCU) published five volumes dealing with urbanization at the grass root, sub-state and state level.

While writing on Urbanization in the Eastern Himalayas, Professor S.K. Munshi has referred a three part model of urbanization as presented by R.J. Johnston. The first part of the model is related to upward quantitative demographic change involving enhancement in the proportion of population living in Urban areas in which migration is the stimulating factor behind urban growth. The second part is the structural change in society resulting out of the development of capitalism in which towns grow as centres of production, distribution and exchange processes. The third part of the model relates to psycho-behavioural urbanization bringing out social change such as attitudinal changes, changes in behavioural patterns and values which may be branded as urbanism. In this three-part model of urbanization, demographic change are the dependent variable driven by structural imperatives. Moreover any attempt to study the process of urbanization anywhere has to take note of the specific context of time and place.

Presumably, any model on the emergence of urbanization in India has particularly to take note of the variety of socio-economic factors and forces, issues and the events.³

Society of Darjeeling and Society of North-eastern hill towns do differ historically. The tribal societies of the North-eastern terrain were kept insulated and isolated from free and open contact with the people of the plains. While Darjeeling has a different history. With the creation of Darjeeling as a hill station and with its designation as the world's best quality tea production settlement, Darjeeling hills in the eastern Himalayas got closely linked with the colonial urban processes since early 19th century and had become the most urbanized tract in the eastern Himalayas.⁴ Tourism and Transportation, Health Resort, Educational Institutions grew in pace resulting a different kind of urbanism for Darjeeling.

The euphoria of 1947 could not hide the ugly realities of the colonial legacy that India inherited and it was specially so in the context of hill stations in India. In 1947 when India gained independence, the district no longer enjoyed the special privileges and status that it had enjoyed before independence except the Bengal Tenancy Act. The Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling henceforth began to be known as the District Magistrate.⁵ After August 1947 the district consisted of four subdivisions, Darjeeling Sadar, Siliguri, Kurseong and Kalimpong. Darjeeling town had been and still has been a major tourist centre and administrative

headquarters. Two military installations at Jalapahar and Katapahar have direct bearing on Darjeeling town. There are as many as 112 schools, five colleges, old clubs in the town. With the end of the British raj, the internal political dynamics of Darjeeling loomed large on the Urban Darjeeling. Urban Darjeeling had witnessed and has been witnessing a conglomeration of socio-economic, ethnocentric, administrative and other compelling factors and forces which have largely given the shape urban politics in the post-colonial period.

After Independence Darjeeling demographic political economic, social linguistic administrative cultural and moral spheres underwent radical changes. The Bengali population who were major shareholders in the government service of the district was reduced to a substantial minority. By the 70s therefore the theory that the more advanced people from the plains exploited the region of Darjeeling is a myth utilized by the leaders of the Gorkhaland Movement. By the mid-seventies one clearly notices substantial degrees of access to positions of political and administrative power of the local people in Darjeeling. The Nepalese position in Darjeeling and to say that they were deprived and economically backward in comparison to the rest of Bengal is an understatement. Infact the urban people of Darjeeling received good education joined the services, identified themselves with the vast Nepali community both in India and Nepal and made rapid economic gains. The urban Nepalese in Darjeeling fulfilled their political and cultural aspirations to a large extent, forging alliances

and with the party in power. The Gorkhaland Movement by and large was not really the question of suppressed discontentment but it was a calculated demand to carve out a separate state where the Gorkhaland leadership under Subhas Ghising would dominate. It was widely recognized that the primary concern for the demand of Gorkhaland was to crush the economic and political domination of the plains. In reality what they wanted was a separation from Bengal – a regional formula leading to slow and gradual crystallization of district level bases exercising a good deal of influence on the Gorkha National Liberation Front Apparatus and ultimately organizing a technique wherein the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council came into existence.

The Gorkhaland Movement launched in the mid-eighties has been a complex set of process working over a period that converged into the formation of the DGHC. In this process of regionalism there has been a resurgence of ethnic identities, which are seeking equivalence with if not priority over separatist claims. The ethnic identities have generally been manifested through the claims of land and language. One therefore tries to analyse the reasons behind the rejuvenation of the Gorkhaland Movement. The reasons are wide ranging. Socially, the movement with primary focus on culture believed in Gorkha identity as a necessary condition for ethnocentric behaviour.

At the same time the GNLF needed the support of all the people in the hills and a volatile form of social politics emerged in Darjeeling. This was a result of roughly equal distribution of Nepalese, Lepchas, Bhutias all speaking the same language, having a homogeneity in culture, economy and religion throughout urban Darjeeling. Politics was definitely in air. With the creation of Gorkha Police Force Ghising's threats of enforcing authority by creating a parallel government, gained momentum. "Transport operators, the intelligence, had started taking orders from Mr. Lakpa Isering Dong, the GNLF advisor and fund collector. GNLF orders became binding on teachers, Government and Municipal Employees in the hills." ⁶ Important dimensions of the movement whether it was the "Study Forum consisting of congress supporters prominent Church personalities like Enos Das Pradhan or the resignations of J. Rai Chairman of Kalimpong Municipality members of Zilla Parishad. Municipal Boards of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong subdivision Panchayat Pradhans, members of the Nepali Academy, Darjeeling Hill Areas, Development Council, ABTA and other governments bodies all submitted their resignations. "The GNLF agitation thus turned into an insurgency". ⁷

The post-colonial urban history of Darjeeling is intimately associated with commodity capitalism, labour migration and the reshaping of local and national ideologies around gender, race, language, citizenship and religion. Darjeeling political journey

therefore is to be traced from being a colonial 'enclave' and to divorce it from its indigenous setting will be a kind of non-recognition of history. The indigenous publicists attacked the colonial character of the plantation, but it remained a central component of the 'progress' and 'nation' to which they aspired, as did other South Asian elite.

To be precise, any political movement in any society at any point of time is an outburst of the people's long suppressed aspiration of ethnic identity development and freedom, tinged with political motivation and mobilization by the local elite. Historicity of the land and people forms the hidden strength of such movement.⁸ Politics there fore has it own dimensions expressed through the emergence of language, citizenship, identity and ethnicity. "The symbol of language has a greater dimension in forming the shape of political communication and politics as such."⁹

The Europeans gave Darjeeling a formal urban shape to satisfy their interests by way of instituting Urban Institutions like Municipality and such other provisionings such as basic civic amenities, viz., health, sanitation, educational institutions, water supply, electricity, roads, markets and such other urban services. The town of Darjeeling under the care and nurture of the British Raj allowed the natives / country gentlemen to stay at Darjeeling. Thus from the very beginning, both locals and Europeans living in Darjeeling had been engaged in non-agricultural avocations. Tea, Timber, Trade, Tourism and Educational Services along with other

non-farm avocations of the people of Darjeeling helped accelerating the growth of urbanism in Darjeeling. The European culture had had a tremendous impact on the inhabitants of Darjeeling, however, the local indigenous culture brought by the migrated Nepalese and inherent primordial culture of the local natives did have their existence since the beginning of the process of urbanization in Darjeeling.

The access of the people of the locality in modern system of Education gave rise to a new form of renaissance which provided the local people to have a new space quite unknown to the neo-political leaders of post-independent India. While the Britishers left India, Darjeeling started confronting with the mega-nationalism which was objectively made unknown to them. As a natural corollary, the little nationalist consciousness of the local people of Darjeeling based on their unique administrative status and distinctive ethno-culturo-centric ethos of the pre-independent period, distinctive identity as a race having unique culture, identifiable language, a different sense of Indianess, citizenship issue, distinct political space within the Indian political structure gave rise to a unique form of politics distinctively different from the politics of the plains and Darjeeling has always remained the abode of such politics, geared and engineered by the local urban leaders. All these factors including economic factors, ushered in a different kind of urban political culture in Darjeeling Hills. The role of Communist Party led trade union movements in the

surrounding gardens had also played a role in organizing movements and shaping as well as sharing the state of the art of political movements in Darjeeling hills. Some of the ingredients of post-independence urban phenomena in Darjeeling need elaboration.

Nepali, language was brought by immigrant Nepalese to Darjeeling. As far as the antiquity of the language is concerned its earliest evidence is found in Rani. Pokhri inscription of 1670 at Katmandu.¹⁰ One can presume from this inscription that Nepali was the language of the Nepal valley. The conquests of Prithivi Narayanshah lead to the spread of Nepali as a link language in various areas under his control. It was during the second half of the 19th century Nepali as a language spread in Darjeeling. During this period the language prevalent in Darjeeling was the Lepcha Tibetan dialect. In a working paper entitled 'The Nepali Language with reference to its relationship with Rai, Limbu, and Lepcha languages ' presented at the seminar on the Development of the Nepali language in India. R. K. Sprigg had demonstrated how the Nepali language apart from being language of the royal court in Nepal also has its closeness to Hindi, and as such it emerged as a common bond of unity among all migrant Nepalese not only in Darjeeling but other parts of India too. In spite of caste differences or religious, Nepali language created a sense of oneness, a sentiment of regionalism among the Nepalese. With the coming of the British, Nepali literature also slowly started gaining impetus and Darjeeling became a center

for education and culture that brought into its fold a spirit of Nepali nationalism principally concentrated in the hill towns of Darjeeling.

In 1872 the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling was however informed that Hindustani and Bengali were the official languages of the district administration. There was no mention of Nepali. There was even no separate schools for the Nepalese. It was only from 1872 that planning was undertaken for the development of separate schools for Nepalese and it was decided that Hindi and Pahari was to be regarded as the vernacular of Darjeeling.¹¹ It is there fore clear that there was no distinct Nepali language in vogue at that time of the coming of the British. It was actually Rev: William Mac farlane who for the first time introduced Nepali in schools and he also endeavoured to develop Nepali literature and language. In 1821 the Serampore missionaries translated the New Testament into Nepali Language. Ganga Prasad Prodhan wrote and authored the first textbook of Nepali language.

Calcutta University included Nepali in the list of vernacular languages for the subject of composition in the Matriculation Intermediate and B.A. Examinations of the University in 1918 by Notification 1 dt. 24.7.18.¹² In 1921 Nepali as a language was introduced as a vernacular subject in Darjeeling government school. By 1925 the Inspector of schools Rajshahi division recognized the introduction of Nepali language at the primary and middle schools of Darjeeling. ¹³ The post Independence era saw the birth of Nepali as a

second language along with Bengali in the three hill subdivision of Darjeeling district by the West Bengal official language Act 1961. In 1961 North Bengal University was established and Nepali was recognized as a vernacular subject and the post-graduate Department of Nepali was established in 1978. It is important to inform that throughout India, Nepali language and literature as a separate post-graduate department can only be available in North Bengal University.

During the last quarter of the 19th century a large variety of news magazine and journals were also published from Darjeeling, and a tide of Nepali journals and periodicals inspired the mental activities of the local people. Within 1981 as many as 290 different Nepali periodicals were published from India. Gorkha Bharat Tivan (1886) was the first Nepali journal published from Varanasi. In 1901 the "Gorkha Khaba Kagat" was published from Darjeeling by 1932 the "Nepali Sahitya Sammelan Patra" contributed to serious prose in Nepali. With the publication of Gorkha" (1945) the mouthpiece of the Gorkha a political flavour was added to Nepali literature.¹⁴ "It contained many analytical, thoughtful and critical essays and also poetry and satire."¹⁵ From 1940 - 48, the modern Indian Nepali literature was born. Prominent Nepali literary heads like Agam Singh Giri, Ambar Bahadur Gahatrraj, Lain Singh Bangdel, Achchha Rai made their appearances in the pages of Gorkha. The period of 1949 - 58 is regarded as the golden Age of Nepali journals. "The lyrical

under current of Nepal literate manifested itself in Pukar (1948) and Bharati in 1949 Kailash Nath Katju the then Governor of West Bengal had sent a message to this journal which was published in its June edition of 1949. The message has a historical significance that is relevant even today.¹⁶

“Before coming to Darjeeling I had heard a great deal of the tremendous urge for education among the hill people but the reality as I have seen it during the last six weeks has far exceeded all my anticipations. The people here seems to have been starved of all education during the British regime and now they are flocking to schools of all grades, both boys’ and girls’, just as a thirsty man would rush to life-giving waters. It is one of the most joy-giving and ennobling sights that I have seen in my life. These small schools are scattered all over the hill side and there the children come walking up miles and miles to learn to read and write. And though it is obviously imperative in the national interest that we should have Rashtrabhasa for the entire Bharatbarsa and wherever necessary, a regional language into which our Bharatbarsa will be divided, it is conceded that the best medium of instruction for a child is his own mother tongue ... And it is not only the children but men and women who live in the villages of India and who speak, read and write to a great extent their own mother-tongue who ask and are entitled to have intellectual sustenance in their own language. It is from this point of

view particularly that I welcome this literary enterprise in the Nepali language...."¹⁷

Sathi (1949) was the local mouth piece of the Indian National Congress. "In 1960(s) the movement demanding inclusion of Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India was initiated. The journals of 1970(s) namely Khoji, Astiva, Chaubandi, Prathinidhi, Utoaha, Hamro Drani, Nepali Bhasa Proyog Gara, Madal, Guhar and others provided in no uncertain terms the ideological impetus to the movement of constitutional recognition of Nepali language.¹⁸ The issue of language and its fostered development has given birth to political connotations in the district and its ultimate culmination from Nepali to Gorkhali has shaped the exteriority of the movement. However comments Tanka. B Subba, 'deep down it makes no sense to claim that Gorkhali is different from Nepali'.¹⁹ Interestingly Ramlal Adhikari had prepared a list of schools belonging to the four subdivisions of Darjeeling who had adopted Nepali as a medium of instruction during the post independence period. His findings were revealing. In the entire district only 50 percent of the secondary and higher secondary schools introduced Nepali as a medium of instruction. It may therefore be added with precision that the colonial hang over which can be felt in every aspect of culture, language, identity in Darjeeling also retains its permanence in the every day life of the people. As a source of identity therefore language has been politicized. And in a

closely-knit community the use of language has been passionately used. At the onset of the political movement language definitely became one of the most sensitive points of the Gorkha identity in Darjeeling.²⁰

As the British consolidated their position of Darjeeling they developed transport, communication, plantation economy, trade and commerce and along with all this, they also developed a group of western read British educated elite class, for their own sustainability. The British rule in Darjeeling thrived on these very factors. A district head quarter soon became a pulsating town consisting of the Palzers the Ladenlas combined with the Bengali elite. What sustained Darjeeling was its image of aloofness. This imposed sense of aloofness lead to comparatively modest political awareness in Darjeeling, in comparison to the other districts of Bengal. Darjeeling as an urban center differed radically from Bengal. Though the Nepalese dominated the district and still does the population in the three hill subdivisions of Kalimpong, Kurseong and the district head quarters were more heterogeneous.²¹ The Lepchas and the Bhutias dominated the labour trade. Tibetans and the Mawaris formed the professional business class. Butchers and the majority of the tailors in Darjeeling are still the Muslims. The Bengalis in Darjeeling mostly came as government employees, as, being a part of the state machinery. So to create a view that the Nepalese have resented the influence of the Bengalis culture is difficult to accept. The Bengalis

had never been a threat to Darjeeling. Most Bengali Government servants, posted in Darjeeling, constantly harped on the harsh winter weather and the westernized culture.²² Instances of a Bengali Government employee choosing Darjeeling for settlement is rare. Culturally, economically, politically and socially there was no Bengali assimilation with the people of Darjeeling.

The wide-heard claim that the Gokhhaland agitation is a result of the domination of Darjeeling by Bengalese is a myth. It is a card used by local political leadership to fuel popular sentiment. Darjeeling had always been an abode of the Lepchas the Bhotias and the Nepalese; the Bengalis had always been the outsider. During the greater part of the GNLFF agitation unlike other parts of India where ethnic minorities were targeted, it was not so in Darjeeling In Assam or else where, when one ethnic group was projected, as having a major edge over other ethnic groups, the argument is that, it resulted in the theory of territorial discontent. The argument does not hold good for Darjeeling. Darjeeling was never a creation of Bengal or Bengalis, but a carefully nurtured colonial policy where in the colonial rulers or policy makes purposely divided and separated the country and created obstacles to the growth of national consciousness. What actually lead to the culmination of the movement was the gradual growth of political awareness due to the development of education and related similar movements (Jhakkhand, Mizo). Growth of an intellectual class from teachers, army personnel

and other professionals – an extremely conscious effort, on the part of the leaders of the movement.

In 1909, at the eve of the Council Act – the leaders in Darjeeling submitted a memorandum for separate land for Darjeeling. More demanding voices were raised by the Hillmen's union for the "creating a separate administrative unit comprising the percent Darjeeling district and the portion of Jalpaiguri district which was annexed from Bhutan in 1865".²³ Much importance has been given to the demand of 1907 as being "a statement for a political delinkage of the hills, from Bengal, strongest possible political statement, the first of it kind showing political awareness and every party in Darjeeling worth its weight swearing by it."²⁴ The British had always encouraged a policy of administrative division creating an environment of conflict between people of different origins.²⁵ The Hillmen's association – was an elite organization under the residentship of S.W. Landela which sought to create the hiatus between the hill people and the plains people on political as well as ethnic and cultural issues."²⁶ However the reorganization of Darjeeling was not viewed sympathetically, by a section of educated Nepalese. The Peoples Association led by Sir P.M. Pradhan and the Kalimpong Samiti under the leadership of Sardar B.B. Dewan sent a separate memorandum in 1920 opposing the reorganization of the district. A meeting was held in Kalimpong in July 1920 and signatories like Prem Sing, N.P. Kumai and Lachman Singh of the

Hill men's union withdrew their signature from the memorandum and they further disclosed it was under persuasion by namely Dr. Graham an European settler of Kalimpong that they had penned in their signatures. ²⁷

With the coming of the Montague Chelmsford reforms of 1919, the Darjeeling planters' Association" European Association and Hill men's Association gave full support to the memorandum in its meeting in march 1920 where a formation of a separate administrative unit was envisaged on the plea of backwardness. Sonam B. Wangyal comments this resolution was important from the point of view that the Europeans too had joined the Hillmen's Association - "being apprehensive about a possible Bengali domination" He further adds that lack of education and poverty and fear of all lead to the prayer. Thus, even before the independence, the local Nepalese tried manipulate, space, politics and economy, to sustain their own identity - joining the Hillmen's Association was a carefully preplanned step in that direction, it was not tinged with any fear of Bengali domination.

As far as the economy of Darjeeling was concerned most people were enmeshed in the multifarious demands for labour that rose with the coming of the British services like portorage, domestic labour - man power for building roads, houses finding wage employment in British establishments and there was a lot of filtration into the local tea and cinchona plantations all of this which

was manned exclusively by the local people. Apart from some Bengal clerks in British offices whatever pattern of employment existed in British Darjeeling the local people had the major share in it. Therefore judging by the contemporary level of economic development Darjeeling was no different from the rest of India which lagged behind in science technology and the urban economy so created was a organized result and deliberate policy of colonization.

A major factor in the growth of regionalism in Darjeeling has been the political opportunity towards regionalism advocated by the British. When the on going nationalist movement for constitutional reforms plagued the British, the Hillmen's Union, having permitted the intrusion of ethnicity and regionalism into their politics as advocated by the British compromised with communal forces on the pleas of protecting the Gorkhas, sent a memorandum to Sir Samuel Hoare Secretary to state for India in October, 1930, arguing that in lieu of the services rendered by the Gorkhas in the military civil and potter departments in the preservation of the solidarity of the British Empire there should be some special reservations kept aside for the Gorkhas. ²⁸ The district of Darjeeling should be excluded from Bengal and be treated as an independent administrative unit. ²⁹

Another memorandum date August 6th 1934 was sent by the Hillmen's Union on behalf of the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese to Sir Samuel Hoare and S. Anderson Governor of Bengal demanding special safeguard for the minorities in the hills and a total exclusion

of the district from Bengal by creating an independent administrative unit directly under the central government. Communal Award was the basis of this demand. The Government of India Act 1935 however made Darjeeling a partially excluded area. Though the Hillmens Union projected the homogeneity of the people of Darjeeling, its major weakness was that it laid almost exclusive emphasis on the Gorkhas and that too on their military activities ignoring the Lepchas and the Bhutias. There was much more to Darjeeling than Gorkha contribution major to the British army development in economy society and culture was ignored. In the work of the Communal Award steps were initiated to include other groups into the fold of 'hill people'. On December 23rd 1934 a public meeting was held under the chairmanship of S.W. Landenla. Many people from all corners of Darjeeling attended the meeting, which was described as a meeting of the 'children of the soil'. Here a pledge was taken for fostering brotherhood among the Nepali Lepchas and Bhutias.

Though the Hillmens Union had highlighted the exclusiveness of Darjeeling from time to time – it ignored the lives and struggles of the common people and limited them solely to 'territory'. Real issues were kept in disguised. Social and economic aspects in Darjeeling reveal that the Bengalis did not dominate the district. All the Bengalis did not rule the district and neither were all the Nepalese the ruling class. Like the Nepalese the Bengalis too were looked down upon. So whether one was a Bengali or a Nepali – it made no

difference in British India. Social and cultural history of Darjeeling brings out the forces of cultural heterogamy and economic heterogametics. An upper class Nepali had more common culturally with a Bengali elite than he had with a fellow poor Nepali. Political events and movements should be placed in their basic social and economic setting. What one should note in Darjeeling is how economic gains social prestige and political power distributed among different social classes and groups. To what extent did the British the Bengalis or for that matters the Nepalese distribute the existing patterns of political social and economic power. From this analysis it is evident that the Hillmen's Union, an elite body of Nepalese Lepchas and Bhutias shared a common basically pro-imperialist political approach.

The Gorkha League; the Hillmen's occasional activities during the first two decades of the century paved the way for the emergence of the All India Gorkha League in 1943.³⁰ The communal Award accelerated the process, and surprisingly the AIGL strongly opposed the separation of Darjeeling district from Bengal.³¹ Dambar Singh Gurung provided the leadership and in "his keynote address at the official inauguration Gurung made a colossal error".³² According to Sonam B. Namgyal he backed, the wrong horse by supporting Nepal wherein and mentioned that the days of the British had already been numbered and supporting the British the cause of the AIGL would be viewed sympathetically. On the eve of the independence two

alternatives were placed for Darjeeling district's separation from Bengal. A separate province should be created along with Darjeeling, Doors and Assam and three districts of North Bengal namely Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Coochbehar together with Sikkim should form a separate province. From the Resolution of 1948 two conferences were taken place in Darjeeling on October 30th 1949 and the 1952 Memorandums highlighted one common point – separation from Bengal.

On April 6, 1947, the undivided Communist Party of India demanded the existing boundaries of the three contiguous areas of Darjeeling district, southern Sikkim and Nepal be formed into one single zone to be called Gorkhastan".³³ The communist stance of 1947 in fact was a social formation where the evolution of the struggle within an emerging bourgeois capitalist society could be seen. Aspects of communist ideology is based on the doctrine that people meaning a community of persons occupying a common territory and having a common language culture tradition should be 'empowered" to share in the governance of the state given a position in the decision making process. Political theorists have differed a lot on many questions but have hitherto agreed that the exploited oppressed and suppressed can only be empowered through their own political mobilization and through extension of social economic and political democracy to them."³⁴

In 1957 the Communists along with the Congress, and the All India Gorkha League submitted a representation to the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru demanding for “regional autonomy” of Darjeeling Hills. By the 1970’s most of the parties in Darjeeling be it the Congress, the Gorkha League or the CPI(M) favoured for an Autonomous Administrative Setup of Darjeeling.³⁵ On 5th April 1980, the Gorkha National Liberation Front was created by Sri Subhash Ghising followed by the establishment of the Pranta Parishad on 8th August 1980.³⁶ Letter was sent to the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi demanding a separation from West Bengal followed by demands of the inclusion of Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule. Ever since mid 1980’s, the GNLFF Supremo Sri Subhash Ghising started gaining his political ground both in the rural and urban areas of Darjeeling Hills and has become the champion for the cause of Gorkhas of Darjeeling. It has been possible for him to make a master blend of politics, economy and primordial society of the Hills. His master-stroke has been the replacement of the term ‘Nepalese’ by ‘Gorkhas’ worked magically to attract both the psychological attention of the Nepalese living in Darjeeling and the political aspiration of the people to have a separate political entity for the Indian Gorkhas within the constitutional structure of India.

What Ghising did was to harness emotional aspects and present communalism as the band wagon for under development and regionalism. Ghising is a shrewd observer of political events and

personalities. He disapproves the intellectual and as such does not want to take the advice and guidance from them. The Gorkhaland movement provides an interesting amalgamation of linguistic ethnic identities with politico-economic interests. The demand for the creation of a Nepali Gorkhali speaking state brings to light the availability of language as an important tool for ethnic assertions in the political process.

The spread of modern education ushered in a belated renaissance in early twentieth century Darjeeling which, in turn, altered largely the internal political dynamics of the “Queen of Himalayas”. Not only language, a sense of distinctive identity on the unresolved issues like citizenship, right of self-determination and governance, sense of “relative deprivation”, ‘Son of the Soil’ policy, reaffirmed primordial bondages, senses of “transferred anger” (on the issue of eviction of Nepalese from Meghalaya during early eighties), “transferred Zealousy” (referring Sikkim as fast growing neighbouring small state), gave rise to a new sense of ‘Gorkha’ identity replacing ‘Nepalese’ identity and accommodating other tribal native communities within the greater “Gorkha” fold. Ever since eighties, under the leadership of Mr. Ghising this unique kind of social cohesiveness dovetailed with political engineering created conjugal sense of political identity cutting across rural-urban spaces of Darjeeling Hills. The other political identities rooted in the tea gardens labour movement have not been able to combat the ethno-

centric movement by their ideologies. One important issue needs to be mentioned here that the rejuvenated politics in the line of regionalism and ethno-centricism in Darjeeling hills have cut the so called rural-urban divide and urban politics of Darjeeling has not been limited to urban areas only, it has its roots in villages too. The thesis of polarized politics or urban-rural divide make no sense for Darjeeling hills. Like its rural counterparts, the urban politics of Darjeeling has been principally concentrated on regional and ethnic issues based on relative deprivation. The right of self-determination has become the common concern of urban political culture. Since, eighties of the 20th century, in almost every form of democratic election be it Municipal election, DGHC election or Panchayat election, the Gorkha National Liberation Front has overpowered almost all other political forces in Darjeeling. To be precise, for the last two decades, the political experiences of Darjeeling amply suggest the emergence of one-party dominance.

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