

Ajapa Sharma

Her Internship Report

I would like to thank everyone here at CRG for their warm hospitality here at Calcutta and for their immense support without which I could not have done this work. I would specifically like to thank Dr Ranabir Sammadar, Dr. Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhary, Prof. Subhas Ranjan Chakravorty and Prof. Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhary. I came to Calcutta through Mount Holyoke College's Global Summer Studies Fellowship. What drew me to Calcutta is my interest in social movements and South Asian borders. I come from a background in Sociology and History, particularly South Asian history. The Gorkhaland movement interested me because it concerns a population and a place that is not only marginal to the imagination of the Indian nation state but also literally on the geographical margins of the Indian map. My research pertains mainly to the Hills of Darjeeling. I visited Darjeeling from the 13th to the 31st of July and met with individuals from different professional backgrounds who could be described as members of the civil society. Darjeeling, a colonial frontier land is today in Independent India a peripheral region. In looking at Darjeeling as a peripheral region. I have understood the movement in Darjeeling whose longer historical demand has been the recognition of the cultural and linguistic difference of the Gorkhas not as an ethnic separatist movement but as a movement for cultural, political and economic integration of a borderland into the Indian state. In looking at the Gorkhaland movement I have focused on how the emergence of spearheads and political power centers that claim to represent the entirety of the demands of the population under question have coerced and co-opted other civic and political bodies and individuals into silence. Even though many may have divergent political viewpoints, the subtle and not so subtle coercive nature of political parties such as the GNLF in the 80s and GJM recently create situations differences are silenced or silently ignored. As national parties have little leverage over the specific ethnic demand within the state and the center and therefore lost following in the hills over the years and non political parties cannot claim political representation under what has become a development state, a regional party such as the GJM has become powerful in the hills. These parties therefore have worn a façade of bearing popular mandate. As state and central government locate these power structures for negotiation, there is a further silencing of alternate and dissenting political viewpoints. While the emergence of a monoparty culture in Darjeeling has made it difficult for there to be a democratic dialogue and democratic process in Darjeeling, the state and central government's negotiation specifically with these power centers creates a further silencing of alternative voices. The center as the Darjeeling case suggests sustains undemocratic forces in the periphery further alienating the people of Darjeeling from a democratic engagement in the Indian nation state.

If one is to look beyond the past two and half decades, one is able to see that language and cultural recognition of the Gorkhas was the main cause of the various political and civic bodies that sprung up in Darjeeling. Bodies such as the Pranta Parishad headed by literary figures like IB Rai were focused solely on the recognition of the Nepali language. The CPI (M) with its large following among the tea plantation workers was mainly concerned with the working class cause. What the GNLF did then was to claim that it represented all the aspirations of the Indian Nepalis in Darjeeling. Ghisingh brought up questions of citizenship and the security of Nepalis in India following the exhortion of a large number of Nepalis from the neighboring states of Assam, Bhutan, Meghalaya. Ghisingh played into the fear of political marginalization in the Indian Nepalis. The multitude of causes that it claimed to represent allowed the GNLF to move into trade unions, started a women's wing, a youth wing and moved into other bodies including organizations based on language. The separate state demand encompassed a myriad of other demands. If alternative voices sprung up, violence was used to silence them. After the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, as scholars like Subhash Ranjan Chakravorty have noted, there was the consequent weakening of the voices of the different alternative voices in Darjeeling. The opposition, the CPRM, a regional offshoot of the CPI M lost following.

With this backdrop in mind I looked at the recent movement. The GJM like the GNLF was able to mobilize its following with the claim that the demand for a separate state encompassed every other demand of the people of Darjeeling. The interesting question here is what made it possible for the GJM to mobilize people under the not so new demand of Gorkhaland 20 years after. While the silencing under Ghisingh created a desperate need for the vocalization of discontent among the people of Darjeeling, the issue of identity re emerged after the popular TV show, Indian Idol featured a Indian Nepali called Prashant tamang who won the show through popular voting mainly in the Darjeeling hill region. While the TV show itself might not have been the most important factor in the movement, it created discussions of citizenship and marginalization of Indian Nepali. *** So what we see here again is the rallying the same

sort of emotive responses towards fear of marginalization as was the case of Ghisingh. The GJM's ways of rallying people are not entirely different from the GNLF's in the 80s. Like the GNLF, the GJM formed its women's wing within a couple of months of its formation. The GJNM (nari morcha) played a crucial role in rallying the support not only of the more cosmopolitan women of Jwalapahad in insisting that at least a woman from a family must attend its meetings and rallies, but also by rallying the women tea plantation workers through its collaboration with trade unions. It was the women's wing of the GJM the Gorkha Nari Morcha that obstructed Madan Tamang, the president of the ABGL or Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League from making his public speech in June 2008. Similarly the Gorkha Janamukti Yuba Morcha was formed to rally the youth of the region under GJM.

A particularly interesting slogan from the movement goes like this:

Agi Agi hida Yuba, Cheli Timro Saath Chinn
Agi Agi Hida Cheli, Mahakal timro saath chha.
Move ahead youth, the women are with you
Move ahead women, Mahakal is with you.

The women formed a key part of the movement but I've found that even as a part and wing of the GJM, they do not have a distinct voice. On asking a member of the Nari Morcha why there were few to none women in the tripartite talks, the respondent replied that she could not answer that question and one would have to ask the central committee regarding this.

The systematic creation of political wings with the membership of specific interest groups allowed the GJM to co-opt alternative interest groups into the movement. The membership of the GJM after 2008 was diverse, ranging from members of Ghisingh's party, lawyers, academic intellectuals willing to chart out a plan for Gorkhaland, businessmen and others. In 2008, a civil society forum was started in Darjeeling. But as the chairman notes it has been difficult for the forum to maintain a membership that does not overlap with that GJM (the power center). The close kinship and patron client relations in Darjeeling's closely bound community, as many of my interviewees noted makes it even more difficult for alternative and dissenting voices to resist. The idea that one has to participate in the movement even just to "show his face" to his neighbor runs strong. Before the signing of the Pintail agreement, The GJM sent out notices to organizations like the Hotel Owner's association to be present at the signing and also stipulated the dress code for the event. One of the members of the hotel owners association noted, "Bimal Gurung would have probably not even noticed that we weren't there but because the owner of the next door hotel would be there, I had to go."

Mechanisms like social ostracism where neighborhoods decide not to talk to families that do not send a participant in the GJM rallies are coercive social mechanisms of rallying people. However, it was not only through the subtle coercion of members from a diverse range of fields that the GJM was able to rally its support, underneath the seemingly Gandhian methods (as Gurung put it) of revolt was violence and terror. Not only were the houses of Journalists who were critical of the GJM ransacked, there were outright verbal warnings given to The clear example is of course Madan Tamang, The GNLF leader hacked in the middle of the day at Chowrasta in May 2010. Madan Tamang's murder is symbolic of the silencing of the critical alternative voice against the GJM. Madan Tamang as close sources claim had 2 years ahead of the recent GTA agreement warned the public of the the possibility of an agreement less than an a separate state. Although a candle rally took place after Tamang's death and his funeral saw popular anguish against the alleged GJM, the anguish watered down. The curious escape of the alleged Nickole Tamang from the CBI and the state and central government's inadequacy in providing a substantive justice to Tamang are indicative of the state's unwillingness to deal with alternative political figures in the region. It is interesting to note that although parties in the opposition such as the CPRM and the ABGL in some ways voice their critical opinions of the GJM, these parties are weakened to the point that they are not taken into account by the state and central government. The democratic mechanisms of dialogue have failed in Darjeeling with the emergence of power structures such as the GJM and the democratic process is put further at risk by the state and central government's failure to bring into account the alternative voices in the hills. There is a certain silent skepticism in the hills regarding the recent agreement. On the day of the signing of the agreement I asked a businessman who runs a famous café in Darjeeling whether the agreement is what the people of Darjeeling mobilized for. He replied, "well it is better if you ask political people but the GJM says it is a step towards a separate state and it probably is so."