

RE-CLAIMING LAND, LANGUAGE AND LINEAGE: WOMEN’S NARRATIVES OF THE GORKHALAND MOVEMENT (1986 AND 2007)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **'Re-claiming Land, Language and Lineage: Women's Narratives of the Gorkhaland Movement (1986 and 2007)'** submitted by **Arpeeta Sharma** bearing registration number **14CWPG05** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies, Centre for Women's Studies, School of Social Sciences is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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1. 2018. Breaking of the 'bahadur': Reading the song Bir Gorkhali within the context of the 2007 Gorkhaland Movement, Lokaratna: An International e- Journal of Folklore Vol. XI (I), 71-77.

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DECLARATION

I, **Arpeeta Sharma**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled '**Re-claiming Land, Language and Lineage: Women's Narratives of the Gorkhaland Movement (1986 and 2007)**' submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Prof. K. Suneetha Rani**, Centre for Women's Studies, is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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List of Abbreviations

AIGL/ABGL- All India Gorkha League/ Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League

CPI- Communist Party of India

CPI (M) - Communist Party of India (Marxist)

CPRM- Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist

CRPF- Central Reserve Police Force

DGHC- Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council

GJM- Gorkha Janmukti Morcha

GNLF- Gorkha National Liberation Force

GNWO- Gorkha National Women's Organisation

GTA- Gorkhaland Territorial Administration

GVC- Gorkha Volunteer Cell

JAP- Jan Andolan Party

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 2017 Resurgence of the Gorkhaland Movement

In 2017, the Government of West Bengal announced that Bengali language would be made mandatory in all the schools across the state. The region of Darjeeling, where Nepali is the dominant language, witnessed a strong protest from its people. One of the concerns vocalised by the protestors was the issue of marginalisation. The argument put forth was that the state was further side-lining the people of the region by ‘forcing’ Bengali on the region. Nepali language was considered very crucial as a marker of the identity for the Gorkha. The widespread protests from the people resulted in the resurgence of the demand for the separate state of Gorkhaland. This led to a massive *bandh* observed by the people and a complete digital blackout and isolation of the region by the state. Access to any social media was blocked by severing all forms of internet facilities in the region. Language, as one of the most important aspects and markers of identity, has always played a crucial role in identity movements. Therefore, the mandatory implementation of Bengali language was perceived as not only a complete dismissal of the history of the people but also of their struggle for identity. Language became a marker of identity in the 1960s *Bhasa Andolan* which demanded that Nepali language be recognised as one of the Indian languages.

Historically, the demand for the formation of a separate state of Gorkhaland sought to form a ‘home’ for the Indian Gorkha community within the Indian nation and to safeguard it from the Bengali dominance, since the colonial period. This demand has

witnessed several forms of articulations and manifestations beginning from the demand for a separate administrative unit to that of a separate state. The major movement that brought the demand to the mainstream was under the banner of Gorkha National Liberation Force (GNLF) led by Subhash Ghisingh in 1986. This movement, considered to be the most violent in the history of the region, led to the establishment of an autonomous council namely Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988.

In 2007, after more than two decades of Ghisingh's rule, a new party called Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) emerged and a new leader Bimal Gurung reignited the demand for Gorkhaland through non-violent demonstrations. This phase of the movement witnessed massive mobilisation of the people and the downfall of Ghisingh. This movement resulted in the formation of another autonomous body called Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in 2012.

Each of these phases represents a change not only in leadership but also in its strategies to engage with the state. Both these phases formed two different histories for the region and as well as its people.

The present study engages with these two phases of the Gorkhaland movement (1986 and 2007) and analyses the movement from the perspective of its women participants. Similar to Stree Shakti Sanghatana's *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle* (1989), where the women who participated in the Telangana People's Struggle (1946-1951) against the Nizams are primary narrators of the movement, this study attempts to engage with women associated with the Gorkhaland movement. The existing narrative on the movement has been presented from

two perspectives - the state and the region. The region has always been represented by the male leadership. The objective of the study is not to judge the movement and the demand but to try and understand it from a gender perspective. It is the side-lined experiences of the women involved in the movement that this study intends to focus on.

The women involved in the movement have often been considered a homogenous group, dubbed as the women's wing of the reigning political organisation. While some of them were able to acquire a position of power within the political ranks, they were comparatively smaller in number than their male counterparts. As a result, their individual histories and experiences during the movement were often ignored. Moreover, these two phases have witnessed the rise and fall of two political organisations and their subsequent effect on the politics of the region, which influence the re-tellings of the movement.

As the dynamics of the region and the movement are discussed from the two dominant perspectives, we can clearly observe the selective representation of their women participants. Documents of the 1986 phase introduce them through photographs of their *dharna*, or their participation in the rally, or as unnamed individuals discussing the issues surrounding the movement. Their individual introduction is often erased in these documents in order to focus on the party and the movement. In 2007, there seems to be a shift in their representation as we are introduced to massive protests 'led' by women and the shaving of their heads for the demand. These actions soon formulated a new discourse in the history of the movement. The 2007 phase was not only touted as Gandhian or non-violent but also as women-led. This came in as a stark contrast to the 1986 phase which was known for its violence and the dominating force of Ghisingh and

his party, GNLF. This change in the functioning of the movement brought about certain questions like, did this 'visible' change in the women's participation project a shift in the structure of the movement? If so, what brought about this change? If not, why was this claim made? Moreover, as the Gorkha identity has always been portrayed as masculine, what constitutes the Gorkha woman and which position does she occupy? These questions further the objectives of this study as they form the basis for the core argument of the thesis.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The Gorkha struggle for recognition of their identity against the dominant Bengali elite has led to many visible assertions. Here visibility refers to any form of public act of defiance by the people of the region against the Bengali dominance. As a result, there has been extensive literature produced by the movement. The existing materials do not focus on the women who participated in the movement, but are centred on the male leadership of the movement. The objective of the study is not to pass judgement on the movement and the demand but to understand it from a gender perspective. The narrative of the movement has been predominantly focused on the male leadership so the study intends to read the movement from the experiences of the women involved in it.

As the movement is still continuing and in the process of evolving, most of the literature produced has primarily focused on the two most active phases in the movement- 1986 and 2007. Both have seen the rise of new political parties, GNLF in 1986 and GJM in 2007, and the changes in the execution of the movement. In the 2007

phase of the movement, the role of media became very active and it is here that visibility of women as participants increased.

The demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland as a geographical entity was established by marking of regions that further concretised the demand. As a result, the three regions mentioned above became the focus of not only the state formation but also the epicentre of the mass movement. The demand for Gorkhaland emerged from the denial of the public sphere of West Bengal to the Nepali-speaking community. It is not just that they are not being taken into account by the government but rather, they have no claim to themselves in the political scenario of the region. Therefore, Gorkhaland can be read as a means of recognition of the political being of the people of the region who have a right in the public sphere of the state. If the movement does not have a place for the political category of the women, the region when built would still be unequal. It will not acknowledge the equal position of the women in their world view.

The core argument of this study is that there exists a narrative of the Gorkhaland movement beyond the dominant and the mainstream male perspective. This narrative while present has been relegated to the margins with the male leadership being always at the forefront. While women have always been integral to any movement, it is always the male narratives that have taken precedence. Therefore, these experiences of the women within the framework of the movement bring in a new reading of the movement. The question of participation itself becomes an issue of discussion, especially in the context of women, where a shift from the conventional understanding of the term is witnessed due to the individual relationship between these women and the movement. With the movement continuing for more than three decades, the changes in their individual role are

also discussed. These women have grown up or grown old with the movement and so their diverse experiences add to the existing history of the movement. It further elaborates the position these women were given within the party and the larger dimension of the movement. Therefore, the study brings to the fore the issue of identity and the demand for separation from the perspective of the women participants. These women have been part of the movement since its inception, directly through their own 'visible' participation or indirectly through the participation of their family members.

As the movement embodies the political assertion of the people from the region, the study seeks to analyse the concepts of home, identity, and ethnicity, which form the base of the movement through the lens of gender. It does not conceive the category of women as homogenous. It seeks to read fractures and tensions in the category and critically interrogate it at the intersection of community, region, and occupation focusing on their role in the movement. The study seeks to understand the gender concerns around participation, negotiation, and assertion in the movement. The objective is to look at the diverse experiences, in relation to gender, within the movement and how each of these perspectives helps in the re-telling of the movement.

While the study works on the re-articulation of the movement by women participants, an examination of the two phases becomes crucial for it intends to understand the evolution of the women participants and its effect on their re-telling. What emerges is the question of how the representation of women participants within the sphere of the movement has undergone a change and how that has affected their position in the movement, thereby analysing the structural shift in the participation of these women in the 1986 and 2007 phases of the movement. While 2007 did see a very obvious

occupation of the public sphere by the women, the scarcity of literature on the women participants all through the movement needs to be critically analysed. The study intends to read how gender has played a role in moulding these visible articulations.

Before examining the discourse of the movement through the lens of gender, the need to understand the question of identity, specifically against the backdrop of the Gorkhaland discourse is crucial. It is in this context that a closer understanding of the two terms- Indian Nepali and Indian Gorkha is required. Both denote the people living in the same geographical space and sharing the same history, but it is in their response to their construction of history that they differ. Those who have been part of the movement prefer to call themselves Indian Gorkhas, while those in the academia have preferred the term Indian Nepali. Those hailing from Nepal are referred to as Nepalese and some of the works cited here have used only the term Nepali as the identity of the Indian Gorkha community. The need to differentiate between the two becomes crucial as it holds a mirror to the fear that the community experiences every day. T. B. Subba in *Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling* (1992) is uncertain about which term should be used, and is sceptical of the acceptance of the word 'Gorkha' by the Centre and the State after the movement; he sees it as a means through which another movement may arise. While institutions like the Sahitya Akademi, and the West Bengal Official Language Act of 1961 recognized 'Nepali' instead of 'Gorkha' or 'Gorkhali', political parties like All India Gorkha League (AIGL), Pranta Parishad, and GNLFF supported the term Gorkhas (Subba, 1992).

As the participants and the supporters of the movement prefer to be addressed as Indian Gorkhas or *Bharatiya Gorkhe*, the study will use this term to address the people of

the region. In some cases the term Nepali has been used, specifically while citing references but the Indian Gorkha is the term that the study engages with. Based on this the Indian Gorkha consciousness becomes integral to the re-reading of the movement as questions like, is identity inherited or is it chosen and what entails this notion of identity will be studied from the point of view of women within the movement. This consciousness is further used to emphasise two aspects- first is the breaking away from the forceful homogenisation by the state and second is to move away from its historical linkages to Nepal. Through this claim they assert their roles as primary stakeholders of the region.

The study does not look at the category of women as an over-arching term but intends to break down this category and read it critically through the lens of community, region, and occupation. The study seeks to problematise the concept in order to understand questions like who were able to participate and under what conditions were they able to be part of the assertion. Thus, the objective of the study is to understand how the question of assertion was addressed by women who belonged to different socio-economic structures. As the study intends to examine the assertion that has taken place in the past through the movement, the workings of memory will come to play so as to not only trace the emergence of the Indian Gorkha consciousness but also to analyse if there is a gendered understanding of this consciousness.

1.3 Reasons behind the Gorkhaland Demand

The need for separation, as demanded by the people of the region, from the dominant Bengali identity stems from historical and contemporary concerns. These

concerns can be divided largely into two- the development issue, and, identity and belonging. While the question of development has been dismissed showing other districts of the state that have far lower facilities, I argue that the issues of development and identity are closely related. The fact that the difference between ethnicity and alienation is wrapped around the issue of development cannot be missed. Therefore, these two issues will be first discussed independently and then in their interconnectedness.

1.3.1 The Development Issue

The call for separation which began in 1907 continues even now, and the issue of development has been at its centre since 1986. In order to argue in favour of the demand, the leaders of the movement often spoke about the lack of development in the region. This claim was always dismissed by the state, and often a comparison was sought to show how the region was more developed than other districts of the state. The leaders of the movement pointed out how the ‘progress’ made in the region has been mostly to cater to the tourism industry. As the region is a hub for tourism and a source of revenue for the state, the development of this sector was highlighted by the state.

Lack of proper medical facilities and institutions of higher education has been used by the leaders to point out the reluctance of the state in developing the region for its people. The fact that there has been a lot of migration from the Hills to the Plains in search of better education and employment has often been quoted by the leaders to highlight the plight of the region. The plains have always been categorised as the domain of the Bengalis and so the migration to Siliguri, which is the nearest hub for medical and educational prospects, further highlights this discrepancy. The demand for a better future

for the next generation has always been at the core of the movement. The demand for autonomy and self-rule away from Bengali dominance is seen to have a direct relation with the structural development of the region.

Vimal Khawas, in “The Project of Gorkhaland” (2009), points out that the “protracted failure of the West Bengal government to provide basic infrastructure facilities like adequate educational institutions, health centres, communication, roads, drinking water facilities, etc can be taken as important indicators in this respect” (Khawas, 2009: 436). The disparity in the development between the *ukhalo* or upward (referring to the Hills) and *oralo* or downward (referring to Plains) has always been associated with the marginalisation of the ethnically different Indian Gorkha community. The lack of higher education centres in the region and the presence of the only state university in the area, the North Bengal University, in Siliguri (which falls under the Darjeeling district but is situated in the plains) have led to the migration of students. Even this institution has a large Bengali student population, making the Indian Gorkha students a minority.

The lack of development has also resulted in the dearth of employment opportunities in the region, leading to a massive migration of the youth from the region. Khawas points out that the “government offices are swamped by Bengalis” (Khawas, 2009: 436). The migration of the youth has resulted in an entire generation of the elderly being left behind. The formation of a state and its separation from Bengali dominance are viewed as the answer to the problems plaguing the region. This notion is further reinforced by Khawas, who quotes Subba, “the argument that the Bengalis in particular often behaved as masters in the Darjeeling hills cannot be easily brushed aside...Had their

attitude towards the hills people been healthy, the latter would probably have no reason to seek a separation from the former”(Khawas, 2009: 436).

Moreover, this unidirectional development is also read from the colonial perspective of the region that has been passed onto the post-Independence era. The region was celebrated for its favourable weather and soon became a medical retreat for the colonial officers. This paved the way for the region to gain special attention as a place of retreat for the elite. The region is still considered so and is ‘embellished’ to cater to the needs of its new ‘masters’. Therefore, a parallel can be drawn between this image of the past and of the present. Each image intends to paint the region as a landscape needed to be enjoyed and the people as part of such landscape.

The demand of statehood rose from the fact that there was no ethnic, social and cultural similarity between the ruling Bengali elites and the Indian Gorkhas. The fact that the region was clubbed together with West Bengal after independence because of the State Reorganisation Commission of 1953 was a cause of concern as the region demanded a separation from the then Bengal (now West Bengal) since the colonial period. Pradeep Kumar, in “Demand for New States: Cultural Identity Loses Ground to Urge for Development” (2000), argues that the demand to assert one’s cultural identity is being outweighed by the demand for development. He uses the theory of the centre-periphery, where the periphery has been exploited for its resources to the core, to understand the rising demand of statehood in the region. The organisation of the states on linguistic lines after the 1950s sought to club regions on the basis of linguistic or cultural similarities. As a result, the dominant regions became more powerful over the sub-regions resulting in patterns of “non-development, development of under-development, or retarded

development” (Kumar, 2000: 3078). These regions became ‘internal colonies’ of the ruling elites as they were being exploited for their resources. Kumar cites the examples of Uttarakhand and Jharkhand, where the ethnic and cultural issues were added to the existing strong sentiments against their state of under-development.

The demand for Gorkhaland has not been considered due to the geographical borders of the region, the ethnic undertones of the demand and the area of the proposed state. The other major reason was the opposition of the parent state of the region, which has always been against the demand. The demand to set up a second state reorganisation commission has been made by groups demanding statehood in different regions of the nation.

While the issue of development has been cited all through the movement, this is not the only reason for separation. The struggle for recognition by a community that has always been treated as an outsider cannot be overlooked. The next section discusses in detail the reasons for the struggle for identity that the community has taken up and how a state or a ‘home’ is seen as the answer that will solve both the development issue and the identity crisis.

1.3.2 Identity and Belonging

The demand for statehood, in the end, is the demand for a ‘home’ for the Nepali speaking community of the nation, which will also cement their claim to their Indian identity. The Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty, 1950 has been viewed as controversial and is asked to be reformulated by the leaders of the movement. The treaty allows the citizens of both sides to reside and work on the other side. This makes the position of the Nepali

speaking Indian citizen precarious as their position of being ‘truly’ Indian is constantly questioned. In the 1986 phase of the movement, Ghisingh demanded for a re-evaluation of the treaty, which was voiced again by Gurung in 2007. The burning of the treaty on July 27th, 1986 in Kalimpong (“27th JULY 1986 – Kalimpong Massacre and Saheed Diwas”, July, 2019), which ultimately led to the Kalimpong massacre, demonstrates the angst that the people felt towards this treaty. The porous border between the two countries has led to these citizens being called ‘foreigners’, questioning the loyalty of the Nepali community in India.

The open border system between the two countries was of concern for the other side too. Vidya Bir Singh Kansakar, in *Nepal-India Open Border: Prospects, Problems and Challenges* (2002), writes about this from the perspective of Nepalese, and how this has affected the country when the same accusations are rallied on the migrants of Indian origin. Interestingly, the demand for the re-formulation of the Treaty is recommended by Kansakar not because of these concerns, but due to the continuous influx of migrants. He traces this system to the colonial period when the British government kept an open border to serve their own purposes. The first was for the recruitment of soldiers into the British Army, and the other was for the import of raw materials from Nepal and the export of goods to Nepal and Tibet.

An increase in the settlement of retired armed personnel originally from Nepal and their subsequent employment as guards and as domestic help here increased the demand for their services in India. These people were ‘celebrated’ for their sincerity and devotion, and it is crucial to note how these characteristics became their trademark, making them fit for a certain type of employment. Nepal also witnessed its share of

migration to the plains of Tarai, where the hill people did not wish to move. The weather condition was conducive for Indian migrant workers who were skilled labourers. So, while people from the hill regions began to migrate to the Indian regions like Darjeeling and Shimla, those from India chose to settle in Tarai.

Due to the open border system, there have been accusations based on the theory of 'Greater Nepal', which suggests that the increase in population in the areas near Nepal was ultimately to annex them. While these theories have been disregarded, the loyalty of the community is still being questioned. The inability to distinguish between the migrant Nepalese and those of Indian origin has resulted in all of them being viewed through the same migrant lens. As Subba (1992) points out, the identity of Nepali was always associated with Nepal, which affected the Indian Nepali community. The open border system further affected this position as the migration continued and blurred all the lines of distinction. This uneasiness is echoed by the leaders of each phase of the Gorkhaland movement. Furthermore, he adds that the notion of 'going-back' has never been a part of the Indian Gorkha rhetoric as they were all born in India and have never been associated with Nepal.

Lopita Nath, in "Migrants in Flight: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement of Nepalis in Northeast India" (2005), refers to the community as an Internally Displaced Population (IDP), and describes them as a community that has been forced to migrate and leave their home due to the violence that they have endured. The violence or conflict faced by such communities can be based on the grounds of religion, the distribution of natural resources or manipulation orchestrated by the authorities for military and political purposes. She argues that the forceful displacement of the Nepali community to the

Northeast has not been highlighted enough due to their history of constant migration within the region and also due to their limited demography, as they are thinly spread across the region.

The migration of the Nepali community to India took place over two waves; the first was to Sikkim and Darjeeling and the second was to the Northeast and Southern Bhutan. The issue of displacement faced by the community in the latter two regions is critical in order to understand the movement. The fact that Nath (2005) refers to the community as ‘migrants in flight’ proves that the fear the people face, which has resulted in the continuous resurgence of the demand of Gorkhaland, is not unfounded. One cannot deny the threat that the community has faced during and after the movement. Nath quotes Monirul Hussain as he discusses the ‘threat of Nepalis’ in the region. He writes, “...irrespective of their length of stay in Assam [they] virtually became dangerous unwanted foreigners, who were threatening the socio-cultural and political identity of the Asamiyas in their traditional homeland” (Nath, 2005: 65).

The demand for a homeland is not just for the community living in Darjeeling, but is shared by the Nepali speaking population of the entire nation. As Nath, in “Migration, Insecurity and Identity: The Nepali Dairymen in India's Northeast” (2006), traces the emergence of the community in Assam and other North-eastern states, she engages with the debates on the issues of security that the community has faced. Therefore, she looks at this question from historical and political perspectives. The community, which was able to establish itself in Assam through colonial assistance as a source of revenue, soon found itself being ousted from its land.

This exclusionary process continued in the post-Independence era, especially during the Assam Movement (1979-1985) that strongly argued for the establishment of the ‘sons of the soil’. The Nepali community in the region faced the threat of being ousted as they were perceived as foreigners. This resulted in their forceful migration or internal migration to other areas. The threat to the lives of the inhabitants forced them to leave their possessions behind and settle in the border areas adjoining the region. The demand for Bodoland and their militant activities also added to this threat and forced the Nepali community to permanently leave the region (Nath, 2006: 144).

Another issue that the community has witnessed is that of the mass exodus from Bhutan and the North-East. The exodus of the people of Nepali descent in Bhutan during the 1980s and 1990s added to the already precarious position of the community in India. Again, the exodus of the community from Manipur in the 1980s added to the fear of being ousted from the country. The demand for separation persists even now, with the recent 2017 resurgence. This makes one wonder if the position of the community has undergone any change at all or has remained the same.

Assam was not the only region where such problems existed. The community faced similar reactions in Manipur and Meghalaya, and even outside the country. The forceful displacement of the community in Bhutan stemmed from the fear of the growing Nepali population in the country. The mass exodus of the community from Meghalaya in 1987 led to the displacement of approximately 7000 to 10000 people as they were forced to move to the Indo-Nepal border. Owing to the continuous exclusion faced by the community, “the more educated began to reassess their political status and democratic rights in the region. This led to a search for an assertion of Indian Nepali identity in

Northeast India” (Nath, 2006: 145). One can also read how such tactics of segregation strengthened the demand for a separate state.

The failure of the region and the nation to acknowledge the identity of the Nepali community has led to the urgency to assert their existence. As Nath suggests, the need to assert their Indian identity is the result of the hostility that they have faced in the Northeast. This reaction has had its effect in Darjeeling with the leaders citing examples of these acts to support their demand for statehood to ensure the safety of the community in the nation. Interestingly, Nath also points out how the term ‘Nepali’ itself becomes a homogenising agent, as not all these people belong to the same caste, class or ethnic backgrounds. As a result, this term becomes significantly loaded as it encompasses caste, language and ethnicity. The term ‘Indian’ is superimposed on their identity thereby legitimizing their claim on the land. It is then that the community refuses to call itself Nepali and calls itself Gorkha, thereby severing their ties with their origin and completely becoming a part of their ‘host country’, India.

David Gellner, in “Warriors, Workers, Traders, and Peasants: The Nepali/Gorkhali Diaspora since the Nineteenth Century” (2013), interrogates the issue of identity amongst the Nepali/Gorkha diaspora. Like Nath, he points out that while a diasporic community has strong ties to their place of origin, there may be cases where “in order to establish themselves in their new host societies people of Nepali cultural background sometimes are obliged to *deny* that they have any diasporic leanings” (Gellner, 2013: 2). The assertion of the Indian Gorkha identity falls into this category. As he explains the reasons for the migration of the community, he focuses on the rise of the Nepali identity in Darjeeling through the acceptance and celebration of the Nepali

language in the region. The move to assert the claim of belongingness of the community was articulated as the demand for the inclusion of the Nepali in the list of official Indian languages. As Darjeeling became the focal point of ethnic diversity, it was the Nepali language that became a connecting common thread. There began a rise of a strong Nepali consciousness which culminated into a common identity for the people not only belonging to the region but dispersed throughout the nation. Gellner refers to Hutt, who states, “In this diaspora, as in many others, much of the “common culture” was constructed after the migrations, not prior to them” (Gellner, 2013: 7).

Their occupational identity as *gualas* or as *chowkidaars* also became a point of ridicule for the community. Gellner rightly points out that, to the rest of Northeast India, Nepalis were “branded as ‘foreigners’ and ‘migrants’... [and] nicknamed *Dajus* (coolies or porters), *Bahadurs* (chowkidaars) and *Kaanchas* (household servants). If they raise any demands-literary, political or economic-they are often told to go to Nepal, as the Governor of Assam did recently” (Gellner, 2013: 4). This perspective is not just specific to the Northeast, but the entire nation.

The issue of belonging stems from the migrant history of the community and the region. The region was clubbed together with Bengal during the colonial period to serve as a retreat for the British officers. People of the region claim that they came with the land when the British annexed the region. While this claim has strong evidence, the colonial documents have noted a steady increase in the population of the region through migration. The history of the region and its people, along with its geographical position has been used to dismiss the claims made by the movement. The fact that Ghisingh consciously demanded for Gorkhaland for the Indian Gorkhas who speak Gorkhali,

thereby negating the ‘Nepaliness’ of the community, points to the need to sever ties with the community’s Nepali roots. While the move to call the language Gorkhali instead of Nepali was not accepted, the term Indian Gorkha or *Bharatiya Gorkha* was widely agreed upon. Interestingly, the need to create a separate identity from their Nepal counterparts was as crucial for the community as highlighting their ‘Indianness’. Therefore, being called an Indian became more important than being called a Gorkha.

The attack on Nepalis, as Subhakanta Behera argues in “Trans-Border Identities: A Study on the Impact of Bangladeshi and Nepali Migration to India” (2011), can be read as a by-product of the Assam movement, where the main targets were the migrants from Bangladesh. The impact of migration on the position of the communities from India needs to be further investigated for a better understanding of the demand for a separate state. The cultural similarities between India, Bangladesh and Nepal need to be understood to analyse the patterns of migration and to read its effects on the regions bordering these countries. Comparing the migration of these two communities, he states that the threat from the Bangladeshi migrants was more than those from Nepal. The discourse on Nepali migration put forth is the one of relative calm due to the Friendship Treaty of 1950, their religious similarity and the ‘floating character of the migrants’ (Behera, 2011: 10). This argument becomes interesting as it completely challenges the demand by the Indian Gorkhas to reject the treaty. While the community is known for its migratory character, the treaty blurs the line between those who are from India and those who are migrants from Nepal. Although the article discusses in detail the effects of migration on the security of the nation, it completely neglects its effect on the culturally similar communities inhabiting the border regions between the two nations, in this case,

the Nepali-speaking Indian citizens. As a result, identity becomes an issue for both the host population (Indian Gorkha) as well as the migrant population (Nepali Gorkha).

Behera also reiterates the argument of the state on the alleged threats posed by the demand for Gorkhaland. The geographical position of the region, with its international boundaries and its proximity to other North-Eastern states, and its shared history with Nepal is often used as a means to deny the demand of statehood. The speculation on the formation of Greater Nepal has always been associated with the demand for statehood. The regions under the rule of imperial Nepal before the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-1815 were identified to be part of this image of Greater Nepal. The fact that there were organisations in Nepal demanding its formation does add to the threat to Indian national security. Even so, the distinctiveness maintained by the Indian Gorkha from their Nepal counterparts makes their position clear and, despite cultural similarities, there is no shared political allegiance. While the demand for statehood clearly mentions the formation of Gorkhaland within the Indian nation, the rise of the Nepali identity as a strong force combating the issue of recognition soon became as important as their Indian identity.

While these two aspects have been continuously cited in the demand for statehood, they cannot be clearly distinguished. Both have had an influence on each other, for the lack of development of the region is often attributed to the oppression of the community due to their migrant status. The statehood demand addresses the issues of both development and identity, and claims that the formation of a state for the Nepali-speaking Indian citizens will solve such problems.

1.4 Emergence of the Gorkha Identity

The evolution of political parties in the region brings to light how the inclusion of the term Gorkha came into being. The Gorkha community sought a separate identity from its roots in Nepal. While the Gorkha community comprised a sub-section of the Nepali community in India, its gradual influence on all the communities in the region led to an evidently over-arching identity in the region. The demand for the creation of a separate identity for the people of the region began in 1907, but the objective here was to bring all the communities together. By the time the AIGL came about, the term *Gorkha* had come to be associated with the identity issue. With the demand for Gorkhaland and the 1986 movement, the term made its stronghold on the question of the people's identity. This section intends to study the history behind the emergence of the Gorkha identity.

Indo-Nepal Peace Treaty of 1950 has been regarded as a controversial document especially by the Indian Gorkhas. The document allows citizens of both the countries to settle and work in either country. In the 1986 phase of the Gorkhaland Movement, Subhash Ghisingh and his party GNLF demanded a rectification of the treaty, as, according to them, it questioned the citizenship rights of the Indian Gorkhas.

Subba (1992) takes the help of various colonial archives to historically trace the origin of the Gorkha community. He examines the emergence of the Gorkha community from Nepal where they ruled for more than four centuries. As he traces the origin of the community before they took over the region, he uses the colonial archives to study the assimilation of other smaller communities into the larger Gorkha identity, and their religious practices. Subba argues that the emergence of the Gorkha identity in India was

through the ‘battlefields’, as their primary occupation was in the colonial army. While the over-arching name Gorkhas cannot be used for all the people of Nepali descent, their military lineage cannot be denied. As he traces this history, he refers to Aitchison who noted that the Company allowed Gorkha soldiers to join the British Army after the war between the East India Company and the Gorkhas. Later, with the permission of the Rana of Nepal, the British were able to officially recruit Gorkha soldiers into the British Army. They also opened recruitment centres at Gorakhpur and Ghoom. It should be noted that the Gorkhas were not the only community that was recruited this way, but other communities like the Rais and Limbus, who were engaged with tea plantations and agriculture, were also taken in.

Subba points out that while the British wanted to retain the loyal Gorkhas, people like Dambar Singh Gurung, the founder of the AIGL supported the Indian stance to transfer the control of the regiment from the British to the Indians, out of fear for the fate of those Gorkhas who were not part of the army. Subba further adds that their addition to the Indian regiment later was met with discomfort by the community as the Gorkhas were employed to quell the various anti-British movements.

As Subba explains, the boundaries of the Gorkha identity experienced a change with the assimilation of other communities within the larger umbrella of the Gorkha identity. He brings forth three perspectives to discuss the same- the Nepalese (people from Nepal), the administrative (British and Indian) and the Nepali (Indian Nepali) perspectives.

The Nepalese perspective intends to read how the Gorkhas are looked upon. Historically, the Gorkhas were the dominant community and had exploited other communities. The outsiders who joined the army were never able to become like the Gorkhas. Subba points out that the term itself was disliked due to this history of their dominance. The dislike for the community was evident during the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-16 where the other Nepalese groups helped the British to win the war. The administrative perspective focuses on the detail that the Gorkhas were never a homogenous group. Different tribes were merged in the group with people from other communities joining the army.

The third perspective is crucial as it encapsulates the position of the Indian Nepalis and the emergence of the Gorkha identity. Subba traces the sense of resentment that has been growing in the region where the retired Gorkhas settled. He observes that the caste differences gradually decreased with the settlement of these mixed communities together. While one cannot say with certainty that the caste issues have been completely eradicated, they are not as stringent as they are being followed in Nepal. On the other hand, there was a dearth of job opportunities in the region of Darjeeling. There was a mass out-migration of the people, and those who did move outside faced discrimination. This led to the need to organise and protect themselves, which in turn led to the formation of the Gorkha Samiti in 1906 and the AIGL in 1943. Later AIGL became a strong political party leading to the demand for a separate state. Additionally, the publication of various newspapers strengthened this consciousness. Politically, the term Gorkha was used to include other tribes like the Lepchas and Bhutias residing in the region during the 1986 phase of the Gorkhaland movement. However, as Subba points out, while the terms

‘Gorkha’ and ‘Nepali’ were taken to be similar, that is no longer the case later. Therefore, we need to look into these two terms further.

The emergence of the Gorkha identity has been mostly read in terms of the migrant history of its people. The authors mentioned above provide multiple perspectives on the issue of identity emergence. While interrogating the identity question, their colonial history gains prominence in all of the writings, but what should also be understood here is how the Gorkha identity took over all the other minority identities. To put it simply, the colonial, national and state responses to the marginalisation of the people living in the region led to the emergence and assertion of the Gorkha identity.

1.5 A Brief History of the Movement

As the respondents in my fieldwork often referred to the differences between the two phases, a historical detail on the two becomes crucial before the analysis of the field narratives is done. Therefore, this section has used details from visual as well as print media along with books written about the movement. This will enable a historical account of the two phases that have always been seen as opposites to each other but have contributed strongly to the narrative of the movement. As a result, it is through these differences that the political history of the region and its people is made.

The Gorkhaland movement, which is the demand for a separate state within the Indian nation, did not begin in a vacuum but has a history of demands for separation. The region has witnessed various forms of movements keeping the demand for separation from Bengali dominance at its core. Historically, the first demand was made for a separate administrative unit in 1907. Subba (1992) observes that this demand may have

its roots in the isolation that the ‘Hill people’, namely the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalis, faced from their immediate dominating community, the Bengalis.

The demand for the ‘creation of a separate unit’ in 1917 comprised the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri of Bengal. What should be noted more importantly is the demand to create the North-Eastern Frontier Province (NEFP), which included the regions of Darjeeling, Dooars, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. This demand was based on the factors of history, geography, language, race, and religion. The Hillmen’s Association established in 1921 demanded for a separate administrative set-up which would enable them to move away from Bengal. The Hill People’s Social Union established in 1934 sought to forge a stronger bond among the three main communities in the region- the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis. Subba mentions that the main achievement of this organisation was the publication of *Nebula* (Ne: Nepali, Bu: Bhutia and La: Lapche or Lepcha), a Nepali monthly magazine meant to unify the region. The establishment of the AIGL in 1943, under the leadership of Dambar Singh Gurung, sought the betterment of Gorkhas spread across India. Subba mentions that the main objectives of the League were recognition of the Gorkhas as a minority, representation of the community in the provincial legislature and the interim government, and freedom for all the Gorkhas who were held as political prisoners by the British government. The AIGL also demanded the creation of a separate provincial legislature ‘Uttarakhand’ in 1949 due to the unequal representation of ‘Gorkhalis’ against Bengalis. The demand for Gorkhastan by the undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1947 was for an independent nation which included Nepal, Darjeeling district and Sikkim. The memorandum submitted stated that

the Gorkha people could be happy only if Gorkhastan was given to them on the basis of a plebiscite.

As the study focuses on the two phases of the Gorkhaland movement, a brief history of the two phases is imperative so as to understand the socio-political scenario of the region. While the region had witnessed continuous resurgence of the demand for separation since the colonial period, the two phases discussed here refer to two phases that changed the history of the region and its people. The two phases have often been touted as opposites due to their execution and the retaliation the people were met with. Moreover, the individual decisions that the leadership took during these two phases affected the history of the movement and the demand.

1.5.1 The Gorkhaland Movement of 1986

The demand for separation took a new turn when Subhash Ghisingh established his party, GNLF, in 1986. The demand which had seen different manifestations in the region now witnessed a growing resentment amongst the inhabitants towards the state. The call given by Ghisingh soon became one of the most violent phases in the history of the region. This change in their image became crucial as there began a change in the general perception towards the community. For the inhabitants of the region, this move presented the community as a strong warrior group and for the state, the community became a threat. This change in their image from being docile to militant re-shaped the history of the movement.

In “Kalimpong's Untold Story” (2007), Janice Mukhia refers to the events of Kalimpong massacre as a reflection of the situation in the region during the 1986

movement. The day that is being written about is 27th of July, 1986. This incident was also captured in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). The town of Kalimpong was the centre of this event. The author reminisces about this as the day when a peaceful march for Gorkhaland was planned in the town. The people had come together dressed in their best attire to participate. The author recounts how the people were unaware of the army personnel surrounding the area. A firing took place resulting in the mass killing of the people. The author retells this event in order to remind the people of 'our story'. The peace protest that was to take place on that day became an event of carnage. This event, therefore, transcends the protest rally and becomes etched in history when the call of 'our maato' echoed everywhere.

The 1986 phase was considered a milestone in the demand for statehood. Ghisingh became an icon and the face of the movement. His defiance of the state made him a threat to the ruling Bengali Government. The state published statements detailing how the demand was unconstitutional, rendering the movement a threat to the nation's unity. This shows the change in the attitude of the state towards the region. The enforcement of Section 144 and the militarisation of the region began a new chapter of incarceration, death, and turmoil in the history of the region. This history culminated in the formation of the DGHC, an autonomous hill council, in 1988.

"Why the name Gorkhaland? ... only the ethnic name of any place or any land... can germinate the real sense of belonging in the conscience of the concerned people" (Middleton, 2013: 611). The above statement was made by Ghisingh when asked why he named this imagined state as Gorkhaland. The state government, in retaliation, published an official document dismissing the claim and calling Ghisingh and the demand anti-

national. Ghisingh dismissed the accusation and remarked, “for, weren’t we just longing to be called Indians?”(Middleton, 2013: 614) In another interview, he remarked that the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai had “described us as foreigners and said we were welcome to go back to Nepal... But if there is Gorkhaland then our identity as Indian belonging to the Indian state, will be clear” (Middleton, 2013: 614). Townsend Middleton, in “Anxious Belongings: Anxiety and the Politics of Belonging in Subnationalist Darjeeling” (2013), reads these retorts along the trajectory of Ghisingh’s politics and argues that “Ghisingh and the GNLFF were not just summoning a history of anxious belonging, they were also producing it” (Middleton, 2013: 614).

The troubled existence of the community with its migrant roots has always been used to argue in favour of the demand for separation. The tag of foreigners has always haunted the Nepali-speaking populace of the nation. Therefore, Middleton argues that this fear, or as she refers to it ‘anxiety’, was used by Ghisingh through his rhetoric against the 1950 peace treaty. He used the treaty to portray the ambiguous position the community held. He added that the treaty had to be re-addressed in order to cement their position. Ashlesha Rai’s *Women in Gorkhaland Movement: A Sociological Study* (2015) reiterates the 1986 phase as the second phase of the demand, as she categorises the smaller separation demands before this as the first. Ghisingh had demanded for the scrapping of Article VII of the 1950 treaty as it allowed ‘reciprocal privileges’ to the citizens of both the countries. This permission added to the existing alienation felt by the Indian Gorkha community, as the line of distinction between ‘us’ (Indian Gorkha) and ‘them’ (Nepalese) began to blur. Even though legally they were citizens of the nation, the fact that the people went on to support Ghisingh in one of the most turbulent and violent

phases shows how deep this fear runs. It was around this time that the expulsion of the community from various regions of the Northeast began.

Rai (2015) divides the 1986 movement into three phases- first, the clashes within the party, which resulted in high casualty rates; second, retaliation by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) wherein measures were taken to counter the movement through violence; and third, the deployment of armed forces by the state to quell the movement and counter the attacks of GNLF on government offices. In 1988, Ghisingh agreed to the formation of DGHC within West Bengal, which reportedly disappointed some of his supporters. Interestingly, Ghisingh took a backstep towards the end of his reign, almost before the 2007 phase began, when he started campaigning in favour of the Sixth Schedule. He had earlier dismissed taking on a tribal identity stating that “...We are civilized. Look at me, I wear a three-piece suit and shoes!”(Middleton, 2013: 615). While 1986 saw large scale participation from the hills, a similar rise was seen in 2007, where the existing party, the GNLF, was overthrown by the GJM and the demand for Gorkhaland was resurrected.

1.5.2 The Gorkhaland Movement of 2007

The momentous victory of Prashant Tamang in the Indian reality show Indian Idol in 2007 was hailed by the hills not only as a victory of the Nepali-speaking population of the country, but also as a means through which the community was gaining mainstream recognition. “For one shining moment, a marginalised minority historically discriminated against as “outsiders and “foreigners” assumed its place at the centre of the national imagination” (Middleton, 2013: 616). Two incidents changed this jubilation to anger and

resentment. First, Tamang was dressed as a Gorkha *chowkidaar* and sang a Hindi film song and the second was the remark made by a Radio Jockey (RJ) building on the caricature of the *bahadur* or the Gorkha guard, which resumed the discussion on Gorkhaland at the national level. Ghisingh had already ruled over the region for more than a decade without bringing any change in the situation, and his recent stint of demanding Sixth Schedule status for the region was heavily criticised.

The comment made by the RJ became a turning point in the history of the region as it paved the way for the resurgence of the demand for statehood. There was a massive protest on the streets of Siliguri, resulting in a struggle between the protestors and local Bengali political factions, who were against the demand. This led to the deployment of the central forces. The Indian reality show, where Tamang won, faced strong criticism for dressing him as a *bahadur* for the re-enactment of a song. The song was picturised based on the actor who was also dressed as a ‘Gorkha guard’. The RJ further added that “All momo (dumpling) shops will remain closed as the Nepali guy has become Indian Idol” (Middleton, 2013: 616). Both these comments re-enforced the modes used to marginalise the community.

One indeed begins to question the position that the community occupies in the social structure of the nation. The mainstream media has often highlighted the community in terms of its occupation, which has also become its identity marker. The contestation between the two terms Nepali and Gorkha, where the latter has been adopted by the leaders of the movement, also has strong connections to the marginalisation faced by the community. Both the terms have been misrepresented by the mainstream media and have led to further alienation of the community.

The rise of Bimal Gurung, a close associate of Ghisingh, who led the Prashant Tamang fan club in the region, and his party GJM, initiated the demand for statehood in 2007. Gurung stirred the discussion against the leadership of Ghisingh and formed the new narrative of the movement, which would follow the non-violent principles of Gandhi. *Gandhivaad/Gandhian* as his party called the movement, garnered massive support among the people. The past horrors of the 1986 phase were still etched in the memory of the people and no one wished to repeat the violence of that period. The fact that this phase supported methods of non-violence also encouraged women to come out in large numbers. Soon, women became a visible part of the movement.

The discussion on the 2007 phase of the movement has to begin from the downfall of Ghisingh's political power. While he did 'rule' the region, the eventual rise of the demand through a new leader and party meant that there was a growing resentment among the people. Niraj Lama (A 'Dictator' Deposed, April 2008) refers to him as the 'Dictator of Darjeeling' as he recounts the events that led to the fall of one of the most influential men in the region igniting the resurgence of the demand. Ghisingh was not allowed to enter the hills by the members of the opposite faction led by Bimal Gurung.

While the events led to the removal of the leader, there were steady changes in the allegiance of its party members. With Gurung setting the stage for the new phase of the movement that was dubbed as non-violent, moving away from its predecessors, the new phase demanded three goals- the demand for statehood, the proposal for Sixth Schedule to be dismissed, and the removal of Ghisingh from power.

The rise of Gurung, who was earlier a close associate of Ghisingh, added a new trajectory to the history of the movement. He had been overseeing the activities of the Prashant Tamang Fan Club in the region and was active in the mobilisation of people to support and help in the victory of Tamang. While he was doing that, Ghisingh was seen rallying for support for the Sixth Schedule and urging people to replace the idol of Durga with rocks (Lama, Mountain Autocrat, Still, July, 2006), and refusing to openly support Tamang. His dismissal of Tamang proved to be his downfall as there were posters stating that if Tamang did not win, Ghisingh will not be allowed to come back (Middleton, 2013). Ghisingh earned the nickname of *pagla raja*¹ or the mad king due to his antics. The fact that the people were scared of Ghisingh's power resulted in their quiet submission, but there were pockets of resistance especially from other political organisations in the region.

Gurung began to speak against the GNLF supremo and gained mass support. Gurung's stand against the Sixth Schedule also helped him to garner support. He used the past as a reference to unveil the mistakes made by Ghisingh and his party GNLF, as they had used force to demand for statehood. The trauma of 1986 was still remembered by the people and so, when he claimed that the 'new' phase (2007) would follow the Gandhian way of non-violence, he found region-wide support. Additionally, there were other external factors that had an influence on mobilising the demand. Statements by State ministers like Ashok Bhattacharya and Subhash Chakravorty, who called Indian Nepalis 'outsiders' and 'foreigners' and remarked that the community should have been ousted

¹ This was a term used by some of my respondents due to the 'crazy' antics used by Ghisingh to 'prove' that they were tribal. It will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

from the country along with the British colonial rule (Chhetri, Whither now, Darjeeling?, July, 2008), further added fuel to the demand.

The demand at its core was a need to belong and with the community's past filled with questions of belonging and of being ousted from their 'homes'. The need to establish an identity separate from the dominant group becomes more crucial here. This became clear on September 28th, 2007 when people gathered in Siliguri to lodge a complaint against the comment made by the RJ. This protest march led to a skirmish with local Bengali political groups resulting in the deployment of the army and the Para-military forces. The direct impact of this tussle was witnessed in Darjeeling when the All Gorkha Students Union (AGSU) initiated a protest march demanding justice, chanting slogans of warning and threat against the Bengali Government (Middleton, 2013).

This transition of festivity that began with Tamang's victory to the resurgence of the demand highlights the anxiety that continues to grip the Nepali-speaking population in the nation. As Middleton refers to the statement issued by the AGSU, "The recent Siliguri riots have prompted us to speak out. The incident made us feel that the Gorkhas are not safe. We always have to prove our identity in this country. This is happening to us because we do not have our own land... The Gorkhas require their own land!" (Middleton, 2013: 618). She opines that the anxiety remains even after the 1986 phase and the establishment of DGHC.

In the narrative of the movement, the state's response has been dominant specially in developing the image of the demand and the movement to the rest of the nation. The state has always played a key role in suppressing the demand. Therefore, it is

critical to read the contradictory history between the narrative of the state and those from within the movement.

1.6 Reading Histories: State Vs the Gorkhaland Movement

An official document published in 1986 and 1987 by the Government of West Bengal (*Gorkhaland Agitation: Facts and Issues*) can be perceived as a clear indication of the State's response to the Movement. The document includes an analysis of the movement and the GNLF by the State Government. One of the main reasons for the continuous focus on the 1986 movement can be read in terms of the change in the perception of the region. The second document published by the government is a kind of 'follow up' on the situation in the Hills and the stand of the State Government after the agitation. The discussion of the issue between the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister and the stance of the State Government on the question of Gorkhaland are also discussed in this document. Promises made by the state assured a better future for the people in the Hills, but the 2007 movement proved otherwise. The fact that the issues surrounding the demand have not undergone any change since the 1986 phase manifests that the future promised by the state never materialised.

While taking a survey of the 'aftermath' of the movement in the Hills, the State provides a detailed description of all the statistical and social changes that have come as a result of the movement. At the same time the industry (Tea and Tourism) of the Hills, which largely contributes to the State's economy, was greatly affected by the movement. There were many ethnic groups who were unable to identify with the 'Gorkha' identity and hence resisted it. What becomes increasingly clear here is the State's need to draw an

image of the movement as one which was led by power-mongers. The movement is depicted as the one which only catered to a select few while the majority was left in a state of poverty. The plight of the tea plantation workers is mentioned in order to defend their statement. The closing of the plantations during the agitation took away the livelihood of all these workers. However, according to Mona Chettri, in “Choosing the Gorkha: At the Crossroads of Class and Ethnicity in the Darjeeling Hills” (2013), the tea plantations were a major site of political turmoil. She traces the political history of the tea plantations parallel to the assertions of cultural identity taking place outside it. The 1986 movement saw the tea plantations emerging as a major site for enlisting supporters of the movement.

Chettri further elaborates that the education brought in by the missionaries was accessible only to the urban dwellers, while those in the tea plantations were more occupied with sustaining themselves. The argument made by the State on the loss of the daily wages of the tea plantation workers due to the movement can be read through Chettri’s analysis of the conditions of these wageworkers. The privately owned plantations and other State controlled industries with the workers receiving wages below the fixed rate were closed resulting in heavy losses for the workers.

L.S.S. O’Malley’s *The Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling* (1907) was one of the first informative documents about the region and its people. It was this text that was used by the state to establish the migrant history of the inhabitants in its official document. T.B. Subba’s “The Gorkhaland Movement and the Human Rights Violation in India” (2010) focuses on the human rights violations that took place during the 1986 movement. He brings out his personal experiences by narrating how his family was

treated by the police. Therefore, while officially there were many cases of attacks on the Police, the atrocities on the general public by the forces cannot be overlooked. It may be said that the attacks on the forces were in retaliation against the violation and violence meted out to the people.

The dominant discourse on the Gorkhaland movement, as cited by the State, has been portraying it as a threat to the national unity. The origins of such argument can be traced to the 1986 phase of the movement when the state strongly opposed the demand and equated it with the secessionist movements like *Khalistan*. The official document published by the state of West Bengal in 1986 as a response to the movement states that “Following the sequence of events in Darjeeling over the past few months, can one not link it with the agitations for Khalistan and independent Assam, Tribal Tripura, and Mizoram, Jharkhand, Kamtapuri, Uttarakhand and similar other movements?” (Government of West Bengal, 1986: 30)

In the above statement, we see an equating of demands for statehood with those of complete separation. This forceful similarity blurs the line of the objective behind each demand. We can see the aftermath of this accusation even now as the demand is often referred to as a threat to the national unity due to the region's proximity to Nepal and its shared history. While there were similarities in terms of the anxiety resulting from marginalisation, the demand for Gorkhaland since its inception, has been for a state within the Indian nation. Even the term ‘Indian Gorkha’ symbolises this intent.

On other hand, the issues of identity, geographical location, and women's participation are the three key factors that form the narrative of the movement. These threads are examined to understand the factors that gave rise to the demand of

Gorkhaland. These factors become key concepts which are discussed in subsequent chapters. These issues should not be taken as individual factors but as the ones becoming interdependent in the course of the assertions. The three factors- Borderlands, Identity movement and Women's participation, their role and relevance to the Gorkhaland movement are analysed in the subsequent section to understand their influence on the movement.

The proximity of the region to Nepal with which it shares its history and the use of this history by the state to negate the demand for statehood has constantly filled the narrative of the Gorkhaland movement. Further, this act of denial of the Nepalese 'roots' adds to the need to cement the claim of being Indian nationals. Moreover, this geographical space transcends into a living entity as it informs the identity of its inhabitants. One can read the threads of anxiety that have enveloped this community with regard to this geographical space culminating in the demand. Women have always been the equal recipients of this history and have been asserting themselves in the collective Gorkha identity. These three factors as active agents in the re-telling enable us to bridge the gaps in the existing literature of the movement.

1.7 Reading Women's Experiences: Borderlands, Identity Movements, and Personal Narratives

The official discourse of the State has often equated secessionist movements with the Gorkhaland demand. This image of the movement as 'anti-national' or 'divisive' or threat to national unity has continued, to negate the actual reasons for the demand. While some similarity between the Khalistan and Gorkhaland is evident, the clubbing together

of the two negates the origin of the latter. I wish to read the movement on the basis of three factors i.e. Borderlands, Identity movement and Women's *testimonios* or personal narratives. These three elements are the structure on which this study is based as each has an influence on the re-telling of the movement history.

The geographical location of the region belongs to a contested landscape. The region's close proximity to the nation's border has been deemed as critical for national security. As a result, when there was a demand for separate statehood, it has been read as a threat to national unity. Its violent and turbulent history has generated a sense of region-specific anxiety amongst its inhabitants. The 1986 Gorkhaland movement became a turning point in the history of the demand as it not only became one of the most turbulent phases in the history of the region but also brought the demand and the community to the mainstream populace. This highlighted the issue of belonging as allegations of their ties with Nepal owing to the region's migrant history led to the state questioning the community's loyalty. I argue, in this context, that borders should not be considered as mere lines of demarcation but be read as geographical spaces or borderlands with inhabitants, which are affected by the political discourse. Therefore, these regions should not be understood as land masses attached to these 'borders' but as 'borderlands', which include the lines of separation that influence the discourse of 'us' and 'them'. The lives of such people are discussed by Anzaldua (1987) when she initiates a dialogue about the 'third space', where the inhabitants do not belong to either side of the border. This section has created its own narrative and Anzaldua refers to it as 'border consciousnesses' or the *Mestiza* consciousness. According to Anzaldua, this

consciousness is produced through writing, memories and personal histories. The trauma of being ‘in-between’ is powerfully used in constructing the *la Mestiza* consciousness.

The language movement has been a constant fixture for communities demanding recognition. The *Nepali Bhasa Andolan* or the Nepali Language Movement during the 1960s and the 2017 resurgence of the Gorkhaland movement focuses on the role of language in the recognition demand. While the former was a precursor to the 1986 phase, it has been constantly present in the movement discourse. Thus, the rule issued by the state on the mandatory implementation of Bengali language in schools was read as a threat to the identity of the Indian Gorkha community. Anzaldua, while theorising the *Mestiza* identity states that language is a homeland. Similarly language becomes a crucial identity marker in the context of the Indian Gorkhas. Furthermore, Anzaldua blurs the distinction between her individual self and the identity that her language presents as it is the language that cements her borderland identity. Even her style of writing, which is influenced by English and Spanish, highlights not only her location in the US-Mexico border but also its effect on her subjectivity as a *Chicana* woman residing in this region. As she discusses her own subjectivity in the physical space she is residing, she distinguishes how her own spoken language is considered ‘impure’ as it is influenced by English. She asserts that while the language she uses is influenced by English and Spanish, it is a ‘living’ language, which is a marker of distinction for the Chicano community. Therefore, we are introduced to the distinctiveness of the borderland subjectivity, where a community addresses its uniqueness through language, which incorporates the political influences of the region.

The formation of borders results in the formation of the binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’, thereby creating regions surrounding this line of demarcation as ‘sensitive zones’. In the State's discourse, the regions near this line have been deemed as ‘disturbed’ or ‘vulnerable’ and so need to be protected by the State. The establishment of armed forces in these areas has been linked to security against infiltration, migration and other ‘illegal’ activities. The State sees this as a safety precaution but there is a flip side to it. The inhabitants of these areas are often targeted by the armed forces. The implementation of Armed Forces (Special Powers Act) 1958, while used mainly for internal issues, has been used in the region with ‘disturbed’ borders. This act provides special provisions to the armed forces leading to many narratives, especially from Kashmir and the Northeast, about the resultant violence.

Paula Banerjee and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury in *Women in Indian Borderlands* (2011) interrogate the borders of three nations, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, which share historical linkages that influence their mutual relations in contemporary times. With the issues of historical suspicion and difference maintained, she reads how women living in these borders are affected by this turbulent relationship. These women form the border history by negotiating with the everyday struggle they face. She refers to Anzaldua and her concept of ‘New Mestizas’ (Anzaldua, 1987), who are the women living in such areas without any historical presence. By identifying such women, she is reclaiming their lives and experiences and formulating the borderland narratives. For Banerjee, borders are not lines but are wrought with the influence of the states surrounding them and in India, “Military security dominates over human security in the border region.” (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2011: xvii).

Banerjee argues that the State keeps women on the margins when there is an issue of citizenship and that it is these women who come to the fore as men withdraw for safety during the time of conflict. It is in such a scenario that the distinction between the public and the private space ceases to exist. The borderlands especially become 'masculinised' due to the conflict which leads to militarisation. Moreover, as this space becomes the point of difference between 'We' and the 'You', it is a region of contention which needs to be protected. What is forgotten or is side-lined is that women are equal stakeholders in this region and have their own set of fears and apprehensions, which they negotiate with every day. As a result, the region becomes a living entity for its inhabitants as it influences their identity. I would like to refer to it as an 'ethnic border', as it not only defines the identity of its inhabitants based on their location but also questions it due to its shared history and culture with the 'other side'.

As one talks about the occupation of spaces, the very demand of Gorkhaland can be read as the concretisation of a space that has at its core the question of home. The notion of the home itself undergoes a change when the position is shifted from a man's perspective to a woman's perspective. One has to question how women understand the concept of home and boundaries as they participate in a movement that not only seeks to assert their identity as legitimate citizens of the nation but also to provide security thereby eliminating the constant taunts of being called 'foreigners'. Geographically, the movement discussed here belongs to the border region with contested historicity. The people belonging to this region have had a relationship with the 'other' side. The migrant history of Darjeeling forces it into the 'protected' zone to retain the national security. Therefore, the region cannot be treated as a mere border but has to be read as a land with

its people and their history. The demand for recognition and the constant pressure of having to prove one's loyalty to the nation has led to the various utterances of recognition. As a pamphlet published by the GJM during the 2007 phase discusses, the demand for separation began with the need to establish an administrative unit. As we read these militarised zones with an obvious masculinised overtone, the question of women and their negotiation with the male-centred space also needs to be read.

The need for recognition as the legitimate citizens of the nation is at the core of the demand for a state of Gorkhaland. The question of identity has often plagued the Indian Gorkha community due to its migrant history. While the movement seeks to clearly demarcate the difference between the Nepalese and Gorkha identity, the tag of 'foreigners' persists. This adds to the question of allegiances, which the State often uses to disregard the demand. There were many political factions demanding separation either within the nation or breaking away from it. The formation of the state of Mizoram, and the turmoil in Punjab with the Khalistan movement informed the decision taken by the Centre with regard to the Gorkhaland movement. One could also relate the violent state-led oppression of the movement in 1986 to these political issues taking place within the nation. While the two movements (Khalistan and Gorkhaland) are not completely similar, the resultant treatment of the Gorkhaland movement by the Government was strongly influenced by the trajectory of the Khalistan movement. Moreover, both movements stem from the demand for recognition and the fear of assimilation. The 1986 Gorkhaland movement, accused of being secessionist and compared with the Khalistan movement, influenced the perception of the Central and State government on the Gorkhaland movement. While the Khalistan movement demanded complete independence,

Gorkhaland has consistently demanded for a separate identity within the nation. The fear of being subsumed and appropriated by the dominant led to the demand for separation.

The present study tries to move away from the dominant discourse on the movement and tries to read it through the experiences of the women involved in it. The extensive documents on the movement have been written from the perspective of the State and the male leadership of the movement. I intend to problematise the latter, which has completely disregarded the experiences of the women participants. These women have been a crucial part of the movement since its emergence, but we are only provided glimpses of it in the movement history. Therefore, re-reading the two phases of the movement from the perspective of the women participants enables us to ‘fill’ the ‘unauthorised’ lacuna that the movement history has.

Women have always been a part of identity movements and it is crucial to understand how they have negotiated with being part of such a volatile issue. The Khalistan movement witnessed strong support of the women combatants as they were involved in what Laurent Gayer refers to as ‘martial feminism’ in “Princesses” among the “Lions”: The Activist Careers of Khalistani Female Combatants”(2009). He borrows this term from Schalk as he discusses how women’s participation in such armed struggle countered the male domination “...over the use of violence and that aimed to emancipate women through the gun.” (Gayer, 2009: 2). While Schalk used this term in the case of Sri Lanka, Gayer intends to read it against the backdrop of the women combatants of the Khalistan movement. He argues that these women would “...occasionally claim that women make as good or even better fighters than men and that their participation in the

armed struggle was a way to claim gender equality, for themselves and for the women of their community at large.” (Gayer, 2009: 2).

The 1986 phase of the movement has often been referred to as violent due to the clashes between the State and the people. Some of the women moved from the women’s wing of the GNLF and joined the Gorkha Volunteer Cell (GVC), which was often associated with aggressive retaliation. As one woman respondent remarked, the attack on her husband by the police made her join the movement as a part of the women’s wing and later the GVC. Therefore, it is interesting to read how these women have ‘returned’ to normalcy after being part of the turbulent phase. Moreover, the two phases analysed here belong to a distant past, where aggression took place and it is the negotiation with this past and its aftermath that we examine through the re-telling.

Gayer (2009) traces the life of ten ex-militant women Khalistan combatants, who had to ‘re-enter’ the societal gendered roles in Punjab after de-militarisation. The idealisation of the militant past and the regressive position that they now hold is encased through the interviews conducted with these ten women who became part of the movement after Operation Bluestar. Interestingly, there is a romanticisation of this militant past and how their return to civilian life is not desirable. Therefore, Gayer interrogates what he terms as the life cycle of these combatants as he moves between the different phases of participation of these women combatants. He refers to Becker, who suggested that not all forms of commitments are conscious, but some are spontaneous. This becomes especially poignant when looked at from the life histories of these combatants as their choice of becoming a part of the movement was riddled with not just a conscious decision but was also affected by their surrounding environment. It is the

“contact zone of public and private lives” (Gayer, 2009: 4) that is addressed through these life-histories.

The women interviewed ranged from those who were initiated into the movement by her family members to prove their loyalty, to those who on their own chose to enter the movement. Some of these women were driven by revenge as they wished to avenge the death of their family at the hands of the State. There were also cases of love and marriage within the movement. Marriage acted as a safeguard against attacks on these women from other male militants. Their life in the movement is a past that these women remember more fondly than their present condition.

Gayer argues that the societal structure of the Khalistan movement was no different than the Punjabi society. Women’s chastity needed to be protected. Another aspect was motherhood that was practised in the movement. Pregnancy symbolised the continuation of the family tree of the male militants. Women, on the other hand, viewed this as a liability as it meant the end of their combatant career. These women had to temporarily leave the movement so that they could deliver the baby and resume after a stipulated period. The roles of the women combatants were more like message couriers and ammunition transporters. But they were not part of the attacks on the police. This gendered division of movement labour was contested by some as some of the respondents spoke about their roles beyond the assigned functions often leading to violence.

This contestation brought out two distinct divisions amongst the women in the movement-- those who aided the movement through the gendered division of labour, and those who became full-fledged combatants. Gayer argues that those belonging to the

latter section developed “...self-conscious masculinised identity, which in their eyes predated their enlistment in the guerrilla.” (Gayer, 2009: 14). These women had to return to civilian life post-demilitarisation, and it is here that they romanticise their past “...as an unmitigated moment of liberation and gender equality.” (Gayer, 2009: 18). As many men were killed in the movement, some of these women were sent to live with their husband’s family and some were made to re-marry thereby pushing them back into the societal structure. Therefore, the freedom sought by being part of the movement remained transient as once the movement was over the contested societal binary that was somewhat broken in the movement came back as these women were forced to enter the social life.

Both the Gorkha and the Sikh communities have a rich martial history dating back to the colonial period. Historically, the Gorkhas or Nepalese Gurkha² soldiers were originally from Nepal. This construction of the martial race has been celebrated and continuously re-enforced through tales of heroism. It has also dominated the rhetoric of the Gorkhaland movement as it borrows from the martial image of the *Bir Gorkhali*. Tejimala Gurung in “The Making of Gurkhas as a 'Martial Race' in Colonial India: Theory and Practice” (2014) posits, “martial race soldiers were not just 'raced' they came to be 'gendered' as ideally masculine” (Gurung, 2014: 520). This meant that certain sections were honed by the British imperialists for the purpose of war. Not all communities residing in Nepal were considered for recruitment. Moreover, we witness a migration from Nepal to Darjeeling, where many of the retired Gorkha soldiers chose to remain. This adoption of the constructed identity of the Gorkha in the movement

²Both Gurkha and Gorkha refer to the same community but the former spelling was used in the colonial texts. In the texts published by the community and other official media platforms (both regional and national) use the term Gorkha.

narrative seems deliberate so as to evoke images of strength, loyalty and history. Therefore, it is interesting to read how women are viewed in a community that has a predominant masculine identity. Both the Khalistan and the Gorkhaland movements had women participation but what needs to be examined is where in this construction of the masculine community identity do women position themselves. This positioning of women is produced in two ways –by the community and by the individual women. As Gayer (2009) mentions, the role of these women changed after the movement ended as many were ‘forced’ into the everyday. Moreover, the gendered division of labour existed within the movement also. We witness a subsuming of the women’s identity within the larger Gorkha masculinity in the context of the Gorkhaland movement.

In the course of the study, several concepts have become the critical lens through which the women’s role in the movement can be read. As the movement occupies the public sphere, questions like, how have the women influenced it, and in turn, how it has affected the women, arise. Both the movement and the public sphere have always been perceived as male-dominated spaces. Hence, women accessing these spaces give rise to questions like, who were these women, what were their socio-economic positions and how they were treated in these spaces. Nancy Fraser, in “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” (1990), critiques the concept of the public sphere as used by Habermas. While Habermas describes the public space as an equal space for all, Fraser introduces opposing concepts like counter-publics, alternate publics and the stratified public space. It is within these counter concepts, through which there is a breaking up of the ‘equal’ public space, which I wish to contextualise in my study.

The concept of counter-publics introduced by Fraser examines how every dominant faction that takes over the public space has another section opposing it, which becomes the critique of the dominant. Therefore, within these movements, one can look at the Bengali elite as the dominant and the people from the region asserting themselves and their identity become their counter-publics. My contention is that breaking of the dominant and the counter-public can be taken further within the region and in particular within the movement. If one reads the movement from the point of view of gender, the male participants of these movements become dominant while the women are their counter-publics. In the case of this study, the major question that comes up is, if there are counter-publics existing within the category of the women participating in these political movements. Therefore, in order to analyse it, a detailed attention has to be given to their political, social and economic backgrounds. This will be based on their actions within their occupied public space and their interactional dynamics with the space. The dissection of this space will enable us to read these women's locations in the hierarchical structures. Furthermore, the narratives of the women from the movement blur the distinction between the private and the public as these respondents move between the two spaces in their claim on the movement.

Gender becomes central for this study while re-reading and re-articulating the movement. The movement and the subsequent actions emerge in the public space and so one examines how within this space, the relationship between gender and movement is played out. We can notice a big difference between the women in the 1986 phase and those of 2007 in terms of their refusal to be secondary participants in the movement. However, we also have to closely examine as to how much of this empowerment is self-

asserted. Moreover, the influence of the sense of difference on women's articulations becomes crucial for this study, as it primarily focuses on the re-telling of the movement.

Fraser's understanding and examination of the public space as stratified become crucial in the study as questions like if the identity movement that took place in the region and occupied the 'outside' or public space had a stratified layer in it, and if it did, then where did the women locate themselves in such layers of stratification. It is here that I wish to focus on an 'alternate' public space, where a separate narrative of the movement reads through the experiences of the women involved in it. One cannot look at the occupiers of the public space as a homogenous entity. Therefore, their 'unequal' composition enables us to understand not only the hierarchy but also the factors that contribute to it.

This heterogeneous composition of a movement focusing on the women involved in mass movements is further elaborated by Ilina Sen in *A Space within the Struggle: Women's Participation in People's Movements* (1990). She initiates a discussion on the characteristics and the objective of women's movements in India. The book focuses on the large mass movement that aimed for social and political change and women being active agents in these movements. She claims that as a large-scale movement will involve women's participation, though their participation does not mean an autonomous assertion, which has the strength to pressurise the movement to recognise the women in these mass movements. She provides a different reading of a movement where the spontaneity of the women participants is used by the leadership. While these forms of social movements do seek justice for the disadvantaged classes, the internal oppression that takes place towards women should also be read in-depth. Placing of the women at the

forefront of any public movement can be read as a way of buffering the leadership from any state actions. Therefore, it is necessary to read diverse forms of analysis of a movement as it enables a multi-dimensional interpretation.

The purpose of creating a space for the assertion of the identity of a suppressed group through the process of uncovering their history is crucial for any movement. Therefore, the 'buried' history of the people who have been oppressed becomes a tool for resistance in the battle against dominance. The formation of the 'imagined' space of Gorkhaland underwent its material realisation when borders were etched, making it a concrete entity. The construction of these boundaries enabled people to politically name the region as their home thereby enabling a complete removal of the tag of foreigners. A defined territory is required by the State in order to create its 'own' territory, thereby creating a self and the other. The social groups also create their own markers which divide various groups from one another. Paula Banerjee's *Borders, Histories, Existences: Gender and Beyond* (2010) suggests that while boundaries are linear and man-made, the boundary lines that construct the border are political in nature; there is no linearity in the case of frontiers. She further argues that with the incorporation of the British colonial administrative concepts of foreigners or 'aliens' specifically for the nomads/wandering community, it controlled the mobility of its colonised subjects.

The demand for separation that began during the British colonial period saw its desire for separate statehood that led to a mass movement. For a movement that has been continuing for more than three decades, memory becomes a crucial tool in order to excavate the experiences of the women within the movement. As the movement is still in the process of evolving, the diversity of experiences faced by the women will enable

different readings of the movement. The oral narratives of these women coming from different socio-economic background become integral to the study. As the existing documents have alienated the women's experience in the movement, the oral narratives become a tool not only to revive the buried voices but also to create a new history. Moreover, as both the phases are events of the past, with different history and mode of execution, a comparison between the two becomes crucial. It is in lieu of the use of memory and the importance of oral narratives in the reading of the movement that I wish to refer to Wendy Singer's *Creating Histories: Oral Narratives and the Politics of History-Making* (1997), which tries to understand the relationship between various narratives of the history of Independence by looking at the written records and oral narratives of those who have witnessed and have been a part of the movement. It looks at the geographical region of Panda in Bihar and its history of peasant movements. The objective is to understand how each of these narratives defines what is 'history', how history has been created and how the 'peasants' have enabled the creation. As she analyses the oral and written narratives of the movement, she talks about the language used in writing these oral histories which plays a significant role. People themselves become (participants and participant-observers) the composers of histories. Their actions, writings, records, songs, and stories produced images of the past and of the underlying social divisions that shape their history.

As both the phases of the Gorkhaland movement belong to the past, it becomes crucial to use memory and oral narratives as tools to analyse it. Singer's text then becomes significant in understanding how these 'new histories' are made. The movement's history has been constructed from two dominant perspectives: that of the

state and the people. In the case of the latter, the narrative is dominated by the perspective of male leaders. Here also, it is the people, mostly men, who become the ‘creators’ of this history. Women are mostly viewed as providing support for the male leaders. Therefore, the present study intends to not only question the existing narratives but also to formulate a ‘new’ narrative to fill the gaps.

The formulation of this ‘new’ narrative uses memory as a tool, which enables us to explore the events of the past. Both memory and the oral narratives become crucial in re-constructing a well-documented narrative. Srila Roy’s *Remembering Revolution Gender, Violence, and Subjectivity in India’s Naxalbari Movement* (2013) uses similar tools to explore a new way of reading the Naxalite Movement. Roy continuously asserts that in a public arena which is a male-dominated one, a woman’s entry is not inclusive but is one where she is always considered a ‘matter out of place’. Thus, one of the methods to internalise such exclusion is denial. The trauma of the events that took place in the lives of the women interviewed is often followed by a denial of such acts. The case spoken about was with regard to the sexual violence that many of the women comrades faced within the organisation or in the shelters they had to stay when they were on the run. Therefore, the denial of such acts is often manifested in the form of silence or forgetting. Roy speaks about the normalisation of such violence where some violence, for instance by the State, is accorded a large mass of recognition while the other every day forms of violence in the movement are never articulated. It is for this everydayness of the violence that she uses the word ‘normalise’. Roy refers to the memories that the women respondents have gone back to as ‘lacerated’. While the violence perpetrated by the State was recognised to intimidate people, the violence within the movement was not

considered. Thus, memory becomes a tool to critique the movement and the State through the different forms of violence inflicted on the participants of the movement. The present study also goes beyond the state-region discourse that has dominated the Gorkhaland movement. It looks at the socio-political relations within the region through the narratives of the women participants.

A reading of the borderland as a masculine space discussed above further probes as to what happened to the women of this region who participated in the movement. The fact that women are equal inhabitants of the space and equal stakeholders in their claim of belongingness emphasises the need to understand their experiences of living in a militarised zone. Within the nation, the turmoil of the questioned loyalty and identity has been faced mostly by communities living on the ‘fringes’ of the national boundaries. Jammu and Kashmir has been a site of ongoing suffering and resistance, with the State branding it as a troubled area with high militant activity. Anuradha Jamwal and Suchismita, in “Women's Voices: From Jammu and Kashmir” (2011), read the experiences of women living in the border and how the region’s (Jammu and Kashmir) existence has affected them. The personal histories of these women range from being abducted during partition to one of mistaken identity. What binds these narratives is the resultant suffering that these women have faced due to their proximity to the border. The region is described as the one that is “...too heavily militarised for any semblance of normalcy and normal life. The levels of violence are not always visible, often not reported but felt psychologically, due to the build-up of troops, excessive restrictions and mined areas.” (Jamwal and Suchismita, 2011: 75). Therefore, what makes the lives of its inhabitants different is the “...fragility of their national identity, which can be so easily

questioned and snatched...” (Jamwal and Suchismita, 2011: 76). The women fare worse as basic facilities like education and health care are lacking.

People belonging to these regions have to forcefully migrate to other areas due to such restrictions and limitations. The role of that State in the displacement of the ‘borderland people’ has often been attributed to the forceful measures taken by the armed forces. The reasons for ‘fencing’ their homes are often mentioned as the lack of trust by the nation (Jamwal and Suchismita, 2011). The historical proximity they share with those from the ‘opposite’ side is viewed with suspicion by people belonging to the region. Interestingly, the same argument can be used for the region of Darjeeling, where the inhabitants are accused of being disloyal to the nation and the region becomes heavily militarised when the demand for a separate state is made. The question of loyalty stems from the migrant history that the people share with Nepal.

Another common thread witnessed in movements is the absence of men due to the fear of the forces. Hence, the responsibility of the family falls on the shoulders of women. Women have to take up the role of providers and protectors. The interviews conducted with men of the border villages revealed that they would often go into hiding out of fear for the armed forces and the militants. The rationale provided for leaving their wives and family was that women have no threat while men do (Jamwal and Suchismita, 2011). Women were used as a ‘shield’ to safeguard men in the 2007 Gorkhaland movement. It was agreed by women respondents that they knew women would not be attacked by the police and so they ‘led’ the protest marches.

The politics of ‘difference’ exercised within the community is also visible within the region. Sumona DasGupta’s “Renegotiating Internal Boundaries by Women of Jammu and Kashmir” (2011) unveils it by reading the existing boundaries between the rural and urban life during the movement in the 1990s. She reads how the conflict has affected the mental health of women residing in the rural landscape of the region. As she delves into the myriad struggles that these women from rural Kashmir underwent, she traces it to the struggle for survival. The idea of home is questioned as it begins to evoke fear instead of assurance. The constant harassment by the armed forces and the militant groups imposing themselves for checks and shelter respectively further marginalised these women, who would often face sexual assault. The enforced disappearance of male members forced women to come out of their homes to ensure their safety. DasGupta uses various census data to show how such issues were more prevalent in rural Kashmir as opposed to the urban setting. This reading of internal boundaries can be analysed through the party politics in the Gorkhaland movement. The presence of multiple political organisations in the region and their struggle for dominance have led to violent outbursts. This has led to physical and psychological trauma of the organisations outside of the dominant. As a result, the image of the united Indian Gorkha identity, which is a call for unity in the movement, has developed fissures. It is therefore interesting to read how women have negotiated with this partition within the community and how it has affected their participation.

The experiences of women in the Gorkhaland movement will be explored through the lens of borderlands, movements and women’s narratives in the course of the study.

Using these variables, the movement, which has witnessed a number of resurgences in its volatile 1986 phase, will be re-told through the experiences of the women in it.

1.8 Objectives of the Study

- To engage with the concepts of home, identity, and ethnicity, which form the crux of the movement, through the lens of gender.
- To read the diversity of experiences through the intersection of community, region, and occupation.
- To critically analyse ‘participation’, moving away from the conventional understanding of being actively involved.
- To pose questions like if there has been any structural shift in the position of women participants in the two phases.
- To understand the gaps existing in the dominant literature, and also to read the fissures existing within the region through diverse narratives.

1.9 Research Questions

- How does a gender perspective enable us to re-examine the documentation and the interpretations of the movement?
- How does the diversity of the experiences of women coming from different socio-economic strata enable varied readings of the movement?
- How do the intersecting identities of community, gender, and occupation influence the Indian Gorkha consciousness?

- How does the historicity of the land and its people influence the re-reading of the movement?

1.10 Chapterisation

The study has been divided into six chapters, which include the introduction and the conclusion. These chapters individually analyse the factors discussed above in the context of the region, the movement and the women participants. The objective is to provide a larger understanding of the concepts discussed in the subsequent chapters to decipher if there exist different manifestations of similar concepts. Moreover, as the study moves from a larger to a particular frame, the present chapter initiated a discussion on movements similar to the Gorkhaland movement and the conceptual threads associated with it. Therefore, the events are also understood from the point of view of these concepts. Movements like Khalistan are examined for their impact on the nation and its geographical location. The Gorkhaland movement of 1986 was also continuously being compared to these movements as it was accused of being secessionist. The point of similarity between these movements is their politically turbulent geographical location.

Both the movements cover contested areas due to their active borders. Moreover, both the regions have been affected by the colonial legacy. In the context of the 2007 phase, the issues of concern have not undergone any change. Geographical location, the issue of migration and various forms of identity assertion have remained the same. What the study uses to bind all these issues, through the data collected, is how women have been a part of all these assertions and have suffered the same issues. It is through their articulations that the study intends to fill the gaps existing in the documentation of the movement. The

thesis will follow the American Psychological Association (APA, sixth edition) formatting style.

Chapter 2- **Review of Literature and Research Methodology:** This chapter focuses on two aspects; the review of works that enables a detailed reading of the study and the methods or the process through which the fieldwork was conducted and through it presents a framework of the techniques employed for the study. The former is further divided into three sections; borderlands, identity movements and women's *testimonios*. Each section becomes a factor that influences the analysis of the narratives. The methodology discusses the researcher's role, self-reflexivity, position of the respondents and the factors that influenced the collected narratives.

Chapter 3- **Region, Representation and Gorkha's Daughters:** Historically, the demand for separation from Bengali dominance began during the colonial period. Over the various articulations, language became an essential tool for this assertion. This demonstration of claim gained strong support in the 1950s through the *Nepali Bhasa Andolan* or the Nepali Language Movement. The continuous demand led to the inclusion of the Nepali language as an official Indian language in 1992. The role of language in the identity assertion was highlighted in the 2017 phase, where it became the catalyst for the resurgence. This chapter discusses various literary texts, in both English and Nepali, related to the region and the identity. The literary writings have strongly voiced the demand for recognition. The chapter engages with issues of translations while reading these texts from the lens of gender. Therefore, this chapter will act as a point of entry into the discussion of the women participants within the framework of the movement. It also initiates a discussion on the concept of 'Indian Gorkha women' within the masculine

term Gorkha. As the title of the chapter suggests, the claim of the women on land or *maato* and their subsequent support for the demand is problematised in order to understand the role played by the Gorkha women in what is considered to be a Gorkha men's movement.

Chapter 4- **Women in/as 'Movement Family'**: The chapter is based on the themes that have emerged from the narratives of the women respondents. It seeks to divide narratives collected on the basis of family, participation, conflict, identity, migration, and marginalisation, etc of the women respondents. The objective is to provide a holistic reading of the interviews conducted with the thirty women respondents on their participation in the Gorkhaland movement. This chapter highlights the diverse experiences that these women underwent as a part of the movement and how they have related to each other and their male counterparts during each phase. The concept of 'movement family' discussed here is the imagined bond forged between participants. This 'bond' is examined amongst not only women participants but also between the women respondents and their male counterparts. The concept of 'family' undergoes a change as this rhetoric is often used by the leadership to portray a unified Gorkha identity during the course of the movement. Therefore, as the two phases witnessed women and men coming from different socio-economic backgrounds and different political allegiances, the Chapter intends to examine the inter-personal relations as well as the intra-personal relations existing in the region, especially from the perspective of the women participants.

Chapter 5- **Backlash from the 'Backbone'**: The term 'backbone' was used by a respondent, who referred to the role of the women as the 'first line of defence' supporting

the leadership and the movement. This chapter functions as a response to their limited representation in the movement narrative though women have been an integral part of the movement. It is based on the narratives of twelve women chosen out of the thirty respondents. The narratives have been chosen based on the willingness of the respondents to speak about their personal lives. These women were willing to discuss issues of marginalisation that each one of them faced during the movement. It includes women coming from diverse sections and the deciphering of their experiences within the movement. These women discussed not only their lives in the movement but also the fate of their families in the narrative. While the previous chapter discussed the holistic category of women and their diverse experiences owing to various factors, this chapter provides a closer reading of women as individuals as they re-tell their political and personal histories.

Chapter 6- **Conclusion:** In 2017 the demand for Gorkhaland re-emerged after the State Government's implementation of the Bengali language in schools. The role of the 2017 phase in the study is crucial as it reveals the continuing anxiety within the community even after the various resurgences. Women have been 'active agents' in all the three phases of the movement. The direct links amongst all the three phases highlight the underlying causes that continuously resurge when a volatile situation arises. These issues have been discussed from the prism of gender and so this chapter engages with the questions that the study initiated.

The demand for separation entailed behind the various statehood movements follows the trajectory of the formation of identity against the dominant. While for the Khalistan movement the dominant was the Hindi speaking centre, it became more

regional for the Gorkhaland and Bodoland movements. The geographical location, the historicity of the land and its people added to the fear of assimilation. All the three movements discussed have been extensively written on but it is on the question of gender analysis that they have been limited. In recent times, there has been a surge of writings on women participants of such movements, which begs the question if there is a possibility of re-telling a movement through the experiences of its women participants. The three lenses discussed above- borderland, identity movement and women's narratives structure this re-telling. While these three factors influence the study, it is read from various secondary sources in the following chapter. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the process of data collection, due to its role in formulating the study. Therefore, the next chapter focuses on these issues and discusses how each of these factors and the experiences from the fieldwork have impacted the study.

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Chapter 2

Review of Literature and Research Methodology

The present chapter provides a detailed discussion of the process of data collection. It traces a clear trajectory that the fieldwork entailed, the challenges that arose, the role of the respondents and the position of the researcher. The objective of the chapter is to present how the fieldwork was conducted and to provide a brief review of various secondary sources that are used to support the study. In order to engage with the latter, the sources have been divided into three sections- borderlands, identity movements and women's *testimonios*. These three sections are the three factors that influence the study. As discussed in the previous chapter, these three factors become the basis on which the women's experiences in the Gorkhaland movement are read. Each of these is explored critically in the following section.

2.1 Review of Literature

This section has been divided into three parts: borderlands, identity movements and women's *testimonios*.

2.1.1 Borderlands

The three afore-mentioned terms highlight the legacy that the region of Darjeeling has moved with from generation to generation. As one of the major tourist destinations of the state of West Bengal, the region is often referred to as the Queen of the Hills; the region has been characterised with lush tea plantations, a toy train and the old colonial structures. It is important to understand that the three main 'touristy' characteristics

mentioned here are all related to the region's colonial legacy. Therefore, a closer examination is required to understand how the colonial imagination of Darjeeling is continuously being reproduced through tourism and how this image has been passed down from the 'old colonisers', the British, to the 'new colonisers', the Bengalis. Both the region and its people are closely interconnected and hence one has to interrogate how they impact each other.

In order to understand the reproduction of the image of the Hills through the lens of tourism, it is important to look at the exchange of power that has taken place over time. One of the ways of engaging with this power structure is through the lens of employment. The coming of the British forces to the region, which eventually led to its acquisition as a medical retreat for the ailing English masters, gave way to the formation of a new labour market in the region. Both the natives (existing indigenous community) and the migrants (people who had come from neighbouring regions) were employed by the colonial officials. Their jobs ranged from being menial labourers to tea-plantation workers. Employment in the army and English households was also taken up by them. One of the main phenomena that Jayeeta Sharma, in "Producing Himalayan Darjeeling: Mobile People and Mountain Encounters" (2016), seeks to engage with is the formation of the labouring class in the hills. This creation of a new class, that comprised both the migrants and the natives, led to a certain image construction of these people. She refers to Captain Herbert's description of the natives, which clearly conveys his intention behind it. His reference to the Lepchas as sturdy and good-willed people who need to be trained for work, further supports the idea that they were in demand as cheap labour needed to work for the British in the region. It is therefore interesting to observe how this image has

been continuously reproduced for the consumption of the outsiders. Amongst the oft-repeated images used is that of the ever loyal *bahadur*, and the other is that of the woman plucking tea-leaves with a basket on her back.

While the need for cheap labour was a fact, Sharma points out that it was not readily available as many of the indigenous communities were engaged in agricultural activities. In such a case, migration and dislocation were active factors that helped in these labour activities. Road construction was crucial for the sustainability of the colonial enterprise in the Hills and labour became crucial for such a venture. The need for men who could work under the weather conditions of the Hills grew and, as a result, people from closer regions like Sikkim immigrated here. Men brought from the plains would often quit their work as they were unable to tolerate the hill environment. What is interesting here is the description of the labourers provided by the colonial officers. The description was mostly about their bad clothing and living conditions. However, they also thought that these people were apt for the job as they were physically strong and sturdy.

Sharma's example of a book by Hurry Mohan Sannial tries to draw a link between the English and Bengali imaginations. The present Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee has popularly referred to the region as *pahar hasche* or the hills are smiling. It is interesting to note how even in this narrative it is the geographical space that has been given importance, while the people remain faceless. While Bengal has been heavily influenced by the colonial era, the desire for West Bengal to relive its past has become strong during Mamata Banerjee's rule. In 2011, she went on record to say that Kolkata, the state capital, would become the next London, while Darjeeling would become the next Switzerland (Kolkata Will Be London, Darjeeling Another Switzerland:

Mamata, 2011). A replica of the Big Ben was constructed in Kolkata in 2015. It is interesting to understand how, even in the re-imagination of Darjeeling, it is popularised as a vacation spot.

Nandini Bhattacharya in her article “Leisure, Economy and Colonial Urbanism: Darjeeling” (2013) points out that the idyllic place that the English found resembling their climate, which they had successfully divided between themselves and the natives, was soon overcrowded by the Indian ‘outsiders’. The establishment of Darjeeling as a colonial outpost was because of the nostalgia that the English felt for their homeland. Darjeeling eventually transcended this pristine image of leisure to a more commercial centre within the colonial economy. This led to the influx of both colonial officials as well as the Indian elite into the region. It is important to note that within the context of Darjeeling, the relations among climate, health and commerce is crucial. It is along these lines that the author questions the dichotomy of the Plains and the Hills. She tries to understand how these hills represented everything that the plains lacked. Another relation she tries to read is between health and illness with the hills, which led to expeditions into the various hill stations during the colonial period.

To the colonisers the Hills stood for good health and purity, while the Plains symbolised filth and illness. Bhattacharya notes that, as the English started to create their own space in the hills, the degree of segregation between the Whites and Indians increased. One of the examples provided is that of the two sanatoriums in the region. While one housed only the English, the other one was for the Indians. While the English sanatorium treated all kinds of illnesses, the native one was not allowed to treat them all. Interestingly, the natives raised their voice against this and accused the British of

segregation. Bhattacharya refers to Kennedy to understand how the movement towards the sanitised hill station increased as a necessity to carve out a space for the Europeans as opposed to the plains, which were represented by dirt and filth.

The colonial formation of the region of Darjeeling has always been read in the light of the idyllic hill sanatorium for the colonial officials. Bhattacharya interrogates this reading and tries to understand how these colonial retreats were crucial for the colonial economy. As she particularly looks at Darjeeling and its adjoining areas she tries to highlight the relationship between the medical discourse and the discourse of leisure and how that led to the formation of the economic hub in Darjeeling. She tries to examine the concept of colonial urbanism by reading the spatial segregation that took place in the region between the natives and the Whites and how that was linked to the colonial economy.

The formation and the evolution of Darjeeling as it stands now, Sharma (2016) argues, are due to its history of migration. While the region could not produce much, it did become an essential trading hub. She traces out the history of some of the families in the region to demonstrate that all their migration cannot be dubbed under the conventional push and pull factors, which were more social in nature. Reasons like the emergence of the region as a trading hub may have given the impetus to some people to migrate.

It is essential to study the formation of the labouring class in the hills in order to understand how these conventional types of colonial employment have undergone changes and have enabled Darjeeling to become more urbanised. Sharma refers to the

dominant forms of jobs like the army, tea plantation labour, *coolie*, or domestic labour, and tries to trace some of the people who moved away from these jobs so as to earn a better living. While many of the natives were employed by the colonial officials in their expeditions, it was not mentioned in their writings. References to Bhutia labour shed light on how each such community was seen by the English. The Bhutia, who were considered as ‘not clean’, were used in expeditions or as *coolies*, but could not move higher in terms of employment. It is also interesting to read how the ‘industrious’ Nepali was given more preference over a Bhutia or a Lepcha who was treated as a labourer. Sharma provides an example of how the army preferred people of certain groups, as there was an assumption that they were better fighters. As a result, while some were able to reap the benefits of commercialisation and move up the socio-economic ladder, others could not.

With the increased immigration to the hills from the neighbouring regions, the migrants were used for cheap labour. Regions like the mountain tracts of eastern Nepal witnessed a high rate of outflow, also because an advance payment was provided to these people as a bait to come to Darjeeling. However, it is important to note that even though this migration was not of a permanent nature, the population of the region did rise. Sharma cites Hutt in stating how the region of Darjeeling symbolised as a land of opportunities to the potential migrants. According to Hutt, Darjeeling was also called *Mugalan*, which loosely translates to the land of the Mughals.

Introduction of the tea and cinchona plantations, and railways added to the commercial viability of the region. Moreover, Darjeeling served as the administrative capital of the government of Bengal during the summer months. Therefore, the conventional and popularised notion of the region as a medical retreat does not view the

same as a commercial hub, especially for Indo-Tibetan trade. As the title suggests, the region of Darjeeling has been a 'contested landscape' both politically and geographically. Its shared boundary and history with Nepal have always been questioned, especially with the rise of the separation demand. While discussing the reasons behind the establishment of these hill stations by the English, Chatterji (2007) notes the transfer of the Darjeeling region from the hands of the Raja of Sikkim to the British. The emerging British Darjeeling served as a space for political, social, economic and military investments. It is from here that she traces the history of the region till the demand for a separate statehood. The conventional reason for the formation of the hill station was the health issues faced by the English in tropical India. These hill resorts acted as a sanatorium not only for their climatic conditions, but also for their similarity to English weather conditions. The region also gained prominence as a military outpost as the Anglo-Gorkha relations and their hostility with Nepal added to the necessity for the establishment of the forces. The administrative function of the region was also initiated when it was converted to the summer capital of the Bengal presidency. The trade and commerce routes to Darjeeling were given a special attention. With the establishment of the tea and cinchona plantations, and the Indo-Nepali and Indo-Tibetan trade, Darjeeling evolved from a health restoration centre to an active business space. Educational institutions established by the Christian missionaries also helped in evolving the hill station.

The 'Borderland' cannot be considered merely as an area with lines demarcating identities, and forming a narrative of 'us' and 'them'. It needs to be read as a living entity which has its own history and identity. Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) does the same as she reads the US-Mexico border as a vivid space

with its own socio-cultural history. She positions herself, when she reads this space, as a Chicana woman imagining a new consciousness emerging as a result of situating oneself in the borderland. To her, this space is also alienating due to her identity as a queer woman. It is a space where two cultures meet and the line of difference becomes blurred. According to Anzaldua, this meeting of the two cultures gives rise to a new identity. She encompasses this in her writing by using both English and Spanish. History, language, and religion become tools for her to address her position and that of the new identity that she has envisioned. She ends with a call for a new *Mestiza* consciousness; by synthesising the ideas discussed in the book, she locates the *Mestizas* as the means through which a new world order can be formed.

The role of the region in the narrative of identity formation and the movement has been crucial. The region has been viewed as contested by the state, especially during the movement. While the state has often commented on the need to ‘protect’ the region due to its proximity and shared history with Nepal, it has often overlooked the region as a dynamic entity. Therefore, the term ‘borderlands’ refers not only to a geographical space but also to an active agent with its own specificity. The formation of the new *Mestiza* consciousness, as mentioned earlier, can be read in line with that of the Indian Gorkha identity. This formation of ‘Gorkhaness’ engages with both Indian and Nepalese identities. Their cultural and linguistic similarities with Nepal and at the same time their political allegiance with India, provide a complicated situation for the Indian Gorkha community to negotiate with. As Anzaldua suggests, the region and its people have their own socio-cultural history, which has given rise to a new identity. This study tries to read not only the rise of this new consciousness, but also the disintegration of this Gorkha

identity. After the 2007 phase, a rise of the identities of sub-groups was witnessed in the region. The Tribal Development Boards initiated by the state provided special privileges to these groups. People started moving away from the ‘constructed’ Gorkha identity to their indigenous ‘roots’ with the inception of the Lepcha Tribal Board in 2012.

A region’s existence has to be traced from its origin, so as to understand the historical shifts that it has witnessed and how these changes have affected its narrative. Sanghamitra Misra’s *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India* (2011) places her site of inquiry in the North-Eastern part of India, in particular, the Goalpara region in Assam. The objective of the book is to look at how political and economic domination influences the construction of space. The desire to create a ‘new space’ as a legacy of the colonial times exists even in its post-colonial format. While the book looks at Goalpara as its site of study, it looks at the region not just in its post-colonial form, but traces its history from the pre-colonial period. The need to trace the history of the region from the Mughal period here is to understand how the region became the site of ‘many borderlands’ with the advent of British colonialism, where contestations over cultural nationalism produced conflicting spaces and identities. The author questions the contemporary historical literature available on the region. As the literature focuses on the region as ‘historical frontiers’ or as ‘borderlands of heartlands’, it completely erases the history of the region with regard to capital, conquest, trade and culture. The book digresses from the conventional boundaries of geography, and it rather seeks to revive the history of resistance by the indigenous tribes of the region by creating a Goalpara identity.

The region of Darjeeling is a product of colonial construction with strong ties to the British colonial history. Sonam Wangyal's *Sikkim & Darjeeling: Division & Deception* (2002) refers to the popularly accepted meaning of Darjeeling from L.S.S O'Malley's colonial text (Wangyal, 2002: 5). O'Malley refers to the region as *Dorje-ling* and states that the name Darjeeling is the corruption of its original form. He refers to it as the "place of dorje: the mystic thunderbolt of the Lamaist religion" (O'Malley, 1907: 182). Wangyal refers to the multiple Tibetan meanings that the word *Dorje* entails, which range from the name of a man to thunderbolt to a reference to Buddha himself. Therefore, he refers to the name as 'the place of thunderbolt'. As the Lepcha community has been considered as one of the indigenous communities of the region, their interpretation of the name has also been considered by Wangyal. He says that the name means "a paradise on earth" or "the abode of the gods", according to the Lepchas.

L.S.S. O'Malley's *The Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling* (1907) provided a detailed description of the region, the people and the administrative set-up. With the formation of Darjeeling, a large inflow of migration took place. While there were already indigenous tribes present, this influx came from the adjoining regions of Bhutan, Tibet, Sikkim and Nepal. Even with a large proportion of the migrants coming from the region of Nepal, O'Malley argues that while immigration to Darjeeling was high, out-migration to Sikkim was also taking place. He states that while some from the region joined the police forces and shifted to Burma, a large number of them had an agrarian background, and so, took up jobs in the tea plantations. He also mentions that while majority of the migrants were permanent settlers, some were not so, as they leave the region after earning enough money.

The role of such colonial documents is to provide a comprehensive description of the region. While this document does not provide an insight into the lives of the inhabitants, it sustains their claims of indigeneity. Moreover, it is one of the oldest written records of the region and provides a historicity to the region and its people.

The formation of Darjeeling as a colonial hub as well as its eventual development into an identity marker of the Indian Gorkha community developed an intricate relation between the region and the movement. Aditi Chatterji's *Contested Landscape: The Story of Darjeeling* (2007) discusses how the landscape of the region evolved in relation to the ethnicity and migration of the population from the colonial period to the contemporary times. This question is examined from social, cultural, historical and geographical perspectives. As she initiates a discussion on the objectives behind choosing hill stations as part of colonial administration, it becomes crucial to note how the region transcends its image of a sanatorium to a more politically active space. Chatterji engages with the time period between 1835 and 2000 in the region in order to understand how the issues of ethnicity and migration have helped in the formation of the present day Darjeeling. With the need to move away and form a separate identity for the people and the region present since the colonial time, it is interesting to read how the region has played its role in this need. As she illustrates her objectives behind her study, the question of the migrant history of the people is assumed without any question. Her argument is that a migrant community is likely to face segregation because of the relation it has with the "colonial city" which is divided into the rulers, the ruled and the intermediaries. If Darjeeling is to be considered as a space ruled by the English and the people of the region become the section they ruled over, it is interesting to read how the intermediaries, especially the

middle-class Bengalis, have benefitted from this. She tries to understand how the landscape becomes a symbol of power shared among these three sections.

One of the main areas of contention with the text is the manner in which this migrant history was accepted without any question. The acceptance of the entire population as migrants can be argued as a gross error, as colonial documents do provide information on the indigenous populations. Moreover, the region's continuous change of rule from Sikkim to Nepal to Sikkim and finally to the British further added to the population strength. What is interesting here is the categorisation of the three classes in this hierarchy. In the post-colonial period, we witness the role of the 'rulers' being taken over by the erstwhile intermediaries. These new 'rulers' come from the upper strata of the society, mainly from Indian nobility and the Bengali upper class. This change resulted in the rise of a new 'elite' who continued to look at the 'migrant' as constituting the workforce. This image of the Indian Gorkha community as the workforce continues to exist in the contemporary period through such popular cultural markers as the tea plantation workers or the *bahadur*.

In the discourse of the movement, this concept of the 'borderlands' is understood through the formation of Darjeeling. While the hills comprise Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong, which is also the site of the study, the historicity of Darjeeling makes it synonymous with the Indian Gorkha identity. For Bhattacharya, the historical formation of Darjeeling was closely related to the health conditions of the English. The primary focus of the annexation of the region was the establishment of a sanatorium for the ailing British officers. With its conducive weather, there began a slow movement of these officers towards the region, which was soon followed by the Indian elite. She further

elaborates how the region's role as a medical retreat was crucial for the colonial economy. Sharma traces the history of the region through the formation of the labouring class and how this image continues even today. The need for the colonial establishment to thrive rested on the construction of roads. This led to the demand for cheap labour. In order to meet this need, migrants from neighbouring places came here, and slowly, along with the indigenous community, there began the formation of a new class of workers. It is through these labouring and business classes that the region of Darjeeling came to be. This led to the rise of the region as an economic hub.

Sharma's reference to Sannial's work, describing the role of Bengalis as one of disseminating knowledge to the 'uneducated' native, is similar to Chatterji's description of the intermediaries. Both Sharma and Bhattacharya provide a historical overview of the region and its growth towards becoming an economic hub that attracted more migration. They provide a critical examination of the colonial image of the migrants and the indigenous community's persistence even after Independence. While Sharma provides a historical account of the formation of the region and its inhabitants, this study looks at how this formation has often been used to cater to the image of the 'outsiders'. Moreover, the role of trade in the rise of the region and its ultimate ascension as the marker of the Gorkha identity become crucial in the background of the movement.

The legitimacy of the region as a part of the Indian nation has long been associated with the movement discourse. The contestation around the region's migrant history due to its association with Sikkim and Nepal has often been used against the separation demand. Like Misra, this study engages with the history of the region and its people, and tries to understand how it affects the political psyche of the movement. By

redefining the meanings of heartlands and borderlands, it goes beyond a mere topographical study of the region. By looking at the movements of resistance within the region, Misra tries to evoke the history of the region, which goes beyond its colonial construction. Wangyal (2002) achieves a similar objective when he discusses the meaning of Darjeeling in Lepcha language. Therefore, as there were indigenous communities present in the region, the meanings behind these indigenous names further add to the historicity of the region. This provides an insight into the region that has always been looked at from its colonial history and helps the claim of indigeneity by the people.

A defined territory is required by the State in order to create its 'own' territory, thereby creating a self and the other. Social groups also create their own markers that distinguish various groups from one another. Paula Bannerjee traces the history of these frontiers and borders. In *Borders, Histories and Existences: Gender and Beyond* (2010) she clarifies that its objective is to show how the West/European concept of borders was imposed first and later became a part of South Asian discourse, impacting the formation of states and boundaries in the region. The author draws on the difference between frontiers and borders. She suggests that while boundaries are linear and man-made, the boundary lines that construct these borders are political in nature, and that, there is no linearity in the case of frontiers. Moreover, frontiers are considered as zones at the periphery of political division. She looks at how the new nations incorporated the administrative set-up of the British in the post-colonial phase. She investigates how the rules of the colonial state later became a part of the post-colonial state that further strengthened the notion of 'foreigners' through various legislative measures. It is in these

lines the author looks at the Sino-Indian border and the issue of the Line of Control in Kashmir. The author critically reads colonial archives to look at the patterns of migration that took place in the region and how this migration affected the women in the region. She engages with the treatment of the women living in the borderlands by the Indian State, and, critically views the trafficking of women and children, leading to various diseases, and the borders as conflict zones accentuating the vulnerability of women.

The purposive creation of a space for the assertion of the identity of a suppressed group through the process of uncovering their history is crucial for any movement. The ‘buried’ history of a people who have been oppressed becomes fundamental in their battle against dominance. The formation of the ‘imagined’ space of Gorkhaland underwent its material realisation when borders were etched, making it a concrete entity. The formation of boundaries enabled the people to politically name the region as their home, thereby enabling a complete removal of the tag of foreigners. Identity has been at the core of the separate statehood demand. This leads to the last section which investigates how democracies construct differences. The forceful migration of Nepalis from the Northeast is one of the many examples of displacement in order to create a space for a specific community is discussed here. The author, therefore, talks about the changing position of the indigenous people, who were once considered crucial to the region, as being relegated to the margins.

Bannerjee, like Misra, traces the formation of frontiers through the creation of borders from the colonial history. While these frontiers are man-made, there can be no linear understanding of the dynamics existing within these frontiers. The concept of ‘foreigners’ or ‘aliens’ have a relation to how the British controlled the mobility of its

colonised subjects, specifically the nomads/wandering community. The Indian Gorkha community has to always prove their loyalty. The second half of the text brings in the experiences of women living in these borderlands. While this has predominantly been read through the lens of trafficking and violence, we can link it with Anzaldua's own experience with her multiple identities. As the study tries to situate the experiences of the women living in these spaces and their engagement with the movement, we can examine it from the perspectives of geographical spaces and identity.

One has to examine the proximity and shared history of the region with Nepal so as to understand its political environment. While most of the texts discussed focus on the effect of migration from the perspective of the Indian Gorkha community, Kansakar's *Nepal-India Open Border: Prospects, Problems and Challenges* (2002) writes about it from the perspective of the Nepalese, its effect on the country and a similar accusation rallied on the migrants of Indian origin. The case of the open border system between the two countries has led to concerns on the other side too. The demand for the re-formulation of the Treaty by Kansakar, however, is based on the flow of migrants. He argues that the British government kept an open border for their own benefit. As a result, Nepal also witnessed its share of migration pouring into the plains of Tarai.

The Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty (1950) has been a source of concern for the Nepali-speaking population of the nation. This treaty allows free entry to Nepalese citizens, which makes the position of the Indian Gorkha community precarious. These Nepalese citizens are allowed to hold employment and reside in the nation, thereby blurring the distinction between them and the Nepali-speaking population of Indian origin. Kansakar provides insight into a similar concern, from the 'other' side. The need

to re-evaluate the terms of the treaty is present from both the sides and provides us an understanding of the discomfort that this document entails. The burning of the treaty during the 1986 phase shows the concern felt surrounding this document. Owing to the open border system, there have been accusations based on the theory of ‘Greater Nepal’, which suggests that the increase in population in the areas near Nepal was ultimately to annex them to it. While these theories have been discarded, the loyalty of the community is still questioned. The inability to distinguish between the migrant Nepalese and those of Indian origin has resulted in all of them being viewed through the same lens of ‘othering’. The confusion is exacerbated to the detriment of Indian Nepalis and their social standing because the open border between the two countries, seemingly, allows unrestricted passage for Nepalese to India. This uneasiness is echoed by the leaders of each phase of the Gorkhaland movement. The study is based on the foundation of the movement, which has been strongly influenced by the Treaty. Therefore, this article provides a detailed analysis of the problem from the ‘other’ side. The similarity between the issues both sides are facing further supports the fact that the document has to be revised.

The allegations of being ‘foreigners’ resulted in the forced migration of the community from India and outside. Subhakanta Behera’s “Trans-Border Identities: A Study on the Impact of Bangladeshi and Nepali Migration to India” (2011) argues that in the case of Assam, it was a consequence of the Assam movement, where the main targets were the migrants from Bangladesh. The discussion on Nepali migration put forth was relatively peaceful. The article discusses in detail the effects of migration on the security of the nation, but it does not address its effect on communities from the opposite sides with historical and cultural similarity. One cannot look at these migration patterns or

interactions on a linear basis. As these regions and people have a dynamic relation, both within and outside, one has to look at them from beyond the discourse of national security.

Interestingly, Behera's position as an outsider to the region but an insider to the nation becomes a mirror to the arguments posed by Kansakar. He also rearticulates the argument posed by the ruling elite on the threats posed by the demand for Gorkhaland. The geographical position of the region, with its international boundaries and its proximity to the Northeast and its shared history with Nepal are often used as a means to reject the demand of statehood. It has always been associated with the speculation on the formation of Greater Nepal. I argue here that the 'threat' of Greater Nepal or the act of questioning the 'loyalty' of the community becomes a farce as the demand has always been for a separate state within the nation. In the case of identity, the national marker becomes more crucial than the community itself for the people. This article allows us to read the 'border' dynamics of the two nations and its effect on the regions surrounding it. This helps in detailing the various arguments posed against the demand and helps to critically examine these claims made in the name of national security.

2.1.2 Identity Movements

The Indian Union has witnessed the rise of the demand for separation from various parts within the country. While some have been for a complete separation from the union, there are others which have sought for a separate identity from their 'immediate oppressors'. The formation of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and recently, Telangana stemmed from the demand based on

identity, allocation of resources and systemic marginalisation. This section tries to engage with some of the movements that the nation has witnessed, along with the practices of marginalisation from nations outside. While looking outside of the nation, the internal conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka is looked at from the perspectives of identity and language.

Economic inequality has been often identified as one of the reasons for the demand of separation. The people have often accused the state for the unequal development of the region. Dean McHenry's "Is Economic Inequality a Foundation of Separatist Identity? An Examination of Successful and Unsuccessful Movements in India" (2007) argues that economic deprivation can be the main reason for such separatist movements. In order to understand this claim, he critically examines three movements; that of Telangana, Vidarbha, and Gorkhaland. Those supporting these movements suggest that economic inequality is the basis of identity movements, as it results in two sections-the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. This distinction seems to be the source of discrimination leading to the separation demand. The term 'economic inequality' is read in terms of production. What is compared then is the gain or loss of wealth between the two groups. This form of inequality can be measured not just empirically but also in terms of perception. The author tries to draw attention to the difference between the concrete, empirical analysis of economic inequality and the perception of economic inequality.

The term 'separatist' refers to the aim of creating a new political sub-unit from an existing sub-unit within a country. The objective is to create a separate administrative set-up equivalent to the existing political sub-unit. The term 'separatist' is used for people

who do not necessarily belong to a particular ethnicity or group but to a particular geographical area. The separatist movements looked into are divided into two sections. The first comprises the successful ones- Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, while the second section comprises the then on-going ones- Vidarbha, Telangana and Gorkhaland. Both these sections are analysed from the perspective of empirical and constructed analysis. The article was written prior to the Telangana formation and so considers it as an on-going movement.

The discussion on uneven development has been a continuous rhetoric within most movement discourses. The demand alleges that the region lacks basic amenities, which results in large-scale migration from the hills to the plains. McHenry's argument that the demands of separation stem from issues of inequality holds ground in the case of the Gorkhaland movement. However, looking at the movement from the perspective of economic inequality alone would be reductive. We have to go beyond this perspective and analyse other forms of disparity. The community's struggle for recognition is not just for the region's development but also for their claim as legitimate citizens of the nation. Moreover, the constant marginalisation of the community at the hands of the ruling Bengali elite provides a socio-cultural perspective for the movement. This article enables an economic perspective of the movement and also permits for an analysis that goes beyond this discussion.

For both Telangana and Vidarbha, the continuous alienation by their respective states, the lack of allocation of resources and unequal development has been at the core of their argument for separation. G. Innaiah's "Internal Colonisation in Telangana: Selected Aspects" (2008) gives detailed statistical information on the relation between the regions

of Telangana and Andhra. While tracing the history of the region and its final forceful merging with Seemandhra, the author focuses on the areas of conflict- industries, land, and employment- where those belonging to the Telangana region have faced continuous marginalisation. The author suggests that although, geographically, the region of Telangana has more resources, there is a lack of development. The Justice Bhargava Committee (1969) had stated that the resources meant for the development of the region were being transported to the Andhra region. It proved that Andhra Pradesh as a linguistic state could not survive because the region of Telangana asserted itself as a result of the ‘Internal Colonialism’ it faced. Thus, language could not completely unify the people of these regions.

The demand for Vidarbha to be separate from the Central Province can be traced to the pre-Independence period. Both Ajit Kumar’s “Statehood for Vidarbha” (2001) and Bal Kamble’s “Movement for Independent Vidarbha State” (2018) trace a history of the demand and the political turmoil it has witnessed. Kamble has tried to incorporate the current situation as he closes with the 2018 developments of the movement. The region has had a strong Hindi influence due to its history, which distinguishes from the rest of the state that is dominantly Marathi speaking. This had led to the conflict and has become the basis for the demand for separation. Kumar suggests that while the demand began on the lines of linguistic differences and economic inequality, it has now become increasingly about the allocation of resources. The regions within Vidarbha have been declared as underdeveloped compared to the rest of the State, which has often been used for the demand to form a new state. While the region has natural resources that could be used for its development, the lack of initiative from the side of the state has been

condemned. Kumar suggests that the demand has now taken a turn as prominent leaders are demanding to address these issues rather than separation. Kamble points out that the present condition of the movement is ‘subsided’.

In 2014, Telangana state was bifurcated from the state of Andhra Pradesh. This stimulated unrest in the region of this study, as the demand for Gorkhaland resurfaced. While the demand for Vidarbha has not had a direct impact on the Gorkhaland movement, the formation of the Telangana State strongly influenced it. In the 2017 resurgence, we witnessed support from organisations like the Telangana Joint Action Committee (TJAC) for the demand. In the articles discussed above, the focus is on the allocation of resources. The region of Darjeeling witnessed development only on the lines of its colonial image of a ‘vacation’ spot. With the lack of basic amenities, coupled with ethnic marginalisation, the demand for Gorkhaland goes beyond the economic disparity it faces. While the issues relating to both the Telangana and Gorkhaland movements may vary in several aspects, there can be several parallels drawn in their development. While ethnicity plays an important role in the movement of the Hills, development is seen as the core concern in the Telangana movement. Moreover, if Andhra Pradesh which was formed on the lines of linguistic similarity could not survive, the region of Darjeeling which has no linguistic or cultural similarity with the larger state of West Bengal faces a sense of alienation in the majority-minority tussle.

As discussed above, the state government compared the Gorkhaland demand with different movements during the 1986 phase. Assam became a part of this discourse not only for being a contemporary of the 1986 phase, but also due to its effect on the Nepali-speaking population living in Assam. Komol Singha’s “Ethnicity-Based Movements and

State's Response in Assam" (2017) charts the rise of the various movements in Assam and the manner in which the State dealt with it. She engages with the issue of ethnicity and how it has led to various assertions in the region after the Assam movement. She states that such ethnic conflicts are influenced by the goals of autonomy, political dominance, and economic gains. She explains the different waves of migration that took place throughout the history of the region. With the rise of the anti-immigrant movement, there also began a rift between the indigenous tribes and the mainstream Assamese people.

This article becomes crucial while reading the multiple demands that have emerged from one movement. This bears true in the present stage of the Gorkhaland movement, where we witness the disintegration of the ethnic Gorkha identity demanding for statehood and the assertion of different communities for recognition in the region. The reaction of the state and its treatment of the issue can also be read as the various governmental tactics of division, as Singha observes. She remarks that the role of the state in such issues can be divided into three possible initiatives. The first is the direct approach whereby the state uses brute force to suppress dissenting voices. The second is the 'outside-in approach' where the state is able to curb the peripheral support of the resistance while engaging with the centre for political and economic means. The third is where the main leaders are targeted and then the subordinates are taken down. She critiques the roles of both the state and the leaders of the groups in the course of the movement. In the end, she discusses the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016 that continues to plague the state. Both the direct and the 'outside-in approach' have been used in the 1986 and 2007 phases of the Gorkhaland movement. What becomes relevant

in the context of this study is the role of the state that curbed the movement through its machinery. The state's retaliation towards the movement has been both aggressive (1986) and passive-aggressive (2007). This stance has also created its own narrative that has influenced the movement. Moreover, the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016 has been used to support the 'foreigner' accusations against the Indian Gorkha community. Therefore, this article enables us to understand the structural violence taking place against the community, both inside and outside Assam and how some of its aspects mirror the situation of the Gorkhaland movement.

When one goes beyond the economic aspect of the movement, there is the question of ethnic marginalisation in the context of Gorkhaland movement. Sanjib Baruah's *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (1999) highlights the failure of the leaders of the Assam movement to differentiate between the 'foreigners' and the 'indigenous' people. He traces the history of the demand from signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, after which the formation of this 'Assameseness' was contested by the Bodo community. The accusation levelled by the leaders of the movement was that the Assam government formed after the Accord harboured anti-tribal feelings. The case for distinction from their 'Assamese' counterparts was maintained by the leaders. The formation of Assamese consciousness and the success of the Assam movement (1979-1985) created a sense of apprehension amongst the leaders of the Bodo movement. While they were also involved in the movement, their anxiety stemmed from the potential domination of the Assamese identity undermining the tribal Bodo identity. Baruah elucidates how various modes were used to support the demand. Use of Bodo language and the circulation of Bodo literature increased; the revival of religious traditions and the

mapping of the history through which various communities were brought under the fold of the Bodo identity were used to cement the demand by claiming to be the ‘sons of the soil’. The conversion of the Bodo community to Christianity is also discussed by Baruah and how it was connected to the creation of a cultural differentiation from the Assamese identity. As Hinduism was associated with the Assamese, it was not looked at in a positive light. Moreover, Christian missionaries represented the ‘modern’ West and were opposite to the Hindu religion, which under the colonial rule had lost its position. There was also a revival of old religious customs practices here.

This rise of the Bodoland demand is often quoted by the leaders of the Gorkhaland movement. I propose to read it from two perspectives, first, from the rise of the Gorkha identity that emerged as retaliation to their forceful assimilation, and second, from the cracks within the Gorkha identity itself which have been promoted by the state. Sanjib Baruah’s engagement with the rise of ethnic differences after the Assam movement can be read in the light of the various sub-groups moving away from the ‘constructed’ Gorkha identity. The rise and assertion of these identities were especially visible after the formation of the Tribal Boards. Interestingly, the methods employed for this assertion have remained the same. Recognition of their language and maintenance of cultural distinction have been used by both the supporters of the movement and later by the sub-groups. This rise of conflicting identities becomes crucial in the study for reading the history of the movement, so as to understand how it has affected the people, specifically, the women.

The anxiety surrounding the question of belonging has often plagued the community. Their forceful displacement from the Northeast and Bhutan further

concretised this fear. This anxiety has been discussed by Lopita Nath's 'Migrants in Flight: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement of Nepalis in Northeast India' (2005), where she dubs the community as 'migrants in flight' and notes that their 'journey' has not been discussed due to their migrant history and their limited population in the region. She provides examples of the community being under constant threat and argues against the conspiracy theory of Greater Nepal. In the article, "Migration, Insecurity and Identity: The Nepali Dairymen in India's Northeast" (2006), Lopita Nath discusses similar issues of belonging by tracing the journey of the Nepali dairymen or the *Gualas*. While this profession does not fall under the employment generally associated with the community, there exists a strong workforce engaged in this labour in the Northeast. Here too, Nath discusses the history of migration and the consistent forceful displacement that the community has faced. This holds especially true for the Assam movement when the term 'sons of the soil' began to gain momentum. Therefore, the need to belong is strongly reflected in the importance given to the term 'Indian' as an identity marker, which comes before the ethnic Gorkha identity.

The demand for Gorkhaland encompasses those sections of the community who do not reside in the region of Darjeeling as well. As Nath mentions, the issue of belonging has been at the core of the demand for recognition. A community that has been continuously ousted from their land has a visible sense of anxiety and the need to establish their claim. When we look at the history of forceful migration, the demand for recognition is not unfounded. The forceful migration of the community from Meghalaya and Manipur further cemented this fear. The demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland then does not belong only to the Nepali-speaking population living in Darjeeling but it

fulfils the demand for a home for the entire Nepali-speaking population residing in the nation. Therefore, this article provides an insight into those sections of the community who do not reside in the region but actively support the movement. While the articles focus on Assam, they provide a peek into the psyche of a community that has been continuously targeted for its history. Both the articles provide an insight into the lives of those living outside the region, enabling a more diverse reading of the same.

T.B. Subba's *Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling* (1992) looks at questions related to the evolving of the Gorkha identity, movements preceding the demand of statehood, reasons and demands behind the statehood movement, the aftermath of the movement and the role of media in the movement. In order to theorise the concepts of ethnicity, state, and development, Subba builds his argument along the lines of Glazer and Moynihan on how the state maintains these ethnic divisions through the allocation of 'rewards' in order to sustain itself. Ethnicity is guarded by various groups either to safeguard their 'rewards' or to overcome their disparities so as to achieve development.

As one of the decisive texts on the movement, it provides a detailed context of the 1986 and 2007 phases of the movement. The book was published after the 1986 phase and so looks at the movement from a retrospective perspective. It historicises the region, the people and the movement. The text lists out the events that took place in the movement and the role that the media has played in it. While this text provides a holistic reading and allows one to gain knowledge of the dominant narrative of the movement, the issue of gender is not discussed in it. Therefore, this study goes beyond the narrative of the text and analyses the gaps in it.

Mona Chettri's "Choosing the Gorkha: At the Crossroads of Class and Ethnicity in the Darjeeling Hills" (2013) discusses how the economic issue of the Hills is being seen against the backdrop of ethnicity. She observes that the ethnic identity of the migrants directly coincided with their class identity during the colonial times. Therefore, any complaint on the lack of development is seen through the purview of ethnicity leading to resentment between the Hills and the Plains. The lack of socio-political acceptance for them is another reason for this resentment. The image of the hills as a place to go for vacation as the English had imagined it is still stuck to the imagination of Darjeeling. A person from the Hills feels more alienated when he has to face the Bengali-speaking officials for any administrative purposes. It is, therefore, perceived as ethnic bias.

Unlike the movements for Telangana and Vidarbha, the Gorkhaland demand is based on ethnic determination. The ethnic marginalisation of the Indian Gorkha community has been discussed by Chettri (2013). What we witness here is the 'trickling-down' effect of the colonial image of the community, which has been adopted by the Bengalis later. This article helps in understanding the psyche of the community, while engaging with the dominant narrative. It provides historicity to the accepted image of the community that resulted in the discord between the two groups leading to the demand for separation.

While the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict cannot be directly read as a parallel to the Gorkhaland demand, there are certain aspects that can be considered so. The articles discussed in this context engage with the issues of marginalisation and the means employed to assert one's identity. Sehar Mushtaq's "Identity Conflict in Sri Lanka: A

Case of Tamil Tigers” (2012) provides a historical overview of the struggle between the two factions and its resultant violence. He examines the reasons behind the rise of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the state’s response to it, its eventual fall, and the future of this conflict. He traces its origin from the colonial period and asserts that the roots of this difference began there. The ethnic and religious position enjoyed by the Tamil population during the colonial period because of their knowledge of English language led to this demarcation. This became evident when the Sinhalese domination began post-independence. Through the demand for documentation to prove their citizenship, the Tamil population was disenfranchised as many lost their right to vote. This led to a strong resistance from both within the region and outside. The attack on Tamils by the opposite faction further aggravated the situation, leading to the demand for a Tamil Eelam or separation from the dominant forces by carving out a nation for the Tamils. This demand was spearheaded by the LTTE and their leader Prabhakaran. Mushtaq lists out the various techniques used by the group in their struggle for the demand and the response of the state with the eventual failure of the movement and the killing of Prabhakaran in 2009.

As discussed before, the Gorkhaland and Tamil Eelam movements have their roots in the identity issue, but they differ from each other in their demand. While both seek independence from repression and domination, the demand of the Indian Gorkhas is to remain an integral part of the Indian union. What needs to be read is the identity crisis that both the sections have faced. Their structured marginalisation leading to a strong assertion from the groups through various modes like the language movement, which is discussed in detail in the next article, strikes a familiar note. Moreover, the similarities

between these movements help us to understand how, even in diverse socio-economic and regional situations, the modes of marginalisation used are similar. Mushtaq traces the history of this movement to the colonial period in order to understand the cause of this discrimination. When a group is systematically alienated, it leads to retaliation from the group. This remains a fact in the case of both the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indian Gorkha.

Language has always been an integral part of the identity movements. Sasanka Perera's "Reflections on the Issues of Language in Sri Lanka: Power, Exclusion and Inclusion" (2015) examines this tussle for power that came through by prioritising one language over the other. He has divided his work into three parts, begins with the position of languages before Independence, then its position in the Official Language Policy (OLP) 1987, and finally ends with a fieldwork report on how the policy is working in the present time. Historically, both sides demanded the status of 'native' language during the colonial period. In 1956, the Sinhala Only Bill was passed, which made Sinhalese the official language. Perera states that this led to a widespread protest by the Tamil leaders. With the implementation of the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act 1958, Tamil was used as an administrative language in the Northern and Eastern provinces since 1966. However, even with this special act, the position of the two languages remained contentious. It was in the 1980s that a law was finally passed to place the two languages at an equal level. Based on the fieldwork he has done in three regions with diverse demography, Perera points out how the constitution is being continuously violated despite the amendments. Even the complaints on this violation are not recorded, according to the data collected by him. Finally, he argues how the recent statement by the

Minister of Housing, who called the Tamil version of the national anthem a ‘joke’, reiterates the division that still exists even after the conclusion of the most violent movement that the nation witnessed.

The role of language and the division it has caused amongst any two or more factions cannot be dismissed. The immediate cause of the 2017 resurgence of the Gorkhaland movement can be attributed to the mandatory implementation of Bengali language all over the state. This decision came as a shock to the region where the Nepali language was dominant. It was deemed as a means to further marginalise the community, especially considering the precarious position of the community due to the constant allegation of being an outsider. The Nepali language was included in the Eighth Schedule after the 1986 phase. Therefore, this move by the state was strongly condemned, leading to the resurgence of the demand for statehood. The article provides an understanding of the language proving a basis for recognition for a community. While the Nepali language is dominant only in the hills, its role as an identity marker remains constant. It helps us to understand the role of language, and especially literary works, in the movement, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

In the case of Nepal, which has a close cultural similarity with the region of Darjeeling, the modes of identity assertion have been viewed from the lens of caste and ethnicity. The relationship between the regions has been continuously contested. This not only establishes a sense of difference but also of similarity between the two. It is due to this intertwined relation that I have tried to read the articulations of identity in Nepal and any possible difference or similarity between the two geographical locations. David N. Gellner’s “Caste, Ethnicity and Inequality in Nepal” (2007), looks at the existing caste

and ethnic inequality in Nepal which has become a source of conflict. Owing to the existence of various caste and ethnically diverse communities, they are divided on the basis of the Varna system that is also followed in India. The article looks at history and the concretisation of the caste system by formulating its legal code, the *Mulukhi Ain* in 1854 on these grounds. As a result, many migrated to other regions like Sikkim and Darjeeling in search of employment and land. The article also looks at the political issues that Nepal has faced like the banning of political parties and the refusal of the state to recognise the issues of ethnicity and caste, which has led to the unequal distribution of resources, thereby reinforcing the dominant position of the privileged castes. The article reads the *Janajati Andolan* or the 'People's Movement' while tracing the rise of dissent in Nepal.

As Gellner points out, caste atrocities have been one of the reasons why people chose to flee from Nepal and reach *Mugalan* or the place of the Mughals (Hutt, 1998). It is also due to the mixing of different communities that the compact caste hierarchy practiced in Nepal got blurred. While this does not mean that there are no caste practices in the region, the demand for statehood enveloped the people under the banner of Gorkhas. The shared history between the two regions has often led to strong contestations on the claim made by the community. This article provides detailed reasons behind their mass migration to the region. As one reads the history of the region and its people, migration becomes an issue that needs to be analysed from different vantage points. It becomes a common theme in the movement's narrative and we witness its manifestation in literary writings as well. Therefore, I read this issue through the testimonials of the women participants and literary writings.

2.1.3 Women's *Testimonios*

The demand for separation that began during the British colonial period developed into a desire for separate statehood leading to a mass movement. For a movement that has been continuing for more than three decades, memory becomes a crucial tool to understand the experiences of the women within the movement. As the movement is still evolving, it is the diversity of experiences faced by the women that will enable different readings of the movement. The oral narratives of these women coming from different socio-economic backgrounds become integral to this study.

In the context of this study, the oral narratives are examined as *testimonios*, which is a first person narrative of an event, where a gross injustice took place against an individual or a group. The objective, therefore, is to call for justice. Here, *testimonio* is used as a medium through which the narratives are examined in this thesis. *Testimonio* has been used in the Latin American literature as a form of resistance especially in the women's writing. Lindsay Pérez Huber's "Disrupting Apartheid of Knowledge: *Testimonio* as Methodology in Latina/o Critical Race Research in Education" (2009) refers to the definition of *testimonio* given by the Latina Feminist Group is a "way to create knowledge and theory through personal experiences, highlighting the significance of the process of *testimonio* in theorising our own realities as Women of Colour" (Huber, 2009: 643). Another definition Huber (2009) mentions is that of Yudice who describes *testimonio* as an "authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of the situation" (Huber, 2009: 643).

Kavita Panjabi's "The *Testimonio* in Latin America and India: Critical Contestations of the Collective Voice" (2009) traces the impact of this re-telling and discusses the basic characteristics of *testimonios*. She elaborates that the role of such re-telling is to narrate the history from 'below' as the narrator is part of that space. Bernal, Burciaga and Carmona (2012) also discuss the role of *testimonio*, its characteristics and the importance of listening. Therefore, the role of both the speaker/witness and that of the listener/interlocutor becomes crucial in the re-telling.

The above mentioned articles discuss the characteristics of *testimonios*, as they trace their origin and impact. In all of the discussions above, the thread of individual and collective narratives remains pertinent. While *testimonios* discuss the injustice suffered by an entire community, Panjabi (2009) argues that rather than looking at the individual narrative as breaking this collective re-telling, it should be read as a voice that was not able to find a place in the collective. It is based on this that this study looks at the narratives of the women respondents individually. These women participants were part of the collective but were not given their space. While women have been part of the movement before the 1986 phase, the limited literature on their presence resulted in gaps in the 'official' movement discourse. The women respondents participating in the movement have described their own lived realities and how they have witnessed this movement since the 'radical' 1986 phase.

As mentioned before, movements become the ground on which one can read the difference between the 'documented' and 'undocumented' narratives. Similar to the case of the Gorkhaland movement which was able to garner national attention since its turbulent 1986 period, the dominant texts have mostly looked at the face of the leaders,

who have always been men. While women's participation has been documented, their experiences within the movement have been given limited attention. What this means is that the existing narratives of the movement have only been half told as they represent only one section of the movement and the population of the region. In Stree Shakti Sanghatana's *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle* (1989), we witness an engagement with these 'gaps'. The focus is on the women participants and their narratives of the Telangana People's Struggle against the Nizam and the feudal landlords. The gaps that emerge from these silences are read through 'undocumented' utterances. What becomes pertinent is that these memories which were not sanctioned by the 'authority' are 'unearthed'. This discomfort about the 'unsanctioned' is still visible when the respondent herself asks for the tape to be switched off while she talks about some experience that may not be accepted. The sub-text becomes important in the formulation of the personal narratives as the main narrative does not always work in a linear path. The dual burden of the private and public spheres that the women participants shoulder becomes evident in the interviews.

The present text reconstructs the history of the movement from the perspective of the women involved in it. The women here are not seen as a collective but are taken as individuals who were part of a collective. Each respondent has her own story that is given a full chapter. This thesis tries to engage with similar questions and views the category of women as heterogeneous. The above text provides the background to the objectives of this thesis which examines and critiques the existing documents on the Gorkhaland movement and re-reads it from this 'unauthorised' perspective.

In Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar's *We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement* (2014), which is an anthology of the women who participated in the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar-led Dalit Movement of the 1930s, the women who were part of this movement come from unrecognised classes/castes. Therefore, the book becomes a testament of their right to assert their identity. The editors refer to the various contemporary issues where the caste question was highlighted, like the Mathura rape case, the Durban Conference and the politics of language, as Kumud Pawde puts it, where the learning of a language was seen as a caste privilege. The book is broadly divided into two sections. While the first section looks at the history of the movement with key references to the various social movements that took place and the role of women within these movements, the second contains biographical sketches and in-depth interviews of the women who participated in these movements. The book follows the trajectory of the rise of Dalit Consciousness under the leadership of Ambedkar while reading the social history of the Dalits within the vicious caste circle. The fight for water rights, temple entry, and equality in general, are all different forms of assertion of the Dalit identity. The book, therefore, tries to historicise these acts of resistance.

Like *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle* (1989), this book also examines the role of women in the Dalit movement. It provides first-hand experience of the movement with the help of the interviews of the women involved in these movements. The Dalit movement encompassed all sections of people, as Ambedkar believed that the caste system could be broken only through the emancipation of women for it is through the control of their sexuality and reproduction that caste also gets reproduced. Thus, by giving these women recognition and by

translating the book into English, there is a larger audience created for the book. This form of recognition is also an objective of this thesis. While women have been associated with the Gorkhaland movement, their representation in the official documents is limited. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap and enrich the documentation of the movement with the help of the subjective narratives by women who participated in the movement.

Ilina Sen, in the introduction of *A Space within the Struggle: Women's Participation in People's Movement* (1990), initiates a discussion on the characteristics and objectives of the women's movement in India. The question of women's issues has been strongly articulated not just by women activists, but also in academics through the introduction of disciplines like Women's Studies. She observes that on one hand the women activists have raised their voices against the oppression of women, and on the other hand, the social location of these activists and their neglect of the issues of working-class women gain prominence. The book focuses on the large mass movement that aimed for social and political change, where women have been active agents. She clarifies that a movement does not become a women's movement just because there are women in it. A large scale movement will require and involve women's participation. This does not automatically entail an autonomous assertion from their side but has the strength to provide pressure on the movement to recognise the women in these mass movements. Analysing the political, social and economic situation of the Nation in the post-Independence era, the text looks at various instances in the country which reflected the post-Independent unrest. With the growing dissent within the country, the various women's organisations that had become inactive after Independence formulated a new objective of attacking the various oppressive forces.

As Sen examines the various movements where women have been active agents, it is the distinctions within the category of 'women' that need to be analysed. While these social movements do seek justice for the disadvantaged classes, the internal oppression taking place towards women needs to be analysed. Placing of women at the forefront of any public event can be seen as a way of protecting the leaders from any state action. In such a scenario, one questions the act of leading itself. She remarks that while many of these issues are not discussed in the book, the main objective of the book is to look at the role of women within the workings of mass movements. These investigations can also be made in the context of the Gorkhaland movement. The 2007 phase saw women 'leading' various protests. One can view this as a means through which the leaders were creating a safe zone from the state's retaliation. Similarly, the existence of different political organisations has led to aggression within the region. It is along these variables that one has to read the experiences of the women involved in the movement.

Deepa Joshi's "Feminist Solidarity? Women's Engagement in Politics and the Implication for Water Management in the Darjeeling Himalaya" (2014) engages with two major stereotypes- first that women are always egalitarian and that they support equality, peace and sustainable development, and second that women have strong links to nature. Therefore, Joshi intends to interrogate the question of development and see if there has been any change in the inequalities existing between men and women and among themselves. She takes the region of Darjeeling with its history of political conflicts and issue of water shortages, and examines these two stereotypes within this issue. As she reads the movement, her focus is on the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) led 2007 movement, where the *Nari Morcha* or the women's wing grew in prominence and led

many of its members to be part of the new Gorkha Territorial Administrative (GTA). While these women were able to participate in the movement actively as women in positions of power, they were ‘unwilling’ to help with the water injustice. Therefore, the paper studies the ‘complex spatial realities that shape gender-poverty-environment disparities’ (Joshi, 2014: 224) in this particular context. Joshi problematises the perception of women as passive recipients in the developmental framework. She interrogates if women can change politics or they just function as part of patriarchy. This article has two core objectives- one is to read the underlying “gendered priorities in a patriarchal, coercive political domain” (Joshi, 2014: 248) and to understand the politics of unity amongst women coming from diverse backgrounds with their own agendas in the context of an environmental issue.

What gains prominence in the present text is the breaking of the homogenous identity of women. As mentioned before, the 2007 phase witnessed a massive support from women and they were seen as ‘leading’ the charge. This projected the image of a united and strong women workforce in the movement. This article questions this ‘unity’ and examines the role of the women in its structure. As the time period is after the 2007 phase, this work allows us to re-trace the position of women in the movement. The fact that this work highlights the existing gaps in the hierarchy also enables us to question the 2007 phase, which was touted as being gender equal.

The role of women in the demand for Bodoland is read in terms of ‘peace building’. Topu Choudhury’s “Bodo Women in Peace Building: A Case Study of Kokrajhar District” (2017) discusses the role of Bodo women in the demand, which was led by the All Bodo Student’s Union (ABSU). The formation of All Assam Tribal

Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) in Kokrajhar in 1986 was to establish “...equity between men and women, addressing problems concerning women, traditional or otherwise and empowerment of weaker sections.” (2017: 193). The paper, based on the Kokrajhar district of Assam, chronicles the events that took place in the region and examines how Bodo women were affected by it. The oppression suffered by the women during the movement at the hands of the forces resulted in physical violence and the loss of lives of their relatives. The women had to take up the responsibility of the household and agriculture as men were either arrested or were on the run. They were also involved in peaceful processions against police brutality and became the spokespersons of the movement to gather support. These women were seen actively participating in maintaining peace in the region post-movement.

The role of women as a symbol of peace has also been used in the rhetoric of the 2007 phase of the Gorkhaland movement. The present text discusses the different roles women played in the Bodoland movement. This helps in understanding how women have always been part of movements as active agents. Moreover, their roles in various groups provide us information on the structure existing in the movement. As women have often been associated with peace, one has to problematise this concept. As Sen suggests, the position of women leading the processions could be linked to this image. This acts as a shield for the male leadership against the state’s retaliation. This will be further discussed in the following chapters.

Memory then becomes a tool to critique the movement. One of the issues that the respondents chose to remain quiet about during the interviews conducted on the movement for this thesis is that of sexual violence. These cases of violence may have

been perpetrated from outside or inside, but are addressed only fleetingly due to the stigma attached to it. As Roy notes, there is an immediate critique of this silence that the self was forgotten at the cost of severe violence for the cause. While the process of healing may or may not take place through such testimonies, one cannot but look at these women as survivors of atrocities committed not just by the state, but also by the people whom they trusted. The sexual violence of the 1986 phase of Gorkhaland movement continues to be a taboo for many of the respondents. It is a past that they wished to forget as it was associated with shame. The following texts discuss the silences associated with such issues through the narratives of women who have been victims of this violence.

Srila Roy's *Remembering Revolution: Gender, Violence, and Subjectivity in India's Naxalbari Movement* (2013) looks at the Naxalite Movement between the late sixties and the early seventies through the lens of gender. It, therefore, becomes a re-reading of the movement from the women's perspective. It charts its journey by forming a nexus among the Naxalite Movement, women participants, and their memory. The book is located in West Bengal and the respondents are the middle-class women who participated in the movement. She examines the movement from the perspective of gender and the effect of this factor on the narratives of the respondents. The role of memory, as these respondents searched for the distant past in their re-telling, is critically read. She speaks about the normalisation of such violence where some violence (such as by the State) is accorded a large mass of recognition while violence in their every day (existing within the organisations) is never articulated. Roy speaks about these memories that the women respondents had gone back to as lacerated, because, while the violence

perpetrated by the State contained fear that was allowed to be recognised, the violence within the movement was not considered so.

Similar to Roy's analysis of sanctioned and unsanctioned narratives from within the movement, we are introduced to the personal narratives of Krishna Bandyopadhyay's "Naxalbari Politics: A Feminist Narrative" (2008). As she recounts her experiences in the movement, we are provided instances of the cracks within the movement. The irony is that, the character and virtue of the women are evaluated from the middle-class *bhadramahila* perspective. Love, within the context of the revolution, is also seen under a masculine hegemony where the woman is considered a mere extension of the man, and is supposed to take his place in the revolution after his demise. The death of the husband elevates the widow to a new level where she becomes revered. The memory of her dead husband is invoked by reading his writings to her in order to make her feel guilty, if she is involved in a new relationship. While the atrocities of the state towards the participants of the Naxalite Movement have been echoed in several writings, the voices of the women victims are rarely heard. The violence against the female comrades within the organisation is rarely mentioned and only a few have deliberated on it as Krishna Bandyopadhyay does.

In both the texts mentioned above, the events took place in the distant past. What becomes pertinent in these texts are the 'internal' acts of aggression that the women suffered during their participation. In the context of the Gorkhaland movement, we witness patterns of discord in both the 1986 and 2007 phases. The female survivors of such atrocities bring to the fore the gendered perspective that existed within the movement. Therefore, these texts enable a critical reading of the movement.

Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (1998) looks at the Partition narratives from women's perspective. In her introduction to the book, Butalia mentions that the book looks at the Partition only in the context of Northern India. Written in the style of a narrative, she traces her roots in Pakistan and re-tells the story of her own family who had migrated to Punjab after the Partition. Her mother, one of her first respondents, recalls her journey and the part of the family she had to leave back in Pakistan. Butalia reiterates that the story of Partition that was often told by its victims was a distant instance in history for her. After the 1984 Sikh riots, she realised that she was able to identify with the narratives. As she was helping the victims of the Delhi riots, many of them recounted the Partition history. The image of the *Watan* that many of the refugees associated with India was shattered in the 1984 riots. She chronicles the communal violence suffered by women who were abducted and raped and killed in the violence that erupted after the Partition engulfed both sides of the border. This goes beyond the figures that have dominated the existing discourse of Partition.

The present text moves away from the mainstream representation of the Partition narrative as it engages with the survivors of Partition violence. What it provides us is an untold side of the Partition that engages with questions of violence, belonging and identity. The violence on women during the Partition has often been reduced to numerical values. The text tries to put faces to these numbers. It also engages with the questions of home and belonging. This has a crucial link with this thesis since the demand for Gorkhaland is for a home for the Indian Gorkha community. One can draw parallels between the memory of violence that each Partition survivor discusses or keeps silent about, and the taboo surrounding the 1986 Gorkhaland violence. It is under these contexts

that we can read the experiences of women and examine if there exists any difference among them.

Violence during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots led to the loss of lives, forceful migration of families, and loss of livelihood. Anshu Saluja's "Engaging with Women's Words and Their Silences" (2015) engages with all these issues as she maps the lives of Sikh women during the riots and the aftermath. It is through their silence that she tries to understand the lives of these women, who have been the victims of trauma. The field data is based on the oral narratives of the women survivors of the riots and also of those activists involved in the rehabilitation of these families. The interviews of these women survivors chart their personal experiences during the riot. There were questions that they were uncomfortable to answer. Saluja tries to closely read this silence. The inability to understand the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination in their lives, having to tend to immediate issues rather than mourn for their loss, and the realisation of this loss after the urgency subsided are discussed in the narratives. The discussion on violence etched in the memories of the survivors as they recall the trauma faced by the men often disregarding their own, coupled with their selective silence on issues that they were not willing to discuss, enable a new reading of the silences.

The text discussed here tries to engage with the questions of gender and identity to reclaim history through personal narratives. The power of these 'her-stories' enables an engagement with the existing narratives that have chosen to 'forget' them. What gains importance here are not the utterances, but the silences. The silence surrounding the question of violence has often been witnessed in movement narratives. In the 1986 phase, any discussion on the atrocities suffered by women is often met with silence. This text

allows us to understand these silences and engage with them. It is the sub-text that gains more prominence here. Any reading of the Gorkhaland movement also needs to understand the importance of its geographical location, as it influences the demand and movement which have been at its core since the colonial period.

In *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir* (2003), Urvashi Butalia looks at the experiences of Kashmiri women. The book comprises chapters written by people from both inside and outside of the valley of Kashmir. While some are or were inhabitants of Kashmir, others have visited the valley in search of answers to their questions. These writings look at the various events and incidents that the women face in the valley. When one talks about Kashmiri women, they encompass not only the Muslims but also the Kashmiri Pandits. The diversity is further heightened by including the Ladakhi Muslims and their understanding of the on-going conflict that has deeply affected their personal lives. The book looks at the history of the valley to make a stark comparison with the present situation. It is for this purpose that the memory of the inhabitants becomes crucial. The two images- of the official shown through the *shikara* images in tourism banners or of the one visible during the Republic Day parade, and the unofficial image that the book brings of the women being brutally treated by the armed forces are discussed all through the text. The demand for *azadi* by the people of the valley and the need to save *Kashmiriyat* by moving away from the oppression of both India and Pakistan are articulated in each of the writings.

Do You Remember Kunan Poshpora?: The Story of a Mass Rape (2016) by Natasha Rather, Essar Batool, Ifrah Butt, Munaza Rashid and Samreena Mushtaq is about the violence perpetrated by the armed forces on both men and women in the two regions

of Kunan and Poshpora in February 1991. The four women who have written the book formed an investigative team as they met with officials and the men and women of the region. They map out the event that changed the lives of these two villages and the state they were in at the time. They provide a detailed chronology of the event as it took place during that night and transport the reader back to the atrocities that took place. How sexual violence is used as a tool of repression is continuously re-iterated throughout the book, as the journeys of the survivors are narrated. Failure of the law in punishing the accused, tools used to falsify the victims' accounts and the social stigma faced by both men and women are closely discussed. It also discusses the evidence for these atrocities and the legal battle that is still being fought. What becomes critical here, as the authors discuss, is that the movement against the rape incident in Delhi in 2012 garnered huge support nation-wide, but in Kashmir rape was systematically used as a tool of suppression and is not even discussed by most authors.

While looking at the demand for independent Kashmir and demand for the state of Gorkhaland, the thread of the atrocities committed by the State machinery in the 1986 phase of the movement was found to be of some relevance. T B Subba's "The Gorkhaland Movement and Human Rights Violation in India" (2010) discusses the atrocities by armed forces to dismantle the 1986 phase of the Gorkhaland movement. While both the demands have no similarity, it is in the acts of violence against them that we are able to find common ground.

The three sections discussed above provide the framework for the study. Each section provides an integral aspect that enables the reading of the narratives of the women participants. The three frameworks- borderlands, identity movements and women's

testimonies, play a pivotal role in understanding the experiences of women respondents. Each aspect has influenced the lived experiences of these respondents. It is also through the consideration of these three frameworks that the fieldwork was conducted. Issues of geographical location, identity and women's experiences became central during the interviews. These issues also enabled a dialogue with the respondents and formulated my role as a researcher.

2.2 Research Methodology

Growing up, the stories about Gorkhaland had become a common topic of discussion in my house. My mother, who hails from a small town of Kurseong, has always been talking about what she had heard from her family as she had relocated to Kolkata for her work. While we lived in Kolkata, the fear for the safety of her family would always affect her narrative especially when she used to talk about certain instances. As I sat wrapped in the enigma of the past, a new phase of the movement emerged in 2007.

Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong have been the epicentre of the Gorkhaland agitation. Memories of the people's resistance to the State during the movement in 1986 still echoed in many of my relatives' conversations. The interest to know more about the journey from the demand of a separate administrative unit during the British colonial period to that of a separate state had always been there. Moreover, the experience of being both an insider due to my lineage and an outsider due to my upbringing in Kolkata enabled me to see two opposing ideas- the Bengalis who were largely against the demand calling it 'anti-national', and the Indian Gorkhas who demanded safety and recognition as

the legitimate citizens of the Nation. I wished to understand why there was a need for separate statehood. My fieldwork did help me to answer some of these questions but it also raised some new ones.

It is during the 2007 phase that I began to follow the movement closely by reading the newspaper articles and asking my relatives about the situation in the Hills. As I followed the 2007 phase of the movement, I witnessed a complete negation of 1986. The leaders of the present phase had branded the 1986 phase as volatile and violent. I wished to know the problem that the present phase had with its predecessor, because, for me 2007 would not have existed if the movement had not begun in 1986. The demand for statehood began with the call for Gorkhaland in 1986, and, before that it had only focused on the separate administrative set-up. Moreover, the Nepali language was given the status of an official Indian Language only after the 1986 movement and it also led to the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), an autonomous administrative body. There seemed to be a dialogue going on between the two phases where the former symbolised the extreme, and, the latter became a more moderate representation of the movement. I worked on the Gorkhaland movement for my M.Phil. dissertation in 2012. While the focus of my study was the 2007 movement, I wanted to know more about the differences between the two phases. The existence of two opposing parties in the region demanding for statehood provided a diverse interpretation of the two phases. Historically, 1986 was considered as the most volatile phase in the region. With the Kalimpong massacre, strong army deployment, use of indigenous weapons by the people and human rights violations the history of 1986 could not be kept aside. (Subba, 2010)

One of the highlights of the 2007 phase was that the women participants were seen leading all the rallies and this attracted my attention during my fieldwork. Women shaving their head as a mark of support for the demand added a new fervour to the movement. As hair has often been associated with the beauty of a woman, the act of shaving it became symbolic of the extent that women were willing to go for the demand. But amidst all, what continued was the leaders' intent to separate the present phase from the 1986 movement. Some of my respondents were women and had witnessed both the phases. The women I interviewed came with diverse interpretations of the movement. During the course of my fieldwork, I analysed these different readings based on their political affiliations but I was still unable to understand the deliberate difference that was being created between the two phases. Moreover, there seemed to be a shift in the support from the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) that had led the movement in 1986 under the leadership of Subhash Ghisingh to the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) that led the movement in 2007. Many protests against the GNLF became violent. Even as I interviewed political leaders for my fieldwork on the 2007 phase, I was unable to find any women occupying a high-ranking position in the movement. There were women organisations involved within the movement but none of these women leaders seemed to have grown prominent. While male leaders of GJM like Bimal Gurung, Harka Bahadur Chettri, and Roshan Giri spear-headed the movement, there was no mention of women leaders apart from that of the women's wing leader Asha Gurung, who is also the wife of Bimal Gurung. Therefore, one questions if only women of a particular socio-economic position were able to achieve the recognition within the movement. If it is so, then what about women coming from lower socio-economic strata? What role was given to them

and how did they participate in the movement? While the women in the 2007 phase seemed to have ‘visibly’ taken the lead, the question that arose was if there had been any women’s participation during the earlier phase. There were women’s wings functioning during the 1986 but the questions that this churned out were; who were these women, what were their roles in the 1986 phase of the movement, and, where are they now? As the information gathered suggests that there were women’s organisations participating during the 1986 movement, questions on the basis of community, occupation, and the region become crucial for exploration.

During my M.Phil. fieldwork, I met some women participants willing to share their thoughts with me. The women I interviewed were not actively participating in the 2007 phase of the movement but had witnessed and had been affected by both the active phases of the movement that is, 1986 and 2007. With different political affiliations and the 2007 phase ‘visibly’ becoming a more ‘gender-neutral’ movement, the question of comparison with its previous active phase of 1986 through the lens of gender gained prominence for me.

While my M.Phil. fieldwork enabled me to interact with some of the women involved in the movement, I was also able to witness how only some of these women were brought to the limelight by the organisation and the media, which had been very active during the 2007 phase. Despite the term ‘gender-neutral’ being associated with the 2007 phase, the primary focus was on the male leaders. Therefore, I wanted to know more about these women and wanted to understand their experiences which have so far been side-lined. This became more crucial as some of the men interviewed during the fieldwork said that the women participants only made ‘noise’. Such statements like

calling the women participants as noisy or demeaning their participation as a place of gossip trivialise their contribution. Aparna Rayaprol's 'Feminist research: Redefining methodology in the social sciences' (2016) suggests that the objective is to shift the focus as those relegated to the margins are brought to the 'centre', thereby essentialising the 'trivial'. The fact that women have been a part of the movement since the initiation of the demand made me try to understand who these women were, in what capacity had they participated and how their experiences have been within the movement. While a comparison between the two phases is inevitable in my study, I intended to re-visit the Gorkhaland movement through the narratives of the women from both the phases of the movement. The diversity in their experiences of the movement in terms of time (more than two decades of gap between the two phases), their socio-economic history and the region they inhabit have shaped a new reading of the movement.

I followed the snowball sampling method as the respondents were often referred through an intermediary or by their relatives. I reached out to my respondents through unstructured interviews, mostly in their homes or in the party offices. Some asked me to meet them in restaurants. I was able to collect a total of forty interviews of both men and women and hold four focus group discussions. Of the total interviews conducted, thirty interviews have become the major focus of this thesis. The study was conducted in the regions of Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong and was completed in three phases. The last fieldwork was done in 2018 after the 2017 resurgence.

The objective behind choosing the region of Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong lies in the thread of Gorkhaland movement that binds them together since the first major phase of 1986. While other areas, like Mirik and Bijanbari, have also been

affected by the movement, they have not remained the focus of the movement all through the different phases. Additionally, all three regions have their own history with the movement. Kurseong is geographically located closest to the Plains and it is the first large town en route Darjeeling. Moreover, Mirik was under Kurseong before it became a sub-division. I also intended to read the relation of the two subdivisions of Kurseong and Kalimpong with Darjeeling. While Kalimpong was made a district in 2017, Kurseong has remained under Darjeeling. Moreover, the study wished to focus on the hills, where the movement has remained dominant. When I entered the field during my pilot study, my understanding of the region was restricted to its history within the context of the movement. That there existed a certain discomfort within the three regions was unknown to me. While Kurseong has largely been affected by the dynamics of Darjeeling, Kalimpong's history has made it move away from the dominant discourse of Darjeeling. The demand for Kalimpong to be made a district proves this. The final realisation of this came in 2017 when the region was granted the demand. It should also be noted that the formation of the first Tribal Development Board for the various sub-communities started in Kalimpong. While some have seen this move by the State as a means to break the unity of the hills, there are some who saw this as inevitable due to the treatment given by Darjeeling. They referred to this treatment as one given to *kanchi ama ko chora* or step mother's son.

Darjeeling has been celebrated as the cultural and political hub by the Nepali speaking community of the nation. Kalimpong, on the other hand, has been dubbed by many as the education hub of the region, probably due to the number of schools present. Historically, Kalimpong had a strong influence of Bhutan and during the colonial period

flourished as a trade route like Darjeeling. In terms of economy, the region of Kalimpong depends on agriculture whereas Darjeeling and Kurseong have a strong tea-garden belt. Even geographically, Darjeeling and Kalimpong do not fall on a linear route like Darjeeling and Kurseong. Then the question arises as to why Kalimpong plays such a significant role in the history of the movement.

The 1986 phase of the movement witnessed one of the most violent outbursts between the region and the State. It is in this context that Kalimpong truly connects with Darjeeling and the larger issue of the movement. While the region of Kalimpong has been involved in the rise of the identity question before the statehood demand of 1986, my study focuses on the two phases of the movement (1986 and 2007). Given the fact that part of my fieldwork was conducted after the 2017 resurgence, its influence on the re-telling cannot be denied. The power struggles within and outside of the region had suffered a number of backlashes. As a result, the history of the 1986 movement witnessed a violent upsurge that the people of the region refer to as a situation that they would never want to see again. The region of Kalimpong was one of the worst-hit in 1986. With the state's curb on the movement and the internal power struggles, people spoke of a time when no one was sure who the enemy was.

I had heard the stories of the 1986 movement and its repercussions from the elders of my family. Places like *Bijanbari* were considered to be one of the most notorious places during 1986. Kalimpong also grew in prominence due to such activities, especially the massacre of 24th July or *Shaheed Diwas*. The shooting of the protestors on 27th July 1986 by the forces became a catalyst for the movement to go forward. The struggles with the State and those amongst the party members resulted in the loss of many lives. The

day is now observed as martyr's day and those who had fallen are remembered. It is with these images and stories that I entered the region of Kalimpong.

While I had visited Darjeeling and Kurseong quite a number of times, Kalimpong was relatively an unknown place to me. It was for this reason that I chose to start my fieldwork here. The first day in Kalimpong was meant for exploring the town and trying to get some information on the GJM party from their party office and local bookshops. The bookshops became a part of my regular visit as it was a place that people would come together and discuss political issues. I spoke to a bookshop owner, who was also a freelance journalist, on the movement and it was through him that I was introduced to my respondents. He told me that as there are many students working on this issue and that people are now aware that research was happening on the movement. I also asked a college student to be my mediator so as to get a better access to the people. The student was associated with the regional party Jan Andolan Party (JAP), which had come up as an opposition to the dominant party Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) and was dubbed as a party led by the 'intellectuals'. Kalimpong has been the base for the party since its inception and is led by Ex-MLA, Dr. Harka B. Chettri.

As I started my interviews, I had to go to various party offices to meet the members. This is the post-2017 phase of the movement and there existed an air of mistrust amongst the people. As the phase reached its inevitable demise, there began a struggle for power within the region. The leadership of Bimal Gurung that had called the people for a strike when it began was missing during and after the 2017 phase. As a result, a new leader emerged with the support of the State. One of the repercussions of this alliance was that the Gurung loyalists were completely pushed to the margins. Before I entered

my field, I was told that those who did not switch sides had police coming to their houses for raids. While some said that it was a rumour, others believed it to be true and this had an impact on my interactions with my respondents. The credibility of this rumour can be contested but its effect was visible. When I went to the party offices of dominant parties like GJM, the discomfort was obvious. My respondents, who had spoken to me in a welcoming manner before the 2017 phase, now chose to completely avoid the topic.

In Kalimpong, the scenario remained the same. My visit to the party office of the GJM led to my interview with their general secretary but when I tried to speak to the other women party members, especially those from the women's wing, I was told that they did not have anything new to add and whatever their leader has said should be enough. While they did not act hostile, they were clearly uneasy with my presence, which may have been caused by the aftermath of the 2017 phase. The day I had gone to meet them, they were celebrating International Working Women's Day. On the podium, there was a woman addressing the congregation. I assumed that she was the head of the women's wing of the region which was later confirmed by one of the members. As I introduced myself to them and told them about my topic and my wish to interview them, there was a lot of discussion between the members and their head. In the end, I was told that there was nothing new that they could add. This was in stark opposition to the reception I received when I met GJM party members in Kurseong in 2016.

Ultimately, the changes noted amongst those belonging to the dominant party helped me. I was able to broaden my horizon and was able to include minor parties that had participated in the movement. The region of Kurseong was primarily divided between two dominant parties, the GNLF, and the GJM. Therefore, my introduction to

the minor political parties never took place. While their names were familiar to me, I was limited by my knowledge of the political history of the region and also by my mediators, who were acquainted with these dominant parties. This situation changed when I started my interviews in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. With the discomfort looming between the members of the dominant parties, I started enquiring about the other parties. The political organisations that were willing to speak to me were Jan Andolan Party (JAP), which is primarily based in Kalimpong and the other was the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist (CPRM), with its headquarter in Darjeeling.

While I was able to meet members of the dominant parties, their unwillingness to answer made me feel that perhaps the location also mattered as most of the interviews were conducted in the party office. The Darjeeling CPRM respondents chose their house to conduct the interviews, which I think put them at ease to talk on the issues. Additionally, the pressure on the dominant party by the state seemed to be much stronger than it was on the other party. Unlike Kalimpong, the region of Darjeeling seemed inaccessible. The spotlight on the region as the cultural symbol for the insider and as the tourist hub for the outsider can be read as a reason. The people I met were not very comfortable speaking on the issue. While those who did not belong to the political area saw the movement as a hurdle due to the continuous *bandh* yielding no result, others spoke in terms of their party agenda. In Kalimpong, the respondents came from diverse areas and so were willing to speak on issues within the region. Moreover, meeting the survivors of the 1986 phase and speaking to them about their experiences provided a new light to the movement and the leadership. One thread that remained the same between all the three regions was that of disillusionment. With every call for the demand, people

came out and with every pact between the leaders people stopped hoping for the fulfilment of the demand.

While the primary focus of the study was the ‘Hills’, Siliguri became an ‘accidental’ site that I found during my library work. I was able to meet women students and participants of the movement, who spoke about their experiences during the 2007 phase when Siliguri became a ‘battleground’. In the University of North Bengal, students spoke about their experiences of exclusion within the university space during the 2007 phase and the environment of fear that existed in Siliguri due to the statehood movement. While the respondents in the university were a mixed group, they helped in structuring the questions that were used in the fieldwork. Moreover, interviews of a few women participants residing in Siliguri provided a critical understanding of the 2007 phase as most of the violent resistance to the movement took place in the plains.

The role of being an outsider and an insider brought in different perspectives in my fieldwork. While my knowledge of the local language did enable me to access some locations, like the library and party offices for my interviews, it also limited my entry to others like the tea garden. Most of the party offices are located in main towns. I was able to extensively work in such places. The rural locations like the tea gardens were not accessible to me as the people helping me conduct these interviews were also of the opinion that I should meet only the ‘educated’ section. There was a continuous emphasis on the word ‘educated’ and almost all of my respondents told me to interview people who were ‘educated’ as they had a sound knowledge of the movement. Moreover, accessing the tea garden or villages was difficult as I did not belong to the region and

was treated as an outsider. Those who agreed for the interviews specifically asked me not to use their names and so I have used fictitious names to maintain their anonymity.

Since the initiation of my fieldwork in 2016, I have had to grapple with the issue of not being a native of the region. While I may have my maternal roots in the ‘hills’ and know the language, the fact that I was not born there and live in Kolkata is looked at with suspicion. Even as I conducted my interviews, I was acutely aware of this difference and would often be ready with the answer before the question was asked. Sometimes this difference was looked in a positive manner, in terms of an outsider being interested, while some saw it with suspicion. Even my dressing was commented on as being ‘very Bengali’.

Being constantly spoken about my ‘difference’ and my need to establish some similarity so that my respondents felt comfortable, I tried to read my own reactions to the respondents. As Sandra Harding in “Is There a Feminist Method?” (1987) suggests, the researcher should “...be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter...” (Harding, 1987: 9). The cross-examination, which I faced in the course of my fieldwork, might have been uncomfortable for me but my previous field visit had aided me to understand the stress of my presence for my respondents. This clarification of my lineage became so naturalised for me that there were times when I spoke about it without any question from the respondents. To me, the fear of being considered a Bengali by my respondents, and be shut out from any conversation was a constant worry. This influenced my pre-conceived notion of how knowing the language and having one’s ‘roots’ could give an easier access. Rayaprol (2016) has discussed that the role of the researcher is that of a learner who listens to the field, thereby breaking the hierarchical

structure. It helped me to unlearn my understanding of accessibility and navigate my relation with the respondents. It also helped me question my privilege. It also helped me in knowing my respondents better as there was a common ground of mutual learning between the researcher and the respondents. This further adds to the self-learning as K. Suneetha Rani in *Identities and Assertions: Dalit Women's Narratives* (2017) also asserts the “rediscovering of the researcher through the eyes of the researched.”(2017: 41).

My position as a researcher, who knows the language but does not ‘belong’ to the region brought out different reactions from the respondents. While some sought to ‘educate’ me about the movement, others chose to be discreet. This was especially visible in terms of the violence of 1986. The discussion on the 1986 phase was chosen by many to be dismissed as a dark past. Those who did speak about it preferred to speak only about their political activity. Violence on women was almost always dismissed with an acknowledgment. My presence also made them to ask me questions about my objective. I entered the field with the expectations of being an observer but that also underwent a change when the women started asking me questions such as why have I chosen such a topic. Suddenly, I was no longer a witness to these narratives but a participant. These women also asked me for my support as they narrated their experiences. The constant need for my nod or affirmation was present all through the interviews. It felt almost like a demand from the respondents as they would often look at me for a response. They added that as I did not belong to the region, I could provide an outsider’s perspective to their re-telling. It also meant that my position served two purposes for them, first as an individual who needed to be educated about the history of the movement and second as being able to provide an unbiased opinion. As Rayaprol

explains “the researcher’s own identity and how it is perceived by the researched significantly influence the ethnography as well as the analysis emerging out of it.” (Rayaprol, 2016: 383). Moreover, my presence also influenced their re-telling as they had to incorporate my limited knowledge of the region and the movement.

The data collected spanned over three years, as I spent two months in each phase of my fieldwork. The changing political scenario made the data more diverse than I had anticipated. Meeting the same respondents after the 2017 phase, I noticed a shift in their behaviour towards me and the issue of the demand. The field had also undergone its own change during my second visit when I was able to observe the steady change in power. The Municipal election was likened to a *khata kholyo* or opened business, as the Trinamool Congress (TMC) or AITC (All India Trinamool Congress) led state government won in Mirik. This challenged the authority of the reigning GJM. While the GJM won, the absolute majority that it had enjoyed was broken. The rallies by the TMC were seen as a foreboding for the movement and the party. The houses that I was staying in Kurseong for the duration of my fieldwork were associated with the GJM and so were not very comfortable with my suggestion to approach the GNLFF members as the latter was supporting the state government in the Municipal election. This was seen as a betrayal to the history of the movement and the demand. I was allowed to converse with the family about the two phases, their experiences and their views on the political scenario of the region through unofficial ‘chats’ over household chores.

My third and final visit was delayed due to the resurgence of the movement in 2017 and I was told by my contacts not to go there till the situation became normal. The field was significantly different due to the shift in power within the party after the 2017

phase subsided. The situation post-movement was etched by fear and the ones who were once free to speak to me asked me to talk about anything but the movement. I found it difficult to engage in conversations with respondents, specifically those belonging to the dominant parties. The families I lived with during my fieldwork in Kalimpong and Darjeeling were willing to discuss their opinions on the movement but did not have official ties with any political organisation.

I was able to collect a total of forty narratives from both men and women involved in the movement from my three field visits. I was also able to collect four focus group discussions. While all the respondents belong to the region, some have completely left the movement; others have chosen to change their support according to the change in the political power in the region. There were some who left the region because of the backlash received after the fall of their party. As a result, I have tried to bring all of these diverse elements in the form of my respondents. The objective was to make my respondents as varied as possible, as the movement itself is more than three decades old. Moreover, I have also tried to read the term participation from different lens as not all women interviewed have ‘actively’ participated in terms of their visibility. The demography of my respondents can be loosely divided on the basis of categories like those that have remained loyal to one party, those who had moved to another party, those who participated but were never recognised, the politics of marginalisation practiced within the movement and how it has affected the women involved and the issue of conflict and trauma faced by each of these women depending on their loyalty to the party.

The diversity in the socio-economic status has also been noted. While all the women belong to the upper and lower middle class, some of the women respondents

belonged to the marginalised economic background but have since moved up due to their political participation or marriage. Anonymity was a common thread as all of my women respondents wanted their name to be not disclosed. The male respondents, however, were more comfortable and did not have such reservations.

The initiation into my third fieldwork began with my first interview in Siliguri. My respondent came from a family of CPI (M) supporter, who had to forcefully migrate to Siliguri during the 1986 phase out of fear for their lives. I was interested to know how their experience differed from the popular notions of celebration of the 1986 phase as a symbol of united Gorkha resistance. As I entered the house, my respondent introduced me to the rest of her family. I was introduced to her by her relative, who was an acquaintance of mine. As a result, I was introduced and accepted within the circle of her family. I was acutely aware of my own position as a researcher during my conversations. My respondent's constant reference to her statements as not being very informative, for my study, made me realise that my position as a researcher becomes my primary identity to my respondents. This issue continued to resurge all through my fieldwork.

While reading the movement, I had often chosen to look at the dominant parties involved in it. This field visit brought in diverse participants of the movement. The CPI (M) family was never a willing participant of the movement. The backlash they faced from the community during the 1986 phase left a psychological imprint on them. While my respondent did believe in the demand, she refused to join as she felt that it would be disrespectful to the hardships that her father had suffered. Living in a small community outside of the region presented as a disadvantage to her family with the resurgence of the movement in 2007 as they were being forced to join the movement. When my respondent

refused, she was treated like an outcast and had a fall out with a local woman leader. In the end, she joined the 2017 phase but as she mentions, her joining was due to the stress that her family had to go through. I was introduced to a woman leader through her, who became my next respondent. They were unsure about my objective when I went to their house. Even when my mediator explained to them about my work, they did not approve of my coming. I realised that my clothing and the fact that I came from Kolkata made them uneasy. They asked me if I was a reporter and continued to check if any of their names would come in my writing. My mediator helped me to put them at ease yet I could see that they kept looking at my notes all through the interview (I was not allowed to audio record the conversation).

Darjeeling brought a different experience with it. When I spoke to women from minor political parties, they called me to their house for the interview. These women were able to tell me their personal stories after I clarified that their names will not be used in any of my writings. They trusted me and soon some of their family members joined us and spoke on the issue. Their interview lasted for more than an hour and tried to include me in their conversation. This was in stark contrast with the people I met from dominant parties where my respondents were not comfortable. Even their answers overlapped. One of the reasons can be the pressure that had suddenly engulfed the region after the change of power. The discomfort they faced due to my presence made me reflect on how the answers given by them may have undergone some editing.

While the objective is to read women's experience within the context of the Gorkhaland movement, a detailed discussion on the existing literature to formulate the method of the study becomes crucial. Based on the secondary sources cited above the

framework for the fieldwork was devised. This enabled the assimilation of data and its analysis.

As the study explores the narratives collected to re-read the movement, a closer reading of literary texts as one of the devices used to establish the issues of identity and belonging is also addressed. Language as one of the markers of identity for the community and the history of the *Nepali Bhasa Andolan* or Nepali Language Movement in the region marks the relevance of such texts in the identity narrative existing in the region. Then the history of the region becomes relevant as most of the texts discuss the nature and the experiences of the people residing in the region. The region becomes a living entity which encompasses all its elements. Just as women are the ‘other’ half of the movement, who have not been ‘documented’, the region and the movement are active agents who have helped in moulding the experiences of these women.

The region and the texts are read from the lens of gender as one explores the various utterances that arise from it. The present chapter provides the foundation to read the history of the region and the movement which further leads to the examination of its literary representations of these concepts and if there exists a gendered lens to it. The next chapter engages with the literary representations and their gendered reading and further explores the category of Indian Gorkha woman, whose experiences provides insightful tools for the re-reading of the Gorkhaland movement.

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Chapter 3

Region, Representation and Gorkha's Daughters

The present chapter discusses two aspects that have been crucial in the movement- the region, which is central to the movement as a geographical location and a cultural marker, and the literary texts that have been a dominant form of articulation in the identity discourse. These two aspects are not only interconnected but also are closely related to the movement. Darjeeling, as an identity marker in the movement discourse remains dominant even in its literary depiction. This chapter examines the history and the mutual influence of these two aspects and attempts to read these from the lens of gender.

In order to engage with the question of identity in the context of gender, the chapter traces the emergence of the region, namely Darjeeling, as the symbol of the demand for autonomy and links it to the movement that changed the course of history of both the region and its inhabitants. The region and the movement become the background in which questions of identity and belonging are discussed using the lens of gender. The objective of the study is not to question the movement and the demand but to pose questions that initiate a discussion on the gendered influence on factors like identity and belonging. The chapter begins with a detailed reading of the region through the lens of its colonial heritage and its continued influence on present.

This chapter discusses the journey of the formation of the region of Darjeeling and the role Nepali language has played in the quest for recognition by the nation. Therefore, along with the history of the language movement and the significance of translation of texts into English, some literary texts will be taken into consideration to

understand how the questions of land, belonging and identity have been addressed, and if there exists a different reading from the perspectives of women writers. While the texts discussed here cannot be considered the accurate representation of the rich Indian Nepali literary history, they shed light on the issues that the community has witnessed. Further, it also enables a gendered reading of the texts and its connection with the region.

The position of the region as being synonymous with the identity of the Nepali speaking population in India could be understood based on the establishment of Darjeeling as a district and its position through the various colonial documents. While the community is scattered throughout the country, the question that arises is, how did this region become a symbol of assertion for the Indian Gorkha community? In this regard, the need to understand the role of Darjeeling, not only in identity formation but also in the resultant movement, is crucial. While colonial documents do speak about regions like Kurseong and Kalimpong, the discussion of Darjeeling somehow subsumes the identities of these regions. Even the literature on the movement makes Darjeeling the symbolic and geographic representation of the assertion. The chapter also seeks to examine how Darjeeling itself becomes a separate entity that plays a crucial role in constructing the Gorkha identity and also the colonial legacy that Bengal does not want to give up. Moreover, one geographical space encapsulating the diverse history of other regions and its inhabitants has to be critically analysed.

The catalyst of the 2017 resurgence of the Gorkhaland movement was the compulsory implementation of Bengali language in the schools of Darjeeling by the State. This decision was ensued by massive protests and demonstrations by the Nepali-speaking population. These public rallies carried posters like *Matribhasa Hamro Pran Ho*

(our mother tongue is our life) (“West Bengal: Stir in Hills over ‘imposition’ of Bengali”, 2017). In one of the casual discussions during my fieldwork, I heard a respondent remark how this move by the state was meant to curb the position of the Indian Gorkha people so that they would be forced to study the language of the outsiders instead of their own. Another respondent commented that she would rather have her son study Bengali as it opened more avenues for her child’s future. Although she was worried that she will not be able to teach it to him, she agreed that this language would benefit him in the future. Interestingly, she also added that this move was a clever ploy by the state to further cripple the demands of the Gorkhas. In the end, she said that while her son would be able to learn Nepali from his family, Bengali was the language with a better scope.

The demand for separate statehood by various communities witnessed its manifestations in the mobilisation of the said communities against their immediate oppressors. One of the processes of this concretisation was to emphasise the significance of their language. It is in this context that literary publications aid in cementing the identity formation of the community. Since there was a need to establish an identity which was accepted by the nation and also create a distinction between Nepali and Gorkha identity, Ghisingh wished to establish the Gorkha Language. While Nepali and Gorkha were essentially the same language with different nomenclature, the need to rename it was strongly vocalised by Ghisingh. For Ghisingh, any reference to Nepalese identity was considered detrimental to the demand for Gorkhaland. Literature became an outlet for this belief, as Ghisingh refused to celebrate Bhanubhakta, the first Nepali poet of Nepalese origin. He chose to celebrate Agam Singh Giri, a Nepali literary stalwart from Darjeeling (“Push for poet B-day - GTA to celebrate Bhanu Jayanti”, 2014).

The reading of the region and the literary texts from the lens of gender initiates a discussion related to a possible reading of the movement different from the dominant narratives. One respondent referred to herself as a *Gorkhe ko Chori* or Gorkha's Daughter and another commented that she was also a Gorkha. What remains common in the above discourse is the need to connect oneself to the Gorkha identity but Gorkha is a dominant masculinised identity. One can question here, if there exists an Indian Gorkha Woman's identity; if there is one, what position does this identity hold, and how do the women writers and characters engage with this identity in their literary representations. These issues are further discussed with the help of various texts with the Gorkha woman's identity in the centre.

3.1 Understanding the Region

The role of Darjeeling as a symbol of the people's identity can be traced from its colonial history. From the migrant history of the region to its role in formulating a narrative of domination and assertion, we begin to understand its importance in the movement history. This section tries to trace the emergence of the region, its migrant history, its role in colonial economy and its present position.

3.1.1 Becoming Darjeeling

The aspiration of the Nepali speaking community to be recognised as legitimate citizens of the nation has continuously manifested itself in various forms. The fear of the community was not without cause as there was a massive exodus of the Nepali community from Meghalaya in the 1980's. As discussed in the previous section, the Indian Gorkha identity emerged in various forms, one of them being the language

movement. The demand for complete autonomy from Bengali dominance with the formation of the state of Gorkhaland gained strong support in 1986. This movement led to the transformation of the region of Darjeeling from an 'idyllic hill station' to the nucleus of the identity movement. Before reading the region in association with the movement, it is crucial to read its formation and rise as a Nepali dominated space.

Amiya Samanta's *Gorkhaland Movement: A Study in Ethnic Separatism* (2000) interrogates the formation of the region from a historical, geographical and cultural standpoint. He traces the colonial history of the region through its formation, the establishment of its various modes of production, tea and forestry. Samanta examines how Darjeeling has achieved a cultural identity for the people living in the region and how this identity has been used in various movements. Both Aditi Chatterji in *Contested Landscape: The Story of Darjeeling* (2007) and Samanta discuss how various communities settled in the region. Migration was one of the ways through which the region expanded. Chatterji engages with the time period between 1835 and 2000 in the region in order to understand how the issues of ethnicity and migration have helped the formation of the present day Darjeeling. As the need to move away and form a separate identity of the people and the region has been present since the colonial times, it is interesting to read how Darjeeling has played its part in the formulation of the identity question. That the Nepali speaking population in India comprises only of migrants has been continuously debated in relation to the identity question, thereby undermining their right on the land. T.B.Subba in *Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling* (1992) suggests that the push and pull theories of migration cannot be read as the authority on the region's history. Voluntary migration

and the existence of communities as a result of the Gorkha conquest of Sikkim which predated its colonial history cannot be overlooked. Therefore, one cannot claim that the whole community comprises migrants alone. Samanta suggests that Lepchas and Bhutias were present here before the influx of the Nepali migrants but were soon outnumbered by them. Eventually, Darjeeling with the dominance of the Nepali community became the centre for the Nepali language and literature in India. The dominance of the Nepali migrants also enabled the introduction of Nepali as the *lingua franca* of the region, as it became the language of trade.

The publication of A. Turnbull's *Nepali Grammar and Vocabulary* (1923) and the establishment of various journals enabled the growth of a political and social consciousness among the people. One can read how the geographical space of Darjeeling itself became synonymous with the Nepali identity through these developments. Moreover, the region became a space for assertion. The rise of Darjeeling as a central political, cultural and economic space for its inhabitants became crucial in the demand for separation. While describing the rise of Darjeeling as a cultural identity, Samanta also observes that the stand of the Nepalis residing in the region became 'anti-Indian' after Independence. The journals and periodicals published from Darjeeling are referred to as 'anti-national'. What needs to be clarified here is how a legal demand for statehood, separate from West Bengal but remain within the Indian nation, is construed as anti-national. The demand made by the community was never for its separation from the nation. But whenever the demand for separation is made, the State that has always dubbed it as anti-national. Thus, the Gorkhaland movement garnered much criticism in 1986, 2007 and also in the recent 2017 phase.

The prominence of Darjeeling in terms of the identity formation of the people of the region cannot be overlooked. Colonial documents also provide a special status to the region. Interestingly, Samanta reflects on the ‘anti-India’ stand of the region due to its demand for separation from Bengal. He does not state that the demand was for separation from the state of West Bengal, and not the Indian nation. Additionally, it should be noted how the region itself becomes anti-national in this construction. The Nepalis living outside the region were asked to go back to Darjeeling to support the statehood demand. The loyalty of the community is questioned not only due to its roots in Nepal, but also because of its geographical proximity to Nepal and China. The region then transforms from a docile space to a rebellious space which is also reflected on the people. The various lenses, through which the region is looked at, in terms of its cultural, political and geographical significance, are therefore critical to read and understand this transformation of the space from the national to the anti-national.

While colonial Darjeeling is considered a space ruled by the British controlling the native people of the region, it is interesting to read how the intermediaries, especially the middle-class Bengalis, have benefitted from this dominance. Chatterji argues that a migrant community faces segregation and the relation it has with the ‘colonial city’ which is divided into the rulers, ruled and the intermediaries is critical to understand the politics of the region. She tries to read how the landscape becomes a symbol of power for these three sections. While tracing the establishment and growth of British Darjeeling, she also studies the post-Independence era of the region. After Independence, the reins of power shifted from the hands of the British to that of the upper-class Indians who were influenced by the British. They came from the upper strata of the society, mainly

comprising the Indian nobility and the Bengali upper class. Therefore, if we were to read the difference between the Darjeeling of the pre- and post-colonial phases, we should also read the region's growth in the post-Independence stage.

3.1.2 Migrant History of the Region

The study of conflicting historical accounts is crucial so as to understand how each perspective reads the movement. The objective is to understand how the state viewed the demand and how it has been perceived by the people of the region. The issue of migration has always been at the core of every argument against the identity question of the Indian Gorkha community. The tag of 'foreigners' and their history of being ousted from their homes added to the 'fear' of the people. This fear is seen by many as the main reason for the statehood demand. It is, therefore, crucial to understand all these perspectives on the issue of migration.

There are conflicting readings on the reasons behind immigration to the region. Samanta (2000) provides a conventional reading of the various 'push' and 'pull' factors responsible for migration. The advent of the Gorkha rulers brought with it changes in the land systems that led to the loss of land for many. This resulted in people leaving their 'home' and migrating to this region. Additionally, he argued that the rigid caste system in Nepal forced many to move out. The use of Nepali language itself began as a means to bring the different communities in the region closer. Michael Hutt's "Being Nepali without Nepal: Reflections on a South Asian Diaspora" (1997) also discusses this migration from Nepal to India and Bhutan. He observes that two major pull factors enabled migration. One was the acquisition of the region of Darjeeling under British rule

which was turned into a sanatorium, as well as the starting of tea plantations. The other was the setting up of recruitment centres for the Gurkha soldiers. Hutt notes that while they initially migrated only for recruitment, the soldiers would often opt to stay in India after their retirement. As the historical emergence of the Nepali identity in India is being examined, the acceptance of the term Nepali can be considered both as a means of communal identification and as a means of assertion emerging from their continuous marginalisation. He argues that the sense of alienation and discrimination faced by the Nepali community in India and Bhutan can be a reason for the political and ethnic conflict. He points out that while the West Bengal State produced various statistics showing the high number of resources invested in the region for development, it should be noted that the people of the region occupy less of the higher level jobs, which are mostly taken by people coming from outside. In Bhutan, the immigrants were perceived to be more successful and they had developed the region. They were seen as a threat due to their success and were seen in a negative light.

The question of citizenship and nationality for the Nepali community living in Bhutan and India centres on the issue of how they are looked at, regardless of whether they were born within the said country or have migrated from Nepal. It is in this context that the Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 is considered a problem, as it provides the same rights to the Nepalese people as to the Indian Gorkha community. This document has been contested by the Indian Gorkha community as it makes their status as Indian citizens vague. Moreover, the exodus of the Indian Gorkhas from the various north-eastern states of India added to the existing fear of the people. The Nepali language was not added to the Constitution initially because it was considered to be a ‘foreign’

language, and the lawmakers were also concerned if this would lead to demands to include other tribal languages. It was officially added only in 1992.

As Hutt (1997) looks at how the community in India searched for a home within the nation, he traces the trajectory of various instances for the demand of separation. However, the dominance of Nepali as compared to other communities needs to be looked at while reading these instances. The inclusion of other communities within the broader framework of the Gorkhali identity by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) was undermined with the dominance of the Nepali community. The demand for a separate administrative set-up and province, the onslaught of communism in the region of Darjeeling demanding for Gorkhasthan and finally the demand for Gorkhaland led to the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). The notification of citizenship that came along with the formation of DGHC gave rights to the people whose country of domicile was India before 26th January 1950, or who were residents of India for five years before the commencement of the date, or those who were born in India or whose parents, at least one of them, are born in India.

The reasons for migration for any community can be diverse; what needs to be then read, in terms of the movement and the demand, is how each of these perspectives has been used politically to address the issue of identity. The question of original inhabitants has been strongly debated by the Bengalis and Gorkhas of the region. The desire to belong to a region, without the fear of being termed as migrants and ousted from their home, led to the dire need to establish an Indian identity and remove the tag of foreigners or migrants.

It is also important to note how the history of migration has been used to construct the identity of the region. Darjeeling's history as a colonial space that grew into a modern-day hub of trade and commerce has been often used to denote it as a space to be protected from the demand of separation. Statements against the demand like asking the Nepali community to leave the region and go back to Nepal so as to safeguard the region from the 'outsiders' are common in this context. Questioning of the loyalty of the people and the inability of the people to protect the region are also alluded to as responses to the separation demand. The 'fear' of the Indian Gorkha community changing their allegiance to or secede to Nepal if the demand for separation is agreed upon is another argument put forth by those against the state formation. In such a scenario, the region and the people are no longer seen as synonymous. The region then becomes a politically and strategically charged landscape that needs to be protected by the state from the people living there.

3.2 Events Before the Rise of the 1986 Gorkhaland Movement

The movement of 1986 demanding 'safety' for the Nepali-speaking population through their recognition cannot be read as the first instance of assertion by the community. The history of the formation of the region began with the British annexation in 1835. As per the 2009 booklet published by the GJM, *Why Gorkhaland*, the region, though was a part of the Bengal presidency, was always kept away from the Bengal judiciary by the British government. Even with these arrangements, people belonging to the region demanded for separation from the Bengal presidency. The GJM traces the demand of separation from the colonial period to add emphasis to the long struggle that the people have undergone. It is crucial to note these demands as they focus on the

unease and anxiety developing amongst the populace of the region. Townsend Middleton's "Anxious Belongings: Anxiety and the Politics of Belonging in Subnationalist Darjeeling" (2013) refers to it as the 'anxious belonging' that continues to grip the community. The necessity to establish the historicity of the demand not only shows the need to establish a separate identity for themselves and move away from Bengali dominance, but also to prove the existence of the community since the colonial period. Even though the Constitution of India dictates that those who resided in India during Independence were its legal citizens, the fact that the community continues its demand sheds light on the apprehension and alienation still existing in the minds of the populace.

Middleton traces the origin of this anxiety from the colonial period when immigration first started. With the British providing opportunities for the Nepali migrants, they did not make this community British-Indian subjects. She argues that the demand for the state stems from the 'illegal' status that the community still has to contend with. She mentions that her respondents were annoyed, during her fieldwork, when she asked them about their migrant history

Historically, the status of the community has been a precarious one. As Subba (1992) and Middleton (2013) point out, the loyalty of the community was questioned after Independence. The fact that the Gorkhas were instrumental in quelling the 1857 mutiny invoked a sense of distrust amongst the general population towards the community. There were letters urging the Gorkhas to join the nationalist movement, demanding that "...the Gorkhas too should rectify their mistake and help India" (Middleton, 2013: 613). As mentioned before, the community also faced expulsion from

the North-East parts of the nation and Bhutan. Middleton mentions how India refused to provide shelter to the Bhutanese-Nepali refugees. These people were led back to Nepal through Darjeeling. The psychological impact of the fear plaguing the inhabitants of Darjeeling can only be imagined. Therefore, the questioning of these elements, of their loyalty and legality in the nation, added to their fear, leading to the assertion of their belongingness.

The post-independence era saw the re-emergence of the demand; the nation became independent but “...the area once again became a colony ruled by new masters” (Why Gorkhaland, 2009: 3). The demand remained the same, but was taken up by a new political organisation. In 1952, the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) submitted a memorandum demanding for separation and in 1955, there was a demand for the formation of a new state comprising Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Coochbehar Districts. The demand continued to re-surface in 1968, 1981, 1983, 1986, 1998, 1999 and 2005 before the second phase of the movement began. There were new political organisations like the Pranta Parishad and GNLF which took it upon themselves to demand for separation.

The language movement in the region became a landmark moment in the struggle for recognition. Acceptance of the Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule as an Indian language was viewed as gaining a step closer to the acknowledgement of the belongingness of the community. Again, the proponents of this movement belonged to the educated section who believed that language inclusion would lead them to the ultimate goal of recognition. The contestation around the name of the language is also crucial to understand the struggle for identity. Ghisingh believed that the language should

be called Gorkhali as opposed to Nepali. The realisation of this demand came in 1992, but the name of the language remained Nepali.

3.3 The Nepali Language Movement or the *Nepali Bhasa Andolan*

This section seeks to interrogate how language becomes a crucial tool in the assertion of identity for a community. The relevance of the language issue can be seen in the recent resurgence of the demand for statehood, catalysed by the move of the State Government to implement Bengali as a compulsory language in all the schools across the state. Language then became synonymous with the identity of the Nepali speaking population in India. Its recognition as an Indian language was one of the critical victories of the Gorkhaland movement. It is also important to note that this language has always been associated with its roots in Nepal and so has always been considered as foreign. Therefore, it is important to read the *bhasa* movement in order to understand the gradual rise of their identity assertion which ultimately led to the demand for the separate state of Gorkhaland.

T.B. Subba (1992) categorises the Nepali Bhasa Movement into three phases according to the demands of the same- the demand for Nepali as the medium of instruction, its recognition as an official language of the region and lastly for the Constitutional recognition of the language. While the movement for the inclusion of Nepali language in the Constitution began in the 1960s, it was officially recognised as one of the Indian languages in 1992.

While Nepali has been accepted as an Indian language, the isolation of the community through their language takes place even now. The 2017 ruling to make

Bengali compulsory in all the schools in the State was met with severe backlash from the people of Darjeeling. Therefore, it becomes important to understand how the demand for making a language, which is supposedly ‘foreign’, a part of the nation is intricately linked to the question of ‘home’.

While there was a *Bhasa Andolan* taking place in both Nepal and Darjeeling, the objectives of the two were different. The movement in Nepal was against the Rana regime and was mostly led by the Newar community against a threat to the language posed by the government, and the migration from neighbouring regions. The movement in Darjeeling witnessed different communities with their own languages coming together and actively accepting the Nepali language as a unified symbol for the identity of the people.

P.J. Karthak’s “Darjeeling's Nepali Bhasha Andolan, circa 1960s – Part I” (2016) refers to the contribution of Ishwar Ballabh in trying to read the Nepali language and literature within the Indian context. According to him, Ballabh mentions that Nepali was referred to as the language of the coolies. With inward migration and the gradual establishment of Nepali as the language of trade by the migrants and the natives, Nepali grew in its prominence in the region. However, it is interesting to note how the status of a language is also associated with the socio-economic section it is spoken by. Therefore, the language and the community it was spoken by were not considered at par with the colonisers or the people coming from the plains. The need to upgrade the status of the language was crucial so as to establish its recognition. Bhallabh, therefore, points out that introduction of the language within the educational curriculum could be one of the ways in which this desired recognition can be realised. The examples provided by him of

English-speaking Nepali writers further shows how the people and the language evolved from in the region. It also demonstrates the growth of the region from its birth as colonial Darjeeling.

Karthak retells the accounts of the language movement that completely took over the region in the 1960s when he was a school student in Darjeeling. His narration reveals a sense of disillusionment that is captured in the events that he witnessed. This article was originally published in 2005 in the Kathmandu Post. It is worth noting that the situation in Darjeeling was also tense around this time. The questioning of the leadership had begun by then which ultimately led to the next phase of the Gorkhaland movement of 2007 under a new leadership and political party. Therefore, as Karthak re-tells the events of the 1960s, he suggests that nothing much has changed in terms of the State's reaction to a democratic demand made by the people. The State's repressive measures towards the people and the region are actively evident in all the events that happened after the language movement.

How does language become part of an ethnic assertion in a movement? Historically, the influx of immigrants from Nepal for the various employment prospects made the region of Darjeeling one of the major hill stations during British colonialism. The first demand for state separation was recorded in 1907. According to Swatahsiddha Sarkar's "Language and Ethnicity in Darjeeling Hills" (2008), their linguistic assertion has been visible in all of these articulations. He assesses that the demand for separation based on ethnic consciousness depended largely on the growth and development of Nepali language and literature (Sarkar, 2008: 87).

Sarkar observes that as most of the communities that migrated to the region had their own languages, there was an urgent need to formulate a language that can be common to all. Thus, Nepali became the *lingua franca* of the region. He further elaborates on how the British and the missionaries enabled the spread of Nepali in India through the publication of books on Nepali grammar and vocabulary. Apart from the contributions of the British that helped to spread the language, indigenous writers like Paras Mani Pradhan and his magazine *Chandrika* strengthened the literary activity in the region. Organisations like *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* established in 1924 in Darjeeling enabled various movements for the recognition of Nepali language. The Nepali language provided a homogenous identity to the people of the region. The author traces how the language played a role in the assertion of the identity of the Indian Gorkha. While language did become a common thread to bring people of different communities together, the marginalisation of communities, like the Lepchas and Bhutias, and their language has been an issue. The acceptance of the state approved Tribal Developmental Boards by these communities in 2013 can be read as their retaliation to this marginalisation.

The Linguistic Nationalism in Darjeeling hills led to the creation of a united assertion demanding for state separation. Sarkar refers to the fact that by using the term Nepali, one does not only mean the language but also the majority of people inhabiting the region. According to the author, the coming together of all the diverse sections of the Hills under the over-arching Nepali identity can be attributed to the publications of various indigenous Nepali literatures during the early 20th century. The literary works discussed by the author are seen as a clarion call for the assertion of the Indian Nepali identity, renewing their loyalty towards Nepali literature and language. The revival of

Nepali literature developed the *bhasa prem* through which one could develop one's identity. Thus, through the development of literature awakened the emotion of Nepali nationhood and self-consciousness. As the article traces the rise of the language movement, it looks at the demands made by various political parties in the post-Independence phase of the Nation. The language demand was always seen at par with the demand for state separation.

3.4 Significance of English Translations

With the continuous resurgence of the demand for separation and its consequent movements, literary texts have become one of the tools for articulating 'Gorkhaness', a term coined by Prem Poddar in "Afterlife of the Original: Gorkhaness (or Indian Nepaleseness) and I. B. Rai in Translation" (2009). Therefore, when such texts are translated into a dominant language, especially English, it not only receives a larger audience but also invites discussions about the socio-political issues surrounding the community. When a text receives international recognition, its reach also increases. Kiran Desai's book *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) brought a larger attention to the region and the movement when received the Man Booker Prize in 2006. The movement formed the background of the text though it was not the main focus of the novel. The Kalimpong massacre of 1986 was highlighted in it, which brought a wider awareness amongst the readers. As a result, the depiction of the movement in mainstream literature was hailed as a form of recognition of the region and its people to a larger audience.

However, this representation of the people and the region in the text faced serious contestations as being wrong in many ways. The fact that the native characters were

shown as mostly illiterate in stark contrast to the educated, elite central characters was criticised. As N. Chaturvedi in “The Inheritance of Stereotype” (2006) points out,

The picture one gains of the Nepalis of the Darjeeling hills from Desai’s book is of a community that is poor and illiterate – perhaps even insignificant – in its entirety. Out of all the Nepalis we meet here, it is only the tuition teacher, Gyan, who is educated; but lest the reader sees him as a learned, ambitious young man, the author makes it a point to show the ‘reality’ of his existence – the poor, sordid environment of the Bong Busti to which he belongs. In the detailed description of the surroundings of Gyan’s shack-like home, the incongruity of his aspirations is meticulously drawn out. Even his involvement in the Gorkhaland movement is left unexplained, evidently not requiring as careful a treatment as the breakfast served to the character of the retired judge when he was a young student in London. (Chaturvedi, 2006).

Instances like the description of the father and daughter-in-law squatting are indicative of their destitution and poverty adding to the generalised notion of the community. Chaturvedi further talks about how Desai pointed out in an interview that she had tried to capture the parallel “between the Nepali diaspora in India, and Asians, particularly Indians, living and scrounging for work in the US.” (Chaturvedi, 2006). The author argues that while this is represented in the book, its failure lies in its representation of the Indian Nepali community as immigrants in India.

What Desai was able to bring through her writing was a further marginalisation of a community that “has not spoken much for itself through Indian English-language fiction.”(Chaturvedi, 2006). The fact that the movement has been trivialised in the book is also a matter of concern. Chaturvedi argues that the entire novel presents the movement’s only contribution is in making the hills a site of violence and torture. Desai attempts to recreate the atmosphere of the uprising, and gives a smattering mention of various leaders and treaties, but fails to move beyond the mere ‘concept’ of the movement (Chaturvedi, 2006). The members of the movement were referred to as ‘insurgents’. Therefore, in the text “the revolutionaries here are indeed mere “insurgents”, forming a thrilling backdrop to a love affair. History does not emerge from the text as a reality, but is reduced to a function in the plot” (Chaturvedi, 2006).

In the 2016 Kolkata Book Fair, Mamata Banerjee’s book titled *Amar Pahar* or ‘My Hills’ was released. The description of the book suggests that during the time of unrest in the region and the actions of some people, it was Mamata Banerjee who came to the ‘rescue’ of the region and its people. The book contains a pictorial description of the various accomplishments of the Chief Minister in the region. As the title suggests, the need to establish the ownership of the region is very evident in it. One of the major changes made by Banerjee in the region was the establishment of the various development boards. This book celebrates the achievements of the Chief Minister in the region and romanticises the Hills as beautiful *pahars*. Interestingly, the people of the region are taken as homogenous entities and the hills are taken as synonymous to the people. There are happy and smiling faces throughout the various collages in the book.

The book completely neglects the voices of dissent in the region and focuses solely on the ‘changes’ brought in by Banerjee.

Jayeeta Sharma’s “Producing Himalayan Darjeeling: Mobile People and Mountain Encounters” (2016) refers to the colonial work of Hurry Mohun Sannial, who describes the hill people as lazy and barbaric. She further notes that according to Sannial, meeting educated men from Bengal would have been beneficial to the people of the region. It needs to be understood that the readers of this book were the educated and elite Bengali *bhadralok*, who were trying to ‘emulate’ their English counterparts. Therefore, Sannial’s objective was to make Darjeeling a space for “Bengali colonisation and rejuvenation” (Sharma, 2016: 95) in line with the colonial objective for the region. With the advent of the railways, Calcutta became much more connected to Darjeeling, which enabled the Bengali elite to follow the ‘English path’. With the Bengali elite taking up lands in the region, which were once sought by the English making them white-centric, lessened the gap between the two sections. Many of the Indian elite moved to the region when the Kings of Burdwan and Coochbehar turned the region into their summer homes.

Bengali movies, like Satyajit Ray’s *Kachenjunga* (1962) and Abhijit Sen’s *Bahadur* (1992), show two contrasting images of Darjeeling and its people. While the former is a Satyajit Ray film showcasing the geographical beauty of the region mirroring the emotions of the characters, the latter is a more commercial movie, whose protagonist is a Nepali *bahadur* or guard.

In the opening credits of the movie, Ray shows a series of drawings along with the names of the cast. These drawings are of everyday life in the hills. They depict stories of women carrying loads, of tourists capturing photographs and of different communities. Even the style used for writing the names resembles the Tibetan script. The picturesque locale is explored as the characters walk through the town of Darjeeling. This film then becomes a stark contrast to the other film, which deals with a ‘migrant’ *bahadur* (Danny Denzongpa) who comes to Kolkata for a job. His entry into an affluent Bengali household is seen in direct contrast, as everyone looks at him in shock. For some, it is suspicion while for some others, it is wonder. As the *sahib* of the house enquires the man who brought him, he is told of the *bahadurs*’ absolute loyalty. The *bahadur* often remembers his home in Kalimpong and the family he left behind. There are instances where he is mistreated as he is told to go back to his *desh* or homeland. *Bahadur* is shown to be a village simpleton who is loyal and takes care of his *sahib*’s family in every possible way.

While both the movies show different ways of reading the community, they also portray a serene stereotype of the community. Darjeeling, as the picturesque and quintessential hill-station of the *babus*, draws from the colonial image of the region and its people. An elite Bengali family vacationing in the hills is again seen through this colonial lens. The natives are used as props to naturalise the setting. In *Bahadur*, the protagonist is shown to be an absolute, devoted ‘servant’. It is his strong belief in loyalty that makes him stay with the ‘owners’ even after being continuously humiliated. There is a scene where he makes a man understand how, even though they belong to different places, they are the same. He is shown to be warm and endearing, and also a fighter when

his 'family' is threatened. All this stems from his acute sense of loyalty. The character is always addressed as *bahadur*, even when we are told his name. The word *bahadur* means courage, but can be read here to denote the social status of the person. He is shown to be a kind-hearted worker but a worker nonetheless.

Therefore, the question arises, what happens when a text by an outsider misrepresents a community? The accolades garnered by such texts lead to a larger circulation further cementing the stereotype. It is under these circumstances that an English-translated work of an indigenous writer provides a counter to such stereotypes. Poddar argues, "...salvaging is at the core of the process of translation. This is no nostalgia for a lost original but a gesture towards an afterlife..." (2009: 14). *Gorkhas Imagined: Indra Bahadur Rai in Translation* (2009) edited by Prem Poddar and Anmole Prasad, brings in a selection of I.B.Rai's short stories to highlight issues of belongingness and identity through the everyday existence of his characters.

Indra Bahadur Rai's "Indian Nepali Nationalism and Nepali Poetry" was published in 1994. The time it was published is important because it was after the first phase of the GNLF led Gorkhaland movement which resulted in the formation of the DGHC. Moreover, as the title suggests, the reference to the Nepali community living in India as Indian Nepalis instead of the popularised 'Gorkha' by the movement indicates the stand that Rai had taken.

He interrogates the notion of Indian Nepali nationalism, and analyses the concepts of the nation and sub-nation. He argues that while officially India is considered as one nation, there exist many nations within it. Therefore, the 'Indian Nepali nation' refers to

people who are ethnically and linguistically of Nepali origin but are Indian citizens. Here, he juxtaposes the concept of a nationalist with that of a patriot; while officially both the terms are taken as synonyms, he questions if being patriotic can have other meanings that go beyond the nationalist reading. He argues that the ethnic and linguistic consciousness that the Indian Nepali community can also be read as patriotism. He suggests that one can become a pan-Indian nationalist only by first loving one's own national people and one's own nationalist community.

The need to be able to provide justice to the works that are ethno-patriotic in nature is important. He proposes that ethno-patriotic literature needs to reflect on how there is uneven development in the nation. Furthermore, he argues that the people who refer to the Indian Nepali community as migrants should know that they came with the land. He quotes many poets like Bhanubhakta and refers to their works where *Bharat* or India is celebrated. Poets like Jnandil Das, who was one of the Joshmani saints, worked in Darjeeling and was part of the movement against the caste system, superstition and animal sacrifice. Each of these poets has celebrated India in their writings.

The division between the history of Nepali poetry in India and Nepal is distinguished. While poetry in Nepal was written by the Brahmins celebrating the kings, poetry in India was written by the common soldiers and labourers who had to travel a lot. Thus, the context of their poems used to be about their activities. The two forms of poetry popularly used were *sawai* and *laharis*. The former was a folk metric rhythm, while the latter was in the form of popular songs. The latter was mostly used by the tea plantation workers and mostly associated with hardships. Poets like Pandit Dharanidhar Sharma brought in the fervour of Indian Nepali nationalism in their works.

I.B. Rai interrogates how the Indian Nepali nationalism has vociferously been articulated in the literary works that have been published. He argues that not all sections have been equally represented within the nation. As a result, there has been a rise of sub-nationalism amongst those who have been marginalised. He points out that there is a misconception about the ‘immigrant’ status of the community as they had always been a part of the land. Rai traces the origin of Indian Nepali writings and compares them to the origin of their Nepalese counterparts. He argues that while in Nepal such texts were mostly associated with the official courts, in Indian Nepali, the writings were done by men in the army who often wrote about their experiences. He quotes other writers like Agham Singh Giri who have contributed to Indian Nepali writing, making a space outside of its Nepalese roots. He points out that these writings also spoke about Indian Independence but due to their limited reach, the language and its writings have been relegated to a minority status. In his poem “War and Warrior” (1970), Giri urges his people not to participate in ‘others’ war’. He explains that if the people of this nation do not take the Indian Nepalis as their own people, they should not fight and die for these people. The community is seen as only ‘mercenaries of war’ (Rai, 1994: 154). It is, therefore, according to Rai, the duty of the poet to tell the truth and help people reach a place where ‘all’ belong. While Indian Nepali poets have been able to talk about the various forms of social injustice present, the final place of belonging for the community is still missing. He adds that one must find their ‘own country and nation’ to reach that final place (Rai, 1994: 154).

The position of the language in the two countries (Nepal and India) differs as it enjoys the status of dominance in the former and that of a minor in the latter. Poddar

(2009) refers to Deleuze and Guattari to further analyse the position of the ‘minor’ literature. He explains that it is through the presence of such literature and its location that a new consciousness is formed. Therefore, the “‘major’ tradition... can never be revolutionary” (Poddar, 2009: 31). These stories then are no longer disjointed narratives but form the history of the people. Therefore, the role of translation becomes crucial in not only ‘educating’ the outsiders about the ground realities that the community faces, but also in acting as a counter to its misrepresentation by ‘outsiders’. It also addresses the historical issues surrounding the ‘migrant’ status. The texts being discussed here belong to both Nepali and English languages. While some have been translated to English, there are others written by contemporary writers in English. The issues of migration, identity and their relation to land have also found voice in poems, where the angst of being treated as ‘outsiders’ is spoken about. Texts of poets like Geeta Chhetri’s *Gangotri Dekhi Ganga Samma* (2012), Lalita Sharma’s *Naudangeako Satya* (2016), Lakhidevi Sundas’ *Sambhavit Aarth: Samprit Ekaant* (2000), and Kamala Rai’s *Samayka Pailaharu* (2014) have discussed such issues from various perspectives. The poems chosen for discussion are taken from the above mentioned anthologies. Both women and men writers have been considered here to understand the themes that link the texts with one another.

3.5 Reading the Texts

The texts discussed here have been divided on the basis of two themes- migration, and land and identity. Each text has explored these issues and discusses how the region becomes a part of this discourse. The texts discussed here include novels, poems and short stories. The texts discussed here range from novels, poems and short stories.

3.5.1 Migration

The phenomenon of migration has been etched in the memory of the Nepali speaking community in the region. The people who have been often accused of being ‘outsiders’ due to their migrant history have had to cope with constant allegations mostly used to discredit their claims to the nation. There are few variations of this migrant history. The first is one of travel to *Mugalan*, a term used by Michael Hutt in “Going to Mugalan: Nepali Literary Representations of Migration to India and Bhutan” (1998) or the land of the Mughals as India was often referred to in many of the Nepali literary texts, coming from both sides. The second is the claim of the authors and the participants of the movement that they came with the land when it was ceded to the British, thereby legitimising their claim on the land. One aspect that remains pertinent in the reading of migration is the movement that the community had undergone. An example of this can be taken from Prajwal Parajuly’s *The Gurkha’s Daughter* (2012), which is a collection of short stories where the dispersed community is linked through its location on the map. The sheer diversity of the regions forms the landscape of migration. The concept of migration again varies depending on the reasons behind it.

Hutt discusses the literary representations of two places- the *muluk* or the hills that is the place of origin and the *Mugalan* which is the abroad that they have migrated to. These two places, the place of origin Nepal and the place of settlement, India and Bhutan, have led to the birth of many literary texts that is not only crucial to Nepali literature but that has also led to the emergence of the need to create a new home and a new identity outside of the *muluk*.

As he draws on the relation between Nepal and *Mugalan*, he traces the history of the migration of the community to India and Bhutan. The defeat of the Gorkhas by the British East India Company halted the annexation of nearby lands and also led to the heavy taxation on the existing lands, which resulted in people's migration to British India. We notice in the demography of the migrants provided that the rigidity of the rituals became somewhat fluid with a mixed community living in these regions. Nepali becoming the common language and the shared experiences of the people belonging to a minority community further cemented them under one group. It is in this context that he brings in various literary sources that have documented these migrations to demonstrate how a collective consciousness emerged amongst the people whom he broadly refers to as 'non-Nepalese Nepali'. He provides a number of literary text references where the motif of immigration is used. While the term *Mugalan* itself is derived from 'Mughal rule' which symbolises the richness and opportunity of the land, the term has since then been used for any region outside of Nepal that has been a destination of migration for the people of Nepal. Both India and Bhutan have been associated with this term.

I.B. Rai's writings have dealt with this concept of migration. The three that will be discussed here are, "Jaimaya aphumatra Likhapani aipugi" or "Jaimaya alone arrived at Likhapani" (2009), "Hamijastai Mainaki Aama" or "Maina's Mother is just like us" (2009) and "Jarr: Euta Bhayekai Katha" or "Jarr: A Story that Happened" (2009). All the three short stories address the issue of migration, but from different vantage points. While the first discusses the journey of an ex-British Gorkha family settled in Burma after the colonial government had given up their claim on the land, the second story is of a nameless woman who had travelled to Darjeeling along with her family with the hope of

a better future. She remains worried about being called an outsider and starts imagining it. The last story is about two lovers, who are outcast by their community, and decide to go to *Mugalan* to begin a new life.

The trope of migration is used in all of these three narratives but all signify different emotions. In the case of Jaimaya, Subedar Shibajit Rai, who was in the British Gorkha Army, and had chosen to settle in Burma along with the family. The move of the government to leave the station and make the troops fall back to Manipur left people like him with no choice but to at least reach Likhapani, Assam to ensure safety. The house that symbolised safety to them had to be abandoned. Like many others, the family had to undertake the arduous journey to shelter with a few valuables. The journey is intricately described. While it begins with a high note of celebration amongst peers, the distance slowly leads to the fall of the group. With people dying due to diseases and accidents, the number starts to dwindle slowly. The Subedar's family is also affected as his wife dies of sickness and he dies trying to cross the river to reach the destination. At the end of the story, it is only Jaimaya who reaches Likhapani all alone.

Rai's 'Maina's Mother is just like us' depicts how *Mugalan* (Hutt, 1998) is looked at by the people who have travelled to India, specifically Darjeeling, for livelihood. Hutt describes the story as one that "expresses the historical and cultural consciousness of the poorer sections of Darjeeling's émigré Nepali community: farmers and workers driven out of eastern Nepal during the past few centuries by landlessness, poverty, and unemployment." (Poddar, 2009: 28). While the story revolves around the hardships that Maina's mother undergoes as a migrant searching for a livelihood in Darjeeling and selling vegetables on the side, Rai points out how difficult and alien she finds the new

place. While Darjeeling is shown to be verging on saturation with no job prospects, the fear of the migrants to be asked to leave looms over the story. There is even a point where some men are seen discussing that there is no scope left in Darjeeling and how migrating to Assam may be a better option. We see Maina's mother imagining people coming to her and asking why she has come here. Maina's mother's fear can be seen as representing the fear of all migrants. He emphasises that the need to move away and carve out a separate identity became crucial for them, which in turn led to the rise of the Gorkhaland movement.

“Jaar” in Nepali means a paramour. The story revolves around a man and woman, who are in love with each other but are unable to marry due to societal customs. The two families form a *mitini* bond, which symbolises that they become one family and so no marriage can take place between them. The protagonists of the story, Thuli and Rudramann, fall in love and profess their feelings before the ceremony takes place. Rudramann is in the army and is posted outside, so he is unaware of the ceremony. Soon Thuli is married to Harshajit and begins her new life when Rudramann returns and asks her to run away with him. She decides to stay with her husband and tries to kill Rudramann, only to be caught by her husband and his family. Rudramann is dragged to the court and it is decided that he would fight for his life against Harshajit. Thuli, who is marked for adultery, becomes an outcaste for both the families. Her mother-in-law asks her to leave and her family severs their ties. They would allow her to live in the premises but will have no contact with her apart from providing food.

The court scene becomes poignant in the narrative as we see how the two are judged for their ‘crimes’ by the people present. Rudramann loses his caste marker and is

treated as an outcaste, accused of incest for having a relationship with a woman from a *mitini* family. Women jeer at Thuli for her 'sins' and when she retaliates, they demand that she give up her marker of marriage. Thuli tears her *pote* strings, which is equivalent to a *mangalsutra*, in anger. Rudramann agrees to fight for his life against Harshajit. He runs into the forest to escape and Thuli joins him there. As they are on the run, Rudramann saves Thuli from a tiger. Harshajit sees this and announces that Rudramann really loves Thuli. He forgives the two and asks them to return. Rudramann explains that the two are now outcasts in the society and have no future there. Instead, they wish to go to a new place and start a new life there. The story ends with them travelling along with people of different occupations on a path which would lead them to *Mugalan*.

These tales of migration are mostly associated with forceful migration. The three stories are linked through the protagonists' need to search for safety. They move away from their original place for a better future. Each protagonist is forced to leave due to some external factors. While the reason for Maina's mother's relocation is never clear, it can be assumed that the myth of *Mugalan* as the land of prosperity may have been a cause. For the other protagonists, safety becomes the key for their movement. The fear of raids by the outlaws forced the Subedar family to leave their home and move to Likhapani. It is mentioned that they were the last to leave the place as they kept hoping that the situation would change. The journey is used as a symbol to show the eventual downfall of the family. Interestingly, the journey has a healing effect in the story about the lovers who finally travel to *Mugalan*. Travelling to India for these two meant a new beginning.

Rai also touches upon this issue in his novel *Aaja Ramita Chha* or *There's a Carnival Today* (2017), originally written in 1964 and translated by Manjushree Thapa in 2017. We are introduced to Janak, who expresses excitement when he touches the land for the first time on his visit to Nepal for marriage. He is born in India but he romanticises the land of his 'roots'. He even hopes to go and meet his blood relatives one day. This comes out as he shoos away a peacock that was following them on their journey back. He says, "we are compelled to leave our homeland, but that peacock also wanted to go to the land of Mughals, just like us! I chased him right around! I saw to it that he went back to Nepal. I left him with a stern warning: 'we humans, we have to move abroad, but if the flora and fauna of the forest also start going abroad, how long can Nepal last.'" (Rai, 1964/2017: 15).

In Parajuly's "No Land is Her Land" (Parajuly, 2012), we are introduced to Anamika, her father, and her two daughters, living in a refugee camp in Nepal. The story deals with the exodus of the Nepali population from Bhutan during the 1990s. Anamika is the protagonist, whose husband had left her and ran away due to his 'anti-government' activities. Failing to produce the required documents, she is pronounced as illegal and is sent to the refugee camp along with her father. The narrative keeps moving between the past and the present. We see her being harassed by men, who call her an outsider. She is continuously objectified and is leered at. She retorts but is met with accusations of being a woman of loose morals. We are told that she has been living in the camp for twelve years, has two daughters and has been married twice. Her failed marriages are used to question her character by the men. She is described as beautiful, which attracted unwanted attention. Anamika is blamed for all that transpires. She married the second

time, as a second wife, for security but is mistreated by her husband for bearing him a daughter. It is only when there is a scope for the resettlement of the family in America that her husband comes back to her. The story ends with four of them taking an official picture and appearing as a 'happy family'.

We are introduced to Anamika and it is through her that we are told about the Bhutan exodus. She was born in Bhutan but she tells the interviewing officer that she does not wish to return as they had treated her as an outsider. The story's title further emphasises her quest to belong which is never successful. She exclaims to the Bhutanese police that she was born here and it is her home, the finality with which they ask her to leave because of her husband's role in illegal activities cuts through her claim. In the refugee camp, she marries a native to elevate her family's position from the refugee status, but that also falls apart. She continues to struggle and does not give in to the taunts by men, but also carries the burden of being called 'loose'. Even her father chides her for marrying twice.

The issue of migration is also seen in Manohar Thapa's *The Unaccepted* (2016) novel, where the protagonist migrates to Delhi to study. This form of migration, though very common, continues to highlight the process of movement that began from the colonial period continuing even now. This constant process of migration, willing or forced, adds to the historical narrative and has often been used to question the legitimacy of the community in the political discourse of a movement. A similar reading can be made of Geeta Chhetri's "*Vartamann*" or "*The Present*" (2012) which focuses on the political issues that have gripped the world in contemporary times. Chhetri discusses the issues of terrorism and diseases like HIV that have taken over the world. It is with these

that she also brings in the subject of unemployment and equates it to an epidemic. She elaborates that the educated youth have no option but to move away from their homelands in search of jobs. The issue of employment is especially important in the context of Darjeeling as many young people have chosen to travel overseas for jobs. The hope of forming a separate state also entails with it a hope of providing employment for the youth. The fact that the region has witnessed a high growth of such migration leading to the rise in the number of parents living alone also added to the demand of statehood as a means to bring back their children.

In another poem, Chhetri takes examples from everyday lives to emphasise the trauma of being treated as aliens in one's own land. "Kaslai manparcha ra?" or "who likes it?" (2012) begins with a description of essential pairs, where one cannot exist without the other. She takes examples from everyday life to emphasise how being called an 'outsider' or 'displaced' affects the people. The poet poses rhetorical questions and continues to ask 'who likes it?' She takes examples like being the only player on a field or being sent to an old age home when one has a family or being a leader in a place with no people or living in a village without the 'villageness' or without any sympathy. All these instances are followed with a refrain of 'who likes it?' The poet uses this line to try to harp on the emotions of those who are called 'displaced' even when they belong to the land and have a home and a family residing there. This ending harks back at the continuous allegations made on the community using their 'migrant' status.

In Rai's "Astitva ko Khoj-Jiyaiko Sandarbma" or "Search of Existence- In the Context of Being Alive" (2014), the poet refers to herself as a lost person. As she recounts her past, she sees the many battles that she had won and the many achievements

she had collected. This claim falls short as she realises, “tara hera ma bhannu paundina-ek muthi maato uthaira- ‘yo mero ho’” (but see I cannot pick up the soil and claim that this is mine) (Rai, 2014: 27). She remembers fondly that the only dream she used to have was to have a home but even though the markers of her family are present all through the land, they are treated as “lawarish laash” or unclaimed bodies.

In “Sapana” or “Dream” (2016), Sharma describes what she saw in her dream. She says that there were many things that she saw in her dream. In her dream, she saw “sae barsha lhamo, afno jaatiya itihās dekheko chu” (the century-old history of the community) (Sharma, 2016: 80). She lists out the names of famous Indian Gorkha figures, like Saheed Durga Malla who sacrificed his life for Indian independence, Ram Singh Thakuri who composed the music for the national anthem, Dal Bahadur Giri who was an Indian freedom fighter, Mitrasen Thapa, a prominent Nepali literary figure and folk singer, and Damber Singh Gurung, the founder of the Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League (ABGL) also known as All India Gorkha League (AIGL), which has had a strong influence on the community. All these names are seen in stark contrast with her own life when the poet explains how in her dream she was able to travel all through the country which was filled with light but the hills (Darjeeling) were enveloped in darkness. She ends with the realisation that this *grahan* or eclipse was engulfing the region. The poem pays homage to the rich history of Indian Gorkhas. As she recalls the prominent figures of the community, she also erases the question of belonging that has plagued the community. When she talks about the century-old rich history of the community, the presence of such names cements their legitimacy. The darkness only covering the “...paharki rani...” (Sharma, 2016: 81), Darjeeling, while other places are filled with

sunshine refers to the inequality the region has faced. This stems from the constant marginalisation of the community and the region, which have always been a part of the nation.

Rai's "Itihaas ko Aankha" or "History's Eyes" (2014) likens history to a camera that takes a picture to store it in its album. The poet feels that the camera is only photographing a certain type of people and so comments "...itihaas le kaile purna satya bhandaina" (history never tells the complete truth) (Rai, 2014: 111). She goes on to elaborate on the kind of people who are photographed. These people are 'tall' or are in front, while those at the back are never considered. These people are able to come to the front by climbing over the ones at the back. These people push and shove people to get their photograph taken. She brings in the image of horse-riding as she shows the two opposite groups. The one riding on the horse thinks himself to be sitting on a throne, while those from the opposite side, 'we', are meant to run after them. There is a sense of angst as she says that these people do not even turn around to look at them. She urges that we should stop running after them so that they are attacked by the dogs or are thrown stones at by boys. She poses rhetorical questions highlighting the frustration of being treated as 'secondary'. She wants history to look at 'real' people.

The issue of migration has been continuously discussed throughout the history of the movement. It has been used by both factions to further their arguments of either against or for the demand. It is in this light that the stories and poems discussed above bring in the various emotions associated with migration and its repercussions in the minds of its people. While for some migration builds the image of an unseen homeland, which is treated as sacrosanct as we see in Janak and his need to send the peacock back to

Nepal, migration is a case of betrayal for others and so they never wish to go back as it is in the case of Anamika's expulsion from Bhutan, and Rudramann and Thuli's boycott from their community. Again, we see a similarity between Janak's family's migration and Maina's mother's for a better future. The poems discuss the aftermath of this history of migration, where they are still treated as outsiders in their own land. The feeling of alienation and forceful migration for better opportunities that still haunt the community is spoken about. It is under these circumstances that poems like "Sapana" and "Itihaas ko Aankha" become an answer. The celebration of prominent Nepali figures and placing them in the history of the nation cement the existence of the community against their imposed 'immigrant' status. Similarly, Rai's poem is a satire on the treatment of the community as secondary and the image of horse riding can refer to the Bengali tourists, who are also seen as oppressors.

3.5.2 Land and Identity

The significance of land has been present in all of these Nepali literary writings. Land has been associated with home, safety, protection, and prosperity. Migration becomes the means to achieve these aspects. The importance of land becomes especially significant when we discuss the position of a 'migrant' community. What then does this quest for land signify in the mind of the people who are swamped with the fear of losing it? Land also becomes the space of contestations and struggle. The roots of ancestry are evoked to lay claims on the land and enforce legitimacy. The importance of land within the discourse of identity has been an ongoing one. With authors like I.B. Rai writing about such issues even before the 1986 Gorkhaland movement to contemporary writers like Manohar Thapa writing about it in 2016, we see that the importance of land remains

the same. Along with such writings, poems by women writers are also looked at as they navigate through these concepts.

“Ratbhari Huri Chalyo” or “The Storm Raged all Night” (2009) begins with a husband and wife braving the storm and trying to keep their family safe. The house and the shed are seen to be affected by the storm and their safety falls on the parents. Throughout the night, there is a fear of landslides that may claim their house and their lives. The parents have no name and are referred to as Kaley’s mother and father. The husband accuses his wife of bringing them to this place. The readers are informed that, the family lived in the town prior to this, which was considered relatively safer from natural hazards. Their current home is away from the town causing inconvenience for all.

For Kaley’s mother, the land meant better possibilities, but the storm ruins it. As she looks back at her life after the move, she realises that coming to this land has led to nothing but problems. She thinks about their condition and realises that it has become worse than what it was in the town. Her dream begins to shatter and she thinks about leaving the place. Her job as the milk-seller was only possible by living on the two acres of land, but she decides that she does not want her family to live in this constant fear. As she decides this, she begins to calm down but, in the end, we see a change. As she speaks to another woman, who talks about how safe living in the town was, Kaley’s mother retorts saying, “Oh disasters happen everywhere...”. She goes on to say that “...It’s true, the storm did do some damage. But we’ll put it right now. It’s not an impossible task, I have my house, my cowshed, my cows in the shed. And there’s the land, with thirty or forty bamboo trees, and fig trees and fruits trees too. The rows of cucumber stretch up to

the sky... How much damage can a storm really do after all?” (Poddar and Prasad, 2009: 126). In the end, we see her running back to her home and to her family.

This change in Kaley’s mother suggests the importance associated with land in her life. As she compares her ‘assets’, we are clearly reminded that it is hers. Repetition of the assertive word ‘my’ as she describes her property provides her with a sense of pride. We are told in the beginning that her fields were destroyed by the storm, but as she begins to explain about her property, she talks about her crops. While we understand it is exaggeration, we begin to understand how poignant this description is for her. Even with the destruction, she dreams of rebuilding her life and the fear of the natural calamity seems to dissipate. As she goes back, she gets the tools that her husband had asked for to mend the house and the shed. This also symbolises the rebuilding of their life that had been questioned for some time but invariably remains constant.

The question of identity and belonging is read from the other side in Rai’s “Ghosh Babu” (2009) and Parajuly’s “Let Sleeping Dogs Lie” (2012). Both the protagonists are of a non-Nepali descent but are residents of the region, with a successful business. As the title suggests, Subodh Ghosh or Ghosh Babu is a Bengali man, who lives in Darjeeling and owns a dry-cleaning shop. Parajuly’s protagonist is Munnu, who owns a paan shop. While the two come from different socio-economic backgrounds, they are the minority in a region dominated by the Nepali community. Both have good relations with the community, but it is when the people turn on them that they have no choice but to give in. The role of Darjeeling as a place with multiple narratives is captured in such stories.

The narrator in the first story is a Municipal Commissioner and Ghosh babu goes to him for help. The people working in his shop were demanding a raise and decrease in the workload. The position that Ghosh babu comes from is also reiterated as he describes how he had come from Calcutta and washes the clothes of all of Darjeeling. As he mentions that even his wife washes the clothes, the narrator imagines that the clatter outside is the laughing at the remarks made by Ghosh babu. As the negotiations with the workers progress, we are given a glimpse into what kind of an employer he is and how his employees treat him. While the class hierarchy is shown through the dialogues exchanged, we are also shown the helplessness of Ghosh babu. He eventually gives in to the demands when the case is tried in front of the Labour officer. The narrator is filled with remorse as he is told triumphantly about this victory and comments “the law had weighed up the workers’ rights, but it had not weighed the mind’s affections.” (2009: 98).

In the case of Munnu, who was born in Kalimpong, the stability that he enjoyed from his business did not make him forget how he was perceived by the people of the town. The author explains that despite knowing no home other than Kalimpong, he knew he would never totally belong here, that he would always be considered an outsider. Listening to his customers’ problems without asserting his superiority would be the easiest way for him to be one of them-or come close to being one of them (Parajuly, 2012: 48-49). The narrative of belonging that we witnessed in Maina’s mother’s life takes on a new approach in the character of Munna.

The story of fear may be similar, but the history of the two characters is different. This fear becomes ‘real’ when he accuses a customer of stealing. This customer, a young girl, was a regular at his shop. She would often steal items and Munnu would turn a blind

eye. Munnu told his landlady about the issue but feared the repercussions if he told the girl's mother, Mrs. Gurung. The landlady promptly agrees to talk about this on his behalf. The aftermath of this discussion is seen with the mother coming and thrashing Munnu, emasculating him in his own shop in front of a crowd. The kind of slurs she uses is mainly pointed at his religion.

The differentiation between the Gorkha 'us' to the Bihari Muslim 'them' becomes even more evident when she urges the crowd to help her. She says "at least as Nepali people, you should help a Gurkha sister... A Mussalman insults Kalimpong's own daughter, and all you Nepalis do is stand and watch *tamasha*. All of you Nepali coolies should be sent back to Nepal if you can't defend one Nepali's honour when a Bihari insults her daughter." (Parajuly, 2012: 59). While his landlady, Dr. Pradhan, is not as vocal as Mrs. Gurung, she also maintains this difference. When Munnu remarks that he cannot complain of the stealing to the mother, she remarks "hire a runner- a starving boy from your hometown." (Parajuly, 2012: 56). Munnu is acutely aware of this distinction not just based on money but also based on the roots. In the end, Munnu apologises to Mrs. Gurung and takes the blame of wrongfully accusing her daughter.

Such reversal of the major versus minor discourse and breaking of the region into multiple narratives further diversify the issue of identity and its linkages to the need to belong. Ghosh babu demonstrates this need to belong by using a Nepali proverb while trying to negotiate with his workers. Munnu does this by not discussing his economic position and also by taking the blame so that his business does not suffer.

Rai's *There's a Carnival Today* (2017) encompasses the themes of land, identity and belonging through the story of Janak and his family and their engagement with these issues. Janak is an educated and respected man in the town and we see the rise and fall of his image throughout the narrative. By the time the novel ends, he is shown to be a shell of his former self. The Darjeeling shown is of the 1950s after the Independence, and we are introduced to a myriad of characters who inhabit this place. Janak dreams of having his own house. He provides the argument that assets can be stolen if they are in the form of money but "... a frozen asset like a house is a thousand times greater...a house will serve his family till the end of time" (Rai, 1964/2017:25). This trope of building is present throughout the narrative. Poddar comments that Rai's style tries to bring together abstract and contradictory ideas about writing and the Gorkha community. Therefore, for the protagonist, the need to own a home must not be read "simply as materialistically aspirational, as a derivative symbol of arrival for the protagonist, but as a measure of dwelling that is at home in history." (Poddar, 2009: 37).

The issue of identity is also discussed here. The Indian 'descent' is focused on when Janak's aging mother asks why the British, who made "cities, roads and building" (Rai, 1964/2017:4) left India. He refers to the image of a thief and explains, "our country is our home. You tell me, Aama, what would you do if a thief enters [it]?" (Rai, 1964/2017: 4).

When he talks to his wife about 'their' claim on Darjeeling, Janak explains their position as the Nepalis of Darjeeling, who are trusted by both India and Nepal, and so they try to win their affections but "...Darjeeling is ours and we are Darjeeling's." (Rai, 1964/2017: 170). He further remarks that even though historically all the shops, houses,

tea plantations, and the flora may have belonged to some other regions and now may belong to the government or the Bengalis or Marwaris, “Darjeeling is ours”. He supports his claim by stating that it “has belonged to those who can plough its grey and red soil and produce food... Whoever this soil gives to, that place is theirs; the rest can only live here in hope.” (Rai, 1964/2017: 170). This need to create the ‘rightful claim’ on the land may have stemmed from Janak losing his business to a Marwari trader. Sita also showcases this demarcation when she has a fight with the trader. She accuses him of coming to their place and sucking their blood.

While Janak may differ in his political stand, Bhudev, a party leader, has a more radical ideology. During a party meeting, while addressing issues like employment, migration to Assam and rights on land resources, he suggests “the peaceful policies of Panchsheel and co-existence are making us warrior Gorkhalis ineffectual and turning us useless. I’ve only ever seen one place where tigers, cat, mice goats, snakes, birds and crocodiles overlook their mutual enmity and live together in harmony. In the zoo below the park.” (Rai, 1964/2017: 67). He tries to provoke the community by criticising the ‘tame’ stance taken by the leaders.

The novel ends with a massacre of the protestors from tea plantations demanding fair wages. The clashes that ensued with the armed forces led to many casualties. Janak’s son is also caught in the crossfire but survives, and later Janak is forced by Bhudev to give a speech defying Section 144. He would be arrested but had no choice but to give in.

Thapa’s *The Unaccepted* (2016) is based on the experiences of a boy, Manish Moktan, who moves to New Delhi for higher studies, and his experiences of

marginalisation. This form of migration for further studies has been taking place from the region for a while. The protagonist mentions that while there are good schools in the region, people have to go to the plains for higher studies. The protagonist is shown to be a Buddhist monk who takes up this life after he undergoes a tragic incident.

The novel looks at the inner psyche of the protagonist as his identity keeps getting questioned by the people he meets. The first instance is in Kolkata when he travels to meet his uncle. He is interrogated by a man on the bus on his 'desh'. This man calls him 'Korian' first and then asks if he is from Assam. This conversation made the narrator, for whom it was the first trip to Kolkata, feel both 'welcoming and alienating.' (Thapa, 2016: 25). There is a poignant moment when he looks at his reflection, trying to ascertain on what makes the others think of him as an outsider. The only difference that he sees is the missing beard and moustache which make him question "does it genuinely claim that I am not an Indian?" (Thapa, 2016: 34). Further he exclaims, "I may look a little different and may belong to a minority but it doesn't imply that I am an alien." (Thapa, 2016: 35). The lack of acceptance of his identity by others, even after being otherwise informed, leaves him crushed and dejected.

There is a sense of difference present all through the text. The description of each city (Kolkata and New Delhi) vis-à-vis his home Darjeeling draws a parallel between the warmth and cold that he experiences psychologically. He experiences the same kind of alienation in Darjeeling when he is made fun of by the locals as they call him 'Chinese'. His anger reaches a point where he asks himself as to why should he always prove his 'Indianness'? This constant sense of alienation develops into suffocation when the protagonist comments on the insecurity that people like him are bound to suffer. He

explains, “The feeling of being unsafe in one’s own ‘house’ is the worst thing a person has to go through.” (Thapa, 2016: 81). This emotion becomes especially poignant when we look at this statement through the prism of the statehood movement. The movement is referred to here through Manish’s uncle, who is a political leader and describes his work as one to get back their identity. We see his uncle trying to coax Manish into joining the movement. Manish forms camaraderie with a family from Imphal, Manipur, who understands the issues that he is facing. The breaking point comes when Manish and his Manipuri friend David are attacked by men, who had earlier taunted them. David loses his life in this incident, which scares Manish. Manish later joins a regional political party, which has been part of the political unrest in the region. Interestingly, his uncle, who has been part of this organisation, had urged him to join earlier but Manish had refused. This organisation is seen to be raising issues of identity assertion in the region. Therefore, we witness how the experiences that Manish undergoes finally culminate into his joining the organisation.

The novel asks basic questions like the meaning of ‘unity in diversity’ and tolerance. The protagonist is put in such circumstances where he has to question how his presence within his own nation is looked at suspiciously. He explores his ‘difference’ and tries to fight this sense of alienation that grips him the moment he leaves his home. His ultimate return is one of anger and frustration, as he is gripped by the loss of his friend. As we see him join his uncle in the fight for identity, we understand the sense of resentment that is being echoed all through the region. While the setting of the novel is in the past, the issues, questions, and the anger remain the same. The demand that was raised more than a century ago has a strong resonance even now. The angst of the

protagonist is perhaps echoed poignantly when he says that his father's death for the nation somehow holds no meaning as he is continuously treated as an 'outsider'.

Chhetri's "Vartamaan ko Aawaz" or "The Voice of the Present" (2012) is an invocation made by the poet to Lord Mahakaal or Shiva, to hear their prayer. The prayer is for the people to find success in their quest for identity. She describes how this struggle is "shai barsha maang ho yo... itihās yasko sakshi cha" (a hundred-year-old demand and history is a proof of that) (Chhetri, 2012: 19). She describes how people from different walks of life have invested in the movement. These people are students and mothers who have been relentlessly taking part in this fight for *chinari* or marker of identity. This continuous struggle has now become an active volcano which cannot be extinguished. She says that this demand is from the heart and cannot be bribed. She prays to God for his blessings to stop the injustice that is taking place against their patriotism, as they are losing their patience.

In "Afno Thalo" or "My Land" (2012), a similar tone as the previous poem is seen. The poet tries to narrate the sense of marginalisation faced by the community. The image of 'home' is present throughout, as the poet navigates and tries to decipher the emotions faced by the oppressed. She gives examples of how one would feel if an outsider came and took over the house. She refers to the different chores of the house which are considered personal and through them, questions the reader. The questions are rhetorical and use metaphors like guests acting as the owner of the house or how the kitchen is taken over by an outsider. She moves on and questions as to how the readers would feel if the benefits from their land, toiled by their ancestors by planting the tea-garden, are taken by someone else. The poem ends on a poignant note when the poet says

who would like it if one has to serve someone else in their own land. There is a parallel drawn between the land and home. Both symbolise the belonging and angst of being treated as second-tier citizens in their own land. The reader is left to ponder over these questions and their relevance as the demand for assertion persists.

Chhetri's "Timi ra Ma Milera Haami" or "You and I Together as Us" (2012) talks about how unity can help the community. Here the poet urges the elimination of differences to project a united front to help the community through language, literature and culture. The love of the *jaati* or community should come before petty discrimination. The poem ends with a strong declaration from the poet, who says "timi ra mo milera haami kehi ta nischai nei garnucha" (you and I together as us will definitely do something) (Chhetri, 2012: 54).

In "Kinaki Malai Ekta Chahincha" or "Because I want Unity" (2016), Sharma uses images of opposites where she is willing to be negative just so that there can be unity. These images are of light and darkness, of abundance and scarcity and of affluence and poverty. The continuous repetition of unity by the poet should be taken in lieu of the contemporary political scenario of the region. While the demand for statehood is supported by all, the presence of different political parties within the region has often led to a collapse of the unity of the region. Therefore, the refrain used by the poet, where she is willing to place herself lower, emphasises the need for harmony for the fruition of the statehood demand.

The celebration of martial attributes of the Gorkha community has often been used to invoke the spirit of resilience in the quest for statehood. In "Bhootpurva Sainik

maathi Aatyachar” or “Injustice on Ex-army Soldiers”, Chhetri (2012) tries to portray the injustice of 9th April 2009 faced by ex-army soldiers, when they were mortally attacked. The poet warns the perpetrators that this act of violence will not only be remembered by the present generation but also by the next generation and retribution for the act will be made. The attack on soldiers, who are imagined as the protectors of the nation, is read as an act of betrayal.

Sharma’s “Aadhikar” or “Right” (2016) sings the unsung sacrifices made by the Gorkhas. The poet lists out the various wars that the Gorkhas have fought for the nation. From the First World War and the Second to the ones fought against Pakistan, Burma, China and Kargil, each has claimed the lives of Gorkhas, but the community is still treated as outsiders. She asserts that “...malai mero dhartima afno chihan chahincha” (I want a mark on my own land) (Sharma, 2016: 19). She asks “...aatma-balidaan ko kaha mulyakan?” (Where is the value of self-sacrifice?) (Sharma, 2016: 20), re-iterating how, even after their sacrifices, they are alienated and have no right on their land. Thus, it is important for the poet to die carving her identity on the land than being treated as an ‘immigrant’ on it.

Sundas, in her poems “Senani Prati” or “To the Soldier” (2000) and “Kargil hai! Kargil!” or “Oh Kargil!” (2000), discusses the aftermath of the Kargil war of 1999. The war affected the region as many of the soldiers who were killed hailed from the region. The first poem is an ode to the martyrs as the poet begins by describing how these men have gone into an eternal slumber at a young age. Their youth had just blossomed and in their search for courage and bravery, their life had left them too soon. She talks about their newlywed brides whom they had asked to wait but had never returned to. These

brides were left behind so that they could serve the country and ultimately sacrifice their lives for the country. They had asked their wives to wait for them so that they could start a new journey together. The promise of a family remained unfulfilled as they have remained only in memories now.

The next poem humanises the region of Kargil as the poet refers to the terrible loss it has caused. The poet begins by saying that she never knew of Kargil before, but it has only brought destruction since its introduction. She equates this introduction to an earthquake which has left only ruin at its wake. Just as the earthquake destroys everything, this encounter has destroyed many lives. It is blamed for taking away lives and killing budding hopes within the blink of an eye. She points out that the calamity did not just touch the lives of the people of Darjeeling, but of the entire nation. Kargil is likened to a murderer, who has reduced the identities of people to martyrs. She ends with the regret of ever knowing the existence of Kargil, feeling that had she not known about it then the tragedy would never have probably happened.

The significance of land and identity has been continuously reiterated through the movement. The need to claim the land is closely associated with the need to formulate not only an Indian identity but also to safeguard it. In the context of literary texts, this discourse has been read through both stories and poems. Both have tried to read this from different perspectives with the end of asserting their belongingness.

The manifestation of this need for recognition is seen from different perspectives throughout the discussion. As the stories taken to analyse are not only about the Nepali-speaking community, they journey through these problems from both within and outside

the region as also of those characters who are a minority within the region. Stories like “Ghosh Babu” and “Let Sleeping Dogs Lie” depict non-Nepali people who reside in the hills. They shift the focus from the marginalisation of which is present in Thapa’s novel to those occurrences of alienation within the region. The notions of unity and identity get skewed as we read these stories. Poems ask for unity in the region, where the poet urges the erasure of differences and joining up to achieve the goal of identity.

Land becomes an important theme in all the texts discussed above. Both *There’s a Carnival Today* and “The Storm Raged all Night Long” discuss the importance of land in the lives of the protagonists. Both Janak and Kaley’s mother dreamt of owning their own home. This dream makes the latter drag her family outside of town, and she chooses to go back though there is a fear of natural hazards killing them. Owning a home is seen as Janak’s ultimate dream that is never fulfilled.

Land and identity are discussed in the poems on Gorkha soldiers and in the poem on Kargil war. The soldiers’ sacrifice for the nation is contrasted with the treatment meted out to the community. While these poems discuss the aftermath of the war in the lives of their families, others discuss how they are still demanding their rights even after offering the ultimate sacrifice. The need to unite and fight becomes crucial for the assertion of the demand.

3.6 Thematic Analysis

The texts discussed here do not directly refer to the movement but discuss issues that have been at its core. Thapa does refer to it through his protagonist, who witnesses the violence ensuing in the region and the eventual realisation of alienation that he has

suffered outside the region leading to his joining his uncle in the movement. The term Gorkhaland is not directly used in the novel but the readers are introduced to the identity crisis and the need to establish one's belonging. Poems like "Sapana" and "Vartamaan ko Aawaz" refer to the demand for separation calling it a hundred-year *maang* or demand. Similarly, Rai's *There's a Carnival Today* (2017) also refers to the identity question. The issues that each of the characters faces in the course of the story is built up to reach the climax of the police shooting the tea garden protestors. Darjeeling here is seen to be witnessing a gradual rise in identity demands which soon manifested as identity movements. We see this when Janak tries to make his wife Sita leave her bad habit of chewing betel nut. He tells her "good habits are as useful as Bihari servants; bad habits are as evil as Bengali masters." (Rai, 1964/ 2017: 31).

Role of the land or *maato* in the texts discussed ranges from a search for a 'new' home within the discourse of security to the protection of this 'home' as it establishes the identity of its people. The texts like "Jaimaya Alone Arrived at Likhapani", "Maina's Mother is Just Like Us" and "Jarr: A Story that Happened" discuss the search for a new home for the characters. All the protagonists had to migrate to the region but what was ensured was the hope of a safer future. The issue of migration has been dealt within each text reflecting on how moving to the 'region' was viewed as a means for a better future. Again, in *The Unaccepted*, the protagonist faces a continuous barrage of questions regarding his identity and is even attacked, when he moves away from the safety of his 'home'.

The sense of alienation and dejection seems etched through most of the writings as poems depict the lack of ownership on the land, for which the poets' family gave up

their lives. The land here symbolises the roots which have taken ground through the sacrifice of the people residing in the region. A claim on the land then becomes necessary as Sharma lists out the names of famous people who had struggled for the land and the nation. The actions of these people and of those from the region are pushed to the margins and so it becomes crucial to spell out their claims on the land through the struggle of their ancestors. This claim is further re-iterated by Janak in *There's a Carnival Today* (2017) where he says that the region or the land has been transformed by their ancestors' hard work. As discussed above, he refers to his home, Darjeeling, being made by his forefathers but what needs to be understood is the role Darjeeling plays in the identity formation of the region and its people. This sense of alienation within one's own land is invoked by Chhetri, where the distinction between the *maato* and home is blurred. One can equate the chores one performs within one's household to the work of their forefathers in the development of the region, and the sense of discrimination they experienced for being treated as second class citizens in their own 'home'. This feeling of alienation and discrimination has led to the demand for separation.

3.7 Gendered Representations

This section tries to engage with the question, if there exists any difference in the representation of the region and the community in the writings of women authors when compared to their male counterparts. While the texts discussed here cannot be considered as a complete representation of Indian Nepali literature, they provide a glimpse of it. In the texts, especially in the poems, the use of 'we' or *haami* as a collective identity becomes prominent. The plight of the community becomes dominant in prose as well as poetry. The characters or the speakers become the medium through which the issues

within the community are addressed. Therefore, Maina's mother or Kaley's mother does not have a name, but the fear of being called an outsider and the need to establish their claim through land is evidently shown. Even in the poems like "Aadhikar" or "Kargil hai! Kargil", betrayal by the nation even after the loss that they have endured to protect the country highlights the narrative of marginalisation that the community faces.

All of the texts by women discussed here are written in the form of poems. The poems chosen do not specify the speaker but focus on the issues that the community is facing. As a result, we see a similar narrative as that of the movement, where the individual is subsumed within the community. Similar to the narratives of the respondents in the course of my fieldwork, an individual's need is seen as a part of the group's need. The issues of recognition, claim to the land and the threat of being ousted are prevalent all through the texts, but there is no reference to any individual who faces these concerns. Rather, it is always the community that has toiled for the land and the nation. One can then ask if the cause becomes greater than the individual, wherein they begin to visualise their needs as a part of the larger landscape.

In some stories, the characters become conduits of emotions that the entire community undergoes. This becomes doubly strained when the protagonist is a woman. For example, we see the issue of migration being discussed through the characters of Thapa's Manish Moktan (*The Unacceptable*) and Parajuly's Anamika (*No Land is Her Land*). While the two characters represent different time periods, the psychological trauma of having to prove one's belonging binds them together. For Anamika, her role as a single mother forcefully displaced from Bhutan and trying to secure a life in Nepal meant the need to get married to a Nepalese man to establish her legality. Even in the

camp, after she is forced by her second husband to leave for not being able to give him a male child, she is subjected to taunts by local boys as well as by other women in the camp. Manish, on the other hand, faces continuous racist comments by ‘outsiders’, which ends with the death of his Manipuri friend. The thread of marginalisation is present all through their narratives, but the form of harassment differs. Anamika is treated as an outcaste by both ‘her displaced people’, who are living in the refugee camp with her and the outsiders. Those living in the camps look down upon her as a woman who got married a second time, and from whom their husbands need to be ‘protected’. The fact that her first husband abandoned the family and her intention of securing her family through the second marriage are completely dismissed.

The role of land to combat the sense of alienation can perhaps be read through the desire to belong as projected by characters of Maina’s mother, Kaley’s mother and Anamika. All three women represent three different circumstances but the role of family remains crucial. The first two are not even given names thereby trying to project them as ‘common’ and making it relatable. Safeguarding their family becomes crucial for all the three characters even as they are struggling with migration. Here land becomes a medium through which belongingness is established. While Kaley’s mother is the only one who actually manages to own a tangible piece of land, it is more symbolic for the other two. For Maina’s mother the region becomes a beacon of hope and so she fears that her family may be forced to leave. For Anamika, Bhutan is her ‘home’ but is forcefully uprooted by the state and she has to migrate to Nepal. Nepal becomes a land of safety for her and so she re-marries in the hope of further securing her family’s future. In the end, as she hopes

to get a refugee status for her family and travel to America, she agrees for reconciliation with her second husband in order to further secure the future of her children.

The questions of what constitutes the identity of a Gorkha woman and which position does she occupy can be seen being debated in literature. As Gorkha women witnessing the issues affecting the community, they voice their sorrow and anger through their writing. These women become spokespersons to reiterate the injustice done to the community. The division between the individual and the collective blurs as these women narrate events. Writing, or more specifically literary writing, can be read as a tool of participation within the movement's narrative. While analysing the various connotations of the term 'participation', which go beyond 'visible' articulations, it can be perceived how the act of writing itself becomes a tool of assertion and participation in the movement, especially for women writers. This varied understanding of the term is further discussed in the subsequent chapters, which try to understand how participation can be read through various lenses.

Writing becomes a tool not only to establish one's participation but also to assert one's identity. The discussion on the Indian Gorkha woman identity is closely interlinked with writing as the women authors project their perspectives on the issues surrounding the region and the community. The lines of demarcation between the individual and the community experience are blurred as the women narrators discuss the issues affecting the entire community. The women writers share their views on identity but clear gender lens is not used to read the identity questions. The subsuming of all other identities within the Gorkha identity is further highlighted in the poems like "Adhikar" and "Senani Prati". Both celebrate the martial Gorkha identity, which is masculine. Therefore, the nature of

protest and participation projected through the writings of women vocalises the dominant discourse of the movement but does not focus on the position of women in it.

Rai, in her “Astitva ko Khoj-Jiyaiko Sandarbma” or “Search for Existence- In the Context of Being Alive” (2014) refers to her family that sacrificed itself for the land yet it cannot call the land their own. She talks about her hope of living forever on this land but she feels that her hopes are dying. She feels that all her emotions have become unimportant. She equates her tears of remorse to sewage water and her sweat of hard work to ‘just’ stains. She ends by equating her life to that of a dead body. What we witness here is the subsuming of the individual within the larger community identity.

The role of the region in literary texts and in the lived experiences of its people remains crucial. As the texts discuss the importance of land and identity, Darjeeling shifts from being just a geographical place to a living entity for its inhabitants. Therefore, it is crucial to read the region as an active participant in the identity discourse. Its historical formation has been discussed above but what also needs to be discussed is its gendered image. The land has always been considered gendered due to its role as a ‘provider’ or a ‘nourisher’. This image undergoes a change when addressed by the ‘outsiders’, citing it as a threat. While the texts discussed above do not specifically mention land or *maato* as feminine, Darjeeling as the over-arching identity of the Hills has been celebrated as the Queen.

Darjeeling, called as the Queen of the Hills, adds to the regality of the region. It is interesting to note that there are two contrasting images that the region is associated with. The first is of the serene beauty which was found suitable and accepted by

outsiders, and the other one is that of resistance, a form of threat that has to be checked. The region has a rich history of grievances against the outside hold on the region. The post-Independence era saw active resistance against the Bengali dominance and the acceptance of the Gorkha community by the rest of the Indian Nation, which was met by strong retaliation from the dominant Bengali community. The demand for separation began during the colonial era, when it was a demand for a separate administrative body.

Therefore, a closer examination of these two faces of the region is required so as to further analyse how the region and its people are looked at in times of peace and resistance. Furthermore, with the continuous reference to its geographical proximity to Nepal, the question of national security has also become a key issue against the demand for separation.

Geographically, the region is surrounded by Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and China. The proximity of the region to Siliguri, which is also called ‘chicken’s neck’ that joins the North-East with the mainland, also makes it a strategically lucrative place. All these surrounding areas make the region highly sensitive. This has always been the counter-argument when the Gorkhas have demanded for separation from West Bengal. During the 1986 phase of the movement, the demand was equated with that of Khalistan, the demand for the secession of Punjab from the Indian nation. During the present phase of resurgence, the Chief Minister accused the movement as being funded by the Nepal Maoists (“Darjeeling blast: GJM writes to Rajnath seeking intervention”, 2017)

Additionally, claims were made in both the phases that if a separate statehood was given, it would lead to a forceful invasion and occupation of the region by Nepal posing a

threat to the Nation. In other words, it is only under the ‘protection’ of the ‘mainstream’ West Bengal that the region can be safe. This is in stark opposition to the treatment given to the region and its people, when both agree to the ‘accepted’ notions set by the dominant powers. With phrases like *pahar hasche* (Hills are smiling) and *amar pahar* (My Hills) often used by Bengali authorities, there is a sense of possessiveness and dominance over the region and its people.

As discussed above, the texts analysed here do not represent the complete Nepali literature but provide a glimpse of the concepts like identity and migration in women’s writing. Furthermore, the lens of gender enables a critical reading of the term of the Indian Gorkha Woman, which is at the epicentre of the study. The literary texts have been used as a tool to understand this category in this chapter. A re-examination of the existing movement history is possible only by studying the lived experiences of these women. In order to accomplish this objective, it is crucial to first understand the term within the context of the study.

3.8 Understanding the term ‘Indian Gorkha Woman’

The relationship between the history of the region and its people and that of the movement evolved into the celebrated identity of the Indian Gorkha. This identity was meant to perform a dual function, to evoke respect from the nation and to create a distinction between the Indian Gorkha and the Nepalese people. Moreover, unlike the term Nepali, which could lead to alienation of the community due to its link to Nepal, Gorkha was read as ‘familiar’. The above sections sought to historicise the region and the movement as they not only form the background of the study but also become critical

factors in the demand for identity. The united Gorkha identity espoused by the leadership sought to bring in all the sub-groups, existing in the region, under one identity.

The celebration of this identity is associated certain markers with it. These markers, like the *kukri* or a knife often wielded by the Gorkha soldiers or the acts of valour, especially in the context of armed forces were popularised in the movement. In 2007, the song *Bir Gorkhali* by an indigenous rock band Mantra used similar markers serenading the brave Gorkha. This song became popularised to the point of becoming an ‘anthem’ of the 2007 phase. It was further performed by Prashant Tamang after he won the reality television show. Interestingly, this song refers to the speaker as the son of Gorkha or *Gorkhali ko choro*. It proceeds with listing the traditions and festivals that the community celebrates which is a matter of pride for the speaker. The pride of being the son of Gorkha is equated to being the son of the soil. Here the reference to soil and land equated to home, which the ‘son’ belongs to.

In the above discussion Gorkha or Gorkhali becomes an identity of celebration and also of struggle. While the identity is often contested, especially after the establishment of various Tribal Developmental Boards based on the diverse sub-groups in the region, it has been popularised in the discourse of the movement. Although this identity has been a crucial marker for the community in the struggle for identity, it represents only half of the community. The military Gorkha is always a man. It is within the creation of this *Bir Gorkhali* or Brave Gorkha image of a warrior man that I wish to examine the position of the Indian Gorkha woman. The celebration of the ‘Gorkhaness’ by the son should not negate the daughter but as the song proudly calls out “I am the son of Gorkha”, one has to ask where is the Gorkha’s daughter. A quick search on the internet

of the word Gorkha shows pictures of the Gorkha regiment of the Indian Army or of men waving *khukris*, carrying the banner of Gorkhaland. Contrary to this popular image of the men, the image of the woman is often represented as a tea-garden worker plucking leaves.

This image of the ‘docile’ Gorkha woman seemed to have undergone a change during the 2007 phase, as a large number of women ‘actively’ participated in the movement. Two actions during this phase were crucial in establishing the ‘position’ of the women in the movement. First was the shaving of the hair by a group of women supporters for the demand and second was the ‘visible lead’ that the women’s wing of GJM undertook during massive rallies. The title of the chapter was taken from one of the supporters, who added that the women were equal stakeholders of this movement as they too belong to this land. While the women referred to themselves as “haami pani Gorkhe ho”, or “we are also Gorkha”, the image of the Gorkha woman was missing from the discourse of the movement. The visibility celebrated by the women cadres of the GJM seemed inadequate as there were limited representations in the chain of leadership. Moreover, the women’s wing seemed to rally itself with the objectives supported by the leadership. It was added by many respondents that all the problems existing in the hills can be sorted with the formation of Gorkhaland. Another slogan that was used to unite the women in the 2007 phase was “haami Gorkhe ko chori ho” or “we are Gorkha’s daughters”. This slogan was used mainly to evoke their strength to defend the men in the movement. The role of the women’s wing as defined by their own members was to safeguard the male leadership. As one respondent remarked, the women leading rallies would not receive strong reaction from the forces unlike their male counterparts.

Another statement often mentioned was, “haami yo maato ko ho” or ‘we are of this land’ that most of the respondents replied when I asked them the reason for joining the movement. This claim to the land by tracing their ‘Gorkhe’ ancestry became a common thread throughout the interviews. This Gorkhaness or Gorkha consciousness was often derived from their father’s identity, and so when I asked them for their views on the existence of the Gorkha woman identity, it was often subsumed within the masculine Gorkhaness. While phrases like “hamro Gorkha bhai-baini haru” or ‘our Gorkha brothers and sisters’ have been a part of the movement discourse, we do not find any specific reference to the Gorkha woman. The given role of the woman is to protect her husband and brother. Formation of the state was seen as the ultimate goal and so, all the other issues became subsumed within the movement.

What we witness in the re-telling of the movement by the women participants is a glimpse of their private memories which have been excluded from the dominant public memory. As the public memories get disseminated through the male leadership, the role of the women is mostly featured as supportive. This glaring omission from the movement’s narrative is addressed through the interviews collected here. It also points to the fact that their role remained the same despite the ‘visible’ participation of women in 2007. This further broaches the position of Gorkha women in the larger context of the movement. All the women interviewed believed in the demand for recognition and wished to be addressed as Gorkhas rather than Nepalis but could not answer what ‘made’ one a Gorkha woman. While a Gorkha man is represented through a martial and masculine image, the Gorkha woman is often not represented at all. The popular image of the women from the region is that of a tea garden worker and more recently as a part of

the rallies demanding Gorkhaland. As a tea garden worker, she is depicted as a woman plucking tea leaves from the plantations situated at the foothills. This image has been widely circulated, and it represents the quaint colonial image of the region and its people. While the prevalent Gorkha image counters this ‘quaint’ depiction, it still addresses only the men. Therefore, we ask questions such as what the characteristics of a Gorkha woman are and where is she positioned in the movement narrative. Does she only perform supportive roles? If not, what is her role in the movement? How does she perceive herself within the movement? It is with these questions that the study engages in the subsequent chapters.

Veena Das’ “Communities as Political Actors: The Question of Cultural Rights” (1999) discusses how the individual is often overshadowed by the community, as it is through this identity that the individual enjoys its benefits. We witness the same in the context of the movement where the community becomes larger than the individual identity. While the respondents did discuss some aspects of their personal experiences in the interviews, the continuous shift to the pronoun ‘we’ was evident. One can read this as stemming from political gains or safety from persecution or strong belief in the demand, but what is obvious is the need to remain a part of the community. The treatment of those not supporting the movement, during both the phases, provides us an understanding of how an ‘outcast’ is treated. Das discusses the role of culture in the community and how it binds the individual within its boundaries. She remarks that the public culture has always been dominated by men. Women have always been present, but have been a part of the private and it is only by making their narrative public that one can address the heterogeneity of a community. As a result, the Gorkha cultural image of a strong man

protecting the nation becomes the symbol for the community, subsuming the question of gender in it. The movement at its core is defined through this Gorkhaness, which is predominantly male, and so, irrespective of any differences, one has to accept it to remain a part of the community. Das asks a pertinent question, "...does this shared culture homogenise the community to the extent that other definitions of culture and community are effectively denied and silenced?" (1999: 468).

The role of language in various identity struggles has been crucial. The recognition of a language, its impact on the community and the building of its history through an expanded repository cement the claims of recognition of a community. It becomes all the more significant for a community which geographically resides within the proximity of a border-system with which it shares a history. The contested nature of the existence of this community becomes the theme of much of its literary texts. Literature then becomes a tool through which the daily life and struggles of the inhabitants are addressed. Through the stories told here run the common themes of identity and the need for assertion. They shed light on the mundane and make it relevant for the contemporary political crisis. The stories analysed here belong to different timelines but their relevance and criticality are what join them together to form a dialogue on the issues plaguing the community.

If these texts are successful in discussing relevant issues, then why is there a need for them to be translated to other languages like English? The argument for this need is that there exists a monologue about such issues by those 'outside' the community. As a result, there is a misrepresentation of this crisis. It is, therefore, the objective of these translations to reach a wider audience and make them aware of the perspective from the

other side. While the Sahitya Akademi has published a number of Nepali books, the limited readership due to the language barrier severely affects their influence. Translations have enabled to overcome this obstacle. In such advancement, the limited availability of translation of the works of women writers also needs to be addressed. The total translations of Nepali literary texts have been limited, but those that are available are by men. These are stalwarts in their field and would obviously be focused more on, but there are women writers who have voiced the same opinion and are still unknown to the larger audience.

The subsuming of the individual within the community by women writers, especially in the case of identity and recognition, has been strongly visible in the movement's narrative. For example, one respondent commented that once the demand of statehood is met, all other issues will be solved. This statement demands a further reading of the position of women within the movement's narrative. Their assertions through writings add a new level in the understanding of the term participation, especially for the women authors. The next chapter will discuss the experiences of women within the Gorkhaland movement based on their personal narratives.

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Chapter 4

Women in/as ‘Movement Family’³

This chapter intends to analyse the important issues related to the Gorkhaland movement from the perspective of the women respondents. As has been mentioned earlier in the thesis, the objective of the study is not to critique the movement or the demand but focus on the narratives of its women participants. Hence, these issues become the links that help us understand the role played by the respondents in the movement irrespective of their political allegiances.

The chapter focuses on the different experiences that each respondent has undergone and intends to structure patterns of connection that formulate this re-telling. As each respondent is linked through their participation in the movement, the construction of the familial bonds, espoused by the leadership and supported by the people, becomes a point of contrast and similarity. As the concept of ‘movement family’ is discussed, the need to establish these links is crucial. Therefore, out of the thirty narratives collected, common issues are chosen. The personal experiences may have been different for each respondent but all the narratives add to the movement narrative and enable the closing of the ‘gaps’.

Both in 1986 and 2007 the movement witnessed the rise of one party respectively; the GNLFF in 1986 and GJM in 2007, which dominates the narratives of the movement.

³ This term is taken from the interviews collected, where all the respondents used the image of family to describe their relations with each other. This constructed familial bond became crucial in the movement narrative of support and betrayal. Here the concept is read from two perspectives, first, the dynamics they shared with all the members of the movement and second, re-telling the movement narrative from different vantage points. This concept is further discussed in the chapter.

As a result, this chapter seeks to go beyond the dominant narratives and tries to include those women belonging to other lesser known or less influential parties in the region. The narratives are divided on the common threads of family, role in the movement, conflict, trauma, identity, space, migration, marginalisation and position of leaders. Each of these themes has been looked at from the perspective of women, but not just those who belong to the dominant organisation. Therefore, the analysis of each theme intends to represent other possible perspectives.

Time also acts as an important variable in the reading of these narratives. What has to be remembered is that both these phases occurred even before the interviews were held. Thus, each of these respondents had to go back to their past to recall their life events relevant to the interview. While some of the respondents chose not to speak on certain aspects, factors like political history, party allegiances, and family history influenced responses to other questions. It should also be noted that the existing tension between certain political parties in the region, and the relation between the region and the state also affected these narratives.

A total of thirty women's narratives were collected from the regions of Kalimpong, Kurseong and Darjeeling. While some were 'visibly' a part of the movement, others have an indirect participation by supporting the actively engaged family members. There are also some who have moved away from the movement after the first phase and those who became a part of the movement incidentally. The term 'visible' refers to the active participation, where the respondent was a part of a mass organisation and participated in various political activities. Therefore, the fundamental concept of 'participation' will also be looked at from different standpoints. The underlying premise

in understanding these narratives is that even if factors remain the same, no two people can have the same experience. The diversity in such lived body experiences of each of the women respondents enables a narrative that forms and highlights different facets of the movement narrative. As a result, the objective is to form these individual narratives and the experiences into a concrete structure, so as to formulate a ‘new’ reading of the movement and re-visiting the existing sources to pave way for a ‘new’ interpretation. The emphasis on the ‘new’ does not mean that these experiences never existed before but rather that these ‘stories’ were relegated to the margins to create a space for the leadership of the movement, which has always been predominantly male.

Issues such as family, identity, violence, space and migration are studied from the perspective of gender so as to formulate a narrative that provides an insight into the experiences of women involved in the movement. As the study looks at the two phases of the movement; 1986 and 2007, the comparison between these two phases is also taken into consideration. Both phases have witnessed changes not only in the execution of the movement but also in relation to the people and the state. Therefore, the chapter wishes to engage with this difference through the lens of gender. The issues that came up during the interviews with women participants were identified and have been addressed to formulate the larger narrative of this chapter. These personal narratives then became the basis on which a ‘new’ reading of the existing knowledge of the movement was formulated.

The thirty women respondents belong to the regions of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. These three regions, popularly known as ‘the Hills’, have collectively been the epicentre of the movement. Each of these regions has its own history and the experiences of the women from these regions differ depending on these individual

histories. The movement itself has undergone a change from the ‘violent’ 1986 phase to the ‘peaceful’ 2007 phase. Therefore, the women have witnessed this change and have been a part of the movement either during one phase or both. These women belong to different political organisations and thus the need to engage with different perspectives is integral to this study. The Gorkha National Liberation Force (GNLF) emerged dominant in 1986 and in 2007 the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM). Therefore, the chapter is built on these threads not only to engage with the gaps in the existing archives on the movement but also to provide an analytical reading from a gender perspective.

The issues or linkages discussed have been read in connection with the concept of ‘movement family’. These women become a ‘movement family’ not due their inclusion in any organisational structure but through their narratives. The trajectory of this ‘bond’ follows a similar understanding of the constructed Gorkha identity. As discussed before, the Gorkha identity was often used by the ruling political organisation to achieve dominance and also to alienate those who posed a threat. The familial bond was also selective as it formed connections only amongst the supporters of a particular political organisation.

The chapter has been divided on the basis of the issues that were commonly discussed by all the respondents, irrespective of their political allegiances. These women are all linked through their experiences in the movement and so there were two aspects that were particularly highlighted in the interviews- the concept of pain, which included not only the one inflicted by the state but also the one caused by their ‘own’ people. This idea becomes more relevant as it haunts the people in their quest for recognition. The

questioning of their loyalty and their belonging to the nation add to the burden of pain that the people are met with.

Another aspect that came up during the interviews is the construction of the Self, the Other and the Others within the context of the movement. The respondents have created their self or their image in the movement in relation to not only their contemporaries in the region but also their ‘enemy’ that is the outsiders. While the Other, in this case the state, has always been an oppressive enemy, the Others are simultaneously an enemy and a ‘family’.

The presence of the personal and the official demands a closer reading of the term ‘movement family’ from the lens of gender. The existence of the Self in the movement discourse and its interactions with the Other and the Others has to be read through the discourse of ‘movement family’. These respondents are not only part of this imagined bond individually but also as a group. Their interconnectedness with each other through their common history of participation informs their re-telling.

4.1 Constructing the ‘Movement Family’

The term ‘movement family’ refers to the constructed familial bonds formed due to the participation in the movement. One of the factors that have influenced this ‘bond’ is their political affiliation. As the thirty respondents belong to different sections within the movement, the term acquires various meanings based on different contexts. The use of both ‘in/as’ to understand the role of women in this constructed bond is to not only understand their relation with others but also amongst themselves as they re-tell their experiences. Therefore, it is interesting to read how this familial structure not only affects

the interpersonal relationship among the participants but also influences those on the outside.

During a casual conversation over a cup of tea, one of my respondents remarked that the movement was referred to as *kokro ko nani* or a ‘child in the cradle’ in 1986. This statement was made by the leaders of that period and women were urged to take care of this ‘child’. The symbolism used here alludes to the role of the woman as a nurturer, who had to care and protect the ‘child’. The movement was referred to as a child, as it was considered to be still in its nascent stage. While the demand for separation was present since colonial period, an organised movement with radical means was new for the region and its inhabitants. By calling out to the maternal instincts, the leaders wished for a mass mobilisation of women. This mobilisation was especially crucial as many of the men in the movement were being targeted. Moreover, in the interviews with all of the respondents, the leader is always referred to as the *tauke* or *baje*. A close translation of the word *tauke*, which is derived from the word *tauko* or head, refers to the head of the family. *Baje* or grandfather has similar connotations. These terms were used by all of the respondents, irrespective of the political organisation they belonged to. We see a similar rhetoric in the 2007 phase, where the term *didi-bhai* (sister-brother) was used to establish the relationship amongst the participants. Even in a speech by the head of GJM women’s wing, Asha Gurung (March, 08, 2017), the call was for the protection of the *bhais* by their *didi-baini*.

Another means of establishing this bond was the re-telling of violence. As the violence of the two phases of the movement was being discussed, the horror was further emphasised by the use of the phrase *bhai le bhai lai maaryo* or brother killed their own

brother. The reference of the internal struggle for power in the region led to many deaths in 1986. In 2007, the violence was more psychological than physical. While clashes with the state were present, the respondents also focused on power struggles within the region. Therefore, the betrayal by one's own kin, even if not related through blood, was seen as the act of ultimate betrayal. Here the act of disloyalty breaks the constructed bonds of family and ultimately resulted in altering the united Gorkha identity projected by the movement.

The construction of the familial bonds is done through not only the relationship these thirty women shared with others but also amongst themselves. All of these respondents are linked through their retelling of the movement and form their own bonds with each other. While each of the respondents represents different experience, it is through their association with the movement that they form a bond. The narrative of the women participants of the Gorkhaland movement was recorded to understand the gaps in the existing narrative of the movement. Here the understanding of 'movement family' takes a turn as these women may or may not belong to similar political allegiances but it is through their participation in the movement that these bonds have been constructed. It is also because of their history with the movement that each respondent becomes a conduit for its re-telling, performing her role as a witness and a creator. Moreover, all of these women belong to different geographical space, which means that their relationship with each other begins from their engagement with the remembering of their experiences in the movement.

The narratives of these respondents are often influenced by each other. As a part of the movement, all of these women had witnessed the brutality of the state-sponsored

retaliation during the 1986 phase. As a result, the loss of lives and the trauma of physical pain were common to all of them. While some did discuss the power struggles within the region, the state sponsored repression of 1986 was discussed by all. The interweaving of these narratives eventually leads to the re-telling of the movement narrative by the women involved in it.

The term ‘movement family’ was borrowed from reactions of the respondents as we discussed the role of women in the movement. While none of the respondents used this term to describe their relation with each other, their accountability to this constructed familial bonds were evident. The rhetoric of the movement also supported this relation as women were urged to ‘protect’ their brethren based on this. Although the image of the family was often invoked to garner support for the movement, it was strongly embellished with lines of demarcation. The notion of this familial bond was selective as the entire population of the region did not adhere to it.

The selective nature of this bond formation was evident in both the phases of the movement. The experiences of women who belonged to organisations outside the ruling party expressed a sense of isolation they suffered due to their allegiances. What we notice is that in both phases this sense of hostility was projected as a struggle for power. If we read it from the context of identity, the term Gorkha represented all the Nepali speaking community residing in the region and those outside. Similarly, the formation of the familial identity was also assumed to include the entire population as the goal of a separate statehood was common to all. Moreover, even though the entire population in the region was not enlisted in the organisation, statements like “hamro Gorkhe daju-bhai

haru” (Our Gorkha brothers) suggested the inclusion of all. The line of differentiation was witnessed despite such declarative statements.

The respondents referred to the participants of the movement as brothers and sisters. While the term ‘family’ was not used directly, the implication was evident. As one member of the GNLF remarked, the death of Ghisingh was like losing a father-figure. In the case of Gurung, the image of the ‘head’ was continuously evoked. What becomes evident in the course of these discussions is that the construction of this ‘family’ was being strongly re-enforced. Irrespective of the political allegiances the role and the responsibility of safe-guarding this structure fell on the women participants. Moreover, there existed a disparity in understanding this relation between the men and women participants. This rhetoric of the family was missing in responses of the male respondents. Unlike the public addresses where the male leaders asked the sisters or *didi-baini* to ‘take care’ of their brethren, Ghisingh and Gurung were acknowledged only as their leader in the personal interviews. Even the reference to the relation between the participants were official than personal.

The existence of this dichotomy of the personal and the official demands a closer reading of the term ‘movement family’ from the lens of gender. When a respondent comments that it has always been the women or *nari*, who have come out to protect the men, one has to read the deeper implications behind such a statement. For example, during the 1986 phase, the fear of being arrested resulted in men fleeing the region. One respondent commented that due to the ‘absence’ of men, women had no choice but to come out and protect the region and the movement. The region here is equated to ‘home’ and so participating in the movement meant safeguarding one’s home. This strong sense

of responsibility is also reflected amongst the women participants of the 2007 phase. In chapter 3, there was a discussion on how the women were equal stakeholders of the land, when a respondent remarked that they were also of this land.

The formation of this ‘movement family’ and the position of the women in it can be read as a reflection of the conventional family structure. These women as equal stakeholders of the region and its history try to establish their rhetoric through the re-telling. What also needs to be addressed here is the necessity of these narratives as it questions the positions ‘given’ and assumed of these women by the male leadership. We have discussed how this image of the movement family has been addressed and re-enforced in the movement narrative through the leadership and the women participants. Here I wish to focus on the term ‘family’, which has been one of the key issues discussed by all the respondents. I wish to read the mainstream structure of the family with gender-assigned roles and examine if these constructed familial space bears any similarity to it.

This concept of land or home and family are closely intertwined. When asked about their relationship with land, a respondent added that land is a legacy of their ancestors and so they have a direct claim on it. According to her, the current status enjoyed by the region was possible only because of their *purkha* or ancestors and so they could never give it up to outsiders. This claim builds on the premise of shared bonds amongst the entire population residing in the region. Additionally, this claim also establishes a parochial view that any demand other than a separate statehood is a disservice to the history of the movement and its people. The effect of this view was witnessed in the treatment of Ghisingh and his followers in the 2007 phase. The reaction of women participants with regard to these constructed familial bonds has remained the

same in both phases. These women expressed the concern for the male leader and acted as the “first line of defence” for him. As one respondent commented, this movement (2007) would not have succeeded without the help of women. The women participants of the 1986 phase did not enunciate their role as vociferously as their 2007 counterpart though the feelings of responsibility and protection remained the same. Therefore, the evocation of this ‘bond’ resonated strongly amongst the women participants despite the limitations based on factors like political allegiances.

The notions of domesticity for women are often associated with service and sacrifice. The role of the woman is to cater to the family’s needs and remain an integral part of its support system. The man is seen as the provider and the head of the family. What this chapter intends to observe is if the parameters established for a woman in a family structure is being replicated in the functioning of the movement family. This conventional gender role within the mainstream family set-up becomes the basis to understand the structure of the movement family. The domestic responsibility based on the gendered lens also influences the image of home as perceived by men and women. Therefore, when a woman takes on to care for the home and family, she has certain roles assigned to her. She is the care-giver and so she becomes a mother for the baby or the movement as well as a sister to protect her brethren.

The role of the women participants has been mostly etched as supportive within the confines of the movement. So in 2007, we see women mobilising for the movement and being at the forefront of the rallies due to the assumption that women would not be attacked by the forces. She is also actively made to ‘protect’ her male leaders due to the same belief. She provides unquestioning support to the ‘head’, who is the representative

of the demand and the movement. The services enlisted above further cement her position as a means of support for the male leadership but she is never given an identity outside of the political organisation that she belongs to. In 1986, the roles were determined by the violence that the region was undergoing. As a result, women were given the role of messengers or cooks for their comrades, who were on the run or were engaged with spreading information on the movement amongst the public. While some roles may have changed, the functioning of the women's wing to support the leadership has remained.

As discussed above, one of the images used to urge women to participate during the 1986 phase was by equating the movement to a baby which needed to be protected. In 2007, this rhetoric of protection shifted from the image of the child to the image of leader, who was referred to as the head of this constructed family. The role of women comparatively shifted based on their 'visibility'. The 2007 phase, as opposed to its predecessor, witnessed mass mobilization of women and women 'leading' rallies. But one has to question it from the paradigm of family structure, which has had its influence on the positionality and role of women in the movement. I wish to highlight two statements made by a man and a woman participant, both from the 2007 phase, which further elaborate how women viewed themselves and how they were perceived by their male counterparts. The first statement is by a woman respondent, who remarked that she was able to participate in the 2007 phase as there were concessions made for women, who could participate only after they finished their household chores. She added that women had the option of joining the rallies only after they had taken care of their children and in-laws and so for their benefit, the rallies were often organised in the afternoon. Therefore, this flexibility was read as a mark of consideration by the

leadership and seen as gender inclusiveness. Ironically, a remark made by a male leader established an opposite perception of women. This leader commented that women would meet in groups with the only objective of gossiping and making noise. This statement is in clear opposition to the image of thoughtful leaders that the women respondents had drawn through their narrative. While a single comment does not represent the entire male leadership, reference to *Nari Morcha* or women's wing as noisy was made by men participants as well as those who had never been a part of any political organisation.

The 2007 phase was touted to be 'led' by women based on their visibility and activities. The difference in its perception, discussed above, provides an oppositional gaze on women's participation. This gaze needs to be further argued from the perspective of women's re-telling. While the women respondents have attributed their mass mobilisation during the 2007 phase to the lack of violence, the subsuming of the 'woman' within the greater goal of Gorkha identity has to be problematised. Being an equal stakeholder in the demand and being assimilated needs to be read separately as each factor has influenced the role of the women participants. There exists a dichotomy, when a woman respondent refers to herself as an equal representative of the identity, like calling herself a Gorkha, and adding that the formation of statehood would solve all problems in the region. This assertion that 'all' problems existing in the region can only be solved through the formation of Gorkhaland questions the position of issues like gender, ethnicity and even political affiliations present within the region.

The structure of a mainstream family is also established through the inter-personal relation existing amongst its members. In the case of this study, the focus is based on the relationship between the woman, as mother or sister or wife, and other members of the

family. While the image of the wife has not been a dominant part of the movement rhetoric like the image of mother and sister, it did find its way in the re-telling of some of the respondents. For example, two participants acknowledged that their participation was a direct influence of their husband's activities. The image of children has been used to refer to the future of the community and so as most of the respondents commented the fruition of the demand was to secure a 'good' future for them. To emphasise this, one respondent commented that her ancestors and her generation had continued the struggle so that the benefits of this struggle could be enjoyed by their children. Here the respondent refers to herself as an *aama* or mother, who not only wants a future for her child but also wishes to come out of the loneliness from being an aging parent, living alone as her child has migrated in search of employment. As a result, she is particularly focused on the dearth of employment opportunities, which often led to the migration amongst the youth of the region. This relation remains a common denominator amongst all the respondents, irrespective of which time frame they belonged to. As a 1986 phase participant remarked, she took on the struggle for her children and now her children have undertaken the same struggle for their children. Therefore, within the structure of the 'movement family', the woman takes on the role of a mother, who is trying to secure a better future for 'her' children.

One tries to examine the structural and relational similarity between a mainstream family and a 'movement family', specifically between the men and women, in leadership roles. In the case of the movement, similar to the one in the conventional set-up, this relation also establishes the role of the woman. The 'head' of the movement family has always been a male leader and is often symbolically referred to as *bau-jasto* or father-

like. The other male leaders become *daju-bhai* or brothers. The women are expected to protect the men as expressed by a woman leader of the women's wing of GJM, who had urged her fellow members to keep supporting the men and shielding them from harm for the demand to survive. As one respondent added, if the women do not 'protect' the leaders (men), the movement will not be able to achieve its goal.

The male leadership, Ghisingh (1986) and Gurung (2007), has always been the face of the movement. As discussed above, they were treated as the 'saviours' of the people and were touted as the ones who would realise the aspiration of Gorkhaland. These men were revered as we often hear the suffix *-jiu* as a mark of respect added to their names. Moreover, these women often commented how they would always follow the 'orders' of the *tauke* as he represented the demand, and how he was the only one who could achieve the goal. This type of blind devotion became a common mode amongst the respondents depending on their political allegiance. The women began supporting the leaders and what we observe is how the leadership's will was followed without any question. An example of this can be witnessed in the Kurseong Municipal Election (2017), where there were no pamphlets issued by the women's wing. When asked the reason, a woman respondent remarked that all the main demands were addressed in the pamphlets printed by the main office. The focus of this pamphlet was on the question of identity and encroachment of the state on the region. I was later informed that during the peak of the 2007 phase, there were pamphlets printed by the women's wing but they were always in line with the vision of the male leaders.

The concept of movement family unveils the layers of inter and intra-personal relations that exist within the movement narrative. The construction of this 'movement

family’ rests on the formation of bonds forged through their participation in the movement. As we have examined the structure and the functioning of these constructed bonds through the lens of gender, another aspect that becomes part of this narrative is the concept of pain. The reading of pain is understood from two vantage points that emerge in the women’s narratives, that is the loss of comrades and the betrayal by the *aafno maanche* or our people. This ‘loss’ becomes the cornerstone of the re-telling as each respondent recounts the pain of that memory.

4.2 Understanding ‘Pain’

The demand for separation has been made since the colonial period but it was in 1986 that the region witnessed one of the most violent phases in its history. The region was facing not only external issues but also internal turmoil. The physical and psychological issues faced by the people during 1986 were echoed by the respondents when they narrated their experiences. While the execution of the movement underwent a change in 2007, the fear remained. Interestingly, the fear of threat was not just from the people outside but also from their own brethren. As all these narratives were collected only after the event had taken place, the recollections or the reactions provided by the respondents reflected pain in remembering the past with anger. The anger that had once surrounded the event was replaced by pain as the women commented on how *aafno maanche* or our people became the enemy. I wish to engage with this concept of pain so as to understand how the intricate relationship between violence, anger, and pain is formulated within the context of the movement.

While the narrative of pain has emerged from the engagement with both the state and within the community, I wish to divide this account and highlight the issues prevailing within the region. The betrayal of the *afno maanche* has haunted most of the re-tellings by the women participants. The retaliation by the state resulted in the subsequent silence surrounding the issue of sexual atrocities during the 1986 phase. The need to focus on the internal issues of power becomes important as the literature on the movement has not focused on it. Moreover, the situation of relative peace in 2007 and the projection of the united Gorkha front since the 1986 phase are broken through these narratives of suffering.

The role of the women in the 1986 movement included the retrieval of the bodies of their fallen comrades. Veena Das, in her “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain” (1996), discusses the relation between language and body in understanding the discourse around pain. Mourning becomes a medium through which language and body create a new understanding of silences. It is to understand this relation that she refers to the distinction between ‘good death’ and ‘bad death’. I propose to borrow this concept of difference between ‘good death’ and ‘bad death’ to understand it in the context of the movement. A ‘good death’ needs the “... ‘screaming’ and lamenting and the presence or ‘appearance’ of kin...” (Das, 1996: 78), while the ‘bad death’, has no kin support and is surrounded by silence. This description undergoes a change in the movement, where the distinction between good and bad death ceases to exist. I wish to provide two examples to support the above statement. First, how the women were given a task to bring the bodies of their fallen comrades, and second, how the death ritual of a respondent’s father was disrupted by the state machinery. Both the incidents took place in

1986 when the movement was at its peak. According to the description provided, the first belongs to the ‘bad death’, as the people who died were ‘defying’ the state; these were ‘silent’ deaths because there was no recognition of these lost lives, and the latter belongs to the ‘good death’, as the father died of a natural cause and had his kin mourning for him. The disruption of the rituals by the armed forces under the pretext of a house search, and the subsequent ‘quiet’ cremation ‘allowed’ by the authorities blur the distinction between the two. The loss of a brother, who was arrested by the authorities for questioning and never returned, makes one question if there exists a difference between good and bad death in a movement.

The “gendered division of labour in the work of mourning” (Das, 1996: 78) as Das elaborates also undergoes a change in a scenario where men are almost non-existent. As a respondent commented, “lokne maanche ta thiyena” (there were no men). There were men in the movement but most of them had gone into hiding due to the fear of the armed forces. According to the rituals, “it is the task of the men to ritually cremate a body for the dead person and to find a place in the cosmos for the dead” (Das, 1996: 78), while women were given the role of the lamenting and wailing for the deceased. This conventional rule undergoes a change when it is the women who accompany the deceased to the cremation ground. The women are no longer left at home but have to enter the ‘forbidden’ ground.

Physical violence perpetrated by the state has led to silence of the participants in the movement. While some respondents spoke openly about the atrocities they had to face in the movement, some requested that they did not wish to speak about the 1986 phase of the movement. There was absolute silence on the question of sexual abuse

during the phase. None of the women respondent wished to engage with this issue. There were some who pointed at other women, who may have been subjected to the atrocity but they chose to keep the discussion around the physical assault when it came to their personal experiences. When asked if there were any official report filed on the issue of sexual violence, one respondent commented, “time ka thiyo, bhagdanai time goyo” (where was the time, we were always on the run). As Das suggests, the conventional act of mourning is “...reversed when the normal flow of life is seen as disrupted by the violence of men. In that case, women bear witness to this disorder by new construction of speech and silence” (Das, 1996: 82). Das’ reading of the Partition narratives is relevant for the movement context, where dis-remembering becomes the ‘new’ mode. While the atrocity was never denied, the refusal to speak about it acts as a temporary seal. The only time this memory was accessed is to either disown the 1986 phase by the leaders of the 2007 phase, or to urge the people to come together or to claim the movement by those who were part of it in 1986. But there is a selective claim where any reference to sexual violation is avoided. In all of these three circumstances, the memory of suffering and pain is evoked to claim the movement.

When does memory become dangerous? When does memory stigmatise? I wish to read these two questions from the silence that has encompassed the narratives of the respondents, surrounding the issue of sexual violation by the state and the psychological violence perpetrated by the members of their own Gorkha community. The women respondents have witnessed both the 1986 and the 2007 phases. As these women spoke about their journey in the movement, their narratives not only recorded their life but also that of their family. The silence surrounding certain issues and the discomfort in speaking

about others make one question if there is still some cause of threat in this assumed, post-1986 'non-violent' movement. The stigma associated with sexual abuse caused all my respondents to refrain from answering. Das describes, 'When asking women to narrate their experience of the Partition I found a zone of silence around the event. This silence was achieved either by the use of language that was general and metaphoric but that evaded specific description of any events so as to capture the particularity of their experience or by describing the surrounding events but leaving the actual experience of abduction or rape unstated.' (Das, 1996: 84)

A parallel can be drawn between Das' experience with women, who were subjected to Partition violence and the field response of this research. While each of the women involved in both the phases spoke about the physical and psychological atrocities that they or their comrades were subjected to, the silence on the issue of sexual violation remained impregnable. These women would recall their experiences as they evaded arrests and possible incarceration, but the memory of abuse was selective as 'it was dangerous to remember' (Das, 1996: 84). A part of this denial may stem from the societal humiliation that they would have to face if the reality was revealed. The geographical limitation of each region adds to this fear as people are known to each other. It should be remembered that the events discussed here belong to a past that is almost three decades old. The reality of 1986 has now become a number where the names are now obscured and are re-told only to stir the emotions of the people. This silence also protects the women from becoming outcasts and this past was considered as a dark phase in the history of the region and of the movement with the resurgence of the movement in 2007.

Another relation that needs to be read in order to understand the articulation of pain is the one shared amongst the people. The obvious suffering caused by the state was not the only dominant discourse in the narratives collected. The respondents spoke about the issues that they faced at the hands of their own kinsmen. It was interesting to see how the perpetrators were no longer just the outsiders who inflicted pain on these respondents but were their 'own'. This internal discord again breaks the 'imagined' unity of the Gorkhas. The silence surrounding this issue is not as absolute as it is on sexual violence but there was an evident discomfort present. These women spoke on the issue only when they were assured that their names would not be used. Some even asked for the recorder to be switched off to continue the interview. What happens when the perpetrator is known? How do the women respond when the suffering inflicted is by their 'own' people?

The tussle for power in the region has been continuing since the demand for separation was made during the colonial period. Measures were taken during the 1986 and 2007 phases by the dominant political organisations to suppress the opposite factions which created division amongst the people of the region. The narratives of the women respondents belonging to the opposite factions referred to the backlash that they faced during the movement. As the statement *afno maanche* permeated throughout these interviews, what became evident is the rise of distrust amongst the people of the region.

Acts of social boycott, physical assault and the loss of home and livelihood became the mode through which dominance was maintained. The women respondents' recounting their experience reveals how the suffering induced by the struggle for power in the region affects them even to the present day. The violence that these women and

their family endured led to forced migration and self-alienation. As it is in the case of the outside dominance, here too, the relation between pain and language needs to be understood in depth. While silence dominated the discussion on sexual abuse, engagement with the internal disputes was agreed on if certain parameters were met with. Even the language used by the respondents was one of assertion and claim. The fact that they were assured of their anonymity led to a change in their mode of discourse. These women started discussing familial history during the movement and how they were betrayed by their own people. One respondent recounted how she witnessed a man from the opposite faction coming out of the police car and pointing at her comrade's house. This man's face was covered but she knew who the man was. The image of a familial bond amongst the people of the region that has been crucial for the movement is shattered when one witnesses their 'own' acting against them. When an entire village is alienated by its neighbouring villages due to the difference in its political ideology, the act of alienation is not performed by an unknown being but by a familiar entity.

The social anxiety still surrounds these women as they remember, and one seeks to question if remembering can be read as an act of both strength and weakness. Here memory becomes dangerous for them as they still feel that they may be subjected to oppression. Those who have moved away from the movement recorded their experience with anger. One respondent even asked me to use her name as she had no fear of the ruling party.

The relation between 'pain and language that culture has evolved' (Das, 1996: 88) has been read from two perspectives that have emerged from the movement. The execution of this relation has changed depending on the existing circumstances. While

silence becomes a coping mechanism for the former, claim becomes integral for the latter. Moreover, the social suffering, anger, resentment, and pain resulting from oppression provide an insight into the culture of violence that existed in both the 1986 and 2007 phase in the region.

4.3 Engagement with the ‘Everyday’

Using the title of Kalpana Kannabiran’s book, *The Violence of Normal Time: Essays on Women’s Lived Realities* (2005), I wish to understand if there exist ‘normal times’ after a traumatic event and how violence permeates through memory. It is in the everyday that violence enmeshes itself in the ‘weave of life’ (Das, 2006: 9). Both the phases are read through the aftermath of the violence that is present but rarely discussed. While the state-sponsored aggression has been etched in the narrative of the movement, those perpetrated by fellow men and women is quietly remembered. In the course of my interview, all of my respondents were willing to speak about these acts of violence, only behind closed doors and with the assurance of complete anonymity. As Kannabiran remarks “...it is often assumed that the danger of violence lies exclusively in its use by dissidents, while figures from across the world demonstrate quite clearly that authorities are the greater perpetrators of violence...” (Kannabiran, 2005: 2). This statement holds true for the movement as in all of the acts of violence discussed here, the aggressors have always been from the dominant factions. While the state has always been in the position of dominance, this role in the region was passed on from GNLF (1986) to GJM (2007).

As discussed before, in 1986, the violence acted out by the state to suppress the movement witnessed large scale devastation in the region. The internal struggle for

power incited hostility resulting in clashes within the region. In 2007, this form of retaliation was taken over by a more psychological strategy within the region, whereby the dominant groups staged social boycotts and *gheraos* against political oppositions. By the time these interviews were conducted, both phases were being described as distant past due to the time gap between them. As a result, what these interviews were able to witness was the aftermath of the trauma that still existed. After the acts of violence during the 1986 phase, there was an expectance of normalcy after the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988. The aggressive actions both from the inside and outside meant loss of lives, property and livelihood, so one asks if there can be a 'going back' to the past period of normal. As I asked questions on the events of 1986, the reluctance was visible. Some of the respondents asked me to switch off my recorder as they discussed their engagement with violence during 1986. This became more pertinent when they spoke about personal loss, like the loss of a brother, who was arrested but never came back, or how a respondent was beaten up by the police, as she was being arrested or how a respondent's husband was severely injured, which led to her joining the movement. The act of normalisation in the aftermath of the movement is still negotiated by the respondents even after three decades of its occurrence. Das (2006) mentions that even the act of being included in the community or the state does not 'heal' the damages incurred.

In 2007, the struggle for power in the region witnessed its manifestation in social boycott of previous leaders, who had fallen out of grace. While the acts were not violent in terms of physical harm of 1986, they mostly targeted complete isolation of the individual. The internal struggle in the region has always been between familiar

individuals. Due to the limited geographical space, the individuals involved in each faction are known to one another and even related. The perpetrators of violence were known people in 1986 as well as 2007. It is here that the question of normalcy becomes more complicated as after the formation of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in 2012, both the aggressors and the victims continued to live in the same region. As one respondent commented, she could not go to any public space as she would see people whispering about her. This act of boycott not only affected the individuals but also their families. Das comments, "...the event attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary." (Das, 2006: 1). In both cases, the events in both the phases were able to penetrate into the mundane and ordinary every day, even after a considerable period had passed.

This negotiation with the everyday after a traumatic event influences the public and the private memory constructed around the movement. As discussed in the previous chapters, the public memory of the movement has been constructed from two perspectives, the state and the leadership of the movement. The movement has witnessed a change in its leadership through the two phases and so the rhetoric of the movement has been influenced. Therefore, apart from the marginalisation of women's voice in the movement, what is also completely side-lined is the internal struggle for power in the region and its resultant chaos. This examination of the difference between public and private memory, especially in the context of each woman respondent, shows how they understand the role of their opposition from within and outside the region and help in the construction of identities.

4.4 Understanding the Linkages

This section is divided based on the themes that have emerged out of the narratives collected from the women participants. Each of these themes represents the broader areas in which these individual experiences can be read. As the movement is not static, the experiences of these women can also be read as those reflecting the changes that took place in course of the movement. The study does not intend to question the demand or the movement, but, its objective is to read the movement through the narratives of the women involved in it.

The image of the woman as a mother or sister taking care of the movement also took centre-stage in the discussions as the common notions of family underwent a change and brought forth a new term ‘movement family’. I use this term to denote how the participants of the movement were brought in by the leadership and constructed into a family structure, wherein the women were *did-baini* or sister to their male counterpart, who were dubbed as *daju-bhai* or brother. Additionally, the 1986 call given by the leadership for the movement, where Gorkhaland was referred to *kokro ko nani* or a baby in the cradle, further added to the image of the family. This image of the family was continuously evoked in the interviews as the respondents spoke about the atrocities that were meted out to their comrades. Statements like “hamro didi/baini ko izzat luty” (our sisters were raped) and “hamro daju/bhai lai maaryo” (our brothers were killed) highlights the ‘invisible’ familial bonds existing amongst the participants. I use the term ‘invisible’ to emphasise how the movement has created this family but not the biological bonding. Even the leader is seen as a father figure, Ghisingh becomes “hamro bau jasto

nai thiyo” (just like our father) and Gurung becomes the *tauke*, which literally means the head, implying the position he holds in the movement family.

These themes converge with one another under the over-arching concepts of individual and collective identity. The constant negotiation between the individual ‘I’ identity, and that of the collective ‘we’ identity in the interviews was witnessed. The collective identity was seen to provide a safety cover for many of the respondents as they used it especially while discussing their experience of personal trauma. It also provided a shield for any acts that may have been deemed as ‘illegal’. Therefore, the themes discussed below stem out of this negotiation and provide a structured reading of these narratives. The collective identity used by some of the respondents also brings forth the integral role played by their allegiances to benefit the political parties.

4.4.1 Family

In course of the study, interviews were conducted with both the women and men participants of the movement. It was noticed that the narratives of male participants were dominated by their political stand while the women included the narratives of their family in their individual experiences. *The Consequences of Social Movements* (2016), by Lorenzo Bosi, Marco Giugni, and Katrin Uba, analyses the reason, the mobilisation and the resulting consequences of a social movement. They cite authors like Rochon and Polletta and Jasper to argue that an individual’s relation to a movement has an effect not only on their biography but also on “many casual participants” (Bosi, Giugni and Uba, 2016: 7). This statement is especially true for family members. In the context of the study, the

‘casual participants’ refer to the family members of the respondents who were targeted by the state and the regional oppositional factions during the movement.

Each of the respondents spoke about how the movement affected their family, especially in relation to the ‘fear’ during 1986 phase. With the clashes between the state and the people at its peak during the 1986 phase, many of the participants witnessed their family being ‘affected’ and ‘assaulted’. The reported role of family undergoes a change in the narrative of 2007 phase, with the respondents talking about how their family allowed them to join the movement due to the peaceful and safe means taken up by the leadership of 2007 movement. Therefore the narratives focus on the issue of safety where the movement becomes the cause of both danger (due to the clashes amongst regional parties and conflict with the state) and security (due to the non-violent mode exercised in 2007) to the respondents. It should also be noted that while 2007 was considered to be a peaceful and democratic movement, the atmosphere of fear existed. The situation was not as overt as it was during 1986, but this tool of peaceful and democratic movement was used not only to garner support but also to establish dominance.

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006) describes that the community is conceived as one with ‘deep horizontal comradeship’ (Anderson, 2006: 7) even with the realities of inequalities. The position of such political organisations outside the dominant spectrum provides an example in these lines. The situation of 2007 can be best described from the perspective of a woman respondent from Kurseong. She was never a part of the movement directly but had strong ties to it through her family’s participation. As her family was associated with GNLF during the 1986 phase, the tables turned on them in 2007 when GJM

launched a political attack on this group to secure power. The tool used by GJM was a social boycott on the families who remained loyal to GNLFF and Ghisingh. When I asked her about her experience, she responded that all the people are known to each other as the region is so small geographically. As a result, one gets to hear about everything and see the changes very clearly. The people avoiding them and refusing to help them became a norm and soon there was a mass *gherao* in front of her sister-in-law's house as her sister-in-law was a senior member of the GNLFF party. Instances like these became normal during the course of 2007. The claim made by the dominant party was that the people against the party were also against the movement and so against the struggle for recognition. The mass retaliation led many to forcefully migrate from the region.

Similar trajectory had been witnessed in 1986 when Ghisingh claimed that the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) members in the hills were a threat to the movement as it was a branch of the state government. It should also be remembered that the CPI (M) had a stronghold in the region prior to the GNLFF led movement. The retaliation on the members of hill CPI (M) led to many forceful migrations. A woman respondent, who originally hailed from Kalimpong but had moved to Siliguri after her father had to migrate, revealed to me that her father was threatened during the 1986 phase for his support to the State party. She added that out of fear her father chose to move out of Kalimpong and reach Siliguri with the family. She further added how this system of alienation and fear continued even in the 2007 phase when her family was boycotted for not participating in the movement. As she had chosen not to participate; her neighbours read her refusal to participate as an act of betrayal. This act of refusing to join the

movement due to familial history becomes a mark of difference, especially amongst the women respondents.

One can also read this familial past from a different perspective, especially with regard to those belonging to the CPI (M) cadre of 1986, who later joined the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist (CPRM) and supported the movement. Each of the women from Kalimpong and Darjeeling who belong to this organisation (first CPI (M) and later CPRM) had to move away from the region during 1986 and their families were implicated due to their ties with the state. It is worth mentioning that these women became a part of the party due to their familial ties with it. As a result, their refusal to join the movement, especially of the two hailing from Darjeeling, stemmed out of their familial ties with the CPI (M). The third respondent, who is from Kalimpong, was only six years old in 1986. However, it was the trauma of the violence her entire family faced due to her father's allegiance to the state that made her retain that memory vividly.

Interestingly, while some were subjected to this form of repression, there were some who joined the movement to avoid such persecution. Some of these women respondents mentioned that they joined the latter phase as they still believed in the demand. When asked to compare, the two phases the respondents spoke of the glory of the previous phase and called it a 'real' movement. The term 'choice' has been used to describe these respondents' entire political move, but it cannot be read as exclusively independent. Factors discussed above have had an impact on their decision-making.

The understanding of the term 'family' itself undergoes a shift as it is no longer limited to the familial or blood ties. Within the context of the movement, the entire region

and to some extent the entire Nepali speaking community residing in and outside the region becomes a family, where the women are kept in the roles of mother, daughter, sister or wife. While the image of the wife is not so popular, it is the image of the mother and the sister that is often used in various discourses. As a result, this evoked the image of the family where women are *ama* (mother) or *baini* (sister) taking care of the *daju* (older brother) and *bhai* (younger brother) to safeguard the movement. Even as the respondents spoke about the internal struggle in the region for power, the phrase used such as ‘bhai-bhai le eka aarka lai maaryo’ (brothers killed each other) reiterated the image of the family. One can term this as an ‘imagined’ relationship that goes beyond blood ties and forms a movement family. As Anderson puts it, “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” (Anderson, 2006: 6)

Anderson (2006) cites Seton-Watson, where the author talks about the formation of a community when the people ‘consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they have formed one’ (Anderson, 2006: 6). Anderson replaces the phrase ‘consider themselves’ to ‘imagined themselves’. He further adds that, as Gellner pointed out, this form of imagination does not depend upon the ‘creation’ but is influenced by ‘fabrication and falsity’ (Anderson, 2006: 6). This can be seen when we further examine the cracks within the united Gorkha identity.

The speech given by the president of the women’s wing of GJM during the Municipal election victory rally gave a call to the women members to protect the men. The 2007 phase with its women ‘led’ rallies was construed as ‘progressive’. The women

belonging to this group felt that it was their duty to protect men, especially the male leadership for the strengthening of the movement. As the women belonging to this group were interviewed, most of them had joined the movement in 2007 and felt that the movement could become successful only because of the strength of the leadership. As a result, these women became the barrier between the state forces and the male leadership. The emphasis on the leadership being 'male' and the celebration of it can also be seen amongst those who participated in the movement during the 1986 phase. As mentioned before, the movement was compared with a newborn baby that needed to be protected. The leadership was again male that was given the status of a demi-god. The analogy given was that these women had to protect the movement by protecting the leader, who was the face and representative of the movement. Therefore, the imagined familial bond evoked by the leadership, in both the phases, served two purposes- one was to mobilise the people, especially the women, and the other was to strengthen this 'united' Gorkha identity.

4.4.2 Role in the Movement

The Gorkhaland movement has spanned over more than two decades and has seen a change in not only its leadership but also in its execution. As a result, the experiences of those who have participated in the movement have changed depending on which phase they belong to. Moreover, those who have been a part of both the phases (1986 and 2007) have witnessed this transition and have been active recipients of it. As their experiences are directly related to their 'role' in the movement, this section intends to examine the role each of these respondents had in the course of the movement, how it has shaped their experiences and their current status in the movement.

In Stree Shakti Sanghatana's *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle* (1989), the authors attempted to add to the existing history of the Telangana Armed Struggle (1946-1951), through the experiences of the women involved in it. While the party involved in the movement was unable to move without the support of the women, the role assigned to them was always 'supportive'. One can draw a parallel between women in Telangana movement and the women in the Gorkhaland movement, who have become 'visible' but are still subordinate to the male leadership. The objective behind documenting these experiences is a political act, through which women's history that may have been side-lined or even erased due to the prevailing biases could be retrieved. We are provided with the understanding of what would movement history be when re-told from the experiences of women who have witnessed it.

It is on similar lines that Ilina Sen's *A Space within the Struggle: Women's Participation in People's Movements* (1990) discusses the role of women within movements that are not women-centric. What she tries to bring forth is the criticism that the women's movement faced in India for being a middle-class led movement. In her book she examines the role women played in mass movements, which aimed for a political and social change. She creates a separate section for some movements as 'not' being women's movements. While women did participate in large numbers, the movement had agendas beyond the gender question. Sen further elaborates that while these movements cannot be termed as feminist, the methods employed urge one to focus on women participation.

I argue here that in the Gorkhaland movement, which is based on the factors of ethnicity and identity, women have exercised crucial role and so it becomes critical to examine the movement through the experiences of these women. Each of these women brought in varying perspectives of the movement. Though most of the women participated actively, there were some who were not directly involved but were involved in the movement circumstantially. These women supported their families when the husbands were participating on the ground level. I have read these actions as a form of participation, but not in the popular terms. These women were mothers, daughters and sisters to the men or women directly involved in the movement and held their ground during the oppression from the state and from opposite factions. These women spoke about how they helped their son or husband escape while they remained in the house taking care of the children. As one woman remembers the raid on her house by the state forces during the 1986 phase, when she had to make her sons leave the locality due to the fear of getting arrested. She kept her daughter with her and physically shielded her from the forces as she had heard about the atrocities on women inflicted by the forces. In 2007, she had to again help her son evade arrest. Another woman remembers how her husband would never sleep in the house during the 1986 phase. She never knew about his and her sister-in-law's whereabouts. These women may not have been the mainstream participants or active members of the organization but supported the movement through their support to their family members.

The role of these women also depended on the political party they belonged to. The role of the party had a strong effect on these women as it shaped their role in the movement. The respondents chiefly belong to the following three political fractions;

GNLF, the united front of GJM and the Communist Party Revolutionary Marxist (CPRM), and Jan Andolan Party (JAP). The dynamics between these three political parties in the course of the two phases is crucial. While the GJM came into existence during the second phase of the movement and dominated it, it was the former members of the GNLFF, the dominant party of the 1986 phase, who had joined this party. As for the CPRM, it was formed after the hill CPI (M) broke away from its parent body in 1996. During 1986, the hill CPI (M) was boycotted due to their support for the state. Each of the women respondents from CPRM was directly or indirectly linked to the CPI (M) during the first phase and so had to face retaliation from the dominant party. Their later shift to the CPRM, which supported the demand, witnessed changes in their attitude and their experiences within the movement.

As most of the respondents belong to these three political organisations, their role in the movement reflects the role played by their organisation. As two of the respondents belonging to different parties stated, ‘mo ta abo esma nei morera jane ho’ (I will die in this) with reference to their political allegiances. Another woman remarked how she has given up her life for the party as she has remained unmarried. Therefore, it is interesting to read the trajectory of their participation within the framework of the movement. Some of these respondents changed their political affiliation, some remained and some moved away. Hence, it is important to read these experiences within such groups. Furthermore, some of these respondents have participated in both the phases and some in only one. Therefore, this section will be divided into groups based on the political career that these respondents ‘chose’ and its aftermath.

With the movement continuing for more than two decades, the change in the leadership affected the course of the movement noticeably. The negation of the previous phase became the tool through which the second phase began. The 2007 phase was earmarked as a peaceful movement and the movement soon became highlighted for its ‘non-violent’ methods. It also gained popularity and larger attention for the women ‘leading’ and taking its charge. The women who participated in 2007 mostly addressed the issue of safety, which this phase allowed them to express. As one respondent commented, ‘pahila jasto darr ka cha aile’ (Unlike the past there is no fear now). All of the women belonging to this section belonged to the GJM party and had been active since the 2007 phase. These women spoke about the violence that took place during the 1986 phase, which did not allow many women to participate. All of them agreed that this phase provided safety not only for them but also for their family. They added that this phase also provided the space for them to not only participate but also to take care of their family simultaneously.

The recent resurgence of the movement in 2017 led to a faction within the party. Some of the respondents that I met before 2017 had lost their position after the movement subsided. These were the same women who had spoken about their loyalty to the party and the leadership. These women were unceremoniously asked to vacate their positions as they did not ally with the change in power. The atmosphere of fear pervaded as these women tried to avoid this issue in their responses. The rumour that those who spoke against the new leadership were being targeted was making rounds and so they ‘chose’ to remain quiet.

Those women who shifted their political affiliations during the course of the second phase spoke about their reasons for the shift. All maintained that it was for the demand of statehood that they had shifted as the party promised the realisation of the demand. New information came to light as the interview progressed. This majorly arose from the discussion on the difference between the two phases. These women had witnessed and taken part in both the phases and projected 1986 as the ‘real’ movement. There was an element of nostalgia involved when they said ‘tyo andolan chen andolan thiyo’ (that movement was a movement). On further examining the existing pressures on the people, I was informed of the problems faced by those who refused to join the dominant political organisation. Therefore, for some of these women shifting was the only way through which they could save themselves.

The trajectory of the political career of these women took a turn after they joined the CPRM. The fear that they both had felt during the movement in 1986 changed as they began supporting the demand. When asked about what made them join the movement after the suffering caused during the first phase, two respondents remarked that it was the execution of the movement during 1986, not the objectives, that made them stand against it. Both also said that had there been a discussion on that particular aspect during that time, the cadre would have supported them. They positioned themselves as being more informed about the demand and how its materialisation would help the people and the region.

As I asked one of them about her feelings supporting the same demand that had led to her family to become homeless, she added that it was not the demand but the party (GNLF) had made her homeless. A similar response was given by the other respondent

too, who completely supported the recent movement and felt that without the formation of statehood there can be no development in the region. Both these women had strong male models, who belonged to CPI (M) in 1986. When I enquired about how the male members had felt when these women chose to support the movement, the former told me about her conversation with her father. Her father said that his lack of support stemmed from the violent methods taken up by the GNLFF during 1986 phase. For the other respondent, her uncle had been against the breaking of the state and so could never support the movement. It should be mentioned here that the both these women spoke about the discrimination that they faced from the main CPI (M) body, which made them realise how the party itself practiced marginalisation against its people. These women believed that this was due to their roots. This resulted in their moving away from the CPI (M) affiliation and supporting the demand for recognition.

4.4.3 Conflict and Fear

The question of conflict and fear can be looked at from two perspectives. The first is the well-documented clashes between the state and the region, which resulted in the loss of lives, and the other spectacle is the internal power struggle in the region. Therefore, the discourse on conflict and trauma locates itself in the personal narratives not only to highlight the loss but also to look at the fracture that existed within the region. It is crucial to note that the holistic Gorkha identity celebrated by the movement gets ruptured not just by the intervention of the state but also by the internal struggle for power. The aftermath of this struggle continues even after the movement has subsided for the time being and it is reflected in their re-telling.

The state repression and the retaliation from the people led to some of my respondents' desired need to 'forget'. These narratives were about the rejection of the 'dream' of statehood. Most of such narratives were filled with a sense of disillusionment, which had come over these respondents after the 2007 phase. For one of the respondents it was about erasing her past participation in 1986 as she 'willingly' surrendered to the authorities during the 2007 so that she could not be persecuted further. For some this erasure stems out of the need to establish their claim and to look down upon the opposition. This was the case with respondents coming from the two dominant parties in the region.

With the 1986 phase, the scope and course of the movement changed when clashes erupted in the region between the state and the people. The establishment of armed forces further added to the fear amongst the people as raids and arrests became 'normalised'. The daughter of one of my respondents spoke about her encounter with the police during that time, when the army personnel searched for her another family member. The man was carrying a gun and she remembers how she raised her hand in fear at the sight of the weapon. As she recalled the search, she added that even now she involuntarily puts her hands up when she sees any army personnel. She has even transferred this fear to her young son, who has been told not to talk with anyone in uniform. Although this incident came about as a passing remark; this transference of fear was addressed by other respondents also.

Another incident was narrated by a respondent, whose father's death during the forty-day *bandh* led to a raid in her house as mourners had gathered and resulted in arrest of her family members along with herself. As she narrated her story she spoke about the

fear that existed amongst the men during 1986 as men were being arrested more frequently. The escape of the male mourners from her father's mourning rituals by any possible means, even at the risk of getting injured, further clarifies the intensity of environment of fear during the 1986 phase.

Moreover, the horrors of 1986 led many to refrain from initiating any discussion on it. Tatjana Pavlovic's "Remembering/Disremembering the Nation: the Archaeology of Lost Knowledge" (2004) refers to Ugresic and states "...the subversive nature of memory applies to the obliteration of certain event, things, and people from the collective memory. This erasing is necessary in sustaining the oppressive space of the primordial nation" (Pavlovic, 2004: 133). One can read the above statement in the context of erasure of the 1986 phase in favour of the latter phase. The fact that 2007 ushered in a new mode of executing the movement meant that "erasure of certain events" (Pavlovic, 2004: 149) needed to take place. While Pavlovic uses the term remembering and disremembering in the context of the "former Yugoslavia and the creation of successor states" (Pavlovic, 2004: 132), the interesting issue is the 'official' or state-sponsored memory, which negates anything that questions it. The coinage of the term 'yugonostalgia' (Pavlovic, 2004: 132) represents this negation. One can draw a parallel to this in the context of Gorkhaland, where the actions of 1986 have been discredited by those from the latter phase so as to uphold their contribution.

The dominant political organizations, from the two phases (GNLF and GJM), continue to be in a state of turmoil as each tries to establish dominance over the other, through the movement narrative. As a result, the stories of internal conflict are subdued to accept the 'official' notions of unity. Both 2007 and 1986 are wrought with a history of

the struggle for power and the subsequent violent results of it. While the women interviewed have witnessed acts of violence stemming from regional power struggle, only those who were subjected to it were willing to speak about it. The dominant and the 'official' discourse refuses to discuss such issue as one respondent suggested that we should not talk about such disturbing events.

The 1986 phase witnessed incidents of violence by forces from both outside (State) and inside (regional political turmoil). The women belonging to the CPI (M) recall their experience of how they were continuously forced to remain in the margins. The pressure for people belonging to the branch of the state government in the region mounted as attacks on them became a norm. Stories of how these individuals and their families were implicated became central to their narratives. The thread that became evident in the course of the narratives centred on the issue of violence. Both women spoke about the fear that existed during the 1986 movement. As members of a party, which remained against the demand, they were stigmatised. As opposed to their male counterpart, these women did not hesitate to bring in experiences of their families, which made these interviews not just individual but also about the family history. As one respondent elaborates "bhai le bhai lai maaryo" or brother killing a brother became a norm in the region. While the region boasted of many political parties, the onslaught on the CPI (M) cadre symbolically became retaliation to the state. Both the respondents belonged to this group during the 1986 phase and have since broken off to become members of the CPRM, which supports the Gorkhaland demand. The fear for the safety of the family was etched all through the narratives of both the women.

The narratives of women belonging outside the dominant spectrum provide a new reading on the issue of violence. These acts of aggression towards ‘fellow’ people highlight the fractures prevalent within the assumed ‘united’ Gorkha identity. The ‘stories’ told by these women are family history as it goes beyond the individual experience. What becomes all the more interesting, especially with women respondents, is that it is never about the individual. These narratives become more personal, unlike those of the male respondents, as the interviews progressed.

Unlike the turbulent period of 1986, where the violence involved pertained to the loss of life, the aggression of 2007 seemed more subdued. Hailed as a Gandhian movement by the leadership, meant that the movement was peaceful, 2007 witnessed only some instances of violence. The two phases may have been different in their execution but where they remain the same is in the treatment given to those who refused to join the dominant political party. While 1986 was filled with the loss of lives and forceful migration for those considered a threat by the GNLF, the process changed in 2007. The process of alienation changed as it was not done through physical violence. I argue that while the process may have become subdued, violence remained the same. The means used may not have been overtly violent but a form of psychological fear was prevalent. As narrated by those subjected to violence, by their own ‘kin’, the methods employed by the GJM in 2007 were subtler. Migration did take place but what became dominant was the social boycott. The networks established, living in a given area were severed and people stopped acknowledging and helping one another. What should be kept in mind is that the people who were mostly subjected to it belonged to the previous dominant party and so were familiar faces.

As mentioned before, these women were known faces and so soon these women became social outcasts. One of the respondents narrated about a fellow woman in the cadre who was 'hounded' by the opposition when she had gone to visit her sick husband in the hospital. Her house was later ransacked and she had to move to Siliguri to save herself. *Gherao* or encirclement of a building was a common method used by the dominant faction to subdue the opposition. It is interesting to note that all of the above events narrated by these women were led by the women's wing of GJM. The fear of repercussion was clearly evident when my respondent asked me to change the venue of the interview out of fear of being overheard. Such was the fear that she closed the doors and windows of the room to ensure privacy. Another instance of such alienation was narrated by the woman who had to migrate to Siliguri after her father was persecuted for his allegiance to the state during the 1986 phase. Her experience of 2007 phase was scarred with memories of alienation. She narrated how she 'chose' not to participate in the movement due to her father's history. She lived in a small Nepali dominated locality where the wave of the movement was strong. According to her, joining the movement would mean disrespecting her father 'maile mero baba sita esto kasari garnu sakchu' (how can I do this to my father). Her refusal to join the movement was seen as a disloyalty to the cause. She added that after her refusal, she was treated as an outsider by her neighbours.

These incidents have not been highlighted in the movement narratives of the region. The clashes between the state and the people have always had two perspectives- the state and the region represented through the leadership. Narratives of women coming from outside the dominant have scarcely been addressed. These life-histories, though

limited, provide a close examination of the cracks existing in the fabric of unity portrayed by the leadership. Furthermore, these narratives also challenge the notions of familial bonds propagated by the leadership.

One cannot speak about the issue of violence without addressing the silence surrounding it. While some of the respondents were forthcoming about the state and the party violence they had to face during the movement, the question on sexual violence was completely overlooked. Growing up, I had the opportunity to hear stories of the 1986 movement and the violence that ensued but when I approached this subject as a researcher, I was met with an uncomfortable silence. Most of the respondents addressed this subject with statements like “hamro didi-baini haru ko maathi atyachar bhayo” (our sisters faced atrocity) or “hamro didi-baini haru ko jiu ma haath laayo” (they touched our sister’s bodies). No one used the word ‘rape’. Some said they did not wish to speak about it and used it to describe how safe the 2007 phase was for the women.

During each phase of the movement, the state had questioned the loyalty of the people of the region for the Indian nation. The accusations mostly discuss people’s allegiances to Nepal due to their roots. As a result, it is the ‘duty’ of the state to ‘control’ the region through mobilisation of the state machinery. Therefore, during the course of the movement, the region becomes both a home and a militarised zone for the inhabitants. Dolly Kikon’s *Life and Dignity: Women's Testimonies of Sexual Violence in Dimapur (Nagaland)* (2015) addresses this issue of silence while discussing the sexual violence that exists within the community and family in the region of Dimapur. While her subject pertains to the violence and the silence that the individual has to bear from her ‘own’ people, the silence around the movement revolves around the militarised nation. Again

the issue of impunity became crucial as I started asking for the complaints, if any, lodged against the ‘perpetrators of violence’. All the respondents agreed that saving one’s life was more important at that time than lodging a complaint.

The narrative of fear and conflict leading to the trauma that still exists amongst the people provides an understanding of the horrors existing in the two phases. While the conventional reading of violence in the narrative of the movement has been addressed, the issues beyond the dominant spectrum have also been highlighted by the women respondents. Between the silence and the eloquence, these life histories build on the existing knowledge and provide a new history from the perspective of the women participants.

4.4.4 Migration and Marginalisation

The history of migration and the Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 have always made the position of the Nepali speaking population in India unstable. The geographical location of the region of Darjeeling and its sub-divisions further added to the instability facing the inhabitants of the region. The natives of the region have always been referred to as ‘Nepali’ which, in this case, is often assumed to mean the inhabitants of Nepal. While the term Gorkha was used before the 1986 phase, it was popularised by the Gorkhaland movement. It was meant to serve two purposes that is the primary was to forge an identity that was separate from their historic Nepalese roots and the other was to gain acceptance within the Indian nation by using a term that was not only familiar but also celebrated.

While the region has had its share of natives before the English occupation and subsequent migration, it is this tag of migrants that the community has not been able to shrug off. This situation has gotten worse since the demand for statehood began. The allegations made against the community for allying with Nepal and the questioning of loyalty further cleared their position in the eyes of the mainstream. As a result, the entire community suffered the 'stigma' of being separatist and secessionist and ultimately of trying to break the national unity. The demand by the state government to keep an 'eye' on the region has been continuing since 1986. This can be read as a move to control the region by the mainstream as the region cannot be 'trusted'. This act of treating the community as a second rate citizen is further visible in the treatment of the Gorkha as a *bahadur*, who is loyal but is meant to serve with his dialogue of 'ji saabji'. Therefore, the reading of marginalisation is a direct product of the popularised history of migration of the region as well as that of the community.

The reading of migration and marginalisation should not be limited to the historical factors but should be looked at from other diverse perspectives. The question of migration has come up through the narratives not just in terms of its migrant history but also of those forceful migrations that took place due to the struggle for power within the region. Similarly, the question of marginalisation as a result of the continuous internal struggle led to a massive backlash on the people of the region by the dominant political party. This form of repression came due to the refusal to conform to the then leadership in the region. The fear for life and isolation became tools of repression. This added to the pressure to either join the organisation or leave the region. While the former understanding of migration and marginalisation has remained common to all of the

respondents, the latter emerging from the experiences of a select few brings in a new reading, moving away from the popularised.

I wish to engage with this concept of stigma to understand how a community traumatised and dominated negotiates and ultimately tries to break away from it. Harald Eidheim's "When Ethnic Identity Is a Social Stigma" (1969) uses the term stigma while addressing the existing difference between the Lapps and the Norwegian community in the region of West Finnmark, Northern Norway. While Eidheim reads this relation in terms of how the former tries to imitate the dominant Norwegian traits in order to blend in so as to escape the alienation, I contend that in the context of the Gorkhaland demand, the people celebrate this difference. The demand and the subsequent movement is a subversion of the stigma that has 'haunted' the people of the region, specifically the region, as opposed to the entire Nepali speaking population scattered all over the nation. The region, in this case, becomes an important factor in this alienation due to its historical and geographical roots.

The region and its people perform a dual role as the reason for their celebration also becomes the reason for their stigma. For instance, as long as the people and the area conform to the notions set by the mainstream, they are 'acceptable'. The image set by the state and through that the nation is that of the smiling tea garden worker or a *chowkidaar* (guard). The region also has the image of a tourist destination with Darjeeling as the 'Queen of the Hills'. When there is a crack in this image, like the demand, the place and its citizens become a 'threat' to the 'unity' of the nation. Moreover, this popular image enforced by the outsiders also furthers the notion of stigma. The people and their 'home'

are considered only to follow a singular role (i.e. to be a wallflower). The accusation of being a foreigner again adds to the systematic marginalisation.

What is interesting is that this tag has always been used to counter the demand. The effect of comments on the issue of belonging is perhaps best summarised by one of my women respondents, who often has to travel to Siliguri as it is the nearest point that connects the hills with the plains. She recounts that on a number of occasions, she was asked by ‘non-Nepali’ drivers ‘kaha jana hai?... Nepal jayega?...Kakarbhitta jayega?’ ‘Kakarbhitta is the checkpoint between India and Nepal. As she narrated this experience she added ‘haami ke Nepal ko ho?...haami Indian ho... haami ta yaha ka hi basinda ho’ (Are we from Nepal?... We are Indian...we are natives of this place). Similar experiences were recounted by other respondents as well. One respondent pointed out that the radio in the region also provides frequencies from Nepal but to her, the act of not listening to the Nepal radio shows her belongingness. Here, her decision to not listen to the Nepalese radio becomes her point of claim to her national identity. The continuous dismissal of their roots and their urgency to claim provides an insight on not only their dissent but also the ‘national gaze’ that has caused it.

The concept of stigma can further be used to address the issue of internal fissure within the region. Since the 1986 phase, the political factions have been contesting for power. The 2007 phase also witnessed this, but these disputes were done in a subtler manner. Nevertheless, the stigmatisation of those against the ruling party was proclaimed to be against the demand and so against the struggle for recognition. This resulted in mass retaliation against these select few. The external (outside the region by the entire community), and the internal (that subset inside the region who did not support the

dominant party) alienation presents two different readings of the term stigma. The complex structure of isolation, especially that of the internal struggle, presents a community that to the outside seems united but has fractures within it. This becomes especially interesting when looked at from the perspective of those women respondents who chose to shift sides during the struggle but still have allegiances to their former party. These responses beg to question if these women joined the party out of their choice or due to lack of it? As the act of refusing to join would lead to a social boycott, some of these women mentioned how their lives were affected when the change of power took place during 1986 as well as 2007.

The understanding of home and belonging became a point of departure for men and women respondents. The women respondents strongly spoke about the issue of land, home and belonging in the context of the demand while the men spoke more in terms of political independence through the formation of statehood. The concept of *hamro aune pidi* or our coming generation was discussed by all of the women respondents. Similarly, the notion of belonging to the land or 'my land' brought in the discussion of *purkha* or ancestors, who had worked on this land and brought it to its present status. Additionally, *purkha ko maato* or ancestral land also becomes an important bond that binds all the people of the region. The contestations of the political identity of the Nepali speaking community in the region, the geographical proximity of the region to Nepal, and the Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 have made the question of identity pertinent. Land then becomes an important marker of identity not just for the individual but also for the community. It adds to the claim of recognition and of citizenship.

Therefore, ancestral land becomes a site of claim which connects the entire community with a symbolic bond used for assertion.

This notion of familial bond reflects through all the narratives of the women respondents, unlike their male counterparts. One can argue that it may be the influence of the call made to the women in the region by the political party, whereby “*didi-baini haru le afno daju-bhai ko saath dinu*” or sisters were asked to help their brothers. One of my respondents, who has been active since the 2007 phase, spoke about how *nari shakti* was helping their brothers.

The quest of belongingness has been integral to the discourse surrounding the separate state demand but what it begs to question is, if this need to belong differs in women as compared to their male counterpart. Ritu Menon’s “DO WOMEN HAVE A COUNTRY?” (2004) discusses this sense of belonging in the context of the Partition of India in 1947. I wish to specifically look at how she engages with this concept and try to apply her analysis to the context of the movement. A woman cannot be seen as an independent being but rather has to be guided through the parameters set by the patriarchal structures around them. Menon further quotes Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias to highlight that while the feminist literature has participated in the discussions surrounding the issue of biological reproduction and the reproduction of labour, it is in the “reproduction of national, ethnic and racial categories” (Menon, 2004: 57) that they lack. A case from the 2007 phase can be cited where the women became the flag bearers and enforcers of the ‘Gorkha nationalism’. The male leadership asked all the communities to be dressed in their ethnic dresses to show unity in diversity in the region, and this move was closely inspected by the *Nari Morcha*. Moreover, the established

norms set by the dominant party to be a ‘real’ Gorkha were always executed by the women of the party.

Thus the multiple layers within the concepts of migration and marginalisation are intricately connected to the emergence of the Gorkha identity and the subsequent demand for statehood. The history of migration that has enveloped the region and its people has been used to continuously stigmatise them. Within this reading, the region itself becomes a living entity which plays a decisive role in formulating not only ‘its’ own belongingness but also that of its inhabitants.

4.4.5 Identity and Space

Tea Skokic’s “Must We Know Who We Are?” (2004) suggests that national identity, emerging from the collective identity, gains importance during the suffering caused by war. The historical and physical proximity shared between Nepal and the region has led to a constant allegation by the state in its stand against the demand. The Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 added to this issue due to the clause on the porous border system. As a result, the need to establish an identity separate from this historical context became imperative for the people living in the region. The need to create an identity different from that of the larger Nepalese identity gave rise to the term Gorkha. The respondents interviewed in the course of the fieldwork all supported the term Gorkha and saw the term Nepali as a marker for people from Nepal. Another aspect of formulating a separate Gorkha identity is the need to establish an identity that is a part of the Indian nation but separate from the dominant Bengali identity.

With the existence of different sub-communities in the region, language played an integral role in the formation of the Gorkha identity. While the language has been called Nepali, the move by Ghisingh to call it Gorkha added to the discussion on identity. The *Bhasa Andolan* demanded the recognition of the language as an official Indian language began in the 1950's. The fruition of this demand came in 1992 when the demand was finally accepted. The recognition of the Nepali language became synonymous to the question of the Gorkha identity. The language which historically began as a language of trade soon gained prominence as an important marker of identity. This also enabled in formulating not only an oral but also written discourse on the issue enabling the rise of 'Gorkhaness' amongst its speakers. Anderson (2006) argues that the print languages laid the basis for national consciousness as they formulated a collective. He lists out three steps through which this awareness is formed. The first is through the creation of a single form of communication that binds people under one unified identity; second is the print-capitalism enabling the building of this imagined history of this community leading to the rise of the idea of nationhood; and finally the languages of power created by print-capitalism whereby certain dialects lost their position during its dissemination (Anderson, 2006: 45). The role of language in the quest for recognition became all the more evident when the state announced in 2017 that Bengali will become mandatory in all the state-run schools. The region-wide protests against this move, accusing it to be an act of marginalisation by the state, highlight the fear of being ousted that still exists amongst the people.

In 1986, the emergence of the term 'Gorkha', which was popularised by Subhash Ghisingh, saw its reverberation all through the nation. The brandishing of the *khukri*

became a symbol of the Gorkha pride and the songs serenading this identity were seen as representing all of the Nepali speaking population in the region. While there are different communities in the region, the Gorkha identity has been taken up as an overarching identity marker.

While the celebration of the Gorkha identity and discussion on what does it mean to be a Gorkha has taken place the issue of gender has somewhat been side-lined. The description of the *Bir Gorkhali* as a warrior race often depicted a man carrying a *khukri*. This popularised image has been often used to depict the strength, prowess and nationalist fervour of the community but within this celebrated image, the image of the Gorkha woman is missing. This brings in the question, if such an image exists. Since the inception of the movement, women have been actively participating and have been rallying for the recognition of the ‘Gorkha’ community. When interviewed, they say “haami Gorkhey” or “we are Gorkha” but when asked about their definition of a Gorkha woman, it is always the popular image, which is the male martial identity. As a result, while women have been actively participating in the movement, their identity in the movement can still be questioned.

Another manner of reading this collective identity, which most of the women interviewed spoke on is the issue of anonymity. In the interviews conducted, these women would often use the word ‘we’ instead of the singular ‘I’. Even when the questions raised were specifically for the individual, they would reply in the plural. While the need to address the collective can be read as recognition of the united women participation, the internal and external issues surrounding the movement provide a different reading. The discomfort amongst the respondents while discussing their

activities during the movement further adds a new dimension to the use of a collective marker. The need for anonymity becomes all the more crucial to evade repercussions.

An interview with a woman respondent, who was referred to me by her peers as a radical outfit member of Gorkha Volunteer Cell (GVC) during the 1986 phase, can be seen in this light. The venue for the interview also added to the need for anonymity. As the interview was being conducted in a public market, she became more conscious of her responses. She further asked questions about my family details and my objective for conducting these interviews. While her peers told me about her activities during the movement, she did not wish to comment on her individual participation and referred to it as ‘sapai le garyo’ or everyone did it. Another former Gorkha National Women’s Organisation (GNWO) leader kept using the word ‘haami’ or ‘we’ to discuss what she and her fellow comrades achieved.

Therefore, the question as to why they support an identity which does not have any gender-aware ‘space’ can be raised in the context of the movement. Skokic (2004) refers to Melluci and states, “personal identity is especially fragile in highly differentiated social systems prone to change where the “me” is exposed to many pressures leading to loss of autonomy and freedom and there is a risk of identity being fractured” (Skokic, 2004: 201). She further adds, “personal identities are suppressed, and society becomes dominated by one identity that distinguishes one group of people from another and at the same time is a symbol of recognition” (Skokic, 2004: 202).

Interestingly, Skokic uses the phrase ‘almost Us’ (Skokic, 2004: 202) for women as they are given the characteristics often given to a stranger. She further adds that the

role mostly ascribed to a woman is that of a mother, who is seen as the “bearer of the nation, mother of the future soldiers, and keeper of traditional values and the home” (Skokic, 2004: 202). Furthermore, “nationalism aims to separate the collective and individual experiences of war trauma and victimisation and imposes on women’s remembrance a shared ideological framework, forming a collective memory of common experiences” (Skokic, 2004: 203).

These statements become all the more crucial when weighed from the narratives of the women involved in the Gorkhaland movement. The familial bond is forged with the women participants, whereby not only the demand but also the leadership is asked to be protected by them. Moreover, the hope that the formation of the demand as the answer to all the problems inflicted on the region brings forth the subsuming of the gender issue within the demand. In the article, Skokic (2004) looks at various organisations led by women that came up during the time of crisis. These organisations were later marginalised by the dominant male authorities. The situation in the Gorkhaland movement differs as these women entered as a part of a male-centred political organisation. Therefore, there was no scope of gradual marginalisation. The role of the leader and the party was central to their participation.

It was under these perspectives that the women respondents were asked questions on the issues of identity, movement, and participation. The demand for a separate statehood is the demand for the identity of the community that has often been linked to its ‘foreign roots’. Similarly, the need to be called Gorkha also stems from the identity crisis that this community continues to face. While the term Gorkha under no condition describes all communities involved in the movement, it has been used to join all so as to

address the issue of marginalisation faced by them. The term addresses some issues and leaves out some. One of the questions, as discussed above, centres on the subject of gender. The women interviewed have been a part or have at least witnessed the movement. Therefore, with the change in the movement and in its leadership, the question arose if the issue of gender was also dealt with.

The point of examination began in 2007 as it was helmed as a gender equality movement, due to the women 'taking' the lead. The media portrayed a strong women's wing in the movement, which led rallies and protest marches. The question then arose as to how these women understand the question of identity. When I asked them what the term Gorkha meant to them, most of the women interviewed spoke about a separate identity, away from the 'outsider' Nepali and Bengali dominance but as an integral part of the Indian nation. On closer examination, the description given by these women rang similar to those propagated by the male leadership. Therefore, the aspect of gender was added to the question. The new question centred around two intersecting identities of being a woman and a Gorkha.

On the issue of the intersecting identities, there was no description on who a Gorkha woman is. When I enquired about it, the women belonging to both 1986 and 2007 gave the popular image of the Gorkha, which is predominantly masculine. It is in the personal experiences of these women during the movement that the intersecting identities of gender and Gorkha came to the forefront. The question of space ascribed to these women within the movement also became evident in these conversations.

Both the 1986 and 2007 phases witnessed the participation of women in the movement. These women believed in the formation and recognition of the identity which would solve all the issues in the region. I was taking the interviews of my respondents during the municipal elections. I enquired if there were any pamphlets that they had issued during the movement in 2007 and also during the recent elections. They informed me that the different branches of the party were assisting the central committee comprising the core members of the organization, which also took care of the publications. The women's wing was, therefore, present to assist the leadership and it seemed that it could not possibly branch out independently.

The question of identity becomes more precarious for the women belonging to this community as it not only just celebrates masculinity but also the term Gorkha is an imagined political identity. As a respondent stated that it was the leadership, in this case Ghisingh that led her to realise the meaning of being a Gorkha. To her, if Ghisingh was not there they would not have realised the issue of identity. One can read this statement in order to understand the issue of space that these women occupied during the course of the movement.

The question of identity and space further undergoes change when the individual or the group does not subscribe to the dominant notion. As Rada Iveković and Julie Mostov in "Introduction: From Gender to Nation" (2004) state,

...in a community (and thus within the nation), the communication between individuals is always indirect and goes through a higher office or principle (hegemonic idea, or colonial universal) with which some (the hegemonic group)

can identify directly... Those who are not identical... have only dispersion, diversity and discontinuity... They bring discontinuity into the picture by interrupting the established community self-identity. (Iveković and Mostov, 2004: 13)

While the ‘virile’ man and the ‘submissive’ woman cannot completely be seen from the perspective of the movement, the need to conform to the dominant remains crucial for individual existence. This remained the same for both men and women in the region. Interestingly, in 2007, it was the women who carried out activities that involved the societal exclusion of those who did not follow the dominant party. This denial or refusal to follow the dominant was construed as the denial for the movement and the demand. The dominant party and the leader became the representatives of the movement.

Therefore, the issue of identity and space cannot be viewed from a singular perspective of the ‘united’ Gorkha front. The over-arching term has been used as an identity marker for all the people in the region but it has remained quiet in the context of gender. Again, the gender equality propagated by the 2007 phase can also be read in the context of space and gender, where the question of ‘visibility’ cannot be quantified as being a gender-neutral space.

4.4.6 Emergence of Icons and Cults

The role of the leader became a recurring theme in all of the narratives as the leaders became the point of entry into the movement for many. The position enjoyed by the leadership elaborates the importance given to them especially within the structure of the ‘movement family’. While the political conquests in the region by each leader have

been discussed in detail in the previous chapter, this section focuses on how the respondents perceived them.

Both the leaders have been touted as charismatic. Jennifer L. Epley in “Weber’s Theory of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of Muslim Leaders in Contemporary Indonesian Politics” (2015), refers to Weber’s definition of a charismatic leader as one “who is a bearer of specific gifts of body and mind that were considered “supernatural” (in the sense that not everybody could have access to them).” (Epley, 2015: 8) Furthermore, Epley quotes Tucker in describing a leader, “who comes forward in a distressful situation and presents himself or herself in a convincing way to the sufferers as one who can lead them out of their distress by virtue of special personal characteristics or formula for salvation may arouse their intense loyalty and enthusiastic willingness to take the path the leader is pointing out” (Epley, 2015: 8). While Epley reads and questions Weber’s concept of ‘charismatic leadership’ with regard to the Muslim leaders in contemporary Indonesian politics, I propose to read it in the context of the emergence of Ghising and Gurung.

The demand during 1986 was not only about the formation of a state but also to eradicate any political influence of the state in the region. Ghisingh ‘ruled’ for more than a decade and was only deposed when the Gurung came to power. There is a contested view on these two leaders especially when spoken to the people who have remained loyal to them. For those women respondents who have remained part of the organisation, the celebration of Ghisingh as a demi-god became evident. They used the word *baaje* or grandfather to address Ghisingh. This term is used to denote not only affection and respect for the individual but also create a familial bond with the leader being the head of

the ‘movement family’. The influence of Ghisingh came up when the discussion about the two leaders came up. Those who remained loyal to Ghisingh were treated as social outcast during the GJM rule. When asked, these women described him as ‘ekdumei simple manche’ (a very simple man) who died in exile. Their view of the present leadership is of one who has reduced the demand to a ‘begging bowl’ meant to serve personal causes.

These women also credited Ghisingh for making them understand the meaning of Gorkhaland. Even those who switched sides during the second phase said that without the guidance of Ghisingh, they would not have understood the need of the demand. As one respondent suggested, Ghisingh and his followers ‘educated’ her, which in turn helped her to promote the notions of identity and statehood amongst the masses. The exile of Ghisingh took a toll on his followers and the women respondents from this section spoke about how closely they had worked with him during the movement. As one respondent recollected, she had gone to meet Ghisingh to request him to stop the violence in the region. These women portrayed the image of a benevolent and able leader who formed the first autonomous council in the region.

There were those who participated under the leadership of Ghisingh but lost their faith in him after the movement ended. While one had migrated to GJM, the other chose to completely move away from the movement. Both felt that the formation of the autonomous council, DGHC was a wrong decision and saw it as disrespectful to the people who had lost their lives during the movement. There were also those who never belonged to the GNLF in 1986 and were subjected to marginalisation. They saw Ghisingh

and his party as a tyrannical. These women quoted Ghisingh as a man who disrespected ‘intellectuals’ and only understood suppression and violence to achieve his dominance.

In 2007, the Tamang wave led to the rise of a new leader, Bimal Gurung, who made similar claims as his predecessor, Ghisingh but in what he differed from him was in the execution of the movement. The GJM used the violent history of 1986 to establish its claim on the movement. It proclaimed itself as a democratic movement and employing Gandhian methods. Gurung’s image then rested on being stark opposite to that of Ghisingh, who was known as an autocrat. While Ghisingh was a writer himself, his open rejection of the ‘intellectuals’ has been spoken about by the respondents. Gurung was able to garner support from different political organisations.

The members of GJM hailed their leader as democratic and aware of the structures of power, unlike his predecessor. *Hamro maniniya Bimal Gurung-jiu* or our respected Bimal Gurung sir, as the women respondents referred to him was seen in stark difference to Ghisingh. The oratory skills of Gurung, especially one where he urged the people to shoot him on the head if he fails to achieve the demand, amassed huge support for him. As a prominent women leader said that the women in the party are the first line of defence for the men. She pointed out that it was the duty of the *Nari Morcha* to follow all the orders given by their leader, Bimal Gurung. Another woman respondent pointed out that without Gurung, women would not be able to participate in such a high number. He ‘created’ space where women were allowed to participate and take care of their family without any fear.

There is, of course, a different perspective to Gurung's leadership garnered through the narratives of the women belonging to the GNLF. Amongst them, Gurung is seen as an opportunist using the emotion of the people for Gorkhaland for his personal gain. These women accused the leader of using the term for his gain and assisting the state to control the region. The formation of GTA after the 2007 phase was seen by these women as a ruse to placate the mass. As one respondent said, 'khai ke chen paayo?' (what did he achieve?), mockingly. The meaning of the statement was clear. Another woman respondent remarked 'hamile jasto sahe, testo ta ka sakcha aile ko haru le' (What we faced back then, those participating now can never do that).

The role of the leader is directly related to the demand for a separate state. While the leader is celebrated, his fame is directly related to his position with regard to the demand. With the 2017 phase, the leadership again changed but the use of the term Gorkhaland has remained. While this has been true in terms of a larger group, there have been people who have remained loyal to the leader and have had a strong influence on them during the movement. The respondents I interviewed belonged to this category. These women have not only celebrated the persona of the leader but have actively acted according to 'his' wish. During the interviews conducted with each of them, what became evident is the reverence that they have for their leader. Under such responses, one needs to examine how deep the influence of such a 'man' goes. As the leader has always been a man, it becomes all the more crucial to read his impact on his women subordinates.

The abovementioned linkages or issues discussed further consolidate the relation among the respondents. While these issues highlight diverse experiences, they also shed light on the personal histories of the respondents. These women become part of the

‘movement family’ and connect with each other through the narratives. The formation of the individual within this bond needs to be read closely as even in these common issues each experience differs. This formation becomes crucial to understand as it performs a symbiotic function in understanding the different relationships. The Self or the individual not only informs its existence through those on the outside, but also influences the narratives of the movement.

4.5 Constructing the Self, the Other and the Others⁴

With the interviews collected, one aspect that became extremely visible was the negotiation between the collective and individual identity. The constant shift in addressing oneself, as the respondents progressed with their narrative, was marred with a conscious effort of how much they wished to divulge. This technique was also used to address individuals or groups apart from them. The above distinction is used to describe the individual/respondents or the Self, the outsiders who do not belong to the region or the Other and those, apart from the respondent, who belong to the region or the Others. The last group is further divided between those who belong to the same political group as the respondent and those who belong to the opposite faction. The Gorkhaland movement becomes the background on which each of these identities is created.

The narrative collected performs the specific role of placing its speaker in the history of the movement. It formulates the memory of not only the individual narrating it

⁴In the existing movement narrative, the focus has always been on the Other as the powerful outsider but I propose that the Others should be viewed as equally crucial. They are insiders who have also influenced the narrative of the respondents. The Others represent the people who belong to the region and may or may not have been an ally to the respondent. Both sections have played a crucial role in developing the Self or the movement identity of the respondents.

but also of the people that she had contact with. This becomes more pertinent when the narrator is a woman, as she involves her family in her own narrative. Unlike the male respondents, who limited their narratives to their own achievements and the political discourse of the movement, the women discussed how their entire family was affected by the movement. Therefore, this formation of the Self, the Other and the Others become more comprehensive in order to understand their relationship to each other.

The history of the movement does not just include the events that took place but also recognises the experiences of the individuals involved. It is through these individuals that the narrative of the movement is formed. As pressure was formed, by both internal and external struggle for power, it is the relation existing between these factions that have created the memory of the movement. Under these parameters, the relationship between the individual and collective identity and of those with the outsiders, i.e. the state and the opposite faction in the region needs to be analysed.

Memory becomes a tool for not only constructing the movement but also for the Self and those related to the Self. What this means is that the history of the movement is used by each individual interviewed to construct them as a 'true' Gorkha. When a woman asserts that she and her political party truly fought for the demand, she is indirectly denying the other side's contribution. Again, when the other side makes the same allegations, they are staking their claim on the movement. Similarly, the memory of the 1986 phase is also used for two purposes, either as a precautionary tale or as a glorious past of fearlessness. It is here that the image of the Others is formed. While the Other has always been the state which has unanimously been portrayed as the oppressor, the Others perform the dual of an enemy and a 'family'.

The relation between the state and the region has always been a strained one. Since the demand for Gorkhaland began, the state has brought out official documents calling the demand ‘unconstitutional and separatist’. Since 1986, the state has witnessed a change in power from Jyoti Basu to Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to the present Mamata Banerjee. While the state’s stand has remained the same, the state’s measures have changed.

It was during my second field-visit in 2017 that the state had announced the mandatory implementation of Bengali in schools all over the state. This sparked a massive protest in the hills, where there is a dominant Nepali speaking population. People of the region saw this as a deliberate move to further marginalise the hills. During my informal interactions, one of my respondents called it a threat to the Gorkha identity. According to her, this move was meant to further relegate the people of the region to the margins. This fear increased during the 2017 resurgence of the movement when the chief minister questioned the loyalty of the people and alleged that people of the hills cannot be trusted due to their shared history with Nepal.

This relation with the Other acquires a gender dimension when it comes to the present Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee. One has to remember that her predecessors were all men and the discourse surrounding the role of the leader was also moulded based on their gender. While previous leaders were referred to as ruthless, specially in the context of the 1986 phase, Banerjee’s failure in this regard was attributed to her marital status. We witness two contrasting images being formed- the Indian Gorkha women, participating in the movement and becoming the ‘mother-like backbones’ and the ‘harsh and unmotherly’ state leader. I wish to argue here that unlike her male predecessors,

Mamata Banerjee's role as the leader was dubbed as a failure for not being able to take care of her family. The argument put forth by the women respondents was that she was meant to be a mother-figure, as the head of the state, to all her people including the Indian Gorkhas. But, she proved otherwise in her retaliation during the Municipal elections, the language implementation and the resultant 2017 resurgence.

What became interesting in this discourse was how the women respondents reacted to such tactics used by that state, especially when the leader of the state is a woman. This became a common thread that linked all my respondents. What became crucial while describing the Chief Minister was her gender rather than her role as the head of the state and the chief antagonist. Such image of being an unmarried woman, lacking the familial ties, was pointed out by my women respondents as they spoke about the hardships that people of the region were facing. Phrases like *kathor aimeh* or cruel woman were used to describe her. As a result, Mamata Banerjee becomes the symbol of what a woman should not be. The *tyag* or *balidaan* (sacrifice) that has become the image of women participants in the movement are placed in stark opposition to how the “*daya, maya na bhako aimeh*” (a woman with no compassion) Mamata Banerjee is.

It is not only how the individual configures entities outside of itself but also how the outside formulates him/her. In the movement, the individual identity is consumed by the larger party identity so a respondent belonging to a minority party, which has its allegiance to the state, becomes the enemy, irrespective of her nativity to the region. Here, her individuality ceases to exist. Another perspective of reading this collective identity is through the lens of anonymity. As the movement continues in the region, a threat from both inside and outside exists. Certain issues are considered a taboo, like

speaking against the dominant party, as a result, many respondents chose to speak in the plural 'we'. This ensured response but did not point at them particularly. This shifting between the individual and plural or *maile* and *hamile* or 'I' and 'we' was present in all of the narratives. Interestingly, some women never used 'I' in their re-telling. These interviews celebrated the role of the party and the leader as opposed to personal history. When asked personal questions, these respondents continued to use the collective identity of the party. The Gorkha identity was another aspect of this collectivity that was claimed in the narratives by all the respondents, but party identity was seen as more important than the larger ethnic identity.

The reciprocal relation between the construction of the Self and the movement enables the building of a narrative of the mutual influence. Here the Self or the respondent speaks about all the key characters involved in this re-telling of the movement. While this method has been used in the writings of the male leaders of the movement, here it is the women involved in the movement who become the primary speakers. The history of the movement has always revolved around its male leadership, who have restricted their narrative to the political issues. But when a woman becomes the primary speaker, she brings in not just the political but also the personal. The construction of the movement then takes a new turn, where the movement is not just a political event but also a personal narrative of struggle and suffering.

Each of the women interviewed has been involved in the movement. These women have witnessed the changes in the leadership and in the execution of the movement of how each phase has affected not just them but also their families. These women then stake their claim on the movement to create their image of a 'faithful'

participant of the movement. They bring in not just their claim but also the claim of their political party. While most of the respondents addressed their claim, there was one who did not wish to recall her participation. There was a need for her to erase her ‘movement self’ from history. This was caused due to the suffering that she had endured due to her participation in the movement.

The movement itself means different things for different respondents. It is no longer a passive entity. While most saw it as a demand for recognition, to some it was a time of repression from not just the state but also by the ruling party. Again, the two phases of the movement have different implications for those involved. These women come from a different socio-political background and so each have a different ‘story’ to tell.

Interestingly, this Self underwent a change in 2013 when development boards were set up by the state in the region. The Gorkha self now became a Lepcha or Bhutia self, resulting in the breaking of the Gorkha identity. Therefore, the individuals who were once involved in creating the history of the movement were now engaging in creating a history of their ‘own’ community, through the creation of a community self. The interconnected relation between the self and the movement and those identities surrounding the self became the point of re-reading the movement. It is these connections that enable the formulation of the re-telling of the Gorkhaland movement.

The themes discussed above provide an understanding of an intricate relationship between the women respondents and the movement. These themes overlap as the lines between the individual and collective identities get blurred. These women provide a

detailed narrative of their life history as well as their family history. Where these narratives diverge is in the layered reading of each of the themes. None of the themes discussed have a singular meaning and the two phases make this diverse reading possible. The dynamic nature of the movement and the effect it has had on the lives of all the thirty women interviewed provide multiple levels of analysis.

Issues of identity, marginalisation, leadership, family, migration, and participation have all been unearthed from the interviews conducted. The social, economic and political stand of these women has influenced their narratives and my unusual position of being both an outsider and insider to the region opened some doors while closed some. As an outsider, I did not have much knowledge about organisations beyond the dominant; therefore, it was only after they refused that I started searching for other parties involved with the movement. As an insider, the knowledge of the language helped in my conversations with the respondents. As the interviews were conducted in 2018, the political scenario had changed after the 2017 resurgence of the demand. As a result, those belonging to the dominant party were uncomfortable discussing the movement as opposed to those belonging to the minor political organisations.

As a result, I was given a chance to interview women outside of the dominant spectrum. This enabled me to read the issues from perspectives outside the dominant sphere. From the threads of similarity formulated from the constructed bonds of movement family, the resultant pain caused from the breaking of this bond, and its engagement with the everyday become part of this experience. The construction of the narrator and her relation to those 'outside' further cements her position within the movement family. It is in the positioning of the individual within the context of the

movement that this chapter paves way for the next, where the individual respondents gain precedence. The next chapter, therefore, addresses this issue from the *testimonios* provided by twelve women involved in the movement from varying positions. These women have been chosen out of the thirty respondents on the basis of their diversity, in terms of their political allegiance, their socio-economic position, and on the basis of the phases they were involved in. Therefore, the following chapter provides a background not only to the women participants but also to the core issues that have surrounded the debate on ‘space’ for women in the Gorkhaland movement.

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Chapter 5

Backlash from the ‘Backbone’⁵

This chapter intends to bring to the fore the experiences of the women within the movement and how they enable a re-telling of the movement that is different from the popular, male-dominated narrative. As discussed before, the objective of the study is not to question the movement or the demand but to understand the history of the movement from the experiences of women, who were pushed to the margins. Therefore, it examines how these women understood the discourse of identity, participation and their claim on the movement. The respondents discussed here are not considered as a category but are read as individuals. They have different experiences due to their socio-economic and political position. Additionally, it is their experience in the movement that has been focused to build a narrative that attempts to move away from the existing discourse, which is mostly led by the State on the one side, and the political leaders of the movement on the other. Therefore, the twelve women discussed here re-formulate and examine the narrative of the movement, not only from the outside that is the state-region interface, but also from the inside that is the political turmoil existing within the region.

The movement has lasted for more than three decades and so has witnessed the rise and fall of various leaderships. It is therefore important to note that the demand has remained constant, yet the participation has not. With the rise of the demand, there were two phases that were instrumental in bringing the movement to the fore, the 1986 and the

⁵ The term ‘backbone’ was used by a respondent as she described the role of women in the 2007 phase. I had asked her about her view on women’s participation and she had remarked that women were the backbone of the movement without which the movement could not stand. Further, she added that their role as a constant support to the leadership has allowed the movement to flourish.

2007. The women respondents whose narratives are going to be discussed in this chapter belong to these two phases. Each of the respondents has her political affiliation and has tried to ‘claim’ the movement in her narrative. Here ‘claim’ not only refers to the validation of their individual experiences but also emphasises the claim of their parties on the movement.

As discussed above, the chapter focuses on the women who have been part of both the phases. One respondent stated that, “we are the backbone of this movement”. This chapter intends to read these individuals who have been an integral part of the movement and through their narratives re-tell the history of the movement. While the previous chapter dealt with the re-telling by reading the experiences through common issues, the focus here is on the individuals who have chosen to discuss their personal histories. The Self constructed through the relation shared with the Other and the Others (discussed in details in the chapter 4) and the perception of the ‘outside’ through this relation is discussed in detail. While the names used are aliases to respect the anonymity of the respondents, the objective of naming the individuals is to highlight their singular *testimonios*.

The present chapter attempts to understand the criticality of individual narratives in the building of the movement history. The focus on the chapter is not only on the individual re-telling of the movement but also on the experiences that go beyond the confines of the movement. As the narratives blur the lines of distinction between personal and political, we begin to question the concepts like participation and memory. Since the issue discussed is political in nature, *testimonio* becomes the means through which these respondents assert their experience. While the previous chapter delved into the issues that

have linked these narratives, the present chapter celebrates the difference amongst the twelve narratives. Each respondent has her own history that adds to the diversity in the movement history. The objective is to understand their experiences in the larger movement history against the backdrop of the conflict between the state and the region.

5.1 Rationale

The present chapter focuses on twelve narratives chosen out of the thirty collected. The twelve respondents belong to the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) and Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist (CPRM). These respondents do not represent the entire category of women participants of the movement but address the diversity that this study engages with.

While all the respondents share a common thread of being part of the movement, the selection of respondents has been based on their shifting of positions within the framework of the movement. The difference ranges from those who have remained in the movement with the political affiliation they began with to those who have changed their position and now belong to a minority political party including those who do not fall into the popularised understanding of the term ‘participation’. The women interviewed have been part of the movement and have tried to claim the movement through their participation but the difference is in terms of their experiences within the movement. These narratives have been also been chosen based on the respondents’ willingness to divulge aspects of their life history. This included their family history, their personal narrative of alienation, the violence they suffered due to their political loyalties and their own understanding of the term ‘participation’.

The narratives will be read from the concept of *testimonio*, which highlights the collective struggle taken up by a marginalised group. As the *testimonio* is a first person narrative, the importance of the individual who constructs it cannot be neglected. While the Gorkhaland movement is the background on which the narrative is established, it is the individual women respondents who are the subject of this study. Therefore, this chapter accounts for the individual who has been a part of the movement and through whom the movement is being re-told. These individual lives, inside and outside the movement, help in building the narrative. What further affects this narrative is that all of the twelve individuals involved are women, who have worked in different capacities in the movement and have their own ‘stories’ to share.

5.2 Theories of *Testimonio*

Before we begin to discuss the narratives of the twelve women with regard to the threads that have emerged from them, it is important to understand the difference between testimony and *testimonio*. Within the literary context, as Lindsay Bowman’s *Magical Realist Testimonio* (2015) suggests,

‘*Testimonio*’ is a literary genre and is not bound by the same legal obligations to “truth” which are equated with “testimony”. *Testimonio* is generally considered a fact-based first person narrative of injustice, seeking to represent the experiences of a larger social group, with the aim of rallying support to create more just future. While there may be similarities, *testimonio* is not the same as other non-fiction genres such as biography, autobiography, and historical texts. In “Voices for the

Voiceless,” Gugelberger and Kearney explain the major proponents of *testimonio* that separate it from similar genres: *testimonio* is concerned with the future, not the past; it is concerned with the collective society, not the individual...(Bowman, 2015).

Kavita Panjabi’s “The *Testimonio* in Latin America and India: Critical Contestations of the Collective Voice” (2009) describes

...*testimonio* as a specific genre that represents eye-witness accounts of collective struggle that enact a critique of oppressive state rule. The *testimonio* may be written directly by the activist in struggle. Or narrated orally by the activist and be compiled by the interviewer who also functions as the editor of the text and who has so far, for most well-known *testimonios*, has been a person from another culture. (Panjabi, 2009: 8).

Panjabi further elaborates that in comparison to other forms of literary genres, like novel or autobiography, *testimonio* is an articulation of an entire community. She adds that “...testimony communicates, centrally, the political perception of a marginalised community-it is a history from below narrated by a participant... which could just be a contemporary history-of his/her community, and also communicates a combined vision for the future, the collective political imperative of the community.” (Panjabi, 2009: 10).

In the above discussion, the issue of collective and individual has been constant. Both Panjabi and Bowman discuss how the genre itself is meant to be an articulation of a marginalised community. I would like to focus on the word ‘community’ here. While the genre does represent the collective voice of the community, what also needs to be

focused on is the internal dissent existing within these collective voices. While *testimonios* have been used for a larger social change, I would like to focus on how the narratives I have gathered are also about the claim on the movement by the self. Panjabi suggests that despite internal dissent existing in such collective, they are “united in the face of the world” (Panjabi, 2009: 17). But only with the inclusion of such voices within the collective that it will be able to “nuance the standpoint of the collective” (Panjabi, 2009: 17).

Dolores Delgado Bernal, Rebeca Burciaga & Judith Flores Carmona’s “Chicana/Latina *Testimonios*: Mapping the Methodological, Pedagogical, and Political” (2012) suggests that, “*Testimonio* is and continues to be an approach that incorporates political, social, historical and cultural histories that accompany one’s life experiences as a means to bring about change through consciousness-raising. In bridging individuals with collective histories of oppression, a story of marginalisation is re-centred to elicit social change” (Bernal et al., 2012: 364). They further add, “*Testimonio* transcends descriptive discourse to one that is more performative in that the narrative simultaneously engages the personal and collective aspects of identity formation while translating choices, silences, and ultimately identities” (Bernal et al., 2012: 364).

Thus, the question now arises how one negotiates between the individual and the collective narratives. While the individual narratives do represent the situations that the community is facing, the narrator’s subjectivity cannot be ignored. The narrator’s socio-economic and political background needs to be considered when the narrative is examined. Moreover, to consider the community as homogenous may also yield a skewed analysis. *Testimonio* then becomes a bridge between what is witnessed and what is

articulated. Under such parameters, Panjabi asks “What are the limits of the collective voice in the *testimonio*?” (Panjabi, 2009: 18). She argues that these individual narratives may seem to be breaking the ‘political solidarity’ but in reality, they are voices that have not found a place in the collective. She gives the examples of the writings by Bama and Sivakami to show how women’s experiences that were once seen as individual have now become a part of the larger women’s solidarity network. She concludes that those narratives that have not been included in the collective articulation, due to the ‘internal hierarchies’, mark the limits of this genre.

The platform of witnessing a political event like the demand for statehood adds to the existing definition of *testimonio* which suggests that such narratives bring to the fore the injustice and oppression that a community has undergone. Here the individual becomes a mouthpiece of the community as he or she tells their story. It is here that this study digresses from the mainstream understanding of *testimonio* as the narratives do not just perform the role of a mouthpiece of the movement but also discuss the ‘cracks’ within the community. Interestingly, the respondents often consciously resorted to a collective identity of ‘we’, even when they are speaking about their personal experience. This may be read as a protective measure taken to safeguard oneself from any retaliation by dominant factions both from the region and the outside.

While the remembering and re-telling in women narratives have been linked to healing like it is in Srila Roy’s *Remembering Revolution Gender, Violence, and Subjectivity in India's Naxalbari Movement* (2013), I argue that the narratives presented here have the objective of claiming the movement through their re-telling. Each of the respondents attempts to stake her claim and their affiliated organisations’ claim on the

movement through their experiences. It should also be mentioned that the assertions made by the respondents were a response to the questions that I asked. Another aspect that should be remembered is that the narratives went beyond the question-answer structure during the course of the interview, as the respondents began divulging information that went beyond the questions.

As mentioned before, these women belong to different political affiliations and so their assertion also involves the claim of the party on the movement. These women claim the movement through the events that they have witnessed and participated in. Therefore, these respondents are not only speaking just about themselves within the movement, but also providing a commentary on the movement and the region through the different phases. All of these women have witnessed both the phases and so have witnessed the changes that have taken place within the framework of the movement.

In the context of *testimonio* one also has to read the role played by listener and the interlocutor. Bernal, Burciaga and Carmona (2012) suggest that listening is central to such narratives as the listener ‘unwraps’ this ‘story’ and is responsible to keep the narrator engaged. The listener is no longer passive as s/he becomes part of the narrator’s world and forms solidarity with him/her. “In this act, the *testimonialista* is the holder of knowledge thereby disrupting traditional academic ideals of who might be considered a producer of knowledge” (Bernal et al., 2012: 365). *Testimonialista* refers to the individual who gives the *testimonio*.

The *testimonio* being a first person narrative of the person who is the witness as well as the speaker, presence of the interlocutor becomes an obstacle as it is he or she

who records, transcribes and publishes the narrative. I have used the term, interlocutor to define my role in the interviews conducted. I was never allowed by my respondents to be a passive listener. I was continuously questioned by them regarding my views on their narratives. While my position as a reader trying to understand and interpret the movement from the gender perspective remained, my presence evolved my status from an active listener to the one who became a witness of not just their stories of the movement but also part of their family narrative.

There is a fear of the mediation influenced by the interlocutor and for the narrative to be influenced by his or her presence. Therefore, it is important to point out that my role as the interlocutor is not meant to be a mouthpiece for these women but a reader to fill in the gaps that exist in the dominant narrative with the women respondents' personal narratives. While the women interviewed have the resources to create and disseminate their knowledge, the political turmoil in the region and the constant fear from inside and outside have forced them to remain quiet. While some remain visible and active members of the movement, the constant changes in the politics of the region and its relation to the State have had their effect on the articulation of their experience.

The objective of *testimonio* then is not just about the narrator who has witnessed the movement or any event but it is also about the reader or the audience who have witnessed the events through these narratives. The reader is transported to the event that is the focus of these narratives and becomes part of the life of these narratives. As the life story of these women unfolds, the reader also transcends her role from being a mere audience to a witness. The narratives are personal stories that allow the readers to 'see' the lives of these women during the movement and their participation in the movement.

The reader and the interlocutor are no longer neutral individuals but become part of this narration.

In legal terms, ‘bearing witness’ would mean providing a first person account of an event as evidence in the court. In the present study, witnessing a movement like Gorkhaland fulfil two purposes, the first being the historical account of the movement and its aftermath, which has been continuously discussed and the second being the effect of the movement on the personal lives of the people from the region. It is the latter that this chapter engages with. The 1986 phase has been dubbed as one of the most violent times in the region while the 2007 phase was one of relative calmness. But the inner turmoil existing within the region amongst the people paints a different picture of the 2007 phase. These narratives then become the ‘missing pieces’ that allow us to understand the situation within the region. Moreover, these narratives reflect not only the personal experiences of the witness but also the experiences of the community, including the internal power struggles within the region, during that turbulent period. As all the respondents commented, it led to brothers killing brothers or *bhai le bhai lai maaryo*.

As the interviews progressed the conventional understanding of participation came under questioning as not all the respondents ‘actively’ participated in the movement. Here, active refers to the visibility of the individuals in the organisation. These women narrate not only their ‘stories’ but also those of their families. Therefore, the role of the women in the movement does not end outside in the public domain but extends into their homes. These women perform dual role as they not only take care of their ‘own’ families but also protect their ‘movement’ family.

5.3 Mapping the Role of Memory in *Testimonios*

Pierre Nora in “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire” (1989) suggests, “the quest for memory is the search for one’s history” (Nora, 1989: 13). The position of memory and history as one of interconnectedness and that of opposition can be witnessed all through these narratives under discussion. While the interviews conducted took place after the two phases, the provided responses differed on the basis of the experiences by each individual. For example, the 1986 phase has been termed as a violent phase in the history of the movement. The women respondents who participated in the 1986 phase have glorified it and have called it the ‘real’ movement as the members had struggled during the violent period. Therefore, the ‘credibility’ of this phase and by the extension of the movement, depends on the suffering that the people had undergone. This claim has been shot down by the 2007 phase participants, as they see the previous phase as a blot in the history of the movement. To them, it is the past mistake of their predecessor that the movement has still not resulted in the realisation of the demand. In both the cases, a historical event (the 1986 phase) has been used to validate the existence of each perspective. While both the phases failed in the formation of the statehood, it is in their execution that they are celebrating. The supporters of each phase praise the movement for being radical (1986) and peaceful (2007). This claim is further cemented by the fact that each section looks down on the other phase and its supporters.

The role of memory and history permeates through other aspects that bind these narratives. Some have sought the use of history to claim their phase as better and also to look down upon the mistakes of the past. The need to establish the 2007 phase as the Gandhian or non-violent is posed directly against the 1986 volatile phase. Moreover,

claiming the movement as Gandhian allows it to be more 'Indian' which reflects the core issue of identity and so is more convincing for the nation. The demand at its core is the recognition of the Indian Gorkha community as citizens of the nation and the formation of the region of Gorkhaland can be read as a quest for a home within the Indian nation. The migrant history of the community and the claim of belonging by the Indian Gorkhas through their memory is juxtaposed in the course of the movement as each side intends to de-claim and re-claim the movement. In such case, then, the objective of history is to suppress the 'roots' that the memory is creating in each phase. Therefore, what ensues is a 'creation' of new history, specifically during the 2007 phase, with the objective of gaining power.

The narratives discussed here do not just provide a collective insight into the movement but also shed light on each respondent's personal history. The narrative, at its core, is a re-telling of an individual, who has witnessed a political event and participated in it. As discussed by Panjabi (2009), it is only when these individual voices are taken into consideration that one can provide a holistic reading of the event.

Veena Das' *Remaking the World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery* (2001) intends to look at the narratives that are collected based on four parameters, that is, the relation between collective and individual memory, the creation of a space where the experiences are articulated that are not 'official', voices collected that have been defiant in the face of tragedy and the subsequent healing and returning to the everyday (Das, 2001: 3). After each phase of the movement there has been a lull where people have 'gone back' to their lives but how far one does actually go back is an important question. The recovery of these narratives depends on the political situation in the region. With

each new perspective, one is reminded of how a space has been created for these articulations, for example, the narratives of women belonging to minor political organisations. As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, the aftermath of the 2017 resurgence, where the members of dominant organisation refused to discuss the movement, resulting in an opportunity for the researcher to meet women from other political organisations.

In the case of the 2007 phase, the past was revisited to establish the failure of the previous (1986) movement. As Das suggests, “sometimes violence in one era is grafted onto the memories of another...” (Das, 2001: 7). The memory of the violence that ensued in the region during 1986 was evoked during the 2007 resurgence so as to discredit the leadership and thereby gain power. By doing this the new party and its leadership tried to establish themselves and soon became the face of the 2007 ‘Gandhian’ Gorkhaland movement. The ensuing political claim to power in 2007 witnessed a new form of violence. The GJM employed social boycott in order to suppress the GNLF. Compared to the 1986 phase, the means employed to suppress the opposition could be considered ‘peaceful’ but the aftermath of this psychological violence was echoed in the narratives. Therefore, the narratives from the opposition (GJM) in 2007 become “narratives not only representing violence but also producing it” (Das, 2001: 7).

The narratives collected from the respondents involved in the 1986 movement have to be further read from the lens of ‘remembering’ and ‘forgetting’. While the physical and psychological brutality of 1986 has been discussed, one should also read those crevices existing within the region. These cracks have been present since 1986 and have continued in the 2007 resurgence. In such case both the body and the societal spaces bear the mark of this brutality. Each of the twelve respondents has been a witness to this

movement. Das points out that “the obligation of witnessing includes the practice of ‘re-memory’...” (Das, 2001: 13). The term ‘re-memory’ was used by Toni Morrison, “...to stay wide enough awake to attend to the requirements of just recollection and affirmation and the path of facing who we are and what we become” (Das, 2001: 13).

Sharmila Rege in *Writing Caste Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios* (2006), points out that: “Dalit life narratives are in fact testimonies, which forge a right to speak both for and beyond the individual and contest explicitly or implicitly the ‘official forgetting’ of histories of caste oppression, struggles and resistance” (Rege, 2006: 13). The women’s narratives discussed here also bring forth the personal history of not just these women participants but of the community that they are a part of. The term community itself becomes a space of contestation. The community that they were a part of does not acknowledge their contribution but is more focused on the male leadership and their male subordinates. While there have been cases of women coming to prominence during and after the movement, these women are very few in number. Additionally, there have been women who have rejected the claim of their predecessor to show their and their party’s right to claim on the movement. Similarly, those predecessors also dismissed the claim of the women belonging to the latter phase of the movement. To them the role of women, in the latter phase, was mostly associated with the cultural aspect. They remarked that women participated only in dancing and singing. Each of the respondents interviewed wished to stake their claim on the movement through their participation. Interestingly, this claim was always accompanied with the need to show their political party in the positive light.

The collective response given by each woman highlights how much of the personal information the individual is willing to divulge. While some chose to tell their story in the first person narrative, there were others who used the collective marker of 'we'. Again, those who did speak about their stories in detail added their experience of exclusion. These instances of alienation do not necessarily point at gender issues within the party but can have different reasons like political allegiances or internal power struggles. Aspects like the participation and contribution of women in the 2007 phase under the 'watchful eyes' of the male leadership is discussed by the respondents as they refer to it as *nari shakti*. What binds these 'her-stories' together are their experiences, and the lack of acknowledgement of this experience in the larger readings of the identity movement of Gorkhaland.

As the interviews continued, these women became the tellers of their own stories as I took up the role of an 'active' listener. I have used the word 'active' to highlight how I was made to participate as these women made sure that I do not remain quiet during their narration and so would often look at me for affirmation especially when they spoke about violence. Another means of looking at this inclusion can be my role as a researcher whereby I was given the position of the 'educated outsider'. The narratives presented here add the two dimensions, personal and political. The constant move between the two ushers in two diverse aspects of an individual's life. It also adds to the existing ideas of participation as some of these women never came out of their house to participate in the movement but supported the active members of their family which must be viewed as their indirect participation. In this scenario, the personal space (home) of the individual transforms into a political space, as it becomes her mode of participation. It is also crucial

to understand how balancing the personal and political, with respect to the public and private space, further blurs the lines of distinction for these women.

5.4 Politics of Forgetting

Forgetting, in the context of the Gorkhaland movement, has been used for two purposes, one to silence the issue of sexual violence and the other is to disregard the events of 1986 phase in narrative of the 2007 phase. While the latter falls under the realm of selective amnesia, forgetting has been used as a tool to suppress certain memories. Both aspects originated in the 1986 phase due to its “violent” history. While the trauma associated with sexual violence often led the respondents to refer to other people, who may have been subjected to it, the disregarding of the history of 1986 phase was used as a cautionary tale by the leaders of GJM. Both objectives tried to re-articulate the history of the movement through the group narratives. This re-telling becomes more complex when the respondents are all women. The sensitivity of the issue of sexual violence is often overlooked or is requested to be not discussed. Some of the women respondents belonged to the GJM party and so asked me not discuss the ‘shameful’ past, which resulted in loss of lives. Silence has been used as a tool to demonstrate one’s unwillingness to discuss certain issues.

One of the obstacles I faced during the interviews was the discussion on the state-sponsored violence of 1986. Even those who were willing to speak about police brutality spoke only on certain aspects and only after they were certain that their names would remain anonymous. This meant that any discussion on sexual violence was met with silence and discomfort. As discussed before, this kind of reaction could stem from the

need to suppress the past not only because it is violent, but also that the 2007 phase had to flourish. It has to be remembered that most of the interviews were conducted when GJM was still in power and so there was a need to portray the past as a warning. One respondent suggested that I should ask her questions on the 2007 phase as it was peaceful. Therefore, the 1986 phase is read from two perspectives, one of complete erasure and the other is of warning. The respondents do not deny sexual violence during the 1986 phase. One respondent said that “hamro chori-cheli maathi haath lagayo” (They ‘touched’ our daughters). Here ‘touched’ refers to both physical and sexual assault. What needs to be noted is that it is only with this sentence that the discussion began and ended on sexual violence. Any enquiry beyond this was asked not to be made. Their willingness to speak around the issues such as the ‘concentration camp’ at Kerabari or physical violence like *lathi charge* was addressed but any discussion on sexual atrocities was met with “suneko thiye tara besi tha chaina” (had heard, but do not know much about it). They even addressed their personal experience with police brutality, but avoided any discussion around sexual violence. Such ‘selective remembering’ often led to complete disremembering of certain events.

While this form of ‘collective silence’ does not suggest a complete erasure, the reluctance to engage with this issue was often associated with remembering a traumatic past. Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger’s “Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting” (2010) reads the role of silence in both memory and forgetting. They define silence as overt and covert, and discuss the role of each in memory and forgetting. The article uses the events of the commemoration of the murdered Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to understand how silence is used as a

tool for both memory and forgetting. What I intend to focus on is the understanding of the two forms of silence discussed. While the overt silence demands a complete erasure of an event, it is the covert silence that gains importance. As discussed above, the issue of sexual atrocity was never denied but there was an “absence of content” (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger, 2010: 1104).

The subversion of the role of silence as going beyond forgetting into the realm of memory is discussed. Can the reluctance to discuss certain aspect of the 1986 phase be referred to as repression of memory? While the reluctance is present, there is no repression as all of the respondents agreed that such actions had taken place. Interestingly, any reference to sexual assault on women was often followed by “mero sita chen bhayena” (it did not happen to me). This need to establish the fact but removing oneself from it often refers to the fear of shame that may be associated with this memory. As one of the respondents referred me to her former comrade, she informed me that everyone knew that she has survived sexual violence. This ‘common knowledge’ leads one to assume that the knowledge of this personal trauma may have been discussed by those outside it. During the interview this comrade denied any sexual violence but accepted that she was beaten up after her arrest. Here ‘silence’ plays a role in remembering and forgetting. She is willing to discuss the violence that was meted out to her but was not willing to discuss a certain aspect of that violence. Here one can question why certain types of violence are not a taboo and so can be articulated.

Cindy Minarova-Banjac, in “Collective Memory and Forgetting: A Theoretical Discussion” (2018), examines how collective forgetting is often used as a tool to establish

a political narrative. She cites various examples where the act of collective forgetting aimed to re-affirm the official discourse. She suggests that

...in cases where symbolic and physical violence plays a crucial part... it becomes unclear how collective memories are produced, reproduced, disseminated and consumed across groups, interest and power relation. This lack of clarity raises questions about who owns collective memory, what responsibilities groups have constructing them, and what it means to remember with integrity. (Minarova-Banjac, 2018: 6).

This is applicable to the state sponsored GNLF and GJM narratives of the 1986 phase. As discussed above, such ‘creation’ of contesting histories has been actively used to acquire power. While the events of 1986 are not trivialised, one can see how the phase is judged through the lens of political affiliations. Minarova-Banjac, while she is on the subject of Halbwachs, observes that “forgetting can be a liberating aspect for individuals and communities that seek to separate themselves from old traditions and memories that continue to impact current politics.” (Minarova-Banjac, 2018: 21). Halbwachs refers to the modern middle-class family structure, where certain aspects of the past are erased and a new memory is created in order to avoid conflict. I propose to read this in the movement narrative, specifically in the context of the 2007 resurgence. The fact that the 2007 phase was consciously referred to as Gandhian, thereby disassociating it from its predecessor (1986), can be read in this light.

Both narratives (GNLF and GJM) exist in a symbiotic relation, where the existence of one hinges on the dismissal of the other. This has created an environment of

‘dis-remembering’, especially in the context of the 1986 phase. Here dis-remembering is an act of disowning certain events in order to re-write one’s own version. In the present scenario, we witness this in the selective reference made by the GJM against the 1986 phase. Most of these recollections point to the devastation caused during 1986 while remaining silent on certain achievements. One cannot call the actions of the GJM as complete erasure of the 1986 phase but the ‘selective amnesia’ did ensure to highlight how their work was better when compared to their predecessor. The political need of remembering and forgetting certain points in the history of the movement has been vociferously used by both sides during the 2007 phase. As GJM held the majority, it is their narrative that became dominant.

During the interviews, the contradictory re-telling often sought to claim each phase as the ‘real’ movement. As discussed in chapter 1, there is another dimension in the practice of ‘selective amnesia’, particularly visible in the state sponsored narrative of the movement. Here, forgetting is deliberate and complete, when the demand for separation resurges. The accusation of being migrants by the state, thereby disregarding the claim of the community, suggests how a complete erasure of history takes place. Here the injustice of ‘forgetting’ the legitimacy of the claim further adds to the marginalisation of the community. The respondents question these allegations and discuss their claim over the land.

5.5 Problematising Participation

The twelve respondents represent the cross-section of the total narratives collected. They belong to different categories based on their political ideologies and

experiences within the movement. Therefore, it is through their re-telling that I have tried to examine if there exists a different understanding of the term participation. The book *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle* (1989) by Stree Shakti Sanghatana critiques the works of Renu Chakravathy and P. Sundarayya for celebrating women's participation in the Telangana People's Struggle but not considering the individuality and the varying experiences of these women. It subsumes the role of the women within the 'greater cause' of the movement. While it can be regarded as a contributory history, the book is written from the eyes of the women in the thick of the struggle. The 'little incidents' that had been reduced in the public memory are brought back through the workings of memory and orality. Therefore, the term 'participation' has been read from different vantage point through the narratives collected.

The conventional understanding of participation in a movement refers to the 'visibility' of an individual. As there exist multiple readings of this term in the present study, I intend to analyse both the conventional and the "unconventional" meanings. While both are based on two variables of time and effort (Klandermans, 2007), it is the intensity of the movement that suggests the degree of participation. Bert Klandermans' "The Demand and Supply of Participation: Social-Psychological Correlates of Participation in Social Movements" (2007) discusses the social psychology of movement participation. He cites three factors that affect political participation- instrumentality, which stems from the desire to change one's circumstances; ideology, which refers to the similar political thought processes; and identity, which refers to the commonality shared with a group and reads them through the lens of demand and supply. While the former

(instrumentality) navigates through the potential of the community for protest the latter (ideology and identity) refer to the opportunities offered by the organisation for protest. What binds these two together is mobilisation through such mediums as communication. In the context of a movement, communication refers to the services meant to disseminate knowledge propagated by the leadership resulting in united assertion. In the context of the Gorkhaland movement I argue that individuals, irrespective of their extent of participation, were affected through this form of communication. Therefore, what we witness is that women, who were never ‘actively’ involved in the movement, were able to ‘participate’ by supporting their family, who were involved in the movement.

It does not mean that they were never part of the history just because such women were not visible in the movement narrative. I propose to problematise the ‘unconventional’ mode of participation by focusing on women who never participated in any political mobilisation but have been the participants. Amongst the twelve respondents, one belongs to this category. As I was introduced to her, she told me that she was never directly associated with any political party but believed in the demand. Her son was an active member and had to often leave his family to escape incarceration. All through his participation during the 2007 phase, she took care of the family, which included his son and wife. She recalled how she would often help her son leave while the fear of his safety was always her concern. She had witnessed the violence of 1986 and the fear for her home and her family was constant. It was through her continuous support that her son was able to be part of the movement.

While I have chosen only one respondent belonging to this category, this form of participation was common especially amongst the women, whose husbands or sons were

actively engaged with the movement. These women never participated in any rallies or were members of any political organisation but it is through their support that their family members were able to mobilise and participate. This form of participation does not fall under the perceived understanding of movement participation, where the individual is celebrated through their ‘visibility’.

P.G. Klandermans’ “Identity Politics and Politicized Identities: Identity Processes and the Dynamics of Protest” (2013) further discusses the role of multiple identities in movement participation. An individual has multiple identities which are not always symmetrical. The contested nature of these identities leads to the formation of allies and opposition in the movement, which pressurises the individual to choose a side thereby giving precedence to one identity. He suggests that a collective identity becomes political when it is part of a power struggle, hoping to either to preserve the structure or break it. This group becomes radicalised, when an authority refuses to acknowledge their grievances.

The twelve women respondents belong to different points in the history of the movement and occupy different positions. Even while my discussions with them were going on, one of my respondents was dismissed by her organisation after the 2017 phase as she belonged to the Bimal Gurung faction. As discussed before, some had participated in only one phase, some had been present in both and others had never been ‘actively’ involved. This raises questions such as, how has the concept of participation changed for each individual through the two phases. It is also here that I wish to read this change through the lens of multiple identities, which led to the cracks in the united Gorkha identity. The respondents belonging to minor political organisations recalled their

experiences during the 1986 phase and how their identity as a Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) or hill CPI (M) cadre incurred the wrath of the dominant party. One can read how these respondents chose a particular identity based on their ideology. This choice was seen as a betrayal to the community that resulted in violence. The narrative of these respondents changed in the 2007 phase when they participated in the movement under the banner of CPRM. Here we witness a change as they remain part of the Communist party but also support the demand. We see a similar pattern amongst those who were not part of the 2007 phase. Their choice of not joining ranged from their allegiances to their political organisation, GNLF, which was ousted by GJM, and by the exclusionary means employed against them. Moreover, there were also some who believed that they were side-lined in the organisation and so chose to remove themselves completely from the movement.

Another form of participation that came up in the course of interviews was ‘forceful participation’. As discussed in the previous Chapter, one respondent from Siliguri had no alternative but to join the movement in 2017. Her refusal to join in the 2007 phase led to her social boycott and so even though this participation was a farce for her, it was meant to safeguard her family. It is in reading such diverse experiences that the movement narrative is re-told through these women participants.

5.6 Narratives of Lived Experience

These women have witnessed the two phases of the movement and have ‘grown’ with the movement. Though I was an outsider to the region and to the lives of these women, they allowed me to be a part of their personal narrative. Due to the tense

situation in the region, the names of the respondents have been changed to safeguard their anonymity. This section will provide a brief profile of the respondents. Interestingly, these narratives begin and end with the experience in the movement or the party. Only a small number of women were willing to speak to me about their family.

Some of these women have been part of the shifting allegiances while some have chosen to remain with the same political organisation. Factors like these have affected their position in the movement. With the coming of a new political party and leadership in each phase, including the recent 2017 phase, these women had to undergo changes on their own. It must also be remembered that each of these regions is geographically small, thus, these women are known faces, and so there was constant vigilance on them by the community. Therefore, in a community that is so compact, the political and the personal is no longer a private activity. Each of the women interviewed had to face some pressure from the community during the movement.

5.6.1 Trishna Rai

I was nominated and won the position of a ward member in the municipal elections before the 1986 movement began. During the movement I was still in office under the GNLF party. Therefore, I performed a dual role of being in the movement as a participant and also as a ward member. After the 1986 phase subsided, I left the party and have not been associated with the movement since then. I did not join the 2007 phase as I have recently started an association with an old age home and my complete focus is on it. I left the movement as I saw that it was always those at the higher position of power that got recognition. We all gave everything for the movement but did not get our due. My

son-in-law was associated with the GJM in the 2007 phase and continues to be part of it. The situation during the 1986 was dangerous; those who are participating now are much safer. We were all on the run. The forest was our place to run as we all used it to hide ourselves. I am completely focused on social work and have started an old age home for the elderly of our community, whose children have forsaken them. We are a group of people who came together for this initiative and have been collecting funds for it. We have got some help from the District board and have bought a building for the same purpose. We have been running this home for some time.

My experience in the movement was very hard as the fear for life was constant. I was mostly given the job of pasting posters, which I did during the night. The fear of being caught was there so sleeping in the house was not possible. All of us had to leave our family and our house for not only our safety but also theirs. Police raids used to happen at random and there were stories circulating of the tortures inside the prison. We had also heard of a camp at Kerabari, where some of the accused were taken. We called it a concentration camp as stories of torture and killings came out from there. There were stories that some of our women members were tortured but I did not face any such problems. We had heard that some of them were raped and had heard the stories of their torture. They do not wish to speak about these things anymore and have become a recluse. I was the first in my family to join the movement and I still believe in the demand and it is our right. My ancestors may have come from outside but I am from here. I did not join the latter phase as I did not want to get into this movement anymore. We all worked together but it is always those higher than us who gained power.

5.6.2 Radhika Chettri

I did not participate in the 1986 phase. I was a *panchayat pradhan* of my area in 1986 and there was an unwritten rule that those in such position were automatically members of the CPI (M). We did not have much say and the development of my area was my major concern. I am a teacher by profession and have been active in the community. As a *pradhan*, I had a lot of responsibility. Especially, due to the enforcement of Section 144 during the movement, there were a number of restrictions on the people. The people here were so simple that they did not know what Section 144 or *Dhara 144* meant. They thought that *dhara* meant a stream as it is its Nepali meaning. So, for them it was a new thing, a stream with an uncommon name. All the people from the village came to the town to see this stream and they were arrested by the police. The situation was very difficult for us back then. As a member of the CPI (M), I had to participate in rallies that did not support the movement. I saw my own people killing one another. My father passed away around that time and I could not even give him a proper funeral as our house was raided by the forces.

I officially joined the movement in 2007 under the GJM banner and I believe that the execution of the movement now is much better than it was in 1986. There was a huge loss of life back then but it is safer now. Women are able to come out freely now and support the movement. Women are also the driving force or the backbone of this movement. The *nari shakti* is at the forefront of this movement as we protect the leadership. The movement now is peaceful and it is based on the Gandhian principle. Our leadership does not believe in violence and we are supported by the public. Now the State

is trying to play games and some of our members have moved away but I believe in this party and the leadership. I will be with this party till I die.

The demand is a legitimate one. We are constantly treated as outsiders in our own country. I am not from Nepal. This is my home that my ancestors made fertile. It is through our hard work that the region is what it is. Therefore, if we are asking for something that is our right, then what is the issue? The Chief Minister might try to pressurise us but the demand and the movement will continue. If I die, this movement will be taken over by my next generation. Gorkhaland is the ultimate goal and we will achieve it.

5.6.3 Manisha Ghisingh

I teach in a missionary school in Kurseong. My ancestors all belong to this region and to this country. I was associated with both 1986 and 2007 phases of the movement. I was part of the Gorkha National Women's Organisation (GNWO), which was the women's wing of GNLF in 1986. I was with the party even after the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) but left after I saw the differences within the party.

The movement in 1986 was very different from that of 2007. We had to face a lot of hardships as we were always on the run from the forces. I was a familiar face to them so there were frequent raids on my house. I used to leave my house early morning with boiled eggs wrapped in my sari, so that I would not be hungry. I would hide in different houses every night but I was caught eventually. It was a miscalculation from my side as I had assumed that the raids for the night were over. I was arrested and was beaten with a

stick before I was put inside the van. They did not allow me to change as they thought I may run away. As I was heading to the ‘plains’ in the van, I was reminded of all the things I had heard about Kerabari. I was scared that they may take me there. Once we crossed the place, I felt relieved. I was put inside the holding cell and had to wait for an official decision. When none came, I was worried that the police may harm me. I asked the in-charge to take me to the court at the earliest and took the name of the arresting officer. I was then taken to the court and was sentenced. When I came back, DGHC had already been formed and after assisting the party with its formation, I left.

In 2007, the movement began under the GJM and I joined the teacher wing of the party. I participated in the rallies as I believed in the demand. The political party does not matter; it is the achievement of the demand that is crucial. I joined the rallies but I was not happy with the execution of the movement. The demand cannot be achieved through cultural means. There has to be some action, which this party lacked. Moreover, there were too many leaders in this movement. In 1986, there was only one leader, Ghisingh, which made the movement so influential. This movement also led to the formation of a new district body called Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), which is similar to what Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was.

5.6.4 Doma Bhutia

I was the head of the Gorkha National Women’s Organisation (GNWO) during the 1986 phase. I am from Kurseong, and I am a GNLF and Ghisingh loyalist. My family belongs to this place and has always been here. I was associated with the movement in 1986 but was not a member of the 2007 movement. I worked closely with Ghisingh

during the movement and had gone as a delegate to Delhi during the talks between the Centre and Ghisingh.

As an active member of the movement, I became a target of the forces during 1986. As a result, I had to spend a lot of time being on the run. As my husband was also involved in the movement, we had to leave our children at our relative's house. We had to fend for ourselves as we were in the forest. We continued to hold meetings and collected money for the party. Once I was on the run as the police was chasing me and a fellow member, when I got severely injured. It was then that I was informed that I was to accompany Ghisingh to Delhi. I went with these wounds to show how we were being treated. I almost lost my life while saving myself from the police. I helped bring the bodies of our fallen comrades. It was a job given to the women's wing as there was a constant fear amongst the men of being arrested. I also aided some of my fellow comrades to go to Siliguri, which was comparatively safer.

In 2007, I was approached by the GJM leadership to join the movement but I refused. These new leaders had exiled Ghisingh to acquire power. I could not support them. They created a mass movement and their women's wing surrounded my house and protested. My entire family was subjected to social boycott. The exile of our leader and the treatment given to me by the people affected me strongly. The 2007 phase is not a movement. The leaders wanted to make money. We were part of the 'real' movement. If we were unable to bring Gorkhaland, these people can never bring it. Dancing and singing does not make a movement. We need Gorkhaland but the leaders are not genuinely devoted to the cause.

5.6.5 Maya Gurung

I was born in the tea-garden belt of the region and have seen at close quarters the problems the tea-garden workers face. I have made my way from there to the present position as a tea-garden union leader under the GJM. I have been part of both the 1986 and 2007 phases and have been part of both the political parties. Initially, I was not part of the movement in 1986, but there was an event that changed my stance. I was hospitalised during the early phase of the 1986 movement. A man had sneaked into my ward to hide. He was running from the police. I helped him to hide and after I was discharged, I was requested by party members to join the movement. We were part of the Gorkha Volunteer Cell (GVC). I decided to leave my family after we took our oath to fight for the demand, and also chose to dress like a man. I used to carry a *khukri* with me.

As part of the GVC, we were quite radical. We had to be on the run and we had to do a lot of muscle-work for the party. We had to hide ourselves from being arrested. I saw once an informant, whose face was covered, as the police told this person to point out the houses of GNLF members. These informants were known people, who were our neighbours or friends but now they were against us. I was very disappointed when Ghisingh accepted the DGHC from the State. It felt like a betrayal. We all went to his office to ask him the reason behind this and threatened him to take it back. After the DGHC formation, we were still on the run as we still had cases against us. I eventually joined the State and helped them to catch my former comrades. I had to do it as the leadership had done nothing to help me. I cannot tell you more about the situations I faced back then, as there are some legal implications to it.

I joined the 2007 phase from the tea-garden workers wing. As my roots are from this place, I wanted to help the issue of minimum wages for the workers. While I support the demand completely, the issues concerning the workers are my main concern. The party is helping resolve this issue. The movement is important to all of us and we will continue to fight for it. The difference between the two phases is in its execution but the movement in 1986 felt like a true movement. We were doing something of impact in 1986 but now it is too peaceful.

5.6.6 Ratna Ghisingh

I am a working woman and I live in Darjeeling. I was part of CPI (M) during the 1986 phase. I was not part of the 1986 phase but have joined the demand since I joined the CPRM. I was part of the 2007 phase and more recently, the 2017 resurgence. The 1986 movement was very troubled time, with the leadership taking a stand against the Hill Communist party. We were seen as the enemy and so we had no other choice but to move away. My entire family relocated to Siliguri. There was a threat to our life and so we had no other option but to leave our home. We came back after the movement ended but it seems even now we are seen as those against the movement.

When we came back, I was able to see the problems that existed in the region. During the movement, our safety was the primary concern but once we were back we could look beyond that. We understood that the demand made was legitimate. This is our home. Till the time we do not achieve this demand, the other issues within the region cannot be addressed. My comrades joined the movement and became part of the 2007 phase.

We are a small organisation and have tried to work with the ruling party but our suggestions have always been side-lined. We have remained part of the movement as we believe in the movement and in the demand. Unfortunately, the internal issues between the parties and also those within the ruling party have side-lined the objective of the movement. We as an organisation have done everything for the fulfilment of the demand but the movement has been diverted from its aim. The recent result of the 2017 resurgence was very disappointing. All our hard work was ruined by the decision reached by the dominant faction but we will never give up on the demand. The party will keep working to achieve it.

5.6.7 Indira Dukhpa

I am a teacher by profession and have been associated with the CPRM since its inception. Before that I was part of the hill CPI (M). My uncle was a known CPI (M) leader in our area and so we were targeted by the ruling party during the 1986 phase. I have been associated with the party since I was young. As my family remained loyal to the CPI (M), I chose to shift to Siliguri to avoid the constant pressure of the regional party (GNLF). There I continued working with the party, while my family remained in Darjeeling.

I did not support the movement due to the violent stand taken by Ghisingh and his party. My family suffered a lot during that time. They were attacked by GNLF members. As the party represented the movement, we were branded as not only against the party but also the demand. Our own people attacked us. Some of our comrades lost their lives in the clashes. Some chose to run away but my family remained. They said it was their

home and they did not want to leave. We could not work freely so I chose to leave. I gave everything to the party. I have remained unmarried and have worked for the party tirelessly.

When I was in Siliguri, I saw the marginalisation that the people from the region underwent. The party stood for eradication of the class injustice but within the party we were pushed back. I realised that before fulfilling the goal of a classless society, we needed to fight for the recognition of our community. There are many issues within the region, especially those in the tea garden belt, but those can only be resolved when we achieve Gorkhaland.

When CPRM was formed, it broke away from its parent body CPI (M). CPRM sought to fight for the demand and we have been doing that since its inception. Even after the failure of the 2017 resurgence, I still believe in the demand, and if there is call, I will join again. This is our home and if we want to make it better, the demand for a separate statehood has to be fulfilled. Even now I have fights with people who are against the movement. The problem lies with the leadership. Back in 1986, Ghisingh refused the help of the educated Gorkha section. The dominance of one makes the others submissive.

5.6.8 Meera Rai

I was born in the tea garden belt of Dooars. My father was a prominent trade union leader of the CPI (M). During the 1986 movement, I was very small but I remember the events that took place. Of course, there are other stories different from mine from people on the other side of the movement. My village was a CPI (M) stronghold but the other villages surrounding us were GNLFF supporters. As a result, there

were a lot of attacks on our village. My house was used by the party members for meetings and my mother and other women would teach outsiders about the party. My elder sister and I would also join these discussions.

During the movement my father was targeted by the GNLf. As a result, he would never sleep in the house. He came at night to eat and then left. Our mother would tell us to guard the door fearing that someone might come. We were always scared for our father's life. There was no food supply for us unless it came in an army convoy. As the villages around were GNLf supporters, they cut us off from receiving any supplies. Later our houses were burnt and we had to be shifted to a refugee camp. We returned to our home only after it was rebuilt. It took a lot of time to come back and so we stayed as refugees to save ourselves. I did not join the party when I was in college. I did my masters in Nepali from North Bengal University but did not get any job. I got married and moved to Kalimpong. It was here that I joined the CPRM.

The party and the leadership made me understand the necessity of the demand. There are many, like me, who are unemployed. The formation of a state will help us find employment. There is a difference in the treatment given to us by outsiders. Gorkhaland would help us to form a separate identity. I was part of the 2017 resurgence and actively helped in the mobilisation of the movement. Now I have understood the importance of the demand. I had once asked my father as to why he was against the movement. He told me that the violence and the demand for separation made him see the movement in the negative light. We all belong to this place and it is our home, so the demand is a legitimate one. I will support it again if there is a call.

5.6.9 Rita Chettri

I was never part of any political organisation during the 1986 phase. I was very young when I went with my friends to attend the Kalimpong massacre meeting of 27th July, 1986. To us, it was like a *mela* (fair). All of us were dressed in our finest of clothes as we proceeded to the *chowk* (town square). We had heard about the demand and the movement but none of us were prepared for what was about to happen next. We saw the people burning something and then everyone started running. I lost consciousness and when I woke up I was in the hospital.

I got to know there that we were shot at by the forces and that many people had lost their lives. Ghisingh came to visit us when we were in the hospital. I was taken to Delhi, where I was presented as a member of the party and as a survivor of the massacre. After that I became part of the movement. I had to be on the run as my house was often raided by the police. There were also fake cases made against me. I remained with the party till Ghisingh accepted DGHC. In the 2007 resurgence, I did not participate but as I was a familiar face of 1986, the police started harassing me. I was scared that all the problems that I had faced during the 1986 movement would again come up. Therefore, I took the decision and surrendered to the police. I spent some time at the correctional home in Kalimpong. I do not wish to discuss the movement fearing that someone may act against me. Giving interviews may also implicate me so I chose not to discuss anything political. It is only because the boy who brought you is known to me that I agreed to give this interview.

The movement and the demand have always been right. We need a separate statehood but the leaders have never been right. When Ghisingh accepted DGHC, it was against the people; the present leadership is also no different. The only solution is Gorkhaland and the people want that.

5.6.10 Sandhya Lama

I was part of the 1986 phase. My family has always been in Kurseong. I was the leader of the GNWO and have been closely associated with Ghisingh. I had gone with him to Nepal, when he had gone to talk to the leaders. We had to travel carefully as there was a constant fear of being caught. During the 1986 phase we were on the run from the police. My children were very small and so for their safety, I placed them in the care of my in-laws. The times were very difficult for us. I had to breastfeed my child every day before I could leave so even with the fear of being caught I had to come back. My husband's family was implicated and the police raided our house. My father-in-law was very old but they still took him to custody and placed him in the police lock-up. My house was completely destroyed. We had heard stories of our fellow comrades getting killed by the police and even my husband's relative who lived next door was killed by the police. There was an atmosphere of fear at that time.

Compared to what we faced back then, the 2007 resurgence was just for a facade. Dancing and cultural shows are by no means a movement. We were treated so badly by the GJM but I am not scared. Even if you want to use my name in this interview, I have no problem. They cannot fool us. We know that they are after money. When we became part of the movement, we had no other aspiration but the fruition of our demand. But they

had a clear goal. We are trying to re-organise ourselves again. We have to stand against these leaders who are using the emotions of the people for their own personal gains. These leaders treated Ghisingh sir with disrespect. They have forgotten that it was he who led the charge in 1986 and gave the call for Gorkhaland. You should also join us in the rallies to understand more about our organisation.

We gave up everything for the demand. If I had not participated in the movement, I think, my children would have been able to do better in their careers. Both my husband and I were not there to guide them and that is something I will always carry with me. But we did all those things for the movement. Our movement was real. It was not about convenience like those who are participating now. We still support the demand but do not support the party and the leadership heading it now.

5.6.11 Rekha Gurung

I was part of the GNWO during the 1986 Gorkhaland movement. I became part of the movement when my husband was attacked by the forces. He was severely injured and was hospitalised. This incident urged me to join the movement. I belong to Kurseong and in 1986 I began taking part in the movement under the leadership of Ghisingh. I did not join the 2007 resurgence and have remained associated with the party (GNLF).

I believe in the demand as it is through this that our region can develop. The demand is not just for the recognition but also for creating job opportunities for the youth. The youth of the region have to go to the plains for a better future. As a result, only the elderly are left in the home. I believe if a state is formed, the job opportunity provided to

the youth will help them stay at home. My son is living outside as there was no job available in the region. There is a need to stop this out-migration.

A group of us were part of the GVC during the movement. We were all involved in some activities during the movement. I was not involved in any radical activities. In 1986 movement, we gave up everything for the demand. The present leadership is after power and money. We gave up so many things for the movement and it has affected our families. We lost many comrades. It was the job of the women to bring the bodies. The people participating would not survive if the same situation happens now.

If we had the resources, people from the region would have been working on this issue. There is a need for development in the region. Our children are no less than those in the plains but due to lack of proper infrastructure they are unable to achieve their potential. Our region now is only filled with the elderly. We have no one to take care of us. Therefore, even if I did not participate after the 1986 movement, I still support the demand and the movement.

5.6.12 Gita Bhutia

I have never been associated with any political organisation. My family has been living in Kurseong from several generations. I was married in Kurseong and have been living here. My husband was a Congress man and was never part of the movement in 1986 yet our house was raided. I remember how I had already sent my sons away as police were arresting everyone irrespective of their participation. My daughter was with me when the police raided our house. I had heard stories of how the women were being treated and I was scared about our safety. When the police entered our house, I acted as a

shield between my daughter and the police. Luckily, the officer-in-charge told his men that my husband was not part of the movement. In 2007, my son joined the movement with the GJM. I believed in the demand but when the state started sending their forces to the region, I got worried for my son's safety. I helped him to go away from the region and took care of his family.

The present movement (2007) is following the Gandhian way while in the previous one had taken up arms. We did not have proper guns then and were using *khadua* or local-made guns made out of pipes which led to the death of many youth. The demand for the land was made with the belief that we are living in this region and have raised the demand for over 100 years which is yet to be fulfilled. In this regard, during Subhash Ghisingh's time, the party that took up this issue was GNLF and the voice that is now being raised is of Bimal Gurung and his party GJMM. The difference between the two is that we are following the Gandhian/ Gandhiwadi way while they were *krantikaris* (revolutionary).

We have been accused of being outsiders. If we are outsiders then why do they put the Gorkhas at the war-front for the security of the country? Why are the Gorkhas protecting the borders? They should be considered as foreigners then. They all have Indian citizenship and are working in the country, how can they be called foreigners? It is a movement of identity because they will always call us foreigners till we get our own land. I completely support the demand and the movement.

5.7 Re-telling the Movement

The twelve narrative discussed above bring in different perspectives on the movement. Each of these women belongs to different regions, with different histories and different allegiances. As a result, the narrative, while similar in some aspect, tend to digress in terms of individual experiences. Again, there are some issues that are mulled over due to the ‘discomfort’ they create. Yet, with each narrative there is a new addition to the existing history of the movement.

The male leadership has always dominated the narrative resulting in a lack of voices of its women participant. While some have come up in the ladder of power, their narrative, like that of their peers, is either non-existent or is subsumed in the larger narrative of the male leader. The emphasis on the formation of a separate state as a solution for all problems in the Hills especially those concerning gender, makes one question if such issues were being over-looked. This section, therefore, intends to analyse the twelve narratives on the basis of issues within the context of gender as it tries to re-tell the history of the movement, especially of the gaps.

During the second phase of the Gorkhaland movement in 2007, the videos that surfaced in the local and national news channels were that of women leading the protest rallies demanding the formation of a separate state of Gorkhaland for the Nepali speaking population in India. The demand began with the recognition of the community as separate from the dominant Bengali identity. The visibility of women participants at the forefront dubbed the movement as being more gender sensitive. Interestingly, respondents belonging to the 2007 phase asserted that women represented peace and so women

‘leading’ added to the movement’s image as Gandhian. It is also during this phase that the women shaved their heads for the demand. The significance of a woman’s hair has always been associated with her beauty. Therefore, the act of shaving off a woman’s hair, which conventionally represents their womanly attributes, for the movement shows their determination for a cause. This move then becomes symbolically very radical due to its significance. This act also cemented the belief amongst the spectators that the women participants in this phase were taking a strong lead.

With the resurgence of the movement in 2007, the comparison between the two phases became imminent. One of the arguments proposed by those in the 2007 phase was in terms of the execution of the movement. While 1986 was deemed as violent, 2007 was said to be peaceful and Gandhian. This difference became a bone of contention between the two regional parties involved in the 1986 (GNLF) and 2007 (GJM) phases. For the members of both the parties, the need to claim the movement became pertinent. This claim was made through the roles each of these people played in the course of the two movements. Another claim made by the 2007 phase and its leadership was on the question of gender equality. In 2007 the mobilisation of the party’s women members was being highlighted in media. As a result, claims such as women’s empowerment or women as the first line of defence, as one of my respondents called it, began making the rounds.

This celebration of the women power gave rise to the question about the presence of women during the 1986 phase. If they were present, did they get adequate representation? Or were they relegated to the margins due to the shadow of the leadership? With these questions, the search began for women participants of the 1986 phase. I began my initiation into my fieldwork with a search for women specifically

belonging to the 1986 phase. It has to be kept in mind that with more than two decades passing since the radical 1986 phase there was a lack of women willing to speak to me about their experiences of that time. As one of the respondents of the 2007 phase remarked during the interview that there were no women participants in 1986, I began looking for women belonging to the 1986 movement to understand how women participants from one phase looked at the other. While the awareness of women's participation during the 1986 phase was common, the fact that one of my respondents claimed that there were no such participation led to questioning the motives behind such a statement.

In the course of the interviews conducted, I asked my respondents about their perspectives on the two phases and on the women's participation in them. With the obvious point of difference between the two phases and its reflection on its participants, the need to claim the movement for themselves seemed evident in their responses. As some of the respondents have participated in both the phases it is imperative that their transition from one phase to the other also needs to be taken into consideration. This section, therefore, has been divided into three sections-those belonging to only to 1986, those only belonging to 2007, and those who belonged to both. The objective is to see how each section has reacted towards the other in the course of the interviews.

With the 1986 phase being characterised as aggressive from both the sides (the state and the people), a continuous negation ensued when the 2007 phase began. Fear of the history repeating itself has been used as a tool to ensure support by the leaders of 2007 phase. When the 2007 movement was at its peak, there was a strong initiative taken by the new leadership under Bimal Gurung, whereby a social boycott of GNLF members

began. Most of these members were part of the 1986 phase. The bitter experience of this boycott was reflected in the interview as they began the comparison between the two phases. The clashes between the state and the people introduced an environment of fear amongst the people of the region during the 1986 phase. With curfews, raids and arrests taking place, respondents belonging to this phase spoke of experiences of terror which they felt those belonging to the latter phase were spared from.

As Doma pointed out “aile ko ladies lai ta majja cha” (women participating now are enjoying themselves), she wished to focus on the hardships that they faced during the 1986 phase. On the issue of the difference between the two phases in terms of the women’s participation, she added ‘nari ko role aile pani testo nai cha. Tetti bela pani niskeko nai ho, aile pani niskindai cha. Pahila chen kamti thiyo, aile chen besi niskeko cha. Pahila chen CRPF ko darr le gaali khamthiyo sapai vara.’ (The role of women has not changed. They came out during 1986 and they are coming out now. In 1986, the number was small compared to the 2007 phase. There was a fear of CRPF and we would be scolded at by everyone for participating). When asked why people scolded them, she narrated a personal story of when she was on the run. She would usually take refuge at a relative’s house but with the continuous crackdown by the police, the relatives of the participants were also being arrested. As a result, her relative took in her children but asked her to leave for the safety of his own family. Another aspect added to the question of participation was the lack of men during the turbulent times of 1986. Doma proceeded to talk about how many women had to come out to join the movement with the majority of men missing from the homes due to the fear of arrest. This statement could not be

generalised as many of the respondents have clearly mentioned their ‘choice’ to join the movement.

While Doma sees women’s participation of 2007 as merely part of the ‘cultural show’, Trishna points out that she sees no *bhinnata* or difference between the two phases. As she puts it “hamro jaile GNLF party thiyo tetti bela pani yahi didi-baini haru...kunai arko jagah vara aako haina...aaju GJM cha, tei didi-baini haru andolan gardai cha...” (When GNLF party was there, it was the same people participating... there were no outsiders... now in GJM, it’s again the same people who are part of the movement). As a result, the feeling of resentment, which was common amongst other participants of 1986 phase, is missing in her response. Her moving from the party can be one of the reasons why she differed in her opinion. Moreover, as some of her family members are working with the present dominant party, she did not face the same resentment that her counterparts underwent.

The 2007 phase witnessed a surge of women’s participation, as one of the respondents belonging to the previous phase pointed out “tetti bela young keti haru chen thiyena jasto aile cha. Abo allow hi na garne ghar vara” (there were no young women participating back then, like it is now. Their families would not allow them). As a result, women belonging to different age groups began participating during the resurgence of the demand in 2007. As Radhika, one of the members of GJM, commented women were the backbone of the 2007 movement and that they were the one who protected the men and the leadership. Radhika pointed out “aile ko andolan ma Bimal Gurung ko first sainik chen ladies nai ho... hamile oova sanga pran pani gareko chu tapailai ke chahiyo bhane hami nari ghar hai chorne” (in this movement women were the first soldiers for Bimal

Gurung and we have promised him that if he wants, the women are willing to leave their house). She added that “aile ko purush haru le eti free deko cha nari haru lai. Nari khatiyobhane tyo purush pani khateko barabar nai ho, kinaki husband le ullai permission dio bhanera ta goyo. Husband le rokyo bhane jaandaina” (men have given freedom to women now and so woman’s hard work is equal to a man’s hard work because, the man of the house has given him the permission to participate in the movement. If the husband does not allow, the woman will not go).

There is a contradiction in the two statements made by Radhika. The first one suggests that women have been the driving force of the 2007 movement and the second shows that they have been able to achieve this as their husbands have ‘allowed’ them to join. While the issue of safety which was a concern during the 1986 phase has been considered within the context of this allowing, one cannot simply shrug away the normalised manner in which the second statement was made. Radhika pointed out how women are a symbol of peace while men have a ‘quick temper’ and so women ‘leading’ the movement made more sense. She states “...ladies le gareko shanti ko prateek huncha anta gents haru lai chen chitto rishutch...” (women leading the movement are a symbol of peace while men get angry very fast and so are not fit to be at the forefront). Here, leading meant being at the forefront. She continues, ‘anta haami nari haru le chen dhaak chop garerayo andolan lai success garnulai aile samma naramro karya, khukar andolan chen bhako chaina, kosele pani dukha garnu pareko chaina.’ (we women have protected the movement and made it a success so that no wrong work or violent movement should take place. No one has had to go through any hardships). Sandhya, a participant of 1986 phase and a GNLf loyalist, chimed a similar idea while describing the role of women in

1986. She said 1986 ko nari haru le tyag kei ho” (the women of 1986 really made sacrifices). This tug of war between the conventional image of women as wives or as a symbol of peace and as ones ‘leading’ the movement was visible in almost all of the narratives irrespective of which phase the respondents belonged to. Interestingly, this image of women as being both the symbol of peace and sacrifice and being pro-active leaders is used as a means to claim the movement and to prove/show each section’s superiority over the other.

For those participating in the 2007 phase, the question of safety remained integral. As many of my respondents replied to the question on difference between the two phases, it was the sense of security that made them become part of the movement. The fact that this phase ensured to be a peaceful one especially with the history of the 1986 phase helped many to join the movement. When I asked them if they saw any difference between the two phases, in terms of women’s participation, they spoke about the safety that the 2007 phase provided. As all of my respondents are married (barring one) they felt that they were given the option of taking care of their family during the latter phase. They did not fear for their lives and for their family during the 2007 phase. As the movement took up the mode of being more of a cultural movement as opposed to the former radical phase, it gave its participants, specially the women, a scope to balance the family and the movement. With the increasing number of women in the movement, the 2007 phase soon evolved into what its women members thought it to be, a symbol of women power.

Like Radhika, respondents belonging to minor political parties in the region spoke about the 2007 phase highly due to the scope that they and their party were able to achieve. For women like Ratna, Indira and Meera, who did not participate in the 1986

phase due to their affiliation to the state, the latter phase was seen as more democratic. As their families suffered under the rule of the dominant party (GNLF), 2007 phase provided them the scope to participate in the movement.

Out of the twelve respondents discussed here, two women have been part of the movement since 1986. As a result, these women have switched their political allegiances from GNLF to GJM. Since they have been part of both the phases, it was interesting to see how they have witnessed this change. Both Manisha and Maya were involved in the movement during the 1986 phase. They belonged to different factions within the party. While Manisha was part of the women's wing GNWO, Maya was involved with GVC, the radical branch. Manisha was incarcerated during the movement and spent sometime in the prison. Maya, on the other hand, was on the run from the forces, and along with some other members revolted against Ghisingh for accepting the formation of DGHC. In 2007, Manisha, a teacher by profession, became a member of the teacher's association under the banner of GJM. Maya went back to her roots and became involved with the tea garden association under the GJM party.

These two women come from different walks of life and are currently occupying different positions in the GJM. While Manisha is part of the tertiary organisation within the party, the latter has become a known face in the party as a tea garden union leader. Therefore, when I asked about their perception on how the women's participation has changed since the 1986 phase, both of them spoke about the lack of fear in the 2007 phase. What made their responses similar is in terms of the intensity of the movement in the two phases.

When asked how the movement has undergone a change in the course of these two phases, Manisha characterised the 2007 phase as superficial and added that just by rallying the demand will not be met. On the issue of women's participation, she added that "...aile ko bhanda jyada chen hamro tetti bela GNLF ma women haru chen strong bhayera, morchu ki bachchu bhanera niskeko ho..." (compared to now, we in the GNLF were much stronger... we came out prepared to live or die). While describing the tools used by the women participant of 1986, she said, "Abo CRPF haru aundai sa bhanyo bhane keti haru sadak bhari basidin thiyo, suti dinthiyo. Haamile esto garera chen protection din thiyo male haru lai specially" (when the women heard about the CRPF coming, they would sit on the road or lie down to block the way. We used to do this to provide protection especially to the male). A question may arise as to why they would undertake such risky actions to safeguard the men. This may be due to the systematic assault on the men of the region but there were also attacks taking place on women. When I asked Manisha if there were any such actions taken to save the women, no specific answer was given.

As she continued to describe the hardships that women faced during the prior phase, it seemed clear as to which phase she supported. For Maya who has remained a prominent figure in both the phases, it is the participation of women in the past that has paved the way for those involved now. She added that the hardships faced by women back then could not be imagined by those in the movement now. Moreover, I argue, it is the lack of media coverage during 1986 that has resulted in the limited knowledge about women's participation. Therefore, it was interesting to see that while both women have

successfully integrated themselves in the latter phase; it is in the participation of the former that they take pride.

Each of these sections and the individual experiences that they have spoken about add to the discussion on women's participation in the movement. One common strand that was visible in all of the narratives was the role the leadership played in the movement and how it affected the lives of these women. While the leadership changed in the course of the two phases, the political status of the leader remained the same. Both Ghisingh and Gurung became the face of the movement and exercised absolute control. According to the women respondents the leader became a symbol at whose behest they worked. Comments like *haami tapai sanga chu* (we are with you) and *nari le hamesha afno parivaar ko raksha gareko cha* (women have always protected her family) for the leadership became a common call from the women participants. There was also a comparison between the two leaders by the women belonging to different phases. As a result, the claims made by women on the movement were not just to establish their role but also the role of the leader. Interestingly, while there were women leaders, the power ultimately resided in the hands of the male leadership. As one of the respondents suggested, the failure of the 2007 phase was due to multiple people in power. According to her, there should always be one leader, like it was in the 1986 phase. During the recent municipal election in 2017 where the GJM won a majority, a large gathering was addressed by the head of the women's wing, Asha Gurung, who is also the wife of the GJM supremo Bimal Gurung. As the head of the women's wing, which has been touted as the foot soldiers of the party and of the 2007 movement, I intended to understand how leader of the wing addressed her fellow members, especially from the perspective of

gender. She gave a call to the women to make the people *jaagar* or aware, as the state government made its presence felt during this election. The image of the family was evoked where the men were called brothers while the women were sisters taking care of them. Interestingly, as discussed in chapter 4, a similar image of a family was evoked during the 1986 phase where Gorkhaland was equated to a child and the women were dubbed as mothers. As all the respondents were part of the movement, support for the demand was imperative. But what was interesting was how each one of them personalised this demand. For a person like Radhika, who has been an active face in the movement during the 2007, the issue of being seen as a resident of Nepal was the important issue. Her question was also directed to me as I ceased to be a passive listener and had to participate. My positive response allowed her to continue with her anger and she spoke of many instances when her identity as an Indian was questioned.

The tussle between the contradictory identities, the accepted Indian and the rejected Nepalese of the people was strongly reflected in the interviews conducted. The need to assert themselves as Indian was visible in all of the interviews. The respondents preferred to call themselves Indian Gorkha, where the national identity was given more preference than the community identity. The 2007 phase also visibly carried the portrait of Gandhi, not only to portray the non-violent mode of the movement but also to assert their Indian identity. This resentment at being treated as an outsider by their own people was voiced by another respondent Gita who said, “Haami Gorkhe haru le nai desh ko rakcha garchu anta haami lai ne hepcha” (we Gorkhas protect the nation and we are treated badly). She added “desh ko लागि hamro kati vara daju-bhai haru shaheed bhaye, haami ta afno desh ko लागि marnu ko pani tyari chu” (so many of our brothers have died

for the country... we are ready to give up our life for the nation). This anger stemmed from that statement made by the state that questioned the loyalty of the community. In both the 1986 and the 2007 phases, the question of loyalty was raised by the state due to the history of migration of the community.

With the geographical and historical issues surrounding the region and its people, the issue of identity has been a subject of concern. As one of my respondents suggested “yo ta hamro purkha ko zameen ho... haami haru le yo jagah banako” (This is our ancestral land... It is we who have made this place), one begins to look at the question of identity in connection with the issue of home. In the above mentioned statement, land or *zameen* can be used as a synonym for home. The geographical and historical proximity with Nepal has always been used against the demand. The state government has continuously used this argument to evoke the need to ‘govern’ the people of the region. Perhaps, this may be the reason when asked about the existence of two contesting identities of Nepali and Gorkha, the respondents spoke about their preference of being called Gorkha. “Haami Gorkha ho... Haami kasari Nepali hunu sakchu... Nepal ko haru po Nepali ho” (We are Gorkha... how can we be Nepali... it is the people of Nepal who are Nepali). Statements such as these were heard echoing in my respondents’ narratives.

The issue of *maato* or land becomes crucial in establishing the identity of the people. Their migrant history is constantly questioned by the state in order to discredit the demand, and the need to disregard their history becomes crucial in this. This need is also to establish not only their Gorkha identity but also to assert their Indian Gorkhaness. Manisha points out that, “...haamilai ta uilei nei angrez le lera aako nita zameen sita...” (the British brought us long time ago along with the land). When she makes a statement,

“...haami chen yo maato sita aako raisu nita, ra this is our land..., anto yo maato haami khosnu parcha...” (we came with this land and so it belongs to us and we will have to forcefully take this land), she alludes to the issue of belongingness to the nation and the community’s search for home. She adds that this line of thinking was propagated by the party, GNLF, during the 1986 movement. She further adds, “...zameen hamro bhako chaina anta abo maanche haru lai khedyo ya jaanu bhano bhane, haami jaanu parcha. Hamro astitva chen chaina, existence bhanne kura chen chaina...” (The land is still not ours and if the people are asked to leave or are driven out then we will have to go. We do not have an existence). The question that arose from this conversation was how land could be equated to identity which in turn is also a search for a home and if there is a gendered notion behind this relation.

What became increasingly evident in the course of the interview was a lack of dialogue on the relation between gender and identity. While all the respondents strongly supported their Gorkha identity and wished to safeguard it against outside dominance, when asked about their description of a Gorkha, it was always the masculine, martial image (discussed in detail chapter 3). The identity of a Gorkha is predominantly masculine and characteristics of valour are associated with it. Even songs serenading this identity are always looking at elements that are primarily male. Amidst such detailed description of what makes a Gorkha, there seems to be a gap in terms of gender. The question of whether there exists such a term as ‘Gorkha woman’ was what I intended when I asked the women respondents questions on identity. Almost all of my respondents addressed the question of identity in the same manner that the leadership, which has always been male, had done since the inception of the movement. The limited reference

to any issue that pertained to women was somehow subsumed within the broader narrative of the movement. As a listener, I could see the anger that these women felt due to their personal experiences with the issue of Gorkha identity (treated as an outsider). However, the belief that with the formation of Gorkhaland the issues of gender will also be addressed was also evident. As they said “sapai problem solve huncha Gorkhaland bhayo bhane” (all problem will be solved, if Gorkhaland is formed), the formation of a separate state was seen as the solution for all the external and internal issues in the region.

Sanjeeb Lama’s “Role of Women in Gorkhaland Movement: Assessing the Issue of Power Sharing” (2014) discussed on similar lines and pointed out certain statements made by the women who further validate the influence or the power that the leadership holds on them. Statements like “We should blindly support the decision taken by President Bimal Gurung”, “We have no decision of our own” and “all the programs of *Nari Morcha* are formulated by parent body (GJM) and we are directed to implement those programs on given days” (Lama, 2014: 83) shed light on the role the male leadership plays in the women’s wing.

The difference came when these women spoke about the future. As I was able to interview both men and women, men mostly spoke in terms of the political and developmental gains if the demand for statehood is recognised. For the women respondents, it was also a hope for the *aaune pidi* or next generation. As Radhika said ‘mo morne samma Gorkhaland ko support garchu’ (till I die, I will support Gorkhaland), I asked them why they support this demand, they added that “Gorkhaland bhayo bhane, haami le na payo bhane pani, hamro aaune pidi le afno haq pauncha” (if Gorkhaland

happens then if not us, our next generation will get their rights). As Rekha pointed out, her children had left home in search of better job opportunities, leaving the old parents behind. This is a common occurrence all through the region. Hence, the strong hope for formation of statehood would ensure better job opportunities and stop this migration.

I use the term Indian Gorkha, instead of Indian Nepali, as all of my respondents refer to themselves as Indian Gorkha or *Bharatiya Gorkhe* and completely reject the term Nepali. As a result, I intended to examine this term from the lens of gender. With women occupying a visible space in the movement, it was important to read if they had their own notions of identity or they were following the ideas set by the male leadership. The violence that takes place in these sites is both internal and external. The 1986 phase and its repercussion on the people of the region by the state have often been spoken about especially in the context of its dealings with the State. The official estimate of the loss of life in the region during that phase was more than 1200 (“Darjeeling 2017 is eerily similar to Subhash Ghising’s violent Gorkhaland movement in 1986”, 2017) but the narratives intend to go beyond looking at the numbers and brings forth the stories of trauma that each of these twelve individual women faced during the movement. While 1986 has been touted as a violent phase as opposed to its successor, 2007, one cannot overlook the fact that there were cases of political and social alienation in the region. Due to the geographical proximity of the region, there began a struggle amongst the people of the region due to their political allegiances.

These cases of isolation were not something that was openly spoken about during the course of the interview. While some of the respondents chose to address them openly as I continued to record them, some were comfortable only when the recorder was

switched off. The existence of the internal conflict within the region began in 1986 with the clashes between the CPI (M) and the GNLFF. While the former was the ruling party of the State, the latter was the dominant party in the region. The region also had a strong CPI (M) force and so when the movement began this group was subjected to attacks. Three of my respondents belonged to this group during the 1986 phase and have since broken off and become members of the CPRM, which supports the Gorkhaland demand. Some of the respondents chose to share their personal experiences during the movement.

All the three women respondents discussed here belonged to the CPI (M) during the 1986 phase and later became a part of the CPRM. They have been a part of it since their childhood as their parents were also party members. Meera, who was originally from Dooars, was six years old when the 1986 movement began. Her father was a CPI (M) leader in the tea gardens, before the movement began in 1986 and was against the demand. Similarly, both Ratna and Indira also had familial ties with the party and have been strongly influenced by it. Therefore, when the movement broke out in 1986, they were viewed as the ‘enemy’ of the demand and so were completely alienated. As Meera points out, her father was on the run from the GNLFF workers and would never sleep in the house. He would only come for dinner and so Meera and her sister had to: “ghar dikhin baira guard garthiyu... koi aauncha ki?... mero baba ghar ma na aaosh bhane jasto laag thiyo” (we would be outside guarding the house... what if someone comes... I wished that my father would not come home). Eventually their house was burnt down and they had to spend four years in a refugee camp. They were able to come back home only after the government was able to provide security for them.

Meera's recollection of her fear for her father's life, the scarcity of food that those supporting the state were subjected to and the life in the refugee camp brings to focus how a different narrative was being formulated within the region. The knowledge of the state being dominant and the people of the hills being oppressed are overturned with this narration. These kinds of narratives add a new reading highlighting the cracks existing within the united Gorkha identity. Meera kept telling me all through her interview that this was her personal story and so should not be taken in the general. There are other narratives that are different from hers.

Ratna's and Indira's stories are also about forceful displacement as both had to leave their home due to the pressure built by the GNLf and its leadership. While Ratna was away from her home for more than a decade, Indira came back and joined CPRM. Indira asked me to switch off the recorder as she and her mother began their story. The atrocity of the then leadership on any member of the CPI (M) spelled true for her family as her maternal uncle was hospitalised in the scuffle between the two factions. In the hospital her uncle had to be smuggled out due to the fear of being attacked again. Her aunts were then abducted by members of opposite faction and later escaped from being killed. These family histories project a picture of the oppression faced by members of minority parties. The stigma of being called a communist, which entails being against the demand still persists as Indira remarked that Ghisingh had told his 'followers' that if they encountered a snake or a *marxbadi* (communist) on their way, they should kill the latter as it posed a threat to the demand. Interestingly, these notions still continue even though the CPRM openly supports the demand.

When I enquired about her refusal to participate in the 1986 movement, Indira replied that she was seen as a traitor to the cause due to her allegiance to the CPI (M). She believed that “tetti bela ta esto thiyo ki, lu Gorkhaland bhaie halyo bhane pani samasya ko samadhan ta hundai na” (at that time I thought even if Gorkhaland is made, the problems will not be solved). She continued, “Ghisingh ko speech pani testo thiyo, sungur le nunya chamal khancha bhaneko thiyo Gorkhaland bhayo bhane” (Ghisingh’s speech that even pigs will eat high quality rice if Gorkhaland is achieved). Indira questioned such claims made by the leader and said that such claims are not possible as there is no state that will not have problems. For her, the formation of a state did not signify the end of all problems. Moreover, she did not support the use of radical means employed by the movement in 1986. According to her, the people were not made to understand the meaning of *chinhari* or mark of recognition by the leaders during that period. She added that she now understands the reason behind the demand and so has supported and participated in the movement. She has experienced the marginalisation personally in the party (CPI (M)) and realised that it is not possible to eradicate the problem without a separate state.

Another tool used by the dominant factions to quell internal conflict is the social boycott. Both in 1986 and the 2007 this tool was used for those who did not join the dominant party. What needs to be noted is that there were those who supported the demand but did not support the leadership. While the 2007 phase was not rigged with as much bloodshed as that of 1986, these methods of *gherao* and societal alienation led to a mental impact on the victims. The death of Ghisingh’s wife in exile and the refusal of the GJM to allow her cremation in Darjeeling (“Subash Ghisingh’s wife passes away”, 2008)

show a general lack of apathy as people came in large number to block the road. This act by GJM was strongly condemned by the GNLF members, as mentioned by a respondent.

Doma's story as a familiar face in the GNLF and in the region and her eventual boycott for refusal to join the GJM in 2007 bring forth a similar pattern. In the course of her interview, she did not wish to speak about this and so mainly concerned herself about her experience in the movement. After the interview, as I spoke to her family, they informed me about the boycott and her eventual psychological breakdown. She had to be under medication and had refused to go out of her house. What seems very poignant in this situation is that the people surrounding Doma's house and chanting slogans were the women's wing of GJM. While the leadership may have announced the boycott and the women may have been following orders, their belief on the boycott of 'such' people should not be undermined. The women's wing of the GJM, which has been active since the 2007 phase has been responsible for enabling the will of the leadership. At the same time, it should also be pointed out that these women believed in such enforcements as an act of safeguarding the demand. As the GJM became the representative of the demand in 2007, those in the opposite faction were deemed as threat and had to be dealt with. This 'form' of dealing was common in 2007 and one can even look at the participation of some was due to the fear of being dealt in a similar manner. While some respondents who moved to join the GJM during the 2007 phase spoke about their belief in the demand, they also added that the 1986 phase was a 'real' movement because of the sacrifices made by the people. The respect and admiration for Ghisingh remained unhinged for many of the respondents.

A common thread, in relation to the issue of violence, which bound each of the interviews, was the clashes between the state and the people during the 1986 phase. As discussed before the 1986 phase resulted in the loss of lives and property and also forced people to migrate out of fear for their lives. The incidents narrated by my respondents paint a different picture as opposed to those circulated by the State. In the course of the movement, the state officially published two booklets entitled *Gorkhaland Agitation: Facts and Issues* (1986 and 1987). These were called information document and sought to show how the movement was violent and separatist. It should be remembered that the demand for Gorkhaland was coinciding with other movements such as those in the Northeast and with the history of the Khalistan movement; the demand was termed as separatist by the State.

In the official document, the Government of West Bengal describes the movement as violent. The symbol of “blood-stained *khukri*” (Government of West Bengal, 1987: 12) is translated as the violent stance taken by the movement. Similarly, in a leading Bengali regional newspaper cartoons depicting the image of Darjeeling as a snake (Chandi, 1986: 1) and the leadership as a stooge (Chandi, 1986: 1) at the hands of the Centre was published. While the stance taken by the State received a larger audience through the medium used by them, those in the Hills during the 1986 did not have such opportunities. Once the movement subsided, discussions on police atrocities became common. After the resurgence of the movement in 2007, there began a need to pit the two phases against one another in order to show the 2007 phase as better. This downplaying led to the refusal to speak about the 1986 phase as people refused to remember the ‘dark history’.

During the course of the interview all my respondents spoke on violence that took place in the hills during the 1986 phase. Each of the respondents was affected by the tussle between the two factions. Some were directly affected as they were actively involved in the party work, while some left as they did not wish to be involved with either. With the movement continuing since the 1986 phase, there have been instances of violence between the state and the people. While the people involved have been mostly party members, the intensity of these clashes was at its peak during the 1986 phase. Therefore, it is imperative that there is a need to record these experiences. As one of my respondents unofficially commented that women did not have any choice but to come out as there were no men left in the region. It was interesting to see how in the interviews with the women respondents, there was almost always a reference to the men but the same was not witnessed when it came to male respondents. In the interviews conducted with the men, there was no mention of women unless a specific question was asked.

This understanding changed when I interviewed women participants. Whether it was a reference to their husband or to the male leadership, the reference to the male participation was made all through the interview. As a result, the narrative did not just showcase the lives of these women during the movement but also those of their male counterparts. While the 1986 movement has always been a topic of discussion ‘behind closed doors’, the personal experiences of these twelve women especially in terms of the violence that ensued need to be discussed. From being unable to perform the last rites of a parent to the personal incarceration, all these women spoke about their life stories during the course of the interview.

Radhika's interview was the first one that I was able to conduct during my fieldwork. While she has witnessed the movement since the 1986, she was involved in it only in 2007. The situation in the region during the 1986 was also one of mistrust amongst the people. As there were CPI (M) cadres in the region, they were seen as an enemy of the demand by the GNLFF resulting in clashes. It was during this time that Radhika was elected as a *panchayat pradhan* which automatically led to her joining the CPI (M). As a member of the ruling party, she was not subjected to the raids in the house but her house was ransacked during the forty day *bandh*. Her father's death during the imposition of section 144 in the region led to the raid by the forces on her house. As she recounts the day: "mero bau chen 13th March ma khaseko thiye, anta maile chaar jaana maanche ko permission liye. Abo mero bau ko laash jalayera aako haami ghar ma... maanche haru aako thiyo... hamro ta abo maanche haru basnu parcha, tauko khuraunu parcha... haami baseko ta CRPF dallai aayera keta haru lai kheddera, pakrindai, malai ta ghicchuk samatera, gadi ma halera lera aako" (my father died on the 13th of march and I had taken permission for four people to accompany me to the cremation ground. As per our rituals, people have to stay in our house and shave their heads but as we sat in the house after the cremation, CRPF raided and started hounding the boys and caught me by my collar and put me in their car.)

As she continued, she spoke about the look of terror that had come on everyone's face. She added that the fear was for the men who had come to attend last rites, "keta haru jungle-jungle khirki wara phal haner, marosh ki larosh darr le ni... pakrincha tesko darr le bhageko" (the men jumped from the window and ran to the jungle without any care for their safety as they wanted to escape arrest). She later laughed as she recounted

an incident, that men who were playing cards quickly began to do some household chores as the CRPF entered. It was mainly done to divert attention from them. One man in particular “silauto-loro liyera pisheko... khorsani pani na bhako tara pishi rakhekocho” (kept grinding the mortar and pestle even when there were no chillies to grind). As she laughed at the memory of these events, the fear in the minds of these men and also in her was evident in the recollection. She was eventually released from the police station but the entire ordeal of a loss in the family and the eventual destruction and confusion caused by the raid provide a glimpse of the existing fear amongst the people.

Those in the GNLF party were subjected to frequent raids and their families were at risk of being subjected to being implicated. As Manisha spoke about her ordeal during the 1986 phase, she spoke about her arrest. She describes her situation as, “tetti bela ta abo party ko kaam ko laagi nishin thiye tara belka ghar farkinchu ki farkindina tyo tha thiyena” (I would go out with the work for the party but did not know if I would return or not). As she looks back at her ordeal she remembers it with fondness and smiles thinking how brave they were during that time. She wistfully remembered how she would carry *usineko anda* or boiled egg when she left home and wrap it up in her sari. She still remembers how ‘irritating’ it was back then but as she recollects it now she refers to it as ‘ek prakaar ko maja’ or a type of fun. It is therefore, interesting to see how the memories collected of those times of violence not only evoke fear but also a sense of achievement amongst its members. In some way it can be read as their means to claim the movement against those who participated in the 2007 phase and have looked down at the 1986 phase.

As Manisha continued her recollection, she spoke about the day of her arrest. As mentioned before, the geographical space of the region being limited everyone knew about Manisha's arrest and her subsequent release after the movement had subsided. There were some who spoke about sexual exploitation that she had faced during her incarceration. As she continued she added that on the day of her arrest, she had remained in her home hoping that there will be no raid. It was in the night that she was called out by the police and she had no choice but to surrender. As she tried to look inside her house, she remembers "tetti bela CRPF ko tyo thulo dure bhancha ni telle chen hirkakocha" (that time there was a bamboo pole like stick that the CRPF would carry, I was hit by that). After being hit she felt some liquid coming out of her nose, she thought it was blood but later she realised that it was some other form of liquid. As she was led to the officer-in-charge, she recalls that the officer-in-charge asked the local police, who were known to her, "thok de isko" (shoot her). She was grateful that she was spared that day and was taken to custody.

The existence of a 'concentration camp', as Manisha referred to it, located at Kerabari was another point of discussion on the issue of violence. The place was used for interrogation for those who were taken into custody. It came to symbolise a place of fear amongst the inhabitants of Kurseong as people started talking about the tortures and killings taking place in this place. Manisha spoke of her own worry or "ek prakaar ko surta" that she faced till the time she crossed Kerabari. The existence of the camp and her gender added to the fear of being arrested and her eventual fate. As she described her journey to prison, she spoke about how she was kept in the station for two days and

feared being ‘misused’, so she told the officer in charge that she was the ‘guest’ of the senior officer and wished to be produced in the court as soon as possible.

Doma was at the helm of the 1986 phase of the movement in Kurseong as she was a known face in the region and in the party. While in 2007 she was relegated to the fringe due to her unwillingness to join the new party, she did speak in detail about her participation. In her own words 1986 was ‘dar lagdo’ or dangerous, “eta pani basnu na paune, tetta pani basnu na paune. Arka ko ghar ma sutyo anta bhagyo... jungle-jungle posyo.” (I could not stay anywhere and so had to either take shelter in someone else’s house or run to the forest). The fear of police remained and her house was ransacked on a number of occasions. As was the case with any party member, Doma’s family was also implicated during the 1986 phase as the family was not able to stay in their own house due to the frequent raids. During the interview, Doma could not recall all the events that took place during the movement and so her sister-in-law, who was also my mediator, came in to help her remember. As mentioned before, she went through a social boycott during the 2007 phase which led to her complete psychological breakdown. As a result, she had to be under medication due to which she had trouble remembering.

As I asked her about how she grappled with the constant threat to her and her family, during the 1986 phase, her sister-in-law told me that her daughter and her son were kept in separate houses and that her son was dressed as a girl fearing that he might be taken away by the police. Her husband was also on the run and would carry a plastic sheet which would be used as a makeshift bed. He would often sleep in the tea gardens due to the fear of arrest. Doma then added that “hamro herera ta aile haru lai ta shanti ra maja cha ni” (looking at what we went through, those participating in the 2007 have a

peaceful and fun movement). Her stories of evading arrest made her act as a woman who had just given birth and also acting as a woman in labour to save a fellow member were things that she now recollects these details and laughed about them. She was also fired at as she was running from the arrest and had to jump off an edge of a hill to save herself. Due to the continuous implication of the members and their families, many were ostracised by their families, Doma also faced this when her extended family asked her not to come to their house as they feared arrest.

The story of how the families of the party members were subjected to harassment from the forces continues as Sandhya remembered her participation during the 1986 phase. She was still breast-feeding when she was participating and so she had to come home to feed her child. The child was kept in the care of her elderly in-laws as there was no other means to keep them safe. As she recounts the raid on her house, both she and her husband were participating in the movement and their children were kept with her in-laws. During the raid, her old father-in-law was arrested and was kept in the prison, and later got released. She also lost her brother during the 1986 phase.

Some respondents were reluctant to speak about their personal stories of violence and while some did speak once the voice recorder was switched off, others continued to remain silent. For example, Rekha's story was mostly told by her fellow members than by her as she did not wish to speak about it. Her husband was hit during the 1986 phase of the movement, which gave her the impetus to join the movement. She did not wish to speak anything about her personal experience in particular. Similarly, Maya also told me that she could not tell me in detail about her personal experiences during the movement as there were cases against her that were dismissed due to her co-operation with the state.

She told me about how she had helped a man escape arrest. It was later that she joined the movement and chose to leave her family. She belonged to the radical faction in the movement and so was on the run from the forces. She later joined the state due to the cases on her and chose to help the state to arrest her former party members. Another respondent, who was not willing to speak about her experiences during the 1986 phase, was Rita. She hailed from Kalimpong which came to the limelight after the shooting of 27th July, 1986 by the police on the people gathered for a mass rally to burn the Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950.

Rita was one of the survivors of that shooting and soon became the face of the martyrs of that day. She spoke to me only after I assured her that there will be no recording. She said that she never wished to be part of the movement and had accompanied some people on that day just out of curiosity. She added that after becoming part of the party, she had to be on the run as her house was frequently raided on false cases. It was in 2007 when the movement resurfaced that her name came up again for interrogation. She gave herself up and was incarcerated for some time. She said that giving herself up was the only way for her to stop the harassment. For Trishna the rejection of her identity during a raid in her house was the only way to ensure the safety of her and her family. As the officer-in-charge did not know her by her face, she told them that she was not the person the police were looking for and they left her house. As she recalled this incident after the interview was over, she added how fear had gripped her when police had banged on her door.

The nature of violence changed from the time of the 1986 movement to its resurgence in 2007. While the hostility between the state and the people has been

documented by both the sides, it is the aggression that took place within the region that also needs to be examined. These twelve respondents can be placed in different corners within this reading of violence. Therefore, it is interesting to witness how not only their political lives but also their familial lives have been affected by the movement.

5.8 Women's Narratives in the Construction of Movement History

The objective of the study was to address the gaps existing within the movement history that has been mostly addressed by two perspectives the state narrative and the narrative of the region led by its male leadership. While the state's perspective is not basis of the study, the focus is on the region's narrative. The latter has itself undergone a change from the 1986 phase to the 2007 phase. The dominant influence has been of the political organisations and its male leadership, which had enjoyed its majority during the two phases. As a result, the narrative of 'bravery' of the GNLF and Ghisingh during the 1986 phase was negated by the 'peaceful' rhetoric of GJM and Gurung in 2007. What remained similar, irrespective of the phase, is the limited representation of the women participant in the movement narrative. As a dominant discourse of the movement has always been leader-oriented, the participation of women was witnessed but their perspectives were not taken into consideration. The study intended to examine these gaps, where the women participants, as stakeholders of the movement, re-tell the history of the movement through their experiences.

The role of women's narrative in the construction of the movement history has been discussed from two perspectives. The first section looks at all the thirty respondents from the concept of 'movement family'. The objective is to address the issues common

amongst all of the respondents as they negotiate their position within a constructed bond. Here the issues are focused as they bind each woman and influence her experience. While the study does not look at the category of women as a homogenous entity, their position within the movement, through the bonds etched and re-enforced by the male leadership, have remained similar. Therefore, these bonds inform their re-telling.

The second perspective examines the heterogeneous composition of the category but instead of looking at it from the constructed bonds, the twelve narratives are viewed as individuals with their own personal history, outside the movement. While the issues discussed here as similar to those addressed in the previous chapter, the focus on the individual is primary. The twelve women chosen intend to represent a cross-section of the thirty respondents interviewed. Each of the thirty women interviewed have distinctive characteristics which has led to the formation of diverse narratives. Therefore, these twelve women ‘chosen’, out of the thirty, not only engaged with these differences but also addressed familial history, violence and questioned established notions.

The role of women’s narrative within the movement structure is to establish a claim of these respondents. While the primary role of these re-telling was to discuss the experiences of the women participants, who have been pushed to the margins, the role of different factors influencing these narratives were also focused. As these women did not participate in vacuum, their interactions with each other and with other members of the movement, influences their understanding of the movement and its repercussions. Therefore, these narratives become an entry into the dynamics existing within the movement structure. The objective of engaging with the interviews from two vantage points, i.e. group and individual, is to witness the women’s interaction with each other

within the structure and also to establish their personal ‘stories’ that have affected their participation.

The role of families in the narratives present two different readings one is the constructed bond of movement family and the over-arching ‘unified’ Gorkha identity and the other is the blood ties affected by the movement rhetoric. The issue of violence, though addressed in the previous chapter from a holistic point of view, has been examined here from the perspectives of women personal experiences. Here the concept of violence not only pertains to the struggle that the participants suffered from the state machinery but also refers to the betrayal they faced at the hands of their own people. The role of political organisations in the construction of these narratives becomes one of the factors influencing the re-telling. It is through these allegiances that we witness the crevices within the region and the struggle for power. Moreover, the dominance of the male leadership in constructing the concept of identity and the subsuming of other issues like gender and ethnicity within it has been discussed through the examination of these narratives.

These narratives or *testimonios* provided by the women respondents provide a new reading of the existing knowledge on the movement. It is through their personal experiences that each of these women claimed their part in the movement. These ‘stories’ transcend the individual boundary and provide a commentary on the relationship that not only existed between the state and the region but also those amongst the regional political organisations, during the two phases of the movement. It is also an attempt to understand the role of these twelve women in the movement. While each of these women actively participated in the movement, it seeks to engage with the how their participation was

witnessed not just by them but also by their fellow people. Therefore, this chapter not only provides a new reading to the existing information but also interrogates the cracks in it.

Unlike the previous chapter, there is attempt to personalise the movement by accessing the personal histories of these twelve women, who allowed me an insight into their experiences. These women chose to speak about not just their individual self but also about their families. While these women can be taken as a cross-section of the total interviews collected, it is in their willingness to share that these women gained prominence amongst the interviewees. The similarities and the differences shared by these women present the different aspects of the movement. The risk that these women took in answering my questions, specially, the ones where they blame the leadership of both the state and the region for the failure of the movement, cannot be forgotten.

As discussed above, the objective of the study was not to question the movement or the demand but to re-tell the history of the Gorkhaland movement from the experiences of its women respondents. Therefore, it has continuously engaged with the core concepts of identity, land, migration and marginalisation through the lens of gender. The resurgence of the 2017 phase began a similar cycle resulting in the shift of power. In this phase also we witness a similar visibility of the women, which was evident in 2007. Further, as the fieldwork continued after this phase subsided, the aftermath of this resurgence was visible in the narratives collected. The sensitivity and the longevity of the movement (1986, 2007 and the after-effect of the 2017) posed obstacle in the course of the study. The unwillingness of the respondents to discuss certain subjects and the need to remain loyal for the sake of their as well as their family's safety led to well-rehearsed

answers. The trajectory that it followed was similar to its predecessors (1986 and 2007). The next chapter initiates this discussion and elaborates the findings of the study and its future possibilities in research.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 The Cycle of Resurgence

The constant resurgence of the demand for separate statehood witnessed its recent revival in 2017, when the movement began as a result of the compulsory implementation of Bengali language in schools across the state. The demand was a result of the further marginalisation in the region, which is Nepali dominated. Even after its retraction by the state, the movement lasted for 104 days, and did not seem to waver. The region was pushed into chaos as the movement resulted in the deployment of armed forces by the state, violent protests and clashes with the forces, and the destruction of government property. The movement was able to capture the attention of social media and used the platform to publicise how the events were unfolding. The ban on internet and the disconnection of the telephone services by the state meant that their contact with the ‘outside world’ was severed, rendering the region into a state of isolation. This brought out discussions on the violation of human rights through social media posts from all around the world against the state measures. The movement finally subsided in September 2017 and a new leader, Binay Tamang, took the centre-stage as Bimal Gurung and his followers went ‘underground’.

The present study began with a reference to the 2017 phase as a point of entry into the discussion of the movement. The study was based on two phases, the 1986 and 2007, and so included respondents who had witnessed both and participated in both. The question then arises is why does the study begin and end with a reference to a period,

which does not belong to either of the two phases being addressed. The role of 2017 as a point of entry into the discussion on the issues surrounding the movement serves two purposes. First, even after decades of gap between the resurgence, the demand has remained consistent. Secondly, the respondents positioned in the aftermath of 2017 continue to engage with the movement. The 2017 phase is not the focus of the study, but it becomes an entry point into the movement discourse. The 2017 phase focuses on similar questions of identity and belonging that have been ensuing since the colonial period. It is with these questions that the study begins. The 2017 phase becomes a point from which the respondents ‘look back’ at the movement being influenced by it. While the primary focus is on the re-telling of the movement narrative from the perspective of its women participants, the study builds on the context of the region and the movement to provide a structure to this narrative. These respondents have worked in different capacities during each phase, and so provide different vantage points for the movement’s narrative.

One of the major objectives of the study is to engage with issues of identity, belonging and home, within the context of Gorkhaland movement, through the lens of gender. The thesis argues that the existing narrative of the movement has neglected the experiences of the women involved in it and has primarily focused on the male leadership. This lack has been addressed and examined through the *testimonios* of women participants, who were part of the two phases of the movement (1986 and 2007). The study engages with issues that have been part of the movement rhetoric since its inception. Therefore, the objective was to understand if there existed a different meaning to these issues when viewed from the perspective of women involved in it.

The existing literature on the Gorkhaland movement has often focused on the political organisations leading the demand, and their leaders. During the 1986 phase, it was the Gorkha National Liberation Force (GNLF) and Subhash Ghisingh who became the focus of the movement, and in 2007, it was the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) and Bimal Gurung. While some women were seen occupying positions of authority, they were less in number and their narratives were more attuned to that of the organisation.

In 2007 women came out in protest for the Gorkhaland demand and shaved off their hair. This act was hailed as a new era by the organisation as it was deemed radical. Both regional and national media covered it and the movement was hailed, by both women and men respondents, as being gender conscious. This action, along with the scores of women ‘leading’ the processions demanding for Gorkhaland, became the central image of the 2007 phase. With a complete negation of the 1986 phase as radical and anti-Gandhian, the latter tried to portray itself as more democratic. This also entailed the question of women's participation.

While the 2007 phase had strong and ‘visible’ women participants, one began to question whether there was equal participation of women in 1986. Moreover, with the highly publicised image of women ‘leading’ the movement in 2007, one also has to question whether this representation was accurate in reality. This visibility and the nature of the 2007 phase as a ‘peaceful’ movement led to mass mobilisation of women. This form of visibility also brought out the rhetoric that 2007 phase was ‘gender neutral’, which was supported by the women participants. They felt that as the movement was non-violent, women were able to mobilise more freely. This notion was further supported by the argument that women were relatively inconspicuous during the 1986 phase. This

narrative became a common discourse for the 2007 women participants. On the other hand, the women participants of the 1986 phase argued against this discourse and added that they were actively participating in the movement. They added that unlike the 2007 phase, media, especially regional media, had not been that active, then.

The thesis introduced the concept of ‘movement family’ as used in the movement, so as to understand the structure of the movement and the position of women in it. What it sought to do was to provide a critique of these constructed bonds of family, established by the leadership, which positioned the women within the roles designed by the mainstream family set-up. Therefore, the ‘visibility’, which was being celebrated in 2007, was based on the sanction of the male leadership. We witness a similar structure present in the 1986 phase where women were urged to protect the movement. These bonds not only positioned the women in formulation of the movement but also connected each respondent with the other, irrespective of their participation and allegiances. The need to create imagined bonds to strengthen the movement is also read from the gender lens as we witness how women were clubbed under the role of *didi-baini* or sisters to protect their male counterparts or *daju-bhai* (brothers). Further, this relation also extends to the movement that assumes the role of a child, which needs protection and women become mothers to provide this safety.

In the course of the interviews, it became evident that the role of women, despite obvious differences, did not change. The supportive role of the women involved remained constant as they continued to sustain the male leadership. While the image of the women participants became more pronounced in the 2007 phase, their role as a support to the male leadership remained. Similar to those who participated in the 1986

phase, their role became secondary to the male leader. Some women leaders were able to access the upper strata of leadership but they were always outnumbered by men. The position of power exercised by the male leadership did not undergo any change as the objectives of the women's wing of the organisation were subsumed under the larger discourse of movement and identity. This was evident during the Kurseong Municipal Elections (2017) in the region, where the GJM circulated a single pamphlet, highlighting the identity issue and its stand against the state policies. The women's wing or the *Nari Morcha* was instructed to distribute only this pamphlet. When asked about this, the respondents agreed with it as most felt that the formation of statehood was the solution for all the issues existing in the region. This emotion was also echoed by the women participants of the 1986 phase.

The juxtaposition of the masculine and the feminine images in the movement has been explored in the study. The image of the masculine Gorkha as a symbol of martial prowess has been dominantly used not only to establish the bravery of the community but also to highlight the community's loyalty to the nation. It is against this backdrop that the study explored the position of women. As equal stakeholders in the demand and the movement, where is the Indian Gorkha woman in comparison to the dominant male identity. The women of the region are often portrayed as tea-garden workers or more recently as protestors. As a result, one has to question if there exists a Gorkha woman identity beyond the popular masculine image or if she performs a mere supportive role always. The respondents referred to themselves as Gorkha but we witness that as identity permeates through all the movement rhetoric, there is subsuming of all other identities under the term Gorkha. Therefore, this identity is assumed to be the primary marker after

the national marker. Memory became a tool to understand these experiences as women discussed their familial history as well as individual accounts. Memory became a link to the different phases as each respondent 'goes back' to retrieve her experiences in the movement only to realise that these narratives continue to affect them even in the present period. Variables like political allegiances became a primary concern for all the respondents. Their memory is part of private as well as public sphere as their narratives bridge the spatial gap between the two. The women in their narratives not only discussed their personal experiences but also their family's experiences. This reference became recurrent for most of the respondents, and unlike their male counterpart, they made their narratives 'personal'. The existing gap between the private and public experiences in the movement narrative became blurred through the narratives of the women participants.

Another aspect that this study examined was the fissures existing within the unified Gorkha identity projected in the movement. The two phases represent two different political ideologies, which were headed by two different political organisations. As a result, the thesis has tried to understand the political dynamics of the region in connection to the dominant political party during that period. The internal power struggle existing in the region has influenced the re-telling as these women were affected by it. As these women re-tell their experiences, they mentioned the repercussions of their political allegiance. Some remained silent due to the fear of retaliation while others were influenced by their political affiliation.

Women, particularly, had to face severe violence from the state during the 1986 phase and isolation from the society due to the political turmoil in the region. The silence surrounding the issue of sexual violence during the 1986 phase was visible amongst all

the respondents. While some spoke about their physical and psychological trauma, no one was willing to discuss the sexual violence of that period. With the gap of more than three decades, the respondents commented that the notion of ‘going back’ to the period of ‘normalcy’ before the movement began is not possible. The trauma of the pain inflicted by the state and by their own community members will always be a part of their memory. Interestingly, despite the trauma, all the respondents agreed that if the movement resurged they would certainly be part of it.

6.2 Further Possibilities of Research

The study focused on the urban settings of the region but the movement has always influenced the entire region, urban and rural. The role of the tea-gardens, especially in 1986, was discussed by the respondents as they represent a different history. According to some of the respondents, the violence of 1986 witnessed drastic manifestations in the tea-gardens. Even in 2007, a major section of the rallies came from this section. During both phases, the dominant organisation tried to gain support from this section. The demand for equal wages for the tea-garden workers became an integral requirement to garner support. The accessibility to this region was difficult for me personally, but its relevance in the narrative of the movement cannot be denied. Therefore, the support of the workers, the history and the expectations of this section become important entry points to a study on the history of the Gorkhaland, which has so far only looked at the leaders of the movement.

The tea-garden area, in both phases, has produced strong support for the movement. In 1986, the area was dominated by Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI

(M)) and so became a site of clashes between CPI (M) and GNLF. Due to the limited connectivity, the region also suffered loss of lives. A respondent commented that she had heard her comrade discussing how women tea-garden workers were subjected to brutality during the 1986 phase. In 2007, the GJM leadership mobilised its member to these areas to recruit members. There was a branch of the organisation supporting the workers and demanding minimum wages. In 2017, another respondent added that women from the tea-garden belt came in large numbers to be part of the movement. She added that these women and men are daily wage earners and so when they came for almost all the rallies, she felt grateful to them. The role of the tea-garden region in the history of the movement has been crucial and can be further discussed in a study. The violence and the changing face of the region can also be read in depth.

In her article “WE ARE INDIGENOUS TO LAND. BORDERS MOVED, NOT THE PEOPLE” (September, 2019), Surabhi Tamang responds to a comment made by the Tourism Minister Mr. Goutam Deb that if the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is implemented in the state, the Hills will be empty as the entire Gorkha community will be ‘thrown out’. While the statement was made as a caution to the people, the backlash targeted the claims of indigeneity. While the state government has expressly denied any attempt at the implementation of NRC in the state, the warning statement could have been made due to the influence of the ruling national party, BJP, in the region. This claim not only revived the ever-existing discussion of belongingness that has plagued the community, but also opened the counter-argument on infiltration from Bangladesh into the state.

As discussed before, the Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty 1950, agrees to a porous border between the two nations. This blurs the lines of distinction between Nepalese migrants and Gorkhas of Indian origin. As one of the respondents suggested, there are many migrants in the region who are gradually able to ‘become’ citizens and even vote, which the treaty does not allow. Therefore, one is unable to ascertain whether these people can be considered legitimate citizens when even those with valid proof are looked at with suspicion. Similarly, some respondents also suggested that many Bengalis living in the plains were not real citizens of the nation, but were illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

What we see, therefore, is an anxiety present on both sides. It is to combat this anxiety that the need to assert one's Gorkhaness or Bengalianness became especially evident during the 2007 phase. With the current political climate of suspicion and anxiety of being called ‘false’ citizens, one should re-read the meaning of the concept of citizenship. What constitutes a legitimate citizen? Who christens this legitimacy? With the implementation of NRC in Assam, specifically against Bangladeshi Muslim migrants, what does this law mean to the Muslim population in both the plains and the hills?

The 2007 phase of the movement ushered in a new history for the region and its people with the change in power, the execution of the movement and a certain negation of the past, seen as moving away from the violent history of 1986. The celebration of diversity and the united Gorkha front brought forth a strong image of the movement. This representation of diversity became the movement's downfall, however, when the state began its move to establish the various Tribal Development Boards. These Boards granted special privileges for different communities and soon, claims of indigeneity

began. The need to move away from the overarching Gorkha identity began and so, the number of boards increased. The reason proposed by some was that the movement never yielded any result and the power always remained in the hands of a few. The boards enabled them to take care of their own community with the funds provided by the state. It was also commented that the reason for the state's win, in Mirik's municipal election, was because of these boards. Therefore, one can read the rise of the 2007 phase and its impact through the formation of the boards and the effect of this move on the identity claim in the region.

The shifting understanding of Gorkha masculinity through the opposing images of the martial Gorkha soldier and the subservient Gorkha *bahadur* brings in interesting discussions too. Both these images have a colonial context and emerge from their acute sense of loyalty that the British had discussed about. While the '*bahadur*' has fallen into disrepute due to its constant use as a caricature to ridicule the community, one cannot deny the unquestioning loyalty it stands for. As the two contrasting images have been used in the movement's narrative, the shifting identity of the Gorkha man, as a warrior and as a servant, has formulated their own dialogue. As with the individualistic notions of experience discussed in the study through the women's narratives, the two opposing images can be read from different vantage points. Therefore, one can study the origin of such demarcation, its effect on the demand and the movement.

As discussed before, the 2017 phase began with the forceful implementation of Bengali language in schools, all over the state. The fear of marginalisation witnessed its manifestation in mass mobilisations against ruling. Therefore, this action against the region brought back the controversial issue of identity and belonging and their assertion

through language. The language movement gains special reference here, as a revival of similar fears is addressed in 2017. The dynamic of language can also be read through the revival of new identities within the region. The various developmental boards, as discussed above, also saw their assertions manifest through language. While Nepali is the *lingua franca* of the region because of its acceptance as the language of trade, the presence of other languages in the region, like Bhutia, Limbu and Lepcha, became especially assertive. Therefore, one can read this slow transition and the assertion of other identities in the region through the use of language.

The study focused on the Nepali-speaking community residing in the region of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. As a migrant community, it is spread across the nation. During the 2017 phase the social media became a medium through which the community, both in the nation and those living abroad, were able to support the movement. During the resurgence of the demand, the community living in the Northeast came together and supported the movement. Those living in the Northeast can be read from the context of identity and how it engages the people living outside Darjeeling. The history of forceful migration of the community is present in the Northeast, which allows a critical reading of experiences of the community living outside the Gorkhaland epicentre but being affected by it. A further study on the crisis and the internal fissure existing within the community, ‘living outside’, will provide a different vantage point in reading the question of identity and assertion (Kafle, 2007).

The interactions with the respondents, their families, and occasional visits began my journey of not only reading a movement that I had heard about since my childhood, but also helped me re-evaluate my position on it. Identity, home, and safety that are

considered essential for basic existence are called to question as I traverse through the narratives of women involved in the movement. These narratives of personal loss and trauma and their determination to demand recognition inspired these women to move forward.

While concepts like land and identity have always been circulated in the discourse of the movement, they begin to take a different understanding when looked at from the context of gender. These concepts are no longer just political but personal as well, because of the intertwining experiences of these women. These women have been a crucial part of the movement in both the radical and peaceful phases, but in its annals are side-lined as mere 'support'. Their narratives question this treatment as they claim the movement as their own and begin their own discourse of participation through it.

The study began with questions about the gaps existing within the historical narratives of the Gorkhaland movement. Its objective was not to evaluate the movement or the demand but to understand the experiences of the women participants involved in the movement. As the existing sources have followed the dominant narrative of the male leadership, the narratives of women participants allowed a re-reading of the movement. This re-telling has not only enabled us to understand the roles women have performed in the movement but have also provided an access to their familial spaces. Therefore, these narratives become a means to re-claim their role in the movement and assert themselves as equal stakeholders in the region.

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Breaking of the 'bahadur': Reading the song *Bir Gorkhali* within the context of the 2007 Gorkhaland Movement

Arpeeta Sharma

Abstract

In 2007 Prashant Tamang won the Indian reality show Indian Idol which sparked a massive celebration in the region of Darjeeling and its sub-divisions in the state of West Bengal. After the win, a radio jockey commented that if Gorkhas (the identity that the people of the region recognize themselves with) start winning then the people will have to start guarding their own shops. This remark acted as a catalyst and sparked a massive protest in the region and resulted in the resurgence of the demand for Gorkhaland, a separate statehood within the Indian nation for the Nepali-speaking community in India. While the demand for Gorkhaland began in 1986, it subsided after the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), an autonomous administrative body for the region. In 2007, the demand for recognition re-emerged and a new phase of the movement came about. The image of the Gorkhas or Indian Gorkhas, as the people prefer to call themselves, can be read from two perspectives. The first being the image of the warrior and a proud part of the Indian armed forces and the second being the caricatured image of the *bahadur* that has often been seen re-iterated on the screen. In this paper, I would like to discuss one of the songs that gained popularity during the 2007 phase of the movement and how this song celebrates the image of the Gorkha warrior as opposed to the popularized and mocking image of the *bahadur* (chowkidar). The song, *Bir Gorkhali* was written and sung by an indigenous rock band, Mantra and was also performed by Prashant Tamang in Indian Idol. While the song was released before the movement took place, the significance of the song grew as the movement gained momentum. The paper would also look at the rise of Prashant Tamang, and how he became the representative of the Indian Gorkhas from the region. It also seeks to examine if this image can be read as becoming synonymous with the image of the Gorkha warrior. The paper presents a qualitative analysis of the lyrics of the song which becomes a

text so as to understand these two opposite images. Additionally, newspaper archives will be read so as to understand the resurgence of the movement and how the issue of the Gorkha identity became crucial during and post-Prashant Tamang's Indian Idol scenario.

Keywords: Resistance, Identity, Movement, Marginalization, History, and Gorkha.

Introduction:

The present paper intends to read on why does a song like *Bir Gorkhali* gained popularity during the second phase of the Gorkhaland movement in 2007. The paper reads the rise of this song within the context of the events taking place around that time. With the movement as its background, the song is analyzed not only in terms of its lyrics but also through the image created by song thereby breaking the stereotype of the Gorkha community in India. The two contrasting image of the Gorkha- the warrior and the *Chowkidar* are brought into the discussion through the song and the movement.

In 2007, an Indian reality show, Indian Idol announced Prashant Tamang, who hails from Darjeeling, as its winner. Tamang, who worked in Kolkata Police, soon became the face of the Indian Gorkha community in the course of the show and also became the catalyst for the resurgence of the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland in 2007. One of the songs that Tamang recreated was *Bir Gorkhali*, originally performed by a Nepali rock band from Darjeeling, Mantra.

The song *Bir Gorkhali* was first released in 2003 by the rock band Mantra. The song was a part of their first album and was also sung by Prashant Tamang on Indian Idol in 2007. The song later became a part of his album after he won the reality show. Two key instances took place when Tamang was in the show; first, he was dressed as a Gorkha guard or a *bahadur* for one of the episodes and second was a similar remark made by a Delhi based radio jockey on Tamang winning the show. With the rise of Tamang's popularity in the show, there was a massive support amongst the people in the region for his win. The show not only catapulted Tamang, who was working as a constable in the Kolkata Police, as the face of the region in a mainstream popularity

show but was also seen as representing the Indian Gorkha community to the mainstream India.

As a result, the need for Tamang to win the show became a priority in the region. With Prashant Tamang fan club being opened to posters and banners being stuck all through the region, the frenzy to vote for Tamang became crucial. While Tamang winning the competition was being rejoiced, the demand for statehood, which had simmered after the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in 1988, started gaining momentum. As a result, under a new leadership, the region witnessed the resurgence of the demand for Gorkhaland and the movement began in 2007.

While the song was never made specifically for the movement, it slowly became associated with it. The lyrics glorified the Gorkha identity and their strong military lineage which struck a chord with the people and the movement. One can understand the popularity of the song through its second rendition by Tamang for his album. Tamang, coming from a police background, singing the song as the face of the Indian Gorkha community in a mainstream show, added to the celebration of the community and its martial lineage.

Conceptual Framework

The two-contrasting image of the Gorkha has been continuously at play within and outside the sphere of the movement. The caricaturization of the Gorkha as a *bahadur* in various commercial advertisements and films, shows a kind of loyalty expected to guard the house but cannot be elevated from the menial job. Chettri in her paper quotes Enloe's 'Gurkha syndrome', which speaks about the formation of a community, which is usually socially and politically marginalized, and labeling them as martial. She illustrates that due to lack of job opportunity one of the common choices for the community then is to join the military. As Enloe further elaborates, the description of the Gorkhas as loyal and happy had a patronizing undertone to it. The assumption of the hard-working Gorkha as a non-political being with a strong sense of loyalty but without a point of view can be read in terms of the construction of an identity of the community. One can read this in the line of the how the popular

image of the people and the region has been passed on from the colonial era to the contemporary time.

This trickling down effect refers to how the construction of the colonial image of Gorkha is still being used to highlight the inability of the community to 'take care' of themselves and so the requirement of outsiders to take over the leadership role. Sharma provides two examples to support the continuity of this construction. The first is a reference to Captain Herbert's description of the Lepchas as sturdy, hard-working people who needed to be trained under a strong leadership and the other is that of a colonial Bengali writer Hurry Mohan Sannial¹.

It is interesting to read how a book by a colonial Bengali writer described the region and its people, and how its repercussions are still visible in the present situation. One can read Sannial's book as a link between the English imagination and the Bengali imagination. Sannial describes the hill people as lazy and barbaric and so meeting cultured young men from Bengal would be beneficial to the people of the region. It needs to be understood that the people for whom this book was written were the educated and elite Bengali *bhadralok*, who were trying to 'emulate' their English counterparts. Therefore, Sannial's objective was to make Darjeeling a space for 'Bengali colonization and rejuvenation', in line with the colonial objective for the region. With the advent of the railways, Calcutta became much closer to Darjeeling which enabled the Bengali elite to follow the 'English path'. With the Bengali elite taking up lands in the region, which was once sought by the English to be more white-centric, made the gap between the two sections smaller. With the King of Burdwan and Coochbehar making the region their summer homes, many of the Indian elite moved to the region.

Reading the Text

¹ Sannial, Hurry Mohan. Translated by Gargi Gupta, Shipra Bhattacharyya, and Aditi Roy Ghatek. (1880) 2009. *History of Darjeeling in Bengalee*. (Calcutta) Bath: Pagoda Tree Press. Cited in Sharma, Jayeeta (2016) "Producing Himalayan Darjeeling: Mobile People and Mountain Encounters," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*: Vol. 35: No. 2, Article 12.

It is crucial to critically analyze the lyrics of the song in order to understand its popularity and its association with the movement. The title suggests the celebration of the bravery of the Gorkhas. The song is about the present generation speaking about their heritage and their history. It is the son of the Gorkha who is speaking through the song telling the listeners about who he is and what makes a Gorkha identity. He sings praises about the bravery of the Gorkhas and says how the enemies are destroyed by them. The strength of the Gorkhas can be read in the leaves of history and the also heard from their ancestors on how they have won the world. The song also humanizes the Gorkha as people who feel pain just like any other people. The song, therefore, tries to show this sentiment by reiterating the fact that while the community is known for its military prowess, they are not mechanical beings but are one that feels sadness.

The son of the Gorkha now sings about his rich culture of his home. He is a Gorkha who hails from the mountain. The region has its sunshine and rain and they have their own indigenous food. As a Gorkha youth and as a singer, the speaker works to bring in the community, the tradition and music and is proud of the unity amongst the people as he sings his songs in the mountains. As he celebrates the festivals of the community, it is the love for the land resonates deep within him. The love for the land can be read in reference to the love for home. The movement in its core is the demand for a separate home for the Indian Gorkhas within the Indian nation.

The song echoes with the word Gorkha all through. As the song does not follow the conventional nepali music, the heavy rock music sets the tone of primary audience. With the song made for the Indian Gorkha youth, the singer identifies himself with this image and sings about how he is the son of the Gorkha and the son of the soil and he celebrates his tradition and culture. The chorus of the song is *bir gorkhali* and the word *bir*, which means strong, is repeated all through the chorus. As he refers to the leaves of history so as to celebrate the victory of the Gorkhas, he also intends to cement the presence of the community in the Indian nation.

Analyzing the Text

The emphasis on the word break in the context of the song and its subsequent association with the movement refers to breaking of the stereotyping of a community, which has been relegated to the periphery. Therefore, what arises is the need to celebrate and historicize that identity. While the song has an obvious tone set towards the youth, the start of the second phase of the demand in 2007 catapulted it to a larger audience as it was adopted by the movement. This section will seek to understand why there is a need to acknowledge the identity of the Gorkhas and how the persistent accusations made towards the community, in relation to the movement, about their ancestry, their loyalty and their home has led to the need to glorify the Gorkha identity in India.

The image created of the region and its people is closely linked to its colonial heritage. The formation of the region itself is a result of a colonial undertaking. Therefore, in order to understand how a song like *bir gorkhali* becomes closely associated with the movement that is primarily a demand for a separate 'home' for the Indian Gorkhas within the Indian nation. In line with this demand, the accusations made were almost always related to the migrant history of the people. From the 'funny' and 'loyal' Gorkha to the 'threatening' Gorkha, the relation of these two images can be linked to its colonial legacy.

Hutt argues that the sense of alienation and the discrimination faced by the Nepali community in India and Bhutan can be read as a reason for the political and ethnic conflict. He points out that while the West Bengal State produced various statistics showing the high number of resources put in the region for development, it should be noted that the people of the region occupy less of the higher level jobs, which are mostly taken by people coming from outside.

In order to understand the image reproduction of the Hills through the lens of tourism, it is important to look at the exchange of power that has taken place. One of the ways of engaging with this structure is through the lens of employment. The coming of the British forces to the region which eventually led to its acquisition as a medical retreat for the ailing English witnessed the formation of a new labour market

in the region. Both the natives and the migrants were employed by the colonial officials. Their jobs ranged from being labourers to tea-garden workers. Employment in the army and in the English household was also taken up. One of the main arguments that Sharma seeks to engage with is the formation of the new class of cheap labour in the hills. This creation of a new class, which comprised both the migrants and the natives, led to a certain image construction of these people. As she refers to Captain Herbert's description of the natives, it clarifies his intention behind it. The reference to the Lepchas as sturdy, good-willed people who need to be trained for work further supports the idea of cheap labour needed by the British to work in the region. It is therefore interesting how this image has been continuously reproduced for the consumption of the outsiders. Amongst the oft-repeated image used is that of the ever-loyal *bahadur* and the other is that of the woman plucking tea leaves with a basket on her back.

Conclusion

Recently an advertisement of an online retail site showed a man buy a shoe and teaching the *bahadur*, who was sceptical about online purchase how the product sold on this site is quality assured. The accented 'ji shaabji' with the Gorkha cap have become synonymous with the cartoonish rendition of the Gorkha *bahadur* or *chowkidar* in the mainstream media. From the portrayal of the *bahadur* by actors in movies to its portrayal in various commercials, the image of the *bahadur* has always been used to extract laughter. With his accented hindi and his role as a guard, he has always been the one who is ordered around by his 'master'. The obvious economic lower background is made evident by the class difference between the guard and the master.

The relationship between the constructed image(s) of the land (the region) with that of the image of its people is integral in understanding how one affects the other. The 'touristy' picture of the region which has been continuously reiterated recently in the West Bengal tourism ad, where tea and toy train are showcased and women are seen as smiling while picking the tea leaves, paints the same colonial image of the region as quaint hills, that was primarily used as a sanatorium. The

indigenous, as well as migrants from the region who began their work as labourers, have moved upwards in the socio-economic ladder but the tag of the region and its people associated with tourism has added to the image of the Indian Gorkha.

The allegations made towards the people with regard to their migrant history and their allegiance to Nepal, thereby making the demand for statehood a threat to the Nation, has been continuously used to further marginalize the community. The constant reiteration of the colonial image of the region and its people has further reduced the position of the region as a wall-flower and that of the people as aiding to the image of the region as shown in the recent tourism advertisement of the State. Therefore, a song like *bir gorkhali* then becomes one of the means through which this image is being broken and a celebration of the region and the Indian Gorkha identity is made.

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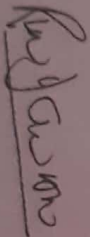
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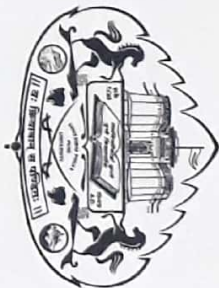
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We wish all success in his/her future career.




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