

# **THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN GORKHALAND MOVEMENT: POST 1986**

**SYNOPSIS SUBMITTED TO JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Arts)**

**By**

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**Introduction:** Darjeeling district's demand for linguistic, ethnic and political identity has a very old and long history ever since 1907. It can be categorized into two phases-pre-independence and post-independence. During the pre-independence era the present Darjeeling District and the adjoining Dooars area under Jalpaiguri District were parts of two kingdoms of Sikkim and Bhutan till the advent of the British. This area was never under King or Monarchies of the plain of Bengal. The area came under British occupation in three phases. Ever since the British occupied Darjeeling it became non-regulated area prior to which the native people were perceived by the British as semi barbarous. The native societies of the hill region of Darjeeling were very simple in nature and practical in character they were ignorant of formal institutions like schools. With the advent of Christian missionary's formal modern education institution was established and sanctioned by the British government of Bengal. Enthused by the success of the boys' school the ladies' mission opened town primary school in Darjeeling.

The post independent demand for a separate state was raised in 1952 by the All India Gorkha League which continued till 1980 by different political parties. Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) led by Subash Ghisingh launched a violent agitation in 1986 which spread like wild fire in the hills of Darjeeling district comprising Darjeeling, Kurseong, Mirik and Kalimpong sub division and the adjacent areas of Jalpaiguri district. This was a mass movement which shook West Bengal. Riots between GNLF and the West Bengal Government reached a stand-off after a 40-day strike. Ultimately the wrangle between Central and West Bengal Government and the GNLF came to an end with the signing of the Tripartite Agreement on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1988 and the acceptance of DGHC (Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council). In 2005 a fresh tripartite agreement was signed to grant sixth schedule status to the existing DGHC which was rejected vehemently by the people of Darjeeling district. A fresh agitation under the new leadership of Shri Bimal Gurung was launched by the Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha (GJMM) which was established on October 2007 from the time of its establishment the party formed Gorkha Jan Mukti Nari Morcha as a frontal organization. After three years of agitation for a state of Gorkhaland led by GJM, the GJM reached an agreement with the state government to form a semi-autonomous body to administer the Darjeeling hills. A bill for the creation of GTA was passed in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly on 2 September 2011.

**Area of Study:** The study is restricted only to the hills of Darjeeling District(Darjeeling Sadar, Kalimpong and Kurseong) confining mainly the political participation of women with

a view to bring about some specific changes, development and growth in the life of the hill people

**Focus of the study:** The present study proposes to study the political participation of women in the Gorkhaland Movement. The study will focus on:

- (1) Women's political participation.
- (2) Women as leader of political party.
- (3) Elected women in Municipalities, State Legislative Assembly and Parliament
- (4) Women Empowerment.
- (5) Impact on family life of women.

**Research Question:** Our work will try to address following questions

1. What made women of Darjeeling actively participate in political movement?
2. How far women can influence decision making process within the party?
3. Activity of women in past and present-day politics?
4. Are the women of Darjeeling socio, economic and politically equal and empowered?
5. Difference between women in leadership positions and ordinary women cadre?
6. Why there is distinction in allotment of seats to women in municipality election, DGHC and GTA elections?

**The scope of the research** is to trace the role of women in the demand for separate state on linguistic and ethnic basis and identifying the problem process and system in empowering women of the region with an objective to highlight the following:

1. Contribution of women in pre and post independent period.
2. Influence of education (especially Christian missionaries) to bring socio cultural and economic change in the lives of the Nepali community.
3. Contribution of women in the movement led by Subash Ghising and Bimal Gurung.
4. Tripartite agreement and various dimensions in the interface with the central and the state: from the perspective of women.

**Survey of literature:** Acknowledging the survey of the existing literature of Darjeeling we find works have been done in various fields which can be a guiding line to our work. The

literature available is based on history society, education, tourism, economy and politics from where we can take theoretical work in the study of women of Darjeeling. No serious work on women and politics is so far done by the historians and academic scholars. Our work will provide an academic source of information to the society and future scholars, which can help in creating awareness and consciousness among the women to actively participate in politics.

**Methodology:** Data for the study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data was collected through-

(a) Questionnaire –

- I. Structured and unstructured question.
- II. Open ended and close ended questions. The close ended question was be pre-coded.

(b) In-depth interviews

1. Women political leaders, prominent members and elected representative
2. Man political leaders, prominent members and elected members.
3. Man and Women having experience in both the Movement

Our research is based mainly on empirical work, were the women participation in politics is very high, the area includes Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong. Interview was covered of hundred forty-five women and fifty men, following snow ball sampling and purposive sampling. Oral narratives and Nepali proverbs were used to record the document so far unrecorded by the mainstream writers and scholars.

Our Secondary source are from published materials, books, journals, government documents, newspaper, magazines, records and reports of the legislative bodies, reports of the local NGOs, involved in women's empowerment, surveys, periodicals, school magazines and documentary videos of the social political and cultural activities.

**Women in the pre and post Independent period:** Narration of the history of demand for separate state for the Indian Gorkha in the pre and post independent era is not complete without a reference to the role of women. Veteran women leaders from the hills like Helen Boju and Putali Devi have struggled along with the freedom fighters of our country to achieve independence from the British but the mainstream historians failed to write the history of those women which is reveled through the oral narratives by their friends and

relatives alive. In the post-independence period women representative to the parliament and state legislative assembly, like Maya Devi Chettri, MP (Gorkha League), Renulina Subba, MLA of Kalimpong (Gorkha League) Santa Chettri, MLA of Kurseong (GNLF), and Sarita Rai, MLA Kalimpong (GJMM) made their contribution.

**Role of Women in the GNLF Movement:** The women during the GNLF movement organized themselves to serve the people who were fighting for separate state. Their task during this time was voluntary. Oral narratives highlight that on January 16, 1988, CRPF opened fire at night and the counter fire started by GNLF in Kalimpong which killed many innocent people, there were no men left to carry dead bodies to hospital for autopsy due to fear of arrest by the CRPF. Women carried the bodies to the hospital, carried to the graveyard and did all the formalities which till that time was only done by men changing the social and cultural norms.

Despite the fact women trying to show their participation in the Movement their contribution was not highly acknowledged which can be visible in the power-sharing policy of DGHC. When there was total strength of 28 (twenty-eight) councilors in DGHC only three were women representatives only 10%.

**Role of Women in the GJMM Movement:** The GJM led Gorkhaland Movement has witnessed the visibility of women in the public in the form of ‘fast- unto death’, relay hunger-strike, social boycott gherao/dharna, hartal/bandh, processions, mobilization strategy.

Women’s contribution needs to be highly acknowledged, the success of the movement owed credit to those women who were ready to shed blood, face lathis and bullets. Pramila Sharma was the first martyrs of GJMM. Neeta Khawas and Bimala Rai, both were in GLP to give security to Gurung and the cadres of the party. They were always visible in the front row providing security, and took the bullets of the police in Nagarkata firing, sacrificing their lives to keep the movement alive

Through formal and informal discussions, it was revealed that women were new to power-sharing they did not have enough exposure and experience, so the municipality elections could be a training ground for women after which they could attain at the higher levels of politics so almost 50% seat were allotted to women in the Municipality elections. The GTA could not rise above this and reserve 33% of seats at all levels for women, although women had valiantly and selflessly stood by the movement at every step and at every corner. Out of forty-five Sabha Sadh, only six seats were for women which are only 13%.

**Conclusion:** Coming to the issue of women in the Gorkhaland Movement led by GNLF and GJMM we can see active participation of women more in GJMM Movement than in GNLF Movement. Print media, electronic media and development of technologies provided an enhanced flow of visible bytes which enabled to spread the news and activities of the Movement and mobilize public. Education was also a significant factor, which contributed to create awareness among the mass which was absent in GNLF days. Women in both the Movement cutting across caste, culture, ethnicity, religion, education and economic background participated but due to traditional patriarchal ordering they were not provided ‘equal power share.’ The politics of inclusion and exclusion is very much witnessed in both the Movement in Darjeeling.

**Limitation of the study:** Women in the hills of Darjeeling have been participating in the Gorkhaland Movement since long time. It has been observed that in the hills one party has enjoyed the majority thereby rendering others as anti Gorkhaland party. Because of this the people/ women have also been supporters of those parties enjoying the majority at a time and preferred to share the experience that boost the morale of the party. The opposition party are not entertained so the supporters are negligible in number. The opinion and experience in that case becomes monotonous. Also, many of the responded were hesitated to express their personal opinions as they may face threat by the party or the police and may get arrested. This was overcome by support building and convinced the interviewee that confidence will be maintained as it is only an academic research and name and address will not be disclosed. But few prominent women leaders were willing to disclose their identity.

**Chaptarisation:**

**Chapter 1.**

**Chapter 2. Reconceptualizing Women's Political Participation In Gorkhaland Movement**

**Chapter 3. GNLF Gorkhaland Movement and Women's activities.**

**Chapter 4. GJMM Gorkhaland Movement and Womens activities.**  
**Chapter 5:**

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