

# Invisible Contribution in Gorkhaland Movement

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**Abstract:** Women in the hills of Darjeeling Hills came out of the the barrier of the household and actively participate sometime consciously and some time as supporting the majority in the movement for the separate state of Gorkhaland. A woman as an integral part of the society has equal rights as men has been reflected through their participation. Gender equality can be widely witnessed in economy but when the question arises in the field of social and political equality. We also belong on the same bench, glorifying patriarchy. Women after performing their role invisibly, without being acknowledged, silently lead their normal life. Women were always invisible in the mainstream politics of India, so in the Gorkhaland Movement.

**Keyword:** Women, Invisible, Gender Equality.

## INTRODUCTION

It is very essential to have a conceptual and theoretical understanding of women's political participation before we explore the invisible contribution "Women". Myron Weiner says 'the Theories process of modernization itself creates condition for increased political participation; and if modernization continues to take place in the developing areas, we can expect both authoritarian regimes and representative government to be challenged by new participants who want to share power.' (Weiner, M, 1966, p 12). Political participation is a complex phenomenon it varies from country to country, time to time, society to society. Researchers have pointed out that exercise of political influence is a special kind of political involvement in which female citizens, no matter here they live, or what their level of education is, find it very hard to engage in. women's roles are such in which political passivity is perceived as the norm. Women in political system is heavily dominated by men.(Christy, 1984, pp7-34). Women who constitute the half of the society are an integral part of the entire social phenomenon. Human society cannot move forward without stirring half of its body, the women. However, it is social and national interest to draw

women folk into social and political process.(Choudhari,1995,p 6).

I would like to analyze the invisible contribution of women in the movement through the lens of the party-based theory of substantive representation, where four alternative relationships generate attention to women on parties.

## HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

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 Ghising launched a violent agitation in 1986 which spread like wildfire in the hills of Darjeeling district comprising Darjeeling, Kurseong, Mirik and Kalimpong subdivision 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 GNLFF 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.

#### 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 revealed 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 (GNLFF), and Sarita Rai, MLA Kalimpong (GJMM) made their significant contribution in the development and empowerment of women in Darjeeling hills. Renulina Subba was the first Nepali women MLA from Kalimpong subdivision in West Bengal state Legislative Assembly. She was a ferocious lady "AATH PURA BHAYAKO PICHARI HAAT DINA". Her speech was impressive and won the heart of common people and at the same time could influence the decision making in the west Bengal state legislative assembly. She was elected for the second term also and could do many outstanding activities.

Many school in the Darjeeling district got recognition, upgraded the junior high school to high school and even Colleges was established during her tenure. Many primary health centers were established. She is also played significant role for inclusion of Nepali language in the VIII schedule of the Indian Constitution.

#### WOMEN IN THE GNLFF MOVEMENT

We can have a clear glimpse of women's participation from 1986 onwards when there was an outrage for Gorkhaland Movement in the hills of Darjeeling under the leadership of Subash Ghising (GNLFF). Darjeeling got enlightened with education only in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, very quickly adopted modernity and development, western education influenced the life of the native dwellers. Gender equality was not at all a problem to native people unlike the mainstream Indian states trying to attain through constitution and court.

Women along with men participated in the movement for a separate state. GNLFF party initially did not have provision for the Women's wing. It was the wife of ex-army who influenced with the welfare services from the army organized themselves as the 'welfare organization' of the GNLFF as Gorkha Women's Organization (GWO). Tilamaya Pradhan, Sampurna Rai, Kalpana Rana, Barbara Sherpa, Prava Dewan, Gopi Maya Gurung, Sarswati Tamang, Tilothama Rai, Nimcheki Pradhan, Hema Lama were the prominent women leaders from Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Kurseong. Women participation during that time was voluntary and carried welfare activities such as nursing the wounded, minor surgeries were done under covered at home with the help of local Doctors, distribution of food and clothes to victims of the prolonged strike of 40 days. They collected funds to support the movement by selling handicraft goods, badges, even canteen were set during mass meetings. When agitation reached its peak there was serious threat from the CRPF, so the men in the society went underground due to fear of arrest so the women under covered carried the role of secret activist.

Oral narratives highlight that on January 16, 1988, CRPF opened fired at night and the counter fire started by GNLFF 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 were only done by men changing the social and cultural norms.

After the formation of DGHC activities of women were no longer voluntary they became an integral part and recognized as Gorkha national women Organization (GNWO). They could actively participate in the electoral politics in the banner of GNLFF. Women participated in the election and got elected to form the local self-government. DGHC had total number of 28 seats out of which three seats were given to women. Nim Chiki Pradhan, Hema Lama and Gopi Maya Gurung were the elected members. Shanta Chettri was the nominated councilor since 1996 to 2011.

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% seat was given to women violating 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act.

#### 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

Women's participation in both the movement was not for power but support for the cause of separate state. Their activities were feminine in character. Through formal and informal discussion with the prominent activist of the movement it was analyzed that women in the GNLFF movement were middle class educated, conscious citizen who could feel the pain of the male counterpart who were facing the bullets, lathis and went underground. Women supported and participated in the movement under covered. Whereas in the GJMM movement women played vital role as the always participated in fore front. It was the common women who came out of their house chores and provided the mass support. They faced bullet and lathis and also were arrested. We can see active participation of women more in GJMM Movement than in GNLFF Movement. Women could come out and join the movement because there were no gender differences in the society. Gender equality is there in the hills of Darjeeling, but we cannot deny the fact that in all the nation of the world women play negligible role in politics so with women of Darjeeling. I therefore conclude my paper that women representation in political sphere should be increased focused on the theory of substantive representation; it is only through representation in numeric a change could take place in politics.

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