

Microsociology of Interethnic Relationships: A Study in Darjeeling District and Dooars since the Formation of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration

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ABSTRACT: The existing research work deals with an understanding of interethnic relationships among the ethnic communities of Darjeeling district and Dooars after the formation of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in Darjeeling hills. A brief introduction of the ethnic geography of Darjeeling district and Dooars has been made to know how significant are the interethnic relationships among these ethnic communities since the formation of GTA. Does the formation of GTA influence these interethnic relationships among its members? The author attempts to know why there are changes, if any, in their relationships, and what are the implications/significances of these changed relationships on the autonomy movement i.e. Gorkhaland movement, as the formation of the GTA is outcome of that movement.

INTRODUCTION

‘Gorkhaland’ denotes the proposed separate state for the hill ethnic people of Darjeeling district and its adjacent areas of Eastern Himalayas by bifurcating these regions from West Bengal. ‘Gorkhaland movement’ is the autonomy movement primarily by the ethnic people of Darjeeling hills of Darjeeling district for achieving a separate state. This movement is also supported by the hill people who have been dwelling in Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district which is known as *Terai* and in the foothills of Jalpaiguri district which is known as *Dooars*. The hill people of these three regions (Darjeeling hills, Terai and Dooars) of West Bengal want to include these three regions in their aspired state ‘Gorkhaland’. The population compositions of these three regions are

different. Darjeeling hills include predominantly the hill ethnic population i.e. Nepalis, Bhutias, Lepchas etc and also include a small sized non-hill dwelling population of Bengalis, Muslims, Biharis, Marwaris etc. Among all these ethnic communities, Nepalis are the largest ethnic community who numerically dominate the other communities. Terai and Dooars have mixed population which includes Bengalis, Adivasis, Nepalis, Muslims, Biharis, Marwaris, Bhutias, Lepchas and many other small distinct ethnic communities, however, the major communities are of the Bengalis, Adivasis and the Nepalis. Gorkhaland movement has an impact on all of these three regions and on all ethnic communities dwelling in these three regions. The hilly region of Darjeeling is the epicentre of the movement as this region is largely populated by the Nepalis (sub-ethnic communities) along with some other hill ethnic communities who command other non-hill ethnic communities to support the

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movement, but they cannot display their much command in Terai region and particularly in Dooars, where non-hill ethnic communities excepting some Adivasis oppose them strongly, because they do not support the movement as they do not want the inclusion of their regions in the proposed state. They do not want separating these regions from West Bengal as demanded by the supporters of the autonomy movement (Bhui, 2008, 2009).

Although a separate political setup was an age-old demand by the hill ethnic communities of Darjeeling Hills but it became a forceful movement during 1980s when Subhash Ghisingh led 'Gorkha National Liberation Front' (GNLF) who organized the movement to achieve 'Gorkhaland', a sovereign state for the Gorkhas and many other hill ethnic communities of Darjeeling Hills, Terai and Dooars by separating these regions from West Bengal. These hill ethnic communities alleged that they have been dominated, discriminated and exploited by Bengalis who led the Government of West Bengal being the biggest ethnic community in West Bengal. Due to the aggressive movement led by the GNLF, the Government of West Bengal was compelled to constitute the 'Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council' (DGHC) in 1988, an autonomous political body for the people of Darjeeling hills. The DGHC included the jurisdiction of the three hill subdivisions i.e. Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kalimpong and thirteen mouzas of Siliguri Subdivision of Darjeeling district. It excluded Terai (except thirteen mouzas) and Dooars region. Although administration of the DGHC by the GNLF continued up to 2006 but people of the region gradually became unhappy and dissatisfied with the dictatorial attitude of Subhash Ghisingh and his party GNLF. Later Bimal Gurung, a disciple of Subhash Ghisingh, took full advantage of the situation and became the leader of Gorkhaland movement. He formed a political party 'Gorkha Janmukti Morcha' (GJM) in 2007 and resurfaced the statehood movement in Darjeeling district and Dooars by prolonged agitations and strikes which disturbed the socio-political situation of the region and hit the economy of these regions badly. The political struggle that continued created unpleasant incidents, and consequently compelled both the Government of West Bengal and the Government of India, to settle the crisis

by signing a Memorandum of Agreement with the GJM on 18th July of 2011, to constitute the 'Gorkhaland Territorial Administration' (GTA), which covers three hill subdivisions and 13 mouzas of Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district as its administrative area. Although GTA includes the same geographical area under its jurisdiction which the DGHC had, but the GTA enjoys more authority in comparison to the DGHC.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Interethnic Conflicts

The intensified movement activities spearheaded by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha throughout the Darjeeling district and Dooars prior to the formation of the GTA have resulted into ethnic conflicts particularly in the Terai and Dooars regions. There are several cases of confrontations among the hill and non-hill ethnic communities for their pro-Gorkhaland actions and anti-Gorkhaland reactions respectively that ultimately made a clear-cut division of the people/society on ethnic lines. The entire ethno-political scenario became so divisive which was enough to weaken the social harmony among these ethnic communities. The incidents of interethnic and interpolitical party rivalries became daily affairs. People were lobbying themselves into different pressure groups on ethnic lines, some of those groups exerted pressure on the government for a separate state whereas other groups demanded strict actions against the pro-Gorkhaland activists, whose activities were actually disturbing the functioning of the society. In that situation, the government of West Bengal agreed to provide an autonomous body 'Gorkhaland Territorial Administration' (GTA) which covers the administration of Darjeeling hills.

Objectives of the study: The following are the objectives of the present research work which deal with the inter-ethnic relationships among different ethnic communities in Darjeeling district and Dooars arising out due to their different attitude towards the autonomy movement, particularly since the formation of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration in July of 2011. The objectives are as follows:

- (i) To learn the ethnic relationships among the Nepali and non-Nepali (Lepcha, Bhutia etc)

hill ethnic communities particularly in Darjeeling hills;

- (ii) To study the inter-ethnic relationships among different Nepali sub-ethnic communities i.e. tribal and non-tribal Nepalis within the broad Nepali ethnic community in Darjeeling district and Dooars;
- (iii) To find out the extent of relationships among the Adivasis and Nepalis, Bengalis and Nepalis in Terai and Dooars;
- (iv) To review the relationships among the Adivasis of Terai and Dooars on the basis of their support and opposition to the autonomy movement;
- (v) To know the state of mind of the Nepalis of Terai and Dooars for their exclusion from the GTA.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Although secondary sources of data have been consulted in different libraries and offices, and related information have been collected from journals, newspapers etc., however, the present research work is primarily based on empirical studies, i.e. it is largely based on the collection of primary data from field sources. Primary data have been collected by interviewing people belonging to different ethnic communities residing in both urban and rural areas of Darjeeling hills, Terai and Dooars. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been collected by using a semi-structured interview schedule. Minimum 10 numbers of respondents from each major ethnic community and total 100 numbers of respondents were interviewed for collecting the data required for the present research study. Respondents were selected by using both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to make the samples adequate and representative.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Mills C. Wright ('59) observes that our personal troubles and public issues "overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life." Sociologists want to expand Mill's observation by differentiating the micro or small scale features of

social life from the macro or large scale features of social structure i.e. society. They learn the behaviour of people when they interact on a face-to-face situation. They named this level of analysis of social life as microsociology. Microsociology deals with everyday life i.e. a detailed study of what people think, do and say to make their daily lives meaningful. It deals with how people balance their hopes and aspirations with their real-life experiences. Macrosociology, on the other hand, highlights the larger picture of the society. It focuses on the large and long-term social processes i.e. family, social groups, dynamics of intergroup rivalries, social class, the economy, culture and society. Sociologists confirm that microsociological and macrosociological levels are intertwined as larger structures are formed due to the repetitive patterns of interaction on the micro level whereas macro structures outline the meaningful interaction by which people relate each other on the micro level (Zanden,'96).

So, it is obvious that microsociology deals with daily interactions of people with one another who are family members, neighbours, own or other community members or even strangers. It mainly focuses on the frequency and quality of these social relationships. George Simmel is well known as a micro sociologist for his contributions to understand the pattern or forms of social interactions among individuals in group situation. Collins ('81) says that microsociology focuses on "bundles of individual chains of interactional experience, crisscrossing each other in space as they flow along time" (as mentioned in Ritzer ('96). The existing research work intends to know the existing form of interethnic relationships among hill and non-hill ethnic communities of Darjeeling district and Dooars after the formation of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). This autonomous political body has been created as a solution to end the ethnic conflicts that occurred among many of these communities due to their different stance towards Gorkhaland movement. The microsociology of existing interethnic relationships among these communities after the formation of the GTA discusses the influences of these small scale relationships on the larger society of those regions. In this context, the viewpoint of Kavin Knorr-Cetina ('81) can be mentioned. She says that the ultimate aim of

microsociological research is a better understanding of the structural and functional aspects of larger society (as mentioned in Ritzer ('96).

The present work also deals with a discussion on an autonomy movement in which one of the contending party i.e. the state government and several non-hill ethnic communities want to maintain the status quo after the formation of the GTA. The other contending party i.e. the GJM and several hill ethnic communities want to bring change in their status who although have got the GTA but are not happy with that arrangement which possibly would insist them for further action. So, both the structural functional, and the Marxian tradition of social change will be useful for understanding the dynamics of ethno-political situation/relationships in these regions. Considering the microsociological and macrosociological levels of analysis, the present work will discuss the economic, social, political, psychological aspects of inter-ethnic relationships in these regions after the formation of the GTA.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1 shows respondents who are selected for the present study belong to different age-groups. It is observed that vast majority (80.0%) of the respondents are between 21 years to 50 years.

TABLE 1
Age-group of the respondents

Age-group(in years)	Number	Percentage
21-30	30	30.0
31-40	22	22.0
41-50	28	28.0
51-60	14	14.0
Above 60	6	6.0
Total	100	100.0

TABLE 2
Gender-wise classification of the respondents

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	76	76.0
Female	24	24.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 2 shows that 76.0% respondents are males and 24% are females.

TABLE 3

Ethnic community membership of the respondents

Ethnic community	Number	Percentage
Nepali	30	30.0
Bhutia	10	10.0
Lepcha	12	12.0
Bengali	12	12.0
Adivasi	20	20.0
Muslim	6	6.0
Marwari	3	3.0
Mech	4	4.0
Bihari	3	3.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 3 shows that respondents who were selected were from nine ethnic communities who provided the needed data for the present study. 30% and 20% respondents belong to Nepali and Adivasi ethnic community respectively. Respondents from Lepcha (12.0%), Bhutia (10.0%), and Bengali (12.0%) ethnic communities are 10 to 12 per cent. 6.0% of the respondents are Muslims, which include both Bengali and Bihari Muslims. Marwaris constitute 3.0%, whereas Mech and Bihari ethnic communities represent 4.0% and 3.0% of the total respondents respectively.

Table 4 shows that majority (56.0%) of the respondents practices Hinduism which includes Nepali (66.7%), Bengali (100.0%), Adivasi (80.0%), Mech (100.0%) and Bihari (100.0%). Marwaris can be categorized into two religious groups – Hindu Marwaris (33.3%) and Jain Marwaris (67.7%). It is also observable that 27.0% of the total respondents are Buddhists which includes 26.7% of the Nepali, 100.0% of the Bhutia and 75.0% of the Lepcha respondents. 9.0% of the total respondents are Christians which includes 20.0% of the Adivasis, 25.0% of the Lepchas and 6.6% of the Nepalis respectively.

Table 5 displays the educational status of the respondents. Out of the total respondents 5.0% are illiterates but it has been found in the study that they are politically well informed of the issues of Gorkhaland movement and the formation of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). 53.3% of the Nepali respondents are educated secondary (pass) to post graduation level whereas 40.0% of the Bhutia, 25.0% of the Lepcha, 75.0% of the Bengali,

TABLE 4
Religious status of the respondents

Religion → Ethnic Community ↓	Hinduism	Buddhism	Jainism	Islam	Christianity	Total
Nepali	66.7	26.7	–	–	6.6	30.0
Bhutia	–	100.0	–	–	–	10.0
Lepcha	–	75.0	–	–	25.0	12.0
Bengali	100.0	–	–	–	–	12.0
Adivasi	80.0	–	–	–	20.0	20.0
Muslim	–	–	–	100.0	–	6.0
Marwari	33.3	–	66.7	–	–	3.0
Mech	100.0	–	–	–	–	4.0
Bihari	100.0	–	–	–	–	3.0
Total	56.0	27.0	2.0	6.0	9.0	100.0

TABLE 5
Educational status of the respondents

Education → Community ↓	Illiterate	Primary (I-V)	Middle (VI-VIII)	Secondary (IX-X)	Secondary Pass	Higher Secondary Pass	Graduate	Post Graduate
Nepali	6.67	10.0	10.0	20.0	13.3	10.0	20.0	10.0
Bhutia	–	10.0	20.0	30.0	20.0	10.0	10.0	–
Lepcha	8.3	16.7	33.3	16.7	16.7	8.3	–	–
Bengali	–	–	8.3	16.7	16.7	16.7	33.3	8.3
Adivasi	10.0	15.0	20.0	10.0	15.0	20.0	10.0	–
Muslim	–	–	–	33.3	33.3	16.7	16.7	–
Marwari	–	–	–	33.3	–	33.3	33.3	–
Mech	–	–	–	25.0	25.0	–	–	50.0
Bihari	–	–	33.3	–	33.3	33.3	–	–
Total	5.0	9.0	15.0	19.0	17.0	14.0	15.0	6.0

TABLE 6
Occupational status of the respondents

Occupation → Community ↓	Tea Garden worker	Agriculture	Private service	Government Service	Business	Unemployed / Student-RS / Housewife	Total
Nepali	23.3	3.3	20.0	16.7	20.0	16.7	30.0
Bhutia	–	–	10.0	20.0	70.0	–	10.0
Lepcha	16.7	66.7	–	8.3	8.3	–	12.0
Bengali	–	8.3	16.7	16.7	41.6	16.7	12.0
Adivasi	35.0	10.0	20.0	5.0	20.0	15.0	20.0
Muslim	–	–	–	16.7	66.6	16.7	6.0
Marwari	–	–	–	–	100.0	–	3.0
Mech	–	50.0	–	50.0	–	–	4.0
Bihari	–	–	33.3	–	66.7	–	3.0
Total	16.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	31.0	11.0	100.0

45.0% of the Adivasi, 66.7% of the Muslim, Bihari and Marwari, and 75.0% of the Mech respondents have the same qualification respectively.

The above Table 6 show that 31.0% of the respondents are engaged in business whereas 28.0% of them are employed in government and private services. 16.0% of them are tea garden workers and 14.0% of them do agriculture whereas 11.0% of the respondents are research scholars, students and housewives etc. If we analyse the data ethnic community wise then it is observable that Nepali respondents are employed in most of the professions i.e. 23.3% of them are engaged as workers in tea

gardens, 16.7% in government offices, 20.0% are engaged in each private and business sectors. Majority (70.0%) of the Bhutias are engaged in business whereas most (66.7%) of the Lepchas are occupied in agriculture. 41.6%, 66.6% and 100.0% of the respondents who belong to Bengali, Muslim and Marwari ethnic communities respectively are engaged in business. It is also observable that Adivasis are engaged in most of the professions but they have the largest representation (35.0%) in tea garden workers. 66.7% of the Bihari respondents are occupied in business. 50.0% of the Mech respondents are engaged both in agriculture and govt. services.

TABLE 7
Monthly income of the respondents

Monthly income → (Rs) Community ↓	1000- 3000	3001- 6000	6001- 9000	9001- 12000	12001- 15000	15001- 18000	18001- 21000	21001- Above	Unemployed/ Student- RS/ Housewife	Total
Nepali	13.3	–	20.0	–	10.0	13.3	6.7	20.0	16.7	30.0
Bhutia	–	–	10.0	30.0	30.0	20.0	10.0	–	–	10.0
Lepcha	8.3	50.0	16.7	16.7	8.3	–	–	–	–	12.0
Bengali	–	8.3	8.3	16.7	8.3	16.7	8.3	16.7	16.7	12.0
Adivasi	20.0	35.0	15.0	–	10.0	–	–	5.0	15.0	20.0
Muslim	–	–	–	33.3	33.3	–	–	16.7	16.7	6.0
Marwari	–	–	–	–	33.3	–	33.3	33.3	–	3.0
Mech	–	–	–	25.0	25.0	–	–	50.0	–	4.0
Bihari	–	–	–	–	33.3	33.3	33.3	–	–	3.0
Total	9.0	14.0	13.0	10.0	15.0	9.0	6.0	13.0	11.0	100.0

Table 7 shows the monthly incomes of the respondents belong to different ethnic communities. 50% of the Nepali respondents have monthly incomes more than Rs.12000/-. 80% of the Bhutia respondents have monthly income above Rs.9000/- whereas monthly incomes for the Lepcha respondents range between Rs.1000/- to Rs.15000/-. 66.7% respondents belong to Bengali community have monthly incomes which ranges from Rs.9000/- to Rs.21000/- and above. 80% of the Adivasi respondents earn Rs.1000/- to Rs.15000/- per month whereas 66.7% respondents belong to Muslim community earn Rs.9000/- to Rs.15000/- per month. 50.0% of the Mech respondents have monthly income above Rs.21000/- whereas 100% of the Bihari respondents have monthly incomes between Rs.12000/- to Rs.21000/-.

TABLE 8
Primary occupation of the families of the respondents

Occupation → Community ↓	Agricul- ture	Private service	Govern- ment. Service	Business	Total
Nepali	6.7	36.7	23.3	33.3	30.0
Bhutia	–	10.0	30.0	60.0	10.0
Lepcha	66.7	16.7	8.3	8.3	12.0
Bengali	8.3	25.0	25.0	41.7	12.0
Adivasi	25.0	60.0	5.0	10.0	20.0
Muslim	–	–	50.0	50.0	6.0
Marwari	–	–	–	100.0	3.0
Mech	50.0	–	50.0	–	4.0
Bihari	–	33.3	–	66.7	3.0
Total	18.0	30.0	20.0	32.0	100.0

The Table 8 shows the primary occupations the families of the respondents. 90% of the total numbers

of families of the Nepali respondents are engaged in private services (36.7%), business (33.3%) and govt. services (23.3%). Majority (60.0%) of the Bhutia families are engaged in business whereas majority (66.7%) of the Lepcha families do agriculture. 25.0% families of the Bengali respondents are engaged each in private and govt services whereas 41.7% of them are engaged in business. Majority of the Adivasi

families are engaged in private services (60.0%) and agriculture (25.0%). 50.0% of the Muslim families are engaged each in government and private services. 100.0% of the Marwari families are engaged in business. Families of Mech respondents are primarily engaged in agriculture (50.0%) and government service (50.0%) whereas 66.7% of the Bihari respondents are occupied in business.

TABLE 9
Relationship with other ethnic community members

Ethnic community	Type of relationship	Relationships with other ethnic community members								
		Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha	Bengali	Adivasi	Muslim	Marwari	Mech	Bihari
Nepali	Cordial	100.0	70.0	60.0	50.0	50.0	40.0	30.0	20.0	30.0
	so so	–	10.0	20.0	20.0	10.0	13.3	20.0	13.3	10.0
Bhutia	Cordial	70.0	100.0	60.0	70.0	30.0	60.0	60.0	10.0	50.0
	so so	20.0	–	20.0	20.0	10.0	20.0	20.0	–	20.0
Lepcha	Cordial	83.3	50.0	100.0	33.3	25.0	41.7	16.7	16.7	41.7
	so so	16.7	16.7	–	8.3	8.3	16.7	33.3	8.3	16.7
Bengali	Cordial	83.3	25.0	33.3	100.0	83.3	75.0	41.6	50.0	33.3
	so so	16.7	33.3	16.7	–	16.7	–	16.7	16.7	16.7
Adivasi	Cordial	75.0	20.0	25.0	90.0	100.0	50.0	25.0	40.0	45.0
	so so	20.0	15.0	10.0	10.0	–	10.0	20.0	10.0	15.0
Muslim	Cordial	66.7	33.3	33.3	66.7	50.0	100.0	33.3	33.3	50.0
	so so	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	33.3	–	50.0	16.7	16.7
Marwari	Cordial	100.0	66.7	66.7	100.0	33.3	66.7	100.0	33.3	33.3
	so so	–	33.3	33.3	–	33.3	33.3	–	33.3	33.3
Mech	Cordial	50.0	50.0	25.0	100.0	100.0	50.0	50.0	100.0	25.0
	so so	25.0	–	25.0	–	–	–	–	–	25.0
Bihari	Cordial	100.0	100.0	66.7	66.7	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	100.0
	so so	–	–	–	–	33.3	33.3	33.3	–	–

Table 9: Having Relationships with other Ethnic Community Members

Table 9 shows the type of relationships i.e. Cordial or so so (moderately good), found among the respondents of different ethnic communities. It is

observable that most of the respondents have good relationships with the members of other ethnic community members. Hill ethnic communities particularly Bhutia and Lepchas are not found in adequate numbers in Terai and Dooars particularly in

TABLE 10
Social relationships among the ethnic communities

Ethniccommunity	Social Relationships among the ethnic communities								
	Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha	Bengali	Adivasi	Muslim	Marwari	Mech	Bihari
Nepali	100.0	66.7	60.0	50.0	50.0	40.0	30.0	20.0	30.0
Bhutia	80.0	100.0	60.0	40.0	30.0	50.0	60.0	10.0	40.0
Lepcha	83.3	50.0	100.0	25.0	16.7	33.3	16.7	16.7	33.3
Bengali	66.7	25.0	25.0	100.0	50.0	58.3	33.3	41.7	33.3
Adivasi	75.0	15.0	20.0	60.0	100.0	30.0	20.0	20.0	40.0
Muslim	66.7	33.3	33.3	66.7	50.0	100.0	33.3	33.3	33.3
Marwari	33.3	33.3	33.3	66.7	33.3	33.3	100.0	33.3	33.3
Mech	50.0	50.0	25.0	100.0	75.0	50.0	25.0	100.0	25.0
Bihari	100.0	100.0	66.7	66.7	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	100.0

Dooars as they are found in Darjeeling hills. In the same way, many ethnic communities of plains (Terai and Dooars) such as Bengali, Adivasi, Mech, Muslims etc are not populated in less numbers in Darjeeling hills. For that, it is not possible to show statistically or quantitatively that ethnic communities have enough numbers of relationships among themselves but it has been studied (observed) qualitatively that the ethnic communities maintain good relationships among themselves.

Table 10 shows that respondents belong to each ethnic community keep social relationships with other ethnic communities along with their own community members, both on individual and family level. But it

is clearly observable that greater numbers of social relationships are found among the hill ethnic communities in comparison to the members of non-hill ethnic communities. Except with the Muslims, Marwaris and Biharis, they keep less numbers of social relationships with other non-hill ethnic communities as these communities are not well populated in Darjeeling hills. On the other hand, Nepali is the only hill ethnic community which has a good representation not only in Darjeeling hills but also in Terai and Dooars. That is why they are interrelated with other non hill ethnic communities with a good number of social relationships.

TABLE 11
Economic relationships among the ethnic communities

Ethniccommunity	Economic relationships among the ethnic communities								
	Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha	Bengali	Adivasi	Muslim	Marwari	Mech	Bihari
Nepali	80.0	60.0	50.0	20.0	26.7	33.3	46.7	6.7	33.3
Bhutia	60.0	70.0	50.0	30.0	30.0	60.0	70.0	10.0	50.0
Lepcha	66.7	50.0	75.0	8.3	8.3	33.3	33.3	–	16.7
Bengali	41.7	25.0	16.7	66.7	33.3	33.3	50.0	25.0	25.0
Adivasi	45.0	10.0	10.0	35.0	75.0	30.0	35.0	20.0	25.0
Muslim	50.0	16.7	16.7	50.0	33.3	100.0	50.0	33.3	33.3
Marwari	100.0	100.0	66.7	100.0	100.0	66.7	100.0	66.7	33.3
Mech	25.0	25.0	25.0	75.0	75.0	50.0	50.0	100.0	50.0
Bihari	66.7	66.7	33.3	33.3	33.3	66.7	66.7	33.3	100.0

It is observable from Table 11 that hill ethnic communities maintain good economic relationship among themselves. It is also observable that Bengali, Adivasi, Muslim and Marwari communities are intertwined by a good number of economic

relationships. Among the hill ethnic communities, Nepalis and Bhutias maintain a good network of economic relationships with other hill and non-hill ethnic communities.

TABLE 12
Political relationships among the ethnic communities

Ethnic Community	Political Relationships among the Ethnic Communities								
	Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha	Bengali	Adivasi	Muslim	Marwari	Mech	Bihari
Nepali	70.0	35.0	20.0	6.7	23.3	10.0	6.7	3.3	6.7
Bhutia	40.0	40.0	20.0	10.0	10.0	–	20.0	–	10.0
Lepcha	25.0	25.0	41.7	8.3	–	8.3	8.3	–	16.7
Bengali	8.3	8.3	16.7	75.0	50.0	50.0	8.3	25.0	8.3
Adivasi	25.0	10.0	5.0	60.0	70.0	55.0	5.0	20.0	10.0
Muslim	33.3	16.7	–	66.7	50.0	66.7	16.7	16.7	16.7
Marwari	33.3	–	–	33.3	33.3	–	–	–	–
Mech	–	–	–	75.0	50.0	25.0	–	75.0	–
Bihari	33.3	–	–	33.3	33.3	33.3	–	–	66.7

The Table 12 shows that the members of hill ethnic communities have greater numbers of political relationships among themselves which they do not have with the members of non-hill ethnic communities. In this context, Nepalis are the only hill

people who have political relationships with all other hill and non-hill ethnic communities. Among the non-hill people — Bengalis, Adivasis and Muslims maintain a good network of political relationships among themselves.

TABLE 13
Family participation in social ceremonies of other ethnic communities

Ethnic Community	Family Participation in Social Ceremonies of other Ethnic Communities								
	Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha	Bengali	Adivasi	Muslim	Marwari	Mech	Bihari
Nepali	100.0	60.0	53.3	40.0	43.3	26.7	20.0	16.7	26.7
Bhutia	70.0	100.0	60.0	40.0	30.0	20.0	40.0	10.0	30.0
Lepcha	83.3	50.0	100.0	25.0	16.7	16.7	8.3	8.3	8.3
Bengali	66.7	16.7	16.7	100.0	50.0	41.7	25.0	33.3	8.3
Adivasi	60.0	15.0	15.0	70.0	100.0	10.0	10.0	15.0	20.0
Muslim	50.0	16.7	16.7	66.7	50.0	100.0	16.7	33.3	33.3
Marwari	33.3	33.3	33.3	66.7	33.3	33.3	100.0	33.3	33.3
Mech	50.0	25.0	25.0	100.0	75.0	25.0	25.0	100.0	25.0
Bihari	66.7	66.7	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	75.0	44.0	42.0	56.0	52.0	28.0	22.0	21.0	25.0

The Table 13 indicate the forms of social relationships found among different ethnic communities of Darjeeling hills, Terai and Dooars. It is observable that females of both hill and non-hill ethnic communities participate in each other’s social ceremonies. It is very clear from the data that more numbers of families/females of hill ethnic communities participate in each other’s social

ceremonies. This type of female participation is also found among the non-hill ethnic communities. But if we discuss the degree of female participation among all ethnic communities then it is clearly observable from the data that degree of family participation is much more among the Nepalis, Bengalis and Adivasis in comparison to other ethnic communities from both hills and plains.

TABLE 14
Is a particular ethnic community privileged to get the attention of the State Government

Ethniccommunity	Yes								
	Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha	Bengali	Adivasi	Muslim	ST/SC	Marwari	No
Nepali	–	6.7	20.0	40.0	–	–	26.7	–	6.7
Bhutia	30.0	–	–	40.0	–	–	–	–	30.0
Lepcha	33.3	8.3	8.3	25.0	–	–	–	–	25.0
Bengali	25.0	–	16.7	–	–	16.7	16.7	8.3	16.7
Adivasi	10.0	5.0	10.0	30.0	–	5.0	15.0	20.0	5.0
Muslim	–	–	–	50.0	–	–	33.3	16.7	–
Marwari	–	–	–	66.7	–	–	33.3	–	–
Mech	–	–	–	–	–	–	50.0	25.0	25.0
Bihari	–	–	33.3	33.3	–	–	33.3	–	–
Total	12.0	4.0	12.0	31.0	–	3.0	19.0	7.0	12.0

Table 14 shows the opinion of respondents on whether the State government favours a particular ethnic community in providing the welfare measures or developmental schemes. 31.0% of the respondents mention that Bengalis get the maximum benefits provided by the government. 19.0% of the

respondents opine that ST/SC people are the beneficiaries of the government welfare measures whereas 12.0% of them opine that both the Nepalis and the Lepchas are the receivers of these benefits. If we analyze the date to find out the opinion of individual ethnic group then it is observable that

40.0% of the Nepali, 40.0% of the Bhutia, 30.0% Adivasi, 50.0% Muslim, 66.7% of the Marwari respondents allege that Bengalis are the actual beneficiaries of government's welfare measures whereas 33.3% of the Lepchas and 25.0% of the Bengali respondents claim that Nepalis are simply the beneficiaries.

TABLE 15
Preference for a particular type of living locality

Ethnic community	Mixed	Dominated by hill ethnic communities	Dominated by own ethnic community members
Nepali	80.0	13.3	6.7
Bhutia	70.0	20.0	10.0
Lepcha	58.3	8.3	33.3
Bengali	83.3	–	16.7
Adivasi	90.0	–	10.0
Muslim	66.7	–	33.3
Marwari	66.7	–	33.3
Mech	75.0	–	25.0
Bihari	100.0	–	–
Total	78.0	7.0	15.0

Majority of the respondents from all of the ethnic communities prefer mixed locality for their residing place. It is also observable from the Table 15 that a good number of Lepchas, Muslims and Marwaris prefer to reside in such localities which are dominated by their own community members.

It is reported in newspapers on several occasions about the incidents of ethnic conflicts in Darjeeling hills, Terai and Dooars due to pro-Gorkhaland and anti-Gorkhaland activities by many of the ethnic communities of these regions. Although majority of the respondents which includes 20.0% of the Nepali respondents also mention that Gorkhaland movement related activities are the major reason for the occurrence of inter-ethnic conflicts but largest number of the respondents (76.0%) blame the sectarian politics played by the politicians. 32.0% respondents complain that the domination and discrimination by the majority ethnic community is responsible for occurring of such incidents. 29.0% of the respondents blamed it on the aggressive attitude of the Nepalis

TABLE 16
Respondent's opinion on factors responsible for interethnic conflicts

Ethnic community	Gorkhaland movement related activities	Aggressive attitude of the Nepalis	Domination and discrimination by the majority ethnic community	Politics	State government's policy	Domination by ethnic Hindu people	Ethnic conflict does not occur here
Nepali	20.0	6.7	66.7	80.0	70.0	6.7	13.3
Bhutia	60.0	20.0	20.0	70.0	–	–	20.0
Lepcha	58.3	25.0	16.7	75.0	–	–	16.7
Bengali	100.0	50.0	–	50.0	–	–	–
Adivasi	90.0	40.0	35.0	80.0	30.0	–	–
Muslim	83.3	50.0	33.3	66.7	–	–	–
Marwari	66.7	66.7	66.7	100.0	–	–	–
Mech	100.0	50.0	–	100.0	–	–	–
Bihari	66.7	33.3	66.7	100.0	–	–	–
Total	55.0	29.0	32.0	76.0	27.0	2.0	7.0

towards Gorkhaland movement whereas 27.0% of them held the state government responsible for such incidents owing to its policies towards the ethnic minorities. In general, the Table 16 shows that the

vast majority of the respondents consider Gorkhaland movement related activities and politics related to these activities are the major reasons behind the ethnic conflicts in these regions.

TABLE 17
Respondent's opinion on who are responsible for interethnic conflicts

Ethnic Community	Bengalis	Nepalis	Adivasis	Political Parties	Particular Political Party	Political leaders	Self-interested persons	Administration/ State government
Nepali	16.7	6.7	23.3	46.7	20.0	33.3	46.7	46.7
Bhutia	10.0	20.0	20.0	50.0	20.0	70.0	20.0	40.0
Lepcha	-	16.7	25.0	50.0	-	50.0	58.3	8.3
Bengali	-	66.7	25.0	58.3	33.3	33.3	50.0	-
Adivasi	-	15.0	-	40.0	10.0	45.0	25.0	10.0
Muslim	-	66.7	-	16.7	50.0	66.7	66.7	-
Marwari	-	66.7	33.3	100.0	-	100.0	66.7	-
Mech	-	75.0	25.0	75.0	-	75.0	50.0	25.0
Bihari	-	-	-	66.7	-	100.0	66.7	-
Total	6.0	26.0	17.0	49.0	17.0	49.0	44.0	22.0

The Table 17 shows the opinion of the respondents regarding responsible persons for the ethnic conflict. 49.0% who represent f the respondents

general opinion of the respondents is that political parties, political leaders and self-interest persons are mainly responsible for these ethnic conflicts.

TABLE 18
Are their relationships with other ethnic community members strained due to their support to a particular political party

Ethnic community	Strained relationships		
	Yes	No	No comment
Nepali	23.3	63.3	13.3
Bhutia	20.0	60.0	20.0
Lepcha	33.3	33.3	33.3
Bengali	41.7	50.0	8.3
Adivasi	30.0	60.0	10.0
Muslim	16.7	83.3	-
Marwari	-	100.0	-
Mech	25.0	75.0	-
Bihari	-	66.7	33.3
Total	26.0	60.0	14.0

The Table 17 shows the opinion of the respondents regarding the responsible persons for the ethnic conflicts. 49.0% of the respondents who represent all the ethnic communities opined that both political parties and political leaders are responsible for ethnic violence whereas 44.0% of the respondents blamed those persons who instigate ethnic violence to fulfil their self interests. 26.0% of the respondents blamed the Nepalis, 22.0% of them blamed the state govt and its policies whereas 17.0% of the respondents hold the Adivasis responsible for these conflicts. The

Table 18 shows that 60.0% of the respondents opine that their support for a particular political party or leader does not make their relationships strained with those people who support other political parties/ leaders. If we analyze the data ethnic community wise, then it is observable that 41.7% of the Bengali, 33.3% of the Lepcha and 30.0% of the Adivasi respondents mentioned that their support for a particular political party has made their relationships strained with other community members.

Table 19 shows that 82.0% of the respondents interact on daily basis with other community members. 67.0% of the respondents said that females of their families interact with the females belong to other ethnic communities on each and every day. They also go to each other's home to attend social/family ceremonies. An ethnic community wise analysis shows that except the Lepchas (41.7%) and Marwaris (33.0%), majority number of the females of other ethnic communities interact with each other and also go to each other's home to attend social occasions.

Table 20 shows that absolute majority (81.0%) of the respondents mention that there are no change in their relationships with the members of other ethnic communities after the formation of the GTA whereas 19.0% of them opine the just opposite view that the warmth in their relationships with other ethnic community members have decreased.

TABLE 19
Daily interactions with other community members

Ethnic community	Do they have interaction on daily basis with other ethnic community members		Do the females have interaction on daily basis with the females of other ethnic communities		Do they (females) visit each other's home	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Nepali	86.7	13.3	70.0	30.0	70.0	30.0
Bhutia	90.0	10.0	70.0	30.0	70.0	30.0
Lepcha	41.7	58.3	41.7	58.3	41.7	58.3
Bengali	75.0	25.0	58.3	41.7	58.3	41.7
Adivasi	90.0	10.0	90.0	10.0	90.0	10.0
Muslim	100.0	–	66.7	33.3	66.7	33.3
Marwari	100.0	–	33.3	66.7	33.3	66.7
Mech	75.0	25.0	50.0	50.0	50.0	50.0
Bihari	100.0	–	66.7	33.3	66.7	33.3
Total	82.0	18.0	67.0	33.0	67.0	33.0

TABLE 20
Change in relationship with other ethnic communities after the formation of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA)

Ethnic Community	Change in Relationship after the formation of GTA	
	Yes	No
Nepali	20.0	80.0
Bhutia	–	100.0
Lepcha	25.0	75.0
Bengali	25.0	75.0
Adivasi	20.0	80.0
Muslim	16.7	83.3
Marwari	33.3	66.7
Mech	25.0	75.0
Bihari	–	100.0
Total	19.0	81.0

TABLE 21
Interethnic relationships before and after the formation of the GTA

Ethnic Community	Before		After	
	Good	Bad	Good	Bad
Nepali	70.0	30.0	90.0	10.0
Bhutia	100.0	–	100.0	–
Lepcha	100.0	–	75.0	25.0
Bengali	66.7	33.3	91.7	8.3
Adivasi	70.0	30.0	90.0	10.0
Muslim	66.7	33.3	83.3	16.7
Marwari	100.0	–	100.0	–
Mech	75.0	25.0	100.0	–
Bihari	100.0	–	100.0	–
Total	78.0	22.0	90.0	10.0

The Table 21 show the relationships among the hill and non-hill ethnic communities before and after the formation of the GTA who have been residing in Darjeeling hills and Terai and Dooars. 90.0% of the respondents mentioned that the formation of GTA has brought peace in these regions which prompts them to keep good relationships with other ethnic communities. But before the formation of GTA, 78.0% of the respondents had good relationships with other ethnic community members. Community wise analysis of the data shows that the formation of GTA has increased the number of good relationships for all other ethnic community members except for the Lepchas.

TABLE 22
Which ethnic community actually is benefitted by the formation of GTA

Ethnic community	Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha	Non-Lepcha		
				All	None	
Nepali	10.0	–	20.0	–	60.0	10.0
Bhutia	80.0	–	–	–	20.0	–
Lepcha	75.0	–	–	16.7	8.3	–
Bengali	83.3	–	–	–	–	16.7
Adivasi	100.0	–	–	–	–	–
Muslim	50.0	–	–	–	33.3	16.7
Marwari	66.7	–	–	–	33.3	–
Mech	100.0	–	–	–	–	–
Bihari	66.7	–	–	–	33.3	–
Total	61.0	–	6.0	2.0	25.0	6.0

TABLE 23
Opinion regarding exclusion of Terai and Dooars regions from the domain of GTA

Ethnic community	Undesirable for hill ethnic communities	Good for non-hill ethnic communities	Good for social relationships among the ethnic communities of these regions	It has created strained relationships among the ethnic communities of these regions
Nepali	100.0	40.0	16.7	10.0
Bhutia	80.0	50.0	30.0	10.0
Lepcha	75.0	50.0	25.0	25.0
Bengali	66.7	100.0	100.0	16.7
Adivasi	60.0	80.0	80.0	10.0
Muslim	66.7	100.0	33.3	50.0
Marwari	66.7	66.7	100.0	33.3
Mech	50.0	100.0	100.0	–
Bihari	66.7	66.7	66.7	–
Total	77.0	65.0	50.0	15.0

Table 22 show that 61.0% of the respondents mention that Nepalis are actually benefitted by the formation of GTA whereas 25.0% of respondents opined that all of the ethnic communities have been benefitted by its formation. Ethnic community wise analysis of the data shows that majority of the respondents from each of the ethnic communities from hills and plains except the Nepalis opined that Nepalis are the actual beneficiaries of GTA. 60.0% of the Nepalis respondents opined that all of the ethnic communities are benefitted by the formation of GTA whereas 20.0% of them say that Lepcha people actually are the beneficiaries as they have achieved the Lepcha Development Board (LDB) from the State government just after the formation of GTA.

The Table 23 shows the opinion of the respondents regarding the impact of exclusion of Terai and Dooars from the domain of the GTA on the people residing in those regions. 97.0% of the respondents consider the exclusion undesirable for the hill ethnic communities, 64.0% of the respondents said that the exclusion of these regions from the domain of GTA is good for non-hill ethnic communities whereas 50.0% of them say that the exclusion is good for better social relationship among the ethnic communities residing in these regions. 15.0% of the respondents mentioned that the exclusion has created strained relationships among the ethnic communities of these regions. Ethnic community wise analysis of data shows that majority of respondents of all ethnic communities opined that the exclusion of these regions from the domain of GTA is undesirable for hill communities. But it is also notable that majority of

the respondents belong to different ethnic communities except the Nepalis (but 40.0% of them also) maintained that the exclusion has been good for the non-hill ethnic people.

TABLE 24
Whether Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas are equally concerned for Gorkhaland

Ethnic community	Yes	No	No comment
Nepali	53.3	40.0	6.7
Bhutia	70.0	30.0	–
Lepcha	25.0	66.7	8.3
Bengali	–	100.0	–
Adivasi	10.0	90.0	–
Muslim	16.7	83.3	–
Marwari	–	100.0	–
Mech	–	100.0	–
Bihari	33.3	66.7	–
Total	30.0	67.0	3.0

Table 24 shows that the vast majority (67.0%) of the respondents opined that all the hill ethnic communities are not equally concerned for Gorkhaland. Ethnic community wise analysis shows that vast majority of the respondents belong to non-hill ethnic communities opines that all of the hill ethnic communities i.e. Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepcha, are not equally involved in the movement for Gorkhaland. In this regard, the hill ethnic communities are also not sure that they are equally concerned for Gorkhaland. 40.0 of the Nepali, 30.0% of the Bhutia and 66.7% of the Lepcha respondents alleged that all the hill communities are not equally concerned for the creation of Gorkhaland.

TABLE 25

Whether the creation of Development Boards i.e. Lepcha Development Board by West Bengal Government is for upsetting the unity among the hill ethnic communities

Ethnic Community	Yes	No	No comment
Nepali	80.0	16.7	3.3
Bhutia	50.0	30.0	20.0
Lepcha	25.0	58.3	16.7
Bengali	66.7	33.3	–
Adivasi	75.0	25.0	–
Muslim	66.6	16.7	16.7
Marwari	100.0	–	–
Mech	100.0	–	–
Bihari	33.3	33.3	33.3
Total	67.0	26.0	7.0

It is obvious from the data in the Table 25 that 68.0% of the respondents find the creation of LDB by the West Bengal Government as an attempt to create fissure in the unity among the hill ethnic communities for the cause of Gorkhaland. Further analysis of the data finds that except the Lepchas (25.0%), majority of the respondents from each and every community from hills and plains consider the creation of the LDB by the State government as an attempt to disunite the hill ethnic communities.

DISCUSSION

The Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) which was established in 2011 is vested with autonomy of Darjeeling hills under a tripartite agreement signed by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), the State government and the Centre. But since the formation of the GTA, the leaders of GJM who run the GTA and the State government are in constant confrontation on several issues concerning the functioning of the GTA. The main issue of that confrontation is related to the autonomy of the GTA as the Morcha leaders claim that the state government is not letting the GTA functioning with independence. They also allege that as per the GTA Act of 2011, the state government should transfer 40 departments to the hill autonomous body but it has not transferred all of those departments to the GTA. The handover of many important departments such as PWD, Land and Land Reforms, Transport, Social Welfare, Fire Services etc have not done till today¹. The political fight between the two parties is one of the main reasons for the failure of the GTA. It could not bring

the development for the people of Darjeeling hills for which they aspired and for which it was created. The present study has observed that the inefficient functioning of the GTA has influenced the pattern of interethnic relationships not only in Darjeeling hills but also in Terai and Dooars as majority of the hill people obviously the Nepalis of these three regions are on the same platform to demand autonomy for identity and development. The GTA actually is operated by the GJM or by the ethnic Nepalis. The claim by the non-Nepalis for the non-functioning of the GTA as a failure of the GJM as well as a failure of the Nepalis signifies the disunity among the hill ethnic communities in Darjeeling hills.

It has been observed in this study that many non-Nepalis of these regions claim that the unity among the hill ethnic communities for this autonomy movement was never strong. The history of autonomy movement in Darjeeling district depicts that the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis politically united for the first time in 1907 when they jointly demanded a 'separate administrative set-up' before the government for the hill people of Darjeeling district. In 1917, the representatives of these ethnic communities submitted a memorandum under the banner of the "Representatives of the Darjeeling district" to the government for 'creation of separate unit' for Darjeeling district and Dooars of Jalpaiguri district. Later on, 'The Hillmen's Association' was established in 1919 as the first formal association for the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis of Darjeeling hills. In 1934, the association submitted a memorandum to the Governor of Bengal. But the memorandum was signed by the Nepalis only and it primarily dealt with the problems of the 'Gorkhas' in Darjeeling hills that upset the Lepchas and Bhutias. It pleaded for an independent administrative unit for the district of Darjeeling largely dominated by the Gorkhas. Although they appealed for an adequate representation for the minority communities in that administrative body but it could not make the Lepchas and Bhutias happy. Until that time, the fraternities of the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis were disturbed because the Bengal government appointed a committee in 1925 to consider the demand of the Nepalis to introduce "Nepali" as the medium of instruction in schools in Darjeeling hills which was

opposed by the Bhutias and Lepchas (for more details, see Subba, '92).

During my field work, I interviewed individuals belong to different ethnic communities of Darjeeling district and Dooars to know their relationships with other ethnic community members resulting due to their support or opposition for this autonomy movement. I have found that each and every hill ethnic community wants to realize its own agenda by participating in this movement. The Lepchas, Bhutias are mainly concerned for their socio-economic and cultural development whereas the Nepalis who also want development are more apprehensive for the problem of their identity crisis. The claim that Lepchas and Bhutias are not so enthusiastically involve like the Nepalis in this autonomy movement may appear hypothetical but it appears valid when the Lepchas gladly accepted the '*Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board*' (MLLDB or LDB) constituted by the West Bengal government in 2013 to take care for their socio-economic development and preservation of their culture. The leaders of the Morcha who control the hill politics since 2007 and also are in charge of the GTA since 2011 are deeply disturbed by the formation of the LDB. They were in no doubt that the creation of the LDB not only would lessen the support of the Lepchas for the Morcha but also would disunite the hill ethnic communities for the autonomy movement. They were right in their theory as many hill ethnic communities also have started to demand development boards just after the creation of the LDB. This incident has created fissures not only in the collective hill ethnic identity among the Nepali and non-Nepali ethnic communities but within the Nepali ethnic community also as the Tamangs who are one of the important constituents of Nepali ethnic community demanded a 'Tamang Development Council' similar to the Lepcha Development Board to ensure an all round development of the community². The demands for development boards by different ethnic communities have provided a new dimension to the pattern of inter-ethnic relationships particularly ethno-political relationships among those ethnic communities. The leaders of GJM find the formation of the LDB as an encroachment in the autonomy of the GTA because the LDB works under Ministry of Welfare of

Backward Classes of the state government. A good number of Nepalis even mentioned that they knew that the Lepchas are Gorkhas before formation of the LDB. They question that if all the hill ethnic communities need separate development boards then what is the need of the GTA. They opine that the autonomy of the GTA becomes indistinct and diminished due to formation of these development boards.

Interethnic relationships among the Nepalis, Lepcha and Bhutias after the formation of GTA are not spontaneous. Many of the Lepchas opined that they are the indigenous people of Darjeeling hills but they are socially, economically and politically backward in comparison to other hill communities. They claim that they are dominated by the Nepalis and Bhutias. They claim that all of the hill communities agitated jointly but after the formation of the GTA the leaders of the GTA mostly of them are the Nepalis have done nothing for the Lepchas and they are being deprived from different facilities. Presently, they are very relieved that the state government has constituted the LDB for the socio-cultural protection and economic development of the Lepchas. The LDB is doing several development works for the Lepchas. But many other hill ethnic communities mainly the Nepalis accuse that the formation of the LDB has unsettled the interethnic relationships in hill society but irony is that many of these communities also are demanding development boards for them. The Lepchas wonder that the leaders of the GJM oppose the creation of the LDB but all at once they demand scheduled tribe status for ten Gorkha or Nepali sub-ethnic communities i.e. Bhujel, Gurung, Mangar, Newar, Jogi, Khas, Rai, Sunwar, Thami and Dewan who comprise 55 per cent of the hill population³. Several Lepchas complain that many Nepalis of the hills started to ignore them after the formation of the LDB by dubbing them supporters of the state government. They agree with the fact that the warmth which they shared in their relationships with their Nepali neighbours has decreased to some extent after the formation of the LDB. Although they do not show a high opinion for the GTA but they admit that its formation is good for their mental health in the sense that now it is not compulsory for them to attend political rallies organized by the GJM.

It has been observed that the Bhutia community of these regions comparatively has better socio-economic status than their hill counterparts. They are good in business. Many Bhutia women are also engaged in their family business. Many non-Bhutias claim that Bhutias along with some Nepali sub-ethnic communities such as the Subba and Tamang people who also have ST status are recruited in most of the reserved posts for the STs in Darjeeling district and Dooars owing to their better educational status. They also allege that Bhutias who are in higher government posts usually apply their influences to employ their own community members in their respective departments. Presently, the state government also has created a development board for the Bhutia community.

Majority of the non-hill ethnic communities such as Bengalis, Marwaris, Muslims, Biharis etc in Darjeeling hills are engaged in different businesses and professions. The existing study has observed that these ethnic communities maintain balanced i.e. good relationships with both the hill and non-hill ethnic communities. They do not show much interest in political affairs in Darjeeling hills but they want political stability there so that they can do their economic activities peacefully. They keep good social and economic relationships with other ethnic community members particularly with the people who control the politics in their respective localities. So, it can be said their political relationships are dictated by the dominating political party of their regions. Actually, they do not have any option other than to support the dominant political party or dominant ethnic community of the region where they do their profession. On many occasions, they utilize their money power to counterbalance the muscle power generally used in hill politics.

It has been mentioned above that the formation of Lepcha development board by the state government in 2013 has led many non-Nepali hill ethnic communities as well as some Nepali sub-ethnic communities of Darjeeling hills to demand development boards for their upliftment. The GJM leadership became too much concerned particularly when the Tamangs, a major Nepali-sub ethnic community which figure about 15 per cent of the hill population⁴ and huge supporters of the autonomy

movement, demanded a development board for them. The state government took full advantage of this ethno-political situation in hills by creating development boards for the Tamangs in 2014, for the Sherpas, Bhutias and Mangars in 2015. The Morcha leaders who rule the GTA allege that the state government is applying the divide and rule policy in Darjeeling hills to disunite the hill communities into different ethno-political groups/communities by tempting them with development boards. The state government actually wants to strengthen its political base in Darjeeling hills by gaining support of these ethnic communities which ultimately weakens the influence of the Morcha in Darjeeling hills. To counter this policy of the state government, the GJM has formed the '*Janmukti Lepcha Organization*' on 7th August 2015 in an attempt to woo the Lepchas as well as to counter the 'Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association' (ILTA) which is based in Kalimpong for its leanings towards the state government. The 'All India Lepcha Association' (AILA) which is based in Darjeeling supports the GJM. The GJM leaders remarked that the GTA is for each and every ethnic community. The LDB is being run as if it has constituted to challenge the GTA⁵. Very recently, the state government has constituted a development board for the Bhutia community which prompted the leaders of the Morcha to change their political stance. They remarked that more development boards could be formed for other hill ethnic communities also for their socio-economic development and for conversation of their culture but all the development boards should be functioned under the GTA. It is important to note that the all the development boards function under the 'Backward Classes Welfare Department' of the state government⁶. So, it is understandable that the state government has given a strong message to the Morcha leaders that right now they do not enjoy the support of all the hill ethnic communities which they used to get since its formation in 2007. Those hill ethnic communities who have got development boards are much enthusiastic to work together with the state government for bringing development in their societies. The emergence of such an ethno-political situation in Darjeeling hills sponsored by the state government has put the hill politics in perspective. It has given immense relief to the state government by

undoing of the Morcha in hill politics. The state government has conveyed a strong message to the leaders of Morcha (GJM) that now they cannot pressurize the government by their politics in Darjeeling hills.

The ethno-political situation whereas is different in Terai and Dooars due to different population composition in these regions. People belong to different hill and non-hill ethnic communities reside in both of these regions. Nepalis, Bhutias, Lepchas are the main hill ethnic people whereas Adivasis, Bengalis, Muslims, Marwaris, Biharis, Mechs are the non-hill ethnic people. The existing study has provided more importance on Dooars as several incidents of ethnic violence were happened there. Adivasis, Nepalis, and Bengalis are the major ethnic communities of this region. Majority of the population of this region is socially, educationally and economically backward but they are politically much conscious owing to the political culture of West Bengal and also due to politics related to Gorkhaland movement. Nepalis are the supporters of the autonomy movement who demand for inclusion of Dooars in their proposed autonomous political body whereas Bengalis and Adivasis as well as some other communities i.e. Marwaris, Muslims, Mechs oppose the demand of the Nepalis. Present study has observed that other hill ethnic communities i.e. Lepchas and Bhutias who are found less in numbers in Dooars are not as enthusiastic as the Nepalis in this autonomy movement.

Although the Adivasis are against this autonomy movement but they demand Sixth Schedule status for Dooars owing to their social, economic and infrastructural backwardness. They complain that they are being dominated by the Bengalis and Nepalis irrespective of the fact that they largest ethnic community in Dooars. A large numbers of Adivasis as well as Nepalis are employed in the tea gardens of Dooars. The present study has observed that Adivasis exclusively depend on their employment in these tea gardens to earn their livelihood. Their daily wage is insufficient to fulfill their daily household needs. Many of the tea gardens are sick and are closed since past. We learnt several cases of deaths of Adivasi tea garden workers due to starvation. So, it is obvious that Dooars particularly tea garden areas suffer from

high poverty. The above discussion has been done to show the backwardness of the region which the political parties, political leaders, self-interested persons exploit to satisfy their selfish ends. In the recent past, economic condition of many of the Adivasis turned into worse when several tea gardens in Dooars were closed down. Many Adivasi families starved at that time. Many of those Adivasis who have been residing in Nepali dominated tea garden regions were helped by the Nepalis. Morcha leaders provided them rations. At that time, the Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikas Parishad (ABAVP), a non-political outfit of the Adivasis of Darjeeling district and Dooars used to deal with the Adivasi issues under the leadership of John Barla and Tej Kumar Toppo. As the Morcha leaders helped a number of Adivasis during their hardships, they were successful under the leadership of John Barla to convince many of those Adivasis to support their claim on Dooars. The other group of the Adivasis led by Tej Kumar Toppo was against the demand of the Morcha. They grouped with other non-hill ethnic communities and went against the autonomy movement. In this way, the political agenda of the Morcha related to Dooars has divided the Adivasis into two opposite groups. On the other hand, many of the Nepalis who were residing in multiethnic localities engaged themselves in disruptive activities in those localities to show their support for the autonomy movement. At that time, a large number of Nepalis from Darjeeling hills also marched to Dooars instructed by the Morcha leaders so that they can dominate the ethno-political situation in Dooars. All these activities related to the autonomy movement disrupted the harmony among these ethnic communities by initiating ethnic violence throughout different urban and rural areas of this region. Then the State and Central Government came forward to settle the issues and signed a Memorandum for Agreement with the Morcha on 18th July of 2011 to constitute the semi-autonomous administrative body 'Gorkhaland Territorial Administration' (GTA) to administer Darjeeling hills. It excludes the Terai and Dooars regions from its domain which has aggravated the Nepalis of these regions. Since the formation of the GTA, the Nepalis have been criticizing the leadership of GJM for letting down the hill ethnic people of Terai and Dooars as they had left them on

their own fate. The Morcha leaders comprehended the feelings of the Nepalis of these regions so they re-approached the Adivasi leaders to support their claim for inclusion of Dooars in the GTA. They also signed an agreement with the dissident unit of Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikas Parishad (ABAVP) led by John Barla in October of 2011 and sent the proposal to the state government to form an autonomous administrative body '*Gorkhaland and Adivasi Territorial Administration*' (GATA) for the Nepalis and Adivasis just after few months of the formation of the GTA in July of 2011. But the state government rejected the proposal immediately.

There is peace in Dooars after the formation of the GTA. The members of different ethnic communities are leading their lives distinctively. But existence of a peaceful situation in a region does not imply the existence of good interethnic relationships in that region. Those Adivasis who supported the Nepalis in their agitation faced the condemnation not only by the non-hill ethnic people but also by their own community members for their support to the Nepalis. They even today blame John Barla of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (he has joined Jharkhand Mukti Morcha of Sibusoren after his expulsion from the ABAVP for his anti-party activities) for bringing division among the Adivasis for the sake of his sectarian politics.

Inter-ethnic relationships of the Adivasis with the hill people is good but many of them particularly the educated ones complain that they do not get government jobs reserved for the scheduled tribes in Dooars because most of these jobs are occupied by the Bhutias, Lepchas, and Nepali STs (Tamang and Subba communities) of Darjeeling hills. Adivasis claim that they are the original scheduled tribes but they are ignored for the posts. They are much disturbed by the demand made by the Morcha leaders for ST status for ten Nepali sub-ethnic communities in West Bengal in addition to the previous ones. Now, Adivasis are gradually becoming minorities among the scheduled tribes in Dooars to hold the government jobs. Adivasis allege that they are victims of internal colonialism that keeps their tribal identity in danger. So, they have the realization that they have to give more emphasis on their '*Sarna*' (nature worshiping) way of life to demonstrate that they are the original

scheduled tribes of these regions. In this context, they opine that their Hindu or Christian identities are now becoming incompetent to protect their constitutional rights. So, their relationships with these hill scheduled tribes are not unchallenging but irrespective of that they maintain good working relationships with them. Adivasis are also interrelated politically with other ethnic community members through their intra-party memberships.

Both the Adivasis and Nepalis of Dooars complained that the state government which is led by the Bengalis not only discriminate them socio-economically but also pave the path for the ethnic Bengalis to dominate them ethno-politically irrespective of their large population in the region. The Nepalis accuse that many Nepali medium schools had been converted into Bengali or Hindi medium schools due to lack of Nepali teachers who are recruited in inadequate numbers. The supply of Nepali medium books is intentionally delayed. They also complain that the state government has made it required for the Nepalis (non-Bengalis) to have some understanding of Bengali (language) to join the state civil services. This stipulation is discriminatory as it debar them from those services. Many of the Nepalis who belong to the SC/ST category complain that they cannot apply for the government services reserved for the SC and STs as they do not have SC/ST certificates. It is so difficult for them to get the ST/SC certificate as government officials ask them to submit a number of documents including their residence proof certificate (of 1950) for the issuance of the certificate. All these incidences grow anti-government i.e. anti-Bengali sentiment in them but that is not manifested in their daily relationships with the Bengalis. It is interesting to note that many of them allege that those Bengalis who have Bangladeshi origin are more biased in comparison to their counterparts i.e. native Bengalis.

It has been mentioned above that non-Nepalis particularly the plainsmen of Dooars protested the daring attitude of the Nepalis during their agitations before the formation of GTA. But the exclusion of Dooars from the domain of the GTA has brought a change in that attitude of the Nepalis. Now, they are in good terms with the non-Nepalis who are in high spirits for the exclusion of Dooars. The ethno-political

situation in Dooars is comparatively better now. But inter-ethnic relationships except the personal ones have lost the degree of warmth which they used to have in the past. One example can be cited here that previously people used to participate in funerals of other ethnic community members but now they seldom attend those ceremonies. Now, one can observe the manifestation / expression of 'we' (in-group) and 'they' (out-group) feeling among many of the members of different ethnic communities during their interactions with others.

The hill people of Dooars allege that their counterparts from Darjeeling hills particularly the Bhutias and Nepalis are employed in most of the government posts reserved for the STs in Dooars. But they are not recruited in comparable posts in Darjeeling hills. The non-Nepali hill communities particularly the Bhutias and Lepchas are least populated in Dooars who also show least interest in politics. They have been engaged in a good network of social and economic relationships with non-hill communities particularly with the Bengalis, Adivasis, Muslims, and Mechs who also reciprocate them with warmth since before and after the formation of the GTA. Bhutias and Lepcha are least bothered with the issue of inclusion or exclusion of Dooars from the domain of the GTA who even blame the Nepalis for their aggressive behaviour and for indulging violence during agitations which obviously had disturbed the social tranquillity of this region.

It has already been mentioned that the Nepalis of Darjeeling hills particularly the Morcha leaders are held responsible by the Nepalis of Dooars for their exclusion from the GTA. They supported the movement wholeheartedly but were disheartened as they are left alone by their hill brethren. They are obligated to lead two lives in Dooars – partly forced by the state of affairs in Dooars, partly out of their own choice and find themselves in a sticky situation. Their ultimate choice is self-determination but present circumstances in Dooars forced a good number of Nepalis to withdraw themselves from the hill politics done by the Morcha. Many of them have joined other political parties even the Trinamul Congress party which is against their demand of Gorkhaland to gain politico-economic benefits for being the members of the ruling party. A good number of the Nepalis and

Adivasis are working together for the Bharatiya Janata Party. Majority of the Bengalis and several Adivasis have joined Trinamul Congress. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha led by John Barla and the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha led by Bimal Gurung also exert a strong authority on a section of the Adivasis and Nepalis respectively. Both these political parties by far mould the political situation in many Adivasi-Nepali dominated areas of Dooars. These types of affiliations of different ethnic peoples with different political parties indicate the existence of a complex network of political relationships which exerts a strong influence on their social and economic relationships.

CONCLUSION

The demand for an autonomy by the hill ethnic communities particularly by the Nepalis of Darjeeling district and Dooars; the opposition of that demand by the non-hill ethnic communities particularly those of plain regions; the strategy of the state government against the demand of autonomy etc are the major factors which have influenced the pattern of interethnic relationships in these regions since past. The 'Gorkhaland Territorial Administration' (GTA) has been created in 2011 for Darjeeling hills to solve the above mentioned issues of the contending parties. But it has not worked up as the inappropriate functioning of the GTA since its setting up for which the GJM and the state government blame each other. The state government points out the failure of the Morcha to run the GTA adequately whereas the latter justifies it to the intrusion by the state government in the autonomy of the GTA. Ethnic communities of Darjeeling hills including many Nepalis also are frustrated with the style of functioning of the GTA by the Morcha. The Morcha is a political party which is hugely dominated by the Nepalis. Consequently, Morcha's failure to run the GTA is considered as the failure of the Nepalis by other ethnic communities which ultimately affect their relationships with the Nepalis.

The state government methodically has taken full advantage of such an ethno-political situation in Darjeeling hills for its political gain. It has initiated to form development boards for different non-Nepali hill communities subsequently for some Nepali sub-ethnic communities also. These ethnic communities

are happy on the government for its initiative to provide them development boards but at the same time they are in no doubt that it are government's divide and rule policy to disunite them so that the unity and strength of the autonomy movement can be weakened. So, the creation of development boards since 2013 and in the following years has created fissures in the unity among the Nepali and non-Nepali hill ethnic communities. Even the Tamangs and Mangars, who are important constituents of the extended Nepali community, gladly accepted their respective development boards. The ethno-political situation is peaceful right now but it seems that there is a Nepali versus others sentiments in a latent form not only in Darjeeling hills but also in Terai and Dooars. And this type of interethnic relationships exists there mainly due to inter-party rivalries owing to the politics related to the non-functioning of the GTA; creation of development boards for different ethnic communities by the government; and above all, lack of democratic environment due to the tradition of one party show in Darjeeling hills. Previously, it was Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) and now it is Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) which shows its monopoly not only in ethno-political affairs but also in intellectual sphere of Darjeeling hills. Many of the hill people there informed the researcher that previously they had different forums for dialogue to articulate and to enhance ethno-political consciousness among the ethnic communities in Darjeeling hills. The activities of those forums led to a good ethno-political understanding among them which strengthen their demand for autonomy in Darjeeling hills. But the dictatorship of particular political parties and leaders since 1985 has left little scope for intellectual discussions on what is right and what is wrong for the movement. Since then, Gorkhaland movement started to get direction by arms (muscle and money power) not by pen which had stopped the intellectual development in the hill society. Literati started to leave Darjeeling hills for other places. This incident has created a vacuum in the intellectual excellence which still persists there. The GTA possibly has done some infrastructural developments but no development has taken place in the intellectual sphere; intellectual erosion still continues there. Nowadays, many of the school

teachers are civil contractors besides their teaching profession.

The interethnic relationships in Darjeeling hills are still politically dictated by the dominant Nepalis i.e. by the GJM but the fact is that the creation of development boards for different ethnic hill communities by the state government has weakened Nepali / GJM's hegemony on the ethno-political space in Darjeeling hills. One example can be cited here to corroborate this fact. Recently, the state government laid the foundation stone to establish a hill campus of the Presidency University of Calcutta in Kurseong town of Darjeeling Himalaya. This ceremony was boycotted by the GJM but the chairmen of all the development boards were present to grace that ceremony⁷. The non-hill people of plains i.e. Terai and Dooars are happy because of the exclusion of these regions from the domain of the GTA for which they had to fight whereas the Nepalis of these are dejected because they agitated for inclusion of these regions in the domain of the GTA. They accused the leaders of the GJM for playing with their sentiments. A politico-regional separation has been created among the Nepalis of Darjeeling hills and those of Terai and Dooars regions due to the exclusion of these regions from the domain of the GTA. Other hill communities i.e. Lepchas and Bhutias are least bothered with the politics of inclusion or exclusion of these regions as their relationships with the non-hill ethnic communities have been remained cordial since before or after the formation of the GTA.

To conclude, it can be said that the failure of the GTA has prompted several ethnic communities both Nepali and non-Nepali hill ethnic communities to demand separate development boards which is the best example to show that the ethno-political relationships among these ethnic communities have gone through a change to a level which influence their present day social and economic relationships. The warmth in their relationships has decreased but the relationships are not stopped. Different ethnic communities of these regions particularly the hill ethnic communities are now easily distinguishable by their growing ethno-political consciousness. Although the inherent diversity among them remains latent when these ethnic groups lead their lives distinctively and peacefully but it becomes manifest when there are

occurrences of agitations which affect their interethnic relationships.

NOTES

1. *The Telegraph* (metro), Siliguri, 19 August, 2015, p. 8.
2. *The Telegraph* (metro), Siliguri, December. 2, 2013, p. 8.
3. *The Telegraph* (metro), Siliguri, 20 August, 2015, p. 12.
4. *The Telegraph* (metro), Siliguri, 26 August, 2015, p. 7.
5. *The Telegraph* (metro), Siliguri, 8th August, 2015, p. 7.
6. *The Telegraph* (metro), Siliguri, 26th & 27th August, 2015, p. 7.
7. *The Telegraph* (metro), Siliguri, 15th September, 2015, p. 7.

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