

Resurgence of the Gorkhas



Comments 2



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The once silent hills of Darjeeling, has grabbed the attention of the central Government and Indian Nepali diaspora. From being a sleepy tourist town, the towering hills are being ravaged by demands from two dissentious groups: the implementation of sixth schedule status vs. a separate statehood- 'gorkhaland'. The angst however, is not limited within Darjeeling itself. Sizeable Indian Nepali populations from states like Delhi, Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim and others are closely taking part in it. Questions like –'can the tag of being honest feed us?', 'can tourism be a year long industry for feeding the people?', 'can sixth schedule remove all barriers?' mirrors their anguish.

"I was born in Assam and have my roots there, but this doesn't stop me from supporting the demand for a long overdue 'gorkhaland' ", says Dhiren Thapa, a college student presently studying in Delhi.

Let us take a minute and question ourselves as to why the peace loving ethnic Nepalis/gurkhas are all of a sudden demanding a separate statehood? Is it just a passing fashion or an attempt by ambitious politicians to raise their profile and votes? Is it really about 'statehood'?

I think the issue is much deeper; the angst beyond what is obvious. Whether we like to hear about it or not, but the truth is, Nepalis have

been the subject of racist jokes and ridicule. Be it in movies or TV serials, Nepalis are always shown as characters playing the part of a 'chowkidaar' with a very funny 'shaab jee' accent. As if they are not capable of anything else.

This stereotyping was clearly visible, when recently an RJ of a popular radio passed unsavory comments on the newly crowned Indian Idol, Prashant Tamang from Darjeeling. Hinting at his ethnicity, he said that now houses are going to be unguarded, since every gorkhas or 'bahadur' can aspire to be an Indian Idol.

This abuse is not limited to the periphery of media alone. Even reputed schools and colleges are said to discriminate student with regard to their ethnicity. "I clearly remember how my teacher used to single me out and call me names based on my Nepali ethnicity. My classmates and the local guys used to tease me calling names such as 'kanchee', it was a very humiliating experience", recounts Padma Pradhan from Guwahati, Assam. It is also unfortunate that the gorkhas or 'doars' have been abused as aliens in their own country by some of the so called anti-social elements of North Bengal.

Therefore for the common Nepali the status of Darjeeling as gorkhaland is a symbol of hope and resurgence. But the irony is- nobody cares for the hopes, aspiration and conflicting identity of millions of Indian Nepalis.

Let us now re-focus ourselves on Darjeeling. Statements like, 'Darjeeling, is it in Meghalaya?', 'I like Darjeeling tea', 'what a great place for budget tourist' are very common statement made by the ignorant country fellowmen. Can people look at Darjeeling beyond a tourist destination and a tea vending hill? Why can't people acknowledge that it also the land which sings song of valour and has a

position of pride in the Indian Defense forces? Even a minority community likes 'gujjars' from North India captures the main national headlines and imagination of all than the decade long agitation of the gorkhas.

Let us admit that Darjeeling is in a state of shambles. Unemployment is on a rampant in the absence of avenues apart from the tea and tourism industry (even the tea industry is facing the problem of lockouts). The only resort left from many is to migrate to bigger cities and metros and join the BPOs (business process outsourcing) - the back office destination. May be we ourselves are to be blamed for this deprived state or it's the stereotyping by our country fellowmen. There may be many arguments but one thing is for sure if we let things work just as they are then surely we are ought to dig our own grave.

The same problem was faced by the northeastern states and to some extent even today, but the degree is little less than before. It was due to the untiring efforts of their leaders in drawing national attention, be it in the parliament or in their respective states. The role of student organizations is also notable. All Assam Student Organization (AASU) played a commendable role in scrapping of IMDT Act 1983 which paved way for detection of illegal immigrants without complexities as posed by the previous Act.

During the recent GJMM (Gorkha Janmukti Morcha) meeting, the delegates quoted that statehood is the only solution to the ongoing problems and that it would fulfill the age old demand of the Indian gorkhas. Whether Darjeeling is granted statehood or the sixth schedule is implemented, that only time will tell us. Meanwhile, my fingers are crossed.

With inputs from Kamal Pradhan

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