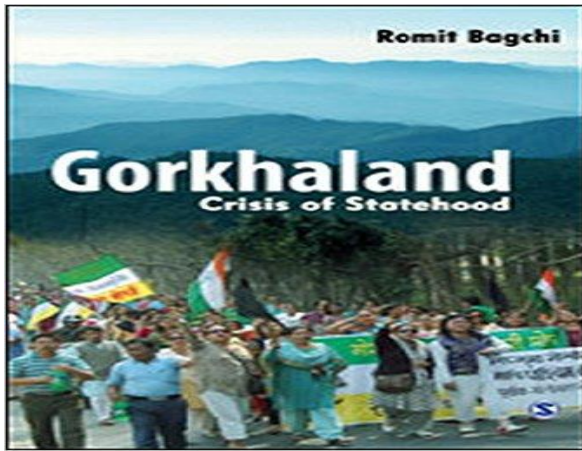


## BOOK REVIEW

Gorkhaland: Crisis of Statehood, Romit Bagchi, Sage Publications India, New Delhi, 2012, Pp. 447  
Price: 895 (Hardback), ISBN: 978-81-321-0726-2



The statehood demand in Darjeeling by the Nepali speaking people bonded by the cultural singularity is more than hundred years old. The demand is of a regionally marginalized hill community which is socio-economically and culturally differs from the rest of Bengal and whose identity is always in question and not acknowledged properly at the state as well as the national level. Gorkhaland: Crisis of Statehood is an attempt by a journalist through his journalistic approach to understand and unravel the various layers of the still ongoing crisis of statehood in Darjeeling district. The author endeavors to delve into the deeper recesses and the psyche of the Gorkha community settled in the restive hills and attempt to put the prevailing stereotypes under a subjective scanner. Though it is highly desirable criteria for a writer to have more or less a firm knowledge about the society, culture and topography of the particular area he is concern with. In this case, the journalistic approach taken by the author and consultation of large sources, primary and secondary, somewhat covers this lacuna for the author.

Romit Bagchi's book deals with the history of statehood demand by people of Darjeeling which is more than hundred years in progress. Beginning with the pioneers of the movement, the book deals with the events till the torch of the movement passed to the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha and its efforts to fulfill the long pending aspirations of the people of Darjeeling. This book is divided into four chapters and discusses various events and the proceeding en route to the demand of the separate state. In the first chapter, 'The Moving Trajectory' the author tries to discuss about the root of the demand of the statehood by the people of Darjeeling. The connection of 'Nepal factor' in the context of statehood is discussed by the author, though a thorough and deep research in this regard is much desirable one. Rise of Subash Ghising and his leadership to the movement is thoroughly discussed by the author. The emergence of Bimal Gurung and his party, Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJMM), is one of the most significant chapters in the process of statehood demand. The author with his journalist mind and approach tries to describe the background and events leading Bimal Gurung to ascendancy. GJMM, in short period of time succeeded in gaining popularity and mass support, Bagchi completely agrees with this fact. In his opinion the alliance of GJMM with BJP was another important development in the process. With a national party endorsing its demand, GJMM got short in its arm, but Bagchi is still not sure of the long lasting aspect of the alliance which is evident in 'What Next?'(p.108). With 'GJMM on Downslide', the author tries to put in light the drawbacks of the party headed by Bimal Gurung and how it tried to maintain its hold over people. He discuss thoroughly about the steps taken by GJMM to check

the erosion of its support base in Darjeeling. The assassination of Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League (ABGL) leader Madan Tamang and how the event affected the GJMM, virtually putting it into trap is well corroborated by the author.

The second chapter of the book 'Shifting Scenes' highlights the crucial events of the movement led by GJMM, it takes into consideration the political tangle involve in the course of the movement and the nature of the alliance politics of the GJMM, particularly its intricate ties and conflicts with the political organizations of the plains, especially from Siliguri and Dooars. The soft relationship between GJMM and Mamata Banerjee, according to the author, was mainly based upon the political gain for both the parties, whose common goal was to oust the CPI (M) from the power. The author is also skeptical about the advantage that GJMM could get if Trinamool Congress comes to power in future (p.280).

The third chapter of the book 'Reflections' is a noble attempt on the part of author to highlight the historical glory and heritage possessed by Darjeeling. He is of the view that the statehood movement is jeopardizing the invaluable heritage of Darjeeling, which is very much a part of the cultural history of Darjeeling in general and Bengal in particular. Bagchi in 'Darjeeling Beckons' is in full praise of Darjeeling. Even in the time of crisis, natural beauty endorsed by Darjeeling remain unchanged, it still beckons the tired eyes with heavenly beauty, suffocated lungs with fresh and beautiful air. Bagchi through this article tries to persuade people who are turning their back on Darjeeling and looking for other places for their comfort to change their mind and visit Darjeeling again.

The last chapter of the book 'Views' deals with the view points of the leaders who are endorsing the demand of the statehood and those leaders who are against it. The views and future course of action of pro statehood leaders like Subash Ghising and Bimal Gurung is put forward by the author in form of interview. "What the Leftist leaders like Asok Bhattachary and Gurudas Dasgupta say represents the surface opinion of the Bengali psyche vis-à-vis the emotive issue"-it clearly suggests that the Leftist leaders are far away from supporting the demand of statehood and the common Bengali mass are behind this. Here, the author makes one point clear that however different the political parties of Bengal are, excepting those in Darjeeling hills, they are united on one issue- Bengal will not divide once again.

The issue, as burning as like the statehood demand, is always prone to partial interpretation by the authors. It is a common phenomenon to take side of one's superficial culture and racial supremacy, as was the case with so many British historians who interpreted Indian history in course of time. In this regard, safeguarding his true characteristic of a journalist, Romit Bagchi is successful in maintaining his impartiality in the issue of statehood. The book is a success so far guiding the readers to the events of the movement is concerned. But despite its innumerable merits, the lack of analytical and theoretical discussions makes this book more a journalistic piece, threaded together by events and its aftermath, rather than a research work. The chronology of the Gorkhaland movement, and all the documents included in appendices make this book really an ideal guide book to Gorkhaland movement. For those readers who wanted to know about the history of Darjeeling and the hundred years old struggle for statehood, this book will serve an ideal platform.

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