Politics of Recognition and the Ethnic 'Others': Revisiting the Gorkhaland and Bodoland Movement

Jhumpa Mukherjee[1]

Abstract

Since the last six decades, India has experimented with various territorial and non-territorial measures for accommodation of ethnic demands. Grant of territorial self-rule to an ethnic community in India is usually based on the principle of ethnic majoritarianism as is evident from the multiple experiments of recasting of state territories. The question therefore is: if ethnic majoritarianism is the guiding principle of territorial reorganization what happens to other communities residing in the area since most of the regions are ethnically heterogeneous and the ethnic 'others' are considerable in number. The present study seeks to critically examine the politics of recognition within the model of ethno-federal self-rule through two case studies, Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal and Bodoland movement in Assam, the strategies of the state and the Centre as well as the responses of the 'other' ethnic communities in the region.

Territorial claims and contestations by ethnic communities have remained a vibrant discourse within the federal contours of India because of its multi-layered and complex diversity. The Indian state has experimented with different methods of ethnic conflict accommodation which include internal self-determination, territorial autonomy, cultural autonomy, constitutional protection. Various states and sub-states that have resulted out of this process are all based on the rhetoric of ethnic self-determination, whether language, region, tribal affiliations, or a combination thereof. The practise of linking ethnicity and territories is not a simple one size fits all solution. Instead of mitigating conflicts, demarcating a territory for an ethnic group may spark off similar conflicts in the region given the fact that the concept of ethnic majority and minority cannot be so easily compartmentalised. Ethnic minorities produced because of the process have faced exclusion on many counts.[2]Again, the process of

[1] Jhumpa Mukherjee,Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, St. Xavier's College, Kolkata 30, Mother Teresa Sarani Kolkata 700016 Email: jhumpasxc@yahoo.com

[2] Despite several constitutional provisions for protection of language rights of minorities, they have been subjected to domination by majorities. For eg, in Assam till 2003, Bodos were forced to study Assamese and not their mother tongue Bodo; in Tripura, KokBorok speakers were forced to learn Bengali since that is the official language of the state, the West Bengal Chief Minister had recently declared Bengali as a compulsory language in schools only to detract later under the face of huge opposition.

territorialisation of ethnicity entails a complex set of factors. As John McGarry and Brendon O'Leary rightly comments that 'exercising the principle of self-determination is only straightforward where there is no large or disgruntled ethnic minority within the relevant region affected by the proposed secession and when the seceding area includes the great majority of those who wish to leave".[3]As a study in Indian politics, the paper tries to critically assess one, the level of ethnic exclusion that happens as a result of territorial inclusion of dominant but not majority groups through ethno-federal self-rule with reference to two case studies: the Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal and Bodoland movement in Assam; second, the perception of the Union and respective State governments in handling the demands and thirdly, the institutions of self-rule and provisions of shared rule within them and finally how have the 'other' ethnic communities of the region reacted/responded to the territorial measures granted to the 'dominant' (not majority) group.

The Macro Story: Ethnicity and Federalism in India Since Independence

The federal journey of independent India represents a long trajectory of manifold complexities primarily because India's diversity is proverbial, and the country had already witnessed a partition in 1947 on the basis of religion. As a country where people identify themselves with their cultural markers, accommodating all the markers is an upheaval task and many a times the ethnic roots cannot be defined within an earmarked territory because of multi-layered identities.

As the framers started the task of adopting a Constitution of free India, numerous apprehensions were raised as to whether linking of territory with language would lead to balkanization of the country. Various Commissions were set up to identify a plausible way forward. The Dar commission (Linguistic provinces Commission) submitted its report on December 10, 1948, stating, "linguistic homogeneity in the formation of new provinces is certainly attainable within certain limits but only at the cost of creating a fresh minority problem".[4]Along similar lines, The State Reorganization Commission (SRC) in its Report in 1955 reiterated that People's wishes must be taken into consideration. But that does not mean people would have the unconditional right to self-determination. It held the view that self-determination as principle of reorganisation should be accepted in rarest of the rare circumstances, that too after taking due cognizance to the question of "(i) human and material resources of the area claiming statehood; (ii) the wishes of the substantial minorities; (iii) the essential requirements of the Indian constitution; and (iv) the larger national interest."[5] The Commission recommended formation of linguistic provinces but within certain

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[3] John McGarry and Brendon O'Leary, Eliminating and Managing Ethnic Differences in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), Ethnicity, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996. p. 335

[4] Report of the Linguistic Provinces Commission, 1948, In B.Shiva Rao, (ed.), *The Framing of India's Constitution , Select Documents,* Vol. 4, Universal Law Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 2004, p. 473.

[5] SRC Report, Para 228.

considerations. The subsequent years witnessed reorganization of Indian federation into sub federal units based on language, tribe, ethnicity. There is a rich scholarship on the role of the Indian state to accommodate various ethno-regional claims spelling the success of the Indian state (Adeney, 2007a; Adeney, 2017b; Bhattacharyya,2001a; Bhattacharyya 2017b; Bhattacharyya 2018c; Brass 1991; Mitra and Singh 2009; Mukherjee2014a; Mukherjee 2017 b; Mukherjee 2018 c; Tillin 2013) While mainstream literature on political accommodation speak about the success stories of accommodating conflicts, but there are some cases where accommodation has not served its purpose. I would refer to two such regions which has witnessed tension and violence after the process of political accommodation; namely, Gorkhaland in West Bengal and Bodoland in Assam. Existing scholarship on the Gorkhaland movement has identified multiple reasons for the movement (Subba 1992; Dasgupta 1998; Samanta 2000; Sarkar 2013; Mukherjee 2015). There is equally a growing scholarship on Assam and the ethnic tensions brewing in the region (Baruah 2005a; Baruah 2009 b; Bezbaruah 1998; Bhaumik 2009; Hausing 2014; Bhattacharyya, Hausing and Mukherjee 2017; Bhattacharyya & Mukherjee 2018) But then the existing scholarship has primarily been concerned with the impact of such territorial reconfiguration, violence in the region, the insurgency problem, asymmetrical federalism in operation. It is imperative to note that there is also the need to locate the politics of recognition of the 'others' since the concept of majority and minority is misleading in the two regions of the study. The States Reorganization Commission was well aware of the fact that any territorial reconfiguration would create substantial minorities and hence the SRC (1955) (Vol. IV) provides a section titled 'Safeguards for linguistic groups' (para 757 -776, &778-785) which advised the Government of India to adopt in consultation with the State Governments a clear code 'to govern the use of different languages at different levels of state administration and take steps, under Article 347, to ensure that the code is followed'. Is it followed? Given the political principle of majoritarianism reigning supreme in government and administration, such safeguards are never salient as can be seen in the very recent notification of the Government of West Bengal to make Bengali a compulsory language in all districts, which was later withdrawn under protest from the Gorkhas. For the regional minorities both the territorial and nonterritorial solutions have proved to be faulty.The majority who control the government can easily ride roughshod over the concerns of the minorities because of an inappropriate power sharing mechanism. Conventional writings have hardly addressed this gap of locating the others and their reactions. The Indian state can hardly afford to ignore them given the density of population; minorities are often considerable in number unlike the sparsely populated western multicultural countries. The paper seeks to show that conventional mechanism of conceding self-rule to the dominant group (not majority) without any power sharing with the considerable 'others' is unworkable in the present times since ethnic self-rule is also connected with controlling of resources which the 'others' are equally determined to wrest their due share of resources. The article seeks to critically examine the two movements from the perspective of the 'others', the so-called minority communities.

Ethnic Mobilisation in West Bengal: The Gorkhaland Movement and its Trajectories

West Bengal, though a relatively peaceful state, has witnessed sometimes sporadic and sometimes persistent spells of ethnic mobilisation like the Gorkhaland movement and the Kamtapuri movement. Both these movements though have originated in north Bengal, yet are different in terms of actors, issues, strategies but converge on the need for territorial autonomy for the communities. It is pertinent to give a brief backdrop of the Gorkhaland movement to contextualise the region, people and the rationality of the exercise of self-rule. Gorkhaland, the name given to the area around Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong in West Bengal, is the movement launched by the Gorkhas to form a separate state of their won. Who are the Gorkhas or Gurkhas? According to the Anthropological Survey of India the term Gorkha is a blanket term which includes communities of Nepal or who originally came to India from Nepal. The Gorkhas are subdivided into numerous castes or Janjatis like *Chettri, Rai, Tamang, Thami, Bhujel, Pradhan, Damal, Gurung, Yakha, Kami, Mangar, Sarki, Sunwar, Thakuri, Sherpa, Limbu.* Not all are recognised as ST and not all of them share the same vision of self-rule as we shall see later in the discussion. As per the census of 2011, the total population of Darjeeling district is 1,846,823. Majority are Nepali speakers. Their language, very different from the language of the plainsmen, was one of the strong factors behind the emergence of the Gorkha ethnic identity. The leaders of the movement are seeking a separate state for these people, others forcibly being made a part of the movement with no choice being available to them. In fact, the Lepchas have been expressing their discontent of being skilfully manoeuvred by the Gorkhaland champions. Racially all of them belong to the same Mongoloid stock. They exhibit the same physical features. In terms of language also, the language of the Lepchas, Bhutias and various ethnic groups of the Nepalis, belong to the Tibeto-Burman family of languages.However, the moot question is what happens to other ethnic communities residing in the territorial areas demanded by the Gorkhas since the Gorkhas though a dominant group but do not constitute a numerical majority in the demanded region. Would it not lead to similar claims by other ethnic communities? It should be noted that a similar recognition of claim of the Bodos in 2003 has led to severe bloodbath between the Bodos and non Bodos (Adivasis, Rajbongshis, Rabhas, Mishings) and the creation of Bodoland Territorial Council instead of a possible solution led to exacerbation of conflicts. Hence recognition of ethnic claims and its syncing with territory remains to be a problematic in the Gorkhaland context too. Historical evidence suggests that the Gorkha community had demanded a separate state for themselves as early as 1907 when the Hillmen's Association (Hillmen in 1907 included the Lepchas and Bhutias too) presented a memorandum to the then British government for the formation of a separate administrative unit comprising of Darjeeling and Dooars. In the post- independence period, autonomy movement started when the States Reorganization Commission failed to recognize the autonomy of the Gorkhas. Post- independence Gorkhas were the only community in the north east left out during the reorganization of States even though they fulfilled the entire

criterion.[6]The succeeding years witnessed movements for the recognition of Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution as well as for the autonomous status of Darjeeling within the province of West Bengal. In 1982 the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) was formed to pursue the longcherished goal of a separate Gorkha homeland. The fundamental rationale behind this demand was the expulsion of Nepali citizens from Meghalaya, the protest by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) over illegal entry of Nepalese in Assam, protest by All Meghalaya Khasi Students' Union (AMKSU) for deportation of foreigners from Meghalaya, refusal of Sikkim and West Bengal governments to accommodate them. Hence the Nepalese of Darjeeling took up the cause of a separate homeland for themselves. The GNLF led by the charismatic leadership of Subhas Ghisingh created a ray of hope in the minds of the Gorkhas in Darjeeling that Darjeeling might have a separate entity within the geographical map of India. The state of West Bengal was in no mood to bow down to Ghisingh's demands. The government responded by saying that "West Bengal is as much a homeland for the Nepali speaking population living here as it is for other communities---Nepalese, with their distinct language, look, customs and habits are an integral part of the cultural landscape of the State of ours".[7]

Dissatisfied with the attitude of the State government, the GNLF revised its earlier position and started the second phase of agitation by demanding the status of separate statehood for Gorkhaland within the framework of the Constitution of India. The years since the 1980s witnessed violent agitation by the GNLF for the recognition of their claims. However, the movement was branded as anti-national by the Left Front Government of West Bengal. The agitation came to an end with the signing of a tripartite agreement between the Union Government, GNLF and the West Bengal government for the formation of an autonomous council.

Institutional Responses of the State towards the Gorkhaland Movement

Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC)

In a bid to reach a settlement and end the disturbances in the Hills, a tripartite agreement was signed in 1988 between the Union Government; GNLF led by Subhas Ghisinghand the West Bengal government called the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Agreement. Interestingly the Memorandum of Settlement provided that, "in the overall national interest and in response to the Prime Minister's call, the GNLF agreed to drop the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland".[8]In addition, a pact on citizenship and language was signed between Ghisingh, Somaiah (Centre's representative) in the

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[6] Priyadarshini Shrestha, Separation for Integration—Status of Stateless minorities in a multicultural democracy: A case study of the Indian Gorkhas, University of Fribourg, Aug 28, 2015,

[7] Cited in SnehamoyChaklader, Sub-Regional movements in India, with special reference to Bodoland and Gorkhaland, K.P.Bagchi and Company, Kolkata , 2004, p. 91.

[8] As quoted in PrabhatDatta, Regionalisation of Indian Politics, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1993, p. 158

presence the then Home Minister Buta Singh in New Delhi. As per the notification, announced by the Centre, the Act recognizes "Gorkhas and not Gorkhalis or Nepalis as Indian citizens according to Article V of the Indian Constitution"[9] As Subba rightly notes that this insertion has led to a sense of frustration among the Nepalis of the Hills of Darjeeling and in India that through this notification, the Union Government has compelled every Gorkhali or Nepali to call himself or herself a Gorkha.[10]

The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was formed to ensure social, educational, economic and cultural advancement of the Hill areas of Darjeeling district. The Hill Council was set up under the State of West Bengal Act. It provided for a General Council consisting of 42 members of whom two-thirds are elected and one-third nominated by the state government. The Act further stated that "the Government shall provide for the due representation of the non- Nepali communities like the Bhutias and Lepchas while nominating the members". The DHGC was designed as a sub-federal arrangement under the state government towards peaceful conciliation of the long-standing demands of the hill people. The Council failed to bring about desired development owing to structural problems and excessive control of the state government coupled with lack of funds. Subhas Ghisingh then took up the cause of demanding Sixth Schedule status for Darjeeling along the lines of Autonomous District Councils in the North east which not only enjoyed tribal self-government for distinct communities but also more executive, legislative and financial autonomy.In 2005, a tripartite Memorandum of Settlement was signed in New Delhi in 2005, between the Union Government (Congress led UPA with Dr. Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister), West Bengal Government (Left Front Government with Buddhadeb Bhattacharya as Chief Minister) and the GNLF (Subhas Ghisingh) to initiate the process of according Sixth Schedule status to the DGHC. Under the Sixth Schedule, 6 tribes---the Bhutias, Lepchas, Sherpas, Yolmos, Tamangs and Limbus will have greater representation than the 70% non-tribal population. The Memorandum stated that "The objectives of this agreement are to replace the existing DGHC by an autonomous self-governing council to be known as Gorkha Hill Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution so as to fulfil economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the hill people and to speed up the infrastructure development in the hill areas". However, not much happened.

The subsequent years witnessed the Hill Council becoming a toothless tiger and the hills receiving stagnancy in terms of development. All the declarations failed to placate the Gorkhas. Malfunctioning of the Hill Council, coupled with undermining of democratic processes and Ghisingh's apathy towards securing a separate homeland for the Gorkhas recrystallised the demand for Gorkhaland under the new leadership of Bimal Gurung led Gorkha Jan MuktiMorcha (GJMM). It was the call for a separate

[9] T.B.Subba, Ethnicity, State and Development, A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, p. 166

[10] Ibid

state for the Gorkhas giving them a separate ethnic identity in India. The BJP which was gradually gaining momentum, and which had already created the three states of Uttarakhand (out of Uttar Pradesh), Jharkhand (bifurcated from Bihar) and Chattisgarh (out of Madhya Pradesh) in 2000 when it was in power was not against the proposal of formation of new states rather the party was raising the slogan of small is beautiful and was already supporting the demand for Telangana. The BJP hoped to ally the GJMM to gain entry into West Bengal. L.K.Advani, conceded to the idea of Gorkhaland and Jaswant Singh was fielded as the GJM-backed BJP candidate from Darjeeling. However, the 2009 BJPselection manifesto included the BJP's support for Gorkhaland, "We will sympathetically examine and appropriately consider the long pending demands of the Gorkhas, the Adivasis and other people of Darjeeling district and Dooars region." The GJMM lent its support to the BJP candidate in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections in the hope of a reorganisation of state boundary to create Gorkhaland. Though the BJP won in the hills, but it lost the Lok Sabha elections and remained in the opposition. In 2014, the BJP expressly stated, "BJP reiterates that it will sympathetically examine and appropriately consider the long pending demands of the Gorkhas, the Adivasis and other people of Darjeeling district and the Dooars region; of the Kamtapuri, Rajbongshi and other people of North Bengal". However, the BJP though it formed the Government and won from the Hills did not take any initiative to go back to its electoral promise. The 2019 Manifesto of the BJP was yet another photocopy of its earlier promise in a different language, "it would find a permanent political solution to the pending issues in the Darjeeling Hills, Siliguri, Terai and Dooars and recognise 11 IndianGorkha sub communities as ST.

Since 2009, the Gorkhaland movement gathered new momentum under the leadership of Bimal Gurung who adopted a non-violent form of protest by refusing to pay taxes to the government due on electricity and phone bills, changing vehicle numbers from WB to GL (signifying Gorkhaland). The TMC led government kept its promise of an autonomous arrangement for the Gorkhas and the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration was born.

Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA)

A tripartite agreement between the central government (Congress led UPA), state government (TMC) and GJMM was signed on 18th July 2011 for the establishment of a Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) with the objective of establishing an autonomous self-governing body to administer the region so that the socio-economic, infrastructural, educational, cultural and linguistic development is expedited and the ethnic identity of Gorkha established. The GTA was designed to represent the ethnic, linguistic and developmental concerns of the Gorkhas within a democratic framework. From the beginning, the Act provided that the body should be established by direct election to root out anti-democratic forces.

The GTA Council is composed of 50 members, 45 elected and 5 nominated by the Governor to give representation to members of SC, ST, women and minority communities. The Act is not clear about which minority communities it is addressing; neither does the Act provide any protection for the non Gorkha communities in the GTA region. The Act also does not provide for legislative powers to the GTA but confers the powers to frame rules/ regulations under the State Acts to control regulate and administer the 59 departmentsincluding education and agriculture, compared to the Gorkha Hill Council's authority over 19 departments. The GHC also lacked financial autonomy since it was vested with the District Magistrate and in Calcutta with the state government.

In the first elections to the GTA Council/Sabha held in 2012 the Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha (GJMM) won all 45 seats. Though 5 seats are reserved for minorities who are nominated by the Governor, it goes without saying that 5 nominated members cannot represent the cause of considerable number of Lepchas, Bhutias, Tamangs, Sherpas, Biharis, Adivasis residing in the region. Again, the Sherpas, Bhutias Lepchas and other ethnic communities do not share the Gorkhas' vision of self-rule.[11]

The GTA Model: Inclusionary or Exclusionary?

It should be noted that GTA has been created keeping in mind the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution which provides for territorial self-rule to tribal communities in North east India.The Fifth and Sixth Schedules are meant for administration of predominantly tribal areas or scheduled areas under Article 244 of the Constitution. It provides administrative autonomy with the objective of preservation of the tribals' culture and protection from exploitation at the hands of outsiders. The Fifth Schedule covers tribal areas of nine states, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtraand Himachal Pradesh. The Sixth Schedule is applicable to the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. The areas are governed by Autonomous District Councils, which enjoys executive, legislative and judicial powers. The ADCs are empowered to make laws on land, forest, water, village or town administration, marriage, divorce, inheritance of property, social customs and so on. One of the main criteria to grant Sixth Schedule status to an area is that the autonomous tribe should form a majority in the area. However, if we look into the 2001 census of the Darjeeling region the numbers do not give the Gorkhas the right to self-rule under Sixth Schedule because they might be the dominant ethnic group but not the majority since there are other ethnic communities (not STs) who make up 65 % of the population.Tribal population in the Darjeeling Gorkha Autonomous Hill Council area is only 35 % as seen in the following table. The rest are Adivasis (20%), Bengalees (15%), Rajbongshis (25%), Totos, Mech and others (5%).[12] The objective of taking into consideration 2001 census for this study is because GTA was created based on the 2001 census.

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[11] The Wire, Politics, 5 July, 2017

[12] Ibid.

Table 1: Survey Report on Tribal Dominated Mouzas under Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council based on 2001 Census

Name	Total Mouza	Total Population	ST population	%ST	Tamang	Limbu	Total ST	%ST
Darjeeling		1609172	204167	12.69				
Rural areas								
darjPulBazar	45	115837	8973	7.75	19387	16704	45065	38.9
Rangli Ranigiot	29	64349	5019	7.81	18974	7439	31434	53.52
JoreBungalow	47	100724	6945	6.9	23669	11584	42253	38.51
Kurseong	65	85867	7597	8.85	15122	4782	26725	34.68
Mirik	21	42237	3136	7.42	7234	5413	15783	35.61
KPG1	45	67680	11878	17.55	12362	5247	29487	35.48
KPGII	33	60263	14835	24.62	9461	5522	29818	48.13
Gorubathan	27	54279	5880	10.83	12703	6343	24976	39.77
Total in Rural areas DGHC	312	591236	64263	11.46	118912	63134	245541	41.53
Urban Areas	No. of Wards							
Darjeeling	32	107197	12747	11.9	3850	1607	18204	16.1
Kurseong	21	40019	2304	5.07	1400	600	4304	10.75
KPG	23	42998	5421	12.6	1505	645	7571	17.6
Mirik	9	9141	303	3.31	320	138	761	8.32
Grand Total in DGHC area	85	790591	85038	10.88	125987	66124	276381	35

Source: District Welfare Office, Backward Classes Welfare Dept. DGHC, Darjeeling.

Accommodation of Non Gorkhas and the Logic of Development Boards for Minorities in Darjeeling

The hills of West Bengal are rich in ethnicities. And while Gorkhas are the main group, they aren't the only one. Hence Development Boards have been created by the present Trinamool Congress ruled West Bengal government to look into the developmental needs of the ethnic minorities as well as make them partners in the development process. It is pertinent to mention that one of the objectives of the formation of GTA was fulfilment of the development needs of the region. Given the recent occurrences, the TMC which does not enjoy a friendly disposition with the GJMM has tried to assuage the other tribal communities through the creation of these Development Boards since 2015. In 2018, a total of 16 development boards have been formed as the following table shows. While the first 15 boards have been formed on ethnic line, the last one is based on geography. These Development Boards have accentuated the polarisation of the Hill communities into 2 groups, one, who are the holders of the Boards as well as enlisted in tribal list (dominant elite) and the other,

who are denied such representation. It is interesting to note that way back in 1907, the popular slogan which united the hill communities was "*Nepali, Bhutia, Lapche, Lamisabai Gorkhale*" is meaningless today in the face of such polarisation. Today Lepchas, Bhutias, Dukpas, Yolmos share their historical linkage with Tibet and not Nepal and hence do not consider themselves to be a part of Gorkha identity nor are their interest being served through the GTA.

Table 2: Development Boards

Sl. No.	Name of Board	Year of Est.	Created Under
1	Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board	2013	Backward Classes Welfare Dept.
2	Tamang Development & Cultural Board	2014	Tribal Development Dept.
3	Sherpa Cultural Board	2015	Tribal Development Dept.
4	Bhutia Development Board	2015	Tribal Development Dept.
5	Khambu Rai Development Board	2016	Backward Classes Welfare Dept.
6	MangarDevelopment Board	2015	Backward Classes Welfare Dept.
7	Limbu Development Board	2016	Tribal Development Dept.
8	Pahadia Minority Development & Cul. Board	2017	Minority Affairs & Madrassa Education Dept.
9	GurungDevelopment& Cultural Board	2017	Backward Classes Welfare Dept
10	Kami Development & Cultural Board	2016	Backward Classes Welfare Dept
11	KhasDevelopment& Cultural Board	2017	North Bengal Development dept.
12	SarkiDevelopment& Cultural Board	2016	Backward Classes Welfare Dept
13	BhujelDevelopment& Cultural Board	2016	Backward Classes Welfare Dept
14	NewarDevelopment& Cultural Board	2016	Backward Classes Welfare Dept
15	Damai development & Cultural Board	2016	Backward Classes Welfare Dept
16	Terai, Dooars, Siliguri Development & Cultural Board	2018	Backward Classes Welfare Dept

Source: https://thedarjeelingchronicle.com/development-board-implications/ accessed on 18/10/2019

The 2016 election Manifesto of the TMC explicitly mentions about separate Boards for welfare and development of tribes like Lepcha, Tamang Sherpa, Bhutia, Limbar and Mangar have been created for taking care of the tribes housing, educational and cultural activities and holistic development through various programmes but the manifesto is silent on the demands of the Gorkhas or for that matter any resolution of their demands.

Moreover these Boards have led to internal strife among the Lepchas, Tamangs, Bhutias and Sherpas and the Gorkha leadership of GJMM. The Lepcha community is headed by two organizations, the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA) and the All IndiaLepcha Association (AILA). These two associations of the Lepchas owe their

allegiance and affiliation to two different parties, the ILTA to the TMC and runs the Lepcha Development Board set up by the state government and AILA to GJM and is pro GTA. Similarly, the Tamangs are represented by 2 bodies, Tamang Buddhist Ghedong Association (TBGA) and the Akhil Bharatiya Tamang Buddhist Association (ABTBA). The ABTBA is pro GJM and the other is pro TMC. Thus, Development Boards set up for minority developmenthave pitted the Gorkhas against non Gorkhas and sometimes the Gorkhas and other janjatias. These boards being funded by the ruling TMC and enjoying the patronage of the Chief Minister has become the bone of contention for the GTA. Again, the Development Boards though have been set up under the GTA area receive instructions and financial assistance from the state government.

The Development Boards have been set up to bring in cultural, infrastructural, economic development for the different ethnic communities. Unfortunately, they neither have cultural, political or economic autonomy and are dependent on the state government for funds. Though these boards have come up in the GTA area yet the GTA does not have any control over them. Moreover, the members of these Boards are nominated by the Government of West Bengal and can be removed by them, thus making them a puppet at the hands of the State Government. The fact, therefore, remains that despite so many territorial and autonomous arrangements for the ethnic minorities in Darjeeling, they are not included into the design of development. The politics of recognition is more a politics of divide and rule for the hill communities leading to greater social exclusion than inclusion.

The Case of Bodoland in Assam

The Bodoland case study seeks to uncover the complex politics of ethnicity and territory in the Bodoland region in Assam. The Bodoland movement today represents a bitter cocktail of ethnic and economic issues in a highly complicated multicultural environment where ethnic self-rule, instead of becoming a conflict resolution mechanism has exacerbated violence. What is Bodoland andwho are the Bodos? Today the Bodos are the Plain Tribes of Assam comprising 13.7 per cent of the total population of Assam, and 31 per cent in the BTC area (2001 census). The Bodos are not a homogeneous community linguistically speaking; there were as many as 18 branches of the language such as Kachari, Meech, Dimasa, Koch, Garo, Tripuris, Reangs, Jamatia and Rabha.[13]The four districts in Assam's northeast constitute the Bodo Autonomous Districts, namely, Kokrajhar, Chirang, Udalguri and Baksa (Table 3). The Bodos comprise 30% of the population of the BTC districts. The remaining 70% comprises of Muslims, Adivasis Koch Rajbongshis and people of other non-Bodo communities (Table 4). [14]

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[13] S. ChakladarSub-Regional Movements in India With Special Reference to Bodoland and Gorkhaland. K.P.Bagchi, Kolkata.

[14] The Santhals though an ethnic tribe are enumerated as scheduled castes in Kokrajhar district and other BTAD districts

Table 3: Scheduled Tribe Population in Bodo Territorial Area Districts

DISTRICTS	ST* POPULATION	PERCENTAGE
KOKRAJHAR	278665	31.41
BAKSHA	331007	34.84
CHIRANG	178688	37.06
UDALGURI	267372	32.15

*Source: Census of India 2011. * ST here refers to the Bodos; the proportion of non-Bodo ST population is very small. The Santhals (sizeable in number in the Bodoland areas in Assam) are not recognized as ST in Assam although they are considered as ST elsewhere in India.*

Table 4: Non Bodo Communities in BTAD Areas

NON BODO COMMUNITIES	PERCENTAGE
Bengali (Muslims)	19
Adivasi (Santhals and Kuruk)	18
Koch Rajbongshis	16
Others (Bengali Hindus, Nepalis and Rabhas)	15

Source: District Report (2010), O K Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati.

The Trajectories of the Bodoland Movement

The genesis of the Bodo identity articulation can be traced quite early to the memorandum submitted by the All Assam Kachari Association to the Simon Commission in 1929 demanding separate representation, reservation in education and appointment for the Bodo community (Mahanta 2013: 50).In the post-independence period the construction of a distinct Bodo identity coincided with the linguistic movement going elsewhere in the country wherein the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952 spearheaded a cultural movement for the protection of the Bodo language. The BSS resented the imposition of Assamese on the Bodos and criticized the Official Language policy of the Government of Assam. Till 1967 the Bodo movement was completely peaceful and used democratic methods to create Bodo consciousnesscenteringaround the twin concerns of language and script. However, in the wake of reorganization of Assam and the subsequent creation of tribal states of Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya, the erstwhile cultural demand gave way to the demand for creation of an Autonomous Region and the formation of Udayachal by the Plains Tribal Council of Assam. It is during this period that the Bodo movement assumed a change of guard with the leadership passing off to the dynamic All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) which shed off the earlier democratic tactics and adopted a militant strategy to pursue the goal of a separate state of Bodoland and conferment of the Sixth Schedule status on the Bodo-Kacharis of Karbi Anglong. The subsequent years saw Assam rocked in bandhs, roads and rail blockades, assassinations, kidnapping, abduction and inhuman violence. Concerned over the growing unrest in the state leading to the loss of several million lives in the clashes, the Central Government appointed a Committee under the chairmanship of

Bhupinder Singh (1991) to make recommendations as to the autonomy, legislative, financial and administrative arrangement in the area.The Committee endorsed the fact that the Assamese society being essentially multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi religious, special measures should be taken to maintain the distinctiveness of the diverse identities. The Union government wanting to reign in militancy dwelled upon conceding self-rule to the Bodos. That seemed at variance with the true spirit of the Singh Committee which recommended in favour of accommodating the 'diverse identities' and not exclusively the Bodos. The government not reading between the lines entered into a tripartite agreement between the Central Government, the Assam Government and the Bodo leadership, in which the non-Bodos were not a party, and signed three ethnic peace accords --- one in 1993, the other in 2003, and the latest in 2020 the sole principle being political recognition of the ethnic (minority but dominant) identity of the Bodos. Surprisingly, the two accords and the subsequent constitutional amendment were exclusionary in nature.

Till the 1990s the Bodo organizations resorted to selective violence to get their due share in the political process. However, the 1993 accord failed to satisfy them and the next couple of years saw militant bloodbath by the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT) which saw the failure of conventional associations and groups to wrest power exclusively for the Bodos and the changing demography of the region wherein the ethnic rulers (Bodos) were being transformed into a minority group in relation to the Adivasis, Mishings, Rabhas and the immigrant Muslims. The new leadership believing in only militant methods restarted the movement for an exclusive Bodo 'homeland' and resorted to ethnic cleansing. Because of the region's changing demography, persistent Bodo homeland demand and organized discrimination against the non Bodos, a few non-Bodo organizations have started agitational programmers. Mention may be made of the *Sanmilita Janagosthiya Sangram Samithi* (SJSS: United Ethnic People's Struggle Committee), an alliance of 20 non-Bodo organizations. They are demanding a Scheduled Tribes status for the Koch-Rajbongshis and the Adivasis which the Bodo leadership is in no mood to relent. The non bodos have also mobilized themselves and intensified their struggle by launching another organization *Ana Bodo Surakhya Samity* (ABSS: non-Bodo Protection Forum). Interestingly the AllAssam Students' Union (AASU) which had in the 1990s supported the formation of BTC is today supporting the Non Bodo forum, thus reflecting that organizational support to a cause is transient and depends on the dynamics of space and time. The agitation by the various non-Bodo organizations must be seen as a natural fallout of the policy of ethnic self-rule which has created new complexities owing to demographic changes in recent decades. The non-Bodo organizations are today more numerous and quite powerful having access to arms and ammunitions to counter the Bodo organizations and are ready to wrest their due share of resources. The Bodo movement thus brings to the fore the multiethnic, multi linguistic and complex nature of the region and the bitter side of granting ethnic self-rule escalating into severe violence and bloodbath. It has raised questions as to

whether ethnic self-rule in a highly diverse society as of the North east can serve as a permanent and viable model of conflict resolution.

Institutional Responses of the State Towards the Bodoland Movement Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC)

Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC)

The Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was formed under the Accord signed on 20 February 1993 between the State Government, All Bodo Students' Union, Bodo Peoples' Action Committee.The primary objective was to accord recognition and autonomy through an administrative arrangement designed to further social, economic, educational and cultural advancement within a democratic framework; to take steps to protect the demographic complexion of the areas falling within its jurisdiction; use of Bodo language as medium of official correspondence within the BAC area.The Bodo Accord, however, solved neither the aspirations of the Bodos nor tried to address the complex multicultural multi layered demography of the region. The agreement favoured domination of the State government on the Bodos in the sense that the whole arrangement was provided for under the State Law.The failure of the BAC led the Bodo leaders to demand anew the formation of a separate state of Bodoland. After repeated talks and intense militancy, it was decided that a new political structure will be provided in the form of Bodoland Territorial Council and the BTC would be given special status under the Sixth Schedule under the Constitution.

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)

On February 10, 2003, the Government of India, Bodo Liberation Tigers (was banned by the Union Government)on behalf of Bodos, State of Assam signed the new Bodo Accord for the creation of a 'Bodoland Territorial Council' (BTC) under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The objectives of the agreement are: to create an autonomous self-governing body to be known as Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) within the State of Assam; to provide constitutional protection under Sixth Schedule to the said Autonomous Body; to fulfil economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land-rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos; non-tribals are not disadvantaged in relation to the rights enjoyed by them at the commencement of BTC and their rights and privileges including land rights are fully protected;the inclusion of Bodo Language in Devanagri Script in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Bodo language shall be the official language of BTC subject to the condition that Assamese and English shall also continue to be used for official purpose. With the passage of the 100th Constitution Amendment Act, 2003 the Bodo language has got constitutional recognition to be placed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

According to Clause 4.2 of the Accord: A provision will be made in para 2(1) of the Sixth Schedule for increasing the number of members for Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) up to 46, out of which 30 will be reserved for Scheduled Tribes (read the Bodos), 5 for non-tribal communities, 5 open for all communities and 6 to be nominated by Governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities for BTC area of which at least two should be women. Following the tripartite ethnic peace accord in 2003 and the amendment, accordingly, of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution the same year, the BTC was conceded. The BTC comprises of 46 seats. About two-thirds of the seats (30 out of 40) out of the total 46 were (over-) reserved for the Bodos, leaving the majority (of about more than 70 per cent) of other ethnic groups (including tribes such as the Santhals), politically marginalized and vulnerable. The ethnic minority status of the Bodos within the territorial area of the BTC was compensated for by an assured political majority in the council. Since then inter-ethnic conflicts are common resulting often in ethnic cleansing, persistent violence and deprivation of the non-Bodos.

Bodoland Territorial Region Accord 2020

Without trying to ameliorate the cause of the 'others' in the region, the BJP government on January 27, 2020 signed the third Bodo Accord with the Government of Assam and four factions of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) (NDFB-Progressive (NDFB-P), NDFB-RanjanDaimary (NDFB-RD), NDFB-DhirendraBoro (NDFB-DB) and NDFB-Saoraigwra (NDFB-S, formerly NDFB-Songbijit))and ABSU. It was a tripartite accord aimed at quelling the Bodo homeland demand and curb violence in the area. The Accord is not just for the enlargement of autonomy for the Bodos but is also a settlement agreement with the NDFB wherein it has been decided that the Government of Assam will withdraw the criminal cases register red against members of the NDFB factions for non-heinous crimes. All NDFB factions will have to abjure the path of violence, surrender their weapons, and disband their armed organizations within one month of signing of the agreement. The existing Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD) shall be renamed as 'Bodoland Territorial Region'. The Accord states that a Commission will be set up to examine the feasibility of inclusion of villages contiguous to BTAD and having majority tribal population. The same Commission will also examine the feasibility of exclusion of villages contiguous to BTAD which are contiguous to the non-Sixth Schedule areas and having majority non-tribal population.The Accord explicitlyprovides for certain economic, political and cultural benefits to the Bodo groups. For the Bodos settled outside Bodoland Territorial Region, the State government will set up a Bodo-Kachari Welfare Council for focused development of the Bodo villages there. The Bodo-Kacharis living in KarbiAnglong and Dima Hasao districts will be included in the ST (Hills) in a time bound manner. While the Accord provides for protection and promotion of interests of the Bodos in and out of Assam, it is strangely silent on the protection of non Bodos who comprise the majority.

Logic of Recognition of the Bodos vis-à-vis the 'Ethnic Others'

All the three Accords are pointer to the strange silence of New Delhi as well as the State government towards the cause of the ethnic 'others' in the region. This is quite contradictory to Gorkhaland where the State Government has tried to assuage the fears of the non Gorkhas by giving them some degree of autonomy in the form of specific Development Boards. This non recognition of non-Bodo interests in Bodoland by both the State and the central government has given rise to a politics of 'ethnic outbidding' at the local level. While the Bodos claim that the area under their jurisdiction is their homeland, the other communities such as the Santhals, the Bengali Muslims and some small groups of (non-Bodo) ST people living within the same jurisdiction also claim it as their homeland. If being an ethnic majority in a particular region is a marker for the right to self-rule, the demographic numbers do not give the Bodos any claim vis-a-vis the combined others to justify their superior hegemonic status in the region (Table3).The complexities are also reflected in the electoral politics in the BTA region.

The Electoral Mandate: The Rising Voices of 'Others'

The BTR region constitutes a very complicated demography. As already stated above, Bodos comprise 30percent of the total population and the rest non Bodos. Only getting the Bodo votes isn't enough for any party.Elections have been held since 2005. The Bodo People's Front (BPF), the main representative of the Bodo interests, has been controlling the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) since the first election held in 2005 though the seat share has been gradually eroding with every election. While elections were held for 40 seats, the BPF won 33 in 2005, 20 in 2015 and 17 in 2020. The BPF is an offshoot of the earlier Bodo Liberation Tigers, a ruthless militant outfit which was a party to the Memorandum signed in 2003. While the BPF won without any opposition in the first BTAD elections in 2005 and even in the 2010 BTAD elections, however, in 2015 their dominance stands seriously contended by both non-Bodo and independent candidates who reflect the rising power of a strong non-Bodo opposition, a reality which the BPF can hardly afford to ignore. Interestingly, the electoral fray is no longer confined to the Bodo political parties or non-Bodo organizations but national parties like BJP and Congress are equally competing to represent themselves in the Territorial Council making the elections a multi cornered one. The BJP which had won just one seat in 2015 has won 9 seats in 2020 elections and that too not with the BJP-BPF alliance which was the partnership in the 2016 Assam legislative elections. BPF has been a partner in the NEDA (North east Democratic Alliance) and the BJP-BPF combine has fought the 2016 Assembly elections jointly. However, relationship between the two soured after BTC was put under Governor's rule from April onwards owing to the dissolution of the BTC on completion of its 5 year tenure. Elections could not be held in May due to the ongoing pandemic. In the December 2020 elections, BPF won17 seats, UPPl-12 seats,BJP -9 seats, INC-1, GSP-1.The new party UPPL formed by erstwhile ABSU leader PromodBoro who was also a signatory to the 2020 Accord depicts a new level of match making in the BTC area. The independent Lok

Sabha MP Naba Kumar Sarania's , newly formed party GSP has won 1 seat. UPPL earlier called PCDR which was a conglomeration of various political and non-political parties was formed in 2015 to counter the rising dominance of BPF. The new party was formed uniting two regional political parties, the Bodoland Peoples' Progressive Front (BPPF) and United Democratic People's Front (UDPF), apart from the PCDR members. With the floating of the new party, both the BPPF and UDPF were dissolved unanimously. The UPPR represents the tribal interest in the region.

The dominance of the BPF has been questioned in the Lok Sabha elections when it could not win the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha seat. In both 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the singleLok Sabha seat, Kokrajhar which also happens to be the headquarters of BTC was taken by an independent candidate, Naba Kumar Sarania who was backed by non-Bodo organizations. The BPF despite having its hold and dominance in the BTAD Council located in Kokrajhar (consists of 31% Bodos) itself could not win the Lok Sabha constituency which could have been so vital for the representation of Bodo cause in the Parliament. Whatever might be the reason it is not without serious implications. It can hardly be denied that the failure of the BTC government to protect the legitimate rights and interests of the non-Bodos resulted in the proliferation of non-Bodo organizations and their increasing representation both at the Council as well as parliamentary level. In 2019 Lok Sabha elections Sarania supported by non-Bodo organizations was voted back to power again winning a comfortable majority. This may be attributed to the fratricidal clashes over leadership issues within the BPF which is highly self-defeating to the cause of the Bodos as well as between BPF and NDFB. On the contrary, the non-Bodo candidate won the elections because of the strong alliance between the diverse non-Bodo communities and their desperation to make a united front to wrest control over their legitimate share of land and resources. The non -Bodo tribal interests have not been protected by either the state or Central Government.

The BTC elections portrays a politics of ethnic outbidding, fratricidal clashes with each Bodo political party trying to outbid the other, eventually bifurcating and endangering of representation of Bodo interest. The rise of the BJP and non-Bodo organizations like Jangustio Aikyo Mancha, People's Co-ordination for Democratic Rights, A-Bodo Surakha Samiti UPPL, GSP, has been phenomenal and its alliance with the non Bodo organizations

Conclusion

The present study has attempted to critically examine the politics of recognition within the model of ethno-federal self-rule through two case studies, Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal and Bodoland movement in Assam, the strategies of the state and the Centre as well as the responses of the 'other' ethnic communities in the region.

It should be noted that the Bodoland and Gorkhaland movements are similar in

terms of the competitive dominance of one group vis-a vis others. The level of autonomy enjoyed by the Bodos are much higher than the Gorkhas. While in the case of Gorkhaland, the state government was aligned with the ethnic others like the Lepchas and Bhutias by giving them recognition through the creation of Development Boards, in the case of non-Bodos, the Assam government has not taken any initiative to protect their interests leading to the rise of numerous non-Bodo organizations to wrest their dure share of rights and recognition.Secondly, the BJP has consistently maintained the need to recognise Gorkhaland in all its election manifestos but has turned a blind eye when elections were over. However, the response of the Central government towards the Bodo homeland demand has been more accommodative irrespective of the party in power at the Centre. In 1993 when the first Bodo accord was signed, the Congress was in power and in 2003 when the second Bodo Accord was signed, the NDA led BJP was in power and when the 2020 Accord was signed the BJP is in power. However, in a bid to rein in militancy in upper plains of Assam, the central government has signed the Accords with the militant outfits, the BLT in 2003 and NDFB in 2020, completely undermining the demographic complexities of the region and the fact that conceding recognition to the dominant community may led to social exclusion of the others. Thus, the Accords instead of bringingin peace into the region has flared up violence.Thirdly, in terms of extent of autonomy enjoyed by GTA in Darjeeling and BTC in Bodoland, the latter enjoys more autonomy in terms of legislative, executive and financial powers. Despite the differences, one stark fact remains common and that is the exclusion of the non-Gorkhas and non-Bodos who despite comprising 70 percent of the population are excluded from power sharing and shared rule.

In the two case studies, self-rule becomes a prescription for socio-political exclusion of communities and hinders the very principle of shared rule applicable in federative arrangements.Clearly, territory and ethnicity do not necessarily coincide and conceding territorial recognition to an ethnic community in a multi-layered complex reality brings in more complexities and ethnic strife. The West Bengal case truly represents a situation where territorial claims to an ethnic identity clearly is not a panaceabut has brought the Lepchas, Bhutias,Tamangs in the line of confrontation with the Gorkhas. Though the TMC led state government has tried to cash in the differences by creating Development Boards for the ethnic communities but they are mostly non-functional and lack autonomy, being wholly dependent on the State Government for funds. Similarly, the BTC has witnessed the rise of non-Bodo organizations who have fielded an independent candidate in the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency who won the 2019 elections. It is interesting to note that in Kokrajhar, the BTC headquarters, an independent candidate wins election backed by 70 % of the non Bodos. Thus, the West Bengal and Assam experience reflects that conceding of territorial autonomy to an ethnic group as a part of the 'politics of recognition' leads to ethnic exclusion of 'others' leading to the rise of new micro ethnic conflicts where every ethnic community attempt to outbid another ethnic group to gain territorial recognition. The entire debate

of majority-minority claims needs to be reformulated given the fact that the model which worked in the 60s and 70s may not work today in a post globalised world where development concerns are intertwined with identity needs. What calls is reformulation of power sharing institutions and introducing multicultural governance where different ethnic groups have a right to represent themselves and here the state has to go beyond the politics of appeasing one at the cost of several others.

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