

Rural Decentralisation amid the Political Instability A Case Study of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration Region of West Bengal

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Abstract:

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment acts, established Panchayat Raj Institutions in India through which it formed the panchayats and municipalities and the elected local governments under it. It devolved the local governments more powers and responsibilities. The Constitution mandates the panchayats and municipalities in the grassroot level be elected every five years and States are required to delegate tasks and responsibilities to them through legislation. However, in Darjeeling Hills since the violent Gorkhaland crises of 1982-88 and the founding of the autonomous body Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988 for the economic, social, cultural and educational advancement of the people of Darjeeling hills, the three tier Panchayat system has lost its relevance. From then onwards, the decentralisation of power in the Darjeeling hill area has been curtailed. The case of decentralisation in rural Darjeeling hills is distinct from that in other parts of the country and even within the state. People at the grassroots level no longer participate in Panchayat elections. There is a bigger loophole in the decentralisation setup in the village level of Darjeeling hills. Right now under GTA, the two tier Panchayat election is going to be conducted in the Hills. The study focuses on the nature of decentralisation in Darjeeling hills how the historical practice of decentralisation is practiced, the existing nature and will try to answer how will it shape if the two tier election is conducted in the near future.

Materials and Methods: The relevant data for the study is collected through primary and secondary sources. To know the status of the participation, awareness regarding 73rd Amendment Act among them, its implementation to provide opportunities for participation in decision, to assess the functioning of the various development schemes/programmes and its channelization; 16 Focussed Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the villagers consisting of 5-7 members for each FGDs, from 24 villages under 6 Gram Panchayat. The criteria for the selection of GPs are: Three GPs near the Block Development Office (BDO) and three GPs distantly located from the BDO. Similarly from each six GPs, four villages are selected, two villages near the GP and two villages distantly located from the GP. GPs under Gorubathan Block and Kurseong Block are taken for the sample study. Research tools such as interview schedule for ethnographic understanding of the GP staff, Block Development Officer, Politician, and Social Workers are conducted. Also I added in understanding the performance of DGHC and GTA and Development Boards, whether the bodies were successful in bringing development in

hills; measures that could have made the bodies successful; whether they participate in local planning or not? How does the administration affect their livelihood, relationship between Panchayat and GTA etc. The Secondary sources comprised of records of District Census Handbook, 73rd Amendment Act, DGHC Act, GTA Act and peer reviewed journals.

Results and Conclusion: After a period of three decade, the clamour of Panchayat elections is up-roaring in Darjeeling Hills. It started with the 2022 GTA election where major regional political party's (like B.G.P.M, Hamro Party, G.J.M.M.) pre-election campaign was Panchayat election which was mentioned in their manifesto. The majority won party which is B.G.P.M. also clearly mentioned about instituting Panchayat system in Hills. Three tier Panchayat Raj system is the constitutional right of the people which empowers the power of the rural villagers to develop its place and empower its people the way it visualised for the grassroot level democracy. But in Darjeeling Hills, instead of three tier Panchayat election, the state government has ordered of two tier Panchayat election with Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat while the power and function of Zilla Parishad is to be operated through GTA. So in this scenario, the question arises as to what extent the Panchayat system will be successful in functioning under the authority of GTA. During the FGD with the local villagers, it is found that GTA has already been accused of corruption on many grounds. Of the respondents involved in the study, about 95% asserted that GTA will not be successful in addressing the problem of the villagers and the full-fledged Panchayat election is their need. The studied population stated that GTA is by no means free from corruption. The politically elite people, contractors, leaders have their leverage upon every developmental schemes that channelizes through GTA. The Autonomous bodies which is lacking autonomy on the ground, both DGHC and GTA has already failed to fulfil the aspiration of the people and has put numerous vulnerabilities to rural Darjeeling Hills. Furthermore, GTA is more of a politicised body rather than administrative one. It is extremely volatile as is a result of political crises which is frequent in Darjeeling Hills. One cannot deny the fact that the population of Darjeeling Hills still holds deep empathy for their identity issue and is not satisfied with the present administration. GTA is neither a Constitutional body having full authority over its jurisdiction, and is yet to make full use of its powers and authorities under the GTA Act. In such situation, the policy planners should rethink and should institutionalise the Panchayat election according to the 73rd Amendment Act to further strengthen decentralization and democracy at the grass root level for the efficient functioning.

Key Words: 73rd Amendment Act, Rural, Decentralisation, grass root, democracy, development, livelihood

Introduction

According to M.K. Gandhi, "Indian independence must begin at the bottom. Every village should be a republic or a Panchayat having full powers. The greater the power of Panchayats, the better it is for the grassroot level people" (Ramya, 2014). "Rural development and the well-being of villagers largely lie under the purview of Panchayats. It is the decentralisation of power that allocates autonomy to the Panchayat Raj Institutions to function efficiently and independently for the development of a village" (Krishnamohan, 2015). "Decentralisation has been defined by variety of ways. The allocation of power and responsibilities from the top to lower levels of government is one of the most generic definitions" (Kumari, 2016). "One of the most important motives of decentralisation is to increase public

engagement/ participation in local matters, including operations carried out by state government as well as central government. Decentralisation, development and democracy all three have a triangular relationship” (Chaudhury, 2013). The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment acts, established Panchayat Raj Institutions in India through which it formed the panchayats and municipalities and the elected local governments under it. It devolved the local governments more powers and responsibilities. The Constitution mandates the panchayats and municipalities in the grassroot level be elected every five years and States are required to delegate tasks and responsibilities to them through legislation. (SWAMY, 1992) However, in Darjeeling Hills since the violent Gorkhaland crises of 1982-88 and the founding of the autonomous body Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988 for the economic, social, cultural and educational advancement of the people of Darjeeling hills, the three tier Panchayat system has lost its relevance while the Urban Local Bodies (municipalities) are functioning in the urban areas. The decentralisation of power in the rural areas of Darjeeling hill area has been curtailed. People at the grassroots level no longer participate in Panchayat elections. There is a bigger loophole in the decentralisation setup in the village level of Darjeeling hills. Right now under GTA, the two tier Panchayat election is going to be conducted in the Hills. The study focuses on the nature of decentralisation in Darjeeling hills how the historical practice shaped the rural decentralisation and development, the existing nature and will try to answer how it will shape if the two tier election is conducted in the near future.

Data Collection and Methodology

In the light of objectives of the study, a systematic research design is drawn. The relevant data for the study is collected through primary and secondary sources. To know the status of the participation, awareness regarding 73rd Amendment Act among them, its implementation to provide opportunities for participation in decision, to assess the functioning of the various development schemes/programmes and its channelization; 16 Focussed Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the villagers consisting of 5-7 members for each FGDs, from 24 villages under 6 Gram Panchayat. The criteria for the selection of GPs are: Three GPs near the Block Development Office (BDO) and three GPs distantly located from the BDO. Similarly from each six GPs, four villages are selected, two villages near the GP and two villages distantly located from the GP. GPs under Gorubathan Block and Kurseong Block are taken for the sample study. Research tools such as interview schedule for ethnographic understanding of the GP staff, Block Development Officer, Politician, and Social Workers are conducted. Also I added in understanding the performance of DGHC and GTA and Development Boards, whether the bodies were successful in bringing development in hills; measures that could have made the bodies successful; whether they participate in local planning or not? How does the administration affect their livelihood, relationship between Panchayat and GTA etc.

The Secondary sources comprised of records of District Census Handbook, 73rd Amendment Act, DGHC Act, GTA Act and peer reviewed journals.

History of Rural Decentralisation in Darjeeling Hills

“Darjeeling is derived initially from the Tibetan terms, ‘dorje’ which means thunderbolt, and ‘ling’ means land i.e. the Land of Thunderbolt. The District of Darjeeling lies in the northernmost part of the State of West Bengal. Geographically, the northern portion of the district is at the height of 300 to 12000 feet from the mean sea level, is the part of Greater Himalayas and in the south lies the Tarai region

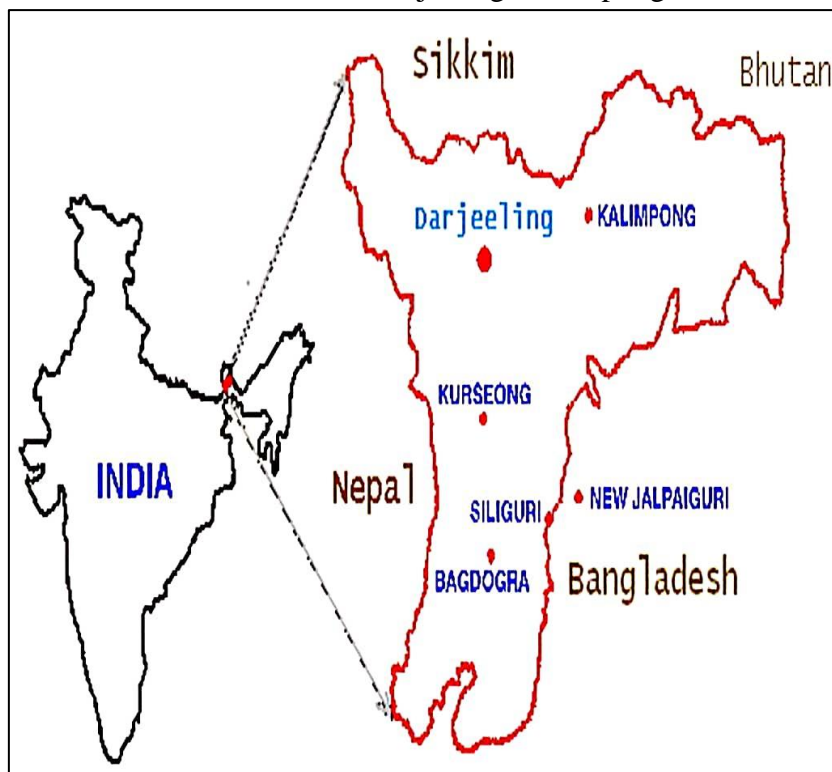
stretching along the base of hills. Historically, the hilly areas under Darjeeling district which is the Kalimpong, Kurseong and Darjeeling Sadar subdivision were inhabited by the ethnic Gorkha communities, Lepchas and Bhutias”. (District Census Handbook, 2011)

Darjeeling has been traditionally kept secluded from the purview of Central administration before the independence as Darjeeling’s climatic condition was more similar to that of British homeland hence it was developed as a summer capital during British rule. “Darjeeling was brought within the purview of the ‘Scheduled District Act’ in 1874, which exempted the district from the application of general laws in rest of the country. Darjeeling’s status as a scheduled district was maintained for quite long period of time. Darjeeling was placed under the ‘Backward Tract’ by the Indian government in 1919. Darjeeling under Backward Tract was a subject to exceptional that is simple and elastic form of administrative and judicial practice. The district was once again proclaimed as a ‘Partially Excluded Area’ under the Bengal Province. As a result, the district fell out of British India’s general administration from the time it was acquired from Sikkim till the time of independence” (Khawas, 2011). The district was kept isolated mostly due to its geographical, linguistic and ethnic differences with the plain people.

The district has no longer unique privileges under the Indian Constitution after independence. However, following decades of internal crises in the hills of Darjeeling district the hills was granted a special status in the year 1988 by the West Bengal government and since then the district began to be governed through two development bodies i.e the District Collectorate and Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). In the year 2007 DGHC was replaced by another Autonomous council, the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA).

MAP OF STUDY AREA

(The Three Hill Subdivisions: Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong)

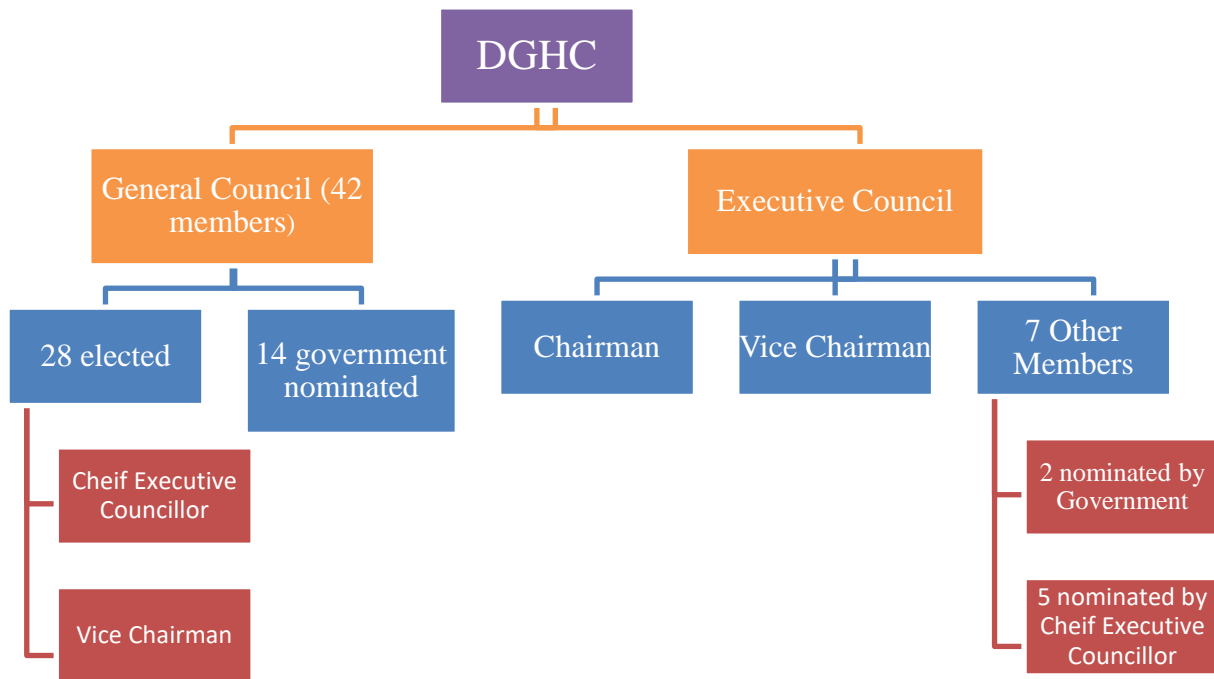


Map not to Scale

Decentralisation Governance and DGHC

In the 1980s, administration of Darjeeling hills was interrupted by a violent tension and movement demanding a separate state. The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was established as a result of this agreement for the socio- economic, cultural advancement, and educational progress of the hill people. It restructured the decentralisation in Darjeeling hills. Since the inception of the DGHC, the two institutions, i.e District Administration and DGHC have been functioning side by side. The administration of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council covered the 3 hill Sub Divisions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and the 13 mouzas of Siliguri Subdivision. (Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Act, 1988)

STRUCTURE



DGHC was in charge of Darjeeling Hills for three consecutive terms, from the year 1988- 2005 without any election. Although the DGHC Act mentions about rigid decentralised power, it is found that the act was hardly implemented on the ground. The DGHC Act, Clause 31 and 32 states about two tier Panchayat election to be supervised by DGHC as Zilla Parishad. In terms of policy planning and development, the Panchayat institutions would report to the General Council.

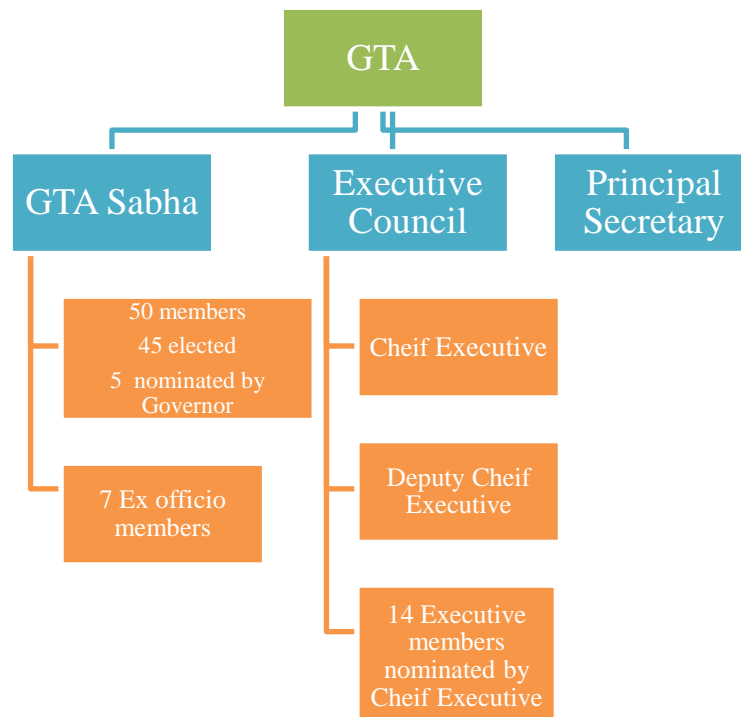
In 1995 and 2000, instead of two tier, one-tier election was held without Panchayat Samiti or Zilla Parishad. In 2005, another election was scheduled to be place, however just before the election, Ghising, the regional political leader of the GNLf and Chairman of the DGHC, wanted additional autonomy in the Darjeeling hills, including a tribal status and inclusion in the 6th Schedule. As a result, the central government, the state administration, and Ghising reached a tripartite agreement to place Darjeeling in the 6th schedule of the Constitution. In March 2005, Ghising was appointed as the Darjeeling Hill’s sole

administrator. The 112 Panchayat's term was set to end in June 2005. The situation postponed the election, and no election was held thereafter, and the body was disbanded without a new election. The one-tier Panchayat system also failed until 2005, and no elections have been held since then. Through the interaction with the common people of the age group between 50- 60 years it is known that the DGHC feared that if the election is held in block and district level institutions, political leaders were concerned about power overlapping. In contrast, interviewing to the former DGHC Councillor and party workers, they argued that, it was clearly mentioned in the Article 243M of the Indian Constitution that, “nothing relating to the Panchayat shall apply to the DGHC area of Darjeeling, West Bengal”. So, taking glance to those data, it becomes evident that nothing was made crystal clear to the public on any matter however the politician continued to work in favour of their own interest. The majority of regional party in the DGHC, led by Subash Ghising, always had been critical of the Panchayat institutions. The DGHC has always aspired to take control of the Panchayat administration.

Decentralised Governance and GTA

The Gorkhaland Territorial administration was established in Darjeeling Hills as an outcome of a political movement in which the regional political party Gorkha Janamukti Morcha, led by Bimal Gurung- a political leader of the party, demanded autonomy and self-rule. GTA administrative authority covers Darjeeling District’s three hill Sub Divisions i.e. Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong as well as the 18 mouzas of Siliguri Sub Division. The State Government or Central Government allocates the fund and the fund requirement would be met on the yearly basis. (The Gorkhaland Territorial Administration Act, 2011)

STRUCTURE



GTA with an autonomous body but has no legislative power and formed with an objective of implementing self-rule through administrative arrangement. While the former DGHC was replaced by GTA with greater autonomy and power as is mentioned in the GTA Act, 2012 but in the ground it has

failed to make use of its advantage. Among the respondents about 90% sees GTA as a powerhouse of corruption for the political elites. The development benefits and schemes which channelizes through GTA have failed to reach the local people and have caused isolation in the rural.

While in the GTA Act 2011, Clause 9-Section 1 (c,d,e), Clause 35 and 36 clearly states about three tier Panchayat system in Darjeeling Hills, after more than a decade of GTA administration, the Panchayat system is not prevalent in Hills, subverting the people of the region from becoming part of the developmental as well as the political processes.

Development Boards: More of a Political Weapon than Development

Amidst political and ethnic crisis in Darjeeling Hills, the State Gov. brought forward what is known to be Development Boards (DBs) in the Hills and is said to establish for the cultural and economic development of the each ethnic groups in Darjeeling Hills. All the members of Development Boards are nominated by the state government and also can be removed by the government. All the DBs are formed on the communal lines and is shown in the following table 1.

Table 1 Showing Development Boards Existing in Darjeeling Hills

No. of Dev. Boards	Name	Year of Formation
1	Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board	2013
2	Tamang Development and Cultural Board	2014
3	Bhutia Development Board	2015
4	Sherpa Cultural Board	2015
5	Mangar Development Board	2015
6	Khambu Rai Development Board	2016
7	Limbu Development Board	2016
8	Kami Development and Cultural Board	2016
9	Sarki Development Board	2016
10	Damai Development and Cultural Board	2016
11	Bhujel Cultural and Development Board	2016
12	Newar Cultural and Development Board	2016
13	Gurung Cultural and Development Board	2017
14	Khas Cultural and Development Board	2017

The formation of Development Board started with Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board formed in 2013 for the ethnic Lepchas followed by Tamang Development Board and Bhutia Development Board in 2014 and 2015 to the ethnic Tamang and Bhutias respectively for the aforesaid reason. It was followed

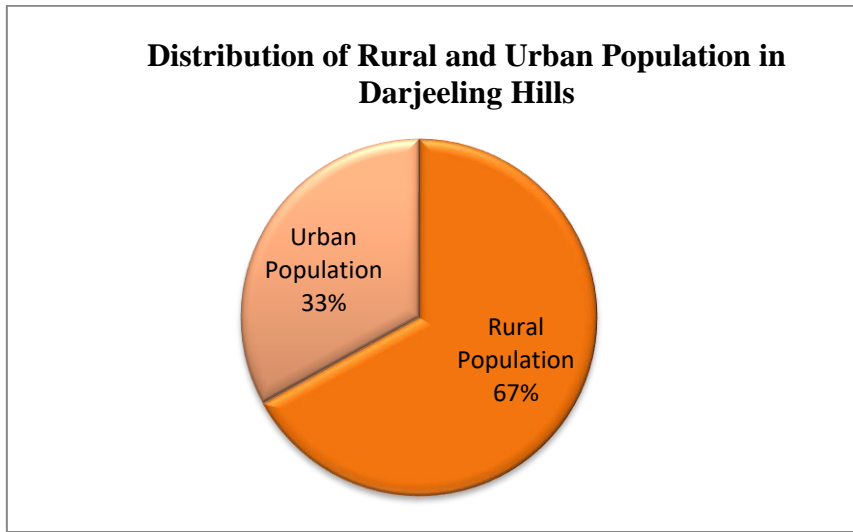
by other DBs for all other ethnic communities. As rural development was paralysed with many loopholes in Darjeeling hills, the development boards brought a sort of hope in for the people as the funds were flowing in the development boards. Soon after, almost every ethnic Gorkhas started to demand Development Boards on ethnic and communal lines. The Development Boards were formed when the political situation was volatile in Darjeeling Hills with frequent crises demanding separation from Bengal. The State government took full advantage of this situation side-lining the bigger political aspiration of Gorkhas i.e. Gorkhaland and provided with Dev. Boards for almost every ethnic communities. While the development boards are said to be for the economic and cultural development of the ethnic communities of Darjeeling Hills, with about a decade after the formation of development board, it is found that not a single villager of any ethnic community is satisfied with the functioning of Development Boards. During the FGDs, the villagers critiqued the development boards on many grounds. The development boards had taken up projects such as building houses, homestays, pony roads, community halls. Among this, the major project, the boards hold is to construct homes of the people who are economically weaker at Rs 2 lakh. However, it is found that the development boards are not efficient enough to fulfil its objectives. Most of the beneficiaries did not get the full amount for the construction of the houses. It is found that the beneficiaries would get Rs. 25000- Rs. 35000 in cash and the building materials in a small quantity and the building of house remains incomplete. It is found that there exist a disparity and favouritism in the selection of beneficiaries. In many cases, those people are provided with the housing scheme who already have a fine storied buildings, while many economically backward villagers are yet to get the benefit. The villagers also complain about the corruption in the Development boards. The fund flows through the state government but neither the account detailing of funds are made public nor have the state government audit the account. It is only the Board members who are benefitted with the Development Boards. The present status of DBs can be traced with; internal conflicts among the members, lack of communication with the grassroot level population and powerhouse of corruption. So, with such negligence it becomes crystal clear that the state government created the DBs on communal lines in order to fulfil the political interest and to divide the fragile Gorkha community during the frequent on going agitation.

Decentralised Governance and Panchayat Election

The state of West Bengal passed the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, which established a three-tiered Panchayat structure. The Gram Panchayats in the grassroot level would function in the village with direct contact with the people, as mandated by the Indian Constitution's 73rd amendment act. Gram Panchayats in the villages facilitated democratic decentralisation. Panchayat Samiti at the block level and Zilla Parishad at the district level are the levels above Gram Panchayats. It is found from the formal and informal discussion with the rural people and the FGD of the studied population that only about 15% educated villagers are aware about 73rd Amendment Act else most do not have understanding of the Act.

According to Census of India, 2011, rural population in Darjeeling constitute about 68% to that of urban population of 32%. Even though most of the population resides in the rural, the population of rural Darjeeling Hills are yet to form the part of mainstream developmental process. The system of institution the region holds is in a fragile state that the grassroot level population are kept secluded from their basic

rights and lack empowerment. The frequent ethnic insurgencies for the demand of autonomy and self-rule from the rest of the state further challenge the situation.



The one tier village level Panchayat institution exists in the Hills but without the elected representatives. There are 112 numbers of Gram Panchayats over 8 blocks in Darjeeling Hills as shown in table 1. The institutions remain without Panchayat election. The village Panchayat is headed by Executive Assistant. Therefore it was the gram panchayat officials who are a government staff, more-or-less controlled the decision-making process after 2008 till date because of the absence of Pradhans and members formed through Gram Panchayat election. The Gram Panchayat institutions mainly function related to the document related queries of the villagers. The document related to Old Age Pensions, Widow Pensions and Physically Disabled People Pension, Rupashree etc.

No developmental works in the rural areas of Darjeeling Hills function through Gram Panchayat. The developmental works are channelized through the GTA or the Block Developmental Office (BDO).

Table2

Blockwise no. of Gram Panchayat in Darjeeling Hills excluding Siliguri Sub division		
Sl. No.	Name of the Block	Total no. of Gram Panchayats
1	Darjeeling Pulbazar	23
2	Jurbunglow- Sukhiapokhari	16
3	Rangli- Rangloit	11
4	Kurseong	14
5	Mirik	6
6	Kalimpong- I	18
7	Kalimpong- II	13
8	Gorubathan	11
Total		112

Source: Compiled through District Census Handbook, 2011

Due to the lack of representatives, most of the problems of the villagers are not being addressed. The Gram Panchayat constitutes with about 3- 4 staff members and is in charge of about 10- 15 villages within the Gram Panchayat arena. The villages are located up-to a distance of about 17- 18 kilometres in a hilly terrain which becomes difficult for the villagers to visit the GP office. The respondents from the distanced villages added that it is very much difficult to visit the GP office for their document related works. They added that it takes all a day to visit and return from the GP office as they have to visit by walking. The villagers added that if they go by vehicle it cost about Rs. 250 to Rs. 300 fare so, they opt to go by walking. The greater difficulty the villagers faces is that they have to visit the GP office several times for their work to be done. Some of the day, the staffs are not present in the office, and some day they refuse to work on their documents and calls the other day. As they are government officials and not the elected members, the villagers cannot question them on any problem. In contrast, the Panchayat staffs argued that there is an acute shortage of staffs in the GP and have been several years that there is no any appointment. One EA and Secretary has to look after 2-3 GPs and has to work overtime for several hours. The staff also added that as they being the government workers have their own limitations and problems in working on different papers of the villagers.

As there is no fund in Panchayat, developmental work in the village are not done by the Panchayat. The villagers are provided with certain governmental schemes under Block Development Office. The role of BDO in the areas of planning and development is also considerably reduced. It is known from the FGD that MGNREGA was the only reliable Scheme which provides welfare for the villagers which was looked upon by the village Panchayat but funded through Block Development Office. MGNREGA scheme provided basic assets and employment to the villagers. Approximately about 90 days a year, employment was provided to the villagers through MGNREGA. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) are some of the schemes which are functioning in the village through the BDO. The Panchayat only monitors those schemes. All the government schemes functions under BDO in the village level. The condition of houses of some villagers is in very bad condition that rainwater seeps through their roof but those problems are not addressed and the villagers have nowhere to be vocal for their grievances. So, in absence of the elected bodies the problems of the villagers are left unaddressed and the villages has remained backward in the Hills.

Gram Sabha was established in 1994 under the West Bengal Panchayat Amendment Act to advise Gram Panchayats in terms of developmental activities and to encourage people at the grassroot level to actively participate in the execution of the schemes as well as further developmental activities. It is defined under the Article 243 (b) of the Constitution of India. Gram Sabha meetings must be convened two to four times a year. Pradhans and members of Gram Panchayats would convene the meetings of the Gram Sabha. Moreover in rural Darjeeling Hills, the population are not aware of various development programmes and schemes granted by the government. The Gram Sansad meetings are held twice a year and Gram Sabha once in a year. Every villager above 18 years is eligible in the meeting. However, it is found that the villagers do not actively participate in the meetings because they are unaware about such rights and developmental schemes. Only the MGNREGS scheme was discussed in the Gram Sabha meeting as it was supervised by the Panchayat staff so the Supervisor of the MGNREGS work and only few villagers attend the Sansad meeting. So even if they participated in such meetings they only heard the decisions and participated the Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha meetings to raise hands and voices in

favour of decisions, but did not say anything which counteract the decision and tangle the decision making process. During the FGD, the villagers added about the corruption going on in the MGNREGS work, there were funds for Individual Benefit Schemes under MGNREGS for the construction of pig farm, cowshed, goatshed etc. which were not provided for the villagers. Moreover, the villagers added that the full amount of construction materials are not provided and used during the work. So, in the MGNREGS work also there were many corruptions going on. The villagers also complaints that they have not got their payment for the MGNREGS work of 2021 and since then, the only employment and asset creation scheme is also stopped by the Centre to all over the state of West Bengal in charge of corruption due to which rural Darjeeling's one and only employment schemes has stopped. It is found that people are forced to go to the city areas in search of employment as the rural is left without any employment opportunities. So, the Panchayat election is utmost necessary for the rural population in Darjeeling Hills.

Present Scenario and Concluding Remarks

After a period of three decade, the clamour of Panchayat elections is up-roaring in Darjeeling Hills. It started with the 2022 GTA election where major regional political party's (like B.G.P.M, Hamro Party, G.J.M.M.) pre-election campaign was Panchayat election which was mentioned in their manifesto. The majority won party which is B.G.P.M. also clearly mentioned about instituting Panchayat system in Hills. Three tier Panchayat Raj system is the constitutional right of the people which empowers the power of the rural villagers to develop its place and empower its people the way it visualised for the grassroot level democracy. But in Darjeeling Hills, instead of three tier Panchayat election, the state government has ordered of two tier Panchayat election with Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat while the power and function of Zilla Parishad is to be operated through GTA. So in this scenario, the question arises as to what extent the Panchayat system will be successful in functioning under the authority of GTA. During the FGD with the local villagers, it is found that GTA has already been accused of corruption on many grounds. Of the respondents involved in the study, about 95% asserted that GTA will not be successful in addressing the problem of the villagers and the full-fledged Panchayat election is their need. The studied population stated that GTA is by no means free from corruption. The politically elite people, contractors, leaders have their leverage upon every developmental schemes that channelizes through GTA. The Autonomous bodies which is lacking autonomy on the ground, both DGHC and GTA has already failed to fulfil the aspiration of the people and has put numerous vulnerabilities to rural Darjeeling Hills. Furthermore, GTA is more of a politicised body rather than administrative one. It is extremely volatile as is a result of political crises which is frequent in Darjeeling Hills. One cannot deny the fact that the population of Darjeeling Hills still holds deep empathy for their identity issue and is not satisfied with the present administration. GTA is neither a Constitutional body having full authority over its jurisdiction, and is yet to make full use of its powers and authorities under the GTA Act. In such situation, the policy planners should rethink and should institutionalise the Panchayat election according to the 73rd Amendment Act to further strengthen decentralization and democracy at the grass root level for the efficient functioning.

Declaration

This research work is an outcome of M.A. Dissertation; Sikkim University, Department of Geography of the author Bhumika Rai, under the supervision of Dr Abdul Hannan, Assistant Professor, Sikkim University, Department of Geography.

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