**Does Identity Politics Subsume Local Governance!**

**A Study of the Darjeeling Hills**

**I Introduction:**

It is widely accepted that the idea of local governance in India, self-rule, in other words, got further prominence through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts in 1992. While the 73rd amendment deals with the rural local bodies (Panchayati Raj Institutions – PRIs), the 74th amendment relates to urban local bodies (Municipalities). Interestingly, this study seeks to understand a self-rule struggle, despite being in vogue for more than a century, still stumbles to create the constitutionally guaranteed decentralised governance. It is said that the Darjeeling hills had been struggling for self-rule since 1907 when for the first time an ‘administrative set-up’ was demanded (Samanta, 2000; Sarkar, 2013b; Subba, 1992). Thereafter, this struggle, in varied forms continued till contemporary times. In its 116 years of struggle, it has witnessed the establishment of decentralised bodies like the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988, Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in 2012, and finally, the formation of Development Boards since 2013*.* Even, a proposal to bestow the Darjeeling hills with 6th Schedule status – the provision for tribal areas, also came into prominence. Erstwhile DGHC and the present GTA, in a way, were established to socio-culturally and economically empower the areas under their respective jurisdictions. On the other, the recent Development Boards, which do not have any restricted territorial delimitation, are formed within the GTA to socio-culturally empower the individual ethnic communities under the Gorkha agglomeration.

**II Importance of this Study:**

Available literature concerning the ethnopolitics in the Darjeeling hills has analysed the self-rule struggle mainly through the lenses of *identity* and *development.* If we go deeper, it appears, academia has dealt with the identity issue mainly through the nation and nationality question, whereas the development angle has been elaborated broadly through economic attributes. Although, the existing literature has also simultaneously sought to establish the idea that identity preservation and socio-economic development are intricately juxtaposed with governmentality of the state (Middleton, 2016; Samanta, 2000; Sarkar, 2013b; Subba, 1992), it falls short in synthesising the identity and development issue with decentralised governance. But if we analyse the governmentality question only through the lenses of the state of West Bengal and the Union of India, it may provide us a narrow understanding of the self-rule aspirations in the Darjeeling hills. Hence, there is an immediate need to academically engage with issues of governance through the efficacies of local governing structures in the Darjeeling hills. This issue becomes topical when we notice that the politico-administrative set-ups (DGHC and GTA), which were regarded as a move towards establishing decentralised governance, hardly delivered the expectations of the hill-people. Moreover, when there was a proposal by the Union of India to provide 6th Schedule status to Darjeeling hills, the subsequent leadership negated this provision citing their non-tribal characteristics. Interestingly though, in the present scenario, there is an all-round consciousness and aspiration for identifying as tribal and get the tribal status. Thereby, an apprehension may arise – does the identity movement in the Darjeeling hills camouflage decentralised structure? This study seeks to study such a proposition.

Moreover, the constitutionally empowered (73rd Amendment) institution of decentralised government still eludes the Darjeeling hills. Originally, in the DGHC Act, 1988, a two-tier PRI system was enshrined, where DGHC would act as the third-tier of the system (Verghese, 2004), in tune with the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973. Similarly, the GTA Act, 2011 also enshrines the establishment of a two-tier Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI), within the framework of the 73rd Amendment Act 1992, where GTA would act as the third-tier of governance. Surprisingly, these provisions remained on paper and are yet to be implemented. To add to this further, Darjeeling district also practices a dual structure of local governance. On one hand, while the rural areas are yet to get any constitutional local body, the urban areas are bestowed with municipalities. Further, there is a dichotomy in the practice of a decentralised system between the plain and the hill areas of the Darjeeling district. While the plains of the Darjeeling district are bestowed with a three-tier PRI system and municipal bodies, the rural areas of Darjeeling hills are yet to come under PRI. This study, thereby, seeks to deal with these issues with the following research questions:

**III Research Questions:**

1. What hinders the establishment of PRI in the rural areas of Darjeeling hills?
2. Whether the rural areas of Darjeeling hills did not prefer to come under the PRI structure?
3. Does the rural areas in Darjeeling hills practice traditional local governance?
4. Is it the state that does not wish to establish local governance?
5. Why are the local governance structures non-existent in the rural areas vis-à-vis the urban areas of Darjeeling hills?
6. Why do Darjeeling hills practice dual structure of local governance?
7. Which agency provides basic amenities in the rural areas in the absence of local governing structures?
8. Does identity politics subsume the essence of decentralised governance in Darjeeling hills?
9. Does the identity-based politico-administrative structures – GTA and Development Boards – treated as the institutions for decentralised governance?
10. Why has the demand for Gorkhaland fell short in addressing the issue of decentralized rural governance?

**IV Methodology:**

This study collected data through primary field-work applying the methods of focused group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, and institutional ethnography through semi-structured and non-structured questionnaires. Field-works were carried out in select villages of Darjeeling hills. The field survey provided us the very essence of decentralised governance (or the lack of it), and also certain insights into how do the hill-people negotiate with the lack of a PRI system in the rural areas. In terms of history, polity, ethnic composition, land-use and altitude; hill areas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts have commonalities as well as marked distinctions. Both the districts have three administrative blocks in the hills. Jorebunglow-Sukhiapokhri, Kurseong and Mirik are the three blocks in the hills of Darjeeling district whereas Kalimpong district has Kalimpong I, Kalimpong II and Gorubathan blocks. Nepalis, Lepchas and Bhutias are the major ethnic communities in the hills of both the districts. However, within the Nepali ethnic constellation, there are several other communities like Tamang, Rai, Gurung, Limbu, Sunwar, Yolmo, etc. While Nepalis are in majority in the hill areas of both the districts, proportionally, the shares of Lepchas are higher in Kalimpong compared to Darjeeling. Relevantly, although Bhutias are less in number in both the districts, socio-politically they hold considerable influence. Thus, in order to be representative, the sample selection for the study was not only from the villages of both the districts but also included respondents representing all the major ethnic groups in the Darjeeling hills.

Additionally, in-depth interviews with the government officials, elected representatives of the municipalities, representatives from the political organisations as well as the local intelligentsia further enriched the data collection of this study. Moreover, as Development Boards came into existence as an afterthought to the DGHC and GTA model of governance, institutional ethnography with select Development Boards and GTA further provided us with a varied perspective. This study selected three villages each from the administrative blocks depending upon and distance from the nearest administrative headquarters for data collection. Two remote-villages and another one from the nearby areas of the administrative blocks comprised the data collection sites for this study. In total, twenty four (24) Gram Panchayats (GP) were selected for data collection (Table 1). Respondents from these villages were chosen across the ethnicities, mainly through snowballing techniques.

Moreover, once we initiated the study in the Darjeeling hills, it was observed that the traditional governance system through the Samaj is very old and is embedded in the history of this region. As a result, in order to have a nuanced understanding of the historical situatedness as well as continuity, a case study was undertaken in Lachung area in North Sikkim. The traditional structure of *Dzumsa* in Sikkim and the *Samaj* in Darjeeling hills bear resemblance in more than one way and in the later tries to minimize the gap that exists due to the absence of elected rural governance mechanism in the Darjeeling hills.

**V What hinders the establishment of PRI in the rural areas of Darjeeling hills!**

One of the main reasons why the inhabitants of Darjeeling hills are bemused and dissatisfied is because of its appalling rural governance system. The existence of a fully operational three-tier PRI in the plains of the district only serves to exacerbate these sentiments and may be held accountable for the continued feeling of separation between the hill people and the other regions of Bengal. The dual structure of government and governance that exists in the Siliguri subdivision in the plains, as well as the regions governed by Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) and the former Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), continues to be the primary cause for this obfuscating scenario.

The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council was established in 1988 after a movement led by Subhas Ghisingh. The district was split into two, the plains and the hills of Darjeeling, leading to the creation of this autonomous apparatus, financially and legislatively dependent on the state and its administration. In contrast to the lowlands, which only included the Siliguri subdivision, the hills under the control of DGHC included the subdivisions of Kurseong, Darjeeling, and Kalimpong. The wider administrative structure in the Darjeeling district's rural regions underwent a significant change concurrent with the division of the Darjeeling district. The Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad, served as the highest tier of rural government, while the Panchayat Samitis served as the intermediate level and the Gram Panchayats served as the lowest level of rural government. On the other hand, the hills were only left with panchayat bodies at two levels, at the intermediary and the grassroots, while the DGHC replaced the Zilla parishad, as specified in the DGHC Act, 1988. One of the main points of contention in the politics associated with this geography in the Darjeeling hills is a marked two-pronged dichotomy in the rural governance system within the Darjeeling district i.e., between the plains and the hills as well as between the rural and the urban areas within the hills.

This research study has attempted to further probe into this looming binary and its ramifications in terms of rural development, through a documentation of the perceptions of respondents on these aspects. But before delving into that, it is important to briefly understand the related factors associated with such a scenario.

**VI The DGHC Act and the substitution of Zilla Parishad with Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council**

Though the DGHC Act of 1988 has been long lost and forgotten in the collective memory of the hill dwellers in Darjeeling, its implications still ring large. They, in all likelihood, consider this as a legislative ploy that gave rise to the duality in the structures of rural governance in the hills. The issue of the cessation of the Zilla Parishad in the hills of Darjeeling, and its substitution by the General Council body of DGHC has been first raised in the section 31, subsection 1 of the DGHC Act of 1988. The particular section and the sub-section has laid down and emphasized upon a symbiotic relation which the General Council is supposed to share with the Panchayat Samitis and the Gram Panchayats, altogether forming the administrative polity of DGHC. It further mentions that the Panchayats and the blocks at the intermediary level are also supposed to execute the “*direction of General Council on matters of policy or planning for development*.”

The DGHC was given the responsibilities of a Zilla Parishad under sections 153, 154, 155,156,157,158,159,160,161, and 162 by clause 2 of section 31. The newly created autonomous administrative entity is given the duty and authority to ensure social justice and economic development in the rural areas of the Darjeeling Hills under the first two subsections of Section 153 of the West Bengal State Panchayat Act (WBSPA) 1973. To that end, the General Council is required to create a development plan for the members’ five-year terms in office as well as, a yearly plan for the execution of community development-related goals. The issues concerning livelihoods, water supply infrastructures, health, sanitation, and education are subject-heads included under this category. One may point in this regard that the DGHC Act legitimised a large number of jurisdictions in terms of control and management, including those related to physical infrastructures, to the newly formed council by bestowing the roles and responsibilities of the Zilla Parishad as specified in the sections 155 to 161 under the WBSPA Act to the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. This ultimately gave rise to constitutional ambiguities, and rural areas in Darjeeling hills remained outside the purview of three-tier local self-government/rule in 1992, when the entire nation witnessed a momentous occasion when local self-government/rule as recognised through the 73rd amendment Act.

**VII The constitutional ambivalence and the question of duality**

A common observation from the fieldwork in Darjeeling hills suggests that the presence of a three tier PRI in the plains of Darjeeling but a provision of only two-tier PRI in the areas under Gorkhaland Territorial Administration seems puzzling. One of the pertinent responses in this regard, which associates the DGHC Act and 73rd constitutional amendment, came from a respondent in Mirik, who mentioned:

*The DGHC Act of 1988 mentioned that there will be no Zilla Parishad in the parts of Darjeeling. The hill council would be a substitute for the Zilla Parishad in the hill areas, and as a result, the three tier PRI elections are not in existence in the hill areas of Darjeeling district*.

The respondent further mentioned that though he hasn't read the bill personally but *“a constitutional amendment is required before the panchayat elections at the district level may take place”*. It's important to mention that the constitutional provision, which the respondent is referring to, is article 243M of the Part IX of the Indian Constitution. The part 3, and sub clause (a) of the article states that, *“panchayats at the district level shall not apply to the hill areas of the district of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal for which the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists under any law for the time being in force.”*

Almost every individual who are versed with the trajectorial progress of the political administrative milieu in the hills of the region, holds this constitutional provision and a lack of perseverance on the part of the leaders in the hills as accountable for the continuation of ambivalence in the PRI structures in the hills. One of the responses by Mr. Ajay Edwards, the leader of the Humro Party, highlights this situation very neatly,

*The Act of GTA also fell into the same trap as the Act of DGHC. When Bimal Gurung and the Savasads started their tenure in Lal Kothi they fell into the same trap like the elected councillors of GNLF (Gorkha National Liberation Front). One of the reasons behind this is also the fact that they don't want to let go off their power and decentralise, thus, they didn't utter anything about the panchayat during five years when they came to power. So, 22 years have elapsed, from the time we were witness to the three tier PRI system doing wonders in rest of India, it failed to even kick start in the hills of Darjeeling. For a three tier to be implemented over here there needs to be a constitutional amendment. Moreover, in 1992 the GNLF said that we don't want the panchayat system over here, so Darjeeling was left outside the ambit of a three tier PRI through Article 243 M of the Indian Constitution. So, to implement a three tier panchayat system over here is not an easy task, because it requires a two third majority to amend the constitution and remove Article 243M so that panchayat election at the three levels can be held at the Darjeeling hills*.

There also prevails a possibility of power clash, in case a three-tier panchayat is institutionalised, between the *Sabhdhadhipati* of Zilla Parishad and the GTA chief, as NB Khawas, the spokesperson of All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) in Darjeeling hills notes. One interesting point which he also mentioned:

*The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, knowingly or unknowingly, signed the GTA Accord which contains the provisions of a three tier PRI...although the GTA Act of 2011, mentions that the GTA body will replace the third tier, or, the top tier, of the panchayat, it potentially carries the risk of being declared infructuous, if challenged in the court of law. This is because neither the GTA nor the erstwhile DGHC are/were constitutional bodies. They are/were legal bodies that came into existence not by Acts of Parliament…while, on the other, Zilla Parishad, and the other two panchayat bodies are constitutionally recognised…. this increases the chances of collision of interests and power*.

As Mr. Khawas further puts it

*The powers of a Zilla Parishad's sabhadhipati is much more than the powers of a GTA chairperson. As a matter of fact, the panchayat pradhans have more power than the GTA chief. This is all because the panchayat bodies at the grassroots and district level are all made by consent of the upper house and the lower house of the Parliament*.

Now, if viewed through the lens of history, Darjeeling hills has always been a space where the rule of exception prevails. As a social anthropologist and junior research fellow from a renowned Institute noted,

*If we go back to the history since the British times, what we can think of is that, this place has been ruled by exception, there has always been a rule by exception. Exception in the sense that what laws were applicable elsewhere, were not the same here. In some sense, I think the Indian state has continued that in its various forms, so I think the question, why there is a two-tier system in the hills boils down to the question of political will from both sides, the political leaders from this place as well as the political leaders from the state of West Bengal. Also, I think, for the large portion of time, all actors like people from here and the people from the WB government, their main aim has been how do you get statehood or how do you negotiate against statehood right? As a result of which various questions like rural governance and urban development, I think have been pushed to the back, no one has seriously engaged with these questions, like what is going to happen to these issues? Or how one is going to deal with these issues?*

*So, I think as a result of combination of these two factors, one is, the history of the rule of exception and the other being a lack of concern about the issues have led to the institutionalisation of the bleak two tier PRI system not being challenged accordingly. But I think recently...if you look at the recent past, over the last one year or so there has been various people who have been talking about bringing the three tier system back because last time in September or October, or October or November, when the chief minister had come to Kurseong, she had a meeting in the town hall. That time people did raise this question of bringing back the three tier panchayat raj system, so that is there. But like I said, it’s a consequence also of not thinking about these things seriously, as you are only thinking about one overarching goal or how to stop that goal. So that is my view*.

As a whole, there prevails an opinion amongst the masses that a lack of a properly functioning rural governance infrastructure is one of the major reasons legitimising the frequent agitations witnessed in the hills. Since a new GTA body was constituted after a period of five years, there was this unanimous decision amongst the masses that the newly formed body in joint consultation with the state government should look for an option of running two parallel systems. The GTA on one hand, and three tier panchayats on the other. Now that is how only a properly functioning three tier PRI may come to be in the hills. If a three tier PRI sees the light of the day, Suraj Gurung, a scholar of Nepali literature and an ex-contest for the state legislative assembly noted,

*The number of agitations which we see happening from time to time won’t be happening any more. If there is proper development and infrastructural amenities and proper opportunities for the people, then the extent of agitation will be stopped to a huge extent*.

The constitutional ambivalence, which legitimises the duality in terms of rural governance in the hills and plains of Darjeeling district, has also overflown to the gradually increasing disjuncture in terms of development of amenities and infrastructures in the hills. The absence of elected panchayat officials in the grassroots further aggravates the problem. Though there prevails a provision for a two-tier system in the hills of Darjeeling, no elections have been conducted since the year 2000. As an ex-MLA from the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha mentioned,

*Since there are no elected representatives, I think the main complaint when governance is concerned for the rural people, you know we don’t have access to our own development, infrastructural development or any form of development, why? Because it’s always done through the BDO, done through the DM’s office that is one. That is about the governance part*.

This contrariness sometimes become overtly conspicuous, as observed by our Field Investigators (FIs) during their fieldwork in the Darjeeling hills.

**VIII A Sudden Halt in the Panchayat Elections in the Hills**

Within the political discourse in the hills of Darjeeling, it is a popular notion that the authoritarian stance of GNLF’s founder president, Subhash Ghisingh, inter alias, had an instrumental role to play in the prevailing mess of the political system in the rural areas. Firstly, in amending the constitution in 1992 for the purpose of enabling only two-tier rural polls. An amendment of article 243M within part IX of the Indian constitution legitimised the exceptional institutionalisation of only a two-tier panchayat system, comprising the gram panchayats and panchayat samitis in the rural areas under DGHC. However, in spite of having a provision of two tiers, the election at panchayat samiti never saw the light of the day. Panchayat elections were limited to the gram panchayat level only. Secondly, after the panchayat’s terms expired in the year 2005, it is believed that Ghisingh was reluctant to allow the subsequent panchayat polls.

Mr. Vivek Chettri, a columnist for the English daily, *The Telegraph*, claims:

*Rural governance and development in the hills of Darjeeling is in a state of chaos. He attributes this mess to the absence of public representation through the panchayat system, which was supposed to allow the people in the hills to exercise their political rights. While the constitutional amendment in 1993 mandated a two-tier panchayat structure in the hills, elections were held for only one-tier in 2000*.

Mr. Chettri thereby speculates that this was because the people in power, including Mr. Subhash Ghisingh, then heading the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, did not want the powers and functions of the Panchayat Samiti to clash with those of the councillors. Consequently, only a one-tier panchayat was allowed to prevail, despite the constitutional provisions for a two-tier panchayat. After the gram panchayat elections were held in 2005, subsequent rounds of election were not organised. This was due to the sudden shift in the political discourse towards bargaining autonomy through the rubrics of the 6th schedule. This change in political momentum led to the discontinuation of panchayat elections. Even after the formation of the GTA, the elected councillors, led by Mr. Bimal Gurung, did not show any interest in holding panchayat elections. This was probably due to the fear that the elected officials in the panchayat system would overpower the councillors, as had been the case with their predecessors from the Gorkha National Liberation Front. As a result, panchayat elections have not been taking place since 2005.

The potential of conflict between the panchayat bodies and the autonomous council still prevails in the present day. This possibility of conflict has also been evident during our fieldwork. It was considered to be the primal reason which has generated a colossal amount of paranoia amongst the local leaders of Darjeeling. The cognizance of this was also shared by Mr. Bimal Rai. As he noted, “*in Darjeeling hills, presently there are two parallel forms of government that prevail over the theatrics of governance and development. But in between them, it is the individuals in rural areas, who are merely pushed into the shadows*”. He further emphasized, “*it is the rights of the villagers which have vanished in the squabble of these two bodies.*” In this context of the clash of power, Mr. Chettri, the journalist added:

*See a clash of power becomes a huge problem at times. It may seem nothing from the outside. In GTA we have the principal secretary and in the Darjeeling district we have the DM, the clash of power between them is huge. In certain areas, the DM has more power than this particular guy*.

Within this group of respondents, responsibility for the absence of a panchayat had to be divided between the state and others. Mr. Pramoskar Blone, the representative of the Hamro Party, opined:

*In addition to the regular strikes, protests, and the neglect of local leaders, the state government refused to conduct panchayat elections. The government did not take any action because the funds for Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat had been diverted to the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). If the panchayat system operates effectively, the government fears overlap and contradiction that might crop up as an extra burden for the GTA. As a result, the government has refrained from holding elections in order to reduce such an anticipated burden*.

Now, an important question which looms large, in the absence of a well institutionalised PRI infrastructure in the hills, how is governance actualised? Is there any other body that fits into the gap? It is precisely at this juncture, the traditional governance body of Samaj, and their everyday operationalisation in the hills became important to note during our fieldwork.

**IX Government through Samaj**

If we closely look at the scenarios in the Northeast India, one observes that various communities/societies had been functioning rooted in their traditional governance mechanisms and structures. A few prominent traditional governance structures are the presence of *Dzumsa* in North Sikkim and *Samaj* in the Darjeeling hills. The mention of *Dzumsa* becomes important here as Sikkim happens to be the parent state of Darjeeling hills. Despite being part of the same geography, there is marked similarities in the governance structures, be it traditional or legal, of both the regions. North Sikkim inherited the legally empowered *Dzumsa* system to maintain its sanctity even in its post-merger status in India, whereas the rest of Sikkim follows the two-tier PRI. Surprisingly, the Darjeeling hills, in the absence of a constitutionally empowered PRI structure, has been sustaining with the existence of *Samaj* – a body that does not even have any legal functions and functionaries.

The following narration from one of the respondents, which he had heard it from his ancestors, in the *Dzumsa* area could yield it better:

*…that time Chogyal was linked with Tibet and Bhutan. In Lachung, there were only 13 houses initially with Dzumsa in existence. This thing was not known to Chogyal and the Dzumsa system was naturally existing. When Chogyal visited Lachung at that time he found Dzumsa system very interesting and asked them to keep this system. Lachung, Lachen and Chungthang are together known as* ***‘Uthusum’****. It is said that these three places should stay united, an agreement was also signed. The people belonging to these three regions were allowed to stay and move in any of these regions; according to the agreement. After many years, when population increased, then a monastery was constructed in Chungthang where people from Lachung and Lachen also visit. During that time Uthusum was strong. Afterwards, Chungthang went towards Panchayati Raj, but in Lachen and Lachung there is no Panchayati Raj. Mani Shankar Aiyar, the then Cabinet Minister, also came here once and iterated that the system running in Lachen and Lachung should not be replaced.*

*Samaj* can be village specific as well as community specific and it varies across villages. In some villages, there are only an overarching village *Samaj* and, in few others, there are multiple *Samaj* based on multiple communities. The extent and location of a *Samaj*'s role in the hills may vary. According to most *Samaj* members who were interviewed, the *Samaj*'s role in their respective villages was limited to addressing minor issues. However, there were cases where the *Samaj* got involved in areas of governance that required proper supervision. One may categorize the activities of the *Samaj* based on their scope. The activities range from providing financial aid to members in a specific village to recognizing and approving land transactions in non-*khasmahal* areas. Other activities include assisting the residents of a particular village in accessing certain benefits such as old age and widow pensions, as well as collecting funds from individual villagers for repairing infrastructure like roads. One respondent clarified:

*Samaj is Samaj only, Samaj do not involve in any other developmental works or bodies. Yes, sometimes we all gather and work for the benefit of the village but that is not a developmental work, it is a community help among the villagers.*

It was of concern whether or not the *Samaj* participates in any development-related activities and if so, in what role! While some interviewees stated that the *Samaj* does not work towards rural development, others elaborated on the role of the *Samaj* in terms of village-level development.

One interviewee from the Gorubathan block expressed that the *Samaj* system is a beneficial structure/arrangement. In the event of an unfortunate incident occurring in the village, the *Samaj* takes responsibility for providing relief and consolation. When asked about the working of *Samaj*, another interviewee from the same block explained that one member from each *Samaj* is obligated to provide assistance to those in need, with events such as weddings and funerals being typical examples. Each *Samaj* has a contingency fund, where money is collected monthly during meetings, ranging from 50 to 100 rupees. The characteristics of a *Samaj* were also highlighted, such as the fact that it was established to assist each other in times of need, with each *Samaj* having its own resources that can be utilized by all members. There is an expectation that each member will help one another and be helped in turn, with no government involvement as the *Samaj* is a voluntary group found in almost every village. The following narration from the field explains it further,

*During any event in the village, the Samaj comes forward for a help. For e.g. if someone’s house is damaged, we gather and help them, to build small footpaths in the village, during funerals, in such events we gather and help each other.*

While there is unanimous response, across different blocks under the study site, how disempowered the *Samaj* is in terms of developmental works, but in some cases like redressal of disputes related to marriage, elopement, etc; *Samaj* plays significant role. One such narratives from Kothidara Village of Ghayabari I GP, under the Kurseong block, *“right now, if some disputes arise in the village we directly go to the police only because a President, Secretary of the Samaj does not have such powers that they can solve such disputes.”* Another respondent decreed, *“we try to solve it through Samaj also but if the case is a major one and cannot be solved through Samaj then we hand it over such cases to police only”.*

Relevantly, in case of any disputes related to marriage the role of *Samaj* can be sensed through the following,

*Once, a man, from our village, married to a woman, who was already married to another man, in the same village. So, in that case we did a formal gathering of the Samaj and decided that the man, who married someone else’s wife, to pay Rs. 60,000 to the women’s previous husband and then Rs, 5000 as a fine to Samaj. After that incidence, no such cases has repeated in the village.*

**X Duality of Rural Governance in between the Hills and Plains**

The duality of local governance in the hills and plains of Darjeeling is a complex issue that has arisen due to the differences in the geography and demographics of the two regions. While the plains have a well-established system of local governance with the Panchayati Raj institutions, the hills lack such a system. The hills of Darjeeling have traditionally been governed by autonomous bodies such as the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) and later, the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). These bodies have been set up to address the specific needs and aspirations of the people of the hills, who are predominantly “Gorkhas”. The lack of a uniform system of local governance has created a duality of local governance in the region, which needs to be addressed for the overall development of the area.

Mr. Edwards, while talking to one of the investigators on the spill overs of this dual mode of governance, lamented about the fact that it has been more than 22 years that the hills haven’t been able to reap the benefits of three-tier PRI. The duality in terms of discongruity in the development infrastructure, comes to the fore, as he narrated about his experience in plains of the district,

*As a kid I spent a lot of time in Bagdogra, which does not fall under the GTA. I used to roam around the Panchayat area, there were friends, and it was so backward but within this 20 plus years of Panchayat raj you can see, things there have greatly improved. Their roads are better, there is solar lighting, the water issues are resolved, and local health centers are doing really well. The kind of drastic change that I saw in the Panchayat even in a place like Siliguri which is not very far from here was indeed encouraging. But, when I come to my place, and as a politician, I went to explore the situation, our roads are in tatters. Those are things which Panchayat can do, like water, roads, lights and what not. It’s not that there is no Panchayat work happening in Darjeeling, but it’s been done through officials like your BDO, or Panchayat secretary, and it is not what India dreamt about when they thought about the three-tier, it was not that they will make the officials powerful, and people mere recipients of schemes.*

There are problems which also arise in terms of financial allowances. As one of the panchayat secretaries pointed out that in the absence of elected officials in a panchayat and a fully functioning three tier body, funds from centre do not come to the account of the panchayat. Presently as many secretaries complained, panchayats in the plains through different schemes receive an amount that may go up to 1 crore per annum. Also, a colossal lacuna prevails in terms of implementation, as a senior bureaucrat pointed out,

*A three-tier panchayat system is definitely a lot better. I am saying this since I have worked in other districts before coming to Darjeeling. There we witness a lot of delegation of works, and a variety of works are taken up by each tier. I have worked in some districts where the Zilla Parishad is supposed to take up big landmark schemes. The panchayat Samitis used to take up schemes of a moderate amount and the other small livelihood related schemes were taken by the Gram Panchayat office.*

Thus, a properly institutionalised division of labour at the three levels of panchayat makes way for a properly conceived development plan, which is very much missing in the areas falling under Gorkha Territorial Administration. Although, the above-mentioned responses highlight the problems arising due to the absence of a three tier PRI in the hills of Darjeeling, in actual terms, there are host of other related problems as well. As an ex-MLA from the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha elaborated:

*Since there are no elected representatives, I think the main complaint regarding governance for the rural people…we don’t have access to our own development, infrastructural development or any form of development… Why? Because it’s always done through the BDO, or the DM’s office…that is why the people’s will is seldom reflected in governance…it is actually the whims of the administrators*.

**XI Rural Residents, Permanent Bureaucrats, and a Debilitating PRI in the Darjeeling Hills**

In one of the focus group discussions in the Gorubathan Block, a respondent mentioned that it is the prevalence of political chaos in Darjeeling that is to be blamed for the lack of panchayat elections in the hills. Generally, people in the rural areas are of the opinion that the local leaders are ignorant about the panchayat system or its absence in the hills. Also, there was a widely shared belief amongst many respondents that the GTA embezzles a lot of funds. The participants in another FGD strictly held on to the belief that when the funds and schemes turn up for the development of infrastructure in the rural areas, a majority of the sum is pocketed by the unaccountable leaders. One of the investigators in this project was provided with an example,

*They say that a road has been sanctioned from Phaparkheti to Sherpatar but if you see right now they have not put here a single pole. But who will speak up for us in these matters, there is none. We therefore are the victims of such a process. This is due to high level politics and corruption; everything has been destroyed in the rural areas. This is why Panchayat election is necessary for us.*

The overall political terrain in Darjeeling hills has witnesses a lot of flux. One may say that it has always been so, although in the making. The Darjeeling hills first saw a panchayat election in the year 2000, and thereafter, the process got discontinued. This is mainly because the chairman, Mr. Subhash Ghisingh wanted to bring in the hills of Darjeeling under sixth schedule. But when it failed, there was again a demand of separate state, now from a new leader, Bimal Gurung. The hills saw this new leader, to emerge in 2007, who had used the absence of a three tier PRI as one of his political ploys to garner political support. But lamentably, when the new autonomous administrative body, the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration was formed, they turned a blind eye to all the promises which they had made regarding the panchayat election in the hills. The rural residents were therefore again pushed into darkness. Thus, one of the respondents stated:

*Since 2001 we have been only dancing to the fake promises of our local leaders. It’s been nothing but an emotional abuse. Yes, we want a panchayat election, but we are already growing old. The new generation won’t even get to know about its benefits. Sometimes all these demands feel like mere waste of energy.*

The attitude of the people towards the state is ambivalent. While everyone in the hills holds the local leaders accountable, the attitude towards the state is ambiguous. One group of respondents, although lesser in number, like to believe that the State government wants the election to be conducted. One amongst them mentioned:

*In my view, the CM we have today, I think, we will not get such CM because in the time of Jyoti Basu, to see the face of CM, it was like seeing the face of God but today CM comes here and she says that you all need to conduct the Panchayat election through voting, and then only the constitutional process will start here. But because of the greediness of the political leaders, they are not interested in the Panchayat election*.

But on the contrary, there were another group of respondents, who believed that, Bengal government from the very beginning has done injustice to them. We, the people of Darjeeling hills, are treated like orphans. This is the reason, why election is not conducted in the hills. In case of financial allocations and disbursements, negligence becomes apparent, the unaccountable local leaders make the situation further worse. In this regard, one of the officials at panchayat pointed that there is a provision for three panchayat elections in the GTA, but neither the TMC government nor the local leaders are willing to take it up. Though meagre in scale, he pointed out the various benefits which the voters may avail in the presence of a properly functioning gram panchayat. For instance, Old Age pensions, disability pensions, widow pensions. Also, there are provisions for projects which are bigger in scale, like building of houses for the landless. But as he vehemently noted, the funds for all these are kept by the state only, and channelized for developmental activities or purposes outside the hills. On this matter, another panchayat employee pointed out:

*I think the state government does not want to give development funds to the hills that is why it has withheld the elections in the hills. Even the GTA doesn’t want to have panchayat elections because if we have Panchayats then they have to give the share of money to the Panchayat, so they also recommend the state not to conduct elections in the hills, because if we have elected members in the Panchayat, this Savasads in the GTA will become toothless. Since there is no elected body in the Panchayat, the Panchayat has no power right now*.

In this research, we have used the issue of panchayat elections as a periscopic tool, and try to broaden our gaze into the politics of Darjeeling hills. The absence of an elected body in the panchayat helps us to understand the perception of power relation that prevails between the Government of West Bengal and local political organizations in the hills. It provides an avenue to delve into how the rural residents are victims to a negotiation of power between entities clinging onto an ontology of autonomy totally disjuncture from one another. A snippet of an interview from an individual belonging to a tea garden estate in Mirik puts this issue very neatly. As he believes,

*After the 1986-88 Gorkha Movement in the hills, the power of the reigning political party - Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), became unchallenged. In order to end the GNLF's hegemony and quell the aspirations for a breakaway state in the hills, the state government opted to bring in more territories under constitutional rule by placing them under the jurisdiction of panchayat. In an effort to weaken their hold on the hills, other territories—including the tea gardens—'areas that were not regarded as being a part of Indian constitutions' were brought under their control. This measure assured that the Panchayat Raj would open the doors for the other political parties so that the state government could use it to assert its authority and domination in the area. It was a move to give the state administration a platform to actively participate in Darjeeling hill politics so that Gorkhaland’s desire would never become a reality as it did in 1986–88. Whatever the cause, this action insured that we, the residents of the tea garden areas, would be controlled by the Indian constitution, which had never been so before 2001. We received right to vote. Benefits following inclusion under the Panchayat System were minimal to non-existent, but the inclusion did put a stop to our struggle for existence, which is a significant victory for us. But unfortunately, in spite of coming under the jurisdiction of panchayat, we don’t have anyone to represent us now. Our local leader acknowledges our plight, but they are the ones who are solely responsible.*

This response was further substantiated by another resident of the tea garden area who mentioned that the GTA is solely responsible for not letting the elections happen in the rural areas. Because, as he thinks,

*If election in the village level happens and if we have Pradhans to work for us, I do not think we will be needing GTA. I think they [implying the local political leaders] have figured that as well, thus, they do not let the panchayat election happen*.

Now the snippets from the interviews above alludes to a situation where a conflict of intent prevails in between the state and the local political organization. But on the other hand, our investigators also came across interviewees who perceives the absence of elected bodies in the panchayats, as instances of co-optation, and co-production towards the aspirations of autonomy. But interestingly the ontology of autonomy of the local political organizations stands very different over here. In a way it shifts from the understanding of autonomy which highlights an aspiration towards self-rule, and slowly turns towards an understanding of autonomy related to an idea of authority; an idea of total jurisprudence. Such instances of co-optation become much comprehensible through the following response,

*The state wants that whatever the dominant political party wants, and only that should prevail and the state do not want to interfere in this matter. The ruling party do not want the election to be conducted so the state government isn’t allowing it to happen. There might be a mutual talk between the state and the ruling party that the schemes and benefits will be channelized through the ruling party only, otherwise if the state gives pressure and says that the Panchayat election should be conducted according to the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, the election will be conducted but the state is also not doing this*.

The absence of elected officials in the panchayat becomes much more conspicuous, as the elections in the urban municipalities takes place regularly. What becomes more striking is the way development and smooth governance has unfolded in the urban areas, where as there is a looming stagnancy in the rural areas, in terms of development of infrastructures. An elected body in the panchayat was deemed to be of utmost importance by almost all the respondents who were interviewed for this research. As they noted, due to an absence of an elected body some of the development works are paralysed. The benefits which they rightfully should receive, have not been granted to them. A colossal amount of envy could also be noted amongst them, as they saw their friends and relatives staying in areas under municipality getting access to basic infrastructural amenities. As a president from a village *Samaj* narrated:

*In municipalities people are receiving benefits but in Panchayat GP areas people are not receiving any benefits. For instance, there is a problem of drinking water supply in our whole area (both municipal and GP area). But, in municipality area these days, people are getting the supply of drinking water under Amrit Jal Yojna, while we don’t have any such facilities. (This village is adjoined with the municipal area, a single divide these two areas.) The facilities in municipalities and GPs should be equal because given an option, we people elect our leaders similarly there should not be unequal treatment in terms of facilities.*

**XII Does Identity Politics Subsume the Essence of Decentralised Governance in Darjeeling Hills!**

The politics of Darjeeling is heavily influenced by the interplay of governance and identity, which have gained enormous significance over time. The issue of autonomy is closely related with such a situation. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the complexities of autonomy and its relation to governance and identity**.**

The concept of autonomy in the political context gets legitimized for communities when they have a legislative and self-governing body. Autonomy is understood in two ways - the legal version of autonomy as "reason" and the aspirational desire of a group to be self-governed. Interestingly, scholars have noted that the efficacy of autonomy has historically been appropriated by the legal version, neglecting the popular aspirations of people. In the case of the Gorkhaland movement, the state government has been meticulous enough in changing the movement's rhetoric whenever it gained sufficient momentum. As a result, when popular aspirations for full autonomy reached their peak in the 1980s and later in 2000s, both Ghisingh and Gurung were co-opted by the state's version of the rational legal-jurisprudential form of autonomy, leading to the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in 1988 and the Gorkha Territorial Administration in 2011.

Interestingly, the theatrics of co-optation in between the reason or the legal-jurisprudential version of autonomy and the aspiration of autonomy still prevails in the hills of Darjeeling. But it is not merely limited to the state anymore. The staggering absence of a properly institutionalised panchayat raj institution in the hills of Darjeeling becomes the perfect example in this regard. The absence of a properly functioning panchayat in the hills emanates a feeling of an absence of a local sense of autonomy amongst the residents of the rural areas. As one of the respondents from the Gorubathan Block noted:

*Although groups like GTA are active locally, the residents of Darjeeling and Kalimpong must realize that they will never have the same level of ties to the rural interiors [villages] that the elected panchayat members can have. The poorest of the poor would never gain from development under GTA since the members care little about the disbursement of benefits amongst the rural people… Only the houses of their Sansad members benefit from the majority of the GTA programs. The auditing of the projects is frequently flawed, and the villagers are kept in the dark about the funds that have been approved under GTA for the development, so there is no one to protest against the misdeeds of the members themselves…The poor cannot meet the Sansad members to discuss their complaints once the election has been completed. Contrarily, since we Panchayat members are required to attend the office every day for a set amount of time, it is convenient for people to get in touch with us and address their complaints. A panchayat office is the easiest for the poorest people to access any development body.*

What we witness in the case of the governance in the rural areas of Darjeeling is that the autonomous structures like the erstwhile DGHC and the present GTA have been dominantly wielding a legal jurisprudential form of autonomy over the rural areas. Now if we delve into the reasons responsible behind such behaviour, the paranoia of the councillors belonging to the political organisations Gorkha National Liberation Front and Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), during the regime of DGHC and GTA respectively, were held accountable. As an ex-MLA, noted that, when Mr. Ghisingh was at the helm of affairs, he did not want the panchayat elections to happen. Though the respondent could not substantiate the claim with proper data, he firmly believed that Mr. Ghisingh’s unjustified suspicions led him to keep the constitutionally stipulated self-governance aspiration of the rural residents at bay. It is a widely shared opinion that the councillors and chairpersons alike under the regime of DGHC and GTA were suspicious of the officials and as a result, autonomy in the rural areas of the hills of Darjeeling suffered. They feared that allowing a panchayat election in the rural areas would provide a leeway to the panchayat officials to enjoy more power in their respective areas of jurisdiction than the elected officials at the executive and general council in DGHC and GTA.

In this case what became essential to note is, how people residing in the rural areas of Darjeeling hills are relating their relative absence of autonomy within the prevailing political structure, which ironically, they achieved after a prolonged struggle in the name of aspirations for autonomy in the hills. It is paradoxical because, on one hand, there are partial actualizations in terms of the achievement of autonomy, e.g., DGHC and GTA, while, on the other, there is a conspicuous absence of self-governance in the rural areas of the hills. The important question therefore is, how the perception of rural residents regarding the contradictions prevailing in terms of the autonomy in Darjeeling hills, may further help us understand the notion of autonomy in plural terms? Also, how does the idea of a self, come to the fore through such perceptions?

The notion of the self becomes important to take into account because, within the political ambiance of the hills of Darjeeling, we can witness varied notions. We have the entire constituency of the hills, as one ‘self’; the different ethnic communities, as the “constituent self”; and different members within the ethnic communities as the “individuated self”. One of the objectives of this study has been to probe into the very idea of self which comes to the fore by delving into the perceptions of the rural residents on issues pertaining to rural governance vis-à-vis the prevalent political scenario in the region.

In dissecting the Gorkhland movement, and their affinity with it, given their positionality as rural residents of Darjeeling, one of the respondents pointed out that the primal source of the movement is an enmeshment of both identity crises and non-fulfilment of aspirations of development. As he mentioned, “…*the movement straddles across suppression of the Gorkha community in terms of development, employment and livelihood issues; and of course the issue of identity of the Gorkha communities continues to be over-arching*”. The respondent also believed there prevail a handful of people who conceived the movement as a crisis of development, and thereby *“…strongly roots for a position where they subscribe to an argument which emphasises that if the development machinery is properly institutionalised in the hills, then the spark of the movement may not transform into a blaze*…”

However, other respondent suggested that there prevails the issue of identity, which no amount of development funds can quench, the aspiration for a separate state as a marker of identity. Moreover, when it comes to identity, the respondents believe, the imperative is to establish the distinction between the Gorkha individuals of Darjeeling vis-à-vis those in Nepal. The respondents further elaborated that the question of identity is organically tagged with the question of land. As one of them noted, “…*we Gorkha individuals are residing in this land before independence. We came to be a part of India along with this land*.”

Scholars who have dealt with the movement through the lens of identity, nationalism and citizenship categorically highlights about the allegations of “immigration” labelled on the Gorkha individuals from Darjeeling; the aspiration towards Gorkhaland thereby to a major extent may be minimised and a sense of security amongst the individuals of Darjeeling can be established. From what became apparent through the interviews of the rural households, regarding the Gorkhaland movement, that though issues of development were important, they took a back seat, paving the way for the imperative of identity to become overwhelming. As one of the respondents noted:

*It is not only that a small community in Siliguri did rally saying that we are foreigners, once an ex-Prime Minister also said that, Gorkhas are foreigners… but we are genuine citizens of India who inhabit the hills prior to the time of independence…so why are the Central government and the state governments often ignore this fact. This generation is tired of the movement but again next generation will come and it may start again.*

*…History bears proof that from the past only our area was kept alienated from the rest of Bengal; the Scheduled District, Partially Excluded area and after the independence also there was a demand of our identity and then from 1986 onwards only, the nomenclature Gorkhaland, as a marker of identity became important. The people over here argue that our ancestors died here by sacrificing their lives during independence but we are still struggling for our identity…we have become strangers in our own land…the Gorkhaland movement thereafter got momentum during 1980s*.

The very fact that question of development occupies a relatively sub-ordinate position was reified by another participant, who observed:

*The intellectuals in Darjeeling have different opinions, some roots for a Union Territory, and other arrangement which breaks away from the latches of Bengal. May it be Union Territory or other, those are for the development and the development can be done through GTA as well. During the CPIM government in the 80s, they also talked about a separate regional administrative structure for Darjeeling hills with some parts of Siliguri area; all these are for the development. But Gorkhaland takes into account the identity crises, so how will the government take care of this? If the government could provide any other setup other than Gorkhaland which could secure our identity; that is a different thing. But till the problem of identity crisis is not solved, the agitation will arise again and again in the hills because in my lifetime also I have seen many such agitations, yet the aspiration did not wane, it will not vanish. So, this issue cannot be linked with development only but with identity as well…sometimes during the movement, these two are sometimes linked together.*

Though development oriented aspirations occupy a subordinate position in the rural areas in case of the Gorkhaland movement, it definitely cannot be discounted. When it comes to the task of scrutinising the movement, it primarily oriented towards the issue of identity, through the lens of development, three factors become important to take into account which are, i) lack of employment opportunities ii) the compulsion of the Bengali language in jobs iii) the epistemological dominance of the plains in terms of policy measures in the hills.

One of the pertinent complaints in this case was many of the educated youths are deprived of job opportunities in the hills. Closely associated with the problem of employment is the problem of language. A proficiency in the Bengali language in government services, is one of the vital sources leading to a push factor in the hills. An elderly individual summed up,

*There is not only one reason for the demand of Gorkhaland, development is also there, development in the sense; many of our youths are highly educated. Though they are highly educated, they could not reach up to high levels in terms of employment, there are many reasons. One of the reasons is language. Another reason is our communities are in minority compared to the rest of Bengal. So, it seems like we are in the shade of a big tree where we cannot grow. Due to the majority of the plain people, their language prevails all over the state, obviously we are affected. Sometimes they say, Bengali as a compulsory language for everyone in the state, and we feel suppressed. Our people could not understand Hindi also properly, how can Bengali be compulsory for us. It is not that Bengali is not a good language, it is better to know all the languages but we also knew that for some employment opportunities, it is written that reading and writing in Bengali is mandatory. Primary School Books are printed in Bengali in the plains only and that books used to come in the schools. These are small examples.*

Another case in this regard has been the posts in government offices held by Bengali individuals from the plains. Such an instance serves the purpose of enhancing the already existing rift in between the people of the hills and the plains. It buttresses a feeling, where people are forced to think that the state does not treat the hills in a good way.

Related complaint which further makes the demand of a separate state more obvious and licit in the consciousness of the people in the lacunae in terms of policy measures in the hills. In most of the policy measures there prevails an epistemological hegemony of the plains of Bengal. Many retorted that the laws made in Kolkata cannot be sustained in the hills, there should be separate structure for this because the economy, geography, language, everything in the hills is different from the rest of Bengal. One example becomes important to note that a beneficiary of the Tamang Development Board shared,

*The Boards give us an amount of 2 lakhs for building of houses, which is just not enough. One thing which has to be noted over here is that the transportation cost is different, the budget required to construct a house in the plain is different from what is required in our hills. Only 50% of the construction can be completed in the hills with the similar amount of fund for one house in the state.*

On a similar note, journalist Bimal Rai’s response was,

*In the plain areas there are many packages which are being implemented, and the geo-physical location of the plains play a very important role there, but hills are geographically different. For examples in the hills usually floods don’t happen, here landslides are more common, so there should be provisions of reliefs related to such incidents. What I mean to say plains and hills are very different, if you give a Dhoti that won’t work over here? If you distribute cycles, that also won’t work. Dhotis are distributed over here. Okay you are disbursing things but the geographical conditions over here are different, so pay heed to the geographical contingencies. And that is happening because things are not happening orderly and there are no proper supervisions. So, most of the village areas have been left out or left behind for this*.

The demand of a separate administrative set up thereby becomes a very plausible solution to these problems. As raised by a member of civil society organisation that under such circumstances, the issue of Gorkhaland becomes an unifying factor that carries the potential as a panacea of all ills that ails the hills. He in such cases narrates to one of the field investigators,

*See I think Gorkhaland is very pertinent to this. I don't know what others will say but according to me, it's important. For that matter not just Gorkhaland but any separate administrative set up, outside the purview of state government of West Bengal is very important for rural development. This is because, as a social worker, when we work in different social sectors in the hills that may be education, livelihood or health care, everything boils down to a separate state issue, a separate administrative issue. Since we don't have our own political setup here in the hills and we are directed by people who stays in Howrah, Nabanna and such officers who have never turned up to Darjeeling, who are only here for vacations, they don't know the problems of the people. They only see Kanchenjungha and Chowrasta, all they know is the Mall Road and Glenary’s and they have never ventured to places like the ones you have been to, they would never know the problems which people face. There is this proverb in Nepali that says the khukuri will never understand the pain of a block of wood. So you are striking a wood block by knife so only the block can understand the pain which is being inflected. So, even for that matter we know our problems, we know what we are going through, and the solution which needs to be implemented to address such problems. So if there is a separate administrative setup whereby we have our own chief ministers or people who have the power to implement legislative bills and acts and do something concrete on the ground, then problems pertaining to rural government can be tackled with.*

**XIII In lieu of Conclusion**

The above description happens to be a snippetof the entire study and is in no way a full representation and analysis of the data that we have generated from our fieldwork. The final Report, which we are initiating, intends to be much more elaborate and representative of the data generated. We intend to submit the final Report in the following lay out:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: An Insight into the existence of Duality of Governance in the Darjeeling hills

Chapter 3: The Intersections of Identity and Governance in the Darjeeling hills

Chapter 4: The Land Question in the Darjeeling Hills

Chapter 5: Conclusion

**Table 1: A compiled List of the Districts, Blocks, Gram Panchayats and Villages Surveyed**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **District** | **Block** | **GPs** | **Villages** |
| Darjeeling | Jorebunglow-Sukhia Pokhari | Ghoom Khasmahal Gram Panchayat GP | Nehru Gram (Ward no. 4)  Ghoom Bhanjang Forest village (Ward no. 5)  Bhalokhop Busty (Ward no. 6) |
| Darjeeling | Jorebunglow-Sukhia Pokhari | Sukhia-Simana GP | Simana Bazaar (Ward no.14)  Gurasey forest busty (Ward no 6) |
| Darjeeling | Jorebunglow-Sukhia Pokhari | Pokhriabong II GP | Malat (Ward no 16) |
| Darjeeling | Kurseong | Pandu GP | Pandu busty (Ward/Sansad1)  Basseri Ambotia Tea Estate (Ward/Sansad 7) |
| Darjeeling | Kurseong | Chimney Deorali GP | Upper Chaitepani (Ward/Sansad IV) |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Darjeeling | Kurseong | St. Marys-1 GP | Gairigian (Ward/Sansad no30)  Sepoydhura (Ward/Sansad12) |
| Darjeeling | Kurseong | Sittong-1 GP | Goan Lower Sittong (Ward/Sansad 5)  Sabjey (Ward/Sansad 1) |
| Darjeeling | Mirik | Soureni 1 GP | Khaptawali Gaon  Soureni Bazar  Toklang,  Tingling |
| Darjeeling | Mirik | Soureni 2 GP | Sadhugaon  Dhargaon  Bungkulung  Kataria |
| Darjeeling | Mirik | Chenga Panighaatta GP | Chenga  Panighaatta Bazar  Panighaatta Tea estate  Nepania |
| Darjeeling | Mirik | Pahelo School Dara 1  GP | 8th Mile |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | Kharka Gaon  Dhobi Khola  Nigalay Gaon |
| Kalimpong | Kalimpong Block 1 | Nimbong GP | Ghanti Dara  Nimbong  Nimbong School  Pemling |
| Kalimpong | Kalimpong Block 1 | Sindebong GP | Beech Gaon  Sindeybong |
| Kalimpong | Kalimpong Block 1 | Tashiding GP | Lepcha Gaon  Tanek |
| Kalimpong | Kalimpong Block 1 | Lower Echay GP | Kafley  Thapa Gaon  Thapa Gaon (school)  Waling Gaon  Tamang Gaon |
| Kalimpong | Kalimpong Block 2 (Pedong and Lava) | Kagey GP | Benda  Beech Gaon  Lower Lodam |
| Kalimpong | Kalimpong Block 2  (Pedong and Lava) | Pedong GP | Upper Pedong Gaon |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | Upper Nerong  Mairong Gaon  Lower Mairong |
| Kalimpong | Kalimpong Block 2 (Pedong and Lava) | Santook GP | Upper Santook  20th mile  Mirik  Paktam |
| Kalimpong | Kalimpong Block 2 (Pedong and Lava) | Sanghse GP | Bhangay  kharka  Biruk |
| Kalimpong | Kalimpong Block 2 (Pedong and Lava) | Payoung GP |   Lower Payoung  West Payoung  Upper Payoung |
| Kalimpong | Gorubathan | Dalim GP | Lepcha Gaon  Gairi Gaon  Rai Gaon  Dalim Forest Village |
| Kalimpong | Gorubathan | Gorubathan I GP | Sombary South  Mal Busty |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | Bhutabari Forest Village |
| Kalimpong | Gorubathan | Nim GP | Samabyong Tea Garden  Nim Busty  Upper Fagu Tea Garden |
| Kalimpong | Gorubathan | Gorubathan II GP | Sherpa Gaon  Phaparkheti  Ambiok Busty |

**A Snapshot of Select Beneficiary Scheme in a few Blocks**

**Jorebunglow SukhiaPokhri**

Swachya Bharat Abhiyan

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojna (JGSY) and Jawar Rozgar Yojna (JRY) (existed earlier when there was a full-fledged panchayat in the hills)

Other schemes: Old Age Pensions, Widow Pensions, Disability Pensions (these are there in every block but their existence appeared to be much lesser than the plain areas of the state)

**Mirik Block:**

MGNREGA

Prime Minister Awas Yojna (PMAY)

National Old Age Pension Scheme

Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Schemes

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sarak Yojna

Gitanjalee Housing Scheme

However, it was a common observation that the rural people are unaware of various beneficiary policies/schemes that the Government has initiated. Besides, the document and their verification related work appears to be a depressor. The villagers stated that they always faced trouble as they are located in faraway villages and visiting the GP office to complete these formalities of paper work, a difficult and daunting task.

According to Sharan Rai, in the Soureni Tea Estate, the Labour Welfare Board used to give stipends to tea workers' children to help their schooling, but now all funding for health care and education has been cut off. The workers are therefore left to fend for themselves.

**Kalimpong Block 1:**

MGNREGA

PMAY