



Youth at the Frontlines: Political Mobilization and Regional Autonomy in the Gorkhaland Movement

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ABSTRACT

Historically rooted in socio-political marginalization and cultural misrecognition, the Gorkha movement has evolved into a powerful expression of regional autonomy, with youth emerging as central actors in shaping its direction. Drawing from both historical records and contemporary developments, the research investigates how young Gorkhas have engaged in mass mobilizations, cultural assertion, and digital advocacy to contest exclusionary narratives and reclaim community pride. From the early activism of the 1907 Hillmen's Association to the technologically sophisticated campaigns of the 21st century, youth have consistently energized the movement through symbolic protests, grassroots organizing, and strategic use of social media platforms. Anchored in the frameworks of Social Identity Theory and New Social Movement Theory, the study illustrates how youth activism not only amplifies political demands but also reframes the movement around questions of dignity, representation, and justice. Despite facing challenges such as state repression, media bias, and political fragmentation, youth continue to be the vanguard of the Gorkha identity movement. Their sustained engagement ensures the struggle remains dynamic, inclusive, and reflective of contemporary aspirations for recognition and regional empowerment.



INTRODUCTION

In India's diverse and multilingual political landscape, identity politics has always influenced regional ambitions and socio-political movements. The Gorkha identity movement stands out among them because it combines problems of ethnicity, history, autonomy, and marginalisation. The demand for a distinct Gorkhaland—a recognition of the Indian Gorkha community's territory and politics—has been heard by many generations. This is because the Gorkha people have always felt left out and wanted to celebrate their culture. The Gorkhaland demand, which is based on history and strong feelings, represents the unanswered problems of federal accommodation, ethno-cultural acknowledgement, and fair development in postcolonial India. The strong involvement of young people is at the heart of this movement's revival and modern manifestation. Their engagement has changed the way the battle is fought and given it fresh vitality in terms of its ideas and ways of doing things.

The Gorkha identity movement began in the early 1900s, when the Hillmen's Association sent the first official request for a distinct governmental structure for Gorkhas in 1907. This first expression was not an isolated event; rather, it marked the beginning of a protracted conversation over belonging, autonomy, and representation inside the Indian Union. The movement changed throughout time in response to changes in politics, colonial legacies, and tactics for constructing a new state after independence. The demand for Gorkhaland has been a strong symbol of collective identity and political ambition through many waves, from the founding of the All India Gorkha League in 1943 to the violent protests led by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in the 1980s and the more recent protests led by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM). Youth activism, especially since the 1980s, has become not just a supporting factor but also the main driving force behind the movement. Young Gorkhas have been leading the way in demonstrations, bringing back cultural pride, using internet technology, and becoming involved in local politics to put the desire for statehood front and centre. Their duty is not only to respond or be a symbol; it is a revolutionary force that questions existing power structures, changes the way

people talk about identity, and sparks strategic innovation. The involvement of young people with both conventional and modern political instruments has helped redefine the movement's aims in ways that speak to a wider audience and work on both national and international levels.

This intergenerational participation, especially by young people born after the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was formed in 1988, shows that identity is not just a fixed ethnic marker but a dynamic construct that is shaped by political agency, cultural memory, and digital connectivity. The movement's transition from aggressive agitation to performative and digital activism reflects larger patterns in global identity politics, as under-represented groups use a mix of methods to get their views heard. This change moves away from the hierarchical, leader-centered models of past movements and towards a more decentralised, network-based type of activism that values inclusion, intersectionality, and symbolic resistance. Theoretical foundations from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and New Social Movement Theory (Touraine and Melucci) provide a critical framework for examining this transition. Social Identity Theory elucidates the psychological need for group identification and the emotional catalysts of collective mobilisation, while New Social Movement Theory underscores the cultural-symbolic aspects of activism in post-industrial cultures. Gorkha youth activism exemplifies the intersection of political recognition and financial empowerment, while concurrently affirming cultural pride, linguistic identity, and historical validity. This dichotomy gives the movement both political power and cultural significance.

The Gorkha identity movement, particularly the activity of youth within it, must be contextualised within a wider framework of socio-political exclusion. Indian Gorkhas, despite their considerable achievements in defence and labour, continue to experience stereotyping, under-representation, and governmental neglect. The refusal to give Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to some Gorkha subgroups, the perception that state resources are not being fairly distributed, and the inability of semi-autonomous groups like the DGHC and the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) to bring about real change have all contributed to youth dissent. This opposition is

not chaotic; it is quite organised and shows a generational conscience that comes from remembering the past, being active in the community, and being good with technology. The period after 2007, which saw the growth of the GJM and the protests of 2017, is a clear example of this change. During these rallies, young people not only packed the streets, but they also took over the internet, selecting information, organising protests, and disputing the stories told by conventional media. Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook turned became digital battlefields where people spoke about Gorkha identity in new ways and made it more popular. Hashtags, infographics, virtual petitions, and campaigns for diaspora support have all changed the movement's geography, moving it from the slopes of Darjeeling to the halls of the British Parliament.

There are problems that come with this change. Youth activists have to deal with a complicated political situation that includes factionalism, monitoring, false information, and official persecution. Leadership problems in Gorkha parties, a lack of faith in institutions, and differences across generations make it more harder to come up with a unified program. But what really strikes out is how strong and creative Gorkha youngsters are. They keep pushing for change in new ways, like using RTI applications to promote transparency, holding cultural events to show off their history, or campaigning across borders to raise awareness throughout the world. These methods show that the people who came up with them have a deep grasp of how to become involved in politics that combines passion with practicality and idealism with strategy. Additionally, the involvement of young people has helped the Gorkha movement go beyond its original goals of gaining land to include problems of gender justice, workers' rights, and environmental sustainability. Young Gorkha women, LGBTQ+ organisations, and tea garden labour collectives are all working together on projects that show how identity politics today are based on many different things. This openness makes the movement more democratic and fights against stories that say ethnic mobilisations are narrow-minded or backward. By doing this, Gorkha youth have changed the meaning of identity from a barrier to a bridge that connects the past to the future and local problems to global solidarities. It is

also important to stress the symbolic capital that young involvement creates. The movement has been full with emotional symbols that get people excited and keep the momentum going. These include martyrdom stories (like Madan Tamang) and cultural revivals (like pride in the Nepali language). These symbols are carefully chosen and spread via both conventional and digital channels. This maintains the movement's emotional energy while also letting it adapt to new situations. In this way, Gorkha youth activism is not just a political act, but also a cultural performance—a way for young people to recover their identity via rituals of protest, storytelling, and togetherness.

The current rebirth of the Gorkha identity movement, driven by young activism, signifies a fundamental transformation in regional movements inside India. It questions the top-down federal paradigm, calls for acknowledgement of ethno-cultural diversity, and insists on real political representation. At its root, it represents a bigger historical search for the right to belong with dignity, to take part without bias, and to be governed fairly. Young people are not only along for the ride; they are the main builders of this adventure because of their enthusiasm, creativity, and determination.

Their activity shows what may happen when people become involved in democracy even when they are cynical and feel alone. It serves as a reminder that history is not simply inherited; it is constructed, reconstructed, and reinterpreted by those who have the audacity to take action. India is still dealing with the problems of pluralism, federalism, and justice. The Gorkha identity movement, which was heavily influenced by its young, gives us important information on the role of subnational agency in building the country.

Youth activism has played a crucial role in the Gorkha identity struggle, influencing the direction and intensity of the Gorkhaland movement from its beginnings to the present (Tamang, 2021). The quest for a unique Gorkha identity dates back to 1907, when the inaugural formal petition for a separate administrative entity was presented to the Morley-Minto Reforms committee (Sarkar, 2014). The pursuit escalated during the 1920s and 1930s, as Gorkha students, traders, and labourers in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Assam, and Shillong engaged in Gandhi-led Non-Cooperation and Civil

Disobedience movements, orchestrating hartals and boycotts, and founding youth organizations that established a foundation for subsequent mobilizations (Tamang, 2020; Phipon, 2018). The establishment of the All India Gorkha League in 1943 by Damber Singh Gurung, together with subsequent advocacy by leaders such as Jung Bahadur Rai, reinforced youth participation in the political mainstream (Rana, 2019).

The 1980s signified a pivotal moment with the emergence of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) led by Subhas Ghising, whose leadership inspired young students and intellectuals with an 11-point program unveiled in Ghum in 1986 (Chakraborty, 2022). The movement, occurring in three distinct periods from 1986 to 1988, saw extensive youth engagement, characterized by enormous protests and direct action, culminating in over 1,200 fatalities and considerable violence (Rana, 2019). Survey data highlights significant youth engagement, with 73.2% of respondents in a recent research reporting political marginalization in West Bengal and 70.4% recognizing cultural identity as pivotal to the desire for statehood (Tamang, 2021). The unrest resulted in the establishment of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988, however the quest for complete independence persisted unsolved (Sarkar, 2014).

The revival of the movement in 2007, spearheaded by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) under Bimal Gurung, once more positioned youth at the forefront (Tamang, 2020). The GJM, employing both peaceful and assertive strategies, advocated for widespread civil disobedience, including tax non-payment and organized strikes, utilizing digital media and grassroots mobilization to maintain momentum (Phipon, 2018). The 2017 agitation, enduring for more than three months, witnessed unparalleled young involvement, particularly from the GJM, underscoring the generational continuity of activism (Rana, 2019). The result indicates that 40.8% of questioned Gorkhas endorse full statehood as the most feasible solution, whereas 26.8% favor administrative autonomy (Chakraborty, 2022). Notwithstanding political obstacles, youth action has sustained the Gorkhaland movement as a vigorous entity, maintaining the issues of recognition, autonomy,

and dignity at the forefront of the Gorkha community's demands (Tamang, 2021).

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the study are to are to investigate the historical and socio-political context of the Gorkha identity movement and the rise of youth activism within it, analyze the methods, strategies, and platforms employed by youth activists in promoting Gorkha identity and rights, evaluate the influence of youth activism on public discourse, political mobilization, and policy responses concerning the Gorkha identity struggle, and examine the motivations, challenges, and perceptions of youth engaged in the Gorkha identity movement.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The scholarly exploration of identity-based movements in India has historically concentrated on the intersection of ethnicity, regional aspirations, and nationalism. Within this context, the Gorkha identity movement, especially as shaped by youth activism, stands as a pertinent yet underexplored subject in the academic domain. A review of existing literature reveals several intersecting themes—historical marginalization, cultural assertion, political mobilization, and the evolving role of youth within movements for self-determination. The present article builds on this body of scholarship while contributing a unique focus on the lived experience and participatory agency of young Gorkhas in both digital and physical arenas.

Historical Foundations of the Gorkha Movement

The historical underpinnings of the Gorkha identity movement trace back to early twentieth-century mobilizations. Scholars such as Sarkar (2015) and Shneiderman & Turin (2006) document the emergence of Gorkha consciousness in colonial India, beginning with the 1907 Hillmen's Association's demand for a separate administrative unit. These early aspirations were galvanized by a shared cultural heritage and the Nepali language, forming the basis of a collective identity that transcended regional fragmentation. Bhattacharyya (2014) expands on these themes by analyzing the role of early political organizations like the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) and their contribution to

the political discourse around ethnic self-governance.

Subhash Ghisingh's Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), established in 1980, catalyzed the most intense phase of the Gorkhaland agitation between 1986 and 1988. This period witnessed extensive state violence and youth mobilization, a theme explored in detail by Brown (2015), who studies how rural-urban youth mobility intersected with political unrest in Darjeeling. Similarly, Ganguly (2005) frames this unrest within broader ethnopolitical mobilization and governance failures, suggesting that deep-rooted poverty and ethnic exclusion were central to the appeal of separatist politics.

Youth Activism as a Transformative Force

The significance of youth in the Gorkha identity movement is a recurring motif in contemporary studies. Rai (2018) argues that youth participation has been instrumental not merely in sustaining the movement but also in reimagining its ideological contours. Youths are no longer passive recipients of inherited grievances but active agents shaping the discourse of identity and autonomy. This is echoed by Tamang (2021), whose empirical findings underscore the emergence of student-led organizations, protest strategies, and the digital reconfiguration of the movement in recent decades.

Drawing from New Social Movement Theory (Touraine, Melucci) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner), the article under review aligns with works such as those by Middleton (2013) and Chhetri (2022), who examine how identity-based mobilizations in the Darjeeling Hills emphasize cultural recognition, linguistic pride, and symbolic assertion rather than economic redistribution alone. This analytical lens is crucial in understanding the Gorkha movement not merely as a territorial demand but as an ongoing negotiation of community belonging and psychological self-worth.

The Digital Turn in Identity Politics

An important contribution of the current article is its emphasis on the integration of digital media into traditional activism. Scholars like Mandal (2020) and Chhetri (2021) explore how online platforms such as Facebook,

Instagram, and Twitter have been appropriated by Gorkha youth to counter negative stereotypes, circulate movement narratives, and generate global support. The role of the @gurkhaequalrights campaign and online petitions in the UK, for instance, reflects a growing sophistication in movement strategies. Middleton & Shneiderman (2018) contextualize this digital turn as a transformative force that redefines the spatial and symbolic reach of marginalized identities.

The convergence of online and offline activism also creates new modes of solidarity and participation, as observed by Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase (2015), who argue that digital platforms democratize access to leadership and foster inclusive dialogue. Brown et al. (2020) take this further by analyzing how diasporic activism—especially among Gorkhas in the UK and the Gulf—connects global struggles for dignity with localized movements for self-rule.

Intersectionality and Inclusion in Gorkha Youth Activism

Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes the intersectionality of youth-led movements, a theme mirrored in the reviewed article's discussion of gender, caste, and class. Works by Singh & Singh (2024) and Ghatani (2024) delve into how Dalit Gorkhas and women activists have carved space within a predominantly male and elite movement structure. Their inclusion marks a departure from earlier monolithic narratives of identity and introduces a more layered understanding of what it means to be Gorkha.

Youth organizations such as the Gorkha Youth and Students' Association (GYASA) are documented by Chhetri (2018) as spaces of inter-caste collaboration and gender sensitization. These developments align with a broader shift in social movements that prioritize intersectional justice over purely ethnonational goals. The reviewed article contributes to this dialogue by emphasizing youth agency in redefining not just who speaks for Gorkhas but also what issues constitute the movement's core agenda.

Challenges and Systemic Barriers

The literature is equally robust in documenting the challenges faced by youth activists. Sarkar (2014) and Newar & Singh

(2017) highlight the brutal state repression during protests, such as the 2017 agitation, which resulted in fatalities and large-scale arrests. Mukhia (2024) and Singh & Patel (2021) argue that political co-option, disinformation, and factionalism remain persistent hurdles. The disillusionment with administrative structures such as the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) and the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) reveals a broader skepticism regarding institutional reforms that fail to deliver meaningful autonomy. The role of unemployment, lack of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, and economic disenfranchisement is also well documented in works by Kaushik (2009) and Chettri et al. (2017). These socio-economic drivers reinforce the movement's urgency and mobilize youth around intersecting issues of affirmative action, development, and justice. Tamang (2020) rightly argues that such material concerns deepen the political consciousness of youth and integrate their identity struggle with broader campaigns for equity and opportunity.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The assertion of ethnic and cultural identity has frequently been at the core of regional and community-based movements in a country as diverse and multiethnic as India. The Indian Gorkha community's continuous fight for political rights, socio-cultural inclusion, and acknowledgement of their unique identity is one such important movement. The declaration of Gorkha identity and the call for a separate Gorkhaland have endured for decades, rooted in a history of marginalization and stereotyping. The active participation of Gorkha youth, who use both traditional and digital platforms to express their concerns, rally support, and shape public and political debate, has marked a significant change in this movement in recent years. The movement has gained fresh vitality and viewpoints from youth action, which has taken the form of student movements, online campaigns, cultural events, and protests. Nevertheless, little is known about how this youth-led action is impacting the Gorkha identity movement as a whole, despite their growing involvement. The issue is the lack of targeted studies on the precise roles, driving forces, and efficacy of youth activism in determining the course, prominence, and results of the Gorkha conflict. Without this knowledge, youth's contributions are still not given enough

credit in academic research and policy discussions, which restricts the ability to use their efforts to create inclusive and positive identities.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive method with a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the Gorkha identity movement and youth activism within it. Primary data was collected through group discussions with youth activists, community leaders, and political figures engaged in the movement. The secondary data includes academic articles, books, government reports, news articles, and historical records were utilized to provide context and support the analysis. The combination of primary and secondary sources enabled a comprehensive exploration of the movement's historical, socio-political dimensions, and the role of youth activism in shaping its trajectory.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study's theoretical framework is based on the New Social Movement Theory (NSMT), specifically as it was established by Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci, and Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979). The motivations and behaviours of Gorkha youth in their agitation for identity recognition can be fully understood by combining these theories. According to Social Identity Theory (SIT), people's affiliation with particular social groups shapes a large portion of their self-concept. Members of such groups feel compelled to assert their uniqueness on a psychological level when they are marginalized when their individuality is not sufficiently acknowledged. Young people in the Gorkha community have a strong sense of in-group identity as a result of past neglect, stereotyping, and political under-representation. The motivation behind their activity is to promote community pride, combat marginalization, and validate the identity of their group. SIT aids in comprehending the psychological and emotional factors that motivate them, such as the need for respect, approval, and a favorable view of oneself. Social action cannot be explained solely by materialism or class-based theories, according to New Social Movement Theory. It emphasizes movements that have their roots in culture, identity, and symbolic expression.

When examining Gorkha youth activism, which encompasses cultural assertion, linguistic pride, and attempts to recover history through music, art, rallies, and digital campaigns in addition to calls for a distinct state or political authority, this is especially pertinent. In post-industrial societies, movements are frequently about protecting autonomy and generating meaning rather than pursuing financial gain, according to Melucci, a prominent NSMT theorist. The theoretical framework is ideally suited to Gorkha youth activism, which is motivated by a desire for recognition in the community and identity. The visible manifestations of this identity through symbolic, cultural, and digital activism are explained by NSMT, SIT aids in comprehending the inner motives of young activists, such as identity building, group loyalty, and emotional attachment to their community. By including both ideas, the study is able to investigate youth activism as a socio-political phenomenon as well as a psychological process. Given that the Gorkha identity movement is influenced by both individual experiences of exclusion and more general socio-cultural manifestations of resistance, this dual lens is crucial to capturing its complexity. Therefore, the integration of Social Identity Theory and New Social Movement Theory offers a strong foundation for examining how young people are involved in the Gorkha identity conflict. It makes it possible to comprehend young Gorkhas' identity perceptions, the motivations behind their activity, and how their work shapes the movement's collective identity and future course.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

GORKHA IDENTITY MOVEMENT'S HISTORY AND YOUTH ACTIVISM

The movement for Gorkha identity based in the Darjeeling hills, Kalimpong, and the Dooars area of West Bengal has been a one-hundred-year-old struggle to be recognized and self-governing (Sarkar, 2015). The first official plea for a Nepali-speaking Gorkha territorial unit was in 1907 with the Hillmen's Association, which campaigned to bring disparate groups together using the slogan "Nepali, Bhutia, Lapche hami sabai Gorkhali" (Shneiderman & Turin, 2006). The All India Gorkha League (AIGL) was established in 1943 and was the first

political organization in the area and a driving force behind post-independence campaigns for statehood, such as the 'Assam Chalo' movement and petitions to national leaders in memorandums (Bhattacharyya, 2014). The call for Gorkhaland gained momentum in the 1980s, with that of Subhash Ghisingh leading the movement by establishing the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in 1980 (Chakraborty, 2022). The movement gained momentum between 1986 and 1988, and there were violent clashes, more than 1,200 deaths, and the destruction of government assets (Brown, 2015). The movement's initial major political victory was the creation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988, which offered partial autonomy but did not fulfill the central demand for statehood (Whelpton, 2012).

The youths' activism was a compelling engine in all the stages of the Gorkha identity movement, especially at the most disturbed stages (Rai, 2018). The top leadership in the 1980s of Subhash Ghisingh successfully coaxed youths into action with youth students and intellectuals, seen best exemplified with the GNLF's 11-point program stated in Ghum in 1986 that stimulated the youth leading to large scale mobilizations and strikes (Sharma, 2021). The initial phase of the movement (April–October 1986) witnessed extensive intra-party and inter-party conflict, whereas the second phase (November 1986–April 1987) was characterized by CPI(M)-led counter-movements and ferocious confrontations with state-armed police forces, leading to additional casualties and displacement (Chakraborty & Saha, 2024). The youth not only served as foot soldiers but as organizers and ideologues as well, defining the narrative of the movement and taking it to global forums, such as memorandums addressed to the United Nations and foreign governments (Singh & Patel, 2021). The DGHC era (1988–2011) experienced a temporary pause, but frustration with restricted autonomy maintained the activist spirit in the younger generation (Bhattacharyya, 2014).

The resurgence of the movement in the 21st century was characterized by the emergence of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) headed by Bimal Gurung in 2007, which brought youth to center stage once again (Chakraborty, 2022). The GJM rejected the Sixth Schedule status mooted by the Centre and

state government in 2005 as not doing justice to the aspirations of the Gorkha people, and instead re-fueled the demand for full statehood (Sarkar, 2015). The years 2007–2011 saw huge youth-driven protests, demonstrations, and online movements, culminating in the establishment of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in 2011 with Bimal Gurung as its initial chief executive (Rai, 2018). But the GTA was perceived as yet another half-measure, and the movement went on, particularly after Telangana was formed in 2013 and revived hopes for statehood (Chakraborty & Saha, 2024). Significantly, youth leaders like Madan Tamang of the Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League (ABGL), killed in 2010, were realized as sacrificial and resistant symbols, further galvanizing the youth support base (Brown, 2015).

Demographically, the suggested Gorkhaland area spans more than 7,500 sq km and has a population of approximately four million, with Gorkhas making up about 35% of the population (Whelpton, 2012). During the 2011 West Bengal Assembly elections, GJM candidates, riding on youth support, won all three Darjeeling hill seats, proving the long-term power of youth activism (Sharma, 2021). Academic research and surveys consistently point out that young Gorkhas experience a strong sense of exclusion and marginalization, motivating their activism on the issues of statehood, constitutional recognition, and the Nepali language in official spheres (Chakraborty, 2022). Youth groups have also formed coalitions with other marginalized communities, expanding the social base of the movement and ensuring its ongoing relevance (Singh & Patel, 2021).

Youth activism has formed the cornerstone of the Gorkha identity movement, from the early movements of the Hillmen's Association to the modern-day campaigns pioneered by the GJM and other organizations (Rai, 2018). By spearheading protests, utilizing online platforms, and participating in political negotiations, young Gorkhas have sustained the struggle for identity, dignity, and self-determination (Sarkar, 2015). Their resilience and flexibility have helped to ensure the

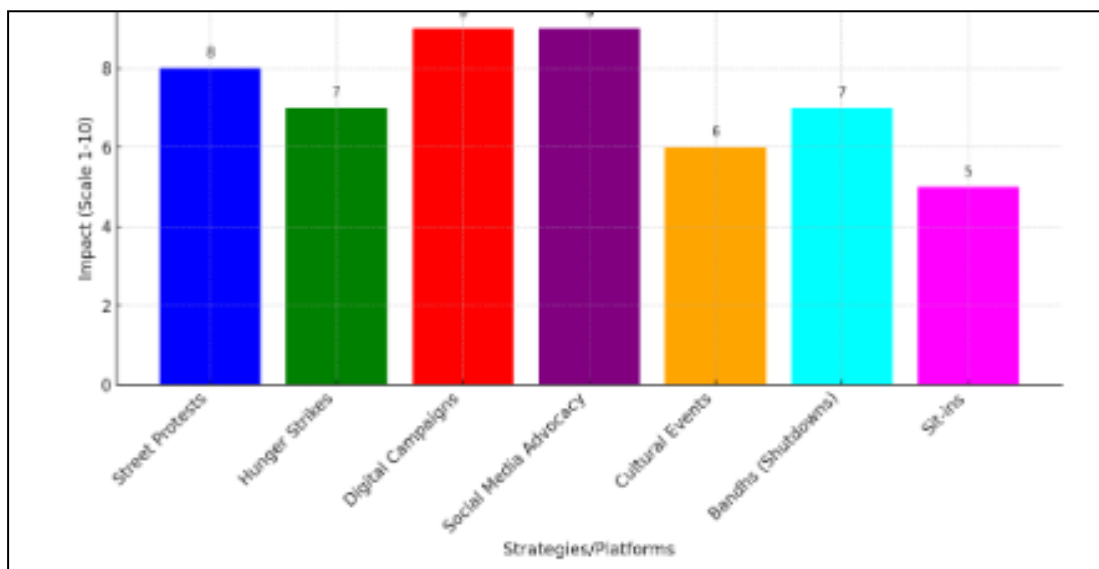
movement remains alive and vibrant, in spite of repeated repression and state efforts (Chakraborty & Saha, 2024). As the call for Gorkhaland remains a challenge to India's federal system and a test case for regional autonomy, the activist role of youth shines through as both catalyst and emblem of the people's ongoing aspirations (Shneiderman & Turin, 2006).

STRATEGIES AND PLATFORMS USED BY YOUTH ACTIVISTS FOR GORKHA RIGHTS.

Youth activism within the Gorkha identity movement has assumed varied forms, from classical street demonstrations and hunger strikes to contemporary online campaigns (Brown et al., 2016). Traditionally, young activists have been at the forefront of mass rallies, black flag protests, and strikes—techniques dating back to the 1980s in the GNLf-led agitation under Subhash Ghisingh, when youth were mobilized to join through emotive orations and direct action (Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2015). These types of activism tended to involve clashes with authorities, the mobilization of bandhs (shutdowns), and hunger strikes, like the high-profile Gorkha Satyagraha hunger strike in the UK in 2021, which mobilized large numbers of youth and caught the attention of the public (Brown et al., 2020).

Young activists have taken a mix of street mobilization and calculated online mobilization. At the grassroots level, these involve planning protest marches, sit-ins, and symbolic actions such as the black flag protest, as well as mobilizing cultural events to stake out Gorkha identity (Brown et al., 2016). During the 2017 Gorkhaland agitation, youth movements like the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) organized bandhs, hunger strikes, and non-cooperation movements, which led the state authorities to negotiate (Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2015). Infographics, posters, and synchronized dates for events announced via social media have been characteristic of recent youth movements, which allow for quick mobilization and increased participation within the younger population (Brown et al., 2020).

Graph 1.1 representing the strategies and platforms used by youth activists for Gorkha rights



The advent of online activism has changed the face of Gorkha youth activism (Middleton & Shneiderman, 2018). Social media sites such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are crucial arenas for mobilization, education, and organizing supporters (Mandal, 2020). For instance, the Instagram account @gurkhaequalrights was central to the 2021 Gurkha Justice Campaign, posting details, rally dates, and infographics emphasizing pension inequalities and past injustices (Chhetri, 2021). These online sites democratize information access, allow for sharing personal stories, and promote geographically dispersed community solidarity (Middleton, 2013). Offline, youth groups like the Gorkha Youth and Students' Association (GYASA) in Delhi offer apolitical youth spaces for participation, networking, and advocacy (Chhetri, 2018). Digital and offline sites are employed side by side, with online activism frequently leading to on-ground protests and vice versa (Mandal, 2020).

The convergence of modern digital instruments with conventional activism has furthered the reach and influence of the Gorkha identity movement (Middleton & Shneiderman, 2018). Online petitions, for instance, that garnered more than 100,000 signatures in the UK have prompted parliamentary debates and raised more media coverage of Gorkha grievances (Chhetri, 2021). Social media activism has also allowed the amplification of marginalized voices—also those of Gurkha women—on specialized pages such as @gurkhawomen, expanding further the inclusivity of the movement (Middleton, 2013).

Although online activism has its pitfalls in terms of disinformation and the possibility of "slacktivism," it continues to be an effective weapon for awareness, education, and mobilization, particularly among youths well-schooled in how to maximize these tools for social change (Mandal, 2020). The interplay between street-level activism and online advocacy continues to shape the tactics of young activists in the struggle for Gorkha identity and rights (Chhetri, 2018).

YOUTH ACTIVISM'S IMPACT ON THE GORKHA IDENTITY STRUGGLE

Young activism has deeply shaped the struggle of the Gorkha identity, steering public debate, political action, and policy solutions through determined action and creative techniques (Ray & Chowdhury, 2022). Figures emerging from recent surveys highlight the pervasiveness of political and cultural marginality reported by the Gorkha: 73.2% of respondents identify political exclusion in West Bengal, with 70.4% of respondents claiming that cultural identity captures the heart of the call for statehood (Chhetri, 2017). This generation consciousness, particularly among young people, has maintained the movement's currency and dynamism, with younger activists still venting frustration at exclusion and an intense aspiration for self-determination (Singh & Singh, 2024). The leverage of online spaces, grassroots activities, and mass mobilizations has enabled youth to redirect the narrative from simple territorial claims to a more expansive

struggle for dignity, recognition, and socio-economic justice (Sarkar, 2012).

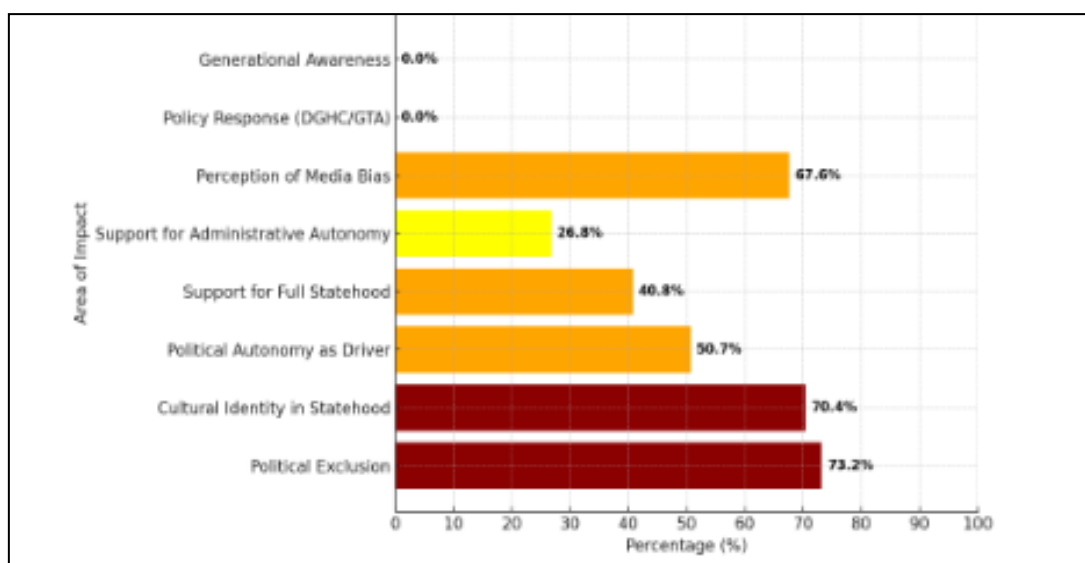
At the grassroots level, youth-led demonstrations, strikes, and hunger strikes have been instrumental in keeping the momentum of the movement going (Behera, 2007). The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), which had strong youth involvement, coordinated mass protests during the 2017 Gorkhaland agitation, which caught national attention and forced state authorities to the negotiating table (Dasgupta, 1999). Survey findings indicate that 50.7% of the people view political autonomy as the leading force behind the movement, followed by 40.8% who favor full statehood as the most reasonable solution, and 26.8% who favor increased administrative autonomy (Ray & Chowdhury, 2022). These figures show how youth activism not only galvanized the community but also brought out clear political aspirations. 67.6% of respondents believe media portrayals of the movement are biased, suggesting that youth-led digital campaigns have been crucial in countering negative narratives and ensuring the movement's perspectives reach a broader audience (Singh & Singh, 2024).

Policy reactions to youth activism have ranged from the establishment of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988 and the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in

2011 (Patil & Torgal, 1988). These administrative concessions have, however, been roundly criticized for their narrow scope and failure to address the fundamental grievances of the Gorkha people (Sarkar, 2012). The continuation of youth demonstrations and online activism has pushed the governments to re-open the dialogue, yet the root problems of political representation, cultural recognition, and fair development are still not addressed (Ganguly, 2005). The influence of the movement on government policy is therefore seen in the sporadic administrative reforms, but the absence of meaningful change keeps encouraging more activism and calls for statehood (Chettri, 2017).

The larger implications of young people's activism in the Gorkha movement include questioning India's federal state and initiating multiculturalism and regional autonomy debates (Ray & Chowdhury, 2022). By placing emphasis on identity, autonomy, and justice, youth activists have pressured policymakers to face the challenges of accommodating regional demands within a central framework (Singh & Singh, 2024). They have created an inclusive discourse, established precedents for other regional movements, and made the struggle for Gorkha identity an ongoing issue of Indian politics (Campbell, 1869).

Graph 1.2 Impact Level of Youth Activism in the Gorkha Identity Movement



MOTIVATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF YOUTH IN THE GORKHA IDENTITY MOVEMENT

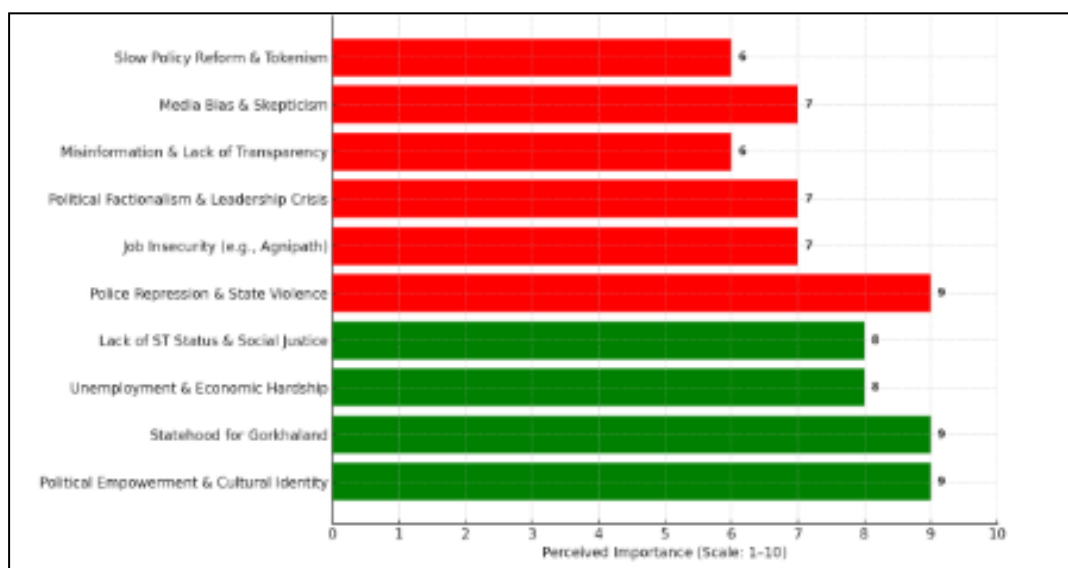
The forces behind youth engagement in the Gorkha identity movement are diverse, based both on cultural pride and socio-economic

imperatives (Chhetri, 2022; Singh & Singh, 2024). The foremost reason is the pursuit of political empowerment and cultural independence, as Gorkhas have historically sought constitutional safeguards for their language, tradition, and separate ethnic identity (Chhetri et al., 2017). The call for an independent state of Gorkhaland that covers Darjeeling, Terai, and Dooars is still at the core, with young people considering statehood to be a path to gaining political representation, more effective governance, and administrative autonomy (Chhetri, 2012). Economic issues are also involved: extremely high unemployment levels in Nepal (well above 11%) and lack of jobs within the Darjeeling hills have caused large numbers of young Gorkhas to seek alternative incomes, such as serving in foreign armies or seeking employment abroad (Kaushik, 2009). Lack of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for various Gorkha groups also gives further impetus to the yearning for social justice and eligibility for affirmative action benefits, seen by youth as essential for vertical mobility and communal progress (Mukhia, 2024; Chhetry, 2018).

Gorkha movement youth activists are confronted with a challenging array of both

external and internal problems. Externally, state repression is ever-present threat—protests are frequently met with police brutality, arrest, and even death, as with the violent 2017 agitations when many young protestors were killed (Newar & Singh, 2017; Sarkar, 2014). The launch of programmes such as Agnipath, which provide brief military careers with no guarantee of long-term security, has also increased concerns about employment stability and is considered to be an assault on age-old understandings that previously assured permanent service and pensions (Singh & Singh, 2024). Domestically, the movement suffers from political factionalism, leadership crises, and the disavowal of alternative voices, resulting in disaffection among young people (Chhetri, 2022). The dilatory fulfillment of promises like ST status and land rights, in spite of repeated promises, has further weakened the trust in local as well as national leadership (Chhetri et al., 2017). Misinformation—particularly about land allotment and government policies—is also an ongoing issue, so much so that youth organizations like the Gorkha Youth Activist Network (GYAN) have resorted to using RTI (Right to Information) applications in order to establish facts and seek transparency (Mukhia, 2024).

Graph 1.3 representing the motivations (in green) and challenges (in red) faced by youth in the Gorkha Identity Movement



Youth participating in the Gorkha identity movement are influenced by a sense of responsibility across generations and anger at continued marginalization (Sarkar, 2015; Singh

& Patel, 2021). Most young activists feel they are bearers of a heritage, eager to ensure a dignified future for their people (Rai, 2018). Skepticism regarding mainstream media exists

among most youths, with 67.6% of polled youth believing media reporting on the movement is biased or uninformed (Chakraborty & Saha, 2024). Youth also express disappointment with the glacial pace of policy reforms and perceived tokenism of administrative institutions such as the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), which have not been able to bring about substantive change (Bhattacharyya, 2014). In spite of these failures, there is persisting optimism and dedication among youth, who continue to stage mass rallies, online campaigns, and grassroots studies to keep the movement dynamic and vibrant (Singh & Patel, 2021). Their activism grows more intersectional, targeting not merely ethnic identity but land rights for tea garden laborers, gender equality, and wider causes of social justice (Whelpton, 2012). Youth activism within the Gorkha identity movement is motivated by the demands for recognition, justice, and opportunity, yet is constantly thwarted by political, economic, and informational challenges. Despite these challenges, Gorkha youth remain at the forefront, shaping the movement's direction and sustaining its momentum (Sarkar, 2015; Rai, 2018).

FINAL REFLECTIONS

1. Youth activism has changed the way people talk about the Gorkha identity in a big way. It's no longer just about territorial claims; it's also about dignity, socioeconomic justice, and cultural recognition. This has kept the movement going strong and important in both local and global settings.
2. Social media sites like Facebook and Instagram have made information more accessible to everyone. This means that young activists can plan rallies, fight against biased media stories, and build unity across national and international borders. This makes online activism an important addition to traditional street protests.
3. Even though some administrative concessions have been made by groups like the DGHC and GTA, the Gorkha identity movement's main goals of full statehood and meaningful political representation continue at the centre of ongoing youth-led activism.
4. Young activists use intersectional approaches that combine calls for racial recognition with larger social justice issues like workers' rights to land in tea gardens and equal rights for men and women. This makes the movement more open to everyone and has a bigger social effect.
5. The Gorkha youth face long-lasting problems like political division, government repression, and bias in the media, which make it hard to work together and get support from institutions. But their strength and ability to change are what make the movement dynamic and forward-looking.
6. The results show that a large portion of Gorkha youth sees political exclusion and cultural identity suppression as main reasons for their activity. This highlights the psychological and socio-political factors that keep them involved.
7. Combining old-fashioned ways of organizing like mass protests and strikes with modern digital campaigns is a big step forward in young activism. It makes activism more effective and reaches more people during important times like the 2017 Gorkhaland agitation.
8. The result found that young people are involved in the movement shows a strong sense of shared identity formed by social identity theory and new social movement theory, which puts more emphasis on cultural expression and personal freedom than just economic needs.
9. Youth-led campaigns successfully challenge negative stereotypes and stereotypical media representation, allowing the Gorkha movement to dictate its own agenda and win wider public sympathy within India and overseas.
10. Chronic unemployment and denial of Scheduled Tribe status generate economic and social grievances that mobilize youth participation, connecting claims of identity with hopes for affirmative action and social mobility.
11. Use of Right to Information (RTI) applications by youth organizations reflects their deliberate approach towards addressing transparency and governance concerns, correcting misinformation and pushing for accountability among state institutions.
12. Legacy of previous mobilizations by young people during the 1980s still energizes present-day activists, illustrating a consistent generationally rooted allegiance

that marries historical awareness with contemporary forms of activism.

13. Youth activism has broadened the scope of the Gorkha movement by adding cultural festivals and symbolic activities, enhancing ethnic pride and ensuring the visibility of the movement across various social arenas.

CONCLUSION

The Gorkha identity movement, which has its roots in the Darjeeling hills of West Bengal, is a strong expression of the long-standing pursuit of recognition, autonomy, and justice by the Gorkha people. Historically marginalized and culturally different, the Gorkhas have traditionally struggled with the problem of asserting their distinct identity within a pluralistic but frequently exclusionary Indian federal system. This movement, fashioned by years of political negotiation, administrative give-and-take, and occasional mobilization, represents the wider processes of identity politics and regional aspiration in India. The emergence and continued engagement of youth have introduced new dynamism, approaches, and attitudes to this struggle and have made them indispensable as agents of change and continuity.

Youth activism in the Gorkha movement has gone from classic street demonstrations and hunger strikes to technologically advanced social media campaigns and grass roots mobilization. The social media outlets, including Facebook and Instagram, have been particularly used by youth activists to send messages, arrange rallies, and oppose dominant discourse. These websites have democratized access to information and promoted solidarity across geographies, as with the Gurkha Justice Campaign in the UK, where online activism was translated into real political participation and global advocacy. On the streets, youth organizations have mobilized

mass rallies, cultural festivals, and symbolic actions that keep the movement alive and visible, and simultaneously tackle intersecting issues such as gender equality and labor rights.

The influence of youth activism is seen in the changing shape of public debate, increased political mobilization, and sporadic policy interventions. Though administrative institutions such as the DGHC and GTA have made partial concessions, Gorkha youth's sustained activism has ensured that the central demands for statehood and meaningful representation remain on the agenda. Their motivations-grounded in cultural pride, economic ambition, and social justice-will be matched by major challenges such as state repression, political factionalism, and media prejudice. The resilience and adaptability of the Gorkha youth have made the movement dynamic, inclusive, and forward-looking. Gorkha identity movement is a paradigm of the multifaceted interplay between history, identity, and youth-led activism. It underscores the need for authentic political representation, balanced development, and acknowledgment of regional identities in India's democratic process. As the movement advances, the energy, imagination, and resolve of its youth will continue to be at the heart of pushing the agenda of the Gorkha community and defining the larger conversation on multiculturalism and federalism in India.

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