

Subaltern Dreams and Hegemonic Realities: Deconstructing the Failure of the Gorkhaland Movement within the Indian Nationstate

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Abstract

This paper reconsiders the persistent non-arrival of Gorkhaland, the demand of the Nepali speaking Gorkha community of the Darjeeling hills for a state of its own, carved out of West Bengal, not as a failure of political will or administrative delivery, but as a case study in how a modern, ostensibly democratic nationstate manufactures durability. Working through Antonio Gramsci's writings on hegemony, the integral state, and passive revolution, and reading these categories alongside the Subaltern Studies historiography that first naturalised them for the Indian context (Guha 1982; Chatterjee 1986, 1993; Spivak 1988), the paper argues that the Gorkhaland movement has been less defeated than *absorbed*: drawn, cycle after cycle, into institutional forms, the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, that resemble concessions while functioning as instruments of containment. Gramsci's notion of *transformism*, the slow ingestion of oppositional leadership into the very order it once opposed, offers a more precise vocabulary for this process than the language of "cooption" ordinarily used in the literature on Indian ethnic politics. At the same time, the paper takes seriously the movement's own complicity in its containment: its reliance on charismatic strongmen, its narrow social base, and above all its inability to wage what Gramsci called a war of position the slower, less visible labour of building institutions and common sense in civil society rather than a succession of wars of manoeuvre fought and lost in the streets. The paper closes by asking, self critically, what is lost and what is gained when a theory forged to explain class domination in interwar Western Europe is transplanted onto a postcolonial, ethnically stratified federal polity, and suggests that Gorkhaland's long defeat illuminates a broader predicament facing subnational movements that must negotiate hegemony from within, rather than confront it from without.

Keywords: Gorkhaland, Subaltern Studies, Hegemony, Antonio Gramsci, Passive Revolution, Transformism, Indian Nation-State, Territorial Autonomy.

1. Introduction: An Aspiration That Will Not Die, and Will Not Arrive

There is something almost cruel about the landscape in which the Gorkhaland movement has unfolded. The Darjeeling hills are, in the popular and touristic imagination, a place of repose tea gardens terraced into impossible slopes, the wheeze of a colonial era toy train, mist that arrives on schedule. It is easy to forget, looking at postcards, that this same terrain has for more than a century been the site of one of the Indian republic's longest running and most bitterly unresolved political struggles: the demand of the predominantly Nepal speaking Gorkha community for a separate state, to be excised from West Bengal and granted full status within the Indian union. The demand has outlived several of its own leaders. It has survived colonial rule, the reorganisation of Indian states along linguistic lines in 1956 (from which the hills, tellingly, were excluded), and at least three distinct cycles of mass agitation, each bloodier and more exhausting than sustainable. What it has not survived into is statehood.

The existing scholarship on Gorkhaland tends to reach for one of three explanatory registers. The first treats it as a case of ethnic sub nationalism, in which a linguistically and culturally distinct community mobilises against assimilation into a larger, differently defined nationality, in this instance, a Bengali majority state (Samanta 2000). The second reads it through the federalism literature, as a problem of centre – state bargaining in which Delhi and Kolkata calculate the costs of concession against the electoral and territorial risks of further state fragmentation (Dasgupta 1999). The third, more materialist in orientation, emphasises the region's genuine economic marginalisation its dependence on a colonial era plantation economy, its underdeveloped industrial base, its chronic underinvestment relative to the plains (Lama 2018). None of these accounts is wrong, exactly. Each captures a real dimension of the conflict. But taken individually, or even together, they struggle to answer the question that ought to be most puzzling about Gorkhaland: why a movement of such evident popular depth, historical continuity, and moral legitimacy one that can, on any given occasion, empty the hills of ordinary life for weeks at a stretch has never once come close to its stated objective.

This paper proposes that the puzzle dissolves once one stops asking why the movement has failed to *win* and starts asking how the state has succeeded in making sure it never has to *lose*. That

reframing is Gramscian in spirit. Antonio Gramsci's writings from the *Prison Notebooks* were composed to explain a cognate puzzle in a very different setting: why the Italian working class, armed with what appeared to be an objectively revolutionary situation after the First World War, nonetheless failed to seize power, while the bourgeois order reconstituted itself, battered but intact. Gramsci's answer was that ruling classes do not simply repress subordinate groups; they *govern* them, by successfully presenting a particular, interested order of things as the natural, common sense order of things, and by absorbing challengers into that order rather than merely crushing them. This paper's wager is that something structurally similar, adapted for a postcolonial and explicitly multi-ethnic federal state, has happened in Darjeeling.

It is worth being honest, at the outset, about a tension this move creates. Gramsci wrote about class hegemony within a nominally homogeneous nation; Gorkhaland is a conflict staged along the axis of ethnicity and language within a state that is constitutionally committed to accommodating precisely that kind of difference. The paper does not treat this tension as fatal to the analysis Indian Subaltern Studies scholars, most influentially Partha Chatterjee, have already done much of the work of translating Gramsci's categories into a postcolonial register, and the present paper leans heavily on that translation. But the tension is real, and it returns, deliberately, in the paper's closing section, where the limits of the Gramscian optic are addressed rather than smoothed over.

The argument proceeds as follows. Section 2 sets out the theoretical apparatus, moving from Gramsci's original formulations of hegemony, the integral state, and passive revolution to their reworking within Indian Subaltern Studies. Section 3 offers the historical narrative required to make the theory legible the origins of the grievance, and its three successive cycles of agitation and settlement. Section 4 is the analytical core of the paper: it reads the Indian state's response to Gorkhaland as a coordinated, if not always consciously coordinated, exercise in coercion, transformism, and discursive containment. Section 5 turns the analytical lens inward, onto the movement itself, treating its internal failures not as a footnote to the state's success but as a constitutive part of the same hegemonic process. Section 6 steps back to interrogate the theoretical frame itself before Section 7 concludes.

2. Theoretical Framework: Hegemony, Passive Revolution, and Their Postcolonial Afterlife

To read the Indian state through Gramsci is to refuse, at the outset, a picture of the state as a machine that simply issues orders backed by force. That picture is not wholly false the state does, when it judges the moment to require it, deploy force, and the Gorkhaland story contains ample evidence of this but it is radically incomplete, and its incompleteness is precisely what makes Gorkhaland's failure so difficult to explain on coercion alone. A purely coercive state would have either granted statehood under sustained pressure or crushed the movement outright long ago. It has done neither. What it has done instead requires a subtler vocabulary.

2.1 Hegemony and the Integral State

Gramsci's core insight is that a ruling group's power rests only partly on its control of the coercive apparatus the police, the army, the courts and rests substantially on its capacity to secure the *consent* of those it rules, by presenting its own particular interests as the general interest, and its own worldview as simply how things are. He calls this "moral and intellectual leadership" (Gramsci 1971, 57): not domination that announces itself as domination, but domination that has succeeded in becoming invisible, absorbed into the unreflective common sense of everyday life. Civil society schools, newspapers, religious institutions, professional associations, even cricket commentary and Bollywood cinema, to update the list for the Indian case — is the terrain on which this kind of leadership is won or lost, in a way that no army can secure on its own.

Gramsci's related notion of the *integral state* insists that political society and civil society are not two separate spheres but two faces of a single apparatus: "State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony armoured by coercion" (Gramsci 1971, 263). A stable order relies overwhelmingly on the civilsociety face, holding the coercive face largely in reserve, deployed against those minorities who refuse to be persuaded. This is, one might say, a state's insurance policy rather than its ordinary mode of operation. As will become clear in Section 4, this is a remarkably apt description of how Delhi and Kolkata have handled Darjeeling: coercion in short, brutal bursts, framed always as an exception forced upon a reluctant state by an unreasonable movement, bracketed on either side by long stretches of negotiation, patronage, and public appeals to national sentiment.

2.2 Subalternity, Common Sense, and the Problem of Speaking

Gramsci's subaltern classes are those social groups so fragmented, so lacking in a shared institutional memory and organisational continuity that they cannot easily produce their own account of the world to set against the ruling group's common sense (Gramsci 1971, 52–55). Indian Subaltern Studies, inaugurated by Ranajit Guha and his collaborators, took this fragment of Gramsci's thought and made it the organising concept of an entire historiographical project, one built on the claim that the peasant and tribal insurgencies of colonial India possessed a political consciousness of their own – not a defective, prepolitical version of elite nationalism, but an autonomous domain that colonial and, later, nationalist elite historiography had systematically failed to register (Guha 1982). Where Guha's early work stressed that colonial dominance in India was achieved without ever attaining genuine hegemony dominance, in his phrase, without hegemony, resting on coercion far more than on any successful manufacture of consent among the governed, the question this paper inherits is whether the *postcolonial* Indian state has managed to do what the colonial state could not: to secure something closer to hegemony proper over groups like the Gorkhas, even as it continues, when pushed, to fall back on coercion in a distinctly colonial register.

Gayatri Spivak's famous intervention adds a further complication that this paper takes seriously rather than treats as a rhetorical flourish. Spivak's argument that the subaltern, strictly speaking, cannot *speak* – that any attempt to represent subaltern consciousness, including by sympathetic scholars, risks reproducing the very structures of representation that silence it in the first place (Spivak 1988) is a caution this paper cannot fully escape. Writing about the Gorkhaland movement in the analytical language of Gramscian theory, produced largely outside the hills and addressed to an academic audience even further removed from them, is itself an act of representation with its own hazards. The paper proceeds nonetheless, on the more modest premise that an account of *how the movement has been contained* is not the same claim as an account of *what the movement authentically wants*, and that the former is a legitimate object of analysis even where the latter remains, properly, contested terrain that belongs to the community itself.

2.3 Passive Revolution and the Postcolonial State

The concept that does the most analytical work in this paper is passive revolution: Gramsci's term for a process by which a ruling bloc absorbs pressure for structural change from below by

conceding just enough new institutions, redistributed offices, targeted economic packages to defuse the pressure without altering the underlying distribution of power (Gramsci 1971, 106–120). It is, in Gramsci's own memorable phrasing, revolution without a revolution: transformation registered at the level of form, foreclosed at the level of substance.

Partha Chatterjee's reworking of this concept for the Indian case sharpens it considerably. Chatterjee argues that the postcolonial Indian state itself was founded on a passive revolution of capital: a bourgeois led nationalist project that absorbed and reorganised, rather than overturned, the institutional inheritance of colonial rule, producing a state that governs through a permanent, managed accommodation of the demands of subordinate groups rather than through their political defeat or their genuine incorporation as equal partners in a shared national project (Chatterjee 1986; 1993, 200–219). On this reading, the DGHC and the GTA are not aberrant, oneoff tactical improvisations invented to deal with an inconvenient hill community; they are entirely characteristic instances of how the Indian state has, since 1947, managed practically every subnational and ethnic demand that has threatened to become unmanageable through the invention of new administrative tiers, new categories of recognition, and new local elites invested in the survival of the arrangement that created them. Gorkhaland, in other words, is not exceptional. It is, if anything, paradigmatic.

Read together, these concepts yield the analytical scaffolding for the rest of the paper: the Indian state as an integral state that reserves coercion for moments of crisis while relying primarily on the manufacture of consent; the Gorkha movement as a subaltern formation whose fragmentation is not incidental but constitutive of its subalternity; and passive revolution, in its specifically Chatterjeean postcolonial form, as the mechanism through which the state has, again and again, converted the movement's most dangerous moments into occasions for its own renewal.

3. Historical Context: Three Cycles of Agitation, One Recurring Settlement

The demand for Gorkhaland did not emerge fully formed in the 1980s; it has a long and largely unbroken prehistory, and that prehistory matters, because it is what allows the movement, in Section 5, to be described as suffering from an inherited rather than a merely tactical weakness.

3.1 The Colonial Inheritance

The British East India Company annexed the Darjeeling hills from Sikkim in 1835, initially as a modest sanatorium for colonial officials seeking relief from the plains' summer heat. What followed was the deliberate construction of a plantation economy tea, principally sustained by the large-scale importation of Nepal speaking labour from across the eastern Himalayas. The effect, over the following century, was the consolidation of a demographic and cultural enclave with little in common, linguistically or historically, with the Bengali speaking plains onto whose administrative map it had been affixed almost as an afterthought. Petitions requesting administrative separation from Bengal date back at least to 1907 and 1920 (Middleton 2013, 45), which is worth dwelling on for a moment: the grievance predates the Indian republic itself, and indeed predates the very idea of a linguistically reorganised Indian federation. Gorkhaland is not, whatever the national media's preferred framing suggests, a post-Independence irritant. It is older than independence.

3.2 Subhash Ghisingh and the First Mass Agitation

The movement's modern, insurrectionary phase begins with Subhash Ghisingh and the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in the early 1980s. Ghisingh's innovation, politically, was to draw a firm line between a "Gorkha" identity territorially rooted in the hills, loyal to India, historically distinguished by service in the Indian and British armed forces — and a diffuse pan Indian "Nepali" identity that carried, in the national imagination, uncomfortable associations with a foreign nationality (Samanta 2000). The distinction was not merely rhetorical; it was loadbearing, because it pre-empted the most damaging accusation the state would later deploy against the movement, that of disloyalty, by insisting on the community's Indianness before the state could question it. The strategy did not prevent what followed: a 28month agitation beginning in 1986, among the bloodiest sustained confrontations between a subnational movement and the Indian state outside the northeast, ending not in statehood but in negotiation.

That negotiation produced the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988, an autonomous body with control over a limited set of departments, but remaining, crucially, an administrative subordinate of the West Bengal government rather than anything resembling a state. Ghisingh, the agitation's most charismatic figure, became the Council's caretaker, and in that transition from insurgent to administrator, the movement's momentum did not merely stall; it was, in a fairly

precise sense, converted into something else (Dasgupta 1999). This is the moment, examined more closely in Section 4, at which the paper locates the movement's first full experience of passive revolution.

3.3 Bimal Gurung, the GJM, and the Return of the Cycle

Disillusion with the DGHC's failure to deliver either development or a credible path to statehood produced, roughly two decades later, a second insurgency under Bimal Gurung's Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), erupting first in 2007–2008 and again, more dramatically, in 2017. The structural resemblance to the 1980s cycle is almost uncanny: mass mobilisation, coercive response, exhaustion on both sides, and a negotiated settlement, the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), established in 2011, that expanded the DGHC's powers only marginally while leaving its basic subordination to Kolkata untouched. The 2017 agitation, provoked by the state government's attempt to make Bengali compulsory in hill schools, lasted 104 days and tapped into precisely the anxieties about cultural absorption that had animated the movement from its earliest petitions. Its resolution followed the established script: repression, exhaustion, a quiet return to the status quo, and the eventual reabsorption of GJM leadership into electoral politics (Chhetri 2021).

What should strike any reader of this history is not any single episode but the *shape* of the pattern across nearly four decades: agitation, repression, negotiated concession, disillusionment, and renewed agitation, repeating with the fidelity of a script rather than the unpredictability one would expect of a genuinely open political struggle. That repetition is itself a datum requiring explanation, and it is to that explanation offered through the lens set out in Section 2.

4. The Architecture of Containment: How the State Has Managed Consent

The Indian state's handling of Gorkhaland is not best described as a single strategy consistently pursued, but as a repertoire of interlocking tactics, deployed in shifting proportion depending on the moment, none of which would by itself have sufficed. It is the combination, and the fluency with which the state moves between registers, that constitutes hegemony in Gramsci's sense a capacity to govern that does not announce itself as a plan, because it has become simply how the state behaves.

4.1 Coercion as the Reserve Instrument

Coercion in Darjeeling has never been the state's primary instrument, but it has been its decisive one at the moments that mattered most. The 1986–88 agitation saw the deployment of the Central Reserve Police Force alongside the West Bengal police, producing what independent observers at the time characterised as a pattern of extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and systematic intimidation (Samanta 2000). The 2017 agitation, though its casualty figures were lower, was met with an extended internet shutdown, sweeping prohibitory orders, and police action that again resulted in deaths and mass arrests. In both instances, coercion performed a double function that is easy to miss if one focuses only on its immediate, suppressive effect. It ended the acute crisis, certainly. But it also recalibrated the movement's own sense of what was possible, raising, quite deliberately, the price of continued confrontation to a level at which negotiation on the state's terms, and offering considerably less than statehood began to look, to exhausted and grieving communities, like the only available exit. Coercion, in other words, did not simply suppress dissent; it manufactured the conditions under which consent to a lesser settlement became rational. That is precisely the dynamic Gramsci has in mind when he describes the integral state as hegemony armoured, rather than replaced, by force.

4.2 Transformism: The Absorption of Leadership

If coercion is the state's reserve instrument, transformism is its everyday practice, and it is here that the concept of passive revolution earns its analytical keep. The DGHC and the GTA should not be read primarily as concessions extracted by the movement from a reluctant state; they are better read as the state's own preferred solution, arrived at because it had learned, from bitter experience, that granting a controlled measure of institutional recognition is a far cheaper and more durable way of managing an insurgency than either indefinitely repressing it or, worse, actually satisfying its demand. Each body created a tier of appointive and elected office, staffed overwhelmingly by the very leadership that had, only recently, been leading agitations against the state. Ghisingh became a caretaker of the institutional order he had once threatened to overturn; segments of the GJM leadership underwent a comparable transition after 2011 and again after 2017.

What is analytically significant here is not merely that individual leaders "sold out," a moralising shorthand this paper deliberately avoids, but that the structure of incorporation itself did the

ideological work of deradicalisation. Gramsci calls this transformism, the process by which the leaders and even the programmatic demands of an opposition are gradually absorbed into the hegemonic order, stripped of their original antagonism in the process (Gramsci 1971, 58–59). A leader who is also the custodian of a development budget, a patronage network, and a cadre of dependent local officials has, whatever his private convictions, acquired a structural stake in the survival of the very arrangement his movement was created to abolish. The autonomous council does not merely fail to deliver statehood; it manufactures, out of the movement's own leadership, a local class whose material interest now runs counter to the movement's founding purpose. This is the precise mechanism by which passive revolution converts institutional recognition into political demobilisation, and it explains, better than any account centred solely on repression, why each cycle of agitation has ended not in victory or in outright defeat, but in a kind of managed disappointment.

4.3 Discursive Containment: Unity, Development, and the Demand to Prove Loyalty

The third instrument is the least visible and, in a Gramscian register, the most important, because it operates in the register of common sense rather than of policy. Two discursive formations do most of the work. The first is the discourse of national unity, within which any demand for territorial reorganisation along ethnic lines is pre-emptively coded not as a legitimate constitutional claim of which India's federal history contains many precedents but as a species of secessionism, verging on disloyalty to the nation as such. This framing, reproduced with remarkable consistency across national media outlets and political parties that otherwise agree on very little, has the practical effect of isolating the movement from potential allies elsewhere in India, denying it the wider civil society sympathy that a genuine war of position would require. It also places an asymmetric burden of proof on the Gorkha community specifically: a community with an unusually visible history of service in the Indian armed forces finds itself required, again and again, to perform its patriotism as a precondition for being heard at all (Chhetri 2021). Few demands could be better designed, whether by intention or by the unplanned convergence of interests, to convert a claim for recognition into a perpetual trial of loyalty.

The second formation is developmentalism, which works by translation rather than by denial: it does not dispute that Darjeeling has grievances, but it insists on translating those grievances into a vocabulary of roads, schools, hospitals, and economic packages, administered through the GTA

or through direct state schemes (Lama 2018). This is a subtler move than it might first appear, because it concedes just enough to seem responsive while quietly substituting a technical problem inadequate service delivery for the political problem the movement actually raises, namely the community's status and recognition within the federal order. Every school built under this framework, every road paved, is simultaneously a genuine public good and a small, cumulative argument against the very premise that statehood is necessary. Developmentalism does not defeat the demand for Gorkhaland so much as make it seem, with each passing infrastructure project, a little less urgent, a little more like a demand for identity dressed up as a demand for governance even where, for the community itself, the two have never been separable.

Taken together, these three instruments reserved coercion, structural transformism, and discursive translation constitute something considerably more coherent than an ad hoc series of government responses. They constitute a hegemonic apparatus in the strict Gramscian sense: a mode of rule that governs primarily through the manufacture of consent, that treats force as a costly and exceptional last resort, and that has, over four decades, proven itself entirely capable of absorbing a movement it has never had to defeat outright.

5. The Subaltern's Own Undoing: Internal Limits of the Movement

It would be a mistake, and arguably a patronising one, to read the preceding section as implying that the Gorkhaland movement has been a purely passive object of state manipulation, with no agency of its own in its long defeat. Gramsci's own account of subalternity insists on the opposite: subaltern groups are not simply acted upon; their fragmentation, their difficulty in achieving what he calls a "homogeneous political will" (Gramsci 1971, 52), is itself a condition that any serious analysis must examine on its own terms, not merely as an effect of elite manipulation.

5.1 A War of Manoeuvre without a War of Position

Gramsci distinguishes between two modes of political struggle. The war of manoeuvre is direct, visible, and confrontational, a strike, a blockade, a march on the seat of power and it is the mode at which the Gorkhaland movement has consistently excelled, sustaining agitations of a length and intensity that would exhaust most political organisations several times over. The war of position is slower, less dramatic, and takes place substantially outside the moment of confrontation altogether: it is the patient work of building alternative institutions, an independent intellectual

class, and a durable common sense within civil society, capable of contesting the ruling order's account of things on the ruling order's own terrain, well before any direct assault on state power is attempted. Gramsci's argument, developed originally to explain why frontal insurrection had failed in Western Europe after 1917, is that the war of manoeuvre can win a battle, even repeatedly, without ever coming close to winning the underlying contest for hegemony, if it is not backed by a prior or parallel war of position.

By this measure, the Gorkhaland movement has fought bravely, and at real human cost, almost exclusively wars of manoeuvre. Its efforts at cultural revival, the promotion of Nepal language education, Gorkha historiography, and hill festivals, are genuine and should not be dismissed, but they have not coalesced into anything resembling a counterhegemonic intellectual formation capable of contesting the state's narrative on a national stage, still less of building durable alliances with other subnational movements facing structurally similar predicaments elsewhere in India. The movement's public self-presentation, moreover, remains overwhelmingly defined by what it opposes Bengali cultural and administrative dominance rather than by a fully worked out positive vision of what a Gorkhaland state would actually be, a deficit that leaves it perpetually vulnerable to the developmentalist counter narrative discussed in Section 4.3, which can always ask, not unreasonably, what exactly statehood would deliver that a sufficiently well-funded GTA could not.

5.2 Charismatic Leadership and Its Costs

The movement's dependence on singular, charismatic leaders, Ghisingh, and later Gurung, has furnished it with moments of extraordinary mobilising power, and has just as reliably furnished the state with a single, negotiable point of entry through which the entire movement can be, in effect, purchased or fractured. A movement organised around a personality is, almost by definition, vulnerable to that personality's cooption, exhaustion, or eclipse by a rival, and the Gorkhaland movement's history bears this out with almost textbook regularity: the GNLF's fracture and the emergence of the GJM, and subsequent splits within the GJM itself, each occurring at precisely the moments when unity would have mattered most. This vertical, leadercentred structure is not incidental to the movement's fragility; it is a fairly direct expression of the subaltern condition Gramsci describes, in which the absence of durable, depersonalised organisational forms leaves a movement's fate hostage to the fortunes, and the temptations, of individuals.

5.3 The Exhaustion of Cyclical Agitation

The cyclical structure traced in Section 3 mobilisation, repression, negotiated settlement, disillusionment, renewed mobilisation a decade or so later, is not simply something that happens to the movement; it has become, whether by design or by the accumulated weight of habit, something close to the movement's default operating procedure. Each cycle imposes real economic and psychological costs on the hill population, costs that are rarely tallied in accounts focused on the drama of confrontation itself: lost wages, disrupted schooling, and the slow erosion of ordinary civic trust that comes from repeated shutdowns. The state, for its part, has become adept at simply weathering each cycle, confident that exhaustion, rather than resolution, will eventually do the work that outright suppression need not. A movement that cannot break out of this rhythm is not merely tactically stuck; it has, in a fairly precise sense, been drawn into complicity with the very passive revolutionary logic that contains it, mistaking the recurrence of struggle for the accumulation of political power.

6. The Limits of the Gramscian Optic: A Reflexive Coda

No theoretical frame arrives without costs, and intellectual honesty requires naming them rather than letting them sit quietly beneath an otherwise confident argument. Three limitations deserve explicit acknowledgment.

First, Gramsci's categories were forged to explain class hegemony within what he took to be a broadly unified national society; Gorkhaland is a conflict organised along the axis of ethnicity and language, in a state constitutionally structured around the accommodation, not the suppression, of exactly that kind of plurality. Applying "hegemony" here risks flattening a genuinely federal, multinational political order into the image of a unitary class society it was never meant to be. The paper's answer, following Chatterjee, is that the postcolonial Indian state's management of ethnic and subnational demand is itself an instance of hegemonic practice, distinguishable from but structurally continuous with class hegemony but this is a translation, not an identity, and it should be presented as such rather than smuggled in as an unexamined premise.

Second, an account this heavily weighted toward the state's success in managing dissent risks reproducing, in a different vocabulary, the very totalising confidence in state capacity that the analysis is meant to interrogate. The Indian state's containment of Gorkhaland has been effective,

but it has not been costless, uncontested, or complete; the demand persists, has outlived several settlements meant to extinguish it, and retains a legitimacy in the hills that no amount of developmentalist discourse has fully dissolved. A Gramscian reading that forgets this that treats hegemony as a finished accomplishment rather than an ongoing, contested, and reversible achievement, which is how Gramsci himself insisted it be understood, would betray the theory in the act of applying it.

Third, and following directly from Spivak's caution in Section 2.2, there is an irreducible distance between an analysis of *containment mechanisms*, which this paper offers, and any claim to represent the authentic aspirations of the Gorkha community, which it does not and should not attempt. The movement's own historians, poets, and political actors are better placed than any outside theoretical apparatus to say what Gorkhaland means, and this paper's contribution should be read as one partial vocabulary for describing why that meaning has so far failed to translate into a state, rather than as a substitute for the community's own account of itself.

7. Conclusion: Dreams Deferred, Not Dreams Defeated

The dream of Gorkhaland has not died, and this paper has tried to explain why, despite that persistence, it has never once come close to being realised. The Gramscian frame developed here suggests that the Indian state's success is not best measured by any single decisive act of suppression, because no such act has occurred; the state has never needed one. Its success lies instead in a sustained, adaptive capacity to alternate between reserved coercion, the structural absorption of oppositional leadership, and a discursive apparatus national unity, developmentalism that has repeatedly converted a political claim about recognition and self-determination into either a loyalty test or an administrative grievance amenable to roads and schools rather than to statehood. The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council and the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration are the visible monuments to this process: not stepping stones toward the movement's stated objective, but durable instruments of passive revolution, each one manufacturing a local elite with a material stake in the arrangement's survival.

Yet the movement's long non-arrival cannot be laid entirely at the state's door. Its own reliance on charismatic, personalised leadership, its persistent failure to translate repeated wars of manoeuvre into the slower, less visible labour of a war of position, and its inability to build durable alliances

or a fully articulated positive vision beyond the hills, have left it structurally vulnerable to precisely the strategies of containment described above. The state's hegemony over Darjeeling has been secured, in other words, not despite the movement's internal life but partly through it.

Read this way, Gorkhaland is not a regional curiosity but something closer to a diagnostic instrument for the Indian federal order as a whole: a case in which the ordinary machinery of postcolonial passive revolution, the invention of autonomous councils, the incorporation of insurgent elites, the deployment of a national unity discourse flexible enough to delegitimise almost any subnational claim can be observed working exactly as Chatterjee's theory would predict, in close to real time, across four decades and three distinct generations of leadership. Whether the movement can yet break this pattern by finally undertaking the slower cultural and institutional labour of a genuine war of position is a question this paper cannot answer in advance. What it has tried to show is why, absent that labour, the hegemonic realities of the Indian nationstate are likely to keep outlasting the subaltern dreams staged against them, cycle after patient cycle.

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