

Labour in Railways and Plantations in Colonial Darjeeling (1860-1947)

A Dissertation Submitted

To

Sikkim University



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the

Degree of Master of Philosophy

By

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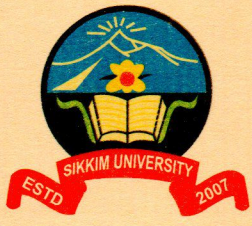
June 2017

Dedicated

To

My Father

Late Sandip Chakraborty



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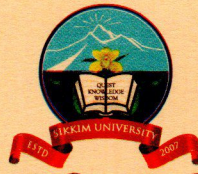
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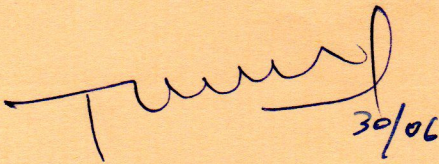
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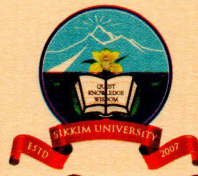


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I am solely responsible for all the errors and arguments in this entire dissertation.

Rajworshi Chakraborty

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INTRODUCTION

Servitude has been one of the most potent, strongest and central forces in the history of humankind that has led to the establishment of various civilizations and regimes, and at times uprooted such structures of power as well. With the abolishment of slavery in 1834, its place was taken by the labourers in the colonial regimes who were exploited to the core by their colonial masters. The plantation system introduced in Darjeeling and India as a whole, by the British colonisers, had at its centre, such an exploited labour force which played an important role in the global economy during the late nineteenth and the twentieth century.

Labour economics is the study of the workings and outcomes of the market for labour. More specifically, labour economics is primarily concerned with the behavior of employers and employees in response to the general incentives of wages, prices and profits and nonpecuniary aspects of the employment relationship, such as working conditions. These incentives serve both to motivate and to limit individual choice.¹

In context to the subject of labour economics this proposed aims to study and analyse the wage structure, the characteristics and the migration demography of the tea plantation labourers. For the purpose of this study, the research historically locates Darjeeling at the receiving end of two strictly colonial phenomenon. First, Darjeeling is seen in the backdrop of a strategic eastern Himalayan location at the crossroads of transnational circulations of bodies, commodities, and ideas, which conveniently contributed in shaping the transcultural character of the town and gave it a distinctive global presence. Second, the evolution of communication from roads to railways which again was entirely a colonial structure that greatly affected the labour economy of the region.

Statement of the Problem

The plantations and the railways, at the same time, proved most progressive for the colonial economy; and the most exploitative for the labourers in the tea plantations of Darjeeling.

¹Irving M. Ives, Ronald G. Ehrenberg and Robert S. Smith, *Modern Labor Economics: Theory and Public Policy*, Routledge, New York, 2016, p. 2-3.

The progressive aspects have received wide appraisal and recognition in various recorded literature, starting from the colonisers themselves and continuing ever so. However, the accounts of exploited labour populations have often been trampled under the wheels of the railway, or overshadowed under the tea bushes. Similarly, the strictly maintained wage system in the plantations played a much greater role in shaping the structural set up of Darjeeling than perhaps has been recognised.

The sole motive behind the launch of plantation in Darjeeling, same as in other parts of India, was Capitalism. Plantations refer to large-scale agricultural enterprises, mostly specialized in one particular crop, grown for distant markets, employing a large number of wage labourers working under the close supervision in a strict hierarchical organization. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines plantations as an agricultural undertaking, employing hired workers, situated in the tropical or subtropical regions, which are mainly concerned with the cultivation or production for commercial purposes.² Nevertheless, in the context of the research, the definition given by Eric Wolf establishes a better approach. According to Wolf, the plantation “is also an instrument of force wielded to create and to maintain a class-structure of workers and owners, connected hierarchically...”³ The planters were able to maintain the plantation system due to migrant labour, low wages, isolation and political support.

The labourers, although the most essential component of the plantation structure were maintained with the bare essential requirements of sustenance. The distinct features of the working population in the plantations of the Darjeeling District included:

- Easy availability of labourers from the lands of Nepal
- Lower wages
- Dominant Nepali presence
- Separatist identity from the neighbouring plains

²Convention No:11 of the Committee on work on plantations: International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 1950.

³Eric Wolf, “Specific Aspects of the Plantation System in the New World”, as cited in Sharit Kumar Bhowmik, “The Plantation as a Social System”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, No. 36, September, 1980.

The distinctive characteristics of the plantations, introduced by the British, was essentially large-scale, primitive and highly labour intensive. For the labourers, the plantation was not only a source of income and employment, but a way of living, a society of its own.

It was not until the late 1830s in India, that the preventive aspect of the mountain stations began to have importance in the medical as well as in the wide visage of the colonial economic system. Also, during this time that the British trade policy underwent a great change with the promulgation of the charter Act of 1833, which abolished the monopoly trade of the English East India Company and opened the Indian markets to the sphere. The abolition of the trade monopoly i.e., *laissez faire* paved the way for the development of a free trade system with a steady growth of capitalistic entrepreneurship in various industrial enterprises, in this context, the plantations of tea. This also witnessed an unrestricted migration of European merchants, traders and planters to India as they engaged themselves in the upper folds of the commercial cultivation structure of economy.

The plantations were not the only new introduction in the Darjeeling hills that left its impact on the life and economy of the place. The railways had their due role to play in this process too. In fact, with the development of road communication and the introduction of the railways linking Darjeeling to the plains, its participation in the British economy was increased ten-folds. Initially the roads carried the produce from the tea-gardens to the plains. This was limited in terms of carriage capacity, time-consuming and also effected by extreme weather conditions or landslides, which are a common feature in these hills. The railways proved more than potent in dealing with these limitations and more. Moreover, the railways contributed in bringing other communities from the plains to these hills of Darjeeling frequently. These men had their own roles to play in effecting the socio-economic life of the labourers in the hills. The railways were a catalyst in this process.

As for the existing literature on this area, one of the biggest problems lies in the fact that these do not address the importance and the role of the tea plantation labourers in the making of the Darjeeling economy, and the position in global economy of the time. The sources available are majorly from the colonial times, recorded, enumerated and written by British and Europeans themselves. Needless to say, the interpretation is highly biased, with the role of the colonisers exaggerated often times. The condition of the labourers found no voice in these works. Similarly, recent works on plantations and the Himalayas mainly focus on

Assam and the trajectory of the “indentured labour” practise in Assam. Darjeeling had no such system of recruitment, and hence it has often been overlooked, even though it has been a summer capital of the British in its own rights, which Assam was not. In addition, most of the literature produced and available on the region are in the Himalayan archives, which are dispersed across many local and national collections in numerous languages, often in a perilous state of preservation, with only scanty historical materials to illuminate subaltern and mobile subjectivities. Partly for these reasons, anthropologists, linguists, and specialists of religious studies who undertake ethnographic or purely textual research have managed to study this region much more than the historians.⁴ Thus, the outlook varies to a great extent in locating the condition of the labour force in Darjeeling.

The available literature on the region in context to the proposed research showcases gaps that need to be filled in for a complete and broader understanding of the labour economy of the district of Darjeeling. In context to identifying the shortcomings of the available sources, the review of literature has been arranged accordingly.

Review of Literature

Most sources tend to realise the role of India in contributing arguably the largest share of tea in terms of production and supply to Britain’s world market after China. Iris Macfarlane and Alan Macfarlane⁵ in *The Empire of Tea: The Remarkable History of the Plant That Took Over the World* have argued that the British commoditization of tea was a main factor in Britain's ability to build a global empire. They stress how the efficiency of the Indian tea industry was a result of colonial officials' employment of methods similar to those used by British factories during the Industrial Revolution, such as assigning specialized tasks and ensuring workers to sign long-term contracts and sleep on or near the work premises. However, in the attempts to study India as a whole, many important local places of production, in this case Darjeeling, are given little or no importance.

In terms of rapid development of township and increasing population of the district, a number of literature have been produced that focuses on the duality of Darjeeling as a hill-sanatorium

⁴ Tina Harris, Jayeeta Sharma, Amy Holmes, “Global Encounters, Local Places: Connected Histories of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and the Himalayas—An Introduction”, *Transcultural Studies*, 2016, p.45.

⁵ Iris Macfarlane and Alan Macfarlane, *The Empire of Tea: The Remarkable History of the Plant that Took Over the World*, Overlook Press, London, 2004, p.44.

and a plantation economy. Nandini Bhattacharya⁶ in her studies on Darjeeling, particularly focuses on this duality and explores the imperatives of healthcare, situated within the socio-political and economic dimensions of this particular duality. These two sites, the hill-station of Darjeeling and the tea plantations, have been approached in the existing historiography separately as two different historical problematics, which she terms as ‘enclaves’.

Dane Kennedy⁷ examines the paradox of hill-stations in colonial India, while studying the sanatoriums constructed by the British in Simla, Ootacamund, Darjeeling, tracing the parallels introduced in all these three places and effectively maintained by the colonisers. He discusses in details that how the hill-station of Darjeeling at once served as integral fixture of British rule in India and at the same time as an aloof haven from the native entanglements. The proposed research draws in this paradox and studies the role of the migrated populations of Darjeeling in serving and clashing with the British interests, thus forming an interesting population demography. Jayeeta Sharma⁸ places Darjeeling within the historical context of hill station sanatorium urbanity that was a key feature of British imperial culture. She explores how a strategic eastern Himalayan location at the crossroads of transnational circulations of bodies, commodities, and ideas shaped the transcultural character of the town and gave it a distinctive global presence.

As far as development of roads and the introduction of railways to the region has been considered, they have been either glorified in terms of western technology or as means to enjoy summers in the hill-sanatorium. Daniel R. Headrick⁹ examines the massive transfer of Western technology to the European colonies, trying to locate the reasons as to why no industrial revolution took place in these countries. He puts forward the notion that the transfer of technology caused the traditional self-sufficient economies in the colonies to stagnate or get crippled and was responsible for the underdevelopment of the colonies. However, the limitation of this work is that while focusing only on the technological development, the

⁶Nandini Bhattacharya, “Leisure, Economy and Colonial Urbanism: Darjeeling, 1835-1940”, *Urban History*, August, 2013.

⁷Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

⁸Jayeeta Sharma, “Producing Himalayan Darjeeling: Mobile People and Mountain Encounters”, *Himalaya Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 2, January, 2016.

⁹Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress : Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988.

importance of the Indian population, and the migrant population in the colonial industries, thus, creating a market for the colonisers is not given due importance.

Julian C.T. Baker¹⁰ explores how the carriages, motion and ascent of a unique railway combined with European and American aesthetic and environmental preconceptions to shape experiences of travel and landscape on the ride up to Darjeeling at the turn of the nineteenth century. He turns to empirical material to analyze how locomotion, rapid elevation gain and onboard social circumstances altered the encounter with the Indian environment. From there he further tries to reconstruct how the DHR orchestrated a dynamic encounter with landscape to consider the phenomenological particularities of train and terrain. The proposed research attempts to see roads and railways as active catalysts in transforming the economy of the district. Furthermore, literature on communication development fails to identify the role of railways in maintaining a permanent reminder of western superiority and dominance over the labour population.

Few works that address some of these gaps have been reviewed for a basic understanding of the proposed areas of research. The likes of Virginius Xaxa¹¹ who analyses the processes that generated the structural underdevelopment in a part of Bengal province, known as North Bengal in today's times. The study pertains mainly to the district Darjeeling which was one of the few districts to have been penetrated by plantation agriculture on a large-scale. The work also recognises the role of the connection between railway and plantation. Xaxa, further outlines how the class differences were coupled with ethnic differences. According to Xaxa, this class segregation which was along ethnic lines was essentially the product of colonial capitalism. However, Xaxa focuses on the role of these ethnic structures in strengthening class solidarity among the managerial and intermediary class. The proposed research, attempts to further the study and understand the effect of these structures in creating solidarity between the labouring classes; creating new identities and its role in economy and the local demands; and the role of colonial capitalism in maintaining these structures.

Objectives of Study

¹⁰ Julian C.T. Baker Mobility, "Tropicality and Landscape: the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, 1881-1939," *Journal of Historical Geography*, No.44, University of Edinburgh, Elsevier Ltd, Edinburgh, 2013.

¹¹ Virginius Xaxa, "Colonial Capitalism and Underdevelopment in North Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 20, No. 39, Sep. 28, 1985.

The study engaged in the following objectives:

- To analyse and understand the labour force engaged in the tea-plantations in the Darjeeling district; and how it affected the demography and socio-economic development of Darjeeling,
- To study the process of migration in the Darjeeling hills and its impact in forming a new identity of the hills,
- To study the communication development, particularly the railways, which became a catalyst to the economy of the labourers in the Darjeeling District

Methodology

The study being historical in its nature and approach and taking the colonial era as subject of study, the help of surveys and interviews could not be taken. But, both primary and secondary data have been taken into consideration. Primary data included the government reports like Labour Enquiry Commission Reports, Census data, and so on available at the archives. The secondary sources included various books and articles written both during colonial and post-colonial era, various journals and official websites. The data obtained from the primary sources, and the information derived from both primary and secondary sources were thoroughly studied and analyzed properly. This study is an analytical attempt engaging both statistical and theoretical framework. It aims to historically reconstruct and thereby understand the history of the above-mentioned region and its neglected labour population in the tea gardens that contributed to the British economy and a pan Indian past.

Chapterization

Chapter 1: Introduction

It discusses the statement of the problem of the proposed research. The core focus is on the literature available on the region in terms of the proposed research and its limitations; The objectives of this study are highlighted and the chapterization is derived based on the objectives. With that a brief idea of the topics to be dealt in the next chapters is given

Chapter 2: The Tea Plantations and Labour in Darjeeling

This chapter initially deals with the condition of Darjeeling before the introduction of the plantations, then the nature of the labour structure that developed with the emergence of plantations, that was created for the latter's sustenance. The chapter also studies the various economic and social facets of the labour population in Darjeeling.

Chapter 3: Similar Faces, Different Traces: Labour Migration in Darjeeling

This chapter studies and analyses the unprecedented migration from neighbouring countries, focusing mainly on Nepal to the hills of Darjeeling after the establishment of the plantations as an economic avenue. It also deals with the occupational and hierarchical structure of the migrated population; finally moving to the role of this migratory population in creating a different identity for each of themselves as well as the Darjeeling hills.

Chapter 4: Transportation System: Railways and the Roads

This chapter traces the importance of communication in the hilly terrains of Darjeeling and the rigorous attempts by the colonisers to connect the plantations with Calcutta and the towns of the plains. The further introduction of railways, another potent tool of the British, for exploitation of the produce from the tea plantations did in no way improve the condition of the labourers but only became a catalyst in the economic benefit of the planters and the colonisers. The introduction of railways has majorly been seen as a technological marvel of the British, but its effectiveness for exploitation has not been studied enough in respect to the region concerned.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the arguments and views discussed and presented in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER 2

THE TEA PLANTATIONS AND LABOUR IN DARJEELING

It may be fairly stated, that no crop is more dependent on an adequate supply of labour than tea... The labour question, therefore, in the words of the 'Tea Commissioners of 1868,' is the sole question to look to in the future.

Charles Henry Fielder¹

For centuries, the Himalayas held a position of spiritual and commercial significance, but mainly to the inhabitants of Asia. It was from the mid-nineteenth century onwards that increasing interests on medical theories, plantation capitalism, commodity commerce, migrations, and strategic machinations brought these mountain localities and habitats to the imperial and from there on to global attention. Precisely, it was the nineteenth century Euro-American medical science, which held that tropical colonies posed great dangers for white races. Periodic bodily recuperation seemed essential to preserve white racial health in hot climates, but this depended on European colonisers having access to the temperate climes of high-altitude spaces. It was essentially this impetus, which in turn inspired the English East India Company to annex the remote mountain hamlet of Darjeeling from the kingdom of Sikkim in 1835. The Company's new British settlement of Darjeeling was planned as a high-altitude sanitarium that would provide refuge for white troops and administrators from the ravages of the Indian plains.²

The geographical description of Darjeeling, in words of Hyde Clark, presented itself as "a spur of the Great Sinchal mountain... a hog-backed ridge, with a steep descent on its eastern side to the torrent of Rogno, and on the west and south-west declining in more gentle declivities, broken into knolls, and intersected by numerous stream-lets..."³ However, it is quite evident that more than the topography of the Darjeeling hills, it was the geographical location of the place that attracted the British to develop it into a sanitarium to fit their

¹ Charles Henry Fielder, "On the Rise, Progress, and Future Prospects of Tea Cultivation in British India" *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Mar.1869), pp. 29-37

²Judith T. Kenny, "Climate, Race, and Imperial Authority: The Symbolic Landscape of the British Hill Station in India," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol 85, No. 4 (1995): 694-714.

³ Hyde Clarke, "The English Stations in the Hill Regions of India: Their Value and Importance, with Some Statistics of their Products and Trade", *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, September, 1881, Vol. 44, No. 3, p.533.

interests. It needs to be mentioned that in India, both military action and government sponsorship in the establishment of the sanitarium greatly facilitated the obtainment of sites,⁴ and Darjeeling is a living example of this trend.

Keeping with the wants of the British, Darjeeling's advantages were first discovered about the month of February, 1828, by J. W. Grant of the Civil Service, and Major-General G. W. A. Lloyd, who were employed in settling the boundary dispute between Nepal and Sikkim. "These gentlemen represented the facts to the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck, in 1829, and that great man, it is said, never lost sight of the expediency of establishing on this tract of the Sikkim hills a station for the benefit of those whose health demanded relief from the heat of the Bengal plains."⁵

Accordingly, Lord William Bentinck, promptly deputed Captain Herbert, the Deputy Surveyor-General, to examine the country in company with Grant. The reports from these men further proved the feasibility of establishing a sanitarium at Darjeeling. They substantiated that the great value of Darjeeling was because it essentially lay between Nepal, Tibet and Bhootan, on one of the natural routes to Central Asia, commanding the trade on the eastern frontier. The Court of Directors approved the project on the ground that it might prove a valuable depot for the temporary reception of European recruits, and a depot for connecting the trade with the territories of Nepal and Tibet. However, Darjeeling till then was a part of the Sikkim dominion under the Sikkimese King. Thus, the British had to acquire Darjeeling first, if any of their plans regarding the place were to be fulfilled.

Accordingly, in 1835, Captain Lloyd was deputed to negotiate with the king of Sikkim for the cession of the land on which the sanatorium of Darjeeling was to be situated. The Raja was requested to cede a tract of country which was to include Darjeeling, for an equivalent sum in money or land. Though unyielding initially, the king finally gave it and a negotiation was soon reached and the Raja surrendered Darjeeling in 1835 for an annual payment of Rs

⁴ J. E. Spencer and W. L. Thomas, "The Hill Stations and Summer Resorts of the Orient", *American Geographical Society*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Oct., 1948), p. 642

⁵ Hyde Clarke, *op.cit.*, p.533

3000.⁶ The deed of grant by the Raja of Sikkim was obtained on the 1st of February, 1835.

The deed worded as follows :

The Governor General, having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of his Government, suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, I, the Sikkimputtee Rajah, out of friendship for the said Governor General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, that is, all the land South of the Great Rangit river, East of the Balasun, Kahail and Little Rangit rivers and West of Rungno and Mahanadi rivers.”⁷

After General Lloyd had successfully secured the lease, he and Dr. Chapman were sent in 1836 to explore and investigate the climate and the capabilities of the place. They spent the winter of 1836 and part of 1837 exploring and reporting on the area and it was finally decided to develop the site as a Sanitarium. General Llyod was appointed as the Local Agent with the power to deal with the applications of land. He further organized the labour for building the road to Darjeeling. It was at this stage that the British Government posted Dr. Archibald Campbell, a member of the Indian Medical Service in 1839 to Darjeeling, who was till then serving in Nepal as the Assistant Resident.

Political instabilities occurred frequently, but the British were determined to bring more and more land under their jurisdiction. It was after annexation of the Terai in 1850 that the whole area was attached to Darjeeling. Previous to the annexation, “the Darjeeling District had been an enclave in Sikkim territory and, to reach it, the British had to pass through a country acknowledging the rule of a foreign, though dependent, Raja.”⁸ However, after the annexations the British territory in Darjeeling came under a continuous stretch with the British Districts of Purnea and Rangpur in the plains and the Sikkim Raja was cut off from access to the plains except through British territory.

In order to maintain peace and security within the boundaries and also from interventions on the borders, military cantonments were built on either sides of Darjeeling, which formed essential parts of the district. The Jalapahar Cantonment, one of the most important

⁶Joseph Dalton Hooker, *Himalayan Journals: Notes of a Naturalist in Bengal Sikkim and Nepal Himalayas Etc.*, New Delhi, (Reprint 1999, First published 1854) Vol. 1, p. 110.

⁷Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, Bengal Government Press, Calcutta, 1947, pp.37-38.

⁸Ibid, p.39.

cantonments, was bounded on the east by the Calcutta Road, on the west by the Auckland Road and on the south by the Cart Road leading upto Jalapahar from Jorebunglow. It was established sometime between 1842 and 1848 when barracks had been completed for accommodating 150 convalescent soldiers from regiments in the plains. It was then described as a Hill Depot. When the earlier established Senchal Cantonment was abandoned in 1867, the barracks at Jalapahar were strengthened further to accommodate 550 soldiers. The second was the Lebong Cantonment, created in 1882 as a part of the Jalapahar Cantonment, with an extent of 82 acres. Unlike Jalapahar, Lebong was situated below Darjeeling at an altitude of just under 6,000 feet above sea-level. It was opened as a separate cantonment in 1895.

In the *Bengal District Gazetteer*, Dash elaborately recorded that when the District was first taken over by the British administration, the hill portion was almost entirely under forest. The only cultivation was that of *jhuming* or that of burning down the forests, in the interior of the hills by Bhutias and Lepchas and on the foothills by Meches and other aboriginal tribes. First, large areas of forest land were brought under cultivation. This was partly due to the suitable political conditions and partly to the second development, i.e., the replacement of the primitive agricultural method of *jhuming* by the more efficient methods of terracing, ploughing and irrigating lands. The whole process of leasing out land for tea plantations will be discussed in the following pages. The third development of agriculture in the District and arguably the most significant one was the introduction of new crops, the most noteworthy being tea.⁹

It was not till the starting of the tea industry that the most rapid strides were made towards the development and unprecedented growth of the Darjeeling district. Writing about the then British District of Darjeeling, O'Malley said, "With the planting of tea, with its enormous demand for labour, the clearing of forest, the opening out of land, and lastly the introduction of the machinery required for the manufacture, we begin an entirely new chapter in the history of Darjeeling."¹⁰

The most essential requirement of the tea plantations was availability of enormous labour power, which attracted more and more immigrants. These labourers were to be fed, clothed

⁹Ibid, p.49.

¹⁰L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers (Darjeeling)*, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1907, p.30.

and to be provided with houses and wages. This led to the development of settlements which in turn generated strong trade and local markets. The succeeding pages will deal with most of these facets of the tea plantations, with the labour as the core of the discussion, and how it was instrumental in giving Darjeeling a separate identity of its own.

Introduction of Land Grants and the Tea Plantations

It was in 1841 that Archibald Campbell had started his experiments with the Kumaon stock in the virgin lands of Darjeeling, to grow tea. In the immediate years, the experiment proved successful, and under the supervision of Campbell, gradually migrant population started gathering and eventually settled in the district. In 1852, it was reported that both the Assam and China bushes were doing well in the garden of the Superintendent.¹¹ With the tea cultivation proving to be a success in the climate and soil of Darjeeling, it seems the next step taken by Campbell was to lease out lands to the interested cultivators to spread the cultivation of tea in the district. In 1853, in the first settlement of Darjeeling, Archibald Campbell made grants of land to cultivators for ten years.¹² These land grants were alluring to the cultivators who were looking to invest in a profitable enterprise. Needless to say, in the beginning it was the Europeans who brought the lands. Thus, the gradual conversion of the leased out land to tea cultivation occurred through European enterprise, comprised to a great extent of retired officials- civil, medical and military personnel as well as entrepreneurs.

Nandini Bhattacharya uses the term ‘pioneering years’¹³ to mark the earlier stages of the plantation establishments when forests were being cleared and the tea bushes were planted, with labourers requisitioned from catchment areas. She further elaborates that it was the pioneering, entrepreneurial years in Darjeeling that lent opportunities to these Europeans from various classes to find an occupation and settle in Darjeeling. They joined the tea companies either as owner-planters or as managers and assistants.

Even though attempts were made earlier to introduce tea cultivation into Darjeeling some time previously to 1853, when two or three small gardens existed, but the real date of the

¹¹ Arthur Jules Dash, *op.cit.*,p.113.

¹²J.C. Mitra, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Darjeeling Terai, 1919-25*, Calcutta Government Secretariat Press, 1927, p.21.

¹³Nandini Bhattacharya, *Contagion and Enclaves: Tropical Medicine in Colonial India*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2012, p.60.

commencement of the industry may be taken at 1856-57.¹⁴ It was by 1856 that the development had advanced from the experimental to a more extensive and commercial stage. In that year the Alubari tea garden was opened by the Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company, and another on the Lebong spur by the Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank. The *Bengal District Gazetteer* records that “The Rev. T. Boaz, in January 1857 stated that tea had been raised from seed at Takvar by Captain Masson, at Kurseong by Mr. Smith, at Hope Town by a Company, on the Kurseong flats by Mr. Martin and between Kurseong and Pankhabari by Captain Samler, agent of the Darjeeling Tea Concern.”¹⁵

With the gradual spread of the tea gardens under these cultivators, more and more impetus was given to parcel out lands to others as well. Accordingly, the government gave away land first as ‘farming leases’ in 1858 for a period of fifty years, at a token rent of eight annas (half rupee) per acre after five years. Next, it formulated the first Waste Land Rules in Darjeeling district in 1859 and auctioned as freehold, large tracts designated ‘wastelands’, including forests and lands formerly cultivated for maize by Lepchas at the nominal price of Rs. 10 per acre.¹⁶ Between 1859 and 1861 the government sold not less than around 9000 acres of ‘wasteland’.¹⁷

In 1861, the government introduced the ‘fee-simple’ which regarded wastelands in perpetuity as ‘heritable and transferable’ property, subject to no enhancement of land revenue. It was also during this time that four important tea gardens were established at Ging, Ambutia, Takdah and Phubsering under the Darjeeling Tea Company, and the gardens at Takvar and Badamton were opened by the Lebong Tea Company.¹⁸

By 1863, Campbell had already made several grants for tea plantations under the Waste Land Rules, as in Darjeeling. The details of which are given below, in Table no. 2.1

¹⁴R.D. O’Brien, *Darjeeling the Sanitarium of Bengal: and its Surroundings*, W. Newman and Co., Ltd., Calcutta, 1883, pp. 54-55

¹⁵ Arthur Jules Dash, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ L.S.S. O’Malley, *op. cit.*, pp.189-190.

¹⁷ Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p.89.

¹⁸ O’Malley, *op. cit.*, p.93.

Table 2.1: Land Grants made till 1863 in the Darjeeling District for Cultivation of Tea

In 1862-63				By the End of 1862-63			
No of lots sold	Area in acres	Collection of Revenue from Lessee (in Rs.)	Arears (in Rs.)	No of lots sold	Area in acres	Collection of Revenue from Lessee (in Rs.)	Arears (in Rs.)
36	31,915	65,608	5,00,290	58	39,196	84,920	5,64,716

Source: *Bengal Administration Report, 1861-62, 1862-63*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1864, p. XX (Appendix).

The Waste Land Rules permitted large-scale speculation because it legislated that only 15 per cent of the lease needed to be planted with tea. Many speculators, thus taking advantage of this rule, claimed and staked out ‘waste-lands’ without cultivating them. Through the 1860s, speculations about the partially laid out tea gardens and prospects of huge profit margin and quick money without actually going through the elaborate process of manufacturing tea became common practices.¹⁹ In this context, it has been noted that, at Darjeeling it was common to find that “there are two utterly distinct systems carried out; one for those plantations which, like the peddler’s razors, are intended for sale; and one for those which are intended, if possible, to pay.”²⁰

In 1864, the government introduced leases in Darjeeling for tea for a period of 30 years, the land being rent-free for the initial five years, and then an annual rate of 6 annas per acre on the whole area under lease.²¹

Needless to say, the appeal of the Darjeeling tea for both the local consumption, as well as, international markets made it a lucrative investment for the cultivators. Therefore, with every passing year, “the cultivation of tea was increasing rapidly... Fresh grants were being continually called for. The circulation of money caused by these plantations was said to have enabled the people to meet the rise in the price of necessaries.”²² The growth rate of the tea business and the returns were such that despite a slump in the tea industry in India between

¹⁹Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p.54.

²⁰E.F. Bamber, *An Account of the Cultivation and Manufacture of Tea in India, from Personal Observation*, T.S. Smith, Calcutta, 1866, p.1.

²¹ O’Malley, *op. cit.*, p.191

²²*Annals of Indian Administration*, Vol. V, n.p., Serampore, 1861, p.214.

1861 and 1866, the acreage in Darjeeling continued to expand and tea plantations expanded to the Terai.²³

The Government offered land to investors on favourable terms. By the end of 1866, i.e., only ten years after the establishment of the tea industry as a commercial enterprise, there were no less than 39 gardens with 10,000 acres under cultivation. In 1870, there were 56 gardens with 11,000 acres under cultivation; and the number had been recorded as to reach 113 gardens in 1874, with almost 18,888 acres of land under cultivation of tea if not less. In other words, between 1866 and 1874 the number of gardens had under the tea cultivation had almost trebled, while the area outrun of tea was multiplied nearly ten times.²⁴

Table 2.2: State of Tea Culture in Darjeeling till 1873-74

Name of Proprietors	Total extent of land (in acres)	Cultivated land (in acres)
Darjeeling Company, Limited	8,547	...
Lebong Company, Limited	5,750	1,109
Tukvar Company, Limited	574	574
Soora Tea Company, Limited	1,252	403
Dr. Brougham (Dooteria)	3,027	700
Land Mortgage Bank, Limited	1,750	500
	1,150	250
	1,200	250
	258	250
John Taylor, Esq	1,626	274
Messrs. Kennedy and Fleming	156	52
Pankhabari Tea Company, Limited	534	...
A. C. Ward. Esq	50	5

Source: *Tea Industry in Bengal*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1873, p.19.

From the data provided in Table no. 2.2, it can be seen that although large tracts of land were brought by various proprietors for the cultivation of tea, it was often a very less portion of the

²³Percival Griffiths, *History of Indian Tea Industry*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1967, p.88.

²⁴O'Malley, *op. cit.*, p.94

whole tract that was under cultivation. The reason for this kind of endeavour has not been specified, but it seems that lack of adequate capital to cultivate more areas; or the absence of pressure from any authority to produce a minimum amount of tea, or bring required area of cultivation, might have been the reason for the slow rate of conversion of lands in to tea cultivation areas.

Hence, we find that after the initial decades of speculation in wasteland, the government finally amended the rules for grants in 1898 when preliminary leases were given only after the lessee showed that he had enough capital to develop the land, and after five years a 30-year lease was granted in perpetuity on condition of cultivating tea in at least 15 per cent of the land.²⁵

Table 2.3: Statistics of Tea Plantations in Darjeeling (1861-1941)

Years	No of Tea Gardens	Total Area in Acres under Tea	Approximate Yield in lbs
1861	22	3,251	42,600
1874	113	18,888	3,927,911
1881	155	28,367	5,160,316
1885	175	88,499	9,090,298
1891	177	45,585	10,910,487
1895	186	48,692	11,714,551
1901	170	51,724	13,535,537
1905	148	50,618	12,447,471
1911	156	51,488	14,250,615
1921	168	59,005	14,080,946
1931	169	61,178	20,496,481
1941	136	63,173	24,815,216

Source: A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.XXXI; also, L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling*, West Bengal Government Press, Calcutta, 2001, p. 94.

Note: The statistics for the years 1874, 1885, 1895 and 1905 have been taken from L.S.S O'Malley, and the others are from A. Mitra.

It should be mentioned here that agriculturally the entire district of Darjeeling was divided into three tracts: the mountains west of the Tistariver, Kalimpong, and the *terai*. At the time of cessions the mountains west of the Tista, that comprise the Darjeeling Sadar subdivision was almost wholly covered with forest. By 1900, it was said, that almost all the slopes were under the cultivation of tree, and two-thirds of the population of the entire district were

²⁵Ibid, pp. 192-193.

residing in these tea gardens, whereas, the remaining one-third of the population resided in the municipality town and in the military cantonments .²⁶

However, soon after the situation began to change with regards to area coverage under the tea cultivation. According to the data provided through the census records and elaborated in the given table, it can be seen that the area under tea remained more or less constant from 1921 onwards, the spread not so much as it had been in the earlier years. By 1945, the number of estates, being amalgamated with larger firms, came down to 125, spreading over the entire district. The distribution of the estates thus stood:

Table 2.4: Total Number of Tea Estates in the District of Darjeeling in 1945

Thana	Number of Estates
Darjeeling	21
Jorebunglow	18
Sukhiapokri	9
Pulbazar	2
RangliRangliot	11
Kurseong	32
Mirik	9
Siliguri	10
Kharibari	4
Phansidewa	3
Garubathan	6

Source: A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.lxiii

The tea industry was effectively financed and controlled from Calcutta. However, the local movement of funds required for the working of the tea industry was handled by various commercial banks as well as tea garden kayahs whose main ostensible function was the retail supply of commodities.²⁷

Table 2.5 shows some of the most well established and largest tea companies that were there in the district of Darjeeling.

²⁶ A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, Calcutta, 1954, p. Cxxiv (Appendix II)

²⁷ A. Mitra, *op. cit.*, p.xciv

Table 2.5: Largest Established Tea Companies in the Darjeeling District by 1920

Name of Garden or Company	Area under Tea Cultivation (in acres)
Amalgamated Tea Estates Co., Ltd.-	
Moondakotee	1,271
Nagri	724
Chongtong	1,048
Lebong	630
Dooteriah	1,305
Phuguri	562
Kalej Valley	659
Darjeeling Co., Ltd:-	
Ambootea	736
Ging	572
Phoobsering	375
Tukdah	461
British Darjeeling Tea Co., Ltd.:-	1,194
Dilaram Tea Co., Ltd	481
Fagu Tea Co., Ltd	940
Gielle Tea Co., Ltd	528
Goomtee Tea Estate	312
Hope Town Tea Co., Ltd	246
Lebong Tea Co., Ltd	1,530
Longview Tea Co., Ltd	794
Margarate's Hope Tea Co.,	541
Pashok Tea Co., Ltd	802
Rhoni Tea Co., Ltd	1,406
Singell Tea Co., Ltd	747
Teesta Valley Tea Co., Ltd	717
Tukvar Co., Ltd	1,250

Source: Compiled from *Detailed Report of the General Committee of the Indian Tea Association, 1922*, Criterion Printing Works, Calcutta, 1923, pp.365-367 .

The Role of the Labour

Tea plantation is an organised industry. The basic requirements to run the enterprise are capital, availability of land, suitable soil and climate and an adequate supply of labour. The first three necessities were already available in Darjeeling. The fourth and most essential component- labour, was not a major cause of worry to the planters either in Darjeeling, as it had been felt by their counterparts in Assam and Jalpaiguri. The growth and spread of the tea plantations both requires and equally thrives on the easy and cheap availability of labour in

the tea gardens and factories. Darjeeling not only had enough supply of working hands in the tea gardens and the factories, but it was also cheaper in comparison to other industries too.

As per the division of labour was concerned in the plantations, the picture was similar to that of other plantations. Hoeing, plucking, pruning, forking, manuring, and weeding were the main types of agricultural operations on the tea estates. The task of hoeing was exclusively performed by men. Females were considered physically unfit for such tasks, therefore they were engaged mostly in plucking, light pruning or skiffing, forking, and weeding. The children were employed mostly in forking and weeding, assisting the women, and in the nursery. As per the demands of the seasons, from April to November, women were exclusively employed in plucking. At this time, hoeing, pruning, and manuring were mostly done by the men in this season. The importance of the seasons in tea plantations are of much importance, as they often interpreted the nature of work to be undertaken. Usually, towards the beginning and the end of the plucking season, when plucking does not absorb so many women, they generally took up forking and pruning, in addition to plucking ; and at the same time, the children were driven to tasks in the nursery and other miscellaneous activities. Similarly, During the winter months of December, January and February, when plucking is almost stopped, the women took upon pruning and forking. Once again, based on the season and the nature of work, the year would be divided into two broad divisions, namely, the busy season, from April to November, and the slack season, from November to March. This was done to facilitate the task of enumeration, during seasonal variation, which has been discussed later in the chapter.

Initially, a sparsely populated land, comprising of native lepchas, the tea plantations in Darjeeling once started, their “growth was phenomenal, and, as the number of tea estates increased, an unexampled immigration took place from Nepal and elsewhere in order to meet the demand for labour.”²⁸In fact, it was from the appointment of Campbell as Superintendent and his pioneering years in introducing tea to these hilly terrains, that the first immigration of Nepalese from the west and of plainsmen from the south who flocked to exploit the land.

It has been an established fact right from the beginning that the majority population of the Darjeeling district and the labourers in the tea garden plantations comprised of Nepali

²⁸“From the Hoogly to the Himalayas,” *The Times Press*, Bombay, 1913, p.34.

migrants from Nepal. Time and again, in various records, this fact has been emphasised. *The Bengal Administrative Report of 1861-63* recorded that the mass of labourers were Nepalese and Bhooteas who moved between Darjeeling and the neighbouring territories. These coolies from Nepal, being almost entirely hill-men, and working in a climate similar to theirs, did not suffer from diseases as opposed to their counterparts in the plains.²⁹ Writing about his experience on the settlement of Darjeeling, Steuart Bayley, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (1887-90), recorded that “Every rood [measure of land equal to quarter of an acre] of land in that district that is not expressly reserved by Government for the cultivation of food-crops has already been taken up for tea, and a very large capital has been sunk in its cultivation, which gives employment to an enormous number of natives, mostly immigrants from Nepal.”³⁰ This migration from Nepal has been highlighted again and again in various official records and personal journals of the time, often stating that how “Of the labourers employed on the tea estates fully 99 per cent are immigrants from Nepaul, or their descendants who have settled down permanently in the district.”³¹

Not only was the migration of labourers from Nepal painted in ink in various recorded works of the time but also equal emphasis was bestowed on the work efficiency of the labourers in the region of Darjeeling, compared to some of its counterparts.

Historical Glimpses of the Plantation Labourers

It deserves a mention that the plantation system in Darjeeling depended less on machinery and more on the manual labour to reach meet its needs. A view regarding the Tea-breaking and the Wincrowing machine in this context is mentioned in the *Indian Tea Gazette*, which stated that none of these machines were seen in the valley and hoped that “there will be no occasion for any in Darjeeling; as the heavier and more solid the tea is, the better it is.”³² This view is further reinforced when the Gazette states or rather advocates that, “Machinery is by many considered a mistake for tea manufacture, in any district where the supply of labour is plentiful, and can be relied upon...”³³ In Darjeeling rolling leaf, a task which was manual and where no machinery was required, was done by able-bodied coolies, and withering,

²⁹*Bengal Administrative Report, 1861-62, 1862-63*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1864, p.83

³⁰C.E. Buckland, *Bengal Under the Lieutenant Governors*, Vol.II, S.K. Lahiri and Co., Calcutta, 1906, p.846.

³¹R.D. O’Brien, *op. cit.*, p.54.

³²*The Tea Cyclopaedia*, Calcutta Central Press Co., Ltd., Calcutta, 1881, p.243

³³*Ibid.*, p. 243

fermentation, drying, etc., being supervised and looked after by the tea makers. The coolies hand-rolled the leaf either on the mat on the floor or on a table, each coolie getting around forty to sixty pounds of 'kucha' leaf to roll, as a day's work.³⁴

Similarly, when the tea left the garden in the Darjeeling district it had to be taken to the nearest railway stations. This work was done by coolies who would carry one or two of the heavy chests on a wooden framework, somewhat like a chair, which was supported by a broad strap round the coolies' forehead."³⁵

The *Indian Tea Gazettee* while making a comparison of the work efficiency of an average labourer in Darjeeling to his counterpart in the Kangra region, states that "a Darjeeling (Nepalese) able-bodied man thinks nothing of carrying a hundred pounds of charcoal up and down steep hills; if a Kangra coolie carries twenty-five seers he considers himself quiet a hero."³⁶ It further adds that a Darjeeling coolie would think nothing of trudging up five or six miles with an 80lb or 100lb box of tea, which took two Kangra men to accomplish in a comparatively level country.³⁷ The mention of strength and ability of the coolies in Darjeeling over their counterparts in regions like Kumaon and Kangra made them a sorted out lot in the Darjeeling tea gardens; that "In Kumaon and Kangra the labour is chiefly local and cheap, but that of both places is much inferior both in physique and character to the self-imported labour in Darjeeling from the adjoining districts of Nepal."³⁸

As far as the cultivation season in the gardens was concerned, February being the peak month for labour: cultivation work is then heavy and the attendance of males was higher. Then between the two flushing periods, March-April and September-November, evoked increased attendance particularly of female pluckers.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 242

³⁵ J.C. Kydd, *India's Great Industries: The Tea Industry*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1921, p.40.

³⁶ *The Tea Cyclopaedia, op.cit.*, pp.239-240

³⁷ Ibid, p.244.

³⁸ Ibid, p.244.

Table 2.6: Statistics of Labourers in Tea Gardens of Darjeeling (1901-1941)

Year	Permanent	Temporary	Total
1901	24,257	16,194	40,451
1911	26,510	13,051	39,561
1921	45,977	2,733	48,710
1931	61,572	2,093	63,665
1941	67,838	1,861	69,699

Source: A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.XXXI

According to the data provided through the census records and elaborated in Table 2.6, it can be seen how temporary labour decreased over time in the plantations. At the same time, the recorded data reveals that the permanent labour was on a continuous rise in the tea-gardens. In context to the proposed research, this changing pattern of statistics begs an understanding. In the initial stages of the establishment of the tea plantations across the district, the labourers would mainly arrive on the seasons of cultivation, and migrate back to their home (in this case, majority moved to Nepal) when the season ended. These labourers were arguably the men who could make the long journeys. As more and more plantations sprung up, and lands were brought under cultivation, the demands for a larger working force was felt. Eventually, the role of women and children became important in the plantations. This resulted in the numbers of migrants to increase. With the women and children, migration after every seasonal cultivation was an arduous task. Alongside, the avenues to have settlements within the plantations was a good incentive to keep these migrants closer to the source of work. On a sociological scale, one of the main reasons for a migrant labourer to return home is to reunite with the family. Thus, when the criteria was fulfilled in the plantation itself, by having whole families to work in the tea-gardens, the reasons to return home were negligible. As a result, the tea garden labour in Darjeeling stabilised, and settled in family patterns. As a settled labour force was considered essential, as well as effective than individual migrating labourers, whole families came to be employed in the gardens. Therefore, family employment in the tea plantations developed as a natural corollary of such a system of recruitment. Furthermore, the ever increasing emphasis on women labourers for the tea plantations also contributed to the family settlements. This can be seen in the table below.

Table 2.7: Statistics for Tea Plantations in Darjeeling District (1911-1921)

1911			1921		
No of gardens	No of male employees	No of female employees	No of gardens	No of male employees	No of female employees
122	26,121	26,845	139	25,638	30,551

Source: W.H. Thompson, *Census of India (Bengal), 1921*, Vol.V, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1923, p.388

Commenting on the work efficiency and the importance of the female labour force population in the Darjeeling tea-gardens, it has been generally opined that the average Nepalese women in the tea gardens of Darjeeling, would do twenty per cent more garden or tea-house work than a man in the Kangra region.³⁹ The detailed study in respect to the population of the women labourers have been attempted in the next chapter.

Writing about the coolie families, O'Brien records that "they were well paid and well housed and each family has its little patch of cultivation rent-free, on which maize and muarwa are grown."⁴⁰ He further adds that how these coolie labourers are better off on the tea gardens, than they were in their own country (which he refers to as Nepal), thus immigrating and settling down in Darjeeling and its localities.

However, one has to be cautious in terms of understanding the family labour requirement in the tea plantations. Most often, we are presented with a picturesque image of women, in colourful dresses, hanging a wooden holder across their body, plucking tender tea-leaves from lush green fields. What lies underneath the shades of these tree bushes requires a second thought. It is an established fact that the wages in tea plantations are lower than in other agricultural jobs. Hence, it becomes all the more necessary for every member of the family to seek work for economic reasons. As the plantations have openings to hire men, women and children alike, it seems as a welcome avenue for family employment. Women were also paid less than men and therefore employed in large numbers.

The Wage System

With the introduction and rapid spread of plantations, Darjeeling started undergoing a structural change, both in terms of agricultural practices and simultaneously in demography

³⁹Ibid, p.244

⁴⁰ R.D. O'Brien, *op.cit.*, p.60

and became enclaves of the colonial economy. According to Nandini Bhattacharya, “the study of these processes of change enables us to understand the permeability that existed between the enclaves and the world beyond,”⁴¹ which was central to the functioning of the enclave economy.

The wage system on the tea plantations had essentially and predominantly been a system of paying on a piece rate basis, paying in proportion to the jobs done, or by results. The basic wage payment in the tea gardens of the Darjeeling hills was majorly through the *hazira*⁴² system. For pruning and hoeing the *hazira* system is the most common one. which came to be- Basic rates: Men 5 annas⁴³ (31 paise), women 4 annas (25 paise), and children 3 annas (1/2 paise). These basic rates had been prevalent for a long time and were in fact really task rates. In this context the *hazira* system requires an detailed understanding. Under the *hazira* system the labourers were required to complete a standard daily task, requiring not less than four and six hours in its completion. Every man, woman or child, in order to earn the *hazira*, was to complete some measured work fixed by the employer. Cultivation or winter operations were often paid for on a bigha⁴⁴ or piece rate system, in which the task for sickling, pruning, hoeing or deep-forking was so arranged that the basic *haziri* was earned by 5 or 6 hours’ work. If the work was completed before time, the labourer could undertake extra work for which he was paid extra. In the plucking season there are two methods of payment, the piece rate and the bigha or task rate. Piece rates are 6pies (Rs 0.03) per seer of leaf : the task is so fixed that by doing it the worker gets the basic wage.

In this case, one cannot help but wonder that when the *haziri* was taken to be the basic mode of payment, depending on the number of tasks completed, then the seasonal works had a

⁴¹Nandini Bhattacharya, *Contagion and Enclaves: Tropical Medicine in Colonial India*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2012, p.54.

⁴² The plantations usually had two methods of wage payment, namely, the *Ticca* and the *Hazira*. The *ticca* was paid weekly, whereas, the *hazira* was paid on a monthly basis. According to Khemraj Sharma, under the *Haziri* system, an employed person (worker/labourer) sells out his/her *Hazira* (job) to another person who is not formally the employee of the garden; as cited in Khemraj Sharma, *Tea Plantation Workers in a Himalayan Region*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p.61

⁴³ Value of 1 rupee= 16 anna, 50 paise= 8 anna, 25 paise= 4 anna, 12 paise= 2 anna, 6 paise= 1 anna, 3 paise= ½ anna

⁴⁴ In Bengal and Darjeeling, Bigha was standardized under British colonial rule as being 1/3 acre, or 0.3306 acre. In metric units, a bigha is hence 1333 m sq.

strong impact on the wages. Thus, in case of cash earnings on tea plantations the earnings of women would then exceed the earnings of men in the plucking season, whereas a man would earn more than a woman in the non-plucking season. This is one facet that will require further insight for interested researches on the wage system of the Darjeeling tea plantations.

According to Mitra, the lowest paid adult male or female in a tea garden in Darjeeling earned close to 13 annas (approx. 81 paise) per day; 8 annas (50 paise) as *hazira* and 5 annas (31 paise) as dearness allowance. The average female worker in Darjeeling earned 12 annas (75 paise) a day; 7 annas as *hazira* and 5 annas as dearness allowance. The adolescents earned 7 annas (53 paise) per day; 4 annas as *hazira* and 3 annas as dearness allowance. Dearness allowances was paid on almost every garden at rates which are usually Rs. 2 to Rs. 8 per month for factory labour, one anna per day for adult garden labourers and half an anna for children.

The wages of the tea plantation labourers, with detailed demarcation between wages of men, women and children are given below in Table no. 2.8 and no. 2.9,

Table 2.8: Daily Wages of Tea Plantation Labourers in Darjeeling (1893-1902)

Wages	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
Cooly	0.25 to 0.31	0.25 to 0.31	0.25 to 0.37	0.25 to 0.50	0.25 to 0.50	0.25 to 0.50	0.25 to 0.50	0.31 to 0.50	0.25 to 0.31	0.25 to 0.31
Women	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.25	0.18 to 0.25	0.18 to 0.25
Children	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12 to 0.18	0.12 to 0.18

Source: *Darjeeling District Gazeetter. Statistics, 1901-02*, The Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1905, p.7.

Table 2.9: Daily Wages of Tea Plantation Labourers in Darjeeling (1903-1912)

Wages for	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
Cooly	0.25 to 0.31	0.25 to 0.31	0.25 to 0.31	0.25 to 0.31	0.25 to 0.31	0.25 to 0.50	0.25 to 0.50	0.25 to 0.50	0.25 to 0.50	0.25 to 0.50
Women	0.18 to 0.25	0.18 to 0.25	0.18 to 0.25	0.18 to 0.25	0.18 to 0.25	0.18 to 0.25	0.18 to 0.25	0.18 to 0.31	0.18 to 0.31	0.18 to 0.31
Children	0.12 to 0.18	0.12 to 0.18	0.12 to 0.18	0.12 to 0.18	0.12 to 0.18	0.12 to 0.18	0.12 to 0.18	0.12 to 0.18	0.12 to 0.18	0.12 to 0.18

Source: *Bengal District Gazetteer. Volume B, Darjeeling District. Statistics, 1900-01 to 1910-11*, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1913, p.10.

From the statistics provided by the records it is seen that the rate of increase of labour wages was minimal, and almost absent in the case of the children. Also, due to lack of adequate data in terms of work culture, employment statistics, and a standard wage rate, the researches on plantation economies face several shortcomings. It should be noted that the work efficiency of labourers vary considerably with the season, soil and plant ; *e.g.*, during the rainy season hoeing is not a difficult task as the soil is soft compared with what it is in the cold weather when the soil is so hard. Again, since the district was on mountainous terrains, and some areas were in foothills (Siliguri), thus, one garden might have required one type of hoeing while another might demand a different sort of hoeing. But the corresponding wages remained unchanged and very low. That begs the question on how livelihood and basic necessities of food and other things were met in such a wage structure. To understand the situation better, the subsequent prices of some consumable items for the same years are given below in Tables 2.10 and 2.11:

Table 2.10: Price in Seers per Rupee in Darjeeling District (Sadar Subdivision), 1893-1902

Year	Article/Commodity		
	Rice (in Seers)	Gram (in Seers)	Salt (in Seers)
1893	10	10	8
1894	12	12	8
1895	12	11	8
1896	13	11	8
1897	9	7	8
1898	11	8	8
1899	14	12	8

1900	12	10	8
1901	11	9	9
1902	10	...	9

Source: *Darjeeling District Gazeetter. Statistics, 1901-02*, The Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1905, p.7.

Note: 1 Seer= 1.25 kg by general standards in India.

Table 2.11: Price in Seers per Rupee in Darjeeling District (Sadar Subdivision), 1903-1912

Year	Articles/Commodities		
	Rice (in Seers)	Gram (in Seers)	Salt (in Seers)
1903	12	13	9
1904	12	12	10
1905	13	11	12
1906	8	9	12
1907	7	9	13
1908	7	7	13
1909	9	9	14
1910	11	11	14
1911	10	11	13
1912	18	10	13

Source: *Bengal District Gazetteer. Volume B, Darjeeling District. Statistics, 1900-01 to 1910-11*, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1913, p.9.

Note: 1 Seer= 1.25 kg by general standards in India.

From what has been given in Table 2.10 and 2.11, and comparing them to the wages as given in Tables 2.8 and 2.9, it can be said that, the wages in the tea plantations did not respond to the movement of prices of commodities.

As per the methodology shown and elaborated in the West Bengal District Handbooks: Darjeeling, 1951 by A. Mitra, to estimate the livelihood sustainability in a tea garden in Darjeeling, the average size of the family of the tea garden labourer was taken to be 4.163 adult human units and the number of earners in terms of adult consumption units to be 2.572. The number of dependents per adult earner was then rounded-off and calculated to be at Rs. 1.634.⁴⁵

The elaborated details to estimate the wage and livelihood of the labourers in the plantation had been undertaken in a survey by the Minimum Wages Committee of 1948. It has been

⁴⁵ A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.lxvi

cited in the Census of 1951⁴⁶. According to this survey, it was revealed that the average expenditure of a family per week in Darjeeling was close to Rs. 25.892. Accordingly, the average weekly expenditure per adult earner was therefore $\text{Rs. } 25.892 \div 2.542 = \text{Rs. } 10.162$. This amount is earned by a labourer working for 6 days a week. Considering there were two adults in the family, a male and a female, this would sum up to $\text{Rs. } 10.162 \times 2 = \text{Rs. } 20.324$ (rounding-off to the near decimal), and the children labourers adding in a few annas to the sum.

Next an attempt was made to assess the cost of consumption of food per adult and came to a conclusion that the cost of such a diet per day per adult consumption unit would be 11.61 annas (Rs.0.75) in Darjeeling. The accounting was as follows:

Table 2.12: Cost of a Prescribed Diet per Adult Consumption/day

Item	Quantity in output per adult consumption unit	Rate in Annas per Seer	Cost in Annas per adult consumption unit
Cereals	15	7	3.27
Pulses	3	12	1.17
Vegetables	10	9	2.75
Milk	8	5	1.22
Fats and oils	2	48	2.88
Fruits	2	5	0.32
Total			11.61 annas

Source: A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.lxvi.

Note: If the value of 11.61 annas, i.e., per adult consumption unit is converted to nearest rupee, it becomes 0.75 paise.

What needs to be seen in context to the data provided in Table 2.12 is that the cost of rice, which is considered the basic food item, has not been included in the consumable items. Perhaps, it was generally taken that rice was grown in the patches of land provided to the labourers and that was enough to sustain the families. Land under rice cultivation was the largest in the district of Darjeeling. However, insufficient data on the supply and cost of rice to the labourers in the plantations presents a major drawback in assessing the cost of consumption per unit of family, which also includes other day to day usage of materials.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The Minimum Wages Committee next attempted to assess the prices of basic amenities of everyday usage including fuel, clothing, lightning, etc. Taking a weekly assessment of per adult consumption unit on these items, the data came as,

Table 2.13: Daily Items per Adult Consumption Unit per Week

Items	Rs.
Lighting	0.072
Fuel	0.290
Clothing	0.408
Household requisites	0.045
Conventional necessities	0.413
Micellaneous	0.225
Total	1.453

Source: A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.lxvi.

From the data provided in Table 2.13, the weekly consumption amount of an average adult was estimated to be Rs. 1.453. Thus, the consumption per adult per day would come to, $Rs. 1.453/7 = Rs. 0.208$. Now, multiplying this sum with the number of dependent heads per adult male earner, i.e., 1.634, we get $0.208 \times 1.634 = Rs. 0.340$. This is the average daily expenditure per family unit on items other than food.

Similarly, the average cost of food per adult family unit would be obtained by multiplying Rs. 0.75 by 1.634, which would come to Rs. 1.225. Therefore, with the two sums of food and other basic amenities used by the tea plantation labourers, the total expenditure per day to be incurred by each adult earner would amount to, $Rs. 1.225$ (food) + $Rs. 0.340$ (other items) = $Rs. 1.565$. This was the findings of the Minimum Wages Committee.

Now, for the proposed research, using the data given in Tables 2.8 and 2.9, an attempt to make a separate study on the minimum wage of a family as an unit can be attempted. Let us take the average family to consist of four members, i.e., one adult male, one adult female, and two children above the age of 12 years (since that was the minimum age considered to work in the tea-gardens). Now, the minimum wage of a male labourer was Rs.0.25 per day; of a

female labourer was Rs. 0.18/day; and , Rs.0.12/day for a child. Considering the number of work days to be six every week, each month therefore had (6 days x 4 weeks=24) working days in an average. Thus, minimum basic wage per month for respective family members would be,

Male wage labourer of the family, Rs. 0.25 x 24= Rs.6

Female wage labourer of the family, Rs. 0.12 x 24= Rs.4.32

Child wage labourers of the family, Rs. 0.12x24= Rs. 3 (Rs.2.88 rounded-off to near decimal)

Also, since two children are taken as assumption, wage will be Rs.3x2= Rs.6

Thus, total minimum wage per family per month will be, 6+4.32+6= Rs.16.32, or Rs.16 (after rounding-off to the near decimal).

Now, if we consider the total expenditure per day to be incurred by each adult earner to be the same, as had been prescribed by the Minimum Wages Committee, then it was Rs. 1.565. Thus in a month it would be (Rs.1.565x30 days= Rs.46.95) Rs. 47.[here, 30 days in a month has been taken into consideration as food and other consumptions are a everyday requirement]. This was almost thrice the average wage earned by the family per month as a unit. This then presents before us a very harsh situation of the wage labourers of the tea-gardens who perhaps were severely subjected to a hand-to-mouth situation. The growing presence of money-lenders (discussed elaborately in the next chapter) in the district could be attributed to the restricted wage structure that majorly prevailed in the Darjeeling tea plantations.

What needs understanding was that this was just an average estimation and families varied in population with the children and women being a large population of the plantations.

However, what remains majorly unchanged was the wage structure, especially of these two mentioned groups.

The changes in the wage structure in Darjeeling, if anything, was nil or insignificant.⁴⁷ What needs to be remembered is that the very development of colonial plantation agriculture in Darjeeling was initiated by the “kind of commercialization closely associated with increased accumulation, giving rise to expansion of productive scale based on managerial farming or

⁴⁷Iftikhar-ul-Awwal, “Supply of Labour to Bengal Tea Industry, 1900-1939”, *Bangladesh Historical Studies*, Vol. IV, 1979, p.53.

plantation agriculture.”⁴⁸ Thus, the maintenance cost of the labourers and employment charges for the planter was mostly at par year after year. Even though the acreage of tea, its exportation and the margin of profit were subject to increase, the wage structure of these toiling labour masses showed no increment.

In fact, as far as the planters and proprietors of the plantations were concerned, the *Indian Tea Gazette* strongly advocates that the main object of the planter and of those whose capital is invested in the tea plantation enterprise is in the form of pounds, shillings and pence and not in philanthropy.⁴⁹ Sharit Kumar Bhowmick, in this context, opines that, “The plantation, being a labour-intensive industry, a reduction in the wage bill would increase profits.”⁵⁰ At the same time the planters were able to have a captive labour force and therefore able to extract as much work as possible from the labourers. This had to be the case, because the investment of the planters in the tea industry was often conditional on their being able to realise at least as high a rate of profit in industry as in trade.⁵¹

Also, geographical isolation, and a sense of segregation from the plains; and an almost complete absence of legal protection in favour of the labourers had placed these plantation workers in a position of total exploitation. The lack of better avenues for employment and restrictions based on ethnicity further crippled the labourers, preventing them from migrating elsewhere for better wages. It needs a mention that despite the proverbial extolling of tea work as a path to riches, the plantation’s retentive potential was limited by its scanty promotion opportunities, limited to a few foremen and overseer jobs.⁵² Furthermore, the planters were cautious as to maintain a strict hand on labourers from leaving the gardens. What is interesting in this context is the role that official records, journals and literature played in creating compartments amongst the labour populations thus creating a identity for them in

⁴⁸Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal Since 1770*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.41.

⁴⁹*The Tea Cyclopaedia*, *op.cit.*,p.242.

⁵⁰Sharit Kumar Bhowmik, “The Plantation as a Social System”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, No. 36, September, 1980, p. 1525.

⁵¹Amiya Kumar Bagchi “Colonialism and the Nature of 'Capitalist' Enterprise in India”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 31, 1988.

⁵²Jayeeta Sharma, “Producing Himalayan Darjeeling: Mobile People and Mountain Encounters”, *Himalaya Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 2, January, 2016, p. 92

terms of specific laborious jobs. These features, along with the role of the strong caste divisions within the Nepali community will be discussed in details in the next chapter.

Restrictions on the Labourers

The plantation system of Darjeeling marked a break from the existing agrarian policies and practices of the colonial government in India.⁵³ Earlier, the agrarian revenue represented the mainstay of income behind the colonial government. With the impetus shifting towards the plantations from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the leasing of previously uncultivated (although not unoccupied) land, designated in the various official reports as ‘wastelands’, was leased out to British private entrepreneurs. It should be mentioned here that in Darjeeling, the native cultivators, if they had any tract of land of their own, had no saleable rights on the soil. Under the Waste-Land rules, all the rights were mostly reserved in the hands of the Europeans.⁵⁴

The tea companies and the cultivators borrowed the structural layout of the tea estates and their management ethos from their previous experiences of tea plantations in the Assam region, but the most distinct feature in Darjeeling tea plantations was the absence of the recruitment of non-indentured labour. In this regard, it was opined that in the contemporaneous Assam tea enterprise it was the planter pressure which resulted in the legislative creation of a penal and indentured system for workers from other parts of India; but as far as Darjeeling was concerned, its steady and nearly complete incorporation into mobile Himalayan circuits made such legislation unnecessary.⁵⁵ However, although the labourers were not under indentured contract in Darjeeling, their mobility between plantations were restricted informally by the managements. In Darjeeling plantations, to quote the words of Nandini Bhattacharya, “this was to limit as much as possible the migration of *sardars* with their coolies *en masse* to other plantations, limit the interactions of workers with potential ‘political agitators’ and circumscribe the role of government in the administration of the plantations as much as possible.”⁵⁶ The reports on the tea industry progression in Bengal and its district towns also support this, while saying that the “Labour in Darjeeling Hills has hitherto been a less serious difficulty than in any other great tea district,

⁵³ Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p.53

⁵⁴ *The Tea Cyclopaedia*, *op.cit.*, p. 238

⁵⁵ Jayeeta Sharma, *op.cit.*, p.90

⁵⁶ Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p.53

and machinery has been employed to a greater extent, and seemingly with more success, than elsewhere.”⁵⁷

In fact, from the very outset, the relatively easier access to labour was instrumental in facilitating a system of free rather than indentured labour in the tea estates of northern Bengal⁵⁸, especially Darjeeling. This in turn proved to be extremely useful for the tea companies in Darjeeling, “because immigration from Nepal was far simpler than the system of importing indentured labourers from the tribal areas of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas that was prevalent in Assam.”⁵⁹

In fact, it has been opined that the contractual system in Assam was designed to provide the planter with wide-ranging powers of detention and resulted in a power equation quite hopelessly in favour of the planters. On the other hand, in case of Darjeeling, the system of free labour meant that there was no government control whatsoever over the immigration into the region. Also, from the indications of all the available sources, it seems that the Government never attempted to restrict the migration of labourers into the Darjeeling district from Nepal. It had no strong reason to, as the supply of labourers were always maintained at a cheap wage structure, and there were no causes of alarm or revolt.

However, the tool of exploitation grew its common branches in the policies of recruitment. Among the policies of labour employment, the main intention of the planters was to employ as many persons as possible but at a very low wage rate. Therefore they found that their best way of obtaining such labour was to recruit an entire family instead of individual workers. This system of migration of an entire family led the planters to cut off workers from their ancestral homes in order to prevent workers to have excuses of returning back. In this way family recruitment within the tea plantations became the cheapest form of labour as by recruiting an entire family the planters assigned wages per family that was much less than what individual workers would get if they were recruited separately.⁶⁰

⁵⁷*Tea Industry in Bengal*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1873, p.xxvii.

⁵⁸R.L.Sarkar and Mahendra P.Lama, *Tea Plantation Workers in the Eastern Himalayas- A Study on Wages, Employment and Living Standards*, Delhi, Atma Ram, 1986, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p.60.

⁶⁰Aritra De, “Exploitation of Tea-Plantation Workers in Colonial Bengal and Assam”, *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3, November 2015.

Also, in the absence of indenture system, another form of indirect coercion was utilised by the planters which deserves a mention. In this context, the definition of plantation by Eric Wolf needs to be evoked. According to Wolf, plantation should be seen as “an instrument of force wielded to create and to maintain a class-structure of workers and owners, connected hierarchically...”⁶¹ Wolf gave emphasis to coercion as an integral part of the plantation system that resulted from the nature of production relations. Sharit Kumar Bhowmik has criticised this definition stating that the main limitation of Wolf’s definition was that it covered just one phase of the plantation system and though coercion is an integral part of this system, it gradually diminishes.⁶² Here it needs to be mentioned that the coercion in case of Darjeeling actually never diminished but only got rigid with time. What is even interesting is the way in which it was maintained by various colonial apparatus. Often the Nepali labourers were portrayed as volatile individuals who could invariably desert the plantation if a better opportunity arose for employment. In fact, despite claims of the plantation providing the migrants a better life and employment opportunities than in Nepal, it should be remembered that the plantation’s retentive potential was limited by its scanty promotion opportunities. Once one became a labourer, the opportunity to rise in the economic or even the social ladder was restricted.

The only other option of recruitment was to join the Gurkha ranks as a soldier. Army employment was virtually permanent, with the prospect of a land grant and a cash pension it was a lucrative avenue. However, the truth was that the army recruiters were strictly instructed to reject plantation applicants. The fact that many of these laboring avenues were limited by gender, race, and ethnicity has already been discussed in the above section while studying the occupational caste distinctions. This was perhaps the biggest and most effective way of coercion experienced in the district of Darjeeling.

Another break from the usual features of administration was that the district of Darjeeling came under the Non-Regulation tracts, where the ordinary laws passed in Bengal were not applicable until a special order from the Governor of Bengal was passed. In fact, the administrative executive in charge of the district was not the District Magistrate, as was the

⁶¹Eric Wolf, “Specific Aspects of the Plantation System in the New World”, as cited in Sharit Kumar Bhowmik, “The Plantation as a Social System”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, No. 36, September, 1980.

⁶²Sharit Kumar Bhowmik, *op.cit.*

case in other districts, but the Deputy Commissioner, who was invested with a greater civil authority in the Non-Regulation districts.⁶³ Hence, the tea plantations within the Non-Regulated tracts were under an administration that could take immediate decisions. On the whole, notes Nandini Bhattacharya, “the district administration was content to let the plantation managers take responsibility for law and order and general governance within the tea estates.”⁶⁴

Another prominent feature of the plantation settlements was the hierarchical set up of the living quarters of the owners and the labourers in the tea-gardens. The living spaces in all plantations were segregated along racial lines. The manager and the assistants (who were largely Europeans) lived in bungalows, situated conveniently at the centre of the estates. The Indian staff, comprising of clerks and resident doctors (who were generally Bengalis) lived in smaller houses separated from the bungalows, and finally the labourers were accommodated along the *coolie* lines. The labourers were further separated into clusters according to their tribe and community. The coolie lines were usually located at the margins of the tea estate boundaries and comprised of huts built by labourers themselves.⁶⁵

The Darjeeling Paradox : A Hill-Station or a Plantation economy?

Firstly, the logic of the British colonisers in the development of hill stations in India was in fact their climatic opposition to the plains. Secondly, the establishment, evolution and historical trajectory of hill stations in colonial India has been seen as being determined by racial distinctions and a value system which favoured the hills over the plains.⁶⁶ Hence, not just the climatic conditions of the plains, but the hill stations were maintained so as to separate the sociological environment of the plains too. Darjeeling too, was no exception to this trajectory.

To study the condition of Darjeeling, the view of Dane Kennedy, one of the strongest advocates of the paradox of colonial hill-stations in India, needs a consideration. Kennedy opines that the major hill-stations of India had acquired a very different demographic and

⁶³ Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p.55.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.55.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.67.

⁶⁶ Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, California University Press, Delhi, 1996, pp. 1-14.

ethnic shape than the British had intended. In case of Darjeeling too, there was no exception. The British had taken considerable measures to have a controlled social and economic structure in the tea-gardens from the very inception of the plantation structure. The attempt to segregate and thus maintain a separate, distinct identity between the men of the hills and the men from the plains was the foremost in this direction (the detailed discussion of which will be dealt in the next chapter). However, far from remaining small and intimate enclaves isolated from the influences of the Indians, the hill-stations had become bustling centres of commerce, service, and administration.⁶⁷ According to Dane Kennedy's argument, the nature of the colonial bureaucracy and the domestic life of the ruling class in colonial India demanded the labour and skills of Indians who by their very presence disrupted the idyll of a sanitary, European enclave in the hill-stations.⁶⁸

It has to be remembered that initially the district of Darjeeling, which was "the chief station in British Sikkim, where there is a Convalescent Depot of 200 men, and a battery of Royal Artillery..."⁶⁹ was to station British troops to safeguard the borders with Nepal, Tibet and Bhootan. Darjeeling, although had not been the scene of military operations, it was used as a starting point of one or two small expeditions into Sikkim... and for operations against the Tibetan forces in 1880 and 1903.⁷⁰ In fact, Darjeeling had close connection with the army not only because it contained four cantonments for the British troops, but most importantly because it occupied a strategic position in relation to Nepal and Tibet and lied astride the important line of communication between India and detachments of the army on the trade route to Lhasa. The Senchal ridge was the first to be chosen for setting a cantonment in 1844, but due to harsh weather conditions was abandoned in 1867 in favour of the Jalapahar Cantonment. Gradually Darjeeling gained a prominent position among all the other colonial sanatoriums built in the hills across India. "In size and importance it is after Simla, the second hill station in India, and as a sanitarium is frequented by large number of Europeans, and to a considerable extent by Indians..."⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.191

⁶⁸ Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p.53

⁶⁹D.J.F. Newall, *The Highlands of Nepal*, Harrison and Sons, London, 1882, p.102.

⁷⁰ A. Mitra, *op.cit.*,p.XXXV.

⁷¹W.H. Thompson, *Census of India (Bengal, Part I), 1921*, Vol.V, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1923, p.121.

It was the decision to simultaneously develop Darjeeling in to a tea producing region that changed the whole aim at conserving the place for the sole purpose of a sanatorium. As has already been seen, plantation was out and out a labour dependant enterprise. This very divergence of the British policy from maintaining Darjeeling as a sanatorium for the limited colonial skins towards the introduction of plantations in the region included in itself the presence of a large number of labourers in the region. Hence eventually, the toiling classes of natives who comprised of men and women from the plains serving either as domestic labour for the Europeans, and as clerks in the civil administration, with the introduction of the tea plantations, now came to comprise the plantation labourers in the tea estates. “The tea plantations with their British planters and Paharia labourers, contributed to the growth of population within the entire area, and thereby to the congestion of the idyllic spaces around and within the hill-station of Darjeeling.”⁷² The idea of a separate, peaceful sanatorium, aloof from the native influence of the plains thus came to a complete clash with the increasing presence population from the plains who moved into Darjeeling with its lure of plantation *vis-a-vis* its connected developments, e.g. the growth of local trade and rise in number of local bazars.

Though the town’s size was a drawback and allowed it to generate only a small portion of the demand to meet the demands of the population, yet, it was quick to acquire a vital importance as a clearing-house for imports and exports between Himalayan lands, British India’s port-cities, and trans-oceanic markets.⁷³

With the increase in daily trade and availability of various items of purchase from neighbouring hills, including Nepal and Bhootan, the migration to Darjeeling for most people from different backgrounds and purposes of visit from the plains became a welcome event. “Darjeeling with its fairy lights and multitudinous attractions; its climbing houses; its cosmopolitan bazaar... its variety of races- the Nepalese, the Bhutanese, the Tibetan and the Lepcha amidst whom are now entwined the Hindu, the Mussalman, the Parsee and the white man... is a holiday resort that is well-known almost the whole world over.”⁷⁴ From the plains migrated a variety of merchants, Marwaris for the most part, and Punjabi traders together with

⁷² Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p.51

⁷³ Jayeeta Sharma, *op.cit.*, p. 93

⁷⁴ R.J. Minney, *Midst Himalayan Mists*, Butterworth and Co. (India), Calcutta, 1920, p.4

Bengali clerks, Hindustani mechanics, and sweepers from Rajputana.⁷⁵ Within a short span of time, and the development of convenient transportation, Darjeeling had become a resort of foremost importance to Bengal and its comparative ease in accessibility had made it a weekend affair.⁷⁶

The bazaar in the main town of Darjeeling and the prominent ones in other towns of the district deserve a mention. One of the features of the main town of Darjeeling was the market square situated on a levelled and extensive piece of ground in the middle of the town and surrounded by substantial buildings erected by the Municipality. The market was usually dominated by purchasers from the various tea-gardens and sellers and visitors from various races. Nepalis predominate but Tibetans and Bhutias from the hills are conspicuous, in striking contrast to Marwaris and other traders from the plains.⁷⁷ R.J. Minney, writing about the view of the town bazar observed that, “The scene is heightened by the colour and panorama of the streaming thousands from the neighbouring valleys, all bowed under the burden of their baskets, toiling ever up hill towards the stalls of the Darjeeling Bazar.”⁷⁸

Table 1.14: List of Market/Hats in Darjeeling Sadar Subdivision

Name of Market/ Hat	Main Items of Business	Days of Operation
Darjeeling market	Orange, potato	Daily
Jorebunglow market	Potato, rice, cardamom	Daily
Sonada bazar	Vegetables, cardamom	Sunday
Pulbazar (Bijanbari)	Potato, <i>chirata</i> , orange	Friday
Ladhama market	Cattle, potato, <i>chirata</i> , orange	Wednesday
Ranibir bazar	Potato, <i>chirata</i> , cardamom, orange	Sunday
Singh mara	Cardamom, potato, <i>chirata</i>	Sunday
Sukhiapokri market	Potato, <i>chirata</i> , butter, peas	Daily
Pokhariabong market	Cardamom, potato, English vegetable	Sunday
Simana bazar	Potato, English vegetable, peas	Daily
Monbhanjan	Potato, <i>chirata</i> , butter	Thursday

⁷⁵“From Hoogly to the Himalayas”, *The Times Press*, Bombay, 1913, p.34.

⁷⁶R.J. Minney, *op.cit.*, p.3.

⁷⁷ A. Mitra, *op.cit.*, p.CXiV

⁷⁸R.J. Minney, *op.cit.*, p.5

Rongliranliot	Maize, vegetable	Sunday
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Source: A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.157

Two important markets were those of Bijanbari and Badamton. Bijanbari was one of the largest market places in the Darjeeling subdivision, situated west of the Darjeeling town, in Pulbazar. It formed a part of the Kurmi estate. Bijanbari-Pulbazar also served the trans-frontier trade with Nepal, with exports in rice, mustard oil, cloth, salt, pulses, cotton yarn; and imports in cardamom, honey, ghee, butter, poultry and eggs, maize millets, etc.⁷⁹ Being a terminus for a Ropeway Station connecting Darjeeling also adds importance to this market place. Badamton was another market place under the Darjeeling Improvement Fund in Darjeeling subdivision.

What also needs consideration is that population of Darjeeling is liable to considerable seasonal variations. The two cantonments of Jalapahar and Lebong, adjoining the Darjeeling town, also experienced similar variations in population. Darjeeling is fullest in May and June and again September and October, the two periods being those in which the climate in the plains is the most trying. An attempt was made to discover the extent of the seasonal fluctuation and supplementary census enumerations were taken in the months of September 1900 to September 1921.⁸⁰ The results were compared to the census data collected during the cold weather, i.e., in March. The data collected has been reproduced in the following Table.

Table 2.15: Comparison of Population Statistics during Seasonal Variation (1911-1921)

Places	1901		1911		1921	
	September	March	September	March	September	March
Darjeeling	NA	15,693	21,553	17,043	24,607	21,416
Lebong cantonment	NA	1,231	1,569	1,037	1,221	504
Jalapahar cantonment	NA	NA	1,574	915	1,395	338
Total	23,852	16,924				

Source: W.H. Thompson, *Census of India (Bengal), 1921*, Vol.V, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1923, p.121.

⁷⁹ A. Mitra, *op.cit.*

⁸⁰ W.H. Thompson, *Census of India (Bengal), 1921*, Vol.V, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1923, p.121

This seasonal fluctuation added a lot of pressure on the dynamics of the district, but at the same time was profitable for the local markets to run a good business. Thus, when Bhattacharya strongly points out that the “enclave of the Darjeeling hill-station existed in a constant tension with the establishment of another institution, also of colonial origin: the plantation economy”⁸¹, she is not very far from the truth. That the unprecedented migration of various classes of people in to Darjeeling was the major reason for this paradox has been established and discussed by scholars and sociologists at various occasions. The next chapter will study and attempt to understand this migration process in detail. Also, the impact of the Nepali population on the district and the presence of other groups will form the topics of study in the following pages.

⁸¹ Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p.51

CHAPTER 3

SIMILAR FACES, DIFFERENT TRACES: LABOUR MIGRATION IN DARJEELING

The population of Darjeeling is exceedingly heterogeneous. The majority of the people in the hills are of Mongolian origin, belonging chiefly to various Lepchas, Bhotias and Tibetans. Together with these hillmen are found the denizens of the plains, who have been attracted to the hills by the prospect of easily acquired wealth... Among them are Marwari merchants, the Jews of the Himalayas, Bengali clerks, Hindustani mechanics, Punjabi traders and even Chinese carpenters.

L.S.S. O'Malley¹

Whatever the importance of immigrants for the development of white settler areas, they were not a significant factor in most tropical countries.

R. A. Buchanan²

The growth of Darjeeling and its transformation in to becoming a home and a hub to the heterogeneous population, as mentioned above, did not happen overnight. It was a gradual process that found its origins in the needs to feed the colonial economy, exerting itself through a well intricate colonial design. The hilly terrain of the district, to begin with, was very scantily populated, as has already been mentioned in the earlier chapter. The views on migration, the rise in population of the Darjeeling District, the influx of various communities, its relevance in the local business and the arguments regarding the origins of the labour force, and its analysis will be the focus of study in this chapter, attempting to reach an understanding based on the available data.

The Theories on Migration

Migration as a global phenomenon has found a wide range of theories and explanations by various writers, who have tried to integrate it into economic and social theories and spatial

¹L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, Government of West Bengal, Department of Higher Education, Calcutta, 2001, p.50.

² R. A. Buchanan, "The Diaspora of British Engineering," *Technology and Culture*, July, 1986, as cited in Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress : Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988, p. 10

analysis. Migration is itself a dynamic concept and involves various forms of population mobility.³ Various forms of migration can be identified and characterised in terms of the form of migration (internal, international), the nature of migration (seasonal/cyclic, permanent, temporary), or regional direction (rural-urban, urban-rural, rural-rural), thus analysing migration flows, trends and patterns.

The early theoretical explanations of rural to urban migration can be seen in the works of E.G. Ravenstein in the 1880s. Ravenstein formulated the “laws of migration”⁴ which list out a number of characteristics which can be identified with this process. They include:

- the greater portion of the migrants go only a short distance, which eventually create “currents of migration” setting in the direction of the great centres of commerce and industry which absorb the migrants;
- migration takes place in a step by step manner;
- the migrants proceeding long distances generally go by preference to one of the great centres of commerce or industry;
- there is a compensating counter current for each current of migration;
- industrial, commercial and transport development leads to increase in migration;
- major migration is towards centres of commerce and industry from the agricultural areas;
- females are more migratory than males within their birthplace;
- most of the migrants are adults and families rarely migrate out of their country of birthplace;
- the major causes of migration are economic.

The Dual Labour Market theory (also referred to as the Segmented Theory) aims at introducing a broader range of factors into economic research, such as institutional aspects, race and gender.⁵ This theory not only links migration to structural changes in the economy

³ Sanjay Sharma; Jeevan Raj Sharma, *Enumerating Migration in Nepal: A Review*, Sthapit Press, Nepal, 2011, p.7.

⁴ E.G. Ravenstein, “The Laws of Migration”, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol.48, No.2, (June 1885), p.167-235.

⁵ M.J. Miller; S. Castles, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, Palgrave MacMillan Limited, Basingstoke, 2009

but explains migration dynamics with respect to the demand side. The duality in this case, exerts itself along the lines of two types of mechanisms in the economy, namely capital-intensive where both skilled and unskilled labor is utilized, and the labor intensive where unskilled labor prevails. The theory argues that migration is driven by conditions of labour demand rather than supply. The immigration of labour becomes desirable and necessary to fill the jobs as the character of the economy creates a demand for low-skilled jobs.⁶ This in turn decides the policy choices in the form of active recruitment efforts according to the needs of the market. The Lewis-Fei-Ranis model of migration theory developed by Lewis⁷, and later extended by Fei and Ranis⁸, is a strong advocate of the dual labour theory supporting the coexistence of a traditional and modern sector. Lewis's seminal theory of dualistic economic development was based on the study of over-populated and under-developed economies, ones with vast amounts of surplus agricultural labour⁹. In simple terms, the traditional agricultural sector acts as a supplier of labour to the modern industrial sector, thus giving a central role in this development process to rural-urban migration.

The largest migration of labour force to the Darjeeling District took place from Nepal. In this context, the Dual Economic Theory of migration, has to be seen in accordance with the economic system in Nepal. Nepal was predominantly an agricultural society. It can be fairly assumed that there was no existence of any modern sector of production or employment in Nepal in the 1860s, when the tea plantations and the railways were introduced in Darjeeling. Now, according to the Dual Economic Theory, the exogenous capital accumulation in the modern sector is essential to generate a demand for labour which will soak up the surplus labour from the traditional sector. This demand was successfully created by the plantations in Darjeeling. The recruitment in the British army was another avenue that attracted large numbers from the traditional agricultural sector of Nepal. The net result was the influx of huge population in the tea gardens and British regiments at Darjeeling.

⁶Aditi Chatterji, *Contested Landscapes: The Story of Darjeeling*, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), Calcutta, 2007.

⁷William Arthur Lewis, *The Theory of Economic Growth*, Taylor and Francis, London, 2003.

⁸J.C.H. Fei; G. Ranis, 'A Theory of Economic Development', *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 51, 1961.

⁹Gustav Ranis, "Arthur Lewis' Contribution to Development Thinking and Policy", Paper no. 891, Economic Growth Centre, Yale University, 2004.

However, the Dual Economic Theory is not free from criticisms too. The theory attracts criticism for not considering the possibilities of growth in the agricultural sector. Its main concern revolves around the industrial sector. The exogenous capital accumulation may at one point be stagnant, or may take a long time to accumulate for the required process of attracting labour. Then where should one seek the required capital to run the industry? The L-F-R model attempts to take this into consideration.

The L-F-R model in this context, presumes that capital accumulation must come from the savings of the population which may grow as production grows. However, it has been cited that the burden of population and indebtedness was widespread in Nepal. Also, scholars share the view that there was the trend of paucity of cash as a medium of exchange in the rural economy of Nepal that forced many peasants to mortgage their lands or to borrow from Hindu money lenders at extraordinary rates of interest. This practice goes in contrast with the assumptions of the Dual Economy Theory. Since, there was the existence of a strong group of money lenders, and indebtedness was prevalent, the accumulation of savings is debatable. Further, with the settling of the Hindus in the regions, the population pressure increased on land. The conditions of over-population and under-development is proven, but the co-existence of traditional and modern sectors of production are absent in context to Nepal. The rise of the production sector in Darjeeling, in the form of plantations, and then as railways, with incentives in economy thus provided the modern sector, which attracted the surplus labour from Nepal. The coexistence of dual systems of economy was thus across borders, and so was the migration pattern.

The neoclassical approach concentrates on wages at its centre and it predicts a linear relationship between wage differentials and migration flows, based on the assumption of full employment. According to this theory, migration is driven by the geographic differences in the supply and demand of labour and the resulting differentials in wages between labor-rich versus capital-rich countries. Since, the ability to migrate is associated with costs therefore; it is assumed that it is not the poorest individuals who migrate, as that would require a minimum sustainable capital to undertake the migration.

The neoclassical theory was extended and the factor of individual decision to migrate was incorporated in its fold, thus bringing the “human capital theory” of migration, as brought by

Todaro¹⁰ to the forefront. Initially, introduced by Sjaastad in 1962 as the human investment theory it considered the decision to migrate as an investment decision involving returns over long time. These returns were then divided into money and non-money components. The costs include money involved, the cost of transporting people and goods. The non-money returns aimed at identifying the psychological changes caused as a result of locational preferences. In other words, the trauma of leaving familiar surroundings, relations, languages and food habits behind.¹¹

The addition of the human capital theory enriches the neoclassical framework by incorporating the socio-demographic characteristics of the individual migrant as an important determinant of migration. This further takes in consideration the factors such as capital endowments, age, skills, gender, marital status, occupation, that are associated with each individual, as well as, the labor market status which strongly affects who migrates and who does not.

A number of the migration theories focus on a wide range of “push” and “pull” factors that determine migration¹². In simple terms, the “push” factors are dynamic occurrences within a country of origin which compel the people to emigrate, including famine, pressure of population, political oppression and war. The “pull” factors are those attributes of the places that attract immigrants, such as labour markets with higher chances of prosperity, better living conditions, access to basic requirements of livelihood, and comparatively lower population densities.

The effect of push-and-pull factors has been supported and cited by Michael Hutt. Sharing the views in similar lines of thought with the likes of Srikant Dutt, FurerHaimendorf and a few other scholars, Hutt says that the “Eastward migration from eastern Nepal probably began on a comparatively small scale as a response to the Gorkhali conquest of districts inhabited mainly by Kiranti population.”¹³ He further elaborates, that permanent emigration from Nepal was driven by two major pull factors. Firstly, it was the establishment of the tea

¹⁰ M. P. Todaro, *Internal Migration in Developing Countries: A Review of Theory, Evidence and Research Priorities*, International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 1976

¹¹ Aditi Chatterji, *op.cit.*, p.14.

¹² Ibid, p.15.

¹³ Michael Hutt, “Being Nepali without Nepal: Reflections on a South Asian Diaspora”, *Nationalism and ethnicity in a Hindu kingdom*, Hardwood Academic, Amsterdam, 1977, pp. 101-44.

industry in the colonial Darjeeling hills. According to Hutt, by 1876, 90% of the workers in the tea plantations of Darjeeling came from eastern Nepal.¹⁴ The second pull factor was the recruitment of Gurkha soldiers into the British Indian army.

Jayeeta Sharma, sharing the views of Geoff Childs, quotes that the “exploration of migrations as protracted historical processes rather than as singular events provides a useful insight into how ontological narratives about small-scale “push and pull” movements can contribute toward a larger discussion of how circulation typologies affected Himalayan social and cultural transformation.”¹⁵

Each of these theories has been under criticism for ignoring one or more facets of migration. The neoclassical theory has been viewed as mechanically reducing the migration determinants, homogenizing migrants, ignoring the market imperfections, and migrant societies and thus, being ahistorical and static. It further tends to leave out the importance of the involvement of politics and policies, which are only considered as distortion factors or additional migration costs. The human capital theory of migration and the “push and “pull” factors have been criticised for being over-simplistic. Scholars and experts have thus, drawn consideration to study migration patterns as “systems” produced due to the interaction between macro and micro-level processes. The macro-level factors take into account the worldwide economic changes, political situation in the concerned areas and laws and regulations controlling emigration and immigration. The micro-level factors include the resources, knowledge and comprehension possessed by the migrants.

The fact that the capital for the plantations and the expansion of railways and infrastructure came all the way from Britain cannot be denied. The linking of world economy thus becomes inevitable to the study of Darjeeling. The World Systems theory views migration as a function of globalization, and links the determinants of migration to structural change in world markets and the increased interdependence of economies and the emergence of new forms of production as essential characteristic of a complex globalised system. In other

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Geoff Childs, “Trans-Himalayan Migrations as Processes, not Events: Towards a Theoretical Framework,” in Toni Huber and Stuart Blackburn, ed. *Origins and Migrations in the Extended Eastern Himalayas*, as quoted in Jayeeta Sharma, “A Space That Has Been Laboured on: Mobile Lives and Transcultural Circulation around Darjeeling and the Eastern Himalayas”, *Transcultural Studies*, University of Toronto, 2016, p.64

words, the mobility of capital is a crucial factor for the world systems theorists. The theory, thus, presents capital and labour mobility as interconnected and as two sides of the same coin.

The following pages will study the migration patterns and look into the reasons for the inhabitants from Nepal and other areas to migrate to Darjeeling, the data in census, and from there on analyse the variables that these migrations reveal.

The Nature of Nepali Migration into Darjeeling

One of the most common features of the colonial economy has been the movement of the labourers from various areas to the industrial zones of employment created by the colonisers for extraction of raw materials, or for working in different plantations, or coal mines. This policy of recruiting migrated labour was governed by two main requirements: either there was an insufficient labour population in the vicinity of the industrial area; or in certain cases, the imported labour came in relatively cheaper wages than the local population. Was this the simple explanation for migration of labourers in Darjeeling too under the British rule? If the requirements for a migrated population in the tea plantations of Darjeeling, their gradual settlement in the region, and simultaneously the movement of other classes and groups of the society in this colonial region of Darjeeling are studied, we seem to get an interesting process that eventually became the identity of the district. To get to this process, we will first need to know the reasons that attracted the minds of the migratory populations to this region as has been recorded in various sources of the time.

The *Lepchas* were considered to be the original inhabitants of these hills when the British arrived. As opined by some scholars, including the observations made by Dr. Hooker, during his stay in Darjeeling, in the writings of W.W. Hunter, and later on emphasized by the likes of Dane Kennedy, these Lepchas were probably reluctant to leave their traditional ways of life and the forests to which they were intimately attached, and hence, did not prove adequate in meeting the needs of the tea plantations. In terms of quantity too, because of the rough terrain and the limited scopes of work in these hills, the population was very scanty and insufficient to meet the demand of labour recruitments in the growing tea plantations and cultivations in the region. As a reason, the much needed labourers had to be brought from outside.

As required, the flow of emigrants steadily increased beginning in the mid-nineteenth century from the central hill areas to Darjeeling and its surrounding areas, with Nepal being the major

supplier of migrators. If one is to apply the causes of this flow of population in the simplistic “push” and “pull” parameters; the push factors in most studies have indicated towards the then prevailing socio-political conditions of Nepal, which in turn dictated the economic conditions of the inhabitants. According to scholars, it was mainly this economic crisis which exerted itself in increasing the fragmentation of landholding, indebtedness, ecological crisis through intense cultivation and deforestation, alongside the rising population. The limitations in accessing more lands to cultivate and chronic deficits in food production in the hill areas of central Nepal forced the inhabitants to migrate.

The changing political scenario of Nepal also had a crucial role to play in aggravating the migration. The history of the Himalayan tea and the marginalization of the Kirantis began in the mid-1700s, when the Hindus, led by Prithivi Narayan Shah, conquered and annexed the fertile low lands of the Rais, Limbus, Sunuwars and other groups who lived in the eastern Himalayan foothills. For these groups, collectively addressed as the Kiranti, the Gorkhali incursion and the subsequent consolidation of Nepal under the Rana monarchy resulted in social marginalization and land degradation due to over-population and over-farming. In the early years after the establishment of the Gorkhali rule in Nepal, various independent revenue functionaries levied corvee and other taxes in kind on the rural peasantry. The families that defaulted on these assessments were enslaved and reportedly, their lands were confiscated. Further, the various clan and tribal leaders were integrated into the administrative hierarchy of the empire as revenue functionaries with hereditary privilege. With attempts to further strengthen their stronghold over the administration, the Gorkhali rulers along with their Brahman attendants followed the rigid interpretation of Hindu caste principles; intended to exclude all other castes and ethnic groups from positions of political power. The Kiranti tribes of East Nepal were a constant problem for the Gorkhali empire, as the former followed their own autonomous rule. To pacify the Kirantis, the Gorkhali rulers started encouraging the settlement of Hindu populations among them in order to limit the local autonomy of the Kirantis altogether.

With the passage of time these upper caste Hindus took over the cultivation rights of lands put up as collateral for cash loans, thus, turning themselves into a new class of moneylenders in the eastern hills of Nepal. This relationship between the high caste Hindus and the Kiranti is an important factor in historicizing why Kirantis moved to India. Similarly, it seems that the Kirantis were averse to working in tea gardens in Nepal, which were run by high caste Hindu elites. Wherever the Hindu immigrants settled, they came to dominate local inhabitants

“by virtue of the ruling ideology which accorded them superior status and prerogatives in the eyes of the law, and by political and legal concessions which enabled them to alienate the lands of indigenous cultivators.”¹⁶ Along with the pressure on land, the paucity of cash as a medium of exchange in the economics of the rural setting of life forced many peasants to either mortgage their lands or to borrow money as loans from Hindu the moneylenders at extraordinary rates of interest. In the long run, the failure to repay such loans became burdensome for the peasants and resulted in foreclosure or debt-bondage.

L.S.S O'Malley opines that it was the increasing pressure on land that caused the continuous migration from East Nepal. FurerHaimendorf¹⁷ reiterates the idea that along with population pressure the scarcity of land in East Nepal was also responsible for the emigrations.

Kansakar¹⁸ points out that that it was the Kut system of land tenure, where a fixed amount of grain has to be paid by the peasant who has taken land on lease, was causing wide-scale rural impoverishment and so forced the people to search for better means of living in distant lands.

These conditions are supported by an account of Henry Ballantine, who served formerly as a Consul of the British Government at Bombay. He recorded the details of his journey and visit to Nepal. According to his writings, “Every scrap of available ground in the valley of Nepal is cultivated to exhaustion, being put under heavy contribution to yield its utmost to support a population already too large for its limited area to sustain.”¹⁹ He goes further, adding that, “Even the mountain sides are called upon to contribute a share, by having the fields carried in terraces...”²⁰

¹⁶ Richard English, “Himalayan State Formation and the Impact of British Rule in the Nineteenth Century”, *Mountain Research and Development*, Vol. 5, No. 1; “Convergences and Differences in Mountain Economies and Societies: A Comparison of the Andes and Himalaya” (Feb., 1985), pp. 61-78, *International Mountain Society*, p. 71

¹⁷ Christoph von Furer Haimendorf, *The Sherpas of Nepal: Buddhist Highlanders*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1964.

¹⁸ VidyaBir Singh Kansakar, “Indo-Nepal Migration: Problems and Prospects”, *Contributions To Nepalese Studies (CNAS)*, Tribhuvan University, Vol. 12, No. 2, Nepal, 1984

¹⁹ Henry Ballantine, *On India's Frontier; or Nepal, The gurkha's Mysterious Land*, J. SelwinTait and Sons, New York, 1895, p. 137

²⁰ Ibid.

Arguably, the gravity of land scarcity for production, rising population and meager means of livelihood was aggravated with the prevalent practice of slavery in the lands of Nepal. The practice of slavery and bondage labour also finds its mention in the records of Ballantine:

Slavery exists in Nepal. The number of people thus held in bondage we were told falls not far short of 30,000, though we doubt the accuracy of so high an estimate. All well-to-do families possess slaves, and the highest classes own great numbers of both sexes. They seem to be exclusively used for domestic work. Most of the slaves are such by descent... They are not imported from any other country, while their ranks are augmented at times by fresh additions from free families, who are brought into servitude as a punishment for misdeeds and political crimes.²¹

In this situation, Darjeeling presented two potent avenues of employment. The first was the recruitment in the British army, and the second being the plantations. It has been opined that since the Nepali government was against its citizens serving in a foreign army, the British encouraged Nepalis to migrate to India along with their families and established Nepali settlements.²² In Darjeeling, Jalapahar and Lebong were the two most prominent recruitment cantonments for these men that attracted a lot of migrators. The British too, considered the Nepalis were hardier than the locals, and the latter were also perceived to be indifferent to the opportunities that had opened up in their home region.

Sarah Besky²³ comments that it was the myths of gold growing on tea bushes that lured the Kirantis to migrate to Darjeeling as an escape from rural poverty and oppression in their native lands of Nepal. When these migrants arrived in Darjeeling, they found no gold, but they benefited from social welfare practices unknown to them under the oppressive Gorkha and Rana regimes. Richard English, along with other scholars opine that, for the Nepalis, at least, “the incentives of permanent settlement in Darjeeling were strong, considering the economic conditions imposed by successive regimes at Kathmandu and the natural pressures of population expansion in their native hills. Emigration meant escape from oppressive taxation, corvee, and debt-bondage...”²⁴ Thus, for their part, Nepalis were attracted mainly by

²¹ Ibid. p.140

²² Bandita Sijapati, Amrita Limbu, *Governing Labour Migration in Nepal: An Analysis of Existing Policies and Institutional Mechanisms*, Himal Books, Nepal, 2012, p.6

²³ Sarah Besky, “Rural Vulnerability and Tea Plantation Migration in Eastern Nepal and Darjeeling”, *Himalayan Research Papers*, Nepal Study Center, University of New Mexico, 2007

²⁴ Richard English, *op.cit.*

the prospect of higher incomes and better educational facilities for their children at a time when employment opportunities back home were bleak or non-existent.²⁵ At the same time, resettlement was a way to earn a steady wage for all members of a family, including children who could contribute to the labour force by doing simpler tasks, such as plucking and sorting the tea leaves alongside their parents.

Most of the ones who migrated, stayed back, and over time, developed a single collective Nepali identity in Darjeeling, and surrounding areas, merging the tribal identities that distinguished them in their own country, which will be discussed in the subsequent pages before which the census records and population statistics will be taken in to account to analyse the scale migration and its study in the Darjeeling district.

Demographic Changes due to Migration

The growth of the Darjeeling district affords the most remarkable instance of the expansion of population of which there is any record in Bengal.²⁶ The area was mostly under a dense cover of forest when the British had acquired this hill territory in 1835. According to the officials, who visited Darjeeling along with Dr. Hooker, estimated that there were not more than a 100 people, spread over the region comprising 138 square miles. The scanty population of Darjeeling, when the officials of the British Government initially came in to these lands, is confirmed by Dr. Campbell, the Superintendent of the Darjeeling District, “When I took charge there were not more than fifty families in the whole tract. In twelve years we had 10,000 inhabitants in it... In 1861, when I left Darjeeling, the total population was estimated at 60,000.” At times there was a sudden influx of very meager population into the region in the form of an occasional raid from Nepal, a few Limbus or Lepchas occupying little clearings in the forests, or a stray visitor from the lands of Tibet. These instances were far flung and hardly affected the population of the region. However, by 1850 it was reported that the number of inhabitants had risen to 10,000.²⁷

²⁵ Bandita Sijapati, Amrita Limbu, *op.cit.*, p.7

²⁶ *Darjeeling District Gazetteers*, Government of India, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1952, p.43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The decision of the Company to develop Darjeeling as a hill resort gave an opportunity to neighbouring peoples to immigrate and take part in the development.²⁸ In fact, it is noted that the first serious immigrations of Nepalese from the west, who flocked in to exploit the land started after the appointment of Dr. Campbell as Superintendent. The rapid influx was noted by Sir Joseph Hooker when he visited Darjeeling around the tenure of Dr. Campbell's supervision. When in 1869 a rough census was taken of the inhabitants, the total was found to be over 62,000.²⁹

The first regular census of the district according to the Government sources, was carried out in the cold weather of 1871-72. Owing to the difficult nature of the country, the absence of regular villages and the scattered population, it was found impossible to attempt a simultaneous census, and the ascertained results were arrived at by a gradual enumeration and the result gave a total population of 94,712 persons. The average density of the population was calculated to be 81 per square mile,³⁰ as stated by O'Malley, whereas, in the records of W.W. Hunter the average density was 77 persons per square mile.³¹ Hunter further records the population based on the ethnicity, and traces that there were 25,781 Nepalis, alongside the 14,088 souls of aboriginal tribes; 23,114 Hindus; 6248 Muhammadans, among others.³² However, in context to the statistics given in this particular census, and the methodology that was followed to differentiate the areas under enumeration the census of 1871-72; it has been majorly opined that, "In some of the wilder outlying districts, where unscientific methods of counting were employed and a simultaneous enumeration was not attempted, the figures of 1872 are found to have been considerably below the truth. The outlying districts, to which reference has been made, are those of Darjeeling, Jalsigoree, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in Bengal proper."³³

²⁸ Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, Government of India, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1947, p.48

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ L.S.S. O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.43

³¹ W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. X. Districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Kuch Behar, Trubner and CO., London, 1876, pg.41

³² Ibid, p.44.

³³ Henry Beverly, *Census of Bengal, 1881, Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Dec), Wiley for the Royal Statistical Society, 1883, p.681

The *Bengal Census Report* draws a similar parallelism in terms of the settlements in the Darjeeling District stating that: “In Darjiling, with the exception of the Head-quarters Station and Karsiang, and the coolie lines on the various tea plantations, there are no villages in the proper sense of the term. The people live in their separate enclosures near their patches of cleared cultivation...”³⁴

When the next census was taken in 1881, the population had increased to 155,179³⁵, a rise by 63 per cent from the previous record. In 1891, it amounted to 223,314, showing an increase by 43.4 per cent.³⁶ Analyzing the population growth rate of Darjeeling, the Census of 1891 records that, “The growth of the Darjeeling district in the past twenty years is the most remarkable expansion of population of which we have any record in the Lower Provinces.”³⁷ It further records that, “Great as this growth of inhabitants is in the whole district, it is very much more marked in the hills area than in the Terai, or submontane tract, which is coterminous with the Siligurithana.”³⁸ However, A. Mitra analysed that “The Census of 1872 was considered defective. There was an immense concealment of females in 1881... labourers absconded from tea gardens from panic... It was believed that the Census of 1891 for the first time took a satisfactory count.”³⁹

While mentioning the simultaneous population growth in the neighbouring Kalimpong subdivision of the Darjeeling district, the Census Report of 1891 records that, Kalimpong, a vast Government estate, consisted mainly of forest. It contained only two tea gardens and two cinchona plantations, the remainder being divided in agricultural plots amongst settlers from Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, as well as amongst the original Lepcha inhabitants. It was annexed from Bhutan in 1865, and was then estimated to have a population of 3,536 people. This number increased in 1881 to 12,683 and to 26,631 in 1891, or by 109.4 per cent in the past decade.⁴⁰

³⁴ W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p.40.

³⁵ L.S.S. O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.43.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ C.J. O'Donnell, *Census of India, 1891, Vol.III : The Lower Provinces of Bengal and their Feudatories*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1893, pg.66

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.XXXI.

⁴⁰ O'Donnell, *op.cit.*, p.67.

O'Donnell recorded that the last decade showed a far slower progress with the increase amounting to a weak 11.5 per cent, a sharp contrast from the previous records, the population, as returned at the census of 1901, being 249,117.⁴¹ However, taking the entire population data in to account, L.S.S. O'Malley suggested that the number of inhabitants was by 1901, more than 2 ½ times as great as it was 30 years ago.⁴²

Based on the population count, Mitra states that it was a leap forward in the population within the period of thirty-four years between 1835 and 1869. The labour force was about 10,000 in 1870 that increased to 44,279 in 1921 and to 61,450 in 1941. The actual population in the tea garden according to 1941 census was 146,508⁴³. According to O'Malley, tea gardens alone added 5,000 or more than 12 per cent to the population surge.⁴⁴

Table 3.1: Actual and Migrant Population in District of Darjeeling (1891-1941)

Year	Actual Population	Number of Migrants	Percentage of Migrants to actual population
1891	2,23,314	1,19,670	53.59
1901	2,49,117	1,13,558	45.60
1911	2,65,550	1,11,269	41.90
1921	2,82,748	1,01,807	36.00
1931	3,19,635	1,00,700	31.50
1941	3,76,361	95,750	25.44

Source : Cited in M.N. Gupta, *Labour in Tea Gardens*, Gyan Saga Publications, Delhi, 1999, p. 26.

However, if we see the data supplied by M.N. Gupta, in Table 3.1, the migrants are not distinguished as to include Europeans, men from the plains, and from neighboring hills. So, it will be not proper to assume the entire percentage of the migrated population as labourers. Also, steadily the percentage of migrants decreases as one moves from 1891 towards 1941, although the population count is on the rise. This is suggestive that most migrants could have

⁴¹Ibid, p.44.

⁴²Ibid, pp.44-45.

⁴³ A. K. Mitra, *Census of India 1951*, Vol. VI, part I A, Calcutta, (1953), p. 268.

⁴⁴ O'Malley, *op.cit.*,p.46.

settled permanently in the Darjeeling District over the years, and thus contributed to the actual population of the district.

Table 3.2: Migration Data of the Population of Darjeeling District (1891-1941)

Years	Actual Population	Immigrants	Emigrants	Natural Population	Percentage Variation
1891	223,314	119,670	962	104,606	...
1901	249,117	124,391	5,694	130,420	+30.3
1911	265,550	117,158	10,416	158,803	+17.6
1921	282,748	110,352	11,243	183,639	+16.6
1931	319,635	100,700	3,455	222,390	+19.0
1941	376,369	95,750	4,120	284,739	+28.0

Source: W.H. Thompson, *Census of India (Bengal), 1921*, Vol.V, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1923, p.116; and, A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.XXXII.

This unprecedented immigration resulted in the collection in Darjeeling of a strangemixture of races, baffling to the stranger and even to the professed ethnologist.⁴⁵ Regarding the emigrants, it was mostly the soldiers who returned to Darjeeling to be recruited in the Gurkharegiments, hailing majorly from Nepal. Considerable number also included the children of the plains-men, who have moved in to Darjeeling for trade.⁴⁶

Table 3.3: Migration between Darjeeling and other Districts of Bengal (1891-1921)

Year	Immigration				Emigration			
	From contiguous districts		From other districts		From contiguous districts		From other districts	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1891	8,368	6,640	1,688	691	1,674	1,124	338	131
1901	8,455	6,757	16,172	9,872	2,147	1,995	486	264

⁴⁵ W.H. Thompson, *Census of India (Bengal), 1921*, Vol.V, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1923, p.68.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

1911	2,000	1,000	2,000	1,000	1,000	2,000	600	400
1921	2,000	1,000	3,000	2,000	2,000	1,000	1,000	1,000

Source: A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.xxxiii

Notably, in the year 1872 the district did not contain more than 419 Europeans and 32 Eurasians. But by next four years, the Europeans had risen to 1,309 and the Eurasians to 329. W.W. Hunter attributes this rise solely to the development of the tea industry, in which the supervising staff was almost entirely European, and to the establishment of the town of Darjeeling as a sanitarium.⁴⁷

In comparison to Darjeeling, the Terai district, records O'Malley, was infested by malaria, and the mortality was exceptionally high, hence the rate of expansion had always been less rapid than the hills.

Table 3.4: The Comparative Statistics of the Population of the Subdivisions in Darjeeling District: 1891-1901

Division, subdivision	Area in square miles	Population		Number of persons per square mile	
		1891	1901	1891	1901
Darjeeling	1,164	223,314	249,117	192	214
Sadar Subdivision	726	105,672	133,386	146	184
• Darjeeling	286	60,963	69,362	213	243
• Kalimpong	412	26,831	41,611	65	101
• Jorebunglow	28	18,078	22,613	646	804
Kurseong Subdivision	438	117,642	115,731	269	264
• Kurseong	185	44,645	46,266	241	245
• Siliguri	263	72,997	70,468	289	279

Source: E.A. Gait, *Census of India, Vol. VIB, Part III, Bengal, 1901 (Provincial Tables)*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1902.

What needs to be equally mentioned is that though labour availability was not a reason for worry, the spread of cultivation area, because of the limitations of a hilly terrain, soon started to be understood, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, by the 1920s, apart

⁴⁷ W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*

from the labour demand, the spread of tea cultivable areas in the district had reached a near saturation point as we get to know from the census, which stated that, “Tea cultivation is not spreading as it did 20 years back, for most of the land which is suitable has now been taken up, but the labour force requires steady recruitment.”⁴⁸

The Coming of Different Communities

As history would have it, many of the labouring avenues were limited by gender, race, and ethnicity. But then again, History was being constructed by the colonisers at the time. The racial and ethnic preferences that colonial employers attached to the different occupational categories were designed to exclude certain groups and privilege others.⁴⁹ In context to this treatment, Dane Kennedy had remarked that, “The singular importance of hill stations to the expatriate rulers of the raj explains why and how the indigenes of these areas came to be defined, confined, reduced and ultimately recast.”⁵⁰

Darjeeling owed a large proportion of its population to the advent of immigrants. As O’Malley observes in his gazetteer, the great bulk of this population of immigrants came from Nepal to work as labourers in the tea gardens; and the population in the hills was mainly Nepalese. However, it is interesting to note that how most of the communities came to be identified with a some specific occupations in the distict of Darjeeling, as elaborated in the Table given below,

Table 3.5: General Classification of Social Groups according to Occupation

Traditional Occupation	Group/Caste
Cultivation and plantation	Khambu, Lepcha, Limbu, Murmi, Newar, Sunwar
Graziers	Bhootea (also cultivators)
Industrial caste	Damai (tailor), Kami (blacksmith), Sarki (leather worker)
Soldiers	Gurung, Khas, Mangar (also, some of them serve as cultivators)

Source:W.H. Thompson, *Census of India (Bengal, Part I), 1921*, Vol.V, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1923, p.373

⁴⁸ W.H. Thompson, *op.cit.*, p.68

⁴⁹Ibid, p. 91.

⁵⁰ Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p.64.

Here on, the attempt will be to identify the various tribes and populations that originated or moved to the district, and over the years settled in Darjeeling district. The census data from 1872 onwards have undergone various changes both in structural and qualitative measures; arranging various groups of ethnic identities, sometimes adding and also at times omitting them from a few classifications and rearranging them. Nevertheless, the general growth of population, and the dominance of few castes and groups over others can easily be traced.

The Lepchas were the aboriginal inhabitants of the Darjeeling hills, and called themselves Rong, and addressed their country as the land of caves. It is said that the term “Lepcha” was used by the Nepalese as a contemptuous appellation to segregate the inhabitants as the word meant the men with vile speech. Most records have shown that the Lepchas were a dying race, this however, can be contradicted, as the census report of 1901 showed their number to be 10,000, as compared to 4,000 souls in the 1872 census record. Although the 1872 Census is criticized for its limitations, yet it is accepted that the numbers of the Lepchas had considerably increased.

Captain Herbert in his records have lauded the Lepchas as “a totally different race, morally and physically, from the people in the plains... they allow themselves to be originally the same people with the Bhoteas or inhabitants of Tibet...in everything the reverse of the Hindoostanee.”⁵¹ The fact that the Lepchas had mutual relations with the Bhoteas has also been seen in the observations by L.S.S O’Malley, who recorded that the Lepcha race had become somewhat impure as they had intermarriages with other races, especially the Sikkim Bhoteas and the Limbus. Indigenous “difference” augured well for colonial needs, since “the character of these people particularly fits them to cooperate with Europeans in improving the country...without those prejudices which obstruct our efforts at improvement every step we take in the plains.”⁵²

General George Byres Mainwaring of the Bengal Army was one of the most fervent advocates of the Lepchas. He is said to have described them as “the free sons of the forest...

⁵¹J. D. Herbert, *Report on Darjeeling: A Place in the Sikkim Mountains; Proposed as a Sanatorium, or Station of Health*, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1830.

⁵² Ibid.

the lords of the soil...”⁵³Vibha Arora follows the argument put forward by L.A. Waddell, who says that the Lepchas have Indo-Chinese origin and they migrated to Sikkim by way of the Assam valley. He considered the Lepchas to be an outlying member of the Naga tribes.⁵⁴

The earlier records of the Darjeeling area show that the Nepalese dominated the population count. The British officials who visited Darjeeling saw the Nepalese to be remarkably willing and loyal, law abiding and are essentially a virile race. Colonel Waddell had written in his records that, “these Nepalese have big hearts; and in many ways resemble the bright , joyous temperament of the Japanese...”. In numerical strength, the most important Nepali tribe would be the Kiranti. The Kirantis include the Limboos, the Rais (Jimdars) and the Yakhas. It was after the Gorkali conquest that the Jimdars were given the title of Rai; and some of the Limboos were conferred the title of Subba, when they were given jurisdictions of areas under the Gorkha rulers. Over the years, The Rais came to be among the most numerous tribe in Darjeeling, with their numbers steadily increasing (Table no. 3.5). Those Kirantis living south-west of Mt. Everest in the Khambu district were usually referred to by the name of the place itself. The 1901 Census data showed that 32,775 residents of the District spoke the Khambu dialect, whereas, in the 1911 Census , the count had gone up to 39,448.

Table 3.6: The population of Rais in Darjeeling District from 1901-1941

Years	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Population	33,133	40,409	41,236	47,431	56,794

Source: Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Calcutta Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1951

The *Sherpas* came from the north-east of Nepal and are of the Tibetan descent. They have a strong population in the Sadar Subdivision, Kalimpong and areas around Cinchona cultivation. These *Sherpas* were greatly sorted for expeditions to mountains, as strong and efficient porters. As per the data of Census goes, there were 3450 *Sherpas* in the District in 1901; in 1931 their numbers had increased to 5,295; and to 6,929 by 1941. Like the *Lepchas* and the *Bhutias*, the *Sherpas* also came to be portrayed with one of the specific occupations.

⁵³ Col. G.B. Mainwaring, *A Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) Language*, 1876, xiii, ix, xix-xx, quoted in Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p.70.

⁵⁴Vibha Arora, “Assertive Identities, Indigeneity, and the Politics of Recognition as a Tribe: The *Bhutias*, the *Lepchas* and the *Limbus* of Sikkim”, *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 2007, p.198.

The Sherpas were seen as able porters before attaching them to any other occupational field. It became an axiom in Darjeeling's porter recruiting quarters that mountaineers would choose Sherpa men for well paid, skilled, and risky expedition jobs. This compartmentalisation was further strengthened with the increasing mountain expeditions of the Europeans to the Himalayas during the 1920s. The British enthusiasts proclaimed the mobile Sherpa male as the ideal high-altitude labourer whose sturdy back would easily bear the provisions of Euro-American mountain expeditions. This discovery transformed the lives and destinies of many Sherpa laborers who had moved to Darjeeling in order to earn a better livelihood than their harsh homeland allowed.⁵⁵

The *Khas* tribe, which had adopted the surname of Chettri, were among the three dominant dominant tribes of Nepal which had overthrown the Newar dynasty back in 1769. They were reported to be widely distributed in most parts of the district, and known to be successful cultivators. The Chettris also found regular recruitment in the Gurkha regiments enrolled under the British banner. They too, had a steady increase in population over the years; as they were numerated 11,597 in 1901, 12,599 in 1911 and their count had gone up to 25,941 by 1941, according to the Census data.

The native name of Tibet is Bod, and the Sanskrit form of this word is Bhot. The word Bhotia hence means is an inhabitant of Bhot or Tibet. According to the Bengal District Gazetteer, the Bhutias can be classified under four groups. The Tibetan Bhutias who originated from Tibet; the Drukpa or Dharma Bhutias whose home is in Bhutan; the Sharpas who came from east parts of Nepal; and the Sikkimese Bhutias who are basically a mixed race of Lepchas and Tibetans, being the descendants of the Tibetans who had migrated and settled in Sikkim and established intermarriage relations with the Lepchas, who were the original inhabitants of the lands. As far as the records and experiences of the botanist, Joseph Dalton Hooker, can be taken in account; he experienced Bhutia readiness to travel far, willingness to carry heavy loads, and modest wage demands that made them favored subjects for expedition work. He recorded this in his travel journals which over time became one of the reliable sources to study the Darjeeling tribes and population in those days.

What needs to be understood is that Hooker was new to the hilly tracts of Darjeeling at the time. The assistance he received was from his peers Dr. Campbell and Hodgson who by then were experienced with the population- both native and migrated, of the region. But then,

⁵⁵Ibid, p.92.

these men had already divided the efficiency and work culture of the labours as they saw fit. This knowledge was passed on to Hooker, who being an outsider, took it as it was, and recorded it in his journal. One important occasion was when Hooker was looking for coolies to accompany with his requirements during the plant-collecting expeditions. He was suggested to employ Lepcha men as plant collectors, based on their deep knowledge of forests and commons, for nearby forays, as Lepchas were considered to be original natives of the Darjeeling hills.

Similarly, when occasion called for Dr. Hooker to expand his explorations and visit Nepal, he was advised against employing Lepcha or plains laborers who would not withstand the terrain and long journey, by Dr. Campbell himself. Instead, Campbell negotiated to hire “Bhotan coolies”, each to carry a heavy eighty pound load of food provisions.⁵⁶ The records of Dr. Hooker in his *Himalayan Journals*, thus, represented the Bhutias as fit and trusted companions in long-distance journeys as porters. However, what is seldom noticed is the other side of this ethnic typecasting where Bhutia laborers found it harder to move up from load bearing and porter work in contrast to their Nepali peers whose growing reputation for cleanliness and tractability in domestic laboring positions often privileged their move into better-paid plantation.⁵⁷

Besides these above mentioned tribes, Arthur Jules Dash in the The Bengal District Gazetteers related to the Darjeeling District mentions about the details of various other tribes and groups living in the district. The Mangars, who were one among the three dominant tribes of Nepal were chiefly occupied in trade, agriculture, and soldiering. They too were recruited in the combatant rank of the Gurkha regiments, and hence had better employment opportunities. The Gurungs were the third among the dominant tribes of Nepal, beside the Chettris and the Mangars. In Nepal, they mostly were a nomadic pastoral race, indulged in rearing and grazing of cattle. After migrating to Darjeeling, most of them found work in the plantations, and were found in numerous numbers around the tea gardens.

⁵⁶Ibid, p.92.

⁵⁷Ibid, p. 91.

Nepali Brahmans are present fairly in large numbers in the District, and like the Chettris are counted as successful cultivators of the soil. A large number of them reside in the Kalimpong subdivision. As per records, no Brahmans are recruited in the Gurkha regiments.

The Newar tribe ruled over Nepal until 1769, when they were overthrown by the Mangars, Chettris and the Gurungs. They usually go by the surname of Pradhan. It is widely accepted that Nepal and Newar are two forms of the same word; and Newari simply means an inhabitant of Nepal (before the Gurkha conquest). The Newaris were basically artisans and traders, agriculturists, and a few worked as domestic servants after migrating to Darjeeling. They were recorded to be in large numbers in the tea areas of the Sadar and Kurseong Subdivisions, and also in the Kalimpong areas.

Tamangs are recorded as a semi-Mongolian tribe who claimed to be the earliest settlers of Nepal. They were also known as the Murmis. The Tamangs are considered efficient workers and the ones who migrated to Darjeeling district were absorbed in various fields of work. Most were recruited in the Gurkharegiments, whereas, the others were employed in good numbers in the tea gardens as cultivators.

According to the observations made by Dr. Campbell, the Limboos were the inhabitants residing largely in mountainous country between the Dood, Kanki and the Koosi rivers in Nipal (Nepal), and found in smaller numbers as one advanced eastwards towards the Mechi river, which forms the boundary with Sikim. It is generally believed that the word "Limboo" is a corruption of the term "EkThoomba", which was used by the Goorkhas of Nepal. Dr. Campbell also adds that the Lepchas addressed the Limboos as the "Chung" people, which was a corruption of the word "Tsang", which was the name of western region in Tibet; from where the Limboos are believed to have originally migrated from.

There were other tribes in the District which were recruited mainly in the Gurkha regiments for their various skills. These tribes mainly include: Sunwars, a cultivating tribe who were recruited from Nepal mainly in the Gurkha regiments; The Yakhas were a agricultural caste, who also went by the name of Diwan. They too were recruited mainly under the Gurkha regiments; the Damais have been recorded as the tailor caste and most of them were employed in the regiments for their skills of tailoring. As a result their numbers were more concentrated in the towns and big tea areas; the Kamis were the much sorted blacksmiths, who like the Damai were employed in the Gurkha regiment for their skills to produce tools

and armours. The Sarkis were mainly leather workers, and hence were recruited as such in the regiments.

The remaining population consisted of the Bhujels who were originally slaves in Nepal. Their numbers were found around the tea gardens in Kalimpong Subdivision and in Kurseong area. The Ghartis were the descendents of the freed slaves in the Darjeeling District. The Yogis are not strictly a tribe or any caste for that matter, but a group of those who took a religious life sustaining on prayers and living off on alms.

Table 3.7: Comparative Population Data of various Groups in Darjeeling District
(1901-1941)

Different Populations in the District	Years				
	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Brahmans	6,470	6,195	8,174	8,791	8,999
Gurung	8,738	9,628	9,575	11,154	15,455
Mangar	11,912	12,451	14,934	16,299	17,262
Newar	5,770	6,927	8,751	10,235	12,242
Limbus	14,305	13,804	14,191	16,288	17,803
Sunwars	4,428	3,820	3,691	4,055	4,822
Tamang	24,465	27,226	30,450	33,481	43,114
Damai	4,643	4,453	5,781	5,551	8,162
Kami	9,826	10,939	11,779	11,331	16,272
Sarki	1,823	1,992	2,036	2,432	2,778
Gharti	3,448	3,584	2,053	496
Yakhas	1,143	1,119	850	824

Source: Compiled from data available in Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Government of India, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1951.

The continuous influx of population in the Darjeeling district has generally been considered to have a two pronged effect on the social structure and demographic pressure on the land. Firstly, the immigration caused the rise in the number of Nepalis who were seen to be more efficient and useful as labourers on tea gardens ; and thrifty as cultivators than the aboriginal Lepchas. Secondly, the development of tea, trade and communication brought a further exploitation by Bengalis, Marwaris and Behari traders. Arthur Jules Dash opines that though these populations were numerically low, and mostly temporary or semi-permanent, they had a strong economic dominance over the Nepalis and other hill populations⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Government of India, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1951, p.56.

The Census of Darjeeling District of 1891, recorded 88,000 persons to have been born in Nepal. The records of 1921 stated that, “There is still a steady stream of migration across the Nepal frontier and more than half of the immigrants still come from Nepal...”⁵⁹

Within forty years, as per the 1931 records from the census, the population of the Darjeeling District was close to 319,635, out of which: 59,016 were recorded to be born in Nepal; 5,321 were born in 5,321; and 218,935 souls were estimated to be born in Bengal (this was including the District of Darjeeling).⁶⁰

An important aspect within the demographic profile is the social composition of this population. It has been mostly opined, and accepted that caste has played central role in the plantations. It is difficult to trace the origin of the Varna system in Nepal. However, the genesis of this system of social segregation in Nepal can be traced more accurately from the reign of King Jayasthiti Malla in the valley of Kathmandu and with the introduction of the Muluki Ain (Old Legal Code) of 1854. As per the Muluki-Ain, the population was divided as under:

Tagadhari (castes wearing sacred thread): This group included the Upadhaya Brahmin, Rajput, Thakuri, Jaisi Brahmin, Chhetri, Bhaju (Newar Brahmin), Indian Brahmin, Sanyasi, Lower Jaisi and various Newar castes who wear holy cord (*janai*).

Matawali (Alcohol-drinking castes): The *Matawalis* were further categorized into two subgroups – ‘non-enslavable’ alcohol drinkers or ‘*namasinyamatawali*’ and ‘enslavable alcohol drinkers’ or ‘*masinyamatawali*’. Magar, Gurung, Sunuwar, for example, were included in *namasinyamatawali*, and Bhote, Chepang, Kumal, Hayu, Tharu and the Ghartis were included in *masinyamatawali*.

According to some scholars, except the Chhetri, Thakuri and the Bahun, all other castes like Limboo, Tamang, Rai, Sunuwar, Gurung, Newar, Mangar, Sherpa, Thami, Bhutia Lepcha belong to the Matawali stock.⁶¹

⁵⁹ W.H. Thompson, *op.cit.*, p.68.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.50.

⁶¹ K. R and T. C Das, Sharma, *Globalization and Plantations Workers in North-East India*, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2009, p.183.

From the 1780s up until the 1900s the Nepalese society was based on legally sanctioned hierarchical structures and the ‘lower’ castes, women, and non-Nepali speaking linguistic communities were socially excluded from state administration and land rights. Hindu religious law and, increasingly, customary law also supported such inequities and exclusion. On the basis of this, another description of caste based groups thus gets noted :

There are significant cultural differences between caste and ethnic groups as there are between Pahadis and Madhesis. The caste groups, known as jats, are Caucasoid Hindus speaking various Indo-European languages, such as Nepali, Maithili, and Bhojpuri. The ethnic groups, currently known as Janjatis, comprise mainly of Mongoloid stock, speak various Tibeto-Burman languages, such as Tamang, Gurung, Newari, and Magar.⁶²

Table 3.8: The Population Statistics of Darjeeling District based on the Caste distinctions in 1901

Caste	District Total	Darjeeling	Kalimpong	Jorbangala	Kurseong	Siliguri
Bhotia	7,620	3,882	2,447	719	492	80
Damai	4,643	1,809	769	656	1,201	208
Gurung	8,738	3,656	1,416	1,588	1,924	109
Kami	9,862	2,884	2,061	1,821	2,573	487
Khambu	33,133	10,012	8,590	5,929	8,040	562
Khas	11,597	3,960	2,223	1,363	3,291	760
Lepcha	9,972	3,071	5,435	366	1,075	25
Limbu	14,305	7,000	2,973	1,704	2,314	314
Mangar	11,812	4,571	1,725	1,448	3,465	703
Murmi	25,398	8,276	3,928	3,761	8,817	631
Newar	5,888	1,533	908	877	2,232	338
Sarki	1,823	668	283	44	721	116
Sunwar	4,428	2,722	934	497	778	37

Source: E.A. Gait, *Census of India, Vol. VIB, Part III, Bengal, 1901 (Provincial Tables)*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1902, pp.100

The distinctions of caste and social hierarchy were based on birth and were arguably something new to the British. Once this sunk in, the census records too, underwent changes, trying to adjust the population statistics as per the caste groups in the colonial Darjeeling

⁶²RajendraPradhan, Ava Shrestha, *Ethnic and Caste Diversity: Implications for Development*, Nepal Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank, Kathmandu, 2005, p.4.

District numerations. According to one view, the establishment of Labour Dhuras (lines) in tea gardens by the British, helped the colonizers to easily divide the whole working population into various castes and tribes having their own respective dialects.⁶³

The observations noted in “*Notes on Tea in Darjeeling by a Planter*”⁶⁴ provides a fair idea regarding the professions of the various castes, they indulged in. The excerpt is as follows:

1. Bowan, Thugre.—High caste, chiefly beggars, no good on gardens.
2. Chettris.—Men very seldom work, keep large herds of cattle.
3. Gurung, Mangar, Bhotia Mourme (Murmi).—Nearly equal in caste. All good coolies and work on most gardens. Bhutias very seldom work on gardens, but sometimes carry boxes or loads.
4. Newar, Lurungs, Limbo, Sunwar.—The Newars are generally shop-keepers or traders.; Cumbu (Khambu) or Jemdars are very fair coolies, a few gardens work almost entirely with these people; Lurungs are good workers, but very clannish and quarrelsome; Limboos intermarry with Lepchas in many cases, very clumsy pickers, but hoe well; Sunwars are jewellers; fair coolies; there are plenty at Kurseong.
5. Carmie, Dhirzee, Sarki, Girtie.—All low castes. Carmies are jewellers or blacksmiths, Dhirzee are dress-makers. Sarkie, boot-makers, workers in leather. Gerties or Guellames, the slave caste of Nepal, not any of these coolies can eat or drink with the higher castes.

The accounts of Dr. Campbell on Darjeeling give a fair idea about the professions that the Limboos took up for a living,

they enter into service of the government and English settlers as labourers, in road-making and building, wood cutting, and tea planting, which their women and children find profitable and easy in picking the leaf, and as cow-herds, grooms, grass cutters; a few take more domestic service as chair-bearers and messengers.⁶⁵

Regarding the Lepchas, it can be said that they were of much likeness to Dr. Campbell, who has essentially recorded them as efficient as plant collectors and baggage carriers.

⁶³ K. R and T. C Das Sharma, *op.cit.*, p.184.

⁶⁴ *Notes on Tea in Darjeeling by a Planter*, Scotch Mission Orphanage Press, Darjeeling, 1888, p.76.

⁶⁵ A. Campbell, ‘On the Tribes around Darjeeling’, *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, Vol. 7, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1869, pp.144-159

With the passage of time, and overlapping of various regimes and socio-cultural influences from others social groups at close proximity, the structure of caste based segregation too, has gone through changes. The change in economic status of a few castes, during the colonial rule has helped some of them to move up the social ladder. For example, the findings show that the Bhujels who were said to be the descendents of slaves in Nepal, were able to take up work as labourers in the plantations along with other tribes. A similar reference to the Ghartis is available in the writings of L.S.S O'Malley, who states that, "In Nepal the Gharti or the slave caste perform the functions of washer men and sweepers, but as soon as they migrate to Darjeeling they refuse to follow such degrading occupations."⁶⁶

The caste system was not a new practice in Nepal. The settling of Hindus in the region had reinforced the boundaries of the caste distinctions, prior to the migration to the Darjeeling District. It can be said that the caste system migrated along with the Nepali's; and those who ended up in Darjeeling eventually came to be addressed as *Pahadis*(hill people). It has been opined on this view that the Brahmans and Chettris, the original dominant castes, were the ones to obtain the land and brought with them those of the low caste composed of Kami, Sarki, and Damai, to do the labour work.⁶⁷ The result "was a simple but effective Caste system and tribal groups ,known as *Janajatis*, were slotted into the middle."⁶⁸

In this context, an account of Henry Ballantine can be quoted to study the social condition in Nepal, where he observes that, "Of the people met in the streets each had to the practiced eye his distinctive mark in dress, cast of features and language, showing the race to which he belonged. There were Hindoos- and under this head may be reckoned first and foremost the dominant race of the Gurkhas- and the lower casts of Magars and Gurungs. Next may be mentioned the Buddhists- the Newars, Bhuteas, Limbus, Keratis, and Lepchas, and, if we except the Newars, all are a dirty, ugly lot, with very strong Mongolian type of features."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ L.S.S O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.152

⁶⁷ Tracy Spacek, "Christianitea: The Evolution of a Religious Identity, in Tea plantations of Darjeeling", Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection, Paper No.1447, 2012, p.3

⁶⁸ David N. Gellner. "Caste, Ethnicity and Inequality in Nepal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42. No. 20 (May 19-25, 2007), 1823

⁶⁹ Henry Ballantine, *op.cit.*, p.132

Ballantine also mentions the presence of the Mohamedans in the country, composed of “Cashmeri, Kabuli and Irani (Persian) traders, hardly numbering a thousand.”⁷⁰

If we are to go by the observations made in the *Notes on Tea in Darjeeling*⁷¹, regarding the professions of the workers in Darjeeling, based on an idea of their caste, then correlating with the Census data in the Bengal Provincial Census of 1901, the population of the district can be analyzed, and an understanding can be reached in a parallel study of caste and the labour in plantations. The Census of 1901 is chosen because of two reasons. Firstly, the data collected and the methodology adopted in doing so is the least controversial than its preceding Census records. Hence, the accuracy of the data cannot be misleading. Secondly, after 1901, the tea plantation industry went through a period of slag, and production declined. Therefore, 1901 provides the peak year, up until then to attract migrant labour. The optimum population, and its characteristic social divisions, can thus be studied in its extensive capacity.

After calculating the population of the entire Darjeeling District, from the Provincial Tables of the Census of Bengal of 1901, including both the Sadar and the Kurseong Subdivisions, the total population count comes to 221,553 (including the Tibetans- 1695, and Musalmans- 8186). Out of this entire population, the Santhals, Oraons, Mundas and the Rajbanshis (Koches) were too negligible in the entire Sadar Subdivision and formed a great bulk in Siliguri, thus adding up to 43,365 souls.

The castes, who had specialised works such as the Lohar, Kamar and the Kumhars, collectively amounted to 2,646 people of the entire population. The population that was in large numbers employed in the plantations including the Gurungs, Mangars, Khambus and such others as coolies, for carrying loads, hoeing, plucking and various works related to the plantations, and then the railways, thus forming the bulk of the migratory labour force, amounted to 105,434 souls amongst the entire population as given in the Provincial Census records of Bengal in 1901.

Estimating the overall population count based on the various castes, in the District of Darjeeling, from the Census of Bengal of 1901, an attempt can be made to club the population in groups, such as:

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ *Notes on Tea in Darjeeling by a Planter, op.cit.*

Table 3.9: The Statistics of Population of Darjeeling District in 1901, Based on Profession and Social Groups

Groups	Total Count
Bulk of Labour	105,434
Specialized Professions	2,646
Brahmans	6,470
Musalmans	8,186
Tibetans	1,695
Tribes in Plains	43,365

Source: Author, compiled from the data in E.A. Gait, *Census of India, Vol. VIB, Part III, Bengal, 1901 (Provincial Tables)*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1902

Note: The total population count in the District was 221,553. The total count of these groups come to 167,796 souls, the remaining comprising of Ahirs, Khas (Chettri) and a few other menial tribes. The Brahmans included Nepali Brahmans, but due to lack of data, they could not be inumerated in the labour group. The Tribes consisting the “Bulk of Labour” group includes- Gurungs, Mangars, Bhutias, Lepchas, Limbus, Sunwars, Murmis, Khambu and Ghartis. The Kumhars, Lohars and Kamar are included in the “Specialized Profession”. The “Tribes in the Plains” include the Rajbanshis, Oraons, Mundas and the Santhals. The plains in referred to Siliguri area of the district, under the Kurseong Subdivision.

What needs to be considered was that the plantation system in Darjeeling was very much a component of the socio-economic formation. The various social groups were set as required to fill in the gaps to fit in a system that was nurtured to benefit the plantation and socio-economic apparatus of the district of Darjeeling. The factors which were made to be accepted as inherent in the plantation system were in fact allowed to exist, or were protected, by the demands of a larger socio-economic system at work vis-a-vis a labour economy under the lieu of the plantation system.

So far, the interpretation of the widely available data on the migration of labour force from Nepal, and the subsequent settling down of the migrants on the soils of Darjeeling seem like a uni-dimensional phenomenon, which has been so recorded in the official records. However, it cannot be evaded that a few queries remain, that demand the records to be interpreted once again, and that too, not in a simplistic uni-dimensional way. Also, the laws of migration thus stated at the beginning have to be seen in context to the development of the labour economy and its subsequent characteristics in colonial Darjeeling District. Did it sit at par with all the common conditions stated in the laws, or did Darjeeling have its own unique experience

under the colonial economic design will need to be analysed. In the concluding pages of this chapter, the crux of the discussion will thus involve the reinterpretations of migration theories and the data available on the migration statistics so far.

Firstly, as per the migration laws formulated by E.G. Ravenstein goes, there are differences that need a better insight with respect to the labour migration in Darjeeling. The law which sits at par with the statistics is the economic crisis in Nepal which propelled the population to move towards centres of industry, e.g. tea plantation in Darjeeling. Also, the plantations were ready to absorb the incoming currents of migratory workers thus, providing shelter, wages and a livelihood. However, what goes into contrast with Ravenstein's theory is that there was no production of a "counter-current" of population towards Nepal. Though a lack of census data in Nepal makes it difficult to get the correct statistics, yet it can be said that, most of the population that migrated, settled permanently in Darjeeling over the time. Secondly, Ravenstein says that the women were more migratory in their birthplace than the men. However, he does not extend that possibility when speaking of migration across boundaries.

In case of Darjeeling, the migration of women was at par with that of men (Tables 3.10 and 3.11) as per the census data. The movement of the women is one of the most essential elements of the plantation economy, and can never be neglected. If we can borrow from the travel records of Henry Ballantine, the practice of slavery and domestic labour could have been a potent cause for the migration of women from Nepal. "This whole system, however, has a most demoralizing effect on account of the women slaves and their debasement."⁷² Thus, it has been an opinion that, "Since the colonial period the percentage of female labourers were considerably higher than the male labourers. The very nature of the plantations were considered suitable for the women work force as this industry being agro-based employed minimum level of mechanized instruments and machines,"⁷³ writes Aritra De. Similarly, the law of Ravenstein stating that families as a whole are not prone to migration, does not fit in with the work culture in the plantations. In plantations, whole families were more likely to be employed, as men were used for tilling, hoeing and ploughing; the women and children were preferred for sowing seeds, the plucking of leaves, etc.

⁷² Henry Ballantine, *op.cit.*, p.140.

⁷³ Aritra De, "Exploitation of Tea-Plantation Workers in Colonial Bengal and Assam", *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)*, Volume.II, Issue-III, November 2015, Assam, p.283.

Table 3.10: Population of both sexes in Darjeeling District 1872-1901

Year	Total Population (both sexes)	Males	Females
1872	94,996	53,199	41,797
1881	155,645	89,351	66,294
1891	223,314	123,046	100,268
1901	249,117	133,006	116,112

Source: *Census of India 1951, Volume VI, West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore, Part II-Tables*, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1953.

Table 3.11: Statistics for the Female Population in the Rural and Urban areas in the Darjeeling District per thousand males from 1901 to 1941

Population of Females	Years				
	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Total	873	869	896	879	883
Rural	892	892	911	905	912
Urban	690	660	777	728	736

Source: *Census of India 1951, Volume VI, West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore, Part II-Tables*, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1953

Unlike in other industries, plantation labour required open air work and constituted a special kind of agricultural employment. The statistics given in Table 3.8 shows that the number of women from rural areas had a higher population than the urban. Two reasons can be located for this condition. Firstly, the number of urban centres were less than rural ones in the entire district of Darjeeling. Secondly, it were the women settled primarily in rural centres who were employed in nearby tea-gardens as labourers. The employment ratio from the rural areas were higher compared to urban ones. The job demand in estates required more women on fields. It is for this reason that women were to be employed in large numbers in the estates rather than in factories. The work being unskilled it was taken as consideration that the women from villages were far more used to this form of employment than working as skilled hands in other industries.

Also, since major migration is taken to have occurred from Nepal, female heads of agricultural households had a particularly hard time when male labour is not available for tasks such as

plowing, a taboo activity for women in certain areas of Nepal. Writing on the male labour migration from Nepal, it is strongly assumed that because of specialization, the husband is more productive on the labor market and the wife is more productive at home. Similarly, the husband could earn a higher wage by migrating than he could earn in the domestic labour market.⁷⁴

In simple terms, it should be remembered in hindsight that among organized industries tea employs the largest number of females in the primary sector. Male labourers perform marginal tasks. This is clearly reflected in gender relation in the labouring community of colonial Darjeeling. Tea plantations, thus contain possibilities for a certain degree of sexual equality in terms of numbers of labourers. As per the data provided by the various Census reports over the years suggest, the percentage of women was never in a dwindling state in Darjeeling District. In fact, it had a representable ratio to that of men. The increasing district total of Darjeeling was the accumulative result of the employment of women, as well as the role of family labour in the plantations. The migration theory of Ravenstein in this context, needs consideration on account of the labour system in Darjeeling.

Secondly, as Ravenstein's laws, there should be a "counter-current" to every succeeding current of migration. However, Ravenstein never actually clarifies, as to in which direction this counter current of migratory population will press forward, or from where it will generate. In case of Darjeeling, it can be said on the basis of data, that no counter-current of labour migration was seen towards Nepal, in response to the immigrants moving in large numbers to the colonial hill station. Nevertheless, it will be wrong to say that there was no movement of labour force at all. However, the place of origin of this migratory force and its destination greatly varied. One of the most sorted out destination was Burma. According to the Report on the Royal Commission of Labour in India, 1931, the industries of Burma were largely dependant on Indian labour. However, it was the Telugus and Oriyas, who formed the bulk of the labour force. Among the Indian immigrants, as per the statistics go, "about one-third come from Calcutta and one-third from the Coromandel ports, the Hindustanis coming from the former and the Telegus from the later; Uriyas are said to come from both. The

⁷⁴Michael Lokshin and Elena Glinskaya, "The Effect of Male Migration on Employment Patterns of Women in Nepal", THE WORLD BANK ECONOMIC REVIEW, p.483

remaining important classes of immigrants are the Tamils from Madras...”⁷⁵ The theory of counter-migration needs a better clarity regarding the source and destination of the labour migration. Thus, to hold it in context to the migration in Darjeeling, partially fulfills the entire process, but fails to comprehend the entire process as a whole.

Coming to the data provided in the Census over the years, it can be said without a doubt that they do provide the requisite information that suggests the massive growth of the Darjeeling District under the British influence. However, having said that, the interpretation of the Census does require a different analysis, rather than plainly quoting its figures.

The Census of 1872, the very first of the systematic records that we have, was held to be inaccurate, and hence, must be read taking this knowledge into account. The population figures given in this Census tend to be inaccurate too, and cannot be entirely relied upon. It must be remembered that the Darjeeling area was considered to be a wilder outlying District in the Census of 1872. It has been mentioned that the Lepchas were the original inhabitants of the Darjeeling District, and that the Nepalese who came as immigrants from Nepal, were a pushing, thriving race and that the Lepchas would soon be ousted by them. Some scholars are of the view that the Nepalese were living on this land from a much earlier period, even earlier than the coming of the British to these soils.

This argument is highlighted by Hutt in his writings where he cites the opinion of Pradhan. According to Pradhan, there were already large number of Nepalis prior to the tea plantations in Darjeeling hills. He reproduces two letters written in Nepali, one in 1815 and another in 1826, both of which support the idea to the coming and going between eastern Nepal and Darjeeling. He further adds that the body of men formed for the purpose of construction and maintenance of roads in the Darjeeling District in 1839, “composed almost entirely of Nepalis.”⁷⁶

While going through the Census of 1872, what strikes a thought is that, it had identified 63 tribes in India. Among these, the tribes that are identified with this region by most scholars are the Mechs, Dhimals, and the Koch in the Terai, and the Nepalese, Bhutia and Lepchas in the hills. A few scholars, thus argue that when in 1872, along with the Bhutias and Lepchas,

⁷⁵ *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India*, 1931, Government of India, Central Publication Branch, Calcutta, 1931, p.426

⁷⁶ Michael Hutt, *op.cit.*

the Nepalese were declared as tribals, then taking a totally contradicting turn in 1876, why were they pushed into the ignominious status of immigrants. Another argument supporting this view comes from the reading of the Darjeeling Guide of 1845. Dr. Campbell, by far the longest serving British representative of Darjeeling, recorded his observations and findings, and noted down the local indigenous tribes of Darjeeling. His recorded tribes were: The Garos, Lepchas, Mechis, Limboos, Murmis, and Haioos. He also gave an in depth account of their customs, languages and vocabularies. He also mentioned the presence of Gurungs, Magars and the Rais in the area. Now, as per the argument goes, the Limbus, Murmis (Tamangs) and Haioos, belonged to the Gurkha community. If this is the case, then there was already the presence of Gurkhas in the area, in a mentionable population, if not a huge one. In extending this view, it can also be argued that, the first waves of large migratory labour in plantations in the Darjeeling District started coming from the 1850s. However, this account of Darjeeling tribes was recorded by Dr. Campbell prior to it. Thus, the arguments are suggestive of the existence of the Nepalese prior to the coming of the British in these Darjeeling hills.

Similarly, the Census of 1872 was not undertaken with proper measures, and areas of Darjeeling were not accounted for, hence it can be argued that the origins of the Tribes and the already existing indigenous population was never properly recorded. The lack of a census numeration in Nepal too, adds to this shortcoming. By the time the Census of 1881 was undertaken, a decade had passed and a part of the original population had already amalgamated with the immigrants, thus changing the original source of origin of most labourers. This view is reinforced from the official records of Arthur Jules Dash, who wrote that, “The large increase in 1881 has been attributed in part at least to the incompleteness and inaccuracy of the first census...”⁷⁷, the census of 1871-72 to be exact. The records of 1881, would therefore need to be studied under this development, rather than holding its records as the final authority.

Similarly, the regional fluctuations, as has been elaborately discussed in the previous chapter, also posed a problem in recording the actual population of the district. To quote Arthur Jules Dash, the “Census returns do not reflect directly or fully the seasonal increases of population due to visitors or school children as, at the time of year when the census is usually taken, schools, hotels and boarding houses are empty: but this seasonal traffic undoubtedly helps to

⁷⁷ Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Alipore Press, Calcutta, 1947.

raise the level of the permanent population figures.”⁷⁸ Notably, these figures were then taken to be the records for the enumerations in the later years because, the schools and hotels were not earlier present in the district. They came up eventually and that too, for the figures to be large in number, the number of both schools and hotels had to be large as well.

It is thus, suggestive to study the entire phenomenon of the migratory population with regards to the greater colonial design. What can be said is that, as compared to the neighbouring tea plantations in Assam, which had the infamous system of indentured labour, Darjeeling had no such system of indentured slavery. The plantations were a seasonal affair, and evidence suggests that most of the population would initially move back to Nepal after the season was over, and return once again for the next season. If there was no indenture slavery, was not the labourer free to move away from the plantation at any given time? This has not been sufficed in the counter arguments, mentioned above by the scholars. The lack of census in Nepal also hinders the statistics of labourers moving in and out of the country each year. What is clear though, is that the pressure on land, and the oppressive reign in Nepal was an important reason for the labourers to move to Darjeeling and pursue economic options; and the time was ripe for the British to attract these workers as they required huge man power for the plantations, and later on, for clearing the hills to establish the railway lines.

Also, the British interest lied deep in focusing on the Nepalis and other hill tribes for the plantations in Darjeeling. The Oraons, Mundas, Bhils worked in the plantations in the plains. They provided a huge labour force and formed the bulk of the hands engrossed in turning the wheels of the plantation economy. Why then, were they not incorporated in the Darjeeling District? It has been suggested that the climate and the death toll of these tribes due to malaria and other fevers, did not let them adjust to the conditions of the hills. So they were mainly retained in the plains. But, it seems as the British wanted the population of the hilly tracts of Darjeeling to have a separate identity from that of the plains. The international scenario forced the British hands for such a policy. While Britain was following its own expansionist policy, Russians in Central Asia had engulfed Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and the Pamirs. Lhasa, the “Roof of the world” remained a bone of contention for both London and Moscow, as the British had already moved up to Sikkim. Darjeeling remained as an important buffer between Nepal and colonial India. The need to maintain Darjeeling as an

⁷⁸Ibid, p.50.

individual zone was thus essential for the colonisers. This process manifested itself in locating the position of the labour population in the wider context of its neighbouring areas as well.

A few factors need to be studied and elaborated, taking into consideration all the above discussed statistics and patterns. Firstly, the wage differentials as a factor for migration needs to be considered. It has been opined by the likes of Todaro⁷⁹ that movement is the response to expected earning differentials, in his case (based on unemployment research in Kenya) rural-urban wage differentials. In context to this it has been contested that the Nepalis emigrated to India, and in this case Darjeeling, not because they perceived wage differentials but because of their search for arable land for which North-east colonial India was a potential destination.⁸⁰ Moreover, most Nepali emigration was considered to be of rural-to-rural nature, where rural-urban wage differential did not have direct relevance to rational of migration. Now, if this is taken in account, then from the studies in the previous chapter we get to know that often small patches of land was provided as incentives to the labourers for cultivations; and as discussed earlier in this chapter itself that landholdings were scarce or in control of Hindus in Nepal. Also, the wage structure was such that the condition of the labourer and his family was in a hand-to-mouth situation. Considering this, land might be a potent cause for migration. Also, we have to remember that although Darjeeling was not entirely rural, but a semi-urban if not completely urban district with rapid strides towards urbanisation; the wages in the tea-plantations, as elaborately discussed in the previous chapter, was always low and close to stagnancy in any rise. Thus, the emphasis on the land variable as a potent cause for migration needs further analysis and understanding.

Spatial variable is another factor that needs consideration in understanding the flow of migration. Spatial variables are concerned with time, distance and space. In a simple gravity model formulation, migration becomes a function of “friction of space”, i.e., as distance increases, the size of migratory flow tends to decrease and vice-versa.⁸¹ This holds true in case of Darjeeling to a great extent. The development in road infrastructure and the introduction of relatively inexpensive railway lines (Communications will be discussed in next chapter) facilitated the movement from Nepal to Darjeeling. Not only this, it has been

⁷⁹ Todaro, *op.cit.*

⁸⁰ Bhim Prasad Subedi, “International Migration in Nepal: Towards an Analytical Framework”, *Contributions to Nepalese Studies (CNAS)*, Vol. 18, No. 1, January, 1991, Nepal, p.85

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.87.

recorded that the railway network further facilitated the Indian “gallawala” (labour recruiting agent) and rice traders to extend their activities to Nepali villages.⁸² Thus, it can be safely assumed that these above mentioned recruiting agents played their due role in getting labourers across the borders to Darjeeling too. The quick word-of-mouth was equally effective in alluring men to these parts, which will be discussed next.

Kinship variable too was important in contributing towards the flow of migration in one particular direction, i.e., the plantations the in Darjeeling. The kinsmen met the demand for and supply of information regarding avenues of employment and living conditions. Ritchey⁸³ emphasizes the impact of this information network in shaping the migration to Darjeeling. Since in those times, information about distance lands could mainly be obtained through personal interactions, the early labourers, who returned to Nepal after plantation seasons, were taken to be the most reliable source. Positive word-to-mouth information thus created the atmosphere for more and more inhabitants to explore the options of employment in the plantations that continuously required labour. This has been considered in simplistic terms as: no one leaves his/her home territory without any prior idea about the destination. Kinsmen are trusted to provide the most reliable information.⁸⁴

Another factor that needs to be highlighted in terms of migration in to the district of Darjeeling from Nepal and other areas of proximity was the lack of check on the numbers of the migrants, in part of the colonial government or the plantation owners. This was not only the case in terms of labourers in the tea-gardens; but simultaneously, between the two World Wars, the British government encouraged emigration for recruitments in the British army. Thus, the absence of checks on migration facilitated a large number of inhabitants to migrate from Nepal and vicinities and settle in the district of Darjeeling; often permanently. Over time they came to constitute the permanent settled families in the tea-gardens, with common identities, and similar cultural and economic affinities. The resultant effects of these processes will be discussed hereafter.

What Srikant Dutt had said that the Nepalese are one such group, who had been styled as 'foreigners'; but they are only technically foreign, and to simply dismiss them as foreigners

⁸²Ibid, p.87.

⁸³ P.N. Ritchey, “Explanation of Migration”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol.2, pp. 363-404.

⁸⁴Bhim Prasad Subedi, *op.cit.*,p. 91.

would be incorrect about the Nepalese.⁸⁵ What is interesting in this process of the colonial design, was the fact that the Nepalese were nominally Hindu, having close affinity towards the cultural heartland of South Asia, whereas the areas in which they were encouraged to settle, i.e., the Darjeeling and the adjoining areas, were culturally and religiously different; often Tibetan-Buddhist, animist and later Christian, with ties in other directions. In fact, by branding the natives as immigrants, the British succeeded in installing a fear in the psyche of the labourers. Regimented rules were introduced to induct discipline and work culture. The fear of being expelled at the whims of the tea garden owners, kept the labourers under work pressure. Once branded as immigrants, within the axiomatic belief of imperial rules, the gullible natives were grinded to serve in the plantations.

It can be said that a Nepalese population might have existed in the Darjeeling District, comprising the Haios and the Mangars. However, that was in a little number and that too, prior to the development of roads and railways and the introduction of the plantations. After the plantations opened, and eventually the communications developed, a large number of these populations moved in to the District and any one of common caste or tribe, already residing were taken up by the British and numerated together, thus giving a combined numerical data of the population. This might have given the impression of the huge number of migrants to move into the district.

The results of classifying the majority of the migrated population as foreigners also contributed in creating a common consciousness of identity among this labour population. Writing on the impact of colonial rule on local populations, ParthaChatterjee in *Nation and its Fragments* says that the, “Process of legitimation of the colonial state by creating a public domain in the form of civil society was fundamentally limited as it could confer only subjecthood on the colonised. In response the colonised... began constructing their identities within the narratives of the community.” The manifestations of this process can be seen in the words of Kumar Pradhan, who writes that, “The Numerous ethnic tribes like Rais, Limbus, Tamangs, Magars, Newars and Thamis living separately in their own villages and speaking their own languages in Nepal had no opportunity of living separately in the changed

⁸⁵Srikant Dutt, “Migration and Development: The Nepalese in Northeast”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 16, No. 24 (June 13, 1981), pp.1053-1055.

environment of Darjeeling...”⁸⁶ Gradually, because of the social need the other languages slowly phased out as those were and Nepali emerged as the common tongue, as it was known to most of these social groups, if not all. It is in this context that Bidhan Golay points out that Colonialism helped in providing base for fashioning a new identity.⁸⁷ Thus the collective consciousness that was germinating among the Nepalis in Darjeeling found its support in the Nepali language. After the collective consciousness grew amongst the people, it became easy for them to identify themselves as Nepali and the process was facilitated by the colonial the political socialization under colonial rule.⁸⁸

Once there was a growing solidarity of a Nepali identity in the district of Darjeeling, the British started exerting it as a potent tool to distinguish between the men of the plains and the men from the hills. The colonial design of providing a separatist identity to the population of Darjeeling can be supported from the records in the accounts of L.S.S. O’Malley, Hyde Clark and Dr Hooker, all of whom saw the new identity of the Darjeeling labour population as a contrast to the people in the plains, and hugely acknowledged the closeness and sense of their loyalty to the British masters, thus encouraging and providing means to keep this identity secure in favour of the British.

The most prominent among these outsider men were seen the Bengalees and the Marwaris who frequented the hills of Darjeeling. Writing about the immediate neighbours from the plains, W.H. Thompson records that “The Bengalis dislike and fear the hill people and the latter do not willingly go out of sight of the hills, nor try to mix with people of the plains.”⁸⁹

Similarly, it has been studied that the District of Darjeeling since its cession in 1835 and subsequent additions in 1850 and 1864, made the tract extremely profitable in the money-lending business with the introduction of the plantation economic structure. In this context, it should be noted that since the original inhabitants were averse to this type of economic ventures, the tract had always been left open for any foreign migrant community to start this

⁸⁶ Kumar Pradhan, *Gorkha Conquest: The Process and Consequences of the Unification of Nepal, with Particular Reference to Eastern Nepal*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1991.

⁸⁷ Bidhan Golay, “Rethinking Gorkha Identity: Outside the Imperium of Discourse, Hegemony and History,” in *Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives*, Concept Publishing, New Delhi, 2009, pp.83-84.

⁸⁸ DeepikaGahatraj, “Identity Formation and Identity Crisis: Nepalis in India”, *South-Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, Volume 3, Issue 5,p.32

⁸⁹ W.H. Thompson, *op.cit.*,p.68.

type of enterprise. It has thus been opined that in these British-ruled district, although it was the colonial administrators, planters, and missionaries who dominated the social hierarchies; it was the Asian traders, who were the key economic actors.⁹⁰

The other prominent outsider presence in Darjeeling was that of the money-lenders, especially the Marwari class. It has to be remembered that the Marwaris did not migrate to the district of Darjeeling as landless agricultural labours or workers, as it usually happened in the case of rural to urban migration in quest of employment in factories or industries as wage earners. Here they migrated exclusively as money - lenders, or traders. Mr. Hunter expresses about Darjeeling and says, “The population of the district is entirely rural... and live solely by agriculture”⁹¹. When the region became extremely viable in respect of its economic potentiality under the aegis of British administration and when commercial agriculture had become the mainstay of the larger population, it provided the required impetus for the growth of a business community amongst it. Thus the tea-plantation structure and its economic setting was necessary for the spread of the money-lenders to flourish in the district.

In this context, the migrated labourers stood in a stark contrast to these money-lenders and businessmen. It has to be taken in consideration that most of the Nepali migrants were not looking simply for better work. Driven by poverty and insecurity, they are looking for any work. Based on this, it is important to ask two important questions, as in to understand the migration that occurred in the Darjeeling district. As migration occurs between two spatial areas, the first question of where do people migrate is implicit to the question of choice of migration. Choice of destination also varies between households depending on existing social and economic structures at the origin, historical linkages as well as institutional networks at the destination. For example, in case of the migration from Nepal to Darjeeling, it can be noted that, In the 1920s and 1930s, mountain people from the SoluKhumbu area of Nepal migrated to Darjeeling, India, where they were employed as porters. The development of the tea estates in northern India in the late 19th and early 20th century attracted migrants from southern Nepal. Migration from these regions was determined by factors exogenous to local economic conditions.

⁹⁰ Harris, T., Holmes-Tagchungdarpa, A., Sharma, J., & Viehbeck, M., ‘Global Encounters, Local Places: Connected Histories of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and the Himalayas’ *Transcultural Studies*, No.1, 2016, p.47.

⁹¹ W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*

The second question then comes is who chose to migrate. Generally, the answer to the second question focuses on social exclusion as a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against. This occurs when the state has discriminatory policies and discriminatory practices exist in the society, be it economic or political, or as often, both.

The settlement of Nepalese in the colonial period thus, has to be seen as a process of being tied to notions of accelerating demographic change to enhance colonial security. It did not in anyway matter to which group the Nepalese belonged; immigrants or natives. The entire population was under the common yolk of colonial economic web, whose end target was growth of the colonial economy. The labourers: natives or immigrants received the same wage irrespective of heir source of origin. Their caste, a boundary to be maintained only in their own eyes if necessary, but as far their colonial masters were concerned, they were not under the caste but the common class of labourers, who gave their labour in exchange of wages. The British had recognized in the earlier phase itself that the Nepalese, could constitute an ideal group, with which to penetrate and form strategic buffers in the northeast and, and collaterally, change the composition of the local populations in some areas, to meet their needs of profit in the colonial belly.

Chapter 4

Transportation System: Railways and the Roads

Railways are economic beings that create and consume scarce resources. Yet their impact goes far beyond the measurable resources they consume and produce, into the realm of external economies.

Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles Of Progress*

The words of O'Malley in the Bengal District Gazetteers very much seem to serve as a friendly warning in estimating the effort and skills behind the construction of the railway lines in the hilly terrains of the Darjeeling hills, amply filled with curves and gorges. Drawing from the writings of O'Malley, where it is stated that, the "Darjeeling Gazetteer prudently warns one against the sin of exaggeration. It points out that the Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway was constructed on a readymade road, and for the most part it was only necessary to lay the rails along that road"¹, it becomes important to understand the construction and the role of the railways in terms of their usage in the hilly district of Darjeeling.

Before the Steel Tracks

The roads and railways of the district were a creation of British rule. Prior to their occupation of the country, the only roads were rough narrow tracks leading through dense forests, and the only bridges were the cane bridges spanning the torrents.² Grant's memorandum of 1830 mentioned only two routes then existing north-ward from the plains into Sikkim. One was by the 'Nagaree' pass and the other by the 'Sabbook Golah'. A third route by the Mahananda was mentioned as having been deserted and overgrown with jungle.³ Thus, when the first British pioneers came to Darjeeling after it had been ceded in 1835, they were confronted with an arduous journey from Calcutta before they could touch the hilly abode.

The importance of roads for communication was well known to the Britishers. This idea is reflected in a letter by General Llyod of 23rd March 1835, which stated that,

¹ *From the Hoogly to the Himalayas*, The Times Press, Bombay, 1913, p.30.

² L.S.S O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling*, Government of West Bengal, Department of Higher Education, Calcutta, 2001. p.164.

³ A.K. Banerji, *West Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1980, p.288.

Supposing Durgeeling be ceded to us, the first object would be the formation of a road within the hills... and would require the superintendence of an Engineer Officer, assisted by some of the Sappers and Miners, as there will no doubt be many rocks to remove by blasting, and various obstacles which without their assistance would be difficult to overcome; the more of this description of workmen are employed the sooner the place will be accessible...⁴

The necessity to develop the transportation infrastructure in the hilly terrains of Darjeeling had been seen to serve two distinct purposes. Firstly, it was essential for the British colonizers in order to further their aims of establishing Darjeeling as a hill sanatorium, as had been perceived in their plans. “An early and critical priority for the colonial hill-station’s sustainability that required critical infusions of labour was transport infrastructure.”⁵ Also, district military roads were cut into the Himalayan foothills during the 1820's and 1830's, with some justification in terms of tribal pacification.⁶

On 3rd June, 1839, under the vigilance of Lieutenant Robert Napier of Royal Engineers, the first road was laid out in the midst of thick forest and along the steep ridges for a length of 40 miles. It came to be known as the Auckland Road. It was completed in 1842 at an expenditure of Rs.8,00,000. Later on, this road came to be called as the Old Military Road, as military soldiers used to travel through this road. The road passed on its way from Pankhabari to Kurseong and had no less than 300 bridges and culverts. From Kurseong it ascended to Dow Hill to the east of that station, and continued on its course along the spurs until it reached Senchel and descended to Jorebunglow near Ghum, from where it gradually inclined higher to the east of the hill until the Chowrasta was reached. It remained the only road to the plains till the Cart Road was built and completed by 1869. Thereafter, the Auckland Road served as an alternate route, connecting the Tonga Road, near Woodlands, to the Cart Road below. However it was soon realised that, “This road was not practicable for wheeled traffic and the development of Darjeeling and the cost of transporting military stores...”⁷

⁴ L.S.S. O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.163

⁵ Jayeeta Sharma, “Producing Himalayan Darjeeling: Mobile People and Mountain Encounters”, *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*, Vol. 35, No.2, 2016, p.88.

⁶ J. E. Spencer and W. L. Thomas, “The Hill Stations and Summer Resorts of the Orient”, *American Geographical Society*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Oct., 1948), p. 647.

⁷ A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, Calcutta, 1954, p.XCV.

However, road construction in these steep terrains was only one part of the challenge for the British. The other was the continuous maintaining of these roads. One of the crucial expenditures borne by the British Government was the maintenance of these roads in the hills, since the roads were limited and traffic was regular. Thus, the Himalayan roads required constant upkeep against nature's wear and tear.⁸ The recruitment of militia has to be seen with the understanding of the urgent colonial requirement for the active movement on a steady road in and out of the district. Hence, in extreme conditions of rain, limited labourers and a difficult terrain to work on, the retention of soldiers was easier than civilian labor who had to be recruited from the Bengal plains, a major reason why Lieutenant Napier was put in charge of a new militia: the Sebundy Sappers. Two hundred men were recruited into this militia, many from Himalayan groups such as Limboos, who came from Sikkim to enlist at Darjeeling,⁹ in Jalapahar and Lebong cantonments, as has been discussed in the previous chapter.

As the tea industry started developing and the plantations went on a rise, increasing year by year, it was recognised that the prevailing road system was hugely inadequate to carry the bulk of the tea production to and from the district. A need of having a cart road was already felt earlier, during the Sikkim Expedition of the British of 1860, when stores were to be hurried, and it was observed that the cost was Rs. 2 per maund from Pankhabari to Darjeeling. The importance of opening out a cart road to Darjeeling through the sub-Himalayan range, in continuation of the road from Caragolah was, thus, fully recognised and a gradient not exceeding 1 in 30 was approved.¹⁰ The British Government henceforth, sanctioned an immediate measure to construct a cart road joining the plains and the Darjeeling District.¹¹

As stated by Jayeeta Sharma, "It was imperative to build mountain roads that would allow the passage of wheeled vehicles as well as animal and passenger transport up from the provisioning plains."¹² Taking an estimation of communication lines joining Darjeeling to the

⁸ O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.168.

⁹ E.C. Dozey, *op.cit.*, p.31, Hooker, *op.cit.*, p.36, quoted in Jayeeta Sharma, "Producing Himalayan Darjeeling: Mobile People and Mountain Encounters", *Himalaya Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 2, January, 2016, p.89.

¹⁰ *Bengal Administration Report, 1861-62, 1862-63*, Bengal Secretariat press, Calcutta, 1864, p. 32.

¹¹ L.S.S O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.165.

¹² Jayeeta Sharma, *op.cit.*, p.89.

other surrounding areas, W.W. Hunter gives a detailed account of roads in his records. Some of the most essential ones were 1) The Darjeeling hill cart road, extending between Darjeeling station and Siliguri, spanning a distance of 48 miles; 2) The new cart road from the saddle to Jalapahar ; 3) From Siliguri to Pankhabari, covering 16 miles ; 4) Gok road from Darjeeling to the Little Ranjit ; 5) the Hopetown road extending from cart road and connecting to Hopetown and Balasan (unmetalled) ; 6) The Mineral spring road, from Darjeeling Station to Rangnu (unmetalled) ; 7) Road from Karsiang to Pankhabari ; 8) Road from Darjeeling station to Jalapahar ; 9) Ranjit road from Darjeeling station to Great Ranjit, 12 miles (unmetalled) ; 10) Singtham Road from Darjeeling to the Little Ranjit.¹³ These roads were under the maintenance of the Public Works Department. Similarly, in addition to building internal arteries such as the Auckland and Station Roads, the Darjeeling municipality took charge of rough hill-paths that served as channels for long-distance Himalayan circulation, and upgraded them as Local Fund roads.¹⁴

Alongside the local British government, the maintenance and construction of the roads were carried out by several agencies. The most important roads were in charge of the Public Works Department; the aggregate was close to 336 miles, of which 173 miles were metalled and 163 miles were unmetalled, and maintained at an annual cost of Rs. 1.5 lakh.¹⁵ Speaking about the building of the roads in the mountains, “it should be understood that construction and maintenance of roads is troublesome and expensive: in the hills because of the mountainous nature of the land, the heavy rainfall and the liability to landslips: in the Terai because of heavy rainfall and flooding.”¹⁶ Thus, the cost of maintaining the District Roads, other than those within the Station was rupees 25 to 30 a mile per annum. The Station roads of 20 miles cost Rs.150 a mile per annum. The difference in cost was basically that the Station roads were broader and metalled in few cases. At the same time the cost of labour was high along with the supervision. On the other hand in the other subdivisions the repairs of the roads were contracted by the planters with their own labourers.¹⁷ Further on, in the hills, blasting was necessary in construction and repair and streams crossing road alignments often had to be treated with expensive revetting to lessen the risk of their harming the road, adds Dash in his

¹³ W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Darjiling*, Vol. X, Trubner & Co., London, 1876, pp.127-28.

¹⁴ Jayeeta Sharma, *op.cit.*, p.89

¹⁵ O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.173.

¹⁶ Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, 1947, p.181.

¹⁷ W.W. Hunter, *op.cit.*, p.111.

*Bengal District Gazetteers*¹⁸. The initial traffic in these freshly constructed roads were thus of simpler origins too.

For the less gradient roads strong bullock carts were the common modes of conveyance. As those roads were few in number it was difficult for the wheeled carts to travel across the narrow and steep paths. The journeys have been captured well in a number Nepali literature set in those social conditions abundant in such tales of cart-drivers and bullock cart owners who played active part in the social life of the people. Besides carrying people, trade was also facilitated by bullock carts.

Other than the carts, the other commonly used transportation were the rickshaws and the dandy. The rickshaw was mostly in demand for local usage, rather than long distance journey. Regarding these fancy vehicles, O'Malley had written, "In Darjeeling itself the commonest conveyances for those who do not ride are the luxurious rickshaw and the hill dandy. The latter is a long coffin-like reclining chair with one end resting on the shoulder of a bearer, and the other slung across a pole (*dandi*) which rests on the shoulders of two men behind. For long journeys four men are necessary, and then the dandy is supported on poles both before and behind."¹⁹

Besides these, the most common way of travelling by the locals and labourers was manual toiling. Hardy porters and strong footed mules were traditional modes of conveyance in the Hills. Powerfully built and of great natural strength, they were capable of carrying the heaviest burdens.

The Impact of Road Transportation

With the establishment of such long-distance road-links the functioning of crucial provisioning circuits were started, whereby *beparee* (trading caste), for instance, transported daily grain consignments from the Bengal plains—supplies that helped to alleviate frequent food or commodity shortages among labourers in the Darjeeling district²⁰, linking its local

¹⁸ Arthur Jules Dash, *op.cit.*, p.183.

¹⁹ O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.170.

²⁰ Jayeeta Sharma, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

market to the supplies from the plains. The road communication also served as a link between the marwari traders who came from the plains to Darjeeling, mainly as moneylenders, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. Also, it has to be understood that the road system in the district not only served local utility, but because of the advantageous position of Darjeeling, it was also of importance to the British as well as to Sikkim and Tibet.

However, it should be mentioned here that the roads were at times used as tools to maintain the segregation between the British colonisers and the population in the Darjeeling hills (both labourers and men from the plains) who were considered racially inferior to the former ones. Jayeeta Sharma presents a strong advocacy in this regard when she mentions that the 1860's construction of a new road to the European sanatorium (Darjeeling Cart Road) was in response to the hill-station's increased visibility of nepali labourers and non-white bodies, so convalescents could avoid the native marketplace.²¹ This underlines the tension between colonialism's practice of spatial and legislative forms of racial and class control and the ever-escalating desire for compliant laboring bodies—particularly with regard to the specific needs of a high-altitude settlement, which started as a sanatorium but became a plantation enclave. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the clash of both the social settings were in constant clash, and the road communication too became an important tool in upholding this duality of the Darjeeling hills.

The Introduction of the Railways

Citing the importance and plannings for the railways to Darjeeling, Hyde Clark writes that, “the hill stations could only be developed by being connected as well with the railway system as with the telegraph system. Sir Macdonald Stephenson had proposed a Northern Bengal railway as one of the great feeders of the East Indian Railway, and in 1857, I became associated with him in the extension of a line by that route to Darjeeling.”²²

²¹ Ibid, p. 90.

²² Hyde Clarke, “The English Stations in the Hill Regions of India: Their Value and Importance, with Some Statistics of their Products and Trade”, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Sep., 1881), pp. 528-573.

In April 1853, the first locomotive in India, the “Lord Falkland,” pulled a train from Bombay to Thane, a distance of 32 kilometres.²³ The opening of a line from Bombay to Thane soon heralded a beginning of great industrial revolution in India. The Railway network in colonial Bengal saw its first passenger train flagged off from Howrah station for Hooghly, a distance of 24 miles, on 15th August, 1854 and the first section of the East Indian Railway (EIR) was opened to public traffic on the Eastern side of the sub-continent.²⁴ From February 3rd, 1855 the railway had progressed westwards covering a distance of 120 miles from Calcutta and reached up to Raniganj.

Soon after, two major events changed the strategy and speed of railway construction all over the colonial Indian landmass. The first was the Mutiny of 1857, which was immediately succeeded by the demise of the monopoly of the East India Company, in 1858. The mutiny had demonstrated the military advantages of the railways, and henceforth, the constructions became “an imperial priority as well as a shrewd investment,” opined Daniel R. Headrick.²⁵

Accordingly, in 1859, a good number of private companies got contracts for some 8,000 kilometres of railroad to be constructed. In October, 1859 the EIR had advanced to Rajmahal in Bihar and as early as in 1860 a distance of 219 miles from Howrah was covered and Sahibgunge, the terminus of the visitor to Darjeeling, was reached. The Eastern Bengal Railway (EBR), a private company got concession for construction and management of railway lines commencing from the left bank of Hooghly towards the Eastern and Northern part of Bengal, including a line to Darjeeling. Construction of EBR lines commenced in April, 1859.

According to the words of O’Malley, “The year 1866 may be taken as marking an epoch in the history of Darjeeling. Peace was established within its borders ; and thenceforward began the march of progress and civilisation. Rapid progress was now at last made in the

²³ Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988, p.62.

²⁴ Mukul Mukerjee, ‘Railways and Their Impact on Bengal’s Economy, 1870-1920’; *Railways in Modern India*, edited by Ian J. Kerr, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p.127.

²⁵ Daniel R. Headrick, *op.cit.*, p.65.

development of the communications of the district, which the Sikkim expedition of 1860 and the Bhutanese war the year before had shown to be vitally essential.”²⁶

The period roughly from 1870-79 saw the “Era of State Construction”²⁷ in the railway sector. Daniel R. Headrick records that between 1854 and 1869 railway construction demanded 75 million pounds, which was close to half of all British investment in India. Sir John Lawrence, the Viceroy (1864-1869) at the time, not only blamed the guarantee system of company construction, but also the broad gauge lines then in use, as the most potent causes for the huge expenditures. He therefore proposed that henceforth the state should build all new railroads and do so on a metre gauge.²⁸ Accordingly, in early 1870s the Government of India took a decision to stop expansion of rail-lines under the auspices of guaranteed companies in new areas and instead decided to construct and manage rail-lines as State enterprises. For construction of rail-lines in North Bengal, a state railway in the title of Northern Bengal Railway (NBR) was formed. Survey was commenced for Northern Bengal State Railway (NBR) that continued in 1870-71. Till then, For the travellers the route from Calcutta to Darjeeling was first by rail from Howrah to Sahibganj, a distance of 219 miles. Then it was followed by steam ferry across Ganges to Karagola and by bullock cart to the river opposite Dingra Ghat. After crossing which again the traveller had to take a bullock cart or palkee ghary and crossed Purnea, Kishanganj, Titalya, Siliguri and the slope commenced via Punkhabari Road, which connected the cart road at Kurseong that led the traveller to its final destination, Darjeeling.²⁹ Or, another alternate route of travelling was to take the E. B. Railway to Poradah, then a short march to Bhairamara, and from Sara, on the opposite bank of the river, along a trunk road of about the same length as when travelling by the E. I. R. route.

Even so, the 1873 trip to Darjeeling was an eight day ordeal as experienced by the artist Edward Lear, whose cars broke down, and his coolies were reported to have fled.³⁰ It was in 1874, that the Eastern Bengal Railway was given sanction for the construction of a line on the

²⁶ O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.34.

²⁷ Ibid, p.71.

²⁸ Daniel R. Headrick, *op.cit.*, p.72.

²⁹ *Illustrated Guide for the Tourists to the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and Darjeeling*, London (1896), reprinted by Pagoda Tree Press, London, 2005, p.7.

³⁰ Edward Lear, *Indian Journal*, ed. Ray Murphy, London, 1953, as quoted in Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p.90.

metre gauge known as the Northern Bengal State Railway, which ran from the north bank of the Ganges to Siliguri at the foot of the Himalayas, through which the route lay to the sanitarium of Darjeeling.³¹ In the latter half of 1877, the road journey only covered the distance between Poradah Junction and Atrai from which place the traveller entrained for Jalpaiguri.³²

The Eastern Bengal Railway served as the main connecting vehicle between Darjeeling and the surrounding points of exchange of goods. Regarding its importance, it is noted that, “one can stay for any length of time in Calcutta without perceiving how important a part in the commercial and social life of the city is played by the Eastern Bengal State Railway. It is the line which traverses in various directions the rich and fertile plains of Bengal and connects Calcutta with North and East Bengal and Assam, and with Diamond Harbour on the Hooghly, and it is the line which takes the tourist and the resident in Calcutta away from the heat and bustle of metropolitan life to the most magnificent hill stations.”³³ As W.W. Hunter records in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, “As its name implies, the Eastern Bengal Railway serves the whole of Eastern Bengal. It extends on the northeast to Dhubri, from which place a line is under construction to connect with the Assam-Bengal Railway at Gauhati ; on the north-west to Katihar, where it connects with the Bengal and North-Western Railway ; on the north to Siliguri, whence the Darjeeling Himalayan 2 feet gauge railway runs to Darjeeling, the summer capital of the Bengal Government ; and on the south to Diamond Harbour and Port Canning.”³⁴

The fact that the attempts to reduce both expenditure and the duration of journey to reach Darjeeling from the plains of Calcutta was under serious debate and considerations, can be highlighted from the discussions presented in the conferences held under the British Council meetings. One such proceeding, published in the *Journal of the Society of Arts* read :

I do not think that either the use of Darjeeling, as a sanitarium for Calcutta, or the traffic in tea, of the Darjeeling hills, would alone justify the expenditure. The question must depend on a consideration which has not, I think, been mentioned in these discussions, viz. - Whether the local traffic of the productive and populous districts through which the line will pass may be expected, with

³¹ W.W. Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol.III, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1907, p. 392.

³² E.C. Dozey, *op.cit.*, p.9.

³³ *From the Hoogly to the Himalayas*, The Times Press, Bombay, 1913, p.1.

³⁴ W.W.Hunter, *op.cit.*, p.393.

the aid of the Calcutta-Darjeeling traffic, to make the line pay, or nearly pay. I do not think that I over estimated the cost. The shortest line, by Caragola, runs right across the watershed of a very watery country, and would be very expensive. The other line, in connection with the Eastern Bengal Railway, would run more parallel with the water-flow and would open up some rich districts, but it would be longer - not, I think, longer (or scarcely longer) from Calcutta to Darjeeling, but a longer new line from an existing railway must be made. My impression is, that if a line can be made at a moderate rate, say £6,000 to £8,000 per mile, it will pay, and should be made.³⁵

On 19th January, 1878 Sir Ashley Eden, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, opened the traffic thus establishing communication between Sealdah and Jalpaiguri and on 10th June of the same year the line was extended up to Siliguri. Decorating Sir Eden with higher credits, R.D. O'Brien writes, "Sir Ashley, with his usual practical common sense, recognised the fact that a light railway, if it could be only be constructed to Darjeeling, would infinitely develop that town... and also put Calcutta and the whole of Lower Bengal in rapid, cheap, and easy communication with its only existing sanitarium."³⁶

Accordingly, in 1878-79 a Company for the purpose of constructing, maintaining and working a steam tramway between the terminus of the Northern-Bengal State Railway at Siliguri and the station of Darjeeling was started, with Government aid, under a formal agreement between Mr. Franklin Prestage and the Secretary of State. An Act was passed in Council to give the Company the necessary powers to construct and maintain the tramway. It was hoped that the delay and difficulty previously experienced in getting passengers and goods to and from Darjeeling would be obviated by the construction of the tramway, and also the prosperity of the hill station of darjeeling would be thereby rapidly developed.³⁷ The British Government in Bengal, took the necessary steps and soon enough, "gave substantial aid to the enterprise by permitting the line to be laid along the cart road, and by guaranteeing that the gross receipts of the Company should not be less than 2 lakhs a year. The construction of the line was commenced in 1879 and was pushed on with great rapidity..."³⁸

³⁵ "Official Report of George Campbell", *Journal of the Society of Arts*, Vol. 17 No. 862 (May 28, 1869), Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce, p. 523.

³⁶ R.D. O'Brien, *Darjeeling: The Sanitarium of Bengal, and Its Surroundings*, W. Newman and Co., Calcutta, 1883, p.4.

³⁷ C.E. Buckland, *Bengal Under the Lieutenant Governors*, Vol.II, S.K. Lahiri and Co., Calcutta, p.700.

³⁸ O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.166.

The Government of Bengal promised to allow the rails to be laid along the road, and guaranteed interest.

By 1880 the line was opened for traffic movement going as far as Kurseong; and immediately by 1881 it was carried as far as Darjeeling. On the afternoon of July 3rd 1881 a small Sharp Stewart engine garlanded with flowers pulled into the recently-built Darjeeling station to cheers and a live band.³⁹ It was July 4th, 1881, when the line was pushed on to the terminus and its designation changed to that of “The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway.”⁴⁰ On occasion of the inauguration of this line, Sir Ashley Eden expressed his thoughts on the immense advantage of the Darjeeling Railways “both in putting Darjeeling within a twenty-four hours run from Calcutta, as well as in enabling planters in the Darjeeling district to land their produce on the Calcutta market quickly, cheaply, and safely.”⁴¹

Table 4.1: Construction of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

Sections of the Railway	Date of opening	Miles
Siliguri to Kurseong	23.08.1880	31.75
Kurseong to Sonada	1.02.1881	9.50
Sonada to Ghum	4.04.1881	5.87
Ghum to Darjeeling	4.04.1881	3.63
Darjeeling to Darjeeling Bazar	16.06.1885	0.25

Source: *History of Indian Railways Constructed and in Progress*, Railway Board, Government of India, Simla, 1938, p.224.

Immediately on reaching Darjeeling via the railway, O’Brien presents a not so pleasing description of the experience. He writes, “the traveller... is almost mobbed by a crowd of importunate, dirty coolies, all anxious to take charge of him and his baggage, and to charge exorbitant prices for doing so.”⁴²

³⁹ Terry Martin, *Halfway to Heaven: Darjeeling and Its Remarkable Railway*, Rail Romances, Chester, 2000.

⁴⁰ E.C. Dozey, *op.cit.*, p.10.

⁴¹ R.D. O’Brien, *op.cit.*, p.5.

⁴² *Ibid*, p.8.

Henceforth, with the exception of the two miles of the Bengal and Assam Railway, the only railways in the entire District came to be those of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, a 2 feet gauge steam tramway system, consisting of the main line from Siliguri to Darjeeling, one branch line from Siliguri to Kishanganj in the Purnea District and a second branch line from Siliguri to Guelle Khola on the Tista Valley Road.⁴³

The main line of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway started from Siliguri, 398 feet above sea-level, and runs along the Hill-Cart Road for about 7 miles on the level to Sukna. After this station the railway begins to climb the Himalayan foothills at an average gradient of 1 in 29 reaching its highest point, 7,407 feet above sea-level, at Ghum station, 47 miles from Siliguri. It then descends for about four miles to the terminus at Darjeeling Station, 51 miles from Siliguri and 6,812 feet above sea-level.⁴⁴ In terms of the rapid works in railway in the district, it has been opined that, . “The opening of the stations to regular traffic depended on the construction of roads through rugged mountain terrain, and most of the muscle for this enormously labour-intensive enterprise came from neighbouring villages.”⁴⁵

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway may be said to have been the first attempt at ‘private enterprise’ in railways since the capital required to form a company that is Rs.14,00,000 was subscribed almost entirely in India⁴⁶ However, by 1887, the cost of DHR shot up to Rs. 28,00,000 which included diversions taken in hand from 1883 and acquisition of new rolling stock including sixteen locomotives. By 1891, total investment was Rs.30,00,000, equal to Rs.60,000 per mile. This was made up of Rs. 16,900 per mile for earthwork, cuttings and bridges; Rs. 13,800 for ballast and permanent way; Rs. 8,000 for stations; Rs. 10,000 for locomotives and rolling stock; and Rs. 11,300 for other items.⁴⁷

The general opinion in regarding the contribution of the DHR as expressed by Minakshi and Bhumali Das is:

⁴³ Arthur Jules Dash, *op.cit.*, p.190.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Station and The British Raj*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, p.178.

⁴⁶ *Illustrated Guide for the Tourists to the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and Darjeeling*, *op.cit.*, p.10.

⁴⁷ R.R. Bhandari, *Indian Railway Glorious 150 years*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 2005, pp.229-230.

The two most significant contributors to the development of Darjeeling's economy were tourism and the tea industry. And that was mainly possible due to the introduction of Darjeeling Himalayan Railway in the hills. Innovative engineering is only one facet of the inimitable Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Perhaps, no other railway system in the world is intimately related with the lives of the people as the DHR. The railway has instrumental in attracting people from neighbouring Sikkim, Nepal, different districts of West Bengal and even as far away as Tibet.⁴⁸

In addition to the advantages which the railway provides in affording a ready means of reaching Darjeeling, it gives a very necessary expeditious means of transit for taking the produce of the numerous tea gardens of the district and other local products down to the plains, as also for taking up to the rapidly increasing station of Darjeeling the necessary supplies of tea-garden machinery and stores of all descriptions.⁴⁹

The Hill Cart Road of Darjeeling and the main line of Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway carried the greater part of the manufacture of the Sadar and Kurseong Subdivisions. The freight mail carried the supplies needed for the towns of Darjeeling and Kurseong for the tea gardens and industries of these Subdivisions. The Kishanganj branch of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway also serves the Terai tea gardens via Siliguri as well as a certain amount of traffic with Nepal through Naxalbari Station. Thus, when the tea leaves left the garden in the Darjeeling district it had to be taken to the nearest railway station. The process gets elaborately described in words as, "This work is done by coolies who will carry one or two of the heavy chests on a wooden framework, somewhat like a chair, which is supported by a broad strap round the coolies. The chests are then packed in the trucks of the small hill railway train which winds slowly down the hillsides until it reaches the level of the plains at Siliguri, where the tea is transferred to a more ordinary kind of train."⁵⁰

The opening of Darjeeling Himalayan Railway had an impact on the trade of Darjeeling and the frontier countries. In the words of Jahar Sen, "Darjeeling was thus brought within an easy reach of the Tibetan frontier."⁵¹ Sarat Chandra Das heard from the Nepalese merchants in Tibet that their trade had suffered due to the influx of Calcutta goods in the Tibetan market. He further points out that 'By the opening of the Darjeeling railway, Calcutta, where most of

⁴⁸ Minakshi and Bhumali Das, *Darjeeling Hill Economy*, Abhijeet Publication, Delhi, 2011, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁹ *The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway*, McCorquodale and Co. Ltd, New York, 1896. p.13.

⁵⁰ J.C. Kydd, *India's Great Industries: The Tea Industry*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1921, p.40.

⁵¹ Jahar Sen, *Darjeeling: A Favoured Retreat*, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1989.

the Chinese articles valued in Tibet may be easily and chiefly procured, will be brought three weeks' journey of Lhasa...'⁵²

O'Malley observes, that Darjeeling, Kurseong, Siliguri and Kalimpong were the chief trade centres in the District concerned. According to O'Malley, "The three places first mentioned are on the railway, which carries most of the trade in the western portion of the district while transport in the east is carried on by means of pack-ponies and bullock carts plying along the tista valley."⁵³ Regarding neighbouring Kalimpong, where the contact to direct railway line was unavailable, the trading of wool from Tibet, O'Malley says that, "is brought by mules and pack ponies over the Jelep-la pass. It is then packed in bales, and despatched to the railway at siliguri on bullock carts..."⁵⁴

No stones were left unturned by the colonizers to boost the production of tea further and further as soon as the railway provided a ready transportation alternative to carry the bulk of the produce. One such example is that, "The first electrical water-power plant had been started at Darjeeling in 1897, a tiny enterprise of 400 kW generating capacity, financed by the municipality to meet the town's needs, primarily for lighting."⁵⁵ In this context it is fairly arguable that the most important needs were not for the native population, but for the tea garden factories to work effectively in the district. Also, the railway workshop at Tindharia was one such unit that drew its power source from such plants. Dash in his records had assumed, "The power needed for electrification of the Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway has not been ascertained but it is probable that the likely traffic, if electrification be found to be economic, could be handled effectively with 3,000 / 5,000 R.W."⁵⁶

By 1905, it was estimated that about one-third of the entire population depended on the tea estates. In the words of Sarkar & Lama, Darjeeling Himalayan Railway played a significant role in the transportation of the tea from the district of Darjeeling to the plains from where it took down to Calcutta. "In addition, a large number of people find employment in a range of

⁵²S.C. Das, *Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet*, Calcutta, 1902, reprinted New Delhi, 1970, p.193.

⁵³ O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.163.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Dharma Kumar (ed.), *Cambridge Economic History of India, c. 1757-c.1970*, Vol. 2, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1984, p. 731.

⁵⁶ Arthur Jules Dash, *op.cit.*, p.178

supplementary industries associated with tea plantations, for example, ply-wood, tea chests, aluminum foil metal fittings, fertilizers, insecticides, transport warehousing and business and trade related with the industry. It may also be noted that the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway service between Siliguri and Darjeeling connecting the plains and the hills were originally started for sending essential supplies like coal, fertilizers, machinery, building materials from Calcutta to Darjeeling via Siliguri and for sending regular supply of tea from the Darjeeling gardens to the Calcutta market.”⁵⁷

Regarding the usage of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway in churning the internal trade of the district, The downward traffic of the hill section of DHR was principally tea, seed, potatoes, cardamoms, oranges, timber and fresh vegetables. The upward traffic of this section was principally rice, flour, tea garden stores, oil, coal, cement, iron, and salt, building materials, miscellaneous goods and general stores.

In 1915 the earnings for August were Rs. 26,722 as against Rs. 17,291 for the corresponding periods of the year prior; while the gross earnings for the financial year ending in March 1917 amounted to Rs.13,01,592. In finances at year ending of March, 1920, the main line carried 263,082 passengers and 61,704 tons of goods. In 1942-43 for instance there was an import of 7,104 tons of rice to Darjeeling, 1,007 tons of salt, 540 tons of sugar, 417 tons of grains and pulses other than rice; 773 tons of provisions and 2,769 tons of coal. Downwards from Darjeeling in the above year were moved 1,080 tons of potatoes and 1,298 tons of tea. Imports from below Ghum included 3,505 tons of rice, 513 tons of salt, 434 tons of provisions and 1,167 tons of coal. Downward export from Ghum included 1,629 tons of potatoes, 2,190 tons of tea and 515 tons of timber.⁵⁸

“Railways directly help industrialization of the country by themselves setting up huge factories and workshops for the manufacture of locomotives, locomotive parts, coaches, and other rolling stock and railway stores.”⁵⁹ Tindharia Workshop produced rolling stocks like the modern lightweight coaches with air-breaking for new diesel engines. “The works were

⁵⁷Minakshi and Bhumali Das, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

⁵⁸ Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Bengal Govt. Press, Alipore, 1947, reprinted by N.L. Publishers, Siliguri, 2011, pg.195.

⁵⁹ J. Johnson, *The Economics of Indian Rail Transport*, Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 1963, pg.113.

extremely well fitted out, comprising: erecting, fitting and machine shops, foundry, sawmill, all the facilities that were needed to maintain the locomotive fleet to the highest standard.”⁶⁰

The cost of carrying the Darjeeling coal to the foot of the hills by tramway would probably not have exceeded a few annas a ton at the most. Allowing however, Rs. 3 for carriage in the first instances by the carts, the estimation roughly stood to – “carriage to foot of hills, Rs. 3 per ton; conversion into patent fuel, Rs.1 ; cost, exclusive of mining, at Sukhna, Rs. 4. Carriage by rail to southern terminus of North Bengal State Railway, Rs. 3. Total cost per ton of Darjeeling coal, again exclusive of mining, at southern terminus, Rs. 7, as compared with Rs. 15 at Sukhna, and Rs. 12 at the southern terminus, for Raniganj coal.”⁶¹ Thus, as per these statistics, in the former case, i.e., in Sukhna it would cost Rs. 11 per ton of coal, whereas, in case for the cost of mining the Darjeeling coal the cost would have come down to Rs. 5 per ton. It was this margin of profit in the production of coal, that perhaps got the interest of the colonizers towards the coal sites in the Darjeeling District, with respect to providing a supply to the railways when it got established. As per the records in the Statistical Account of Bengal, “If, therefore, the difficulties of mining could be overcome at upwards of double the expense of raising the Raniganj coal, the Darjeeling coal would pay at the southern terminus.”⁶²

The introduction of DHR promised jobs for the inhabitants as elsewhere by other railways, thus bringing about a modern way of services in large scale to the people of the area. Majority of the population depended on the plantation economy like tea and others were engaged in their terrace farming or household activities. But to those youths who were getting some sort of education from the ‘school meant for the downtrodden’, it was a great opportunity to bag whatever service they could get in the DHR.

The Competition between Roads and Railways

Both the roads and the railways were highly instrumental in carrying and bringing supplies and goods from the Darjeeling District from the colonial reign. “The Hill Cart Road from

⁶⁰ David Barrie, ‘Tindharia!’, *The Darjeeling Mail*, November 1999.

⁶¹ Statistical account of Bengal, *op.cit.*, p. 139.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 162.

Darjeeling and the main line of the Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway carry the greater part of the produce of the Sadar and Kurseong Subdivisions, the supplies needed for the towns of darjeeling and Kurseong and for the tea gardens and industries of these Subdivisions as well as the traffic from Nepal crossing the frontier ...”⁶³

The situation was the same in most parts of colonial India. According to various scholars, the advent of motor vehicles from about 1930 directly put a competition with the Railway.

“Highways take traffic away from the railways. Whether the Indian railways were being managed by companies or, as after 1924, by the government, the railway heads looked with disfavor upon competition from passenger buses and freight trucks, and acted to oppose their development. In a sense, therefore, the state-owned railways are open to the charge of having helped stunt the growth of a road network in India.”⁶⁴ Then subsequent development in road transport seriously undermined the DHR revenues.

Speaking only about the transportation of passengers, it has been written that, “in May 1926, there were 97 journeys made by car and 378 passengers travelled by bus. In May 1927, the number of journeys made by car was 83 and that by bus increased to 536. The figure jumped to 2,411 journeys by car and 1,309 passengers travelling by bus the following year, alarming the Director of the DHR. In the end of 1928, there was further increase in the figures, and the passengers preferring the bus service was recorded to be 2,953.”⁶⁵

In 1932-33, Mr. Gladstone representing Gillanders Arbuthnot and Co. deposed that DHR is the first Railway to experience the most serious competition. The earnings from passenger traffic have declined from Rs.4.75 lakhs in 1926-27 to Rs.2.37 lakhs in 1931-32.⁶⁶ and that the goods traffic may also meet similar fate. It was further feared, that , if on the same rate “the motor traffic becomes so acute as to force the Railway into liquidation, Government would be faced with the whole cost of maintenance of the road and lose about a lakh of rupees a year which at present is paid by the Railway towards the cost of the upkeep of the

⁶³ Arthur Jules Dash, *op.cit.*, p.162.

⁶⁴ Daniel Thorner, *The Pattern of Railway Development in India*, Railways in Modern India (ed. Kerr, Ian, J.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p.89.

⁶⁵ Terry Martin, *The Iron Sherpa Darjeeling and its Remarkable Railway*, Vol. 1, Rail Romances Specialist Publishers, UK, 2006, pp.160-161.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

road would be greatly increased since the road would then have to carry all the goods and passengers now carried by the Railway.”⁶⁷

The situation however, did not end up far from the assumption of Mr.Gladstone the others. It needs to be mentioned that the main railway line of the DHR connecting Darjeeling and Siliguri, is situated on the Hill Cart Road and while the cost of repairing the actual line was at the time met by the railway, the arrangement with the British Government was such that the Government was to bear the entire cost of upkeep and maintenance of the Cart Road. The execution of this expenditure was performed by the Railway as contractors and on rates mutually agreed upon. In this context, the data collected by Arthur Jules dash in the Bengal District Gazetteers (Table 3.1) can well find a mention. As per the records,

Table 4.2: Yearly Expenditure by Government Railway on Maintenance of Siliguri-Darjeeling Cart Road

Year	Expenditure (estimated in Rupees)
1939-40	1,57,788
1940-41	1,38,250
1941-42	1,35,222
1942-43	50,965
1943-44	1,14,366

Source: Arthur Jules Dash, Bengal District Gazetteers, Calcutta Secretariat Press, Darjeeling, 1947

With the passage of time the competition became more acute. Earlier the mail train carried the goods and was unloaded on the ‘goods shed’ near the stations, wherefrom the coolies carried them to the shops or godowns. But with the motor traffic their load of goods could be easily unloaded in front of their shops with no additional charges of the coolies, any shortage or damage due to the rough handling of the porters and saved time. Not only that but the business group of the society found it more profitable to own their private trucks, thus there was a rapid increase in the number of vehicles in the district.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Table 4.3: Statistics of Traffic and Goods On Road and Rail

Traffic by Rail			Traffic by Road	
Year	Number of Passengers	Tonnage of Goods	Number of Passengers	Tonnage of Goods
1931-32	2,58,000	80,000	48,000	800
1934-35	2,40,000	76,000	56,000	7,600
1939-40	2,13,000	65,000	73,000	15,500
1940-41	2,06,000	57,000	81,000	16,500
1941-42	2,40,000	63,000	63,000	16,800
1942-43	3,09,000	63,000	27,000	5,900
1943-44	3,11,000	76,000	84,000	9,600

Source: Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteer*, Calcutta Secretariat Press, Darjeeling, 1951, pg.194.

Interestingly, it can be noted that the increase in carrying the commodities (including tea) by the road traffic increased from 1939 onwards as in Table 3.2, which relates directly to its counterpart in Table 3.1, where the expenditure for road maintenance is given, and the increase in cost for the road welfare is seen to be around the same period.

Besides the road traffic, ropeways too were a highly preferable mode of goods transportation. The Bijanbari-Darjeeling ropeway competed with the bridle path via Pulbazar of an estimated length of 8 miles. Approximately, the rate charged by the ropeway was 5 annas per maund from Bijanbari to Darjeeling. Comparatively the railway rate for the same costed more than 7.5 pies per maund per mile. Similarly, the Kalimpong ropeway competed with traffic moving along 18 miles of macadam surfaced road usable by wheeled vehicles. The maximum charge by ropeway from Kalimpong to the Rilli railhead is 6 annas per maund which made transport by ropeway preferable to any road traffic costing more than 4 pies per maund per mile.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Arthur Jules Dash, *op.cit.*, p.160.

The Evolution of Support Towns

When the main line from Calcutta to Siliguri was opened in 1878, travellers to Darjeeling performed the journey from Siliguri by tonga. The disadvantages of this means of communication led to proposals for the laying of a steam tramway which were accepted. As already mentioned regarding high maintenance costs for the Cart Road, it was no doubt one important reason for Government agreeing to the proposal which offered to defray these costs out of the profit expected from the tramway.⁶⁹

Accordingly the construction was commenced in 1879 and by March 1880 the line had been opened to Tindharia. Lord Lytton, the first Viceroy to visit Darjeeling, was conveyed by this line in that year. By the end of 1880 it was completed to Kurseong and in July 1881 it was open for traffic to Darjeeling. In 1914 workshops were opened at Tindharia and all rolling stock except wheels and axles is constructed there.

The towns which underlay in the route of this line of communication, were still in the process of evolution or were still yet to evolve. It was in fact, the railways that effectively brought business to “the emerging towns on the route... leading to the emigration of native population from the adjoining villages to these centres of commerce”. Siliguri itself, till then, was a mere hamlet surrounding the railway station. Soon after the opening of the line connecting Calcutta with Darjeeling via Siliguri was established, numerous services were started. The first among which were- the North Bengal express, the Darjeeling Mail, the *Goaland* Express and the ‘Mixed Trains’ which especially operated between Sealdah station and Darjeeling.⁷⁰ Truly, these services were meant to handle the massive influx of settlers and visitors to Darjeeling apart from the transportation of tea.

In this context, it will interesting to make a note that while, the competition for transport was high between the routes connecting Darjeeling and the plains, it was much in favour of the railways once the goods reached the plains. The road system of the District as well as the Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway system both converged on Siliguri and practically the whole of the import and export trade from the plains passed through this Siliguri area, through the

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.192.

⁷⁰ Barun Roy, *Fallen Cicadas- Unwritten History of Darjeeling*, Barun Roy, n.p., 2003, p.30.

Bengal and Assam Railway at Siliguri. “In neither direction have roads been in a condition to carry an appreciable volume of trade, incoming and outgoing, and so practically all import and export has taken place by rail.”⁷¹

The development and importance of railways was the crucial factor behind making Siliguri the most important centre of exchange of goods directly linking the immediate market of Calcutta in the plains and the Darjeeling District. Siliguri steadily developed as a ‘Support Town’, acting as the dumping ground for tea before being transported to Calcutta.⁷² As mentioned in the Bengal District Gazetteers, “Siliguri is important as a distribution centre as well as a centre for the transfer of through traffic from one transportation system to another.”⁷³ All the trade through the Tista Valley with Sikkim and Tibet and with Kalimpong passed through Siliguri. The Kishanganj branch of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and the Terai road system served the Terai tea gardens via Siliguri and there is a certain amount of traffic with Nepal through Naxalbari station, passing through Siliguri once again.

Practically the whole output of tea from the Darjeeling District was exported to the plains through the Siliguri Station of Bengal and the Assam Railway, except for small quantities moved from the Kalimpong foothills by the branch of Bengal and Assam Railway.⁷⁴

Even a closer town like Kurseong, which until the commencement of service of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway was an insignificant hamlet, began to evolve as a ‘support town’.

Table 4.4: List of Hats(Markets) in Siliguri and Kurseong Subdivisions of Darjeeling District

District Subdivision	Name of Market/ Hat	Main items of business	Days of Operation
Siliguri	New Bagdogra Hat	Paddy, rice, vegetable, potato	Sun
	Salbari Hat	Paddy, potato, fish	Wed
	Kaprut	Do	Mon
	Matigara	Paddy, flattened rice,	Tue, Fri

⁷¹ Arthur Jules Dash, *op.cit.*, p.162.

⁷² Barun Roy, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

⁷³ Arthur Jules Dash, *op.cit.*, p.166

⁷⁴ Ibid.

	Siliguri Kharibari Batashi Naxalbari	parched rice, jute, rice Paddy, rice, dal, gur Paddy, rice Rice, vegetable Paddy, rice, vegetable, gur, fish	Sun, Wed Mon, Fri Wed, Sat Tue, Sat
Kurseong	Kurseong Market Tindharia Market Sepahidhura Mirik Bazar	Maize, cereals, potato, egg, tobacco Maize, cereal, egg, milk Cereals, potato, vegetables, milk Cardamom, vegetable	Sunday Do Do Do

Source: A. Mitra, Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling), West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954, p.157

Truly, thence, the establishment of a permanent line of communication, and the prosperity in the business of tea added with the influx of settlers, lead to the evolution of scenic hamlets into small towns whose economy was based on the rail route, whose economy was itself based on the Darjeeling Tea.⁷⁵

Lack of unity and awareness in part of the labourers, contributed to the aggravating exploitations. However, unlike the labourers in the plantations, the railways, because of their continuous nexus and exchanges with other railway counterparts in the plains were arguably aware of the ongoing economic and political scenario. In context to the requirement of the representations of the labourer's demands, thus, K.K Saxena writes that "the abnormal conditions created by World War I and its aftermath, threw a considerable strain on the economic structure of industrial India and during the period 1918-21 a great many so-called Trade Unions sprang into existence on different railways. The objects of the Unions in the beginning were to represent and seek redress for grievances common to employees whom they represented and in some cases to promote smooth and harmonious relations between the administration and staff."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Barun Roy, *op.cit.*, p.30.

⁷⁶ K.K. Saxena, *Indian Railways- Problems and Prospectus*, Vora & Co. Publishers pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 1962, p.108.

Jayeeta Sharma strongly opines that, “The significance of this time-space compression for the hill-station and its welcome impact for Darjeeling’s elite clients has to be placed against the dire consequences of high-altitude road and rail construction upon a subaltern workforce.”⁷⁷

Jan Morris has effectively described how guidebook maps in colonial India delineated ‘native’ and British space as separate and contrasting to each other.⁷⁸ Location, cartographically inscribed, helped to authorize identities of colonizer and colonized. The same can be said of mobility.⁷⁹ How one moved, by what means one traveled, confirmed where one belonged, and thus who one was and who one was not. Riding in the DHR, Western passengers transitioned through yet remained apart from India, and confirmed their distinct identity,⁸⁰ most arguably as superiors to the labourers living within and in the immediate vicinities of the colonially constructed tea-garden settlements.

That the introduction of railways, was an extension of the colonial economic propulsion, which began with the plantations in the region, and the interdependence of these two tools of the British, can be well established when we go through the writings of L.S.S O’Malley, who says, “We have no hesitation in saying that had it not been for the staple industry of tea with its great traffic up and down the hills, and for the fact that the hill cart road had already been made by the Public Works Department, Darjeeling would have had long to wait ere a railway would have overcome the obstacles interposed by nature and have faced the huge initial expense of driving a line along the steep hill-sides, beneath precipitous crags and over furious mountain torrents.”⁸¹

However, it is equally true that the railways played no role in improving the socio-economic life of the labourers. The wages of the plantation labourers as has been discussed in the earlier chapters remained the same even after the introduction of the railways. The railways on the contrary, increased the frequency of marwari and bengali visitors to the district, which

⁷⁷ Jayeeta Sharma, *op.cit.*, p.90.

⁷⁸ Jan Morris, *Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade & Reference Publishers, London, 1979, p.138.

⁷⁹ T. Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*, Routledge, London, 2006.

⁸⁰ Julian C.T. Baker, “Mobility, tropicality and landscape: the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, 1881-1939”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, No.44, Elsevier Ltd, Edinburgh, 2014, p.142.

⁸¹ O’Malley, *op.cit.*, p.38.

in turn strengthened the distinction between hill dwellers and men from plains. With the rise of trading communities, the labourers were further pushed lower in the economic ladder, thus giving way to indebtedness. The railway was a strong symbol of the imperialists in the Darjeeling district, and its smoke engulfed the labourers in the shadows for a long time.

CONCLUSION

The 19th and 20th centuries saw a transitory phase throughout the world in terms of growing colonialism, its evolution, the rampage of various industries, most of which made their global presence felt and introduced previously unknown corners in the colonies to the world. At the same time, with the abolition of slavery in 1834 various economic enterprises felt an acute shortage of labour. In this context, Aditya Mukherji opines that India was foremost in contributing to Britain's growing need for labour to work the labour-intensive plantations and build roads, railways and other infrastructure in the Caribbean, Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa, Malaya, Sri Lanka, Burma, etc.¹ However, in the ever-increasing attempts to study these international and national processes of migration and colonial industries, somewhere the importance of local places have either being demeaned or neglected as a whole. In this background, Darjeeling, the hill sanatorium of the British in Bengal, serving as the summer-capital as well as the source of the Darjeeling tea and the employment provider to the large migrated labour population required a new understanding, which is the core of the proposed research.

In light of the discussed facets of the colonial district of Darjeeling with its system of economy and society, it can be said that it was small part of the permanent contribution of the Occident to the Orient.² The crux of Chapter 1 dealt with the process of how Darjeeling entered the annals of the Europeans due to the purported British discovery of a salubrious mountain region that was intended to rejuvenate white bodies from the privations of the Indian plains; and make them feel closer to home away from home. Studies on development and urbanism have often dealt on how the region of Darjeeling, resulting from an unintended consequence of the colonial experiment, emerged as an urban locality that served as a hub for Himalayan circulation of goods, people, and ideas, and eventually generated important varieties of vernacular cosmopolitanism.³ Similarly, the study in plantations of Darjeeling,

¹ Aditya Mukherji, "Empire: How Colonial India Made Modern Britain", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 45, No. 50 (Dec), 2010, p.78

² J. E. Spencer and W. L. Thomas, "The Hill Stations and Summer Resorts of the Orient", *American Geographical Society*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Oct, 1948), p.651

³ Jayeeta Sharma, "Producing Himalayan Darjeeling: Mobile People and Mountain Encounters", *Himalaya Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 2, January, 2016, p. 96

the most prized identities of the district, was often seen to be an extension of the larger enterprise introduced in the north-east regions of the Himalayas.

The labourers in the tea plantations, the largest population group in the Darjeeling district, somewhere lost their place in these studies and became a mere mentionable option in other larger contexts; such as, plantation as an enterprise of the British, the development of Darjeeling under the colonisers, or cultural identity of the Himalayas where the colorful dresses and physical appearance of the population got priority, but not their economic conditions or livelihood in the plantations. With nothing but their labours to sell and survive on, they were the signs of a new set of meanings that were binding the hills to the plains, primitivism to civilization⁴. However, in place of being recognised as the main force behind the success of the tea-plantations, most often than not, the labourers were ornamental pieces in various works of sociological or anthropological studies of the region. In such context, Bagchi opines that, “The development of 'capitalistic' enterprises under colonialism involved numerous facets, many regional variations, and many temporal changes. In the usual historical narratives these multi-dimensional spaces of variation are often syncopated so that it becomes difficult to identify the processes leading to particular outcomes.”⁵ Hence, the first chapter outlines the attempt in this paper to study and analyse these complex processes that took place in Darjeeling tea-plantations under the British colonialism, the changes in its economy, demography and transcultural identity, with respect to the labour population, interestingly most of which was unplanned as far as the colonial design was intended to be initially.

There goes a famous folk saying: “Suna ko lingo, chandi ko ping, ek jieu khana launa lai thikai chha Darjeeling,” or “Darjeeling will take care of me.”⁶ In this context, Michael Hutt describes how Nepali peasants, enslaved, or landless, or over-taxed, or oppressed by rapacious moneylenders, forsook their native hills for what they called “Mugalan” (meaning India, literally, land of Mughals), to move eastward into British territory where the grass

⁴ Kaushik Ghosh, “A Market for Aboriginality: Primitivism and Race Classification in the Indentured Labour Market of Colonial India”, in Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, Susie Tharu (ed.) *Subaltern Studies X Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Oxford University Press), p.18.

⁵ Amiya Kumar Bagchi, “Colonialism and the Nature of 'Capitalist' Enterprise in India”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 31, (Jul) 1988, p.44.

⁶ H. R. K Gibbs, *The Gurkha Soldier*, Thacker, Spink & Co., Ltd., Calcutta, 1943, p.40.

appeared greener.⁷ Chapter 2 took up from here and explored the avenues opened up by the introduction of the tea-plantations in the district of Darjeeling, and its associated characteristics, and pros and cons. The initial promises of the tea-gardens stand in contrast to this proverbial extolling of work in the tea plantations as a path to riches, with the plantation's limited potential in its scanty promotion opportunities, limited to a few foremen and overseer jobs. At the same time, opportunities to earn a better wage was crippled as has been discussed in length in this chapter. The impact of the introduction of the plantations, most importantly the wage structure of the labourers in the tea-gardens in contrast to the prices of everyday goods for sustenance, showcased the hand-to-mouth of these labourers.

As far as the migration process has been studied in the third chapter, in context to the prevalence of slavery in Nepal, which has been cited time and again as one of the essential causes for migration of the population; it was interesting to invoke the widespread usage of the hill men as attendants, serving the British families in the hills of Darjeeling, and also as domestic help as well in most households in the concerned district. As Dane Kennedy had noted that, “the seasonal influx of visitors created a heavy demand for domestic servants, including *khidmatgars* (butlers), *khansamahs* (cooks), *malis* (gardeners), *dhobis* (washermen), *jhampanis* (coolies, who carried sedan chairs and later pulled rickshaws), *mehters* (sweepers)...”⁸ In context to this, what is interesting to note is that none of these professions held any scopes for a promotion or a better livelihood. The working class, be it in the plantations, or as serving in the houses of the *sahibs*, were under one form of economic subjugation or another.

Similarly, the colonisers saw the birth of a paradox in what was to be a idyllic hill sanatorium, and at the same time a money-spinning tea-plantation economic structure, both coming in clash with the basic idea of the other, yet existing in the same time and space. However, the attempt of the colonisers to maintain the district as a separate abode from the plains was maintained effectively by the government apparatus, where Darjeeling gradually became “a partially excluded district, meaning that governor of Bengal exercised final

⁷ Michael Hutt, “Going to Mugalan: Nepali Literary Representations of Migration to India and Bhutan” *South Asia Research*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (September 1998): p.195–214.

⁸Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p.178.

administrative control separately than the provincial government.”⁹ Simultaneously, we also discussed how the nepalis had an excluded identity as migrants and labourers which manifested itself all through the British rule, positioning them in a state of constant exploitation by the plantation owners as well as the population from the plains who frequented the district.

The resultant was that the labourers were caught amidst a strange society that was rapidly urbanising and yet at the same time, its largest population was left in a hand-to-mouth situation. The development and improvement of transportation further aggravated this condition. Although, “the railroad was extended to Darjeeling under the guise of development of the foothill tea-plantation exploited by the British”,¹⁰ its impacts were far reaching than what was intended by the colonisers. The changing impetus to this constant movement of people, provided by roads and railways, was the point of discussion in Chapter 4 of the proposed paper. With the rapid development in communication, social classes and groups that were previously separated by geographic and temporal disjuncture became active agents in the social production of this colonial district of Darjeeling and it actively took part in the transcultural milieu. Once Darjeeling acquired a firm footing for basic transport, it was successful in luring entrepreneurial and commerce-minded newcomers.¹¹ The Marwaris, prominent among the business class, considered as the Shylock of the hills, were instrumental in assuring the financial slavery of the tea-garden coolies, who could rarely escape the toils of these money-lenders.¹² On account of this, it has been held that, the relations between the hillman and the Marwari perpetuated, the irresponsibility of the former thus preventing him from becoming fit to take the part he should in the economic life of the District.¹³

However, what needs a further reconsideration, is the fact that because an economic system of the tea-garden plantations existed, not forgetting its tight wage structure, it was the lure that attracted transportation development, and a seemingly rising business class to come and exploit this very tea-labour population. This population was the target of exploitation, because quite frankly, the men recruited in the army (the other major employment provider),

⁹ J. E. Spencer and W. L. Thomas, *op.cit.*, p.647

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.647.

¹¹ Jayeeta Sharma, *op.cit.*, p. 93

¹² L.S.S O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p. 107

¹³ Arthur Jules Dash, *op.cit.*, p. 174

had a hiked salary, and were more or less in constant move from national to international borders, unlike the tea-garden coolies who had a negligible to no movement from their source of employment. This population was hence a regular supplier of capital via tea production to the colonial economy, with an irregular prominence in its due worth in common literature and official recorded data. Thus, while talking about India, in its so-called third stage of capitalism under the colonial rule, when Aditya Mukherji opines that, “contrary to expectations, she did so not as a receiver of capital from Britain but as a supplier of capital to Britain”¹⁴, the same is closely applicable to the plantations of Darjeeling, if not entirely.

Thus, by looking beyond the labour economy and its encounter with the colonial rulers, this study intended to open a different interpretive pathway for understanding the kind of oppressive system that existed under the lush greenery of the tea bushes, and underneath the shining steel tracks of the railways- both introduced by the colonisers. This study thus highlights the undebated areas of labour economy of colonial Darjeeling, which so far, history has overlooked.

¹⁴ Aditya Mukherji, *op.cit.*, p.77

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