

Darjeeling Diaries



D. T. TAMLONG, IAS (Retd.)

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*Dedicated
to
the memory of*

Late Mr. G. K. Singh

The Founder-Headmaster

St. George's High School, Pedong

FOREWORD

Success does not mean the absence of failures; it means the attainment of ultimate objectives. It means winning the war, not every battle.

— *Edwin C. Bliss*

This is a book of 27 chapters preceded by formal Foreword, acknowledgement, introduction and followed by Annexure wherein a valuable letter written by the legendary Subash Chandra Bose (the then Congress stalwart) to Damber Singh Gurung dated 08.08.1938 is found.

The author Sri D. T. Tamlong is a charming soul, always generous in his assessments and a true and faithful bureaucrat. The subjects are chosen out of his long experience as a serving bureaucrat for more than three decades and a half, beginning as a West Bengal Civil Officer and later in the Indian Administrative Service in various senior responsible positions and retired as Principal Secretary, DGHC after serving for four years. He was further given an extension in the same post from August 2007 to February 2008. In fine, his book (Darjeeling Diaries) is a bureaucratic biography so honestly narrated in a lucid language with good will toward all and malice toward none. He has tried to bring out many unknown facts about the trials and tribulations while working with non-hillmen bureaucrats during his service career. Sri Tamlong is always passionate about his subjects and acute in his judgements but in the meantime, he brushes aside everything - praise or insult - as a passing cloud, an ephemeral experience. He is not only an able administrator and a righteous person but a facile and studious writer. His book *Mayel Lyang & the Lepchas* (about Sikkim and Darjeeling) written and published in 2008 has run into second edition in 2011. This book also reveals his writing talent which is so very dear to him. As he has very philosophically quoted—

"Iron rusts from disuse, stagnant water loses its purity, even so does inaction, saps the vigour of the mind."

– *Leonardo-Da-Vinci*

At the very outset he has dedicated the book to the memory of Late Mr. G. K. Singh, the founder Headmaster of St. George's High School, Pedong. Such gratitude is a rare quality. He was born in a remote village called Kashyong in Pedong under Kalimpong Sub-division. His poetic fervour spread throughout his entire life when he sang as follows on his first visit to Darjeeling town - "Darjeeling town in the midst of twinkling lights appears as Indrasan, the heaven on earth."

During his long tenure as a bureaucrat and having a simple village background (he comes from a simple, honest, hard working, God-fearing Lepcha community) Sri Tamlong had a myriad of experience while working with non-hillmen shrewd bureaucrats but his simplicity and honest style of functioning had a safe landing and attainment of the highest status of his service. He won the war of life not every battle. He handled the administration, accepted the social life wherever he was posted for such a long period of time and came across sweeping political changes in the hills.

Sri Tamlong begins with the scenario of Bengali bureaucrats posted to Darjeeling and their interaction, behaviour, attitude and views about the local officers and people. Some of them were romantic, making Darjeeling a place for romance and a haven for luxury. He writes that with the drastic change in the political mood and fervour of the people, gradually posting of Bengali District Magistrate to Darjeeling dwindled. The last Bengali District Magistrate was Sri Champak Chatterjee.

The author recapitulates the early history of Darjeeling and its administration since the time of Mr. Campbell who was first appointed as Superintendent of Darjeeling Tract in 1839 and later from 8th May, 1850 as Deputy Commissioner Darjeeling. He describes the authority wielded by the Deputy Commissioner, Darjeeling over the State of Sikkim from 1861-1889. Painting a gruesome picture of Police firing in 1955 resulting in several deaths at Margaret's Hope Tea Estate, Sri Tamlong is pained at the lack of political awakening and complete absence of media reactions. Though dry and historic he has made the event very sensitive. Sri Tamlong states that the Lepchas are the aborigines of Darjeeling called Mayel Lyang and Lepcha Jagat near Sukia Pokhari touching Nepal is a proof.

Most graphically and chronologically the author has recalled the political demand of the people, different political parties and individuals for a separate administration and State, separate from West Bengal since the time of Morley Minto Reforms in 1907 to the formation of D.G.H.C. in 1988 under the Gorkha National Liberation Front.

He has then elaborately assessed the role of the most popular movement for the State of Gorkhaland by the Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha which completely rendered the West Bengal Govt. helpless and series of Tripartite Meetings were held in New Delhi. The concept of Interim Set Up was born and ultimately Gorkhaland Territorial Administration was declared and signed by all the three parties i.e. Govt. of India, Govt. of West Bengal and the leaders of Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha.

The author's view on each event is practically impartial and he has tried to post the readers with correct background leading to the present in his Darjeeling Diaries. The author is a polymath in view of his long administrative experience and in depth study of the situation over which he was called upon to preside.

I wish the readers will enjoy and ruminate on the materials in the Darjeeling Diaries.

Darjeeling
22.09.2011

K. S. Moktan
I.G. Prisons (Retd.),
Govt. of W. Bengal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Mr. K. S. Moktan, I.G. Prisons (Retd.), Govt. of West Bengal, who is widely known and respected as a great scholar in Darjeeling, Sikkim and Nepal, for readily agreeing to write the foreword to this book inspite of his very busy day to day engagements.

I am thankful to Mr. K. B. Yogi, WBCS (Exe.), (Retd.), my friend and colleague of many years, who has held several important assignments in the district of Darjeeling including that of ADM in Darjeeling Collectorate and also of Secretary in the DGHC, for encouraging me to share my experiences in a book and also for writing an appropriate review after going over the draft of the book thoroughly.

I am very happy that I could get a short note containing his opinion on my book from Rev. Solon Karthak who is not only an eminent writer of Darjeeling and Nepal but a very busy missionary and Pastor, now based at Kalimpong. I would like to express my special thanks and gratitude to him.

I appreciate the efforts and pain Mr. Udaya Mani Pradhan has undergone while editing and printing this book. I also thank him for writing a short observation on the back cover which in a nutshell authentically gives the highpoints of the book.

Finally, I thank my wife Amina and son Roneo for all help and encouragement in the successful completion of this venture.

D. T. Tamlong

INTRODUCTION

Darjeeling town, the headquarter of the district of Darjeeling, which I saw for the first time in 1961, was clean, tranquil, peaceful and very enchanting. During that time, a captivating romantic Nepali song, '*Darjeeling Shahar Bijuli Lahar Indrashan Jasto Chha*', describing Darjeeling town as Indra's paradise, was very popular in this region. For a young boy, brought up in a remote backward village near the Sikkim border, it was almost like a dream to be in this '*paradise on earth*'. Darjeeling is, no doubt, the only place in the world, which any person who after seeing it cannot help but fall in love with it.

Though I was born in a sleepy and backward village Kashyong busy near Pedong in the interior of the district and spent my childhood years there, a major portion of my service career and also my life have been spent here in Darjeeling town. I began my career as a petty officer under the Government of West Bengal in this town, and served the Government in various capacities in this district, finally rising to the rank and post of the Principal Secretary, DGHC, a position I held for about four years till my retirement on 30th November, 2005. I was later recalled from retirement by the Government, and had to serve in the same post for a further period of six months from August, 2007 to February, 2008, after which at my persistent request, I was relieved.

In my service career stretching for around forty years, I have been associated with many social, administrative and developmental activities in this district, and have also witnessed varied political scenes taking the centre stage from time to time. Besides, I have also interacted with various kinds of people - rich and famous or poor and simple and have witnessed whatever changes that have occurred in the district over the last fifty years. Whatever I have seen, learnt and experienced in the

administrative, social, developmental and political aspects in all these 40-50 years, can be of tremendous historical value to my fellow residents of Darjeeling and Darjeeling lovers elsewhere, and with the notion that perhaps I shall be failing in my duty and may also regret if I do not share the same, I have decided to come up with this publication. The verse quoted below appropriately describes the state of my mind before starting this book.

*"It isn't the thing you do, dear,
It is the thing you leave undone,
Which gives you the bitter heartache,
At the setting of the sun;"*

- Adelaide Proctor

I have briefly touched upon the history of Darjeeling, its people and their aspirations and have also tried to analyze the reasons for the political tremors that rocked this idyllic paradise from time to time, and the measures that have been taken by the Government of West Bengal and its agencies here in Darjeeling. Further, I have furnished my personal views on the policies and the strategies adopted by the Bengal Government and its officers in their dealings with Darjeeling and its people all along, during the past 50 years. A few incidents in the lives of officers, who were at the helm of affairs of Darjeeling, showing their attitude, commitment or the lack of it including some embarrassing and awkward moments, which cropped up as a result of their personal ego, ambition, greed, rivalry and their irresponsible and wayward behaviour in the course of their sojourn here have also been depicted. A glimpse of power tussle, manipulation and intrigues developed among the officers to quench their greed and selfish ambition, which I observed closely and which occasionally caused problems in my or in other colleagues' careers, have also been given here.

The commentaries and the observations given by me here may not be found acceptable by many of my friends and fellow residents of this place; nevertheless, I hope, the readers will appreciate my sincere attempt to bring to light some interesting happenings which have impacted the lives of the people here in various ways and have also shaken Darjeeling from time to time, as I happened to be at a vantage position to microscopically observe some events which others might have missed out. Readers may

also be able to assess whatever I, being a part of the administration here, tried to do for the people of Darjeeling in course of performance of my duties, even though I have refrained from giving out a detailed list, since I do not consider it in good taste to write about many things done by me which has benefited a large number of my fellow citizens.

The desire to pen whatever I have seen, heard and known about Darjeeling had been plaguing me for a long time. The opportunity to fulfill this desire has come now during my retirement period when I have all the time at my disposal. Moreover, Leonardo Da Vinci's comment, "*Iron rusts from disuse; stagnant water loses its purity;... even so does inaction sap the vigour of the mind*" prompted me to do the type of work which I have been doing all along. My efforts have now culminated in the publication of this book, besides the earlier two already published. In my first book '*Darjeeling & North Bengal from Administrative Perspective*' I had made an honest attempt to apprise the readers about the administrative aspects of Darjeeling and North Bengal, whereas my second book '*Lepchas & Mayel Lyang*' dealt exclusively about the Lepchas. Since there are still so many valuable and interesting historical happenings which the people here need to know, but the same are still unravelled to them, I felt it was my duty to share whatever I have come to know in my long experience here especially about the policies and programs implemented in Darjeeling. In this book, I have tried to give insights as to how West Bengal Government had, all along, been treating the people of Darjeeling, portraying a picture of the outlook and the attitude of the main functionaries, their lack of understanding of the sentiments of the local people, resulting in the sufferings and neglect of the people and the place, and how all these factors culminated in the movement for separation from Bengal. Freedom for which the great leaders from the hills like Dalbahadur Giri, Helen Lepcha, Gaga Tshering, K. B. Mukhia and others had joined Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Bose and others, has now proved to be meaningless and their great deeds totally forgotten with their homeland Darjeeling being considered merely an insignificant corner somewhere in the north east portion of India.

All my life I have taken care not to offend or hurt the sentiment of any person or persons, however, if whatever I have written here, in some way, causes some hurt to anybody in future,

I would like to seek forgiveness before hand. I have already said that I do not possess the skills and the attributes of a born writer, and that whatever I have written, I have done so from the heart with all honesty. I do hope the readers will not only be able to judge my general nature, my outlook and my attitude after reading this book, but at the same time, will also be privy to several useful and unknown facts about Darjeeling which is known to me only. Since everything that I have written has been based on my personal experiences—several administrative, social and developmental issues which have touched my life while pursuing my career in Darjeeling—I felt it necessary to give a short note on my personal background as this relates to the circumstances regarding my long association with Darjeeling lasting for more than four decades.



DIARY BEGINS

My early years - Nothing is permanent in this world. The holy bible in Psalm 103.15-16 says, '*as for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like the flower of the field; as the wind blows over it and it is gone...*'. As per God's divine plan, we come to this world, and like the flower plants each of us grow, cover spaces in the field and face all types of storms and sunshine, and then after blooming for some time fade away to be remembered no more. This universal truth is known to all, and that is why it is in the basic nature of man to try to live a good and successful life in his allotted span of time here on earth.

As for me, I can say that God has been very kind to me. I have been a simple human being throughout. My life began in a small land owning Lepcha family in a remote village called '*Kashyong Busty*'. When I was a mere 3 year old child, my father expired, and my eldest brother R. Dorji took over as the head of the household, and thanks to him, I could complete my education. Despite the hardship of having to trek 6 kms through leech infested, steep forest track every morning to reach my school, St. George's High School, Pedong, I often topped the class exams, and that must have been the reason why I used to be called by the school authorities, later during the college breaks, to teach in that school, and this continued even after the completion of my college education till I left to join the Government Service in 1968. Some of my students have gone far ahead in life in various fields, many having followed in my footsteps in civil administration and are in high positions. I am sure that the fact of my securing a class-I Government job, after passing the PSC exam of 1970, might have spurred many young people in Darjeeling, including my students, to follow me in this service, as nobody from among the hill candidates till then, had passed in that grade in the Public Service Commission exams.

An open house—My village house used to be an open house for all occasions. I remember, during my childhood in the fifties, whenever some death took place in any family in that village, concerned people used to come to our house to meet my elder brother, who was the village Mandal (village head) since the Mandalship had, for many generations through our father and forefathers before him, passed down to him, and he, with his own initiative, had set apart some benevolent fund from his personal income to lend to the poor, free of interest, to meet the funeral expenses or for any such contingencies in the affected family in that village. Besides, for all types of help and advice also, people used to come to our house. Some aspiring youths and students from the area also used to come to the house in the evening and seek guidance. Relatives and family friends also stayed with us very frequently. Our village kitchen always had to prepare sufficient food to meet the needs of the usual family members and also for unexpected 3 or 4 extra guests who would sometimes pop up during meal times. Even the Government officials while on their official tours to the village used to stay in our house occasionally, and they too needed to be fed and looked after.

This practice was, later, to some extent, continued at my residence at Darjeeling, which became my second home after I joined Govt. service, of course it was not possible to maintain the same standard of liberality that existed at my village home; but there used to be guests - known and unknown - mainly from Pedong and Kalimpong areas, every now and then, who could take advantage of the welcome atmosphere of my house. Naturally, it was quite a strain on my monthly budget, especially in the early part of my career, but somehow, I had to carry on the tradition. I was always ready to help anybody, known or unknown, if they genuinely sought my assistance. Many students seeking admission at Darjeeling, as well as many unemployed youths seeking jobs or appearing for job interviews at Darjeeling and others for various personal works like for medical check-up or other works in the offices at Darjeeling, landed up for temporary shelter or help at my house at Darjeeling, and like the Good Samaritan, I readily extended all help to the best of my ability, sometimes even giving monetary assistance. Many people still working in some Departments owe their livelihood to me. Occasionally, a few from my village area used to come to me for some work with gifts of Busty rice and pure butter; naturally in

most cases except those of my relatives, I returned the gift but tried my best in all cases to solve the problems they had come up with.

Career in civil administration—From early childhood, my ambition was to secure a Government job preferably in the officer's grade. One day, while I was serving as an Assistant Teacher at St. George's School, I saw an advertisement for recruitment of officers under Board of Revenue, Government of West Bengal, and I applied against the said advertisement, and later after clearing the usual selection hurdles like the written examination and viva-voce and then after completing an in-service training of six months at Bandel, I was posted as Revenue Officer at Darjeeling. Some important works among many others done during this stint are—

1. Determining the rents of Tea Gardens payable to *Government*.
2. Assessment of losses in acreage of tea gardens due to 1968 landslides.
3. Settlement of lands, recording possessions or ownership.

There were plenty of vacant Government land in Darjeeling town during 1969-70 as the town's population was considerably less, and many persons in their greed tried to occupy such land with the intention of owning the same resulting in many unpleasant disputes. Most of the central Darjeeling town lands were either part of the estates of the Maharajas of Burdwan or Coochbehar, leaving only some patches here and there, which were Government/Municipality vacant land. As per the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1953 and West Bengal L.R. Act 1955, the possession of a piece of land was to be given due recognition, and this ultimately led to the ownership of the land in question.

There were many Benami sales or questionable transactions shown backdated, not properly registered between the Maharajas and the members of the public, and the race for the possession created serious tension at various places. *'Might is right'* dominated the scenes in many areas. Had I been selfish and had some ulterior motive, I could have easily managed recording my own name against any one of the several vacant plots of land at a

prime location which were then available in Darjeeling town or I could have legitimately purchased a piece from the Estate owners like the Burdwan Maharaja or Coochbehar Maharaja at a reasonable price. But the internal judicial system within me - my conscience - did not permit this, as I knew the people would raise eyebrows over such transactions since, like Caesar's wife, we in the Government service, were always supposed to discharge our duties honestly and, at the same time, were also to actually appear above suspicion on all occasions. I used to get pressure from various interested persons for facilitating allotment of plots or regularizing the illegal or questionable transfers of lands or recognising their possession or giving recognition to their transfer documents. A couple of such cases disposed of by me are as follows.

Bhotia Busty burning Ghat—The case of burning ghat at lower Bhotia busty came up before me. There was a flat piece of land at lower Bhotia Busty which many people of Bhotia Busty wanted as a community burning Ghat, whereas there was a group of influential people of that Bhotia busty itself, who wanted that piece for themselves. This latter group had influential people in the offices of DC, CMOH and the Municipality. Due to minor skirmishes which had occurred for the possession of the land, restraining order under section 144 CrPC had been imposed in the said area for some period. I visited the site giving due notice to all, and for the first time in my life I had to confront massive crowd of approximately 5000 people; and there on the spot I heard claims and counter claims. Though there was pressure on me from several corners, I felt that for the sake of common good to a large number of people of the area it would go a long way if the land was awarded for the burning ghat, and accordingly, I gave my decision in favour of public burning ghat. Today, that burning ghat is still being used as a community burning ghat. Some of the local people may still remember the history of the site and my role for existence of the same.

Awarding a prime site to a poor tailor—Bhalu Darji (perhaps that was the name), a poor tailor, had occupied a small piece of vacant land near Dant Kothi, Darjeeling, and there, he was eking out his livelihood by installing a sewing machine in a Kutchra structure erected by him. Despite the counter claims and pressure from other sources, I awarded the site to the poor tailor.

Other works performed by me as R.O. was assessment of rents payable by Tea Gardens under the Estate Acquisition Act 1953 and also assessing the losses suffered by some of the tea gardens in the landslide of 1968 to facilitate for the remission of revenue for the gardens.

Joining WBCS—Even while I was busy with my duties as Revenue Officer, I prepared myself for the WBCS exam, and in the exam held at Calcutta in 1970 (which used to be held at Calcutta till 1974), I could pass in 'A' grade, and as a result, could become the first ever hillman from Darjeeling District to be appointed as a Deputy Magistrate & Deputy Collector directly. This, naturally, must have influenced and encouraged other hill youths a great deal, and so, in the subsequent exams many from the hill could be seen joining the WBCS cadre. Of course, from 1974 onwards, on account of the initiative taken by me as an officer of Darjeeling Collectorate, and with the support of the then Deputy Commissioner, written exams could be conducted in Darjeeling for the candidates of this region which definitely facilitated the joining of many from the hills to the WBCS or Allied Services, most of whom are now in high positions, some promoted to the IAS or even IPS, while a few have also retired.



HILL PEOPLE DISCRIMINATED ?

(malice towards none)

Hill officers just coming up - In the sixties and even in the early seventies, few people from the hills could be seen in civil administrative posts in Bengal, as the general trend among the youths in Darjeeling in those days, followed for generations as a tradition, was joining the Army or paramilitary services or serving the British units at Hongkong. Before my joining the service in February, 1972 consequent on my passing the WBCS Exam of 1970, there were none from this region who had passed WBCS in that grade, even though there were already some who were in the IAS & Allied services from this place, and also a few WBJCS officers, one of whom, Sri D. N. Pradhan, had, by that time, been promoted to the WBCS and given seniority of WBCS, 1962 batch. Sri D. N. Pradhan was therefore the sole hill specimen in the WBCS cadre before my joining in February, 1972. S. B. Zimba was the next after me to join directly in 1973-74 after passing the WBCS exam of 1972. So, I must say that I started the trend of hill officers joining the WBCS cadre, and that must be the reason why Bengali superior officers, who were not accustomed to dealing with hill WBCS officers earlier, found it difficult to accept us as their colleagues, probably because they could not be sure of our competence and also of our loyalty.

Difficult time faced by me— Even though I joined the new service with much excitement and full of dreams, the initial days in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri Collectorates were not at all plain sailing, to say the least. It was baptism by fire interspersed with subtle unhappy and unfavourable circumstances being placed before me, as the authorities including my peers and clerical

fraternity, could not be impressed by me, perhaps, due to my quiet and reticent nature and also because of my unimpressive look. Little did I realize that the Collectorate I had joined was, in a way, a sea full of sharks and whales, where ordinary hill salmon like me were easily gulped down without any qualm. At Darjeeling, though senior to many officers, I was never given charge of Departments commensurate with my seniority, nor given any opportunity to work on some of the challenging Departments like election, establishment etc. which could be of use to me later in my career. I knew that important Department '*Nezarat*' which deals with the day-to-day expenditures of the office, could be given to the most trustworthy of the office boss, usually the '*yes man*', and hence it was out of question for me to even hope for.

We could feel that the authorities were then, swayed by various undercurrents like administrative procedures based on the model practiced at Writers Buildings, Kolkata, which was more favourable to the majority population especially of South Bengal, and also according to the conventions set by the Bengali superior officers in the past for their own convenience here in the hills and practiced over many years by their successors. Either way, the local people were at a disadvantage, and on top of that, the higher officers appeared to have also been influenced by other manipulative sectarian forces, not very inclined then to entrust the sensitive and important Departments to the untried freshman from the hills. This must be because the authorities felt that the hill officers needed to be watched properly before being entrusted with secrets of Government offices as till then we had not been tried, and for them our loyalty was still in doubt, and probably that explains as to why I was treated like an extra officer, and given charge of a few unimportant Departments. A Bengali friend, once accidentally blurted out that the authorities were not too keen to entrust important and sensitive Departments to the non-Bengali local incumbents at that stage. No wonder, I became a victim of the vicious environment prevailing there then.

Even in such a situation, I should have tried to win over some '*godfather or godmother*', from inside or outside, who could have put a word or two in my favour, but that being against my nature, I had no option but to digest whatever the concerned people handed down to me, resulting in my being shifted from one Department to another and from one place to another. Anyway,

in the midst of such unhelpful and unacceptable circumstances, muddied by the intrigues of various groups and coteries which seemed to be somewhat hostile towards me all the time, I somehow managed to preserve my sanity and survived the ordeal, hoping that someday I might secure a better deal for myself.

Sir, that is a VIP car - Perhaps, the situation into which I landed was because of the environment prevailing then in this part of Bengal, where the hill officers were considered **inferior**, and that they had yet to prove their worthiness and usefulness the hard way, as till then they had not earned the trust of the superior officers as they were yet to be tested, and their worth and loyalty ascertained. Even the hill staff members then assumed hill officers not worthy of being treated in the same way as the Bengali and other non-hill officers. Years later, in 1989, when I joined on promotion as ADM at Darjeeling Collectorate, after serving in various challenging posts elsewhere, the bias against the hill officer vis-a-vis non-hill officers of the same grade was found ingrained in the mindset of one hillman employee, Hari Chhettri, who was then Pool Superintendent in DM office Darjeeling. This came to light when, as per the order of the DM, the NDC, D. K. Sharma, told him to allot the Ambassador car no WGX-4000 to me, he said, "*But sir, that is a VIP car?*." All ADMs had been allotted VIP Ambassador cars. He might have taken for granted that hill officers were inferior to non-hill officers, and not at all a VIP like the other ADMs.

Frequent shifting and transfer—I had initially joined in Darjeeling in July, 1973 after completing over a year of service under Jalpaiguri Collectorate—four months under probation at the Collectorate and for a year as a BDO, Kumargram, in that district. In the subsequent years, I also served in other subdivisions of Darjeeling. Whatever be the circumstances, I can now say wryly, that I have achieved the distinction of being the only hill officer who has served in all subdivisions of Darjeeling district, and that is not a trifling feat, considering the fact that later some of my junior compatriots of this part managed to stay put in Darjeeling Collectorate for more than 20 years at a stretch; but, on the other hand, I accepted any assignment willingly and without any complaint. I have undertaken five postings under Jalpaiguri Collectorate—first 4 months as probationer on training in 1972, then as BDO for a little over a year till July, 1973, and

as ADM for two months each in 1989, and 1998, and then again in the same status for a year in 1999 also. This also must be some sort of a record. Five postings in a district !

Taking premature retirement by many—There are now so many hill officers posted away in the plains who would have liked to work in their home district, and they have not got the opportunities till now, as their pleas and petitions have not been effective; and unlike in my time when there were few from the hills, there are now so many contenders seeking home posting. Some of them, not being able to face office intrigue and other hostile atmosphere in the alien land for long and also being disgusted and frustrated for being denied hill posting, have even chucked their jobs, and have come home taking premature retirement. C. R. Rai, P. T. Sherpa, N. T. Lepcha and P. Khati fall in this category. Had they patiently borne the difficulties for some more time and diligently served in the plains where they were posted, they would have, by now, risen to the rank of District Magistrates or even above.

Treatment to S. B. Zimba:- When Zimba joined the Collectorate in September, 1975, there was some initial hitch as there was a surreptitious move by a vested group to retain the existing RTO (*Regional Transport Officer*), S. Mitra WBCS (66 Batch), then under order of transfer, and against whom Zimba had already come on transfer from Jalpaiguri. Mitra also showed his inclination to continue, but sensing that this would create unnecessary misunderstanding with a fellow officer, he handed over the charge to the latter. Zimba also knew about this conspiracy, and was slightly concerned; but thank God, the situation was put to rest before it developed into an uncalled for misunderstanding. He next had to fight it out with NDC for allotting a pool vehicle exclusively for his departmental use. He was given the accommodation vacated by his predecessor, after his persistent pleading for about 5 months, even though the accommodation had been vacated 4 to 5 months earlier, and for those 5 months he had to stay incurring huge expenditure in a rented private accommodation.

Treatment to other hill officers (1972—80) - As already mentioned above, there were a few hill officers of WBJCS cadre (some of them promotees from subordinate services) viz. Indra Sundas, T. B. Rai, N. Wangdi, and C. T. Bhutia, who had come

to the Collectorate after spending years as BDOs, and they were given insignificant posts whereas during the same period there was a Bengali Officer of the same cadre and of equivalent seniority, who had been given important Departments like Election, Nezarat, Census etc. but he had, however, gone from the district by the time I joined in 1973, and T. B. Rai had also retired. Dawa Sherpa, C. N. Lama, S. K. Lama and H. B. Rai were posted away from headquarters, of which C. N. Lama and H. B. Rai were still BDOs in the early seventies. The first hill man who had risen to the post of a WBCS officer was Motichand Pradhan who had become the SDO Kalimpong perhaps in 1946-47 before his retirement. For the next 15 years or more till the promotion of Sri D. N. Pradhan, there was no WBCS officer from the hills. I. Sundas, WBJCS, was the next hill officer to be promoted to WBCS in 1973-74, but he retired around two years later. He had been given charge of Establishment Department for a long time, and he too had not been provided with a vehicle or an official telephone at his residence. There were efforts to snatch this Department by some vested group who were keen to monopolise all the important Departments in the Kutchery, and the opportunity came after his retirement in 1975-76. Sri Sundas, from his long experience in the district and at the Collectorate, knew how power brokers were always looking for opportune moments to try various tricks to discredit and overshadow a young hill officer like me, and he asked me to be careful. Sri D. N. Pradhan being a very senior Deputy Magistrate, having been promoted from the WBJCS long ago, had moved away from the crabby surrounding of Collectorate because of his special posting as Project Officer SFDA.

Due to the above narrated incidents, I felt constrained to conclude that some of my hill colleagues and I were unjustly discriminated upon. C. T. Bhutia, when he was Treasury Officer, had to manage by staying in a small back-room of the Office building of Tribal Department for years as he did not get Government housing until much later when he could share accommodation with me. Zimba tried to stand up against injustices, and as a consequence, suffered uncalled for banishment from the hills for fourteen years. The powers at the Writers Buildings saw to it that he continued to be posted in the plains. He could come back to Darjeeling at the fag end of his service career just because I happened to be present when Siddarth, CPS, DGHC in the course of a meeting at Kurseong, was requesting

the Minister Ashok Bhattacharya for posting some officers to DGHC, and taking the opportunity, I casually suggested Zimba's name for posting to Darjeeling.

Insulting behaviour of SDO Jalpaiguri:—In 1972, I was the only hill officer at Jalpaiguri. One day in March that year, I was asked by my senior colleague, and SDO Jalpaiguri (Sadar), to go to Calcutta to procure election materials from BG Press, Calcutta. I brought the 2 coolie-load of materials, traveling by bus both ways, and handed over the materials and submitted the bill for expenditures incurred towards bus tickets and coolie expenses. While scrutinising the coolie expense claims, he showed his pettiness by mischievously asking me how such and such amount was paid for the coolies. I felt so shocked, insulted, humiliated and angry, I could not speak. How could he suspect me of having earned a few extra Rupees by fabricating coolie charges? Now, I am not sure that such treatment was meted out to intentionally spite a hill officer, but I had definitely never expected such behaviour from my senior colleague whom we used to look up with awe, respect and considered '*a role model*' worth emulating. All I can do is hope today's officers are more sensitive in their actions.

Conspiracy for my Block posting—Another instance of injustice was that while my fellow WBCS batchmates did not have to go for the Block postings, as in those days only the WBJCS officers used to be posted, I was sent by the DC Jalpaiguri in June, 1972, as BDO, Kumargram, being a victim of the clever manoeuvre of my batchmate Ranjital Banerji with the help of SDO, Alipurduar. Normally, the posting and transfer of class I officers like me, were to be issued by the Government from the State headquarter at Calcutta, but as an emergency measure, subject to the post-facto approval of Govt, such local orders could sometimes be issued by the DC. They could have picked my batchmate or one of the two WBJCS officers, who were all at the headquarter along with me, and besides, these WBJCS officers had, in any case, to go for Block posting ultimately. I being a simple and pliable man from the hills happened to be the handy target for exploitation. When later, after eight months, I found out that I was the only Deputy Magistrate of my batch to be posted as BDO, I sent my representation to the authorities at the Writers Buildings, which promptly ordered for my withdrawal

and posting to Darjeeling, but I could come to Darjeeling only in July, 1973, as some relieving officer had to be arranged by the DC Jalpaiguri. Anyway, Block posting was useful to me in many ways.

Unassertive nature, suffering silently— I have already mentioned how most of us hailing from the hills, have had to face instances of discrimination and injustice at the hands of our superiors which might have been caused knowingly or unknowingly. Was the injustice inflicted on me because, unlike so many of my colleagues, I was the timid, unassertive and reticent type, sort of, happy-go-lucky type? It was not in my nature to go repeatedly to show my face to my superiors on every pretext or excuse. I admit, like a typical Lepcha, I am not the assertive and aggressive type, but I have, rather, been a silent worker, and may be that way, like my community members, a silent sufferer too. As per the West Bengal Service Rules, we the officers were supposed to be Government servants for twenty four hours, and accordingly, I used to do the allotted task diligently and quietly, without any murmur or complaint. I also made myself available for any emergency all the time like moving out without security for duties at midnight or coming at midnight when everyone was asleep, putting myself at great risk to my life. Once during 86-88, I was also shot at by militants at Singtam T.E. which my superiors also came to know. During the flood of 1996, I trekked 12 kms of hilly terrain even crossing a swollen stream over a trunk of a fallen tree to reach a marooned village Yelbong in the interior of Kalimpong, and distributed Government relief, and the grateful smile seen in the poor villagers' faces was our reward. It was not an easy task to trek 12 kms of rugged hill terrain up and then to come down the same distance in a single day when I was already above 50 years in age. I have visited many remote villages in all subdivisions of the district in course of my duties, and I am sure, none of my officer colleagues have seen as many remote areas of Darjeeling as I have done.

Unlike some of my colleagues, I never went out of the way to show extra courtesy to please the superiors. One day, the DM asked me to send two bottles of rum to his bungalow, but I told the Nazir to do the same. May be, the DM, was not pleased with me, and these, perhaps, were the little things to ascertain resourcefulness that superiors looked for in their subordinates

before they could be rewarded with good reports and plum postings. I knew some of my colleagues overshadowed me in various ways by employing several tactics by trying to show me in poor light in front of my superiors or by passing unwarranted remarks like 'O, Parbe Na', 'he is careless..' etc. and that is why I did not get good assignments or good ACR during the initial days in the Kutchery. I have also mentioned how two Bengali officers successfully conspired to send me to a Block in Jalpaiguri in 1972. To be fair, it may not have been done because of communal hatred, but must have been resorted to as they must have found me to be easily manipulated.

My unassuming and unassertive nature did not permit me to point out to my superiors that I was the first directly appointed WBCS officer from the hills, and that as per my seniority I had not been given the right assignment in the Collectorate. I rather chose to suffer quietly as long as I remained in the Collectorate, but after leaving the Collectorate in 1978, I started getting the posts in accordance to my seniority, and ultimately, as expected, I became *the first in history* from the hills to be promoted to the IAS in West Bengal. On the whole, despite the limitations within which I worked whether under the Collectorate or under DGHC, I have the satisfaction of seeing several of the infrastructures or institutions set up at my efforts still being useful to the society at large. Besides, there are hundreds of people who got employments, promotions, favourable transfers, admission in technical or other institutions/universities or financial help from banks or Governments for various matters because of me. Many associations or organizations as well as some research scholars also got financial help due to my initiative.

Hill officers always respectful to the seniors— Obedience, humility and politeness used to be the hallmark of a simple hillman in those days. Perhaps, because of this trait, they have been exploited all the more in various ways. At least two hill colleagues of mine were falsely implicated over some financial irregularities which cropped up as a result of their loyalty and obedience to their senior Dadas who coaxed them in committing certain acts, which they did in good faith. While the Dadas escaped unscathed, question marks were put against the action of these hill officers, which took heavy toll on the health of these officers. One of them died a premature death due, most probably, to the

mental agony suffered at the hands of the authorities after the above mentioned episode. There used to be a joke about one obedient hill BDO of our time which was reportedly based on fact. One day, the said BDO entered the chamber of a SDO and the latter said 'wait', but the BDO, assuming that his superior was enquiring about his weight, replied, '64 Kg. Sir' to which the SDO slightly shook his head as it was his long-set habit of turning his head sideways before looking at any body and besides he was squint-eyed too, but the poor BDO, thinking that his superior indicated him to go out, promptly about-turned and left the room like a disciplined soldier.

Poor ACRs to hill officers—Some hill officers missed out on promotion due to poor ACR ratings. T. Wangchuk's promotion to Joint Secretary was delayed due to poor ACR given by his superiors and, I am told, his pension arrears as per his seniority was yet to be settled even after 6 years of his retirement. Recently, Mrs. P. Zimba lost out on promotion due to adverse 'remarks' of a superior officer in her ACR. During my initial years, I was given unimportant assignments and was moved from place to place, from one insignificant Department to another, until I moved out on deputation to Government of India in December, 1978, where I was appointed as Area Organiser SSB for about five months in Siliguri and then transferred to Darjeeling as AO of Darjeeling.

Received Justice under Government of India—The post of 'Area Organiser' was of the rank of an Asstt. Director under Government of India, which in those days were being occupied by senior State or Central Government officers, and accordingly, some IAS/IPS officers were already manning the said posts in some regions. I was told then that AO, Simla, was an IAS man. One AO at Siliguri HQ was SS Banerji IPS (72 batch) and another V. Kumar IPS (68 batch) as Battalion Commandant (AO rank) at Falakata.

As A.O., I was the SSB unit chief at the district headquarter at Darjeeling for the area comprising three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling plus Mateli block area of Jalpaiguri, and under me, there were two Sub-Area Organisers, one at Kalimpong, whose name was Sambhu Dasgupta, a senior WBCS officer (WBJCS, 68 batch) and another Officer, D. K. Tamang, risen from the rank of Circle Organiser, at Darjeeling for Darjeeling Sub-area, comprising of Darjeeling and Kurseong Sub-divisions. Besides,

the two companies of SSB para military personnel, each under a DSP rank, had been placed at my disposal, the headquarter of one company was at Kalimpong and that of another at Kurseong. Long before me, Atuk Tshering, a senior IPS officer used to hold the post of AO at Darjeeling.

My seniority and my worth was finally recognised by the Government of India, and I came out in flying colours, making a reputation for myself in various field and office works. By escaping from the crab like existence at the Collectorate, I, for a time, could breathe easy in the new environment where there was no discrimination but an atmosphere of brotherhood for the cause of motherland as 'SSB' stood for Service, Security and Brotherhood, and there I got the opportunity of proving myself. Immediate authority above me was the Divisional Organiser, North Bengal, of IG of Police rank (*54 batch IPS*) at Siliguri and the Director SSB at Delhi, and for the first time in my career, there was nobody nearby to criticize and overshadow me or pass comment on my work or conduct. What a freedom! I was sort of suffocated at the Collectorate where colleagues and staff were always trying to over shadow, outsmart or out manoeuvre one another. At last I got fair treatment and justice, and my ACRs improved. One day, my Divisional Organiser remarked, '*your DC is Kanjus in giving ACRs*'. Had I continued my service under SSB, I would have risen to the rank of IG or above as one officer who was SAO during my tenure in that organization later rose to the rank of IG.

How the early hill IAS officers fared - In this connection, I cannot help but point out that T. B. Singh, L. B. Pariyar, Bindu Zutshi, and Rinchen Tempo, all of them IAS officers from the hills, were not given charge of prominent districts; they were given unimportant districts like Purulia, Bankura, W. Dinajpur etc., and they were also not given important Departments at the Writers' Buildings. Post Retirement appointments like Chairmanship of PSC or Bank or some other important organizations are considered for people of Chief Secretary or equivalent rank officers; but Bindu Zutshi and L. B. Pariyar, who were both very senior, the former senior even to the Chief Secretary of her time, were not considered for important post-retirement employments. Membership of PSC, Tribunals or such organizations are chosen from amongst the retired or serving

officers of Kolkata and surrounding areas only. I am quite sure that the few hill IAS officers still in service including Rinchen Tempo will continue to be treated in the same manner as was done to their predecessors. Unless some miracle happens, no Darjeeling hill officer will ever be made the Chief Secretary or DG of Police in West Bengal.

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The author has served in the West Bengal Civil Service and later in the Indian Administrative Service in various senior and responsible positions, the last post he held was that of the Principal Secretary in Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council for more than four years. He has tried to bring to light the roller coaster ride faced by the initial batch of hill officers and their struggle for creating a niche for themselves.

'Darjeeling Diaries' is layered with episodes emanating from the author's experience as one of the first Civil Service Officers from the hills. An honest yet often disturbing insight into the travails of a bureaucrat caught in the complexities of a domain alien to hillmen, this compelling book encapsulates a treasury of information for all. It is especially useful to those desiring to pursue a career in this high profile and much sought after profession.

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