

INTRODUCTION

STUDY AREA

Kurseong town is situated at $26^{\circ}53' N$ latitude and $88^{\circ}17' E$ longitude in the Darjiling Himalaya. It lies at a distance of 622 km from Calcutta, 48 km from Siliguri and 29 km from Darjiling (Fig. 1). It has been suggested that 'this name is a corruption of Lepcha word *Kurson-rip*, the small white orchid, which grows plentifully around Kurseong and that it

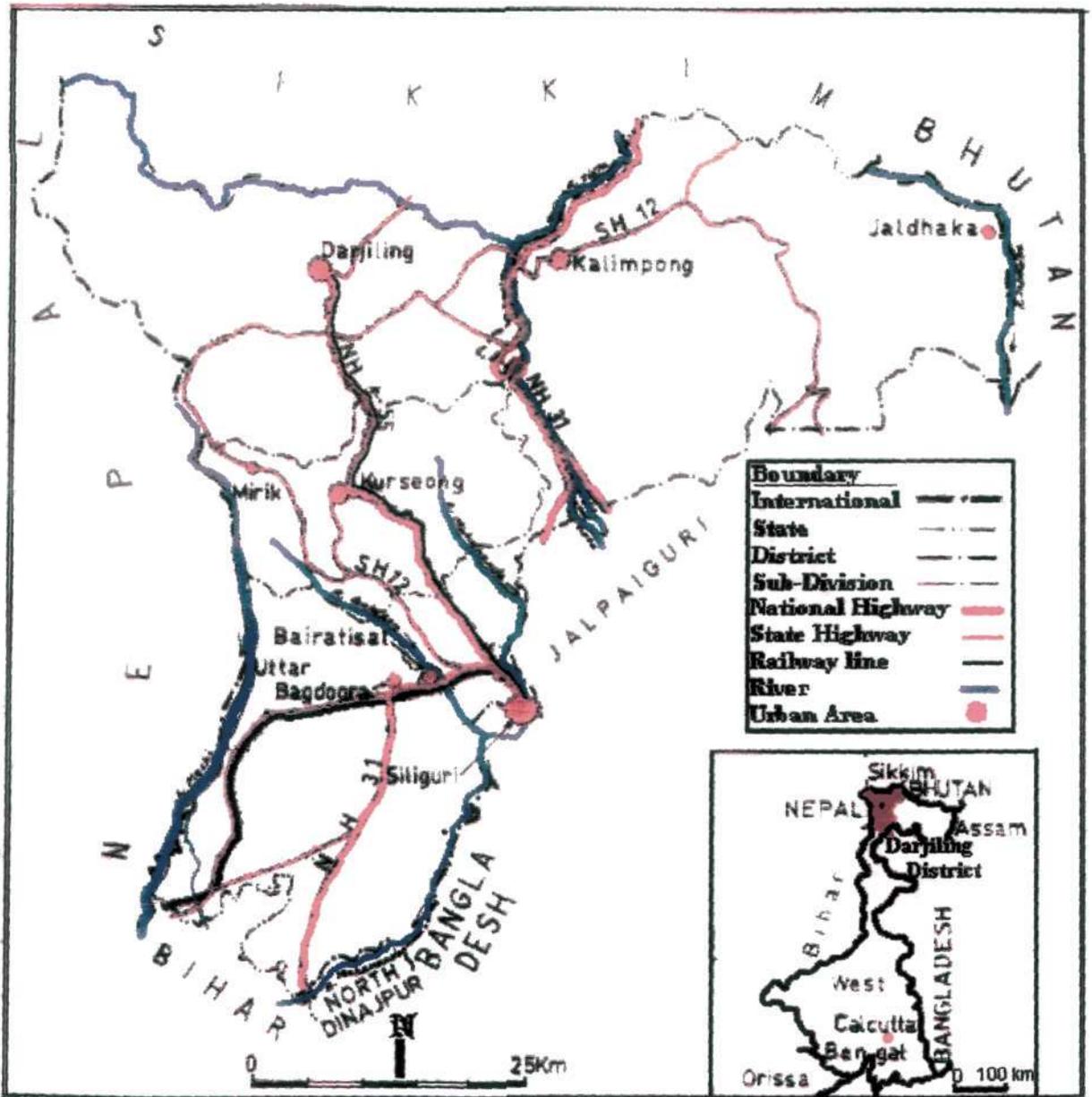


Fig. 1 : Location map of Darjiling district.

means 'the place of white orchids'. Another suggestion is that it refers to a cane used to grow there in rich profusion, and which the Lepchas in their *Rong-ring*, as they term their own language, called *kur*, and that 'seong' is a corruption of *sheang*, a stick' (O'Malley, 1907). Its altitude varies between 1,300 metres and 1,800 metres. It is situated on the Senchal-Mahaldiram range, which radiates from Ghoom Saddle in the north and descends gradually to Mahaldiram and Dow Hill in the south, and further down to the plain of Terai. Stretching

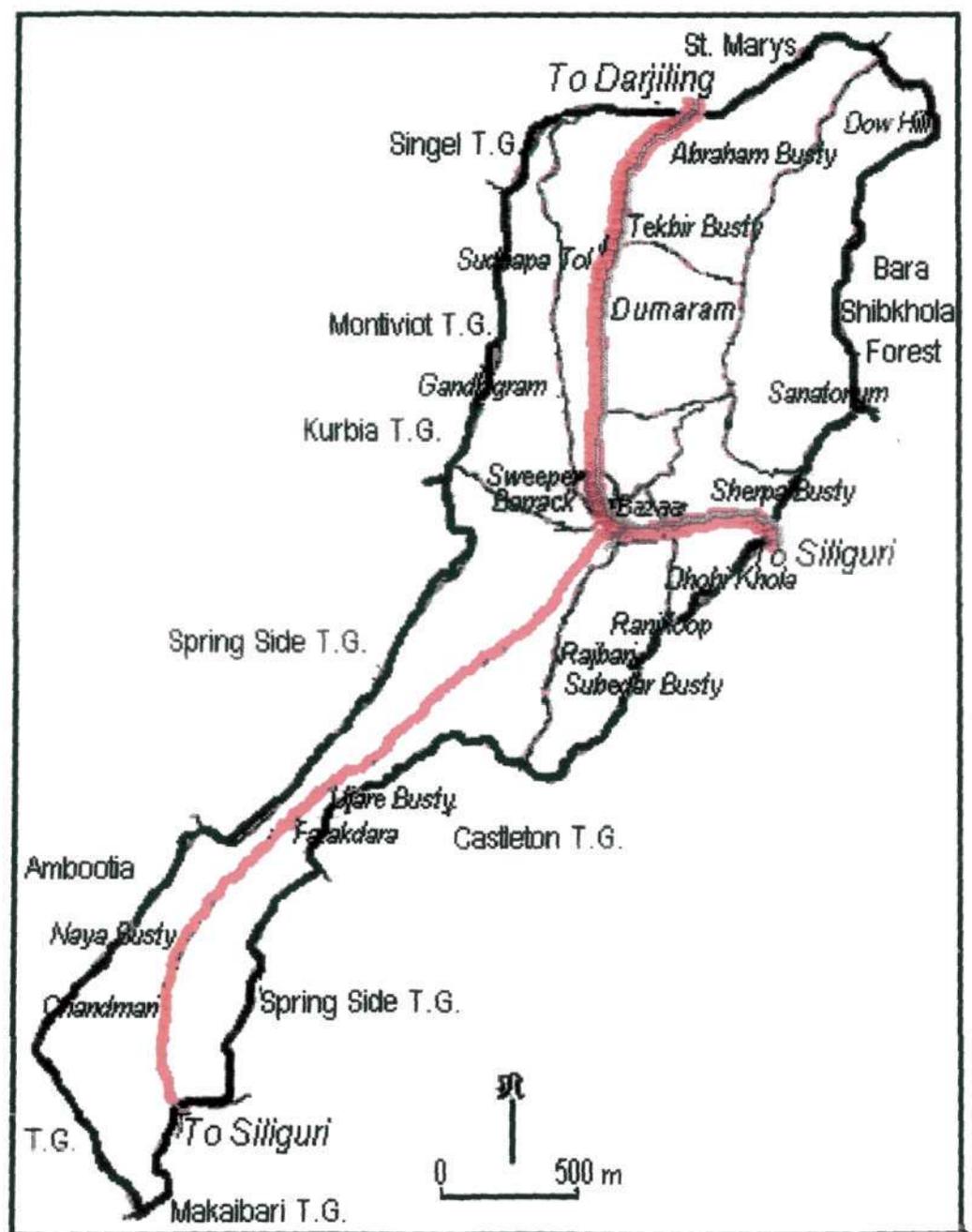


Fig. 2 : Location map of Kurseong town.

from north to south, the town has a westerly slope from the crest of Dow Hill, 1,840 metres above mean sea level (Fig. 2). Another part of the town runs southward, along the crest of a spur branching off from the main ridge near the railway station till it reaches Constantia, a hillock 3 kilometres south-west of the town centre (Pic. 1). The town is bounded by two perennial jhoras (streams): Dhobi Khola in the east and Hussain Khola in the north.



Pic. 1 : The Spur.

THE MUNICIPALITY

Kurseong was constituted as a municipality on 1st May 1879. Before 1879, it was under the supervision of the Darjiling Municipality, which was constituted in 1850, and covered an area of 357.415 sq. km. For the purpose of administration of Kurseong town with its population of 2,836 (Males – 1797, Females – 1039), a Board with six Municipal Commissioners nominated by the Government was formed to administer its affairs. Of the six members, three were Indians viz. Jooman Singh, Sylak Sirdar and Hajee Indad Ali. The Deputy Commissioner, Darjiling, was the *ex-officio* Chairman. The first Chairman was Mr. M.M. Walter. The Bengal Municipal Act of 1900 divided the town into six wards (Fig. 3a) and increased the number of members on the Board from six to twelve, of whom six were elected while five were nominated by the Government and the Civil Medical Officer was an

ex-officio member. In 1936, the Municipal Board was reconstituted and of the twelve Commissioners, nine were elected from the six wards, and the Government nominated three.

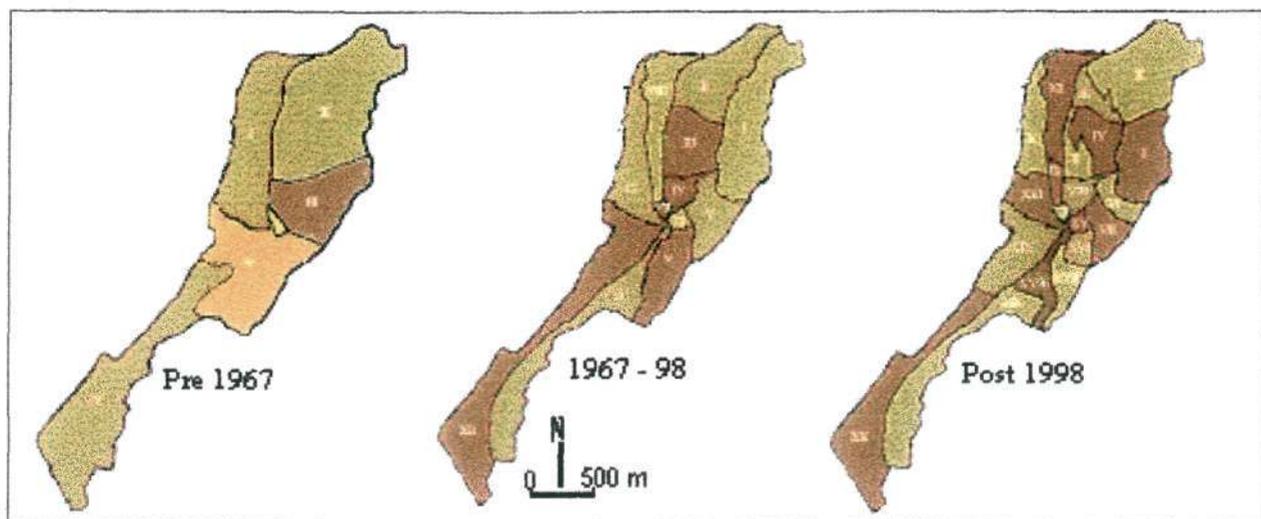


Fig. 3 : Evolution of Wards in Kurseong Municipality.

In 1967, a Government Notification did the first delimitation of ward boundaries. The town was divided into twelve wards (Fig. 3b) and the Municipal Board consisted of twelve elected Commissioners. The rapid increase in population since its inception and especially during 1981-91 led the Board to place a proposal to the Government of West Bengal for further delimitation of ward boundaries and inclusion of certain urban pockets within the Municipality for proper administration. By a Government Notification on 26th August 1998, the Municipality was divided into twenty wards (Fig. 3c) but new areas were not included.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are many folds:

- (a) to evaluate the demographic structure of the town;
- (b) to bring out the urban land use pattern and their changes during 1977-99;
- (c) to study the growth of educational institutions and their impact on the growth of the town;
- (d) to assess the various civic amenities provided by different agencies and their associated problems;

- (e) to assess the environmental status of the town;
- (f) to study the limitations leading to improper growth of the town;
- (g) to critically analyse the different developmental programmes undertaken in the town and their implementations; and
- (h) to suggest proper developmental plan for the future growth of the town.

METHODOLOGY

- (a) Primary data were collected by random sampling by preparing different types of questionnaires (Appendix);
- (b) Secondary data were collected from the municipality and other government and non-government agencies;
- (c) Primary data were computed by taking the help of statistical methods;
- (d) Maps were drawn with the help of multi-date data;
- (e) Base map and land use map of 1977 of the Kurseong Municipality was used for the present land use survey; and
- (f) Survey of India map and cadastral maps were consulted for mapping and analysis.

DATA COLLECTION AND COMPILATION

The data used in the present study were collected from a number of sources. These include published and unpublished records, maps, reports and tabulated data. The study is also based on intensive fieldwork, their analysis and interpretation and also the author's experience supplemented with the dialogues with various authorities and officials responsible for the town's development. For land use survey, the data on land use of 1977 of Kurseong town provided by the Siliguri Jalpaiguri Development Authority were used.

LIMITATIONS

As the study is based on both primary and secondary data, problems cropped up while analysing the said data. While analysing the census data it was found out that the population data of 1981 seemed to be showing a different trend in comparison to 1971 and 1991. As past information in some cases were not available in terms of civic amenities, it became difficult to compare the development of the different functions in the town. The owners of the private English medium schools were not forthcoming in giving the correct information about their schools. The survey of households faced problems like unwillingness on the part of the owners to divulge the correct information on migration and family incomes. Even though the town is divided into 20 wards in 1998, due to the non-availability of census data on 20 wards the study is restricted to pre-1998 divisions i.e. 12 wards.

DESIGN OF THE THESIS

The thesis has been designed in the following format:

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF KURSEONG TOWN

CHAPTER II POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

CHAPTER III LAND USE AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION

CHAPTER IV SOCIO-ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION

CHAPTER V PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH LAND, PEOPLE AND ENVIRONMENT

CHAPTER VI DEVELOPMENTAL PLANS IN THE TOWN AND THEIR ANALYSIS

CHAPTER VII SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOWN

Pre-Independence

The growth of Kurseong is directly related to that of the growth of Darjiling district and no study will be complete without taking the history of growth of district of Darjiling into account.

The present district of Darjiling was a part of the dominion of the Raja of Sikkim. The treaty at Titalya in 1817 between the East India Company and the Raja of Sikkim made the Company the permanent power of the tract. In February 1829, Captain Lloyd and Mr. J.W. Grant visited the Old Gorkha Station called Darjiling for six days and were immediately struck with an idea that the place was suitable for building sanatorium. At that time Darjiling and its surrounding areas were sparsely populated. After a proper survey of the area, the Company directed General Lloyd to open negotiations with the Raja of Sikkim for the cessation of Darjiling in lieu of equivalent money or land and the deed of grant was signed by the Raja on 1st February 1835.

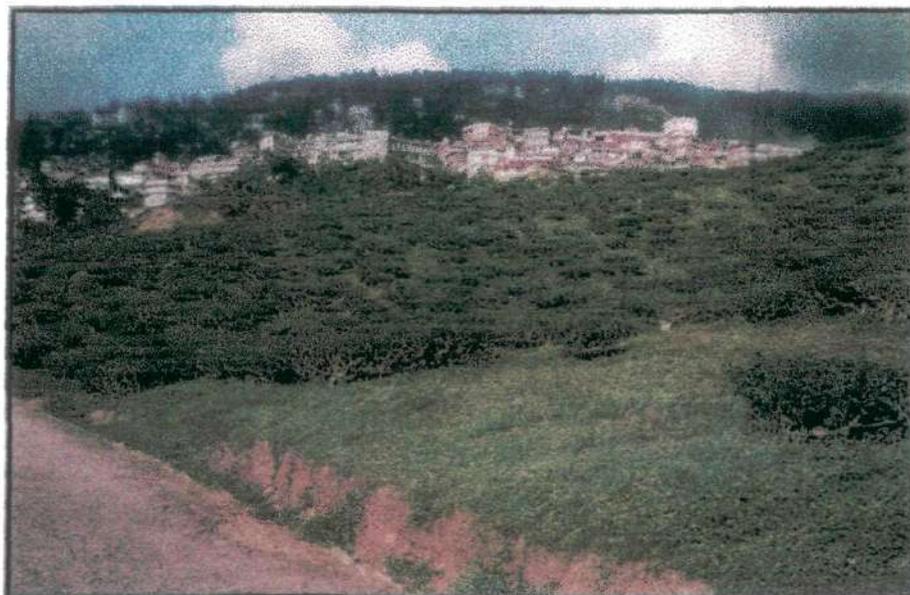
The report by General Lloyd in 1836 decided the fate of Darjiling as the location for a sanatorium and he was appointed the Local Agent with the power to apply for land. In 1839, Dr. A.D. Campbell, IMS, was transferred from Nepal to Darjiling as Superintendent. He devoted his energy to developing the station, and within a decade, the population rose to 10,000, chiefly due to immigration from neighbouring countries -Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. Measures were taken to establish communication between Darjiling and the plains. Lord Napier of Magdala, then a lieutenant in the Engineers, was devoted to the construction of a road from Siliguri to Darjiling. A road, now known as the Old Military Road, measuring 64 km, was laid between 1839 and 1842, at an expenditure of Rs. 8,00,000, from Pankhabari to Darjiling via Kurseong, Dow Hill and Ghoom.

Kurseong became a halting station for military and civil personnel on their way to Darjiling. Thus with the growth of Darjiling, Kurseong also grew. By 1840, a hotel and a few Dak Bungalows had already been constructed in Kurseong. With the political consolidation of the Darjiling hill tract, the firm establishment of tea gardens, for which credit goes to Dr. Campbell, the development of other economic interests in the hill area, the inadequacy of the Old Military Road, which was impracticable for wheeled traffic, was clearly exposed. Accordingly, a plan to construct a cart road, with a width of 7.315 metres and a general

gradient of 3 in 100, was taken up in 1861. The first stretch, from Darjiling to Kurseong, was opened up for traffic in 1864 and the whole road up to Siliguri was completed in 1869 at an expenditure of Rs.55,924 per km. Tongas, bullock carts and pack ponies were the only means of travelling & carrying goods on this cart road.

The high cost of transportation by carts led Mr. Franklin Prestage, in 1878, to submit a detailed scheme to Sir Ashley Eden, the then Governor of Bengal, to start a railway line between Siliguri and Darjiling along the cart road. The Darjiling Himalayan Railway (D.H.R.) Company was formed in 1879 and Kurseong town was selected as the administrative headquarters of the Darjiling Himalayan Railway in 1879. The section between Siliguri and Kurseong was opened up for traffic on 23rd August 1880 and that up to Darjiling on 4th July 1881. This was the first mountain railway in the Indian sub-continent and was completed in less than 2 years, at a cost of about Rs.32, 311 per km.

The establishment of the tea industry in Darjiling is due to the enterprise of Dr. Campbell, Superintendent of Darjiling, who started the experimental growth of tea with the first trial in 1841. The tea industry was established as a commercial enterprise in 1856, with the opening of the Alubari Tea Garden by the Kurseong and Darjiling Tea Company and another garden on Lebong spur by the Darjiling Land Mortgage Bank. By the end of 1866, there were 39 tea gardens with 4046.8 ha under cultivation, and by 1895 the number increased to 186. The Makaibari and Singel (Pic. 2) and Ambootia tea gardens were started



Pic. 2 : The Singel Tea Garden.

near Kurseong in 1857 and 1862 respectively and in 1871 the gardens of Springfield and Castleton were laid out.

Along with the development of communication networks and the tea industry, the district also witnessed the establishment of educational and self-governing institutions by the Europeans. The first school to come up was Loreto Convent for girls in Darjiling in 1846, and the first municipality in the hills was constituted in Darjiling in 1850. The possibility of developing Kurseong as a supplementary hill station to Darjiling started attracting public attention and on 1st May 1879, the second municipality in the district was constituted in Kurseong. According to a report by the then Health Commissioner of Bengal, the total population of the Municipality at that time was 2,836 consisting of 1707 males and 1,039 females. In 1891 Kurseong was made the headquarters of a sub-division that included the Terai and a portion of hill. Simultaneously, measures were taken to provide urban facilities to this newly growing town. In 1879, Sir Ashley Eden, the then Governor of Bengal, founded the Government School for boys and girls (later Dow Hill School for Girls and Victoria School for Boys) at Constantia that was later shifted to Dow Hill in 1880. The St. Helen's School for Girls was opened in a small rented house in 1890 at Fatakdera, and was later moved to its present site in 1900. With the shifting of the Government School to Dow Hill, Constantia was made the office of the Sub-divisional Officer of Kurseong.

The most noticeable urban expansion of Kurseong was however experienced at the turn of the century, when the Kurseong Improvement Committee was set up for organised development efforts of this hill station and with the construction of the Bourdillion Road connecting the Montiviot end of the township with the Old Military Road. A Scots Mission church was built in 1904, and the Jesuits Church in 1905. A new Kutchery was built in 1904, and a hospital and dispensary, comprising a European ward was constructed at the centre of the bazaar in 1905. The West Bengal Forest School at Dow Hill, and the Goethals Memorial School, founded in the memory of Rev. Paul Count Goethals, about 3.5 km from the town were opened in 1907. The palace club was built on a piece of land known as recreation ground in 1905, providing residential and clubs facilities to visitors. Clarendon, Grand, Pelican, Plaza, Plains View, etc. were excellent hotels, and along with the twelve bungalows of the Montiviot Estate, provided accommodation to visitors.

The Kurseong waterworks began operating in 1913, and the Kurseong Sewerage System with sewerage line was laid out in 1919. Scavengers were made to remove night soil by head loads, as it was not possible to press into service trolleys and handcarts etc., by the Municipality. After the World War I, the management of Grand Hotel, Calcutta introduced a passenger automobile service between Siliguri and Darjiling. It cut short the train journey by about 3½ hours, and since then, the course of trade, its volume and passenger transportation have undergone a major change.

Along with Europeans, many Indian Rajas and Zamindars acquired substantial areas in and around Kurseong. Among them were the Maharajadhiraj of Burdwan Sir Bejay Chand Mehtap and the Raja of Kakina. The retreat of the Maharajadhiraj of Burdwan was called Rajbari. The S. B. Dey Tuberculosis Sanatorium, ancillary to the Jadavpur Tuberculosis Hospital, Calcutta, with 20 beds, was opened due to the philanthropy of Late Rai Bahadur S. B. Dey in 1936. The Kurseong Town Hospital, which was maintained by the municipality, was taken over by the Government in June 1944.

Post-Independence

The Govt. of India purchased the property owned by the Darjiling Himalayan Railway Company Ltd. on 20th October 1948. The supervision of the Hill Cart Road was brought under the control of the Public Works Department from the Railways. The premise of the Palace Club was converted into the broadcasting station of the All India Radio in 1961, and the relay centre was set up at Constantia. The Rajbari was made into the office of the West Bengal National Volunteer Force. The Kurseong Water Supply Remodelling Scheme was completed in January 1970. On 30th March 1986, a large part of the *bazaar* was destroyed in a devastating fire and there was a great loss of property. During 1986 to 1988, Kurseong, along with other parts of Darjiling, was in turmoil due to the movement for Gorkhaland – a separate state spearheaded by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). Trade and commerce, tourism and normal life in the hill tract were paralysed. On 20th August 1988 an agreement was signed between the Government of West Bengal and the GNLF for normalcy in the Darjiling Himalayas. Elections were held for the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), an autonomous body under the Government of West

Bengal.In December 1999 the UNESCO declared the Darjiling Himalayan Railway a World Heritage Site.