

CHAPTER – VI

EPILOGUE

I

An overall understanding of the study so far made in the preceding chapters amply suggests that urban Darjeeling – the Queen of the Himalayas is as yet a little understood phenomenon. Compared to the quantum of writing on Urban settlements of the plains of India the research available on Urban Darjeeling has been decidedly inadequate. Two important points may be mentioned to substantiate the argument. First, in the absence of any substantial empirical work, the intensity of urbanism in Darjeeling can only be impressionistically gauged. Second, the general works on the period mostly made by the European administrators / travellers which touch on the problem and issues of Urban Darjeeling lack an appropriate analytical framework.

The sequels to the urban social formation of Darjeeling primarily are : (i) the reaching out of the Britishers in Darjeeling with their own objectives, purposes and culture they represented; (ii) their interaction with local and migrated indigenous cultural matrices and (iii) in subsequent stages, the formation of urban Darjeeling was made complete by the frequent intermixing and assimilations of indigenous and European culture. Thus the major historical – socio-economic and political processes in Darjeeling hills are to be

identified not by taking an epicentric view, but by keeping in mind the fact that historical-cultural stages have always been uneven over this eastern Himalayan settlement.

Viewed from the entire discourse so far presented in different chapters of the study, three major processes may be identified which had been and still have been operative both in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial phases of Darjeeling. These processes are : (i) the expansion of state and superimposition of culture; (ii) the labourization of tribes and indigenous castes / tribes consolidation; (iii) Appropriation, Assimilation and Integration.

Certainly those above processes are not unrelated to one another, and together they constitute a cultural matrix which came to acquire over the last two centuries a recognizable shape at Darjeeling which had initially remained peripheral. Thus Darjeeling experienced with late urbanism compared to its plains' counterpart. The history of integration of Darjeeling into the fold of British Indian political economy as narrated by the European historiographers amply suggests that Darjeeling as a hill station has been solely the creation of the British. Such a hegeographic version of the history of Darjeeling is a kind of epicentric version of history, which is half-truth. Though Darjeeling did begin as a distinctive British colonial identity, it was much more indigenous. The occupation of Darjeeling by the British is one aspect and its growth as a strategic military center ensuring basic civic amenities is bordered around the typical

colonial concept of consolidation has been the other major aspect. Though most historians, political scientists, sociologists have traced British adoption of Darjeeling to the establishment of a sanatoria, the growth of Darjeeling as an urban center was certainly crucial to the British to control Nepal, Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan. This unique strategic compulsion of the British and the compelling physiographic feature of Darjeeling compels a serious reader to look beyond the so called general feature of Darjeeling as a sanitarium or recreational center for the tourists.

The present study sub-serves five distinctive but mutually interwoven processes of how Darjeeling – the most urbanized hill station in the Eastern Himalayas – evolved as the center stage of politico-cultural events, strategic-economic and social dynamics. The processes are:- (i) Darjeeling as a hill town was developed mostly for geo-political and strategic considerations. Our discussion in the preceeding chapters confirmed this fact that Darjeeling was developed as Cantonment and Sanitarium particularly after the Anglo-Bhutan War. The cantonments of Katapahar and Lebong of Darjeeling had a pull effect which brought in civilians, travellers, tourists, traders, merchants, market mechanism and the local settlements. Municipal Acts were brought in motion with the creation of Darjeeling Municipality. With the rise of trade and commerce, Marwaris and few other trading communities from different parts of

plains of India started settling in Darjeeling. Infact, this trading class of people replaced the old commissariat contractors.

√(ii) The promotion of the hill town Darjeeling by the British was principally for trading across the border. The occupation over Darjeeling hills and corresponding control over the Kalimpong hills gave British an opportunity to use the silk route for trade through passes. The big increase in service sectors, market demands, tourist arrivals in Darjeeling prompted people to invest more in trading activities, hotels and transportation. There has been the experience since 1960's that hotels are coming up in all shapes and sizes along with associated business.

√(iii) Since the mid-nineteenth century Darjeeling town served as a major producing ground of very specific corps like tea and cinchona. The growth of tea economy in Darjeeling resulted a huge pull factor for the rise and growth of Darjeeling town as the growth center, service and trade center and center for recreation and leisure. The surplus in tea plantation had a direct impact for the growth and development of Darjeeling as an urban settlement. Commercial tea plantation in Darjeeling dates back about one hundred and fifty years under the British colony and today forms the major socio-economic backbone of the local population. Rural agriculture only supports a fraction of the local population. The primary revenue of Darjeeling population is primarily dependent on tea and tourism industries.

✓(iv) Tourism in Darjeeling flourished with the British and received official recognition in 1835 when the township of Darjeeling was formally opened. Creation of infrastructural facilities such as communicable roads, railways track, hotels, resorts, water, electricity are some of the basic pre-conditions for the development of tourism as an industry. By the late 19th century, a toy train track (narrow gauge) and roads were constructed connecting Darjeeling with the plains of Bengal. The introduction of the Toy Train Track and the road considerably increased the flow of tourists in Darjeeling. The early twentieth century Darjeeling experienced with adventure tourism in the form of mountaineering. Since 1950, most of the expeditions to the Himalayas initiated from Darjeeling. With the conquest of Mt. Everest in 1953, the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute was established in Darjeeling and this has become a temple for the probationers of mountaineering and a spot of tourist attraction. Trekking as a form of adventure tourism activity has become popular since 1960. The big increase in the quantity of tourists coming to Darjeeling during tourist seasons (April-June and September-November) sometimes pose threat to available basic civic amenities of Darjeeling.

(v) Situating in a region having very rich and diverse bio-resources, Darjeeling attracted the attention of the researchers and bio-medicinal and pharmaceutical Corporations to harness them. Darjeeling along with the entire eastern Himalayan tract has become

a cradle of scientific knowledge and an incessant source of commercial ventures. Resultantly, Darjeeling has started receiving adequate development interventions and got boosted in the process. However, the development orientation in the hill town of Darjeeling become skewed and unplanned. Precisely the entire eastern Himalayan region, of which Darjeeling has been a part, plays a crucial role in conditioning the climatic situations, as custodian of extra-ordinarily rich bio-diversity, as the origin of many a lifelines including the river system and as provider of the world's most beautiful panorama. Most importantly Darjeeling Himalayas provide the core strategic security incorporating in it the very basis of border configurations that determine our national sovereignty and national identity too.

II

The study has revealed that till 1971 the town of Darjeeling along with Kalimpong and Kurseong remained as the three urban centers in the hilly part of the District. Another settlement Mirik emerged as towns in the census as late as in 2001. The same census designates Darjeeling as a 'city'. It transpires that originally Darjeeling had been a part of Sikkim – a small independent state of the Eastern Himalayas which became a tributary of the colonial power of India during early 19th century. Darjeeling was identified as the most suitable location for a sanitorium way back in 1828 by Caplain Lloyd. The king of Sikkim could rescue the part of Darjeeling

hills from Nepal which was annexed by the latter with the active military support from the British. As a mark of respect and gesture the king of Sikkim handed over Darjeeling hills to the British with certain conditions. However, the British could manage to secure Darjeeling as a gift from the Raja of Sikkim in 1835.

Soon after the annexation of Darjeeling with British India, Darjeeling underwent through several boundary reorganizations. The territory of Terai geographically connected with Darjeeling was seized by the British in 1849. The treaty between Sikkim and the British in 1861 had reaffirmed the territorial seizure. The European model of hill resort development was instilled in Darjeeling and within a short period of time Darjeeling developed as a center of health resort, cantonment, center of educational institutions and military activities as well as trade and service center. It may not be out of place to mention here that Darjeeling grew as an urban settlement not by the agricultural surplus created out in its rural hinterlands, rather it received its urban form to fulfil the health, strategic and economic and social aspirations of the colonizers. Tea plantation and tourism provided a great pull effect for the people who migrated from neighbouring Nepal, Sikkim and to some extent from Bhutan. The military administrative efforts, road linkages, plantation and tourism, enhanced economic and trade activities and population rise ultimately gave Darjeeling an urban shape.

Kurseong compared to Darjeeling is a small urban center started becoming important and has been developed as a medium town (Census 2001) or a satellite town of Darjeeling. The Kalimpong hills formed an integral part of British Darjeeling hills after following a different course of political experience as revealed in the study. History tells us that Kalimpong part of Darjeeling hills originally belonged to Sikkim. Over the years, it was annexed by Bhutan. The British could manage Kalimpong soon after the Anglo-Bhutan War of 1865. Since then Kalimpong has been designated a part of British India. Strategically and economically gaining control over Kalimpong was considered important by the British for the proximity of the region to the Jelep-la and Nthu-la – the two important passes connecting Tibet and Russia as well. The British developed Kalimpong as an important trade and commercial center. The missionaries established educational institutions in the settlement. Basic amenities and facilities did develop to give Kalimpong an urban shape. The town was designated as a sub-divisional headquarters. The ethnic-caste composition of Kalimpong and Kurseong has a homogeneity with the town of Darjeeling.

The present study further revealed that colonial urban Darjeeling was cut off from and insulated from the urban settlements of the plains of Bengal which witnessed a distinctive kind of administrative experience for military and other objective interests of the British. As a result, each urban component of Darjeeling hills

followed its own pattern of urban growth. The nature, content and pattern of urbanization is therefore fundamentally different for Darjeeling hills compared to its counterpart at the plains of Bengal. The internal dynamics of society / societies of the Darjeeling hills are to be inclusively understood to have a perception of the level and depth of urbanization. The ingredients of local and migrated tribes in Darjeeling hills have developed over the years a consciousness construction resulting a sense of homogenous cultural identity mixed with urban cultural ethos of the plains. This unique sense of primordial loyalties in a diversified poly-cultural set up sometimes lead to ethnic conflicts and tensions as Darjeeling has experienced with through decades.

Two principal types of Hill urban settlements came out during colonial times : (i) the hill stations and (ii) administrative headquarters and Cantonments. Darjeeling is one of such hill towns which enjoyed both of the features. As a result, over the years, population pressure on the town of Darjeeling has been very high. Neither the town was conceived to hold more than lakh of population, nor the very physiognomy of Darjeeling terrain is able to hold such enhancing pressure of population. Due to scarcity of water sources Darjeeling has always experienced with a perennial crisis of water. The town has also encountered with the problems such as the scarcity of energy resources, poor sanitary and sewerage systems, landslides, incessant rains loosening the soil, inadequate parks and

playgrounds, a shortage of essential facilities and commodities, relative isolation from the centres of production, heavy traffic congestions on the roads and the disruption of communication links in the event of heavy rainfall and landslides. Resultantly, the cost of living has become relatively high in Darjeeling compared to urban settlements in the plains. The frequent use of non-biodegradable articles made of polythin causes tremendous pollution and unaccounted environmental hazards. Heaps of solid wastes and pools of sewerage create unhygienic conditions by polluting air, water and soil. Strategies to address such problems should immediately formulated and action-oriented, target oriented policy and planning have been urgently called to save the "Queen of the Himalayas" from further deterioration.

It is important to mention here that the British never conceived of a big towns with more than lakh of population owing to fragile hill eco-systems and they were particularly concerned on the load bearing capacity of the comparatively younger age of eastern Himalayas. Observing the potential of the region, the British restricted Darjeeling within a scale of ideal size. However, urbanization along with its push-factor giving rise to population concentration has become a natural phenomenon. What Darjeeling needs at this juncture is to spreading of the towns taking into account its neighbouring hinterland and connecting those proposed agglomerated areas with adequate linkage facilities and ascertaining

such other required infrastructures. Networking with the up or down towns is preferred than one overgrown Darjeeling 'city'. No further argument is required to substantiate that as a result of historical metamorphosis Darjeeling as an urban settlement has crossed all such critical limits. Thus added area settlement planning can only save Darjeeling from further degradation.

Provisioning of urban services to the rural area has been the call of the honourable President of India, APJ Kalam. As the progress and fruits of development of the economy of rural hinterlands precedes urbanization in the endogenous process, it is urgently needed to ensure urban basic services to these rising rural economies. Such provisioning would have double edged purposes : (i) prevention of population pressure of the rural people on the 'mirage town' Darjeeling; and (ii) creation and consolidation of urban provisions at the rural hinterlands. This may reverse the process of migration and people would always love to live in a pollution free environment with comfort. The concept of balanced neighbourhood may well adopted to save Darjeeling from further population pressure and growing degradation.

Since the hill town of Darjeeling was established more than 150 year age, the town needs a thorough overhauling. The principle of urban renewal has to be adopted to enable the town to ease out its enhancing problems. A planned urban re-provisionings is also extremely important by way of taking short-term and long term

measures for the future growth and capacity building of Darjeeling town. A thorough urban renewal project suggested for Darjeeling must include Conservation, Cooperation, Development Plan, Finance, Legislation, Fixed Duration of Project implementation, Re-development, Rehabilitation etc. Such renewal measures are extremely urgent for the good health of Darjeeling. A regular surveillance is important to see that Darjeeling's development should not be at the cost of environment. Urban renewal strategy for Darjeeling should be in harmony with the local environment and culture. To be precise, an ecological equilibrium has to be achieved by way of making a balance in every effort of development. Harmonising the initiatives of development has become the central focus which can meet multi-dimensional challenges of development.

Urbanization in Darjeeling during the colonial regime was essentially the spatial expression of British power and their urgency to realize various objectives. The initial objective was political, namely, military or defence, and health. Darjeeling was developed as a sanatorium by the colonizer for British military and civilians. The initial hotels were established in the mid 19th Century to encourage visitors (mostly British and indigenous urban elites) from the plains. The most important medical institutions was the Education Sanatorium established in 1882. It was primarily made for the Europeans. The Lowis Jubilee Sanatorium was built in 1887 and it was meant for Indian patients too. To address the needs of the

comparatively poor Indians and Europeans, the Victoria Memorial Dispensary was established during 1907.

Both colonial and post colonial Darjeeling has enjoyed a crucial Military and strategic importance. As a frontier zone adjacent to Nepal, Bhutan, there has always been a fear of intrusion. The significance of Darjeeling as the headquarters of the Eastern zone for the recruitment for the Gorkha soldiers was considerable. The process was initiated since 1886. Hyde Clarke (1859) stressed the strategic value of Cantonments for the vulnerability of the area from the perspective of Nepal, Bhutan and even Tibet. Political and military significance of Darjeeling soon made it a hub of imperial power and the possibility of forming a promising town in Darjeeling was thus firmly established.

Economic activities of Darjeeling as a growth center had started assuming importance since 1840's. Fried Pinn (1986) has extensively searched the primary initiatives of the British on trial and error method for the creation of market and such other economic activities in Darjeeling. The Calcutta Review (1957) reported that Darjeeling market was on the whole well arranged and well stocked. The traders were mostly from the plains and the shops were erected by and remained the property of the government. Trade was free and traders were encouraged to settle in Darjeeling, Tibetan traders were also given separate space for trade. By the end of the 19th century a considerable number of tea gardens did come up resulted the growth

of economic activities in Darjeeling. The other influences of the development of tea industries in Darjeeling were found in the improvement of transportation system and road development. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway that was opened in 1881 practically ushered in a new era of transport economy. Since Darjeeling was designated as the Summer Seat of Bengal Government, administrative functions gave an additional filler to the growth and rise of economic activities in Darjeeling.

Even since inception Darjeeling has had to witness both the positive and negative impacts of urbanization. The physical, the natural and climatic hazards, social and economic and political dimensions of such impacts have been elaborated in different chapters of the study. The vulnerability of Darjeeling, the Finance and nature of local governance are some of the important areas which need immediate special attention. The broader issue is of the capacity of Darjeeling to be able to deal with changes that are taking place both within and without. The question may be raised whether Darjeeling related socio-administrative institutions have the capacity to deal with the demands and pressures that are being generated in Darjeeling as a result of the above changes. Decay in the institutional cultures is a serious phenomenon.

Thus the primary concerns are: erosion in the institutional structures and cultures; globalization led market and products have started destroying some of the finest indigenous, cultural, social and

economic practices, non-recognition and un-awareness on sustainable development parameters, haphazard and overwhelming unplanned and rampant growth of constructions making Darjeeling a “Construction Jungle”. The development of a town like Darjeeling needs to be addressed with new development paradigms and alternative unique policy interventions. The real challenge as perceived by Professor M.P. Lama (2007), in Darjeeling hills is of human security created out of a unique colonial and post-colonial metamorphosis. If any one continues to ignore such challenges, social instability and political turmoil are inevitable.

III

It has been revealed from the that the town of Darjeeling was initially developed on the ideology of differentiation between the ‘hills’ and ‘plains’ which was naturalized and cementised not only physically but also socially, culturally, and even politically. During colonial period, Darjeeling was nurtured and administered with this objective differentiation. This idea of difference did work well both among the hill men and among the westernized middle class urbanites settled in Darjeeling. The end result was the cold response of the hill people in the national freedom of India. The symbols of Indian nationalism could not make its mark in the Darjeeling hills. Neither the Indian nationalists were prepared to make any political communication network nor the hill people were interested to be communicated by those symbolic identities of nationalism. The only

effort of the communists to make their presence felt in the trade unions of the tea gardens. Thus the so called hill-plains divide which exists till date has its own historicity in respect of Darjeeling hills.

The study further reveals that an epicentric position would not be able to point out how the social, cultural and political movements at the local level did develop with a distinctiveness and identities of its own independent of so called pan-Indian social order which is simply a post-colonial phenomenon. The post-colonial society, history and politics of Darjeeling need to be understood keeping in view these regional dimensions in mind. The post-colonial urban Darjeeling has been shaped and reshaped by projecting its own distinctiveness in the form of a concrete identity as well as by integrating itself with pan-Indian socio-cultural and political identities. If one adopts this perspective, it would be adequately revealed that Darjeeling hills although distinctive and differentiated from the plains curtail does have a symbiotic relationship with the plains. It is certainly not hill-plains divide but hills and plains coordination shall shed light to the further growth of the "Queen of the Himalayas".

Some absorptive analysis of socio-cultural and political setting of Darjeeling should not be out of place to present here. The local ethnic composition of Darjeeling had undergone a sea change since the middle of the 19th century till the present time. The local Lepchas and few Bhutias were outnumbered by a large scale migrated

Nepalese. Because of the dominant presence of Nepali people, Nepali language gradually forged a bond of cultural identity. The local Lepchas, Bhutias and other small tribes slowly but ultimately accepted Nepali as the lingua franca in Darjeeling hills. Interestingly, the ethnic identity of Nepali strove to cut across the indigenously developed economic stratification and tried to express itself in two distinct streams. First, the language identity and second, multi-dimensional socio-economic and ethnic identities culminated to various forms autonomy movement in the name of Gorkha nationalism at the regional continuum.

The move to improve Nepali language was initiated by the Christian Missionaries at Serampur in Hoogly district of Bengal during the 1820's as had been referred in the study. In 1918, Calcutta university recognized Nepali as a vernacular language. With the expansion of Nepali as medium of instruction in some public educational institutions, the enlightened Nepali community began to assert itself to have the ethnic cultural identity. Along with the growth of literary movement for Nepali cultural identity, ethnic exclusiveness was also expressed through the demands for autonomy in Darjeeling which were not always homogenous in nature (A. Dasgupta 2001). First, the retired army nepali personnel, policemen supported by landed aristocrats and rich traders voiced their memorandum in 1907 pleading for Darjeeling to be kept outside of Bengal. Second, the Hillmen Association under the

stewardship of Ladenla submitted a memorandum demanding a separate administrative unit comprising "the present Darjeeling district and the portion of Jalpaiguri District which was annexed from Bhutan in 1865". Another petition was placed by them in 1934.

In addition to above two dimensions, another demand for autonomy was formulated by the educated middle class of Darjeeling. The effort was to nourish the incipient Nepali nationalism in the name of Nepali language and literature. The Fourth type of demand for autonomy grew out of Communist led movements of the Nepali working class engaged in tea plantations. As far as the demands for autonomy of Darjeeling was concerned, the Communist stood for regional autonomy. During 1940's the Gorkha League began to put forward the demand for autonomy with a broader social base. The fifth dimension took shape in the post-colonial Darjeeling. The various types of demands for autonomy of Darjeeling started converging in the 1950's and in 1960's. The interventions of certain factors resulted in a shift of emphasis in the movements for autonomy in Darjeeling and gradually the demand for a separate Gorkhaland as an independent unit and thereafter as a part of pan-Indian policy come to the forefront. The violent movement led by Gorkha National Liberation Front came to a temporary pause soon after the establishment of Gorkha Hill Council. During the initial years of this millennium, the GNLFF movement was renewed with vigour and both the central and state of West Bengal have principally

agreed to include Darjeeling in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, providing thereby an autonomous council after bringing amendments to the Constitution.

All these social and political pre-requisites have amply proved that the 'Queen of the Himalayas' has to experience with a tremendous process of historical, social, economic and political metamorphosis. Urban Darjeeling has never been an isolated reality, rather it had been and still has been the center of every activity, be it political, cultural, social, ethnic or economic in nature. The essence of the entire discourse points to the fact that the history of Darjeeling as a major hill station and administrative headquarters during colonial regime and the most urbanized 'city' of the Eastern Himalayas during post-colonial phase always provides a space for further research for understanding Darjeeling in general and urban Darjeeling in particular to have a perception of knowing India's social history not from its epicentric viewpoints but from specificities of Indian social life. In the ultimate analysis, such attempts would approve the proposition that Indian society has been in the true sense the society of societies cutting across their location and growth either in center or at the peripheries.