

CHAPTER -5
**POST COLONIALISM AND THE RESPONSE OF THE HILL WOMEN TO THE
QUESTION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS IN
THE HILLS OF DARJEELING.(1947- 1985)**

Dismantling of colonialism in the form of European overseas colonies was one of the most spectacular events of the twentieth century. This took place after a nationalist upsurge followed by freedom struggle in India, Africa and other parts of Asia. Various campaigns of anti-colonial resistance took forms ranging from legal and diplomatic high grounds of principle and procedure to wars of independence. The ending of colonial rule created high hopes for the newly independent countries and for the inauguration of a proper post colonial era.¹ The Indian independence ushered in post colonial changes in the colonial enclave of Darjeeling hills which had its impact on the changing identity of its natives and installed in them an awareness of their ethnic identity and this has been examined in two parts. The first deals with the rise of the ethnic factor and the role of the women. The second part is about the quest for their economic rights in the period 1947-85. The work at the same time also focuses on some colonial legacy that was apparent in the period of study.

To put it simply post colonial era implies the transition of a society predominantly white ethnic group to one that is multiracial.² While colonialism in Darjeeling hills indicated a system of domination between the ruler and the subjects, in the post colonial period the 'other' that is the native men and women of the hills are no longer geographically distanced but within and over time significantly shaping the landscape, culture, politics of the area. The study undertaken tries to examine the native hill women and their response to the new socio- historic pressure, political concepts that have shaped modern history- democracy, nationalism, citizenship, issues such as race, gender, ethnicity which have redrawn the limits of older conceptions of community, individual and nation.³ Profound changes like decolonization and the massive upheavals that followed such movement of the people has led to instabilities,⁴ changes which have made the old western narratives of progress and reason inadequate for addressing contemporary realities and problems. Post colonial writings have been a challenging response to these pressures even as it offers a means to the native men and women of

speaking of them. Therefore the term colonial and post colonial are key analytic categories, which are used for periodisation of history and the fundamental shift that takes place in stated relations, capital, classes, modes of governance when the voice of the 'other' is no longer silent. It is against this backdrop of changes in the power structure of the once colonized hills of Darjeeling after the official end of colonialism as well as colonialism's continuing effect,⁵ that the rise of the native women has to be studied. For post colonial studies of any kind does not enjoy a panoptic distance from colonial history but exists as an aftermath, as an after-after being worked over by colonialism. It is the image reflected by the east in the mirror the west holds for them. As a result post colonial criticism has forced a rethinking, reformulation of knowledge and social identities authored and authorized by colonialism and western domination.⁶

Critics regard post colonial studies to be a continuity of colonialism, a heritage of imperialism in a deconstructive case therefore even a 'bogus' as new field of studies to some scholars. They argue that for those of us from formerly colonised countries are able to communicate with each other, with other nationalities all over the world as we have access to the culture of imperialism.⁷ Some critics go further to regard the term post colonial to be a fiction, a cover-up of a dangerous period in our lives. For each region has its own peculiar features as the point of contact with imperialism differed hence generalization is difficult to apply for all colonized people. Nonetheless post colonialism is an umbrella term that covers critical approaches which deconstructs European thought in areas as wide –ranging as philosophy, history, literature, anthropology, sociology and political science. In this perspective the term post colonialism refers not to a simple periodization but rather to a methodological revision which enables a wholesale critique of western structure of knowledge and power, particularly those in the post-enlightenment period.⁸

The importance of post colonial studies is that it focuses especially on the psychological orientation of the people that are the products of those conditions.⁹ Post colonial studies have dealt most significantly with cultural contradictions, ambiguities and ambivalence in which women of the Third World have been placed. The use of western or 'white' concepts of gender to characterize the 'Third World Women' often resulted in

reproducing Orientals, racist and colonial discourse.¹⁰ Women of the developing countries have challenged the earlier feminist concepts and the manner the 'Third World Women' were labeled as a singular, monolithic, paradigmatically victimized subjects.¹¹ Therefore in the writings after 1960s the raced, sexed colonized women have begun to speak for the first time and they now claim an original authority to represent themselves.

They are emergent discourses about the break up of masterful subjectivity and the emergence of the inappropriate or "Other." Post colonialism thus emphasizes on the break up of the unitary subject be it man, woman, worker and argues for alternative notions of identity and power. Post colonial critiques have forced white feminist to re-examine the female subjects of their writings and to theories the complexities of gendered and race subjectivities.¹² The 'other' in the post- colonial studies is vocal and expresses strong views growing out of the Hegelian 'master-slave relationship.'¹³ Post colonial studies with regard to the hills of Darjeeling indicates that the question of Gorkha identity among its people was born out of colonial and later neo- colonial rule. It must be pointed out that both colonial and post colonial discourses refer to the dynamics of ethnic identity, race, gender or sexuality. For long ethnicity has been associated exclusively with people of colour, a property inherent in, conferred upon or claimed by people who have been subject to colonial diasporas as in the case of Darjeeling. The discussions of ethnicity is also associated with a discussion of women studies as they are the biological 'carriers of the race' and they occupy a primary and complex role in representing ethnicity.¹⁴ Therefore Post colonial movements of any kind involving ethnic issues cannot be disassociated from the response of the women as in the case of Darjeeling hills.

Looking back at the history of Darjeeling it is seen that the idea of having a separate state or 'Gorkhastan' began to haunt the people who were unsure of their future prior to independence. The legal status of the ceded land of Darjeeling hills remained ambiguous when India became independent. From the 14th to the 18th of August 1947, the Pakistan flag fluttered in the Town Hall of Darjeeling town. The confusion and speculation ended when it was replaced by the Indian tricolor flag.¹⁵ The major

political parties in the hills were the Congress, the Gorkha League and the Communist party of India. The Congress had a moderate following among its members. Among them were Mr. D. B. Pariyal, Mr. Gaga Tshering, Mr. Paras Mani Pradhan, Mr. Dambar Singh Hingman, Mrs Parvati Basnet, Mrs S. Chettrini, Mr. Bir Bahadur, Mrs Maya Devi Chettri, Mrs Putulidevi Poddar, Mrs Helen Ahmed, Mrs D. G. Darnal, Mr. Sarju Poddar, Mrs D. Babuni, Mr. Mangal Singh Prasad, Mr. Punya Prakash, Mr. Naukul Chettri, Mr. Yang Bhutia, Mr. Dawa Norbula, Mr. Madan Thapa, Mrs Usha Chettri, Mr. Prakash Sunam, Mr. Gopal Mothay, Me. Puran Karki, Mr. Narasingh Karki, Mr. Dorjay Tamang, Mrs D. Yonzone, Mr. Theodore Menon, Smt. B. Bahadur, Mr. And Mrs. Panchakothi, Mr. D. B. Ghatraj, Dr. (Mrs) S. Kazi, Mrs S. Sitling, Mrs D. Domala, Mrs. Narmaya Singh, Mrs Paru Rai (Pradhan) and Mrs Mariam Banu.¹⁶

Women members in the Congress party all over India and in Darjeeling expressed their dissatisfaction with the patriarchal attitude of the Congress and the secondary role that was accorded to them. They now wanted to play greater roles in the party functions, as they got involved like the male counterparts, even if their number was small compared to them. They realized just like the African women that they could not wait at the edges of political parties, hoping that some crumbs would fall into their outstretched hands, for which they should be grateful. For them the political platform was to be used to make demands and mobilize energies, to participate in the transformation processes in the post- colonial period, which were the windows of their future.¹⁷ Having participated in the anti- colonial struggle or maybe having associated with the ideals of that struggle these Congress women became candidates for a new and promising identity that of being a citizen of Darjeeling on the same footing with the men. For them joining politics was all about accessing power to secure rights and resources and defending their hard won gains and achievements. The Congress in the hills was active on the question of getting recognition for the Nepali language and demanding a Union Territory status for Darjeeling through speeches, party politics and taking active role in the election campaigns.¹⁸

A powerful wing of the Congress organized by the hill women was the All India Women's Conference established in 1947 at Maya Bose's house in Gandhi Road.

The key members who organized it were Mrs. J. B. Thapa, Mrs Ghatraj, Mrs. S. Sitling, Mrs. Parvati Basnet, Kharkani, Dr.(Mrs.) S. Kazi and Miss Tukku Bose all belonging to the Congress Party. ¹⁹The A. I. W. C. organization was a purely social body dealing with official works concerning charity and social drives. The first office was set up at the Red Cross building and then shifted to the Bhutia Association office at the old Hayden Hall site. Membership increased and a peculiar trend noticeable in the A. I. W. C. was that women of different political background joined the organization and worked as a team for social projects.²⁰

The office records show that the members were Mrs Lakpa Sherpa, Mrs Tendupla Bhutia, Smt. Tshering Sherpa, Mrs Nanda Kumari Singh, and Miss R. Bose, Mrs.L. B. Singh, Mrs D.K. Sinha, Mrs Asha Narwani, Mrs A. Dam, Mrs Darwani, Mrs Narayan Das, Mrs Bhaktasila Bomjan, Mrs L. P. Mrs Sharma Chatlani, Mrs Uma Sagariya, Mrs Gunkasari Pradhan, Mrs Jung, Mrs A. T. Edwards, Mrs Ganga Devi Sevakoti, Mrs Bina Nandani, Mrs Sunita Tamang, Mrs T. Menon, Mrs T. B. Singh, Mrs Hari Maya Thapa, Mrs. Wangdi, Mrs Khanti Chatterjee, Mrs Shoba Khatoon, Mrs Fatima Khatoon, Mrs Zubeda Khatoon, Mrs Radha Mukhia, Mrs Ganga Darnal, Mrs D. Yonzone, Mrs Panchakoti, Mrs Pemba Doma, Mrs Vishnu Maya Pradhan, Mrs R. Nissa Khatoon, Mrs Chandana Mitra, Mrs K. Kushery, Dr. (Mrs) P. Pradhan, Mrs Hira Narwani, Mrs Lobsang Choden, Mrs Durga Devi, Miss L. MacGillivray and Mrs Chitranath.²¹

The large number of women participants in the A. I. W. C. is a pointer to the fact that joining a political party had become quite popular. In this organization the ladies were taught jam making, first aid, rifle training cookery and spoken English. Charity shows were organized to build up the fund for a new office, which was bought during the governorship of Padmaji Naidu at the present site at N. P. road. The organization worked selflessly in helping the poorest of the poor women and children of the hills by holding knitting and tailoring classes, providing crèches for a batch of 20- 30 children aided by two helpers; a primary school and language classes.²²

Independence Day celebration was organized every year with the help of the A. I. W. C. Food was served at the T. B. Sanatorium. Its members formed part of the

Town's Citizen Committee for relief works and also took part in the Project Implementation Committee under Dr. Guha Majumdar of Victoria hospital . Members like Dr. Phulmani Pradhan, Dr. Kazi, Mrs. Prem, Mrs Khanti, Mrs S. Sitling and Mrs. P. Basnet visited rural health centers providing nurses and medicine, new rural centers were set up at Teesta and Pankhabari. Government's help to this organization had been in the nature of providing milk powder and oats for the poor children and sponsoring projects dealing with knitting classes or some educative workshops on the legal rights of women, health and nutrition. Sometimes the A.I.W.C. members of Darjeeling also joined in the seminars conducted by the Women's Co-coordinating Council of West Bengal.²³

Although the Congress was the largest political party in India it was the smallest in the hills of Darjeeling. Here the Communist Party (CPI) was able to organize themselves better than the Congress party. It had a very large membership in the 150 tea gardens of Darjeeling District under the leadership of Ratanlal Brahman.²⁴ The pampering of nationalist feelings in Darjeeling by demanding Gorkhastan was a game of expediency. The CPI leaders were aware of the reality of the ethnic nationalities in India and they knew that the only way to success was the road of ethnicity as language of 'class' was too high flown for the tea garden labourers. The CPI advocated regional autonomy for the ethnic groups in the 1950s and they continued to hold on to this concept even after the CPI and CPI(M) division occurred in the 1960s. It helped them to establish themselves in the hill areas and form a strong cadre.

The CPI(M) was well organized having a District Secretary, Treasurer and Council Secretary and local secretaries in charge of each hill town, having 46 branch committees. The Darjeeling tea gardens were under the Darjeeling District Kaman Mazdoor Union. Female membership was high in the Communist Party. In 1950s, 69% of the total women members were women in the tea belts. The women wing of the Communist Party known as Akhil Bharatiya Maila Samiti functions under its own President, Secretary and Working Committee of 7-11 members.²⁵ Under the Communist Party it was rather a matter of crucial importance that women by claiming for themselves a distinct identity demonstrated their ability to speak out, hold

meetings and carry out the party orders. The Communist Party had by this time bound them sufficiently close to its policies to ensure widespread support in the tea gardens. They struggled to win economic rights for medical, maternity leave and child welfare scheme made them all the more political conscious and they joined the trade union movement in the hills showing leadership qualities. The third largest party in Darjeeling was the All India Gorkha League with a number of women members like Mrs Sarkini Chettri, Mrs Prem, Mrs Ganu Giri, Mrs Kunti, Mrs Bela Tamang, Mrs Pampha Gurung, Mrs Lalita Chettri and Mrs Bhaktasila Bomjan who openly supported party policies. ²⁷ The aim of this political party was to give continuous hope to Nepalese for regional autonomy and recognition of the Nepali language in VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution as one of the national languages.

The year 1948 was a controversial year when the local unit of the Communist Party in Darjeeling advocated the creation of Greater Nepal comprising Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling and Dooars but the vast majority of the Gorkha people did not understand this Pan-Gorkha concept or support the demand. In 1949 the Indo- Bhutan Treaty confirmed and ratified the past treaties including the Treaty of Sinchula of 1865 under which Kalimpong and Dooars had been ceded to British India. In the following year the Indo- Nepal Treaty however mentioned the word cancelled with regard to all previous treaties, agreements and engagements between the British Government and the Government of Nepal as noted down in the appendix number XVIII. The implication of this cancellation of earlier treaties including the Treaty of Sugauli amounted to a restoration of the status quo ante and virtually received the original ownership of Nepal over the areas ceded to the British prior to the Indo- Nepal Treaty of 1950. There was a rise in the feeling of a separate identity from Bengal, ethnicity among the majority of the people of Darjeeling, which had germinated during colonial rule itself. As a result in the post- colonial period the political parties in the hills clamoured for a separate identity. The Gorkha League submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister Sri. J. Nehru on the 29th of April 1952 during his visit to Kalimpong that the District should be administered directly by New Delhi as a separate unit together with Dooars and Assam. Similarly demands were made to the State Reorganization Committee when its delegates visited Darjeeling in 1955. The Communist Party of India echoed the same

sentiment and their memorandum declared that the change of 1947 hardly brought any difference in the lives of the Nepalese nationals or the hill people of the District in spheres of political, economic or social. It was just a show or an outer appearance of placing Darjeeling under West Bengal. No alteration was visible but the same old domination of the Nepalese nationals by the people of another nationality. The old suppression of the Nepali language still persisted. "There is a calculated and studied absence of any outlook in India and West Bengal's policy with regard to the Nepali speaking people to help them develop as a nationality so that they could ultimately govern themselves."²⁷

Besides the regional autonomy issues, the demand for a separate state, the question of Nepali language was very important in the post-independence era. Right from the beginning of the post-colonial period the hill people of Darjeeling were demanding Nepali language be accorded the status of an official language in the District. According to Parasmani Pradhan Nepali language was taught as an Indian language at Fort William before 1820. By 1918 Nepali was included in the list of vernacular and Sindhi language languages for the subject of composition in matriculation and B.A. exams. In 1956 when Nepali and Sindhi languages were recommended for inclusion in the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution only Sindhi language was accepted. Politicians in Darjeeling voiced their dissatisfaction. A leading Congress member of the hills Smt. Maya Devi Chettri representative of the Akhil Bharatiya Mahila Sammelen from Darjeeling, elected from the Municipality in 1948, Governing Member of various schools and Chairperson of the Sandhani Mahila Samiti, twice elected as the M. L. A. as well as the member of the Working Committee of the Congress Party (1954- 1960), gave fiery speeches in support of Nepali bhasa ²⁸ and some of her letters and speeches have been given in appendix number XIX.

When The Prime Minister of India visited Darjeeling in 1961 Maya Devi Chettri led a twenty-three member delegation to place the demand before the government. At her instance Prime Minister Nehru sent a message to Dr. B. C. Roy to include Nepali along with Bengali language as the official language. The declaration of Bengali as the official language in West Bengal on 25th February 1961 sparked off a protest march led

by Shri Ganesh Lal Subba and Shri. Inder Bahadur Rai in support of Nepali bhasa and it was organized by the Bhasa Samiti. A large procession on 31st of March 1961 led by the above personalities including men women and school children, artists, academicians, businessmen, lawyers and others. Some of them were Major J. B. Limbu, Shri. J. B. Pradhan, late T. Gomba, late Buddhiman Moktan, Mr Siddhi Narayan Pradhan, Mrs Chandramit Lepcha, Mrs Lakshmi Lohar, Mr B. K. S. Ghatraj, Mr Punya Prakash Rai, Mr Chandra Kanta Ghissing, Mr Ambar Gurung, Advocate Niladri Sarkar, Mr Amir Lama, Mr Madan. K. Thapa, Mr Hari Prasad Sharma, Mr D. S. Agarwal, Mr T. S. Gurung, Mr Durga Prasad Sharma, Mr Prem Thapa among others.²⁹ On 13th of July 1961 on the occasion of Bhanu Jayanti a hartal was observed. Each political party used the platform of 'bhasa' and 'separate identity' for attracting more supporters. In 1961 by the Language Act, Nepali was declared official language in the three sub- divisions of Darjeeling District. Credit must be given to the leaders of the bhasa movement and both men and women played a joint role in the struggle.³⁰

The years 1962- 1965 were years of war with China and Pakistan. The elections of 1967 brought forward Mrs Maitri Devi of the Congress and the veteran leader Mr Deo Prakash Narayan of the League at the forefront. Once again the demand of giving recognition to the Nepali bhasa and its inclusion in the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution was made vocal by the Bhasa Sangram Committee of Mr Guman Singh Chamling and Mr Samsher Basnet and the Congress representative Mrs. Maitri Devi. The government remained adamant. By the year 1972 the movement gathered support from the All India Bhasa Samiti and in the same year the Delhi Sahitya Academy gave recognition to Nepali bhasa. The years 1975- 1977 ushered in the period of political Emergency in the country as a result the question of 'bhasa' receded to the background.³¹

The change of government at the centre with the fall of the Congress Party in 1977 had great consequences in the hill politics. The Gorkha League member Mrs Renu Lina Subba from Kalimpong (MLA) together with other MLAs like Mr K. B. Chettri and Mr Deo Prakash Narayan demanded for the recognition of Nepali bhasa in the State Legislative Assembly. In the same year a delegation of the All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti

met the Prime Minister Moraji Desai on the 27th of September 1977 to put forward their petition. The Prime Minister told them that the inclusion of the Nepali language in the VIII schedule would open the doors to forty other tribal languages. The Nepalese should not compare themselves with the Sindhis as they were Indians who had come to India before the country's partition. While the Nepalese had come after the country's partition and had settled in different parts of the country by joining the army. His speech created an uproar in the hills and the people realized that the time had come when the issues of language and race mattered more than party loyalties. The Nepalese of the hills of Darjeeling felt insecure about the fact that their citizenship seemed to be at stake and questioned by the Indian Prime Minister. As a mark of protest Mr Inder Bahadur Rai and Mr Shiv Kumar Rai refused the Academy Puraskar given for their literary achievements.³²

The year 1980 can be termed as a watershed in the history of Darjeeling as the consciousness among the educated men and women for political issues gathered momentum. This period witnessed the entry of the women in political parties and samities with organizational and leadership skill. It was a prelude to events that followed soon changing the face of the silent, peaceful hills. The interest of the natives was aroused by the emergence of two new parties the Gorkha Liberation Front and the Pranta Parishad which ignited the Gorkhaland movement.³³ The movement definitely grew out of the search for identity which can be traced to the formation of the NEBULA during the colonial period.

Another vital aspect in the rise of socio-political awareness was the economic exploitation of West Bengal after 1947. This type of neo-colonialism in the form of exploitation of certain major resources like tea, cinchona, timber and the industry of tourism seemed to benefit the plains leaving a meager amount for the hills. Matters came to a head when the Nepalese were driven out from the North East in three waves subsequently in 1967, 1979 and 1980. As a result and the need of the hour was a suitable leader to help them search for their ethnic and cultural- linguistic identity in the future state of Gorkhaland. The Nepalese leaders voiced their need for a separate rule from Bengal, ethno- development and control of their own resources, economic and

cultural. These issues were widely debated at home and work place as a result both men and women were made aware of the gravity of the situation.

Among the hill political parties it was the GNLF (Gorkha Rashtriya Mukta Morcha) that enjoyed widespread support. It was established on the 5th of April 1980 by an ex-nayak who was an aspiring writer and politician, a member of the Akhil Bharatiya Bhasa Samiti since 1954. The green flag with the emblem of the rising sun symbolized confidence, freedom and defense later to be replaced with the khukuri. The G.N.L.F formulated its action plan in cultural, nationalist terms to secure widest possible participation. It took the form of a) abrogation of the Indo-Nepalese Treaty of 1950, b) Inclusion of the Nepali language in the VIII Schedule of the Constitution and c) a separate state. The GNLF demanded the boundaries of a separate state to run across the Sarkosh river in Assam Dooars, the Gagaliya river in the south, while retaining the old boundaries in the north and west. Fiery and inspiring messages of Shri Subash Ghising aroused political consciousness among the hill people and the green flag fluttered in almost every home.

The tea belts of Darjeeling hills changed colour from red to green in 1980 to 1984 as 50% of the women in the left the Communist Party and joined the GNLF.³⁴ This could be due to the new enthusiasm among the youth who hoped for a drastic change in the political scenario or due to a feeling of apprehension, insecurity among the older generation as a result of identity crisis. Undoubtedly the emotional scar caused by the loss of identity made the hill people react spontaneously. At this juncture it must be also be noted that the tea industry in Darjeeling in the post-independence period became crisis ridden with low productivity, financial bankruptcy and labour problem-leading to disgruntlement among the people. Both the young and old worked shoulder to shoulder in the party organization. A remarkable change seen at this juncture was the involvement of women in very large numbers along with men and this time they enjoyed societal approval. Among them was Mrs Gopi Maya Gurung, Mr B. B. Gurung, Mr C. K. Pradhan, Mr M. Moktan Smt. Hema Lama, Mrs Trilotava Rana, Mrs Mina Mukhia, Mrs Indrakala Pradhan, Mrs Bishnumati Sharma, Mr Churimani Kharka, Mr Keshab Lama, Mrs Ongmu Thapa, Mr Navin Tamang, Mr Benjamine Bhutia, Mr Tshering Sherpa, Mr Dawa Pakhrin, Mrs Durga K. Rai, Mrs Pushpa Subba. Mrs

Saraswati Tamang, Mrs Grija Lama, Mr I. N. Pradhan, Mrs Usha Nimcheki Pradhan, Mrs Ganita Waiba, Mrs Bimla Subba, Mrs Gunkesari Pradhan, and Mrs Usha Pradhan and others.³⁵ It is seen that the formation of the GNLF ushered in a new phase in the women's involvement in politics and sometimes the entire village supported its programme. It may be due to the feeling of frustration and the fear which women have for the unknown brought about by the party activities and the secret passing of speeches of the GNLF. They wanted to unite for a cause. These party members displayed considerable skill and dedication to emerge as the future leaders in society. The political forum gave them a chance to vent out their feelings and very soon both men and women party workers got recognition at all levels in the hill region of Darjeeling.³⁶

The other political parties were smaller in size compared to the GNLF and had less women members. Among them were the Pranta Parishad formed on the 8th of August 1980 led by Mr. Ramkrishna Sharma, Mr. Shyam Madan Thapa, Mr. I.B.Rai, Mr. Madan Tamang, Gajendra Gurung, Prem Thapa and Mr. Prem Thapa. They too demanded a separate state, a solution to the question of citizenship granted on the grounds of permanent residence in the hills before 1950 and stood for the cause of NEBULA in the hills. They asked Nepal, England and the United Nations for clarification and assistance.³⁷ All the parties became vocal in the eve of the Gorkhaland stir in 1981 which was triggered off when two boys were killed by the police dispersing a crowd at Chowkbazar on the 7th of September 1981 who had gathered to listen to political speeches. The two boys Krishna and Devraj Sharma were declared as martyrs for the cause of Gorkhaland. The Pranta Parishad and G.N.L.F. raised political slogans for Gorkhaland and criticized the police action at Mirik and Sukhiapokhri. The Gorkha League was much weakened after the death of its charismatic leader Mr Deoprasad Rai and the infighting within the party and remained aloof in the forthcoming elections. The Pranta Parishad boycotted election and though its mouthpiece 'Andolan' demanded Gorkhaland. The Gorkha League M.L.A. Mrs Renu Lina Subba in a dramatic manner, fired a toy pistol to draw the attention of the Vidhan Sabha of Bengal to the much neglected state of the hills and was asked to leave the State Assembly.

This event caught the headlines of the local newspapers and the Congress showed sympathy and some leaders of political parties even staged a hunger strike until the withdrawal of the suspension notice to Mrs Renu Lina Subba by the government of West Bengal. The death of the Prime Minister of India Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1984 brought a halt to all political activities for a short period of time. Satpal Maharaj revived the language issue by undertaking a procession from Gangtok to Darjeeling where he addressed a mammoth crowd that had gathered there. In 1985 leaving aside all political affiliations leaders including the fiery Mrs Renu Lina Subba (Gorkha League), Mr Ananda Patha (C.P.I.M), Mr. Dawa Norbula (Congress), Mr Shyam Thapa etc. staged a hunger strike at Calcutta demanding the Constitutional recognition of the Nepali bhasa.

The hill people heeded to the clarion call given by the G.N.L.F. leader Mr. Subash Ghising. They rallied behind him in his demand for more employment, halting of all activities associated with the transport of timber and tea to the plains. His speeches on the question of the identity of the Indian Nepalese and the need for the review of the Sugauli treaty that cast a big question on the identity of the people of the hill were acknowledged by most of the hill people. Then he raised the demand of Darjeeling being a 'no-mans' land as it was not formally incorporated constitutionally by the India were accepted by large sections of people who did not understand complicated legal matters. The Treaty of 1950 had not been explained in its correct historical perspective as the statement preceding the word cancelled was omitted as shown in the in appendix number XVIII.

The year 1985 marked a turning point in which the silent, peaceful hill station of Darjeeling suddenly changed its mood and turned violent. The aftermath of 1985 was marked by boycott of the Bhanu Puraska, fire light processions that cumulated in the publicly burning of Clause 5 of the Sugauli Treaty of 1950 between India and Nepal. The indiscriminate firing by the C.R.P.F. at the Mela ground killing bystanders and children gathered peacefully to burn the replicas of the clause led to the eruption of violence. A reign of terror was let loose, indiscriminate arrests in what was termed a 'jharoo raids' picking up even people walking on the roads, C.R.P.F. and police punishments and torture, maiming, loot and rape became the order of the day. Violence led to counter violence, that soon spread throughout the hills taking a violent turn

this led to burning down houses, social boycotts on political party lines and killing of opponents. Young and old, men and women fled their homes for fear of assault. Anyone suspected of being A G.N.L.F. supporter was picked up for questioning and many are reported to have disappeared in police custody like Barun Subba, Ajit Bharati, Kusum Pradhan to name a few.³⁸

It was at this critical juncture that the women members of the G.N.L.F. stepped forward helping the wounded and the homeless. Criticisms by other parties made the G.N.L.F. realize that besides political activities the party had to look into the of social and economic aspects. Thus, the Gorkha National Women's' Organisation (GNWO) was born as a sister organization taking over the task of looking after the wounded and their relatives. A 75-member committee for the three hill sub divisions was set up. It had a Central Committee with two branch secretaries, 2 secretaries, hospital-in-charge and convenors. The Office bearers of the Central Committee comprised of President Mrs Usha Roka, Secretary General Mrs .Indrakala Pradhan, Treasurer Mrs Sarwati Tamang' in addition the District Committee had Mrs Nim Chakey Pradhan and Mrs Meena Mukhia as Presidents of Kurseong and Kalimpong respectively and Mrs Gunkesari Pradhan the Secretary General of Darjeeling. Mrs Lakshami Rai, Mrs Kamal Rai as the secretary- in charge of the sub- divisions. Others like Mrs Gopi Maya Gurung was the Chief Convener of Darjeeling, Mrs Anurupa Lama of Kurseong and MrsLalita Shangden of Peshok.

As the atrocities of the administration became greater on the male members the voracious marches demanding release of innocent people taken into custody. Initially the activities were in the urban areas and the tea belts. The Communist Party (Marxist) tried to counter the growing influence and popularity of the G.N.L.F. which was making inroads into its strongholds in the tea gardens, by setting up its own Women's' Committee under the leadership of Mrs Aila Maya, Mrs Jus Kumari, Mrs Sushila Subba etc. They were to a certain extent successful in stalling the activities of the GNWO.³⁹The GNWO began collecting funds of Rs. 10/- from individuals in the hills, which they utilized in distributing rice and medicine. They secretly enlisted the help of the local doctors like Dr. Thaktar and his wife Dr(Mrs) Pakhrin to treated the wounded.

arrested during the agitation. Great courage were displayed by the hill women.⁴⁰ A letter by a schoolteacher of Kalimpong amply illustrates this courage, 'in Kalimpong no male member could be seen outside the house and those who were lucky had survived and fled. There was none to pick and bury the dead except women and young girls'.⁴¹ As the administration began to transfer the GNLF activist to the plains of Siliguri the GNWO took upon itself the unpleasant tasks of searching and identifying dead bodies in the morgue or in the control room of the police department to be taken back to their relatives for their last rites. The more oppressive stand the administrative took the more determined the hill women became. Rallies of women headed by leaders like Mrs Gopimaya Gurung, Mrs Hema Lama and Mrs. Nimchaki Pradhan became more and more and more a common sight and they thundered political speeches and undertook the party's propaganda, organizing pickets during strikes thereby paralyzing the entire hills.⁴²

If we examine the mass participation of the women of Darjeeling hills on a wider perspective, it can be taken as a 'quest for their identity' and making their voices heard by the State Government. While a major part of the educated intellectuals fearful of the course the movement remained 'fence sitters' and silent spectators. Though the strikes affected the daily wage earners and working mothers who had to feed their families and under constant fears of the arrest of their male relatives sons, fathers, husbands, brothers at the slightest pretext, the faith of these women remained unshaken. It was a turning point in the lives of many widows as they now became the sole breadwinners for the family and many plain school teachers or rural cultivators became the leaders of local units. The phase of agitation led to dislocation of health services like the immunization drives for children and transport was hardly available to bring the pregnant mothers from the rural areas if an emergency arose especially at night. The social set-up in the hills witnessed a silent transformation as the experience of 'gun culture' and the atrocities on the people embittered the youth and destabilized the personal relation between generations. The adolescent boys and girls became defiant, teachers in local schools had difficulty in maintaining discipline especially during

examinations.

The participation of the hill women in the Gorkhaland movement is comparable to the post colonial women's uprising in the Tebhaga agrarian movement in Bengal. These women showed great awareness by their large-scale participation in demonstrations, rallies, facing police firing with meager household equipments. The economic deprivation, negligence, developing political scenario in neighbouring states fueled by the oppressive stance taken by the Government gave the women little choice but to rally behind the leadership although the political implications of the declaration of 'no-mans land', or the burning of the 'Treaty' could not have been comprehended by the majority of the rural women who turned out in such large numbers.

For the women who took the leading role in the political movement of Gorkhaland it was the culminating point in the growth of women's leadership, the dormancy of which had broken through their participation in the earlier ethnic movement in the post colonial period in search of their identity. The '*andolan*' period starting from 1980 was a precursor of new developments in the role of the hill women. One is astonished by the tremendous initiative that hill women took in the post colonial period phases of direct action as well as in organizational matters of the local bodies. Inclusion of women as party workers recognizing their inherent strength definitely brought about a change in the status of the women in Darjeeling. However, although the women had been recognized as a formidable force, and took frontal activity in the movement, yet very few direct benefit are in the offering for them in the aftermath of the movement. This has led to growing disillusionment and discontent leading to the resignation of several women leaders from their posts.

In conclusion it may be said that although the women's participation in hill politics have been guided more by general interests than by the 'primary concern for women's issues' except perhaps in the tea belts, the concept of a women as a docile silent onlooker during the colonial period has changed. The hill women has made it clear that they can now highlight issues that concerns them by themselves and can organize and take part in decisive roles as exhibited in the search for ethnic-identity and status in

hill society. It is but recently that young educated women aware with latest social and political trends have begun to spearhead a shift towards individualism, amongst a vast majority in rural areas who still finds difficulty to transcend traditional social barriers and conditioning of generations. Nevertheless, the forces working to alter this role of women in the hill society politics, economics and education are already evident.

Thus, the colonial discourse of ignoring the resistance power, thinking voice of the native people⁴³ needs to be reexamined. For if it be true, then the native has no history and cannot speak, the subalterns as females is even more deeply in shadows.⁴⁴ The Post colonial studies on the women of Darjeeling hills must take into account 'rethinking of values and knowledge generated by de-colonization'⁴⁵ and the experience of the hill women in this regard to migration, suppression, resistance, differences, race, gender and conditions arising after the historical end of colonization⁴⁶ in the hills. Both native men and women were excluded in the politics of the colonial masters and it remained so for most of the hill women even in the postcolonial period. As a result they have less stake in the ideologies or political positions on which these conflicts thrive. At the same time it is precisely these political upheavals that brings about a dramatic shift in the traditional isolated role of women and their involvement, their relationship to the shifting terms of race, nation, and identity has produced positions from which the hill women can articulate alternative representation of radical thinking. This gradual social transformation is evident from women changing their identity gradually from the 'invisible' force to the 'visible performer' in search of their identity.

5.2. THE HILL ECONOMY AND THE RESPONSE OF WOMEN:

This quest for female identity in the hills, revolving around emancipation, which is equated with the absence of gender discrimination, equal pay and opportunity especially in the tea belts now becomes the subject for discussion. One important question that arises here is whether the postcolonial society in the hills of Darjeeling is still negotiating with the enduring legacies like the failure of tea management and the rise of unionism. The ideology of management itself faces a crisis and the roots of this is firmly embedded in the colonial management of the tea gardens and the

alienation of the workers especially the women who turned hostile. In fact like other movements involving female participation at a large scale for instance the jute mill worker's strikes of 1928 –1929 at Howrah, the Tebhaga or the poor peasant cultivator's uprising of 1946- 47, the Chipko movement of 1972. In Darjeeling too it is seen that when women workers are aroused to take militant actions they are tenacious in the pursuit of their goals. It is much harder to get the women to strike than men but once they are out it is much harder to get them back to normal life. It was their participation in strikes and lockouts in spite of extreme hardship that posed as a daunting task for the government.

Men and women workers in the tea plantations have the same problems but in the case of women they are compounded because they happen to be women. These women are doubly exploited not so much by the men folk as by a male management which takes advantages of their being a women to deprive them of what is legitimately their due whether in Assam or in Darjeeling hills. A study of the hill economy will reveal that the tea industry in West Bengal is an important part of state economy and of the Indian tea industry. While production of tea in West Bengal had increased from 78,158, 000 in 1951, to 129, 188, 000 kg in 1980 the labour force in this agro industry had decreased from 322, 679 in 1952, 266,753 in 1953, 236,674 in 1959 to 213, 000 in 1980.⁴⁷ In other words, while the production increased by 40% and the labour has decreased by about 35%..⁴⁸ Statistics provided by the Tea Board as shown in the table 5.1 below provides the number of employment in different part of West Bengal.

TABLE 5.1. NUMBER OF PEOPLE EMPLOYED IN THE TEA GARDENS DURING 1976,1981 AND 1985

AREA	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT FIGURES		
	1976	1981	1985
DARJEELING	47,481	45,640	40,679
TERAI	18,304	18,605	25,185
DOOARS	1,38,192	1,41,770	1,50,375
WEST BENGAL	2,04,750	2,06,833	2,16,239
ALL INDIA	7,35,423	7,61,214	7,77,401

(SOURCE: Tea Board Statistics, 1976-1985).

In spite of inherent legacies a change was bound to come about in the post colonial era regarding the unequal payment between sexes in plantation work. The main reason was the new set of production relations that developed. It was political pressure that forced the government to provide protection and security of employment to the workers. Trade unions began to function among them enabling the workers to fight for their economic rights. Women worker felt stronger by joining the trade union activities of the Communist Party of India. The dearness allowance and ration given to workers in the year 1947 as stated by the official enquiry was as shown in table number XXIII in the appendix.⁵²The Darjeeling Planters Association issued ration at the rate to the workers in their member gardens in 1947 as given below in Table 5.2.

TABLE 5.2. RATION ISSUED BY THE DARJEELING PLANTERS ASSOCIATION TO THE MEMBER GARDENS IN 1947.

Workers	Rate	Rice /Atta/ Dal	Dal / Mustard
Men /Women	Rs 8 per	3 seer, 8 chtk	
Dependant	"	2 seer, 10 "	
Children	"	1 seer, 5 "	
	Rs 6/9		Per seer
	Rs 50/		Per maund

Source- The Darjeeling Planters Association. 1947.

In 1952 the dearness allowance was increased by 1½ annas for the adults and by 1954 it was raised to 2 annas and 1¾ annas for children.⁵³ Women members of the Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha affiliated to INTUC or the Mahila Samiti affiliated to the CPI(M) demanded equal wage payment, of bonus and gratuity, ration at concessional rates, provision for housing, recreational schooling , fuel and maternity benefits. However, as compared to the terai of West Bengal and Assam the pay was less in the hills of Darjeeling though the tea produced sold a very much higher rate.⁵⁴ The data for the comparative wages for the field and factory workers in Darjeeling hills and the comparison of this region to Assam and Terai has been made in tables number XXIV and XXV in the appendix.

Women earning came closely behind the male worker with 42.17% in the hill gardens as shown by the data given in Table 5.3.a & b.

TABLE 5.3 CONTRIBUTION OF VARIOUS GROUPS TOWARDS EARNING A LIVELIHOOD IN THE TEA GARDENS 1962 (a)

Group	Contribution in Rs	Cash income in comparison	Number of earnings	Cash income per earning
Male	9.96	51.16%	1.07	9.31
Women	8.21	42.16%	0.99	8.29
Adolescence	0.83	4.26%	0.15	5.53
Children	0.47	2.41%	0.12	3.92
Total	19.47	100	2.33	8.36

TABLE 5.3. CONTRIBUTION OF VARIOUS GROUPS TOWARDS EARNING A LIVELIHOOD IN THE TEA GARDENS 1962 (b)

Group	Basic	D.A.	Total
Male	1.05	0.40	1.45
Women	1.00	0.40	1.40
Children	0.50	0.30	0.80

(Source-Survey of the Living Condition of the Tea Plantation in Darjeeling Hills. Tea Board of India. 1962.Calcutta.)

Other than this benefit the trade unions still had to fight for the cause of equal remuneration of the garden workers. The records of the Ging factory shows that in the year 1972 men were paid Rs 2.62 as the basic, women received Rs 2.51 and children got Rs 1.38 and in 1975 it increased to Rs 2.82, Rs 2.72 and Rs 1.481/2 respectively.⁵⁵ The unequal wage structure in all tea plantations persisted in West Bengal, Tamilnadu, Assam and Kerala till 1976 as evident from the table (5.3 b) given above. The passing of the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 for plantations was a victory for the trade unionism of the tea garden workers in Darjeeling. The Labour Ministry clarified that Equal Remuneration Act applied to equal nature of work and not to the volume of work. Thus the factory records of Ging tea estate shows that in the year 1978 the basic payment for the men was Rs 5.92, women received Rs 5.81 and children were given Rs 3.04.⁵⁶

Wage payment still differed between the hills and the plains. In 1982 the workers in the Dooars got the following wages- the male workers received Rs 9, the Terai male worker received Rs 14 while the male worker from Darjeeling hills received only Rs 8.62. Women who formed half the labour force were paid Rs 17 paisa less in Dooars and

Terai and 11 paise less in Darjeeling hills. Workers were also given subsidized ration and fuel as part of their wages and this worked out to Rs 1 per day, as average of Rs 260 in cash per month. But the female worker in the Terai and Darjeeling hills received less.⁵⁷ Therefore a female tea worker's pay was substantially lower than the workers in jute, textile and coal mining industries. The cinchona plantation paid Rs 27.88 to adults, Rs 24.22 to adolescence in 1982-83.⁵⁸ The tea Board Statistics of 1985-86 of the Tea Board India records the employment of 8330 men and 27008 women in the hill region of Darjeeling and the payment given to daily rated adults workers varied between Rs 10.87 to Rs 10.12 per day.⁵⁹

Other than wage payment the management is bound to spend on medical facilities, housing, food concessions, educational and recreational facilities for the workers. They had been lukewarm in their response to the concerns of women welfare. At the dawn of independence the tea gardens of Darjeeling having a large resident population remote from the towns and villages witnessed the absence of any medical statutory regulations. As a result the discharge of these obligations by different employers varied widely and in many cases conditions were not satisfactory according to official visits.⁶⁰ It was pointed out that although the West Bengal; Benefit (Tea Estate) Act of 1949 had fixed the rate at 12 annas a day, the period of benefit was extended to 12 weeks i.e. 6 weeks before confinement and six week after confinement. Although no samples were collected it was observed that neither the period of benefit nor the amount of allowance was rigidly followed in some gardens but left to the discretion of the managers.⁶¹ In 1953 special inspection carried out to investigate into a complaint regarding alleged non-granting of ante-natal maternity claims ascertained that the women worker did not submit the notice of confinement in proper time. In another case the non payment of maternity benefit was justified by the management on the third case was acknowledged by the authorities and the pretext was financial inability to pay the worker.⁶² These cases showed the weak position of women tea pluckers and the apathetic attitude of the management – a reminiscence of the colonial ethos.

Thus the unmistakable imprint of colonialism was evident in the early decades of the twentieth century. Their condition was vulnerable even under the new management.

The following year the party pressure of the trade unions forced the management to establish a maternity clinic at Badamtam tea estate at the cost of Rs 150,000 and a segregated female ward at Mohorgong tea estate at the cost of Rs 75,000.⁶³ New female wards were added to Rydak tea estate and the Good Hope tea estate plus 45 estates provided for pucca crèches near factory premises.⁶⁴

It was only through the labour movements that the women found a platform and the apparent tendency to deprive them of the antenatal period on the plea that the notice in writing or verbal communication not given disappeared to a large extent.⁶⁵ The claims made by women tea workers for the years 1953, 1955, 1956 and 1957 have been displayed in table number XXVI in the appendix. The total amount of maternity benefit paid during the year 1957 was Rs 789,110 against Rs 726,801 in the previous year.⁶⁶ New indoor hospitals were in operation in the tea gardens and provision for ante-natal and post-natal care for women was provided. Hospitals in some gardens provided free food, medicine free of cost. Arrangements were also made to send workers to the nearest local hospital. Mobile crèches were also provided in some cases. With the backing of the trade unions the number of claims entertained in some hill gardens in 1957 were as follows given in table number 5.4

TABLE 5.4 COMPLAINT FROM THE TRADE UNIONS ON BEHALF OF WOMEN WORKERS 1957.

Complains in respect of	Nature of Complaint	Action taken and result
1. Sepoydhara Tea Estate	Non payment of maternity benefit	Investigated and settled.
2. Moondakote Te Estate	Less payment of maternity benefit	"

Government of West Bengal Labour Department- Annual Report of the Administration of the Bengal Maternity Benefit Act, (Tea Estate) 1948, in the Tea Plantations in West Bengal for the year 1957.)

At this juncture it has been pointed out by official sources that it was through collective action of the workers forum that the female tea workers found a platform as a result the apparent tendency to deprive the entitled women the benefits especially in respect of the ante-natal period on the plea that the notice in writing or orally in person was not given, disappeared to a large extent. It had been earlier said that the vast bulk of mortality in the tea gardens was not caused by the lack of simple medical facilities but the result of conditions arising from poor diet, inefficient sanitation, contamination

and insufficient water supply and the general ignorance of the workers. The unbalanced diet of 90/94% cereals deficient in calcium, iron, vitamin A and C and tuberculosis causes ill health and high degree of mortality.⁶⁷ Medical benefits were given by the tea managements in the form of cash.⁶⁸

From 1960 certain incentives were offered to the females for example if they plucked leaves above the fixed sum, the extra pice of Rs 1 per kg was given to them and overtime payment if they worked for more than 8 hours. If they were engaged in factory work like sorting out leaves or in the cleaning of the factory then they were entitled to pay- of- post.⁶⁹ Yet modernization has put an additional burden on women by increasing the number of working hours leaving less time for childcare.⁷⁰

The work of the early trade union movements was carried forward by the G.N.W.O, the women's wing of the GNLFF which formed Sabha and Prasabha committee at different villages and they were the driving force behind the empowerment of women demanding economic rights for the females. The workers were provided with a house kutcha in nature with the G.I sheets planks, tarpaulin sheets during monsoons and off time to repair their houses. Essential items like umbrellas, chappals, doko, firewood and ration was given to the workers.⁷¹ Foodgrains included 1 kg rice per week and 3 kg 700 gms of wheat, coal weighing 4 maunds and 700 gm of tea leaves per year to all workers.⁷² Medicines were not supplied but workers get reimbursement for it if they produce the bills.⁷³

Neglect of women's issues like health and childcare have been highlighted by the women's group and have forced the management in the hill gardens to have crèches although the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 stated that any plantation having 50 women workers or 20 children below six years of age has to provide a crèche with trained attendants. It should be a pucca house with suitable furniture, cradles and a washroom.⁷⁴ Every child should be given 175ml of milk and refreshments. The tea gardens of Darjeeling provide only milk and sometimes sago, puffed rice or biscuits and money equivalent to ½ kg milk for each child. ⁷⁵Part of the factory building served as a crèche and some gardens like Happy Valley even provides for a mobile crèche.⁷⁶The

provision of a regular supply of milk for the children by the management is important for the working mothers or they will have to leave their work to feed their children and this will hamper their productivity at work. In spite of difficulties of various kinds there is a process of change noticeable in the status of the hill women working in plantations. They are more aware of their economic independence and can voice their grievances to the management.

At present the women workers in the hill plantations are not only daily rated tea pluckers but are also employed as supervisors or Kamjaris in charge of a section of workers. The Makaibari tea gardens had 8 Kamjaris in their pay roll.⁷⁷ They are also employed as nurses, Lady Welfare Officers, crèche attendants, daffadars and head clerks like Mrs. Vishnu Sharma, Mrs Pawita, Mrs Manrupa Gurung, Mrs Bidya Rai, and Miss S. Choudhury. It is a welcoming change to see the young Assistant Manager Miss Laxmi Limbu taking up the management role with great enthusiasm.

It is seen that women workers enjoy equal status with the male counterparts but there is a need for more women to be engaged in the decision making process so that they can control the benefits derived from their work and also see what policies are needed to make the most effective use of new technologies from the point of view of women so as to narrow any gender disparities. Women workers of Darjeeling have been able to identify themselves to some extent in the closing decades of the twentieth century and they have independent income to spend on their families. A notable trend among them is the formation of the Ama Samaj or the Mother's society that allows saving in a group. Each individual in turn can use the money pooled for constructive purpose like buying fowls, piglet or a calf perhaps thus increasing their side income.

Besides plantation works hill women are engaged in increasing numbers in the agro based industry of sericulture, which the Government of India under the Research National Development support scheme encouraged in these areas since 1947. Training and research centers were opened up. Sericulture activities are confined to mulberry cultivation and rearing of silk worms up to the cocoon stage after which it is collected and taken to the centers across the State. In 1983 about 2700 rural people of the

hills had taken up sericulture, 30% belonging to the backward classes. Of the 336 total number of villages under 8 blocks of the hilly region, sericulture is practiced in 104 villages in 7 blocks except Gorubathan. Sericulture is an excellent subsidiary occupation and a family with $\frac{1}{2}$ an acre of mulberry cultivation can easily earn a minimum net profit of Rs 200 a year by putting idle labour apart from doing other domestic work. With very little capital cultivation can be undertaken.⁷⁸

Other than the cultivation of mulberry plants at home the women workers in the sericulture demonstration farms are engaged in various categories. The Bijanbari Sericulture Demonstration Farms registered 23 regularised daily rated female workers in 1976-77, and 10 in 1984-85.⁷⁹ The Deputy Director of Sericulture, Darjeeling reported 8 in the clerical category, like Miss Rita Bhowmik, Mrs Monika Moktan, 4 as field assistant like Mrs Dhan Kumari Singh, 4 as field operative as Mrs Dawamit Lepcha or Miss Sarita Tamang and 7 rearers like Mrs Deoki Bardewa, Mrs Jasodha Thapa and 2 as peon and darwan and 36 regularised daily rated workers.⁸⁰ Women are engaged as technical or administrative officers like Mrs Regina Bhutia a Senior Research Officer at Kalimpong. The work in the farms includes disinfection of the rooms where the egg trays are kept. The silkworms have to be fed at regular intervals and the trays cleaned. It is a cycle of 40 days from the eggs to the cocoon stage. There are no basic problems faced by women in this industry except for the dangers to health while disinfecting the room housing the worms with bleaching powder or formalin and some may suffer from moth allergy during the period of hatching. Otherwise it is a comfortable manner to earn income.⁸¹

Women of the hills participate in many kinds of economic activities other than plantations and sericulture farms. In fact female participation in economic activities highest in the hills compared to the all India figure reflects a low, declining rate. According to the Census of Bengal 1961 the female labour participation in Darjeeling District is much higher than the State average. In the State of West Bengal 94 females per 1000 persons are workers while in Darjeeling District 301 persons per 1000 females are workers. The highest number was recorded in Pulbazar in Darjeeling hills where 48.66% of the total female population were workers. For India women participation in

the economy was 12.13% and 14.44 % during 1971 and 1981 respectively whereas, for the Darjeeling hills it was 35.37% in 1961, 28.64% in 1971 and 22.63% in 1981.⁸²

Majority of women in India, work in the unorganized sector that implies without legal protection, job security, low wages and poor working conditions. In 1971 more than 80% of the women in India were engaged in agriculture, 10.5% in Industries and 9.4 % in services making up 11.86% of the total working women's population compared to 40 % working in Japan.⁸³ A large number of the hill women are engaged in agriculture specially in the rural belts. Agriculture involves the participation of the entire family. The women usually carry out the monotonous work of planting, harvesting, weeding, threshing etc. The percentage of women involved in agriculture in North Bengal District of Districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar is given in table number XXVII in the appendix.

The percentage of female main worker in female population is very high for Darjeeling district in North Bengal in comparison to the national average of 13.99%.⁸⁴ Much larger numbers of main workers are found in Darjeeling hills in the tea belts and Jalpaiguri terai plantations compared to other sub regions of North Bengal. These main workers are the landless female labourers working in the off farm sector.⁸⁵ The percentage of female main and marginal workers in female population is also very high for Darjeeling District that is 26.37% compared to 4.12% of Cooch Behar. The percentage of non-scheduled female workers in non-scheduled female population in rural areas is high in both the hills and the plains of Darjeeling with a figure of 25.26% compared to 2.79% in Cooch Behar and the national average of 13.40% in the year 1981.

The scheduled caste and scheduled tribe female agricultural labourer is higher in Jalpaiguri than Darjeeling, the highest in India being 96.55% in Chandigarh of scheduled caste female agricultural labourer and 100% in Lunglei and Chhimituipui in Mizoram in the year 1981.⁸⁶ Among the Damais (SC) of the hills of Darjeeling 31.3% are workers of which 42.90% males and 19.79% are females of which both sexes constitute 6.51% in the agricultural sector, 12.65% as cultivators according to the census of 1981. Among the hill Bhutias the census of 1981 records 32.82% as workers and 43.60%

as males, 21.58% as females and both sexes constitutes 41.55% of the cultivators, 5.67% as agricultural labourers and other services.⁸⁷

Another major area of study in the hill economy and its impact on women constitutes the uncontrolled rapid urbanization. The decline in employment in the tea gardens resulted in migration of the population to the three urban areas of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong towns from 32253 in 1911 to 82728 in 1971. The population increased from 19003 in 1911 to 33605 in 1951 to 42873 in

1971 in Darjeeling town, Kurseong recorded a growth of 5,574 in 1911 to 11,719 in 1951 to 16425 in 1971. While Kalimpong recorded a growth 7,880 in 1911 to 16,677 in 1951 to 23,430.⁸⁸ The male population increased from 18,414 in 1951 to 22,736 in 1961 and the female population showed an increase from 15,191 in 1951 to 17,915 in 1961 in Darjeeling. Kalimpong showed an increase in the male population from 16,677 in 1951 to 25,103 in 1961 and the female population from 7,469 in 1951 to 11,155 in 1961.

While Kurseong recorded an increase of 6,387 in 1951 to 6,208 and the female population showed an increase of 5,332 in 1951 to 6,208 in 1961. The number of workers among the male in Darjeeling urban centres numbered 12908 and females numbered 2699 in 1981 compared to 20002 males and 950 females in Jalpaiguri urban areas. The number of male non-worker in Darjeeling towns numbered 17792 and females numbered 23458 in 1981 in comparison to Jalpaiguri where the figures stood at 20562 males and 34221 females.⁸⁹ Women in Darjeeling have found employment in both household and non-household sectors, showing a preference for the latter as shown by the data given in table number XXVIII in the appendix.

The census of 1961 states that the women were employed in spinning, weaving, knitting, embroidery, carpet weaving, fruit processing and preservation, block printing, sericulture, candle making, basket weaving, bee keeping, making of hats, boots, coats, bamboo crafts, bristle dressing, dairy, poultry, floriculture and piggery. Some are engaged in the handloom weaving centres as mentioned in table 5.5

TABLE 5.5. HANDLOOM WEAVING CENTRES IN THE DARJEELING HILLS (1967-1968).

NAME OF CENTRE OR UNIT	NUMBER OF LOOMS	PERSONS EMPLOYED
TIBETAN REFUGEE SELF HELP CENTRE, DARJEELING	33	82
BHUTIA ASSOCIATION, DARJEELING	9	10 (TRAINEES)
TRAINING CUM PRODUCTION CENTRE	13	25
LEPCHA CULTURAL WELFARE CENTRE, KALIMPONG	5	12
KALIMPONG ARTS AND CRAFTS INDUSTRIAL CO-OPERATION SOCIETY LTD., KALIMPONG	40	29

WEST BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETEER, DARJEELING 1980.P256.

Female workers in the handicraft centers numbered 26 in 1967.⁹⁰ The government has encouraged the mechanization of cottage industries like weaving and knitting. In 1977 the Comprehensive Area Development Corporation of West Bengal introduced new cooperative societies, which was created with the amalgamation of seven smaller societies in the project area of Kalimpong I with 2500 members of marginal, and subsistence farmers. Loans were given to alleviate the plight of women and to tap the considerable handicraft skills and resources. A two-ply knitting unit was established in 1984 with 6V-bed flat knitting machines at Pritam Road to give training and employment to a number of marginalized women hailing from the depressed classes. The finalized garments were sold at government outlets and this enabled women of the hills to earn substantial wages and support their families.⁹¹

Similar credit unions were started by the Hayden Hall of Darjeeling in 1970s and soon its membership of 5000 hill women spread out in Bijanbari, Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Loans are given to them without anyone standing as a guarantor and are utilized by the 'poorest of the poor' for poultry, bee-keeping, piggery, tea stall of selling garments by women. The Hayden Hall credit union of women has a saving deposit of 4 lakhs and all loans have been repaid. The Bikash Kendra Credit Union at Kaijal had 30 members in 1985 and each member was made to deposit Rs2 per day. These credit unions help to empower hill women by giving them a source of income and work. Mention can also be made of the organization providing soft loans to the displaced tea workers of Harsingh village, below Lebong, and thereby helping 67 families to take up dairy farming and floriculture. Hayden Hall has been successful in showing the way to alternative employment to these people facing garden lockout.⁹²

Critics like E. Boserup and Thinker point out that developments or change does not necessarily produce improvements in the status of women, rather it may foster deterioration and women in the traditional societies were better off.⁹³ Women in the informal sector as well as in their household duties have been traditionally assigned the heaviest of work like carrying water, grinding corn, heavy loads to be transported, stone breaking and quarrying. However if any of these operations are mechanized they are automatically taken over by men as women lack the training in the use of the machines. In the hills the work of dyeing, spinning and weaving, hauling of rice, corn, millet grinding, knitting have been taken over by rice mills, power driven looms where male workers are preferred. The plight of women workers in the informal sector in the hills is another cause of concern as they have no organized action. These would include the street vendors, hawkers of fruits and vegetables, coolies and domestic maids, construction workers who are paid Rs 15- 22 and work for more than eight hours a day to feed the family. The number of women in the informal sector numbered 35812 in 1961, 32776 in 1971 and 37416 in 1981 according to census reports.⁹⁴ For them the main aim is survival against starvation of the family and very often a drunkard husband.

On the other hand modernization and development in the post- colonial period have opened up new avenues of employment to women in services in the hills like civil services, banks and insurance companies, educational institutions, land reforms, judiciary, post and telecommunication, tourism, government co-operatives and hospitals. Although women's entry into the services sector is limited nevertheless a new chapter has begun in the advancement of hill women's career. One major problem faced by the youth in Darjeeling is the high level of unemployment as jobs in the service sector outnumber new jobs being created in the ratio of 5:1.⁹⁵ This factor requires proper planning and massive investment in basic infrastructure in the hills.

Rapid urbanization has led to overcrowding, squatter colonies, unstable employment, high cost of living and conditions. Women are tempted to sell liquor in large numbers to supplement family income.⁹⁶ Such are the evils of urbanization, together with the development activities taking place side by side. In view of the given backdrop on the economic developments of Darjeeling women, from colonial to post colonial times, it

can be clearly noted that the economic changes affecting them were limited in scope since 1835 but nonetheless these were processes quite distinct from anything that had gone before. The entry of the hill women into the economic field had a profound effect upon the old family structure and social well being of women.

Employment of women accelerates the process of synchronization for it converts the majority of male roles revolving around financial tasks into joint ones and it alters the autonomous patterns in feminine tasks centring around the household into one which has some degree of joint effort. In the hills of Darjeeling we find the male members sharing the household chores as couples have to work either in the fields, plantations or in urban centres. The agro-based industry of tea has made this adaption easier, the women can expand their interests beyond the home as a result of the sharing process. It is worth mentioning that the modernizing movements introduced by the white settlers in the hills, with regard to women and economy, which were carried on in the post colonial era, need not necessarily challenge patriarchy but may merely reconstitute it to align with the changing economic needs and social structure of the hills. Yet these ideological or behavioural changes cannot be compared with any western movement because in India power and authority remains with the husbands. Although women of the world are inseparable in their experience of subordination or various kinds of race, gender, class and sex domination theorists have argued that in the post- colonial period the concerns of the women of the developing countries are different from those of the western countries. For the modern white women issues that are important today are the right to employment outside their homes, the right to equal payment and the right to control fertility. The same applies for the educated middle class hill women in the urban areas today. But for the 'other' women who are poor, the issues that are uppermost in their minds are the right to have children, rather than to go for family planning⁹⁷ as more hands means more help and this is true regarding the mentality of the majority of the women in Darjeeling.

Summing up it can be said that when examined against the continuation of colonial legacies in the early decades of the post colonial period it is seen very clearly that women's economic issues were relegated to the background by the

management. Whether in the garb of colonialism or neo-colonialism the authorities showed no particular concern for the overall development of the hill women. The selfish capital accumulative nature of the owners took a slightly modified stance since 1955 in order to suit the changing political scenario and the mounting pressure by the trade unions. The granting of maternity benefit, equal remuneration by the authorities became the milestones in the road to progress and the establishment of the hill women's identity. In spite of all problems, Darjeeling witnessed the emergence and crystallization of the local women workers, voicing their concern over economic and political issues that were formally male dominated spheres. As the women workers constituted a very high percentage of the hill population, they presented a vital force in changing the colonial role assigned to them.

REFERENCES:

1. William. P. and Chrisman Laura.(ed); *Colonial Discourse and PostColonial Theory: A Reader*. London, New York Harvester Wheatsheaf. 1993, p 1.
2. Frankenburg Rand Mani L. *Cross Currents Crosstalks: Race 'Postcoloniality' and the Politics of Location*. In Padmini Mongia (ed) *Contemporary Post colonial Theory: a Reader*. Delhi, Oxford Univ Press. 1997, p 348.
3. Ahmed Aziz. *The Politics of Literary Post coloniality*. In Padamini Mongia (ed). Ibid, pg 277.
4. Brydon, D (ed);. *Post Colonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Vol I. London, New York, Routledge. 2000, p 1.
5. C Clintock. A; *The Angle of Progress*. In William. P and Chrisman Laura (ed), Ibid,1993, p 2.
6. Prakash. G., *Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism*. *American Historical Review*. 99.5 (Dec 1994) p1475.
7. Spivak G. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. In William. P. and Chrisman Laura (ed). Ibid 1993, p 5.
8. Ama Ata Aidoo, *That Capacious Topic : Gender Politics* in Phil Mariani (ed) *Critical Fictions*. U.S.A. Seattle, Bay Press. 1991, p 152.
9. Shohat. E, *Notes on Post- Colonial*.In Padmini Monggia (ed). Ibid, 1993, p 323.
10. Mac Dowell,.Li and Sharp. J. E. *Space Gender, Knowledge: Feminist Readings*. London. Arnold Pub,1997, p 5.
11. Mohanty C. T.; *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse* in Chandra. T. Mohanty and Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres (ed). *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ Press. 1991. p 52.

12. McDowell, L. and Sharp, J. P. *Space, Gender, Knowledge: Feminist Readings*. London, Arnold Pub. 1997. p 6.
13. Mishra, V. and Hodge B. *What is Post colonialism?* In William .P. and Chrisman. Laura.(ed). Ibid 1993, p. 276.
14. Davis, N. Y.and Anthias F. (ed) . *Women- Nation- State*. London, Macmillian. 1989 pg 18.
15. Pradhan. R. M. *Continuous Political Stuggle for a Separate Constitutional Status of Ceded Land of Darjeeling and Leasehold Land of Kalimpong*. . Darjeeling Mani Press. 1995. pg 60.
16. Report given from the Congress (I) office Darjeeling by the District Party President Mr. D Norbula. and interview with some Congress members of Darjeeling and Kalimpong.
17. Macfadden, P. *African Women and Political Leadership and the Challenges We Face* Harare, Sapes Pub., 2000. pg 7-8
18. Report from the Congress office on the role of its women members. 11. 12. 2001.
19. Interview with AIWC member: Smt. Susanna Sitling. 26. 12. 2001.
20. File Report of the AIWC for the year 1950-65.
21. File records of the A.I.W.C. for 1965.Darjeeling.
22. Report given by the A.I.W.C. office on its activities.5.12.2001. Darjeeling
23. Report given the A.I.W.C. President Smt. Bhaktasila Bomjan.Darjeeling.9.12.2000.
24. Memorial of the Darjeeling District Committee of the Communist Party. 6th April 1947. From the Party Office.
25. Interview with the CPI(M) District Secretary Mr. Sandukpa Lepcha .5.9 98. Darjeeling.
26. Interviews with Mrs S. Sitling on the female participation of he A.I.G.L. Darjeeling District.
27. Letter written bySri. R. Brahman , Sri.Ananda Pathak Shri. D.K.Chaudhury and Shri. Pritilal Subba to State Recognition Committee of the Dargeeling Dist. 20th May 1955.
28. Letters written by the Sri. Maya Devi Chettri M.L.A. to the Government on the question of Nepali bhasa.(Annex No. XVIII)14.8.1956.in Lama. R. M. 1996 Prana Ko Sroth- Maya Devi. Kurseong, Rajan Raj Swarna Pub.
29. Interview with Shri Inder Bahadur Rai of Darjeeling who had fought for the cause of Nepali bhasa.4.9.99.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Interview with the Pranta Parishad President Shri Madan Tamang.Darjeeling.5.11.98.
34. Report from the Party office of the Communist Party of India (M).5.9.98.

35. Interview with the GNLF Councilor Smt Gunkesari Pradhan (resigned):5. 12. 2001.
36. Interview with Mrs. R. Wangdi of Loreto College Darjeeling. (Dept. of Nepali). 4.9.2000.
37. Interview with Shri I.B.Rai, Writer, Leader of Pranta Parishad , Darjeeling, 7.10.1999
38. Report based on the diary belonging to Smt Gunkrsari Pradhan.Darjeeling.
39. Report given by the CPI(M) District President, Shri Sangyden Lepcha Darjeeling 2000.
40. Report given the Ward Commissioner, Darjeeling. Smt. Dijen Lama. 22. 8. 2000. Darjeeling 2000.
41. Letter written by Mrs. Sharda Mukhia to the Home Minister Mr. Bhuta Siingh on 10. 3. 1988 .
42. In an interview with Mrs. Usha Pradhan, a leading GNLF activist during the agitation phase. 6.12.2001.
43. Medsen . D.L.; (ed) *Post colonial Literature: Expanding the Canoa*. U.S. A. Virginia. Pluto Press. 1999.pg 7.
44. Spivak.G; *Can the Subaltern Speak*, in William. P. and Chrisman Laura (ed) *Ibid*. 1993 pg 66-111.
45. Trivedi, H;. *India and Post Colonial Discourse. Critical Theory: Western and Indian*. In Diana Brydon (ed) *Postcolonialism: Critical Cincepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. London, Routledge.2000, pg 9.
46. Quayson Ato. *Post Colonialism: Theory, Practice or Progress*. U.S.A. Malden Polity Press, Blackwell, Malden. 2000. pg 2.
47. Drectorate of Economic and Statistics for 1951- 1980. Minister of Food and Agriculture- Government of India. Tea Board, Calcutta.
48. Tea Board of India, Reports for 1976, 1981 and 1985.
49. Tea Board of India, Reports for 1982.
50. Tea Board of India, report, 1985.
51. Tea Board of India, Report for 1985.
52. Sarkar, R. L. and Lama, M. P. *Tea Plantation Workers in the Eastern Himalayas*. Delhi, Atma Ram and sons,1986, p.107.
53. Tea Board of India, Reports for 1952 and 1954.
54. Tea Board of India, Reports for 1960, 1961 and 1968.
55. Factory Records of the Ging Tea Estate for the year 1972 and 1975.
56. Factory Records of the Ging Tea Estate for the year 1974.
57. Bhowmik, S. *Economic Political Weekly*. Vol 17, No 40 2nd Oct 1982. p 1600.
58. Wage Board 1982-83.
59. Tea Board of India, 1985. Calcutta Office.
60. Report on Standards of Medical Care for Tea Plantation in India by E. Lloyd Jones, M.D. Major, I.M.S. (E.C.), Adll. Deputy Director- General, Indian Medical Service.1946.

61. Report of an Enquiry into the Living Condition of the Tea Plantation Workers in Darjeeling-Terai, West Bengal. 1948. S.K. Halder, Labour Commissioner of West Bengal.
62. Report on the Administration of West Bengal Maternity Benefit (Tea Estate) Act 1948 for the year 1953. G.C. Roy, Chief Inspector of Factories, West Bengal. 21st December 1954.
63. Ibid.
64. Annual Report on the Administration of the West Bengal Maternity Benefit (Tea Estate Act 1948) for the year 1955. Tea Board of India.
65. Factory Report on the Administration of West Bengal Maternity Benefit (Tea Estate) Act 1948 for the year 1953. G.C. Roy, Chief Inspector of Factories, West Bengal. 21st December 1954.
66. Annual Report on the Administration of the Bengal Maternity Benefit Act (Tea Estate Act 1948) for the year 1957. Government of West Bengal, Labour Department.
67. Report of the Nutrition Advisory Committee of the Indian Research Fund Association, New Delhi. 24th November 1944.
68. Tea Board of India Reports of 1950, 1951, 1952 and 1953.
69. Factory Records of Makaibari Tea Estate for the year 1985.
70. Factory Records of Singtam Tea Estate for 1984.
71. Interview with the Assistant Manager Shri. Bikash Gurung of Singtam Tea Estate. 4.8. 2001.
72. Factory Records of Castelton Tea Estate for 1985.
73. Factory Records of Badamtam Tea Estate for 1984.
74. Factory Records of Happy Valley Tea Estate for 1977.
75. Interview with Smt. Sushma Ghosh (Gurung) Research Associate for the work in the Tea garden Plantation Labour in India under Friedrich Ebert. 1996.
76. Factory Records of Happy Valley Tea Estate for 1977.
77. Factory Records of Makaibari for 1985.
78. Malakar. H. *Sericulture and its Role in the Revival of Rural Economy in the Hilly Region of Darjeeling District*. Sarkar. R. L. (ed) *Hill Development Programme Plan and Strategies*, Darjeeling. Indian Institute of Hill Economy, 1983, p. 110.
79. *Sericulture Demonstration Farm, Bijanbari Records. 1976-1985.*
80. Report of the Deputy Director of Sericulture Darjeeling for 1976- 1985.
81. Interview with the Assistant Director Mr. Simon Lepcha of the Central Sericulture, 4.9.2000.
82. Key Statistics of the District of Darjeeling, 1982: District Statistical Office Bureau of Applied Economics. 1983.
83. Lebra, J ,et al, *Women and Work in India- Continuity and Change*. New Delhi, Promilla and Co Pub,1984, p. 287.

84. Report of the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. New Delhi for the year 1981.
85. Sankrityana, Jeta. *Raising of the Curtain- Gender Situation in North Bengal*. Seminar in the Centre for Women's Studies North Bengal University. Sept 2000.
86. NIEPA pub Ibid.
87. Singh, K. S. *The Scheduled Castes- Anthropological Survey of India*. Vol II Delhi, Oxford Univ Press. 1993, pp 397.
88. Census of 1911, 1951, 1961 and 1971 for the District of Darjeeling..
89. Indian Institute of Hill Economy Pub. 1983. p 125.
90. Bengal District Gazetteer, Darjeeling . 1980.p256.
91. Prasad, Rita. *Success Story- A Society Comes a Long Way- the Cooperative*. Vol XXXVII No. 11th May 2000. National Cooperative Union of India. p. 530.
92. Report of Hayden Hall, Darjeeling presented by Dunn, Noreen at a seminar conducted by the Centre for Women's Studies. North Bengal University. Sept 2000.
93. Boserup, E. and Thicker, I. *Women's Role in Economic Development*. U. S. A. Chicargo. 1970. p21.
94. Census Reports of 1961,1971 and 1981for Darjeeling District..
95. Indian Institute of Hill Economy Pub, Darjeeling 1983: pg 213.
96. Report by the Sub- Inspector Smt. I. Gurung in charge of the Women's Cell, Darjeeling. 21. 5. 98.
97. Mc Dowell, L and Sharp,J. P. *Space, Gender, Knowledge- Feminist Readings*. London, Arnold Pub. 199, p.5..