

Chapter II

DARJEELING: THE DISTRICT AND THE PROJECT PROFILE

(Section I : The District)

Darjeeling, the northernmost district of West Bengal, is located between 26°27'10" North latitudes and 68°53'00" and 87°59'30" East longitudes. It roughly resembles an inverted wedge with its base resting on Sikkim, its sides touching Nepal, Bhutan and the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, while its apex projects into the Purnea district of Bihar, West Dinajpur(N) district of West Bengal and Bangladesh.

2.02 The boundary of Darjeeling, of all the frontier districts of India, is most complicated. It is hemmed in by international frontiers. There is Nepal to the West, Sikkim, a state of India to the north and Bhutan and Bangladesh to the East. Only three Indian districts, one of which is in Bihar, offer accessibility to Darjeeling, and that again, only from the south.¹

2.03 Topographically, the district has two distinct tracts --- the hills and the plains. The hills, in the north, consist of a portion of the outlying hills of the lower Himalayas. The plains, in the south, are a stretch of territory lying along their base and known as the Teria. The hills rise abruptly from the plains and the elevation increases north-westward. The mean elevation of the Terai is 300 feet (91.44m) above the sea level, while some of the hills within the district rise to more than 10,000 feet (3000m). Within these two main groupings, there is a mosaic of

micro-topographic units and the complex physical environment is due to different geomorphic processes, each of which has developed its own characteristic assemblage of land-forms. The Terai forms a transition zone, with a sharp physiographic contrast between the hills and the mountains of the north and slowly grading plains of the south. The Terai plains are composed of slightly elevated inter-riverine terraces, being composed of unassorted debries, boulders, sand and residual soils.² Geographically this tract belongs to the plains but geologically, it is sort a of neutral zone, being composed neither of the alluvium of the plains, nor of the rocks of the hills, but for the most part of alternating beds of sand, gravel and boulders brought from the mountain.³

2.04 Natural vagaries like landslides due to heavy rainfall and hailstorm are the constant companion of the people of this district. Hill streams and *jhoras* during monsoon become most unpredictable in their course and behaviour. Landslides and continuous washing of top soil and hailstorm during the month of April and May are the constraints in the process of cultivation. Due to natural slope, flood does not occur in the hills. Sometimes drought affects the plains of the district either by delayed monsoon or by uneven distribution of rainfall.⁴ The climatic condition of the terai plains resemble to that of adjoining plains of West Bengal and Bihar. May is the hottest month when the temperature in the plains rises to 40° C. In winter, the minimum temperature in the area is around 8° C. In the hills both night and day temperature is high during monsoon. January is the coldest month when mean daily minimum is 1.9°C and mean

daily maximum is 8.6°C. Frost is common in winter and due to occasional cold wave temperature may go down to -1°C to -2°C.⁵

2.05 The variation in climate is strongly correlated with the variation in altitudes. On account of hilly nature of the terrain there are sharp contrast in the range of rainfall even within the district. The rainfall is generally heavier in the southern terai regions and ridges and slopes near the plains. In general, the hill areas enjoy pleasant summer, heavy rain in rainy season. On an average there are about 120 rainy days in a year. About 80% of rainfall is received during the month between May to September from the South-West Monsoon and about 20% during the remaining other months.⁶ Whereas the plains face quite hot summer, short rainy season and mild dry winter.

2.06 Although agriculture with allied activities is the mainstay of the people of the district --- Tea, Tourism and Timber are equally important on which the economy of the district depends to a great extent. Darjeeling produces large quantity of tea which earns foreign exchange. Of course, its importance is more on quality than on quantity. The seductive charm of the hills and dales with its panoramic background of the snowy peak of 'Kanchanjunga' attracts a large number of inland and foreign tourists providing an important source of income for the people of the district. Over one-third of the area of the district is covered by the forests. There are wide range of variations in the forest type in the district. The forests earn considerable amount of revenue and provides employment to various categories of people. But the widespread deforestation is not only affecting the future

economy but it is also reacting on the ecological balance of the area.⁷

2.07 The rivers of the district are the chief water resources of the area. The principal of them are - the Teesta, the Rangit, the Jaldhaka, the Mechi, the Balasan and the Mahanadi (Mahananda). There are numerous tributaries - *Kholas*, *Jhoras* etc. which feed these rivers. The main rivers are perennial and characterised by high run-off being fed from the glaciers and monsoon rains. In the hills they flow in deep valleys but in foothills they negotiate a sudden drop in their slope, their banks flatten out and the rivers are spread over a large number of braided channels. The peak discharge of these rivers are recorded during the earlier part of the monsoon season. The rivers of the district are not navigable. Some of these are utilised for the generation of the hydel power. Incidentally the first hydel power plant of India was set up at Darjeeling in 1887.⁸

Historical Background

2.08 The history of Darjeeling presents a late chapter in the extension of British rule, for it was not until the beginning of the 19th century that the East India Company was brought into direct relations with the tract of the country which now bears the name. It then formed part of the dominions of the Raja of Sikkim, a petty ruler who had been engaged in an unsuccessful struggle against the growing power of the warlike Gurkhas. After running the hills and valleys of Nepal, they marched east into Sikkim in 1780 and during the next 30 years the country suffered repeatedly from their inroads. At the end of the period, they had overran Sikkim as far eastward as the Tista river, and had

conquered and annexed the Terai, i.e., the belt of country lying along the lower hills between that river and the Mechi. In the mean time, the East India Company was engaged in unavailing remonstrances against the Nepalese aggressions through-out the whole length of their northern frontier, and war finally broke out in 1814. At its close, the tract which the Nepalese had wrested from the Raja of Sikkim was ceded to the East India Co. The Raja who had been driven out of his dominions was reinstated. In 1817, by the treaty of Titaliya, the whole of country between the Mechi and the Tista was restored to him and his sovereignty was guaranteed by the Company.⁹

2.09 Under the above treaty the Raja was bound to refer to the arbitration of the British Government all disputes between his subjects and those of neighbouring States. Ten years after it was signed, disputes on the Sikkim-Nepal frontiers arose and were referred to the Governor General. Two officers, Captain Lloyd and Mr. Grant were deputed in 1828 to deal with the disputes and they penetrated into the hills of Darjeeling. They were very much attracted by numerous advantages of Darjeeling including sites for sanatorium and military, and hence, recommended to Governor General for its occupation. Lloyd was directed to negotiate with the Raja of Sikkim who succeeded in obtaining the execution of a deed of grant from the Raja of Sikkim on 1st February 1835. The deed ran as follows :

"The Governor General, having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of his Government, suffering from the sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, I, the Sikkimputti Rajah, out of friendship for the said Governor General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, that is, all the lands south of the great Rangit River, east of the Balasun, Kahail and Little Rangit rivers and west of Rungno and Mahanadi rivers".

This was an unconditional cession of what was then an uninhabited mountain.¹⁰

2.10 In 1839, Dr. Campbell was made superintendent of Darjeeling. He found it an inaccessible tract of forest with scanty population. He converted it into an excellent sanatorium, and improved the communication system. In 1850, in a punitive expedition, the British Government annexed the Terai (foothills of the Himalayas) and the portion of the Sikkim Hills bounded by the Ramam and the Great Rangit rivers on the north, by the Tista on the east and by the Nepal frontier on the west. This area of 640 sq. miles (1657.60 sq. Km) was attached to Darjeeling. Subsequently, by a treaty in November 1865 what is now Kalimpong sub-division was ceded to the British. The Kalimpong area was first notified as sub-division under the Deputy Commissioner of Western Duars district. But in 1866, it was transferred to Darjeeling. With this change Darjeeling district reached its present shape.¹¹

Administrative Arrangement :

2.11 After Kalimpong had been brought under British administration the district was divided into two sub-divisions: the headquarter sub-division including all the hills on both sides of the Tista ; and the Terai sub-division which included all the plains in the foothills. The headquarter of the Terai sub-division was at Hanskhawa near Phansidewa from 1864 to 1880. Thereafter it was transferred to Siliguri. Then the meter gauge railway of North Bengal State Railway was also extended to Siliguri. In the meantime, Kurseong had begun to develop and in 1891 it was made the headquarter of a new sub-division, which

included both the Terai and the lower hills west of the Tista. Later in 1907, Siliguri was made a separate sub-division, thus re-establishing the old Terai sub-division. In 1917, the Kalimpong sub-division was also created,¹² since then the four sub-divisions constituted the district of Darjeeling.

2.12 The district was included in the Rajshahi Division until October 1905 when, as a result of the Partition of Bengal, it was transferred to the Bhagalpur Division. With the rearrangement of the provinces it was retransferred to the Rajshahi Division.¹³ The Partition of Bengal in 1947 left the boundaries of the district intact and in the share of West Bengal. The district, with rest of India, attained independence as a part of India in August 1947.

2.13 The district was formerly a Non-Regulation district. As such Acts and Regulations did not come into force unless they were specially extended to it.

2.14 Darjeeling was specified and constituted as a "Scheduled tract" under the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874.¹⁴ With this, the executive was vested with the authority to exclude these areas from the normal operation of ordinary laws and gave them such protection as they might need.

2.15 Darjeeling had no representative in the Legislative Council constituted under the Government of India Act, 1919. It was an area with "Modified Exclusion"¹⁵ and declared a "backward tract". The administration of the district was then vested in the Governor-in-Council and expenditure of the internal administration of the district was not subject to the vote of the Legislature. The effect of Modified Exclusion was that any Act

passed by the Legislature of Bengal could apply to Darjeeling district; but at the direction of Governor-in-Council they could not apply or applied only with such modification as the Governor thought proper.¹⁶

2.16 Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the district was made a "Partially Excluded Area". Under section 92, the Acts of Provincial or Central legislature could not apply to this area unless the Governor directed so by public notifications. Moreover, the Governor could make necessary exceptions or modifications in their applications.¹⁷

2.17 With the independence of India, the special administrative status of Darjeeling as 'partially excluded area' came to an end ; and it became one of the general districts of West Bengal.

The People:

2.18 Towards the beginning of the present century, O'Malley found the population of the district as exceedingly heterogenous. The majority of the people in the hills were of Mongolian origin, belonging chiefly to various Nepalese castes, but also including a large number of Lepchas, Bhotias and Tibetans. Together with these hillmen were found the denizens of the plains who had been attracted to the hills by the prospect of easily acquired wealth. In the Terai, the mixture of races was equally great. He records "Here the aboriginal Koches or Rajbansis as they prefer to call themselves, are most numerous, numbering 29,460 but no less than 52 per cent of the inhabitants were born elsewhere, and the Mundas and Oraons from Chotanagpur and the Santals

from the uplands of the Santal Parganas have a strength of nearly 14,000. Darjeeling has, in fact, been described as a 'Babel of tribes and nations'.¹⁸

2.19 The total population of the district as stated as per 1991 census, is 12,99,919 of which the Scheduled Tribes population is 1,79,153 which is 13.78 per cent of total population of the district.¹⁹ (See Annexure V) The corresponding population, according to 1981 census, was 10,24,269 of which number of Scheduled Tribes was 1,51,073 which was 14.75 per cent of total district population which also constituted 5.63 per cent to that of total state population.²⁰ (See Annexure IV) As the details of 1991 census regarding sub-division and police station wise distribution of ST population and their percentage etc. are not available, they are being presented as per 1981 census in the following table :

Table 2.1 : Police Station wise Distribution of ST Population in Darjeeling District. (as per 1981 census)

Sl. No.	Sub.Div./ Police Station	Total Population	Sch.Tribe Population	P.C. to total Population	P.C. to S.T. Population
A)	Sadar Sub-Division	2,81,346	26,345	9.36	17.44
1.	Sukhia-Pokhri	28,975	2,794	9.64	1.85
2.	Pulbazar	44,746	5,499	12.29	3.64
3.	Darjeeling	1,04,371	9,685	9.28	6.41
4.	Rangli-Rangliot	51,225	4,323	8.44	2.86
5.	Jore Bunglow	52,029	4,044	7.77	2.68
B)	Kalimpong Sub. Div.	1,58,726	26,834	16.90	17.76
6.	Kalimpong	1,18,548	22,332	18.84	14.78
7.	Gorubathan	40,178	4,502	11.20	2.98
C)	Kurseong Sub. Div.	1,11,302	7,406	6.65	4.90
8.	Kurseong	81,882	6,319	7.72	4.18
9.	Mirik	29,420	1,087	3.69	0.72
D)	Siliguri Sub Div.	4,72,895	90,488	19.13	59.90
10.	Naxalbari	81,175	21,626	26.64	14.32
11.	Siliguri	2,32,610	18,397	7.91	12.18
12.	Phansidewa	1,07,464	38,587	35.91	25.54
13.	Kharibari	51,646	11,878	23.00	7.86
Total of Darjeeling District		10,24,269	1,51,073	14.75	100.00

Source : A.K. Das and R.N. Saha , West Bengal Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes : Facts and Informations, special series no. 32, Bulletin of Cultural Research Institute, SC & TW Deptt. Govt. of W.B., 1989. pp 196-197.

(Section II : The Project)

2.20 In this district only part of the Siliguri sub-division with its two development blocks, viz., Siliguri-Naxalbari and Khoribari-Phansidewa, have been brought under the ITDP (Integrated Tribal Development Project). It has been officially accorded as No. 16 Project area. The Project comprises 136 mouzas (see Annexure VI) which is only 19.15 per cent of the total 710 mouzas of the district. The geographical area of the ITDP is

283.14 sq. km. which is 8.99 per cent of the total 3149 sq. km. of the district. Moreover, within the Project area a total of 94,948 people live of which 45,336(47.74 per cent) are Scheduled Tribes. It has further been computed that the Project only covers 30.01 per cent of the total tribal population of the district.²¹

Table 2.02 : ITDP Darjeeling (No.16): Block-PS-Mouza wise Distribution of Population.

Name of Blocks	Name of Police Station	No. of Mouzas	Area in Hectares	Population		
				Total	S.T.	Percentage
1. Siliguri-Naxalbari	Siliguri	40	8491.51	26621	9183	39.50
	Naxalbari	27	4138.05	17314	8848	51.10
2. Kharibari-Phasidawa	Kharibari	28	4526.04	14696	6063	41.26
	Phasidawa	41	11158.05	36327	21242	58.48
Total		136	28313.65	94958	45336	47.74

Source : Mouzas in Tribal Sub.Plan of W.B., Special series, CRI, SC&TW Dept., Govt. of W.B., Calcutta-1991-p6.

Physio-Geographical condition of the Area :

2.21 The Project Area as a part of Siliguri sub-division is located in the Terai and lies at an elevation of about 300ft above the mean sea level. The soil of the area consists of the out-washes which are brought down from the hills. The present form of the area consists of almost horizontal layers of unconsolidated sand, silt, pebbles and gravel.

2.22 The climatic condition of the area is almost the same as those of the adjoining districts of Jalpaiguri and West Dinajpur of West Bengal and Purnea of Bihar. January and February are the coldest months (temperature around 8°C); temperature rises from March gradually and becomes maximum in May (around 40°C). Rainy

season starts from June, pouring maximum rain in July-August and goes as far as September, then the temperature recedes slowly upto October and falls sharp from November. The climate of the Terai is partly influenced by the climate of the hills.

2.23 The Mahanadi, the Balasan and the Mechi are the main rivers of the Project Area. All the rivers flow into the Ganges. The Mahanadi river rises from the east of Kurseong. It has a small catchment area but receives a high rainfall in the monsoon. It changes its course to the south-west in Siliguri and forms boundary between Terai and Jalpaiguri district. The Balasan river after entering the Terai from the Hills of Kurseong divides into two streams --- one called the new Balasan, joins the Mahanadi just below Siliguri; the other the old Balasan (Buri Balasan) passes out of the district to join the Mahanadi in the Purnea district (Bihar). The volume of water flowing in the old Balasan is considerable and fluctuations in its volume occur which are dangerous to roads and bridges crossing it. On the extreme west is the Mechi river, flowing down from Nepal causes havoc to the area off and on.

2.24 The tributaries of the rivers rises from springs and *jhoras* are Lachka, Hubia, Champta, Panchanai etc. These rivers are mostly seasonal in character. The rain water as well as run off water from the hills cause floods and considerable loss to the adjoining areas in the form of crop damage as well as sand deposition on the valuable agricultural lands.

2.25 The rivers are often subject to change their course due to obstruction of boulders and other materials washed down from the hills. The boulders and pebbles are, however, of high quality

and used as building and road construction materials. The indiscriminate collection of these materials from the river beds also causes change of course of the rivers. Some *jhoras* perennial or seasonal in nature available within the area can be profitably exploited for irrigation purpose.

2.26 The soils of these areas are alluvial in nature and the deposits are mostly sands and raw organic matters. The texture classes of soil varies from sandy to sandy loam. The soils are acidic in reaction. The quantity of Nitrogen, phosphate and potash in the soils are low. All these make the fertility of the soil poor and yield of the crop low. ²²

2.27 As regards the tribal people residing in the Project area, they were originally migrated from Chotanagpur as tea garden labourers long time ago. They belong to various ethnic groups and at least nine communities can be identified to be living in this area. These communities are Oraon, Santal, Munda, Malpaharia, mahali, Nagasia, Mrue, Kora and Bhumij. Oraon is the main scheduled Tribes of the Project area followed by Mundas, Santals and others. The tribals create a cheap labour force which is boon to the owners of the land and gardens. On the other hand these landless labourers experienced exploitation not known in other parts of the country. However, they have acquired a skill, a knowledge in agriculture, husbandry and tea industry. They are receptive people, and may be subjected to development to a rapid speed unlike other areas. ²³

2.28 The backwardness of tribals of this area cannot be differentiated from that of the other areas of West Bengal. These people are often subjected to various forms of exploitation like

illegal transfer of land, indebtedness, exploitation in exchange etc. Though various legal attempts have been made to give them protection and help, but they were either ignorant or wanted to remain undisturbed to take such steps. The poor economic condition associated with their social customs and drinking habits lead them to fall into the clutches of money lenders or **mahajans**. This create a vicious circle out of which they could not move out. Various welfare measures have brought benefits to some families for a certain period of time but these were not enough to push up the growth potentiality. Besides, evaluation of these schemes have not been carried out to put them in proper perspective.²⁴

2.29 The Siliguri Planning Organisation (SPO) also observed educational wastage in tribal areas. Many students discontinue education because of language problem. The media of education are Bengali or Nepali and also the text books supplied free of costs to them are of these languages. The tribal students are accustomed to Hindi language. The students thus become uninterested with their study. Moreover, the economic factors also stand in their way to continue study. Guardians prefer to engage them in household and family occupation. Therefore mere spending on education without solving these problems will lead nowhere in educational advancement of these people.²⁵

2.30 As regards the socio-economic conditions of the tribal population of the Project area, they are mainly tea garden labourers or small land-holders or agriculture labours. According to a survey conducted by the SPO at the time of delineation of the Project area in 1975, the Project area had a net cultivated land of 19,951 acres. The cultivable area, i.e.,

total land available for cultivation, was 24,764 acres, of which 19,951 acres (81 per cent) were only cultivated; and 1,697 acres were the lands of tree crops and groves. About 70 per cent of the total net area were owned by tribals of Government vested land, the rest 30 per cent were leased land.²⁶

2.31 It may also be observed from the lists of ITDP mouzas prepared by the Government of West Bengal that 14 tea gardens comprising 16 mouzas have been identified and included in the Project Area.²⁷ But the benefits of the development programmes have not been extended to the tribal people of any tea gardens, though the Central assistance is received on the basis of people and area thus identified.

Infrastructure :

2.32 As per survey of SPO (Siliguri Planning Organisation), many of tribal villages remain outside the market orbit. Paddy, Jute, Wheat, Vegetables etc. are the main commodities transacted in these markets. Many tribal villages do not possess fair weather roads (not to speak of all weather roads) connected with the markets. Moreover, the tribal people do not possess carts, hiring carts at high rate or carrying headloads to a long distance force them to sell commodities within the villages or surrounding areas at a low price. Though the marketable surplus is not enough, the marketed commodities (poor economic condition force them to sell) are considerable and the peoples are at the hands of middlemen or mahajans or whole-sellers.

2.33 In the ITDP areas, one-fifth of villages have all weather roads and the same number of villages have *kutchha* roads which are completely unusable in the monsoon. Roads of the rest villages

are fair but need repair or conversion to all weather roads. One-sixth of villages have the facilities of road transports e.g., bus, auto etc. and many villages could not find even the facilities of cart to reach the bus stands.²⁸

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