

## **Chapter- Five**

### **Profile of Minor Business Communities**

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## **Introduction**

As we have discussed in the previous chapters the major business establishments of Darjeeling were under the control of the Europeans or the British to be more specific and the Marwaris and Biharis who dominated the wholesale and retail trades of Darjeeling. In addition to them there were some other traders and businessmen who came from some other communities. They were few in number no doubt but their role in the commercial life of Darjeeling was not negligible. They were the Nepalis, Bengalis, Kashmiris, Panjabis, Sindhis, Tibetans etc. Excepting the Nepali, these merchants were basically confined to the urban area. Some of these business groups have either wound up or lost their previous prosperity. The Bengalese, Parsees and Chinese almost lost their commercial predominance of Darjeeling Sadar while few Chinese still trade in Kalimpong Sub- Division and the Parsees, referred only in the account of E.C Dozey are now completely absent from the economic scenario of the Sadar.

As for the Parsees, a very few of them were found in the town in the British period. Referring to them Dozey wrote that "as the community (Parsee) in this station is small, indeed, deaths are few and far between; consequently the upkeep of a sacerdotal establishment is neither necessary nor possible. There are three persons buried in this cemetery, which is situated just below the Lebong Road about one and half miles away from the Market Square,..."<sup>1</sup>. We don't find much represent to them after this. A handful of Panjabi and Sindhi businessmen are still there. Special reference must be given to the Bengalese. From the very initial days of Darjeeling's growth a number of Bengalese were involved in trading activities but at present they have lost their numerical as well as commercial hold over Darjeeling. In course of the 1980s Bengalese left Darjeeling due to the Gorkha disturbance.

### **5.1: Nepali Business Community:**

Nepalese are the dominant race of Darjeeling making up more than a half of the population. Nepali migration to Darjeeling has been explained in terms of both 'push and pull' factors. Pull factors was more important than push factors. During the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries permanent emigration from Nepal was encouraged by two major pull factors. One was the colonization of Darjeeling and the subsequent rapid growth of tea- industries and another was the recruitment of Gorkha soldiers into the British Army. Darjeeling had one of the important stations for Gorkha recruitment. The push factors can be explained in terms of historical developments of Nepal. "the Newar kingdom in the Kathmandu Valley was occupied by the Gorkha king rather forcefully, compelling many Newars to flee over to Sikkim and Darjeeling"<sup>2</sup>. Furer Haimendorf brings out the 'push' factors such as pressure on land and resultant impoverishment of the peasants in Nepal being responsible for the migration of the Nepalis. Kansakar adds another important dimension in this regard. To him the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley and later unification of Nepal in 1769 by Prithvi Narayan Shah were responsible for the initial migration of the Nepalese"<sup>3</sup>. S, Dutt considers the following developments as important for coming of the Nepalis to the region in particular: increasing population, fragmented landholding, indebtedness, ecological crisis, and food deficiency in Nepal as indigenous, and the Anglo-Nepalese Friendship Treaty of 1850, the Tripartite Delhi Agreement of 1851, and the revised Indo-Nepal Agreement of 1956 as exogenous factors<sup>4</sup>. The following table (Table No-3.16) shows the rapid growth of Nepalese:

**Table-5.1**  
**Demography of Nepalese in Darjeeling district:-**

1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961
25781*	..	88000	134000	..	..	193016	254608	285009	369130

Source: Census of India

Including Murmis the total Nepali population rose to 32,338 in 1871 C.F Magarth categorized them as tribe separately. The Nepalese formed 34.1% of the total district population in 1872 and 67.6% in 1941 and in the hills 86.8%.

The Nepalese were divided on the basis of caste. The Nepalese inherited a very complex caste system which interrelated with their occupations. But the caste principles

were not strictly adhered to by very many Nepalese in Darjeeling. The traditional occupation of the Bahun (who are at the top in caste hierarchy) for instance, is supposed to be priesthood but as a matter of fact only the Upadhyaya Bahun (who are ritually superior to the Jaisi Bhahuns). The Chhetris are considered as warriors but the British and later the Indian army would not recruit them as soldiers unless they adopted some titles of the Mangars and Gurungs<sup>5</sup>. As such the traditional occupation of the Newars is said to be business but actually they had a wide distribution of occupations. It would certainly be true that all the caste-oriented groups could not have managed their living entirely from the caste-occupations. In spite of all, there is certainly a loose-connection between caste and occupation. A great number of Newars involvement in commerce among the Nepalese is indicated these facts.

Even though the Nepalis were in numerical majority in Darjeeling Sub-Division but their role in business was insignificant. They were basically agriculturist. They had come to Darjeeling mainly as labourers in the plantations and in other constructions works. It was basically the Newars among them who set up commercial establishments in Darjeeling as part of their traditional occupation. "But actually they had a wide distribution of occupations.... they certainly could not have managed their living entirely from the caste-occupations even before the industrialization began to felt"<sup>6</sup>. In course of time some Nepali started their own business but they were concentrated mainly in the transport sector. Some Nepali traders also dominated the brass work, wooden works, motor driving, pack pony and bullock cart operation business and the execution of building and road construction works.

With the growth of the tourism industry the scope of business in transport sector expanded and the Nepali got involved in this trade in increasing number from the last quarter of the twentieth century. As a result a number of Nepali traders engaged in the lucrative motor business that was only by-passed by the Marwaris and Biharis. Now a days each affluent Newar has occupied four wheelers or at least small car for the visitors. The following section gives a short description of the Nepali involvement in trade and business. A very few Nepali traders also engaged in some general lines during the colonial period. The most prominent among them in Darjeeling Bazaar were the Das

studio, Photo shop, Nepal Curio, (curio) Singh Studio (Photo), Laxmi Bhandar (groceries) etc.

One field where the Nepali have done very well is photography. Any discussion about this field has to start with the famous Das Studio which has now become almost synonymous with the history of Darjeeling.

Das Studio of Darjeeling was established by Ratna Pradhan's <sup>7</sup> grandfather Thakur Das Pradhan who migrated from Kathmandu Valley of Nepal around 1894-95. Initially, it had started as curio shop in the early 1920s from where post cards and photographs were also sold. Photography was a hobby with Thakurdas and he used to take photographs of beautiful scenarios, historical events and contemporary life style. Later, he established the famous Das studio in 1927 at Mount Pleasant Road, a site near the present day bazaar which shifted to Commercial Row (presently Nehru Road) in 1950. In 1949 he scraped together a down payment to purchase the premises that housed Whiteaway Laidlaw, a haberdashery.

Today it continues to trade from 15 Nehru Road near Chowrasta. Ratna's father Durga Das Pradhan held the helm of the family business during the period when colour photography had just been introduced to the world at large. In course of time, the family members of Ratna –his father, uncles, brothers, cousins and himself all together worked to develop and expand their business. They specially dealt with picture postcards depicting scenes of the Himalayas. In addition, they also sell other stationery and trinkets. The establishment is the biggest photo store of Darjeeling with old, rare collections. Although all the photographs here were in colour, a huge corpus of Ratna's work was in large format black & white, hugely influenced by Ansel Adams and his technique of Zone Control. He is presently working on collating these images to include in his digital portfolio.

According to Ratna Pradhan his exposure to professional photography, as well as a direct hands-on access to a wide variety of professional photographic equipment during his early years, provided a natural platform on which his passion for this art developed. Ratna's other passion was the outdoor life. He loved hiking, camping and exploring in



Figure5.1 Whiteaway Laidlaw Co, Commercial Row, Darjeeling- 1899 (Present location of Das studio below Figure5.2) Source: Das Studio



Figure5.2 Das Studio Commercial Row Darjeeling-2012

Source: Das Studio

the foothills of the Himalayas. After completing his college education, he enrolled in a mountaineering course at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI Darjeeling). His instructors included the famous Tenzing Norgay, Nawang Gombu, Dorjee Lhatoo & N.Tashi. Ratna was invited to lecture on Himalayan Photography to all the students attending courses at the HMI, a task he undertook for almost 5 years. He also assisted as the Chief Instructor of the North Point Adventure Courses for a number of years. In 1980 he was invited to join a climbing expedition to Kamet & Abi Gamin in the Garhwal Himalayas as a photographer and was one of the successful summiteers. Ratna has undertaken countless photographic expeditions in the Himalayas which added to his collection of photographs.

Das Studio has become almost synonymous with life in Darjeeling town. It became a familiar meeting place as the visitors strolled along Nehru Road to Chowrasta and a walk along the Mall. Generally the story of Das Studio had been somewhat linked with social history of Darjeeling, in that the business provided a popular social hub for visitors as well as the locals.

Another studio was the Singh Studio under Shashi Singh Chhetri that also provided photographic services to the people of Darjeeling. It was founded by Shashi Singh Chhetri, a wonderer from the Elam district of Nepal who came to Darjeeling in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He started his career as a servant under a British Burlington-Smith by name who ran a studio on the Commercial Row<sup>8</sup>. Rajen Singh, grandson of Sashi Singh stated that it was purchased by his grandfather on peppercorn rate in 1935-36 approximately. Sashi's son Shanti Singh Chhetri assisted his father from 1945 and carried on his father's business till his death in 1979. At the demise of his father Rajen Singh became the proprietor of the business. He diversified into book distribution business along with photography from the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, he only dealt with locally published books, but later on, started selling all types of publications both national and international.

Some of the Nepali businessmen are reluctant to reveal their family-history. Some of them even refused to admit any relation to Nepal. One such trader is Kishor Singh Chhetri, owner of the 'Elite Studio' He argued that "I'm Indian and born and brought up here in Darjeeling". Later on after many request he revealed his family story. He said that his grand father Shashi Singh Chhetri was a coolie under the British tea estate in his young days. At the time of his migration from Nepal he was only fourteen years old. During the time of his father the photo store business was initiated. In the last quarter of the twentieth century Kishor Singh expanded this business by engaging in millinery and stationery along with the photo store retailing.

Owner of the 'Bela Shoe, located in Chowrasta Mr. Suresh Pradhan has described the painful struggle of his father Krishna Bahadur Pradhan who established this shoe business. He struggled for a long time in those old days. Initially, he himself made shoes at his house and sold to the customers here and there. In 1934 he became lucky enough to purchase this shop and permanently established his trading network. Presently the whole business is taken care of by his son Mr. Suresh Pradhan who has been assisting his father since 1979. From the very beginning of their business they dealt with the famous shoe company 'Bata'. Goods were chiefly collected from Batanagar. They still produce shoes in their own factory. This family rose from a very humble position. Prosperity changed their fortunes and soon owned home both at Pokhoribong and Darjeeling Town.

Laxmi Bhandar in Chawk bazaar is a grocery shop well known to both old and new residents of Darjeeling. It is the only big grocery business in 'G' building conducted by a Nepali Newar that competed with the Marwari grocery shops from the very beginning of its emergence<sup>9</sup>. History of this family may be traced back in Darjeeling in the last decade of the nineteenth century when Hirabir Tuladar, a young Nepali classical singer migrated from Kathmandu Valley in the year 1890. But as he could not survive on music alone he started a small business of spices, like cardamom, ginger etc. He conducted this trade from the municipality allotment. Goods were collected from the neighboring villages of Bijanbari, Sukhiapokhuri Jore-bunglow etc. Buddha Tulader

assisted his father from 1942. In 1930 they established their grocery business at 'G' building. Presently four sons of Buddha are managing this business.

Kukhri-making is an age-old vocation of the Nepalese .E.C Dozey pointed out that in the first quarter of the Nineteenth century..... "Nepalese who deal in curio consisting of turquoise-ware, coral, amber and jade ornaments, kukhris knives and brass-ware...." Birman Vishmakarma who occupied a very small shop made of tin on Mandir Line, Chawkbazar, rose from a very humble economic position. His great grand father Krishna Vishmakarma was a coolie who migrated from Nepal in the last quarter of the nineteenth century along with their fellow villagers. Initially, Manjit Vishmakarma also started his career as coolie. After his marriage with Madhu Devi he changed his livelihood and engaged in kukri- making along with his wife. At the demise of her husband around the year 1950 she carried on this business for sometime and finally established a small shop. Now it is inherited by her son Birman Vishmakarma from 1980.<sup>10</sup>

## **5.2: Bengalese Business Community**

The commercial history of Bengal dated back to the ancient era. In the ancient age, Bengal was rich in different small and cottage industries as well as in trade and commerce. With the establishment of Muslim rule in India, the communication system between different regions of India with Bengal developed. As a result local trade and industries flourished. Therefore, involvement of the Bengalese in trade had increased in considerable number. During the first half of British period the Bengal trade was in favour of the Bengalese and they earned billions from trade with the Europeans. Soon the situation was changed in the second half of the eighteenth century due to a number of factors. After the Industrial Revolution in England the situation became worse and was further aggravated by the opening of the Suez Canal enabling sea voyage from Britain to India in twenty-five days instead of one hundred days via the Cape route. British import policy changed from importing finished goods from Bengal to importing raw materials at the cheapest possible price and re-exporting finished goods to Bengal and other parts of India. British traders made high profits by exploiting the local

entrepreneurs through buying raw materials at cheaper prices and also squeezed them out of the market by creating unequal competition from high quality industrial products. In addition, the British government had imposed high taxes on the incomes of local entrepreneurs. During the later half of the nineteenth century, Bengali capital was mostly diverted to land and non-commercial occupations. At the same time, development of transportation, primarily the expansion of railways and shipping as well as expansion of a money economy caused a rise in the price of land, making landed investments more attractive. Most of the salary surpluses of Bengali professionals and officials were invested in land. Such a re-orientation in the pattern of investment adversely impacted on the development of entrepreneurship. All this has earned them the epithet 'land gentry'. It is argued that whatever capital the Bengali Baboos accumulated, they squandered away on occasions like marriage and shradh ceremonies for social climbing<sup>11</sup>. Despite all these the Bengalese have a great history of achievements as a community and as great contributors to the history of Darjeeling. There would be no history of Darjeeling without mentioning the Bengalese.

From the beginning of its growth the Bengalese took part in the construction of Darjeeling in several ways. Many British records also referred to the presence of the Bengali traders in Darjeeling. Initially there were some in hotel business and later they invested in tea. Some of them also engaged in retailing.

The Bengali population of the District was in the main confined to towns although there were 201 in semi-urban areas and in the Kurseong Sub-division and 84 in tea areas in the Kalimpong Subdivision in 1941. In 1941 census shows that there were 1,393 Bengalis lived in Darjeeling town and 3,302 in Siliguri.

The figures of the Bengali-speaking population in the District given in various censuses are confusing. In 1891 Bengali was stated to be the mother tongue of 47,435 persons; in 1901-44,802 in 1911- 45,985 and in 1931-37,444. If the totals of those shown as Rajbanshis and Bengalis in the 1941 census are added a total of 31821 is obtained. This indicates a decline in the Bengali-speaking population <sup>12</sup>. But within two decades, the number of Bengali-speaking population increased as high as (census of 1961) 11,5,172.

The partition of India led hundreds and thousands of Bengalis to migrate from East Pakistan.

In 1931 census report gave the figure of 21,89,35 on the basis of birth place. As many of those whose mother tongue was Bengali were probably born in the Terai, all that can be stated with certainty is that 21,89,35-37444-18,14,91 represents the minimum population which was born in the District and that the correct figure lies between 181491 and 21,89,34<sup>13</sup>.

In those days many Bengali aristocrat families and retired lawyers and general fortune-seekers flocked in Darjeeling. But in the British records they were described as service holders specially posted in clerical posts. Only Dash pointed out that "certain lines of business are more in favour of the Hillman or the Bengali". He further added that "The only three pharmacies are controlled by Bengalis"<sup>14</sup> in Kalimpong; not in Darjeeling Sadar. From the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the twentieth century, few Bengalis engaged in hotel business and tea plantation.

Happy Valley Tea Estate, a well-known tea garden in Darjeeling was established in 1854. David Wilson, an Englishman, had named the garden Wilson Tea Estate and around 1860 he had started cultivation of tea. In 1903, the estate was taken over by a Bengali, Tarapada Banerjee, an aristocrat from Hooghly. In 1929, Banerjee bought the Windsor Tea Estate nearby, and merged the two estates under the name of Happy Valley Tea Estate. G.C. Banerjee was the next owner of Happy Valley Tea Estate. He with his wife Annapurna Devi and three daughters (Nonimukhi, Monmaya and Savitri) lived there for some time. Annapurna Devi was related to the Ganguly family of Khandwa; her maternal uncle was Kunjalal Bihari, father of the famous cine Ganguly (Kisor Kumar). The tea produced by Happy Valley was sold by 'Harrods' in UK and 'Mariage Freres' in France<sup>15</sup>.

The Bengalis lived mainly in the Siliguri Sub-Division and their number was insignificant in the three hills. They were influential only in the plains of Darjeeling not in Sadar. Accordingly, in the commercial sector they played much less important role

than in the Siliguri Sub- Division. There were only a few who tried to keep up their glory in the hills.

Dr. Dhirendranath Sinha one such Bengali has most interesting history. He came from the undivided Bengal before Independence. He was the inhabitant of Belpuria, Khulna district of Bangladesh. Dr. Dhiren (popularly known) was an engineer of the Municipality in the first decade of the twentieth century. Under his instruction many roads, bridges and buildings were constructed in Darjeeling. During the swadeshi period, like other Bengalis, he was also deeply influenced by the swadeshi thinking and began to use khadi. One day he slapped on the cheek of a Firingee who insulted him for his swadeshi dress code. Most probably, he was not treated well by the British and soon resigned from his post. Having resigned from the Municipality he started a small pharmacy. He began to run a restaurant named 'Tripti' located on Laden La Road that he took on rent from a Parsee Mr. Avery. Later on, this Parsee went back to Madras in 1981 by selling his property to Mamun Chand Agarwal, a Marwari and the owner of the Big Bazar (Darjeeling Branch).

In 1954 Dr. Dhiren was a homeopathic practitioner but he established 'The Economic Pharmacy' to deal with all types of medicine. He continued his practice till his death in 1980. Later on, he made partnership with Dr. Sailendranath Chatterjee, popularly known as Dr. Khanti. Presently this pharmacy is run by Urmila Sinha, daughter of Dr. Dhirendranath who is also a homeopathic practitioner herself.

During the 1920s three important hotels under Bengali ownership gained popularity. These were Kalibabu's Central Boarding, Snow View Hotel and Hindu Boarding. Of these Central Boarding and Snow View hotels were historically important because these had given shelter to the revolutionaries who conspired to kill Mr. Anderson in Lebong Spur<sup>16</sup>. Ujjala Choudhury and other revolutionaries made an unsuccessful attempt to murder Mr. John Anderson, the then Governor of Bengal on May 8, 1934. As a result of that incident the Bengali youths were ordered to make '*hajira*' everyday to the local *thana*. The Bengalis were terrorized and a great number of them left the hill. In this way

the number of Bengalis decreased further in the subsequent decades and at present only a handful old Bengalis are found in the hill.

There were some Bengalis who left their jobs to start their own business. Among them were Manmoth Choudhury, Biren Mukherjee, Prafulla Chatterjee, B.P Ghosh, Kalidas, A.C Banerjee, K.C Dey, Dr. S.K Paul, Amiya Banerjee (Happy Valley), Barindra Kumar Mitra's father Upendranath Mitra, Direndra Kumar Sinha Dr. Atul Guha etc

Most probably Surya Kanta Basu was the first Bengali who came to Darjeeling in 1865. The Bose Press was established in 1900. A number of important Bengali books, papers, pamphlets etc were regularly published by the Press. A few years later another press was established under the Bengali ownership. Mr. Jiten Mitra launched 'Darjeeling Press'. None of these survive now. Now a days a few roads of the hills named after a very few renowned Bengalis have been witnessing the glorious past of the Bengalis<sup>17</sup>.

Snow View Hotel was founded by Sati Prasanna Biswas who was a tea merchant. In 1921 he came from Meherpur, Chuadanga (Bangladesh). The Zamindar of Siliguri Ramapada Chatterjee gave him shelter for the time being. Later on, after passing the railway recruitment examination he became the guard of Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. This was the period when tea industry was flourishing. This lucrative tea business attracted his attention in the first quarter of the twentieth century. And soon he ventured in this new profession and established 'Tea Chamber' 1924-25 and immediately it gained popularity among the Bengalese. He was the first Bengali who introduced V.P to deal the British and other customers of Calcutta. Even Rabindranath Tagore was impressed by his tea sent by Mr. Biswas. Tagore informed him by a letter<sup>18</sup>.

While his tea business became lucrative, clash soon arose between Mr. Biswas and his British authority of DHR. He immediately resigned from this post and became a full fledged merchant. In March, 1931 he decided to diversify into hotel business. He made plans to open a budget hotel for middle class Bengalese who had started visiting Darjeeling in increasing number particularly during the pooja vacation.

Santanu Biswas, son of Sati Prasanna Biswas said that a few revolutionaries along with Ujjala Choudhury took shelter in their hotel for killing the Lt. Governor of Bengal John Anderson. That this hotel became popular during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the twentieth century is understood from the fact that a number of renowned persons like singer Devabrata Biswas, Rabi Sankar with Sankarlal Bhattacharya had sheltered in this place. In 1979 Sri Rabi Sankar stayed here for ten days and Sri Bhattacharya wrote a part of 'Raga-Anuraga' a, Biography of Rabi Sankar<sup>19</sup>.

Another Bengali sponsored old hotel in Darjeeling was Subodh Mustafi's Hindu Boarding Hotel. It was established on 14 October, 1921. His grand father Kiran Mustafi worked as a manager of Bloomfield Tea estate.

The Bengali Hindu Boarding or Kali Babu's Central Boarding was opened for the public on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1928. Gopal, present owner of this hotel said that they served many VIP like Jayprakash Narayan in this hotel.

In course of time several hotels under Bengali ownership were established in Darjeeling. The Bengali hoteliers paid more attention to the middle class visitors than to the aristocrats. Hotel business became lucrative among the Bengalis due to the fact that Bengali visitors flocked in the hills in increasing number from the very beginning. The trend continues even today. There are a number of tour and travel agencies scatter all over Bengal who generally become instrumental in attracting the customers in the Bengali hotels. Emergence of Siliguri on the foot hills provided further opportunity to the Bengali merchants. It is the only important railway junction in the North-Eastern Region of India. Whether they travel by rail road or air all the visitors have to come to Siliguri before going to Darjeeling. Several Bengali owned travel agencies established a good business network from Siliguri to Darjeeling. Moreover the Bengali visitors also prefer Bengali atmosphere and Bengali food in course of their short stay. All these factors played significant role to patronize the Bengali hotel business in Darjeeling.

### 5.3: Tibetan Business Community

Relationship between Tibet and Darjeeling is traced back before the arrival of the British in Darjeeling. Geographically and historically, by race, religion and language, Bhutan, Sikkim and the district of Darjeeling are very similar to Tibet, though politically they are now distinct. Tibetans Bhutias-a people of Tibetan origin are there, particularly in Sikkim and Darjeeling even though in course of time they were greatly outnumbered by immigrants from Nepal<sup>20</sup>. The name Darjeeling itself is said to have been derived from the Tibetan words 'dorje' meaning thunderbolt (originally the scepter of Indra) and 'linga' a place or land, hence 'the land of the thunderbolt'. the Presence of the Tibetan mercantile group in Darjeeling was a natural historical fact.

After the establishment of sanatorium in Darjeeling, the relation with Tibet became even more significant in terms of commerce. A number of Tibetans migrated to Darjeeling for better livelihood and the British authorities in India also renewed their interest in Tibet in the late 19th century. A number of Indians and British made their way into Tibet, first as explorers and then as traders. It was not easy because Tibet was still a 'Forbidden' country and not at all open to the idea of entertaining foreigners, particularly the Christian British on its jurisdiction. The British authority in India made futile attempts to open Tibet. Hence, treaties regarding Tibet were concluded between Britain and China in 1886, 1890, and 1893, but the Tibetan government refused to recognize their legitimacy and continued to bar British envoys from its territory. From 1860 onwards commercial interests in Tibet were diverted from Western Tibet to the road to Lhasa through Sikkim. It was the shortest route between Calcutta and Lhasa with Darjeeling as an entrepot for Central Asian trade. During "The Great Game", a period of rivalry between Russia and Britain, the British desired a representative in Lhasa to monitor and offset Russian influence. In 1904-5 the Young Husband Mission became the first 'successful' mission to get some commercial facilities from the Tibetan authority.

The physical geography and climate of Tibet are not suitable for extensive cultivation. The Tibetan economy is dominated by subsistence agriculture. Due to limited arable

land, the primary occupation in the Tibetan Plateau is raising livestock, such as sheep, cattle, goats, camels, yaks, and horses. The main crops grown are barley, wheat, buckwheat, rye, potatoes, and assorted fruits and vegetables. Trading is also taken as an important livelihood. They are endowed with trading instinct. It is said that "Tibetan is a born trader"<sup>21</sup>. They journeyed for long caravan. Many early British records described both the good commercial intercourse between Darjeeling and Tibet and the existence of the Tibetan businessmen in the Sadar. In 1873 J.W Edgar, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling reported that he met some Tibetan traders who were on their way to Darjeeling where they wanted to exchange coarse blanket for tobacco. This report has already been described in detailed in the previous chapter. In 1880s R.D O'Brien also described that "Tibetan may often be seen in Darjeeling during the cold weather, short description of them may be of interest. In a mixed crowd in the bazaar of a sundry, if you pick out the very dirtiest man or woman you can find, be sure he or she is a Tibetan trader: these people cross the snowy range annually about November bringing with them rock-salt, yaks, tails, sometimes, gold dust, musk, and other commodities of various kinds, besides, sheep, goats in large flocks. These they sell, and return laden with tobacco, broad-cloth, piece-goods, and other commodities in February, March. During their stay in Darjeeling they live in small light tents which they bring with them. Their favourite encamping ground is in the Lebong spur. It will be observed that there is only one woman in each tent, with five or six men. This is accounted for by polyandry being extensively practiced by the Tibetans. The young woman would be rather fresh complexioned but for a habit they have a daubing their faces over with a preparation of some sort of gum which looks like brown lacquer"<sup>22</sup>. This description of O'Brien provided an important aspect of commercial picture of Darjeeling. Kalimpong was annexed from Bhutan in 1865 and soon it emerged as an important trade centre especially for Tibet trade. But it does not mean that Tibet trade via Darjeeling was completely abolished. A large proportion of merchandise was imported into Darjeeling as stated by O'Brien in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. And the regular exchange was held between them. This commercial exchange and growing importance of Darjeeling encouraged a number of Tibetans to migrate to the Sadar. In 1891, 1,526 persons were recorded as Tibetan -speaking. As per the census figure of 1901, 1,686

Tibetans resided in Darjeeling which rose to 2,774 in 1931 and 7,679 in 1961. A number of Tibetans had also come over after the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Exodus of Tibetan to India began about the middle of 1951, which gained momentum of assumed fairly large proportions in 1956. But the main exodus of Tibetan refugees began arriving in India from 1959 onwards<sup>23</sup>. At that time they did not have any special occupation and embraced any type of livelihoods. Initiatives were taken on behalf of the Government of India and some local philanthropists to provide them with suitable livelihoods. As a result five production centres have come up into being in the district in the last quarter of the twentieth century to attach the Tibetan refugees as trainee-workers, trainer-workers, wage labourers or as self-employed workers. The five production centres with their respective lines of specialization are as follows: (1) Tibetan Central Training (Handicraft) Centre of Lebong, (2) Agricultural Co-operative Farming Society at Sonada (3) Lamhatta Agricultural Co-operative Society, Kalimpong (4) Kalimpong Handicraft Self-help Co-operative society and (5) Sonada Handicraft, Dairy Poultry and Agricultural Self-help Co-operative Society, Sonada. But these units can provide employment only to a fraction of Tibetan refugees and hence a great number of them have worked either as petty traders and peddlers of handicrafts or as labourers<sup>24</sup>.

In fact, from the last quarter of the last century commercial picture of the Sadar has undergone a significant change because of the presence of the Tibetans in great numbers. Being 'born traders' the Tibetans have opted business as their chief means of livelihood in Darjeeling. They have gradually entrenched in every possible commercial pursuits including wholesale and retail trade of groceries, cloth, house building materials and hotel, restaurant and transport business and so on. At present, their growing commercial encroachment has resulted in an intense competition with the old business communities. The Tibetans are not, as a rule on good terms with the old local business communities. Feelings of dislike and jealousy come into play. As a result socio-economic tension is creeping into the wider arena of Darjeeling.

As befits the Tibetans who were naturally endowed with trading instincts, Darjeeling was developed with many economic activities especially tourism. Hotel and restaurant

business provided a ready market which seemed to be more lucrative to the Tibetans and a number of traders entered in this trading. A few instances may clear this picture. One important old Tibetan business family was the Pulger Family who owned and run the 'Bellevue Hotel', and in every way combined the peace and gentleness of that Tibetan family and its culture. Lawang Pulger (1926 – 2007), former director of the Bellevue Hotel, traced his origin from a Tibetan Lepcha family. The hotel is situated on the Mall, Darjeeling's prime area, and overlooks the Chowrasta, the main square with its magical mix of people from India, Nepal, Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan. This hotel was established on or around 1872, (it is well documented in survey maps dating back to 1887) and represents the best of colonial “Raj” architecture. It was owned by an English lady until 1942 when it was bought by the present owners' family who have held it now for three generations.

Lawang Pulger was a grandson of Raja Tenduk Pulger, an eminent Lepcha noble during the British Raj. They came to Darjeeling in the early days of the colonial rule. He got involved in import and export trade between Darjeeling and Lhasa in his younger days during the British time and later, worked for His Holiness the Dalai Lama for many years in what were the hardest times in Tibetan history.

To mention a few of his achievements, he was a co-founder of “Tibetan Freedom Press”(the first Tibetan newspaper in exile) of the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre in Darjeeling and of the Central School for Tibetans (CST) in Darjeeling and in Kalimpong. For decades, he served as a Tibetan representative at the Buddhagaya Temple Management Committee. He was awarded a Medal for Distinguished Service from the Government of India. This hotel commenced operations in 1897 and featured a heritage building constructed around the year 1872 in the wood and stone masonry work characteristic of the colonial "Raj style" British architecture. They owned and managed it since 1943. The hotel is divided into 2 sections – the old building which houses ten wood paneled suites and the recently constructed new wing which houses ten double rooms and six suites with double bay windows. The Bellevue Hotel has become a landmark of Darjeeling tourism and mentioned in Lonely Planet, National Geographic

Adventure, Let's Go, Rough Guides, Cadogan Guides, and other discriminating travel books, including those published in Japan, Korea and other countries.

Tashi Pulger, the present owner is well educated. Born in 1983, he studied at Mount Hermon School, Darjeeling, and then at Oxford College, Bangalore. Encouraged and assisted by his mother Choedon Pulger, he has taken the steps required to preserve the tradition of the Bellevue Hotel even during the turbulent time of political unrest and harsh competition <sup>25</sup>.

Many Muslim Tibetan traders are also well-established in hotel business. One such Tibetan Muslim trader is Habibulla Khallu. He started his hotel business by taking the 'Society Hotel' on lease from the Managing Authority of the Anjuman-i-Islamia for thirty years. He migrated to Darjeeling in the early years of the second half of the nineteenth century when the political turmoil just started in Tibet. He stated that he was an Indian as his ancestors were the inhabitants of Kashmir. They migrated to Tibet very long ago and lived at a village near Gyantse, Southern Tibet.

Among the early migrants few Tibetans achieved considerable economic prosperity through hotel business. The Dekeva family made an adventurer bid in this direction. They took the advantage left by the British to establish themselves in the hotel business. This family bought the 'Dekeling Resort and Hotel' constructed in the late 19th century by Sir William Ferguson Ducat. It was named as 'Hawk's Nest Resort'. The mansion is typical of those built by British of the Raj period. Recently it is restored to its original splendour by the Dekeva family. They have tried to combine every comfort and convenience to increase their clientele. Dekeling Resort and Hotel is run by the members of the family altogether. Many domestic and international guests stay here.

Norbu Dekeva, the present proprietor of Dekeling Resort & Hotel, besides being a hotelier, is actively involved in social activities, in both local and Tibetan Community Social Activities. He is the Founder Member and the General Secretary of Manjushree Centre of Tibetan Culture, Darjeeling. Manjushree Centre of Tibetan Culture is a 20 year old non-profit charitable Institution and has actively contributed towards preservation and promotion of Tibetan language and culture. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is very pleased with the work of Manjushree Institute (MCTC).

Norbu Dekeva is also the board member and first General Secretary of Chagpori Tibetan Medical Institute, Darjeeling, re-established in India in 1992 in commemoration of Chagpori Tibet 1696-1959 by late Dr. S.N. Trogawa Rinpoche.

Norbu had served as the President/General Secretary of Regional Tibetan Youth Congress. Mrs. Norbu has also offered her contribution to her community by serving as President of Regional Tibetan Women's Association, Darjeeling<sup>26</sup>.

In the heart of Darjeeling, close to the Mall's shopping and entertainment circuit is Hotel Shangri-La and Shāngri-La Regency is on the Gandhi Road, are owned by a Tibetan, Ranjan Lama and his English wife, Dawn. They made both the hotels an ideal base for the many local tourist attractions. Originally built by the British, the exterior of the building retains the aura of the British Raj, Shangrila Hotel and restaurant are now run by this family for two generations.

Besides these hotels there are also some restaurants run by the Tibetans such as Kunga, Seven Seventeen,(along with hotel) Dekeva, ,(along with hotel) and so on. In this way, the Tibetans have gradually established their grip in the tourism business.

Many Tibetan traders were engaged in wholesale and retail trade including import and export. Initially, they transacted trade between Tibet and Kalimpong before the Chinese occupation. A few of them also carried on this trade from Darjeeling. The trade was worked on a system of advance. European and Indian buyers advanced loans to the larger Tibetan merchants, though not to the small traders who brought down only two or three hundred maunds. For these advances they charged 1 per cent. monthly. During spring and summer the Tibetan merchants gave advances to the owners of the sheep in Tibet, and arranged to take delivery from the following October. By giving these loans six months or more before taking delivery they were able to buy the wool at a rate per maund three or four rupees lower than would otherwise had been possible<sup>27</sup>.

Recently the migrant Tibetans have established the 'Dragon Market' on the Post Office Road. They trade almost every important item especially cloth and stationery goods. They import goods from the traders of Sikkim Bhutan and Tibet via Kalimpong and Siliguri. A few words may be worth mentioning regarding the role of the Tibetan

Refugee Self Help Centre in bringing about the displaced, disabled Tibetans in the main stream of the commercial pursuits of Darjeeling. It started on October 2, 1959, the Center undertook multifarious activities ranging from the production of handicrafts and training of artisans and craftsman. To day the Centre has been exporting to 36 countries all over the world. Besides traditional items such as Tibetan carpets, wood, metal and leather works, they have also experimented in testing new production lines incorporating traditional Tibetan motifs, which would find a ready market both here and abroad. Among the successful items are footwear and coats which, while keeping the traditional Tibetan styles, are nevertheless modified for suitable wear with European clothes. During its 40 years of existence the Centre has been able to train 1600 persons in various crafts. Out of this, between 1000 to 1200 persons have left the Centre to set up their own enterprises. All of them are now fully self-supporting and several of them are doing very well <sup>28</sup>.

#### **5.4: Kashmiri Business Community**

Kashmir remained linked with India both culturally and commercially through the ages. Kashmiri traders went almost everywhere in India. They had established their own commercial network in the countries where Kashmiri goods had a great demand. They went out with their merchandise and brought goods from both distant and near places like Kabul, Yakhand and Samarkhand on the one hand and India, Ladak, Balluchistan, Tibet and China on the other.

In Darjeeling as in other places of India, the Kashmiris came to trade with their merchandise from the very beginning of its growth. Several Kashmiri traders prospered with a good trading network during the British period. Commenting on the nature of their trade E.C Dozey wrote that mild-spoken Kashmiri and Panjabi dealers engaged in silks, skins and furs<sup>29</sup>. In course of time the Kashmiri merchants changed their business and established their monopoly on the curio trade of Darjeeling. Almost all the curio stores of Darjeeling belong to Kashmiri traders. Unfortunately the Kashmiris who lived in Darjeeling were not separately counted in any census. So it is not possible to

give the exact number of Kashmiris who lived in Darjeeling. At present there are only a few Kashmiri trading establishments in the Bazaar.

The most important among them is Habeeb Mulleck, owner of the most reputed and familiar-old Kashmiri Curio shop 'Habeeb Mulleck & Sons'. This family has been trading in Darjeeling for four generations. Habeeb Mulleck probably came with his uncle in Darjeeling around the year 1880. At that time he hawked and sold socks and cashmere shawls to the locals. In this way after a painful struggle he managed to found a shop on the Mall that he got from the Municipal Corporation on lease. Then he started his small business of woolen garments in 1890. Haji Ahmad Mulleck assisted his father to transact this business. Over time they switched over to the curio business from the first decade of the twentieth century. This business gradually became very lucrative because the foreign visitors flocked in the shop to collect the Indian and Nepali rare objects. Usually very rich, they didn't question the price and purchased without bargaining<sup>30</sup>. This flourishing business of the Mulleck's sons continued for more than 100 years. This store was visited by a number of reputed persons like Rajiv Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, etc. Since the shop is located in the heart of the town it attracted most of the visitors. Over time they branched out into cashmere shawls along with curio business and established another shop next door to their old shop. They deal with Kashmiri handi-crafts, Kashmiri Pashmina shawls, silk pashmina shawl, embroidered shawl, Tibetan Thankas, different stones, brass-ware, copper-wares, silver-jewelry and curio goods etc.

According to Parvez Mulleck his great grand father Habeeb Mulleck hailed from their native town Srinagar. He made his journey on foot, train and again on foot to Darjeeling. At that time he collected his stocks from Kashmir, but at present they collect stocks not only from Kashmir, but Calcutta, Kathmandu<sup>31</sup> as well.

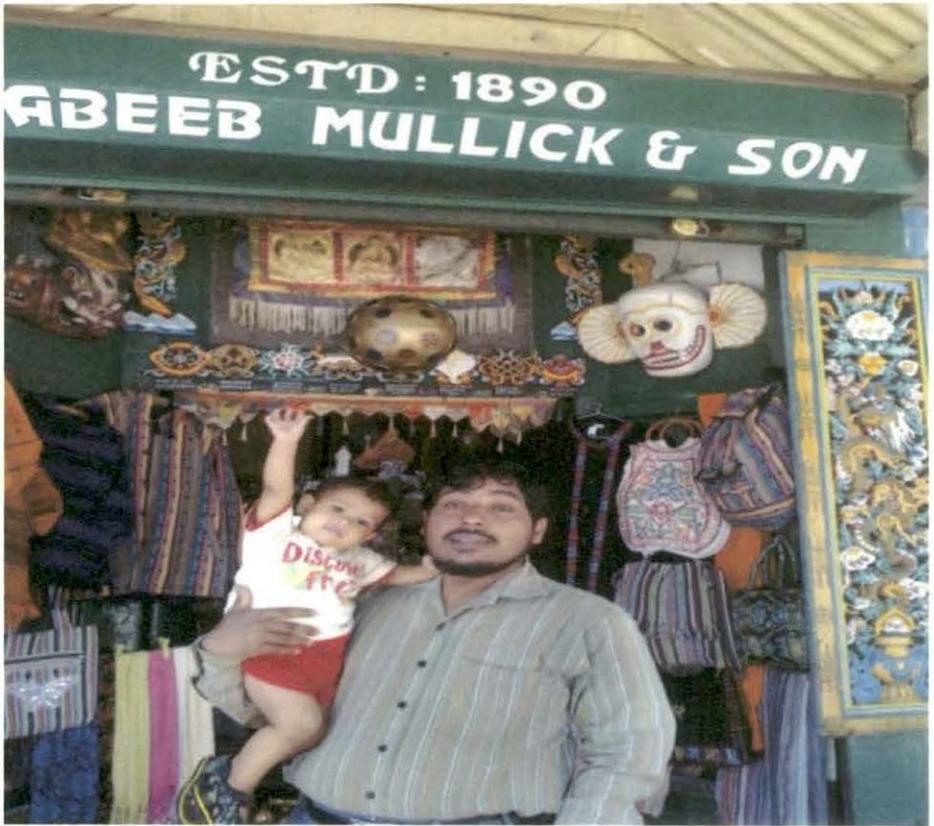


Figure5.3Habees Mullick & Son,Mall, Darjeeling-2012s

Source: Personal Collection



Figure5.4Commercial Row (Mall) Darjeeling-1930s

Source: [http://www.oldmhs.com/older\\_darjeeling.htm](http://www.oldmhs.com/older_darjeeling.htm)

Another flourishing curio business on Laden La Road was transacted by the Kashmiri traders Mr. Abdul Hamid and his brother Abdul Hanif. Around 1940 the two brothers, Ali Mohammad Butt and Gulam Mohammad Butt migrated from Sri Nagar, Kashmir to Darjeeling. Like others, they also undertook a long and adventurous journey. They came from Sri Nagar to Pathankot by bus and from there by train to Lukhnow and finally in Siliguri again by train. Finally both of them moved from Siliguri to Darjeeling by Toy train. Business was the main reason of their migration from Srinagar to Darjeeling in the second half of the twentieth century. Initially, they traded with Kashmiri handcrafts from Judge Bazar and Mt. Peasant Road. This Kashmiri family started to diversify and explore the local market by concentrating on a wider variety of curio goods from 1965 onwards. All goods were imported from Sri Nagar. They purchased Kashmiri shawls from the Kashmiri merchant Ali Mohammad Kawsa in those days. Presently goods are collected from Delhi, Ludhiana, Ladak, Kolkata. They import Thankas from Nepal and Ladak, Buddhist, statues from Delhi, Silver Jewelry from Kolkata. Now their business is divided among their sons.

Ali Mohammad had four sons. All of them engaged in trading in Darjeeling town and altogether owned three shops: 'Art Emporium' is run by Abdul Hamid and Hanif. 'Darjeeling Tea Corner' and 'Curio Corner' are controlled by Mustak Butt and Sahil Butt respectively. All of the shops were specializing in curios and local religious objects that proved to be a wise choice. The post-Independence period in Darjeeling was characterized by expansion of tourism industry. There was increase of tourists on the one hand and affluence and changing expectations of Nepali society on the other. Nepali women generally (as opposed to a small rural areas) became aware of fashions and started adorning themselves with these fashionable breeds, stones etc and decorated their houses with these traditional religious objects (especially the Tibetans) that led their rapid growth in due courses.

Gulam Mohammad Butt had a son, Abdul Rashid Butt who occupied 'Eastern Art', located at Mall.

Another Kashmiri who migrated to Darjeeling for the purpose of trading was Sardar Ahmad Kashmiri's father Sardar Mohammad Kashmiri. He also came from Sri Nagar in

1926. He was a peddler. He hawked Kashmiri handicrafts, pashmina shawls, woolen rugs, carpets, embroidered shawls etc. to the visitors and the locals. The Asian Art Palace was established by Sardar Ahmad around 1947 on the Nehru Road. He switched over to the curio business and it was made farther lucrative by Shakil Ahmad Kashmiri. Shakil Ahmad presently handles the business with two assistants. He imports his curio goods from Himalayan Art & Craft, Kathmandu, Nepal, and some local merchants.

Noor Mohammad, owner of 'Kashmiri Arts' came to Darjeeling much later. He came from Khati- Darwaza, Rainwari along with curio business he also dealt with shawls of different varieties, carpets including Kashmiri carpets, woolen rugs, silk rugs, cushion covers, leather goods, etc. He sold goods on wholesale and retail. Presently it is run by his son Zahoor Ahmad. Noor, a skillful businessman dealing on a very delighted manner was inherited by his son who is also following the same tradition of their family. Now it is very flourishing.

All the Kashmiri traders in Darjeeling maintained close inter-course with their families in Kashmir and also used to visit their native place. Some of them celebrated their religious or other family- festivals together with their family in Sri Nagar. They used to visit Sri Nagar on every family occasion and at the same time observed local festivals. All the Kashmiri traders Muslim and made a kind of religious regional circle among their own community. They did not have any association but maintained their relation with each other in terms of equal status and religion. They bore their own socio-cultural tradition in Darjeeling. But at the same time remained inter connected with the locals. From the very beginning of their arrival in Darjeeling they showed respect to the local culture and participated in socio-economic and political activities. Few in number, they did not have any deep impact on the economy of Darjeeling. But their presence definitely added colour to the socio-economic pursuit of Darjeeling.

### 5.5: Panjabi Business Community

In the British sources the Panjabis were generally referred to as traders. According to the census of 1891 they numbered 344. It also referred to them as traders and soldiers in the Mountain Battery. In 1941 their number decreased to 320. Presently also a handful old Panjabis are found to engage in trading. Those who were inhabitants of undivided Punjab were in general known as Punjabi in Darjeeling. One such Panjabi trader is Bimal Khanna who still continues to trade in Darjeeling. He inherited this business from his father. His father Bakshilal Khanna was a service holder under the British till Independence. In 1951 he purchased the business ownership from British company's 'Pioneer Sport Company'. Its headquarter was situated in London. And Mr. Khanna continued to run this same sports businesses till his death. Now his son Bimal Khanna further expanded this retailing. He ventured into some other trading items like toys, fashionable modern millinery and stationery goods like paper, pen, textbooks, (Nursery and secondary). Mr. Khanna remembered that his father hailed from Sialkot of Punjab, now in Pakistan. He brought about goods from Jalandhar, Mireet, and Calcutta. At present, however, they do not have any connection with their ancestral place<sup>32</sup>.

Another important Punjabi hotel-business tycoon Mr. Mohan Singh Oberoi, popularly known as MS, laid down the foundation of Oberoi Hotel Pvt Ltd. He was attracted by the growing prospect of hotel business in Darjeeling in the second half of the twentieth century. He started his hotel business by taking the lease of the 'Mount Everest Hotel' from the descendant of Mr. Stephen Arathoon for hundred years. Mohan Singh was born on 15 August 1900. He grew up in Bhaun, a small city of some 8,000 inhabitants in Punjab, now in Pakistan. After finishing study he started his career as a manager of his uncle's shoe-factory. He first stepped into hotel management in 1927. He was offered a 1 year contract to manage the Delhi Club. Soon after this he started to engage in hotel business and leased one after another great hotels of India and outside India. In course of time a great chain of Oberoi Hotel Empire was established under his leadership. The prominent hotels bought and leased under MS included Clarke's Hotel Delhi and Simla, Grand in Calcutta, the Mount Everest Hotel in Darjeeling, the Swiss Hotel in Calcutta, Kathmandu Soaltee Hotel in Nepal, Imperial Hotel in Singapore,

Mecna Hotel in Egypt, the Lanka Oberoi in Ceylon, the Windsor in Melbourne, the Bali Oberoi, Bali Island. In this way the Oberoi group initiated by Mohan Singh reached its zenith in course of time. MS Oberoi passed away in 2002, leaving a massive legacy to his family and to the world of hospitality.

In 1950, the 'Mount Everest Hotel' was leased out to Mr. Oberoi for a period of 100 years. The Heritage Landmark of Darjeeling is situated on the Gandhi Road just above 'The Swiss Hotel'. It was started in 1914 by Mr. Aratoon Stephen and was named 'The Central Hotel' which at that time can accommodate 40 boarders<sup>33</sup>. The deed was then supervised by Mr. N.C. Bose, a Bengali barrister. In 1951 MS bought the hotel then the hotel popularly known as Oberoi Mount Everest Hotel. Local residents say that the hotel had caught fire and stopped functioning since 1986.

Diamond Oberoi of Elgin Hotel was then bought by late Kuldip Chand Oberoi of the Oberoi family of hotelier's fame and has been ever since run by his son Diamond Oberoi to the present day. The Oberoi family of Hotelier's fame Mr. Kuldeep Chand Oberoi followed Mr. Mohan Singh Oberoi and bought the heritage hotel of Darjeeling namely 'Elgin Hotel'. Before the partition he lived in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. He came to Darjeeling in 1950 as the Director of Mt. Everest Oberoi Hotel Darjeeling. He had five sons and one daughter all raised and educated in Darjeeling including Diamond Oberoi who at present is the MD of the Oberoi concern in Darjeeling and Sikkim. The climate of Darjeeling suited Mrs. Shanta Devi the wife of Kuldeep Oberoi so Mr. Oberoi bought the entire property of New Elgin in 1965 one of the oldest Hotels in the District established in 1886. A British family used to run the Elgin Hotel on rent before the Oberoi's took over the property; they also ran the Park Hotel now known as the Shangrila near Chowrasta.

Diamond Oberoi took over the management of the New Elgin properties in 1957. He is an enterprising man with a keen sense of business acumen; he has opened up prestigious branches of Elgin Hotels in Kalimpong and Gangtok and has planned every little detail of it himself which are impressive and comfortable. He was educated in St. Joseph's School and College, his colleagues and friends included the Royalty of Nepal and the

relations of H.H. The Dalai Lama the royal family of Sikkim and Bhutan. The New Elgin Hotel is a favourite halting place for the glitterati of India and abroad<sup>34</sup>. Diamond recollects that there was a small hotel called Park Hotel now St. Robert's School. He was philanthropist and loved to give donations to the poor. He was also a religious man and a regular visitor in the Mahakal Temple. When Mother Teresa came to Darjeeling he was the first man to go and met her and help her in her work and function.

### **5.6: Armenian Business Community**

India maintained a close commercial relation with Armenia from the time immemorial. Presence of the Armenians can be traced back as early as the time of Alexander's invasion. In Bengal, the Armenians had formed some commercial settlements prior to the advent of the English settlers. The Armenians, pioneer of the early foreign traders in India and the most enterprising commercial community from the remotest times, formed their first settlement in Bengal during the halcyon days of the Mughal Supremacy. They established their permanent settlement at Syedabad, the commercial suburb of Murshidabad where they flourished for a considerable time, but finally deserted it, in the natural courses of events when it lost its commercial importance<sup>35</sup>. Later, they moved to Calcutta where they soon constituted the small 'Armenian Community' which left a considerable influence in the commercial arena of Calcutta for a long time. A number of business tycoons of this community flourished for a considerable time in various business centres in different parts of India. Some of them even made history in some particular branches. Of them, Stephen Arathoon, is still alive in the heart of Calcutta for his prestigious magnificent construct the 'Grand Hotel'. He not only confined this hotel business in Calcutta but also extended its branch in Darjeeling. Realizing the potential of tourism in Darjeeling, he founded the first most popular hotel of Darjeeling 'The Central Hotel' or 'Hotel Mount Everest in 1914, with 40 boarders of accommodation <sup>36</sup>. This Heritage Landmark of Darjeeling is located at the junction of Post Office and Mt Pleasant Roads. The magnificent building became a centre of attraction as Dozey gave vivid description of this hotel and its development in the following words "The hotel command<sup>37</sup> a view of over 100 miles of the snowy rang, and stands above the town on the Auckland Road was designed by Mr. Stephen

Wilkins, the architect. At present (1920-25) the building consists of a central block, with a north or right wing attached thereto, and contains 120 rooms furnished with all appliances which go toward making life comfortable. On the ground floor there is a large lounge, which is 85× 50 feet, luxuriously fitted up with arm chairs upholstered in dark green leather and small tables arranged on a highly polished wooden floor which is covered with handsome rugs. The overall ambience of the hotel is that of luxury with rich wooden finish ground and staircase, for place and mirrored sideboards.

In praise of this hotel Dozey further added that "This building already possesses a most imposing frontage, but when the scheme has been given full effect to and the left wing added, Darjeeling might well be proud of possessing one of the grandest and most up-to-date hotels in the Orient".<sup>38</sup>

Mr. Arathoon Stephen was mentioned as the lease-holder for the property at 18A Park Street in the city's civic records dating back to World War I. Born in Iran in 1861; Arathoon Stephen was a member of the Armenian community in Calcutta, which is believed to have spent a huge amount of money in shaping the growth of the city. Stephen was a shareholder and the first managing director of Stephen Court Ltd. Stephen lived at 2 Camac Street and was known as a patron of education and art. He died in May 1927. In 1950, the Mount Everest Hotel in Darjeeling was leased out to Mr. Mohan Singh Oberoi of East India Hotels, Kolkata for a period of 100 years. The deed was then supervised by Mr. N.C. Bose, whose residence can be seen in the site at the end of the abandoned complex of Mt Oberoi Hotel. Local residents say that the hotel had caught fire and stopped functioning since 1986.

### **5.7: Sindhi Business Community**

Among Indian merchants and businessmen dispersed across India as well as the world, the Sindhis are probably the most ubiquitous, if not the most conspicuous. They are found in the main tourist destinations as well as in the major business centres. There are few countries in the world where one does not come across some traders from that community. Their origins as well as the precise nature of their activities remain, however, somewhat mysterious and they generally adopted a low profile. The

expanding literature on South Asian diaspora generally have little to say about them, and yet their business acumen is legendary, and in India they have well established reputation as shrewd operators<sup>39</sup>

Given their business acumen and widespread commercial connections it is only natural that they would come and settle in Darjeeling as well. In Darjeeling which attract tourists from all over the world, they owned shops and bazaar in which they, sold stationery goods, cloth, curios and books imported from the other parts of Bengal as well as India. At present not many Sindhis are found in the town. One Sindhi family that we have come across is in the business of book. The Oxford Book and Stationery Co. of Darjeeling on the Mall is one of the very old and prominent Book stores. The present owner, Maya H. Primlani is a Sindhi lady. She recounted how her father-in-law came to Darjeeling from Karachi, Sindh of Pakistan. J. H Primlani was a manager of the Departmental shop and in 1941 he himself established this shop. From the very beginning he dealt with books and added stationery items to his collection only later. It was at the Mall and most probably the best book store ran by a Shindhi. They deal with books of publishers from Delhi, Calcutta, Dehradun, and Banaras etc. They were the dealer of Oxford Press Publishing House in Darjeeling besides, 'India Book house', 'Rupa Company' etc. Now Mrs Maya H. Primlani, at the premature demise of her husband, runs the business with the help of six assistants. She has also introduced modern techniques of business, like taking order through mail, over phone, etc. Books are also sent by VP<sup>40</sup>.

### **5.8: Chinese Business Community**

At present, there is not really any Chinese in the Sadar. A few of them would be found in Kalimpong in business of shoe making and saddle. However, there was a time when there were quite a considerable number of Chinese in Darjeeling and about fifty percent trading of shoes and saddlery was controlled by them<sup>41</sup>. In addition, as O'Malley described they also worked as carpenters<sup>42</sup>. According to 1891 census, there were 57 who spoke Chinese and 156 on the basis of birth place. It is also said that "the Chinese flourish as carpenters in Darjeeling"<sup>43</sup>

According to E. C. Dozey "The Chinese population of both Kalimpong and Darjeeling appreciably increased in 1912 when the Chinese rabble, called an army, were repatriated from Tibet through British territory. Many were the deserters who hid in the forest along the Tista Valley Road, seeking employment in the Rinchipong block where extensive sawing was being carried on by a European firm until all fear of arrest had passed away, when they flocked into the two towns. In the forest soldiers were to be seen working as carpenters at wages varying from eight annas to a rupee a day, during which all the military formalities were most strictly observed, for privates stood to attention when addressed by officers of superior rank.

The result of the influx into Darjeeling is to be seen in the erection of a three-storied, concrete structure on the Jail Road, and immediately below the Eden Sanitarium, where Chinamen congregate every night indulging in potations of much chow and a little harmless gambling.

This club stands on a spot which hitherto was noted for anything but sanitation and has accordingly improved that quarter of the native town"<sup>44</sup>.

This above description depicts the impact of certain historical developments of Tibet on Darjeeling in a particular period. But this was perhaps only a passing phase and there is not any trace of presence of the Chinese in Darjeeling at the moment.

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