

## Chapter 2: Historical development of Darjeeling hills

### 2.1 Introduction

The Darjeeling hills was once ruled by the Kingdom of Sikkim. Darjeeling region was converted into a hill station by the British East India Company in 1800's and came to be known as the *Queen of the Hills*, and remained a part of West Bengal in independent India. The name of Darjeeling is a composition of two Tibetan words, 'Dorjee' means *Thunderbolt* and 'ling' means *place* hence Darjeeling means *Land of the Thunderbolt*. At present Darjeeling district is composed of four sub-divisions i.e., Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong and Siliguri. The former three sub-divisions are together known as Darjeeling hill area, which is the study area for the present research. The history of Darjeeling is rather complex but interesting. The brief history of Darjeeling district is described in the following sections.

### 2.2 Pre-British Period

Till the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area around Darjeeling was part of Kingdom of Sikkim. In 1814, the British East India Company intervened in skirmish between Sikkim and Nepal, following which Sikkim became a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan. In 1828, a dispute occurred between Nepal and Sikkim. British East India Company representatives were sent from Malda to resolve the dispute. They found the Darjeeling very suitable for sanatorium for British troops. The company negotiated with the King of Sikkim to take the area.

On the first day of February 1835, the Maharaja of Sikkim handed over a strip of territory on the Himalaya, 24 miles long and about 5 to 6 miles wide, as a mark of friendship with the then Governor General, Lord William Bentinck, for the establishment of a sanatorium for the convalescent servants of the East India Company. In 1835, Dr. Campbell, a member of the Indian Medical Service and Lieutenant Napier were given the responsibility to develop a hill station there. By 1849, the population grew to 10,000 and following a discord between Sikkim and the Company, the company annexed the Darjeeling region to the British India Empire. The Kalimpong was a part of the kingdom of Bhutan and in 1865, after losing out to an armed British intervention Bhutan ceded the territory of Kalimpong to British India.

### 2.3 The British Period

After taking over the Darjeeling area, the Governor General expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of sanatorium for the British government servants suffering from sickness. By 1840 a road had

been made from Pankhabari where there was a staging bungalow. Another staging bungalow was set up at Mahaldiram. The first hotel was started at Kurseong and a second at Darjeeling followed by some 30 private houses which had been erected. Elsewhere, however, the hills were dominated by their virgin forests as the road from Pankhabari was an almost impenetrable forest. The region was still practically uninhabited and one of the most important problems of administration was to attract native settlers.

In 1839, Dr. Campbell became the administrator of newly annexed Darjeeling with sole authority and responsibility of developing the annexed area. Dr. Campbell devoted himself with rare energy to the task of developing the station attracting immigrants to cultivate the mountain slopes, and stimulating trade and commerce. An unnamed British Inspection Officer wrote in 1852 "Darjeeling an inaccessible tract of forests with a very scanty population housed an excellent sanatorium established for troops and other hill corps, no less than 70 European houses with a bazaar, jail and buildings for the accommodation, a simple system of administration of justice, maintenance of socio-economic harmony with local tribes, experimental cultivation of tea and coffee and various European fruits and grapes ..... I may in short say of him (Dr. Campbell) that to him is the Government indebted for the formation of the district of Darjeeling".

Between 1839 and 1842 Lord Napier of Magdala, of the Royal Engineers, had been engaged in making a road through the virgin forest from Ghoom to Kurseong via Senchal ridge and Kurseong to Pankhabari. This road was however, both too narrow and too steep for wheeled traffic and it was recognized that in the interest of Darjeeling and for the development of the frontier trade, a road broad enough for carts and with an easy gradient was absolutely necessary. The construction of the Darjeeling Cart Road, a wonderful example of engineering feat, which subsequently made the alignment of a railway so comparatively easy was begun in 1861. By 1866 a broad metalled road from the Ganges to Siliguri was constructed and thereby established uninterrupted traffic with the plains. From that time the first attempt was made to make the hills the home of European education in India. For some years Bishop Cotton had been advocating the establishment of hill schools for Europeans and his efforts were supported by Lord Canning. As a result, several schools were established in Darjeeling. The first of which was St. Paul's School which was transferred in 1864 from Calcutta to Darjeeling. In 1864, the first large Cinchona plantation was started and successfully developed at Rongbi.

In 1841, Dr. Campbell had started the experimental growth of the tea plant with a few seeds grown in Ruman from China stock. Twenty years later the original plants had grown to a gigantic size, one of them it is said being 15.2m in circumference and 6m high. It was recognized that the soil and climate of Darjeeling were favourable to its cultivation. Large plantations were established and companies were formed and by the year 1866, there were 39 tea gardens covering an area of 4500 hectare. The year 1866 may be taken as marking an epoch in the history of Darjeeling with the addition of Kalimpong within Darjeeling district. With the establishment of peace and progress civilization began. Rapid development of transport and communication of the district became top priority to the British ruler.

The rapid expansion of tea cultivation had however, result in reckless deforestation and it was recognized that it was necessary to provide for the careful conservation of the forests, for their protection from wanton or unscientific destruction and for the proper development of the part of the resources of the region. The Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Garden was appointed Conservator of Forests for Bengal with a mission for adopting special measures for protection of forests in Darjeeling where large scale deforestation had taken place due to introduction of tea plantation. To control further degradation all non-accessed lands in the old hill territory above 1850m altitude and all such lands between the *terai* and the elevation of 1000m were declared as Reserve Forest and thereby beginning a new means of Forest Conservancy in Bengal.

In the meantime, however, the development of the industry in the hills had been even more rapid as the suitability of the soil and climate to the growth of tea became apparent. Government offered land to investors on favorable terms and the industry rapidly developed. By the end of 1866, only ten years after the establishment of the industry on a commercial basis, there were no less than 39 gardens with 10,000 acres under cultivation and returns of over 1,96,400 kg of tea. In 1870 there were 56 gardens with 11,000 acres under cultivation, employing 8000 laborers and yielding nearly 7,71,100 kg and in 1874 the number of gardens had increased to 113, the area under cultivation to 18,888 acres, the returns to 17,81,700 kg, and the labour force to 19,000 persons. In other words, between 1866 and 1874 the number of gardens under tea had exactly trebled, the area under cultivation increased by 82%, while the production of tea multiplied nearly 10 times. Since that time the industry has progressed steadily until no less than 50,600 acres or 204.6 km<sup>2</sup> are under tea cultivation. Table 2.1 illustrates the advances which has made during 1874 to 1905.

*Table 2.1 Growth of tea industry in Darjeeling during British period*

Year	Number of tea gardens	Area under cultivation in hectare	Production of tea in million kilogram
1874	113	7,643.6	1.7817
1885	175	15,579.7	4.1233
1895	186	19,704.6	5.3137
1905	148	20,483.9	5.6462

The fast growing tea industry had tremendous demand for labour for cleaning, planting, construction and other related work. Huge migration, mostly from Nepal ushered a new chapter in the history of Darjeeling, in conjunction with its demographic transition. Simultaneously, the development of transport facilities were on full swing and by 1881, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway was completed and thereby providing further boost to the already growing tea industry. Another important factor in advancing the general development of the region has been the preservation and development of the forest which supply timber for bridges, buildings, tea boxes, firewood and charcoal.

Native cultivation was practically at the same stage as it was when the British first occupied the country except that the old nomadic wasteful system of cultivation practiced by the Lepchas had been given up, and the use of the plough which they had learnt from the immigrant Nepalese had extended several attempts to introduce better seeds improved ploughs and other implements and those attempts had been met with some success.

The cultivation of coffee was started at about the same time as that of tea on one or two gardens, but did not prove a financial success. Tobacco, again which was indigenous in the hills, and which may might be seen growing around many native homestead had never been successfully cultivated or manufactured on a large scale.

Cinchona plantation had gradually disappeared as the cost of manufacture and transport was found to be prohibitive for private planters after the fall in the price of quinine and a only the Government Cinchona Plantation at Mongpu and its sub-ordinate gardens which produce both quinine and number of alkaloid by-products were then at work.

During British period, they built the basic infrastructure of road, railway line, hotels, tourist lodges. The list of major roads constructed by the British has been tabulated in table 2.2.

*Table 2.2 Major roads constructed during the British period*

Year	Name of road/bridge	Road length ( km)
1839-1842	Siliguri to Darjeeling (with about 300 bridges)	65
1865	Matigara to Kurseong via Pankhabari.	49
1908	Tista valley Road	55
N.A	Tista to Kalimpong	13
N.A	Darjeeling to Teesta Bridge	28
N.A	Naxalbari to Garidhura	18
1879-1881	Darjeeling Himalayan Railway	83
1940-41	Kalimpong to Algarah	15
1915	Siliguri to Giell Khola	31

During the British period the Forest Department had also constructed a number of roads including (i) Old Military Cart road, (ii) Simkona-Lalkuti Cart road, (iii) Sukhiapokhari Cart road, (iv) Manaybhanjan Busti Cart road, (v) Dilaram Road from Bagora to Darjeeling Hill Cart road, (vi) Sukna-Sevok road, (vii) Rissisum-Labha Cart road, (viii) Central Cart road, (ix) South Boundary Cart road and (x) Dalgaon Cart road. In addition to these 39 small village roads, bridle roads and 42 fair weather roads had been constructed during the British period.

Besides the transport network and hotels, 33 Post Offices and 14 Telegraph offices were constructed. During this period Dak bungalows were constructed at Kurseong, Pankhabari, Badamtam, Jorepokhari, Kalijhora, Kalimpong, Mirik, Pashok, Pedong, Phalut, Rangarun, Reyang, Sandakapu, Senchel, Tanglu, Teesta bridge etc. A large number of school buildings, hospitals, hotels, tourist lodges, and government offices were constructed to facilitate administration and basic civil amenities to this newly developed part of the country. Such large scale construction activities by the early developer of Darjeeling also invited environmental degradation as by product.

In 1907, the first ever demand for separate administrative set up for the district of Darjeeling was placed before the Government by the leader of the hill people. This demand was considered to have arisen due to the widespread idea of reforms and the anti-partition wave in Bengal. On November 8, 1917 the representatives of the Darjeeling district submitted a memorandum to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal demanding creation

of a separate unit. The copies of that were subsequently submitted to E.S Montagu, the then Secretary of State for India and Lord Chelmsford, the then Viceroy of India.

## **2.4 Independent Period**

After the tea Industry developed to some extent, the number of tea garden increased leading to forest clearings vis-à-vis damage of environment increased. The Cinchona Plantation area increased to 9700 hectare after 1947. After Independence the State Government established eight CD blocks under Darjeeling hills for the development of interior areas. Development works also started in different parts of Darjeeling hills for the establishment of Block Development Offices and other infrastructures. The people slowly began to misuse the environment by cutting down the trees, collecting of stone boulders from forest land for the construction of their dwelling houses and other structures. During the early independent period the following roads were constructed in Darjeeling hills i.e., (i) Sonada to Munda road, (ii) Pulbazar to Kaijalay, (iii) Singmari-Chowrasta-Toongsung, (iv) Rimbik-Manaybhanjang-Phalut, (v) Sukhiapokhari to Nagari via Pokhraybong, (vi) Latpanchar to Shelpu, (vii) Dilaram to Chimney via Bagora, (viii) from 17<sup>th</sup> Mile to Rangpu via Mongsong, (ix) Kalimpong to 17 th Mile via Dr. Graham's Homes, (x) Relli to Sukrabaray and (xi) Kghunia more to Upper Kumai.

In addition to this several Tourist lodges, Mirik lake, Darjeeling Government College, Kalimpong college, Kurseong college, Darjeeling Polytechnic Institute, I.T.I Toong, HMT Watch factory Toong, PWD Inspection Bungalows at different places, Hydroelectric project of Jaldhaka with barracks and quarters, Ramam hydroelectric project with other structures, Kafaybari Hydroelectric project with other structures in Kurseongb were constructed. During construction of such projects huge number of trees were felled. Mountain slopes were cut down. As a result many perennial water sources dried up. The level of air pollution, sound pollution, soil pollution, water pollution increased leading to the spread of many diseases among the local people.

In the year 1972 the Government of West Bengal established the Darjeeling Hill Area Development Council, for the overall development of hill areas. Since then some special allocation of fund from the Central and State Government began to flow. In view of its socio economic backwardness, peculiar topographical, physical and cultural features, the Government of West Bengal accorded a very high priority of the socio-economic development of the hill areas of Darjeeling. The development activities in the area were

carried out under the State Plan Budget and a Special Central Assistance additive to the normal expenditure from the State Plan.

Accelerated hill development programmes for the Darjeeling hill areas had been taken up from 1974-75 onwards, from Special Central Assistance. During that period the development works were undertaken in agriculture development, horticulture, agriculture marketing, fisheries, soil conservation, irrigation, animal husbandry, forestry, panchayat and community development, co-operatives, industries, sericulture, cottage and small scale industries, communication, tourism, social and community services, education, DWS schemes, information and cultural affairs etc.

Thus, in the name of development programmes vast areas of this hilly region was destroyed. The construction of roads and other infrastructures were indispensable for efficient transport and communication system for tourism development, but these being done in an unplanned and unscientific manner were mainly responsible for destruction of Darjeeling Himalayan land resource along with its rich vegetation and animal wealth. A careful study shows that the construction of 1km long road in hilly region produced 16.60 million cubic meters of debris and each kilometer of already constructed roads generates 550 cubic meters of debris by landslides and rock falls. Thus, nearly 24 million cubic meters of debris slide down damaging vegetation and choking the springs etc. These activities accelerate hill slope instability, deforestation, soil erosion, pollution of water and air especially along the road sides and around the most of the tourist resort like Mirik, Lava Pedong, Risap, Lolaygaon, Kaffer etc.

For such development work, the concerned authority had used powerful explosives like dynamite and excavators hence those areas have become weakened and after completion of project especially roads, heavy traffic creates vibrations which cause cracks on rock and earth, which in turn lead to landslides and erosion along with adverse impact on the flora and fauna. The situation has been aggravated further by construction of roads along geologically active zones like at Likuvir, 27<sup>th</sup> mile under NH-31A, and Paglajhora in NH-55, Paparkheti in Lava-Damdim road. The construction for accommodation facilities like rest houses, tourist bungalows, and seasonal accommodation units, recreation centers, etc. had posed serious menace to the land resources of the region, as it has not only accelerated soil erosion but also caused damage to crops, animals and plants, housing and public properties.

The tourist concentration in the Darjeeling Hill areas started increasing day by day, which went beyond its carrying capacity, while the area under vegetation started decreasing due to accelerated human activities. A considerable area of virgin forest was also being replaced for providing necessary amenities to visitors for tourism promotion. A considerable quantum of forest land had been destroyed only by road construction from 1955 to 1988 in Darjeeling hill areas. Deforestation thus results not only in resource depletion but also in deteriorating fresh and underground water, wildlife and leading to disastrous phenomena like aggravated soil erosion and landslides. The increase in mass tourism has an adverse impact on the unique hill environment.

On April 5<sup>th</sup> 1986, a new political party GNLFF (Gorkha National Liberation Front) was formed and an agitation for a separate state of Gorkhaland started in Darjeeling hill areas, and disturbance started where the entire local people had to participate in agitation. All development works in hill areas came to a stand still for indefinite period. During agitation period, no government department and agency was in position to control the public property. The agitators indiscriminately destroyed the Reserved and unreserved forest. The labour force of this locality remained idle and unemployed, and they were compelled to go forest for the cutting of trees and to sell it to meet their needs. Some antisocial elements started the cutting big trees and started to sell the variety of wooden planks, battens, etc., and set up their business. There was no law and order in Darjeeling hill areas which continued for the period of 2 years. When agitation stopped, then entire hill area was like a barren land. There were only burnt remnants of tourist lodges, forest bungalow, government inspection bungalow, rural and urban libraries, school buildings.

## **2.5 The DGHC Period**

When Gorkhaland agitation was over in 1988, a tripartite agreement, between Government of India, West Bengal Government and GNLFF Party and an accord was signed on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1988 which gave the birth of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). Since then a new set up DGHC started for the development of Darjeeling hill area, since then many new roads construction, tourism development works along with other 18 transferred department's work were undertaken. During this period some big projects were undertaken without the approval of concerned authority such as a helipad construction work at Tiger hill, Dooteriah, Mirik, where vast forest area was destroyed but ultimately those projects was cancelled. The damage to the area had already been done.

During DGHC period from 1988 to 2007 139.5 km of new roads in Darjeeling Sadar sub-division, 105.5 km in Kurseong sub-division and 108.8 km in Kalimpong sub-division were constructed. In total 550 km of new roads (including road constructed by DGHC, P.W.D, CD blocks etc. since 1988 till date within 3 hill sub-divisions where approximately 2.2 million m<sup>3</sup> of debris slide down in the valleys resulting in ecological damage. During the road construction large tract of agricultural land as well as tea garden land and some portion of forest land have been damaged. Some portions of virgin forest and government Cinchona plantation have also been damaged due to haphazard construction of new roads, some new landslide have been appeared, and agriculture land of Muddum road, Kagay road, Todey Tangta road have been damaged under Kalimpong sub-division.

The Government of India has introduced Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme from 2007 in hill area of Darjeeling and about 415 km of village roads have been completed in eight hill blocks, beside the above roads many jhora training works, drains, school buildings and public playground have been constructed resulting in further damage the environment. There are two number of low dam hydroelectric project under construction in Tista river where natural vegetation, the habitat of wild animals and birds have been damaged. Due to construction of those two dams the NH-31A, the life line of Sikkim state and Kalimpong sub-division frequently remained closed during the monsoon months due to landslides. The project area of Stage III of Tista low dam hydroelectric project has declared as the vulnerable area.

Subsequently, development of roads, buildings, hydroelectric power project and urbanization in the hill areas of Darjeeling have pushed degradation further. The cumulative effect of development in the Darjeeling hill areas under DGHC period has tremendous affect on forest and grazing lands. Moreover, forest and grazing land are being used for traditional agriculture, asbest agricultural lands are being used for commercial cultivation, pushing cereal cultivation into higher and marginal lands. Land encroachment is taking place even on protected/reserve forests. The increase flow of cash among the indigenous population has brought in a new perspective as they look at land and forest as an instrument of making money not just a means of subsistence as it was a few years back.

Increasing demand for fuel-wood for tourists, towns and local people has to be met locally, and it is still the major source of energy. Fodder and grazing demands have also to be met from dwindling and exhausted lands. All these are leading to a large number of

malpractices, degrading the land and resources. Commercial demand for timber and other forest resources is another source of fast degradation in post DGHC period, both inside and outside the region. There is an insatiable demand for timber and forest product, for construction as well as for numerous wood-based industries. These resources also form the major source of revenue for the Darjeeling hill areas. The mountain people's rights for timber and other produce incorporated in the Forest Act have also brought in several malpractices. The contract system of working these resources is perhaps the most harmful of all.

The ever increasing tourist influx is creating great impact on ecology and environment. The problem of litter, noise pollution and damage to natural assets is causing great anxiety to environmentalists and other educated people. The development and construction of new hotels involves the destruction of vegetation, felling of trees and erosion of the environment under post DGHC period.

Agriculture which was one of the main occupations in post independent period in Darjeeling hill area did not give quick and high economic gains like tourism. During DGHC period in tourist season mainly (March-June) tourism had become the main source of income, as a result of which agricultural system miserably regressed. Vast prime agricultural land was used for development of infrastructure facilities. These activities created dependence system in addition to adverse impact on economy and ecology of the Darjeeling hills.

The farmers who were living in the vicinity of these tourist resorts left their traditional farming for prompt and easy economic benefits. Places around Mirik, Risap, Lolaygaon, Kaffer etc. were the result of this type of tourism impact where agricultural plots were used for tourism purpose. The landslides, droughts, floods, decline in the forest cover, decline in agricultural yield, soil loss, problem of siltation in reservoirs and rivers, extinction of rare species of wild animals, etc. have been found as the major impact of such degradation. The natural springs were rapidly drying, leading to decrease in the the fodder resources and natural forests were fast disappearing in the Darjeeling hills.

To prevent or reduce further degradation of the Darjeeling hill areas scientific and well planned growth of tourism is necessary in which experts of different disciplines along with local people should have close involvement in the whole planning process. There should be correlation between natural resources and tourism development which should be according to the carrying capacity of particular resorts, so that the space action does not affect their ecosystem and ecological balance. If these proactive measures are not given due importance in

tourism planning and development, the prosperous heritage and environment of the Darjeeling hills would be damaged beyond the limit of repair/regeneration. The Queen of hills will merely be sweet memory of the glorious past to many visiting tourists.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The historical records reveal that the land use of Darjeeling hill area was dominated by virgin jungle before 1835. Records from the British travelers also revealed that lush green unspoiled environment of Darjeeling hills. Since the British occupation in 1835, Darjeeling hills have been experiencing various development works. Many roads, bridges, school buildings, hospitals, railway line, public utility structures were constructed. Development of settlements and urban centers took place. Indiscriminate destruction of virgin forest was taken place for the construction of tea gardens, good alignment of roads, railway lines, railway sleepers and other development works.

During independent period the people of Darjeeling hill area misused the environment according to their wish. The DGHC period gave further independence to the people. The people took law and order in their own hands and the law enforcing agencies failed to impose the rule and order framed by the government.

Darjeeling Himalaya is one of the least economically developed hill region in India, and its backwardness can be attributed to environmental/physical constraints like rugged topography, harsh climate, varying altitude with steep slopes, narrow valleys, ethnic complexity and political instability which makes the life painstaking and hazardous. Various development programmes and the implementing agencies lack seriousness and comprehensiveness in approach and hence do not work to the expectations. The agencies like PWD, PHE, Irrigation, Block Panchayat, DGHC and other major public schemes like hydroelectric project, Neora khola drinking water scheme, Balasom water project etc. have had adverse impact on the environment.

In addition to this there had been great impact to the people of hill region as well as environment due to political agitation during 1986 to 1988 and 2007 to 2011 as the economic condition of people has deteriorated rapidly as great environmental damage was caused during those periods. There is an urgent need to work out for a comprehensive regional planning strategy capable of addressing social, economic, political, demographic and

environmental issues in order to bring in sustainable regional development, employment potential, regional income and general improvement in the quality of human life.

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