

Chapter III

Tea Land - Agricultural Land and the "Enclave" Theory.

The discovery of tea in Bengal dates from 1826, when Mr. Bruce, who commanded a division of gun boat in upper Assam in the first Burmese War, found the plant growing indigenously and brought down with him some plants and seeds. In 1834, a committee was appointed to inquire into and report on the possibility of introducing the cultivation of tea into India. In 1835 an attempt was made by government to establish an experimental station in Lakhimpur in upper Assam, but it failed and the plants were afterwards removed to Jaipur in Sibsagar district and a garden was established, which was sold to Assam Tea Company in 1840. This Company was established in 1839 and it is concerned to be the first concern for the cultivation of tea in India.¹

Attempts were first made to introduce the cultivation of tea into Darjeeling sometime previously to 1835, when two or three gardens existed; but the real date of commencement of the industry may be taken as 1856-57. Only two companies date as far back as 1856 - one is Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company and one owned by the Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank.

However, in the matter of introduction of tea industry, the most prominent name should be Dr. A. Campbell. Dr. A. Campbell started experiments in Darjeeling. In 1852,



Hill Girls Plucking Tea Leaves.

Terraced cultivation land.

Kangchendzonga (28,156 ft.)
in the background.

a Mr. Jackson remarked in a report that bushes of both Assam and China types were doing well in the garden of the superintendent, Dr. Campbell in Darjeeling, as well as in the more extensive plantation of Dr. Withecombe, the Civil Surgeon and of Major Crommelin of the Engineers in a lower Valley called Lebong. It appeared from the report that Dr. Hooker and others considered that too much moisture and too little sun at Darjeeling made it unlikely that tea cultivation at that altitude would be remunerative.²

By 1856 development had advanced from the experimental to a more extensive and commercial stage. The Rev. T. Boaz LL.D. in January 1857 stated that tea had been raised from seed at Takbar by a Captain Makson, at Kurseong by Mr. Smith, at Hope Town by a Company, on the Kurseong flats by Mr. Martin and between Kurseong and Pankhabari by Captain Sessler, agent of Darjeeling Tea concern. Development now proceeded at a rapid rate. In 1856 the Alubari tea garden was opened by Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank, on the Lebong spur. In 1859 the Dhutaria tea garden was started by Dr. Brougham and between 1860 and 1864 garden at Ging, Ambutia, Takdah and Phubsering were established by the Darjeeling Tea Company and at Takvar and Badamtan by the Lebong Tea Company. The gardens now known as Makaihari, Pandam and Stewthal were also opened out in this period. Experimental plantation had been started in the Terai and in 1862 the first garden in the Terai was opened out at

Champta near Khaprail by Mr. Jamu White who had previously laid out of the largest gardens of the District at Singell near Kurseong. Other gardens had been opened out in the Terai by 1866.³

There had been rapid development in the hills as the suitability of the soil and climate become apparent. Government offered land to investors on favourable terms and by the end of 1866 there were 39 gardens in production with 10,000 acres under cultivation and an annual outturn of over 433,000 lbs. of tea. In 1890 there were 56 gardens with 11,000 acres under cultivation employing 800 labourers and giving a crop of nearly 1,708,000 lbs. Development in the subsequent period is shown in Table (3.1).⁴

Table 3.1

Comparative Table of Tea Operations in Darjeeling District from 1866 to 1874.

| Year | Number of Gardens | Extent of land under tea cultivation (acres) | Out-turn (lbs) | No. of lab. employed. |
|------|-------------------|--|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1866 | 39 | 10302 | 433,715 | N.K. |
| 1867 | 40 | 9214 | 582,640 | N.K. |
| 1868 | 44 | 10067 | 851,549 | 6859 |
| 1870 | 56 | 11046 | 1,689,186 | 8347 |
| 1872 | 74 | 14503 | 2,938,624 | 12361 |
| 1873 | 87 | 15695 | 2,956,710 | 14019 |
| 1874 | 113 | 18888 | 3,927,911 | 19424 |

Only Kalimpong sub-division (taken from Bhutan in 1866) was land withheld from development under tea, Government's

policy being to reserve the area for forest and ordinary cultivation.

The largest tea concern in Darjeeling is that of the Darjeeling Tea Company Ltd., which had four gardens established between 1860 and 1864. These gardens are called Ambutia, Ging, Takda, Phubserang. The Head quarter of the Company was in London; its local management is vested in the hands of a superintendent with 5 European assistants. The total area held by the Company in 1892 was 8574 acres of which 1300 acres were under plantation. The number of labourers employed on the Company's gardens is on the average one to every acre of land. The labourers were paid at the rate of Rs.3 (6 sh) per month for children, upto 5 to 5-8-0 (10 sh or 11 sh) for able bodied men. ~~xxx pxx~~ These people were encouraged to settle down permanently on the gardens by assigning to them small plots of land unsuited for tea for the cultivation of cereal crops, such as maize, millet etc.⁵

Most of the gardens held the land for tea under two tenures : (1) Held in grant under Old Rules (2) Held in Free-Simple under New Rules. Land given for tea under (1) was about 18,8983 acres and land given under Rule (2) was about 12308 acres.⁶

Under Old Rule Dr. Campbell reserved the right to use discretion. Dr. Campbell himself states that land given to Nepali farmers were purchased by the Europeans for conversion

of tea gardens. There was a scramble for land to start tea gardens in Darjeeling. There were cases the land given for exclusive purpose of agriculture was converted to tea.

Meanwhile the "discretionary grant" by Campbell was replaced by a new set of rules for the grant of waste land. This was issued for "Darjeeling territory" on the 7th May 1859. The most important provisions were, the grant of waste land should be put up to auction at an upset price of Rs.10 (£ 1) per acre; that the sale at such auction should convey a free-hold title; that existing leasehold grant might be converted to free-hold under the rules at the option of the grantee and that building locations might be commuted at the rate of twenty years' purchase of the annual rent. Between the introduction of these rules in 1859 and their abrogation on the introduction of the Free Simple Rules in 1862, 9172 acres of land were sold by Public auction at an average rate of Rs.12.00. These lands were mainly for tea cultivation in the area.⁷

The provisions under which the lands were put upto auction were much disliked and attempts were constantly made to evade them. Further, at the time many "European speculators" speculated on land and sold it to planters at a high rate. In order to stop all these abuses and to give scope for cultivation in "compact blocks" many amendments were made to the original "Waste Land Rules of 1859". There was a Free Simple Rule of 1852, which allowed commutation of all farming leases given

previous to the introduction of the Free Simple Rules in August, 1862. The area of the land commuted under the order of 1862 is 1342 acres, which together with the area of the commutation under the rules of 1859 makes a total of 21287 acres in the old hill territory commuted to free hold without being put up to auction. Further these rules were changed in 1864.⁸

But it is necessary to note that at the time land was abundant in Darjeeling hill area. A vast area was taken up for settlement, cultivation and plantation of tea. In fact the interest of tea lobby was the most important factor in assigning land. Land granted for cultivation for crops were taken for tea.

When it was clear that tea planters would play an important role in this area, rules favourable to the growth of tea were promulgated. In fact a wide area was declared as "waste land". With the promulgation of "waste land" and its different various (upto 1874) there was an extra-ordinary growth of tea gardens. By "waste land" the British government meant these lands which are covered with jungle and such character or in such position that it was not to be taken for "ordinary cultivation". By 1874 there were 24 limited Companies 17 associations not registered under Society's Registration Act, 70 proprietary estates, 6 estates under the control and management of land-Mortgage Bank of London.⁹

Some Englishmen did a brisk business in transferring leases in the name of company. These personal leases were

transferred in the name of companies either registered in Calcutta or London. Now the identity of lease holders are difficult to establish, but the names like Barnes L.H. Barantee, G.S. Crewell, J.P. Brongham, R.H. Carew, W. Finlay, R. Houghton, J. Johnston, Col. E. Money, W.A. Meleod, J.P. Nimme etc. are occasionally found. The district British officers (Army) sometimes helped the relatives to obtain leases. In the early days, Managers took leases in their name and subsequently transferred them to some companies. Even partners of renowned Agency Houses of Calcutta also established leases (e.g. W.A. McLeod, of McLeod and Co., J. D. Nimme partner of M/S. Duncan Bros.¹⁰

With the growth of tea gardens, agricultural land could not increase. But the British adopted a clearest policy in this respect. Almost all the tea gardens were established in territories occupied from Sikkim and almost all the agricultural land was started in the territories occupied from Bhutan. Therefore, more than 90% tea gardens are found on the West of Tista and east of Tista was reserved for agriculture. It should be mentioned that the river Tista is important to understand the land-use pattern of Darjeeling. The British wanted to develop agriculture mainly in the Kalimpong-Garubathan area and tea in Darjeeling-Kurseong area. That is to say, land taken from Bhutan was mainly reserved for agriculture and land taken from Sikkim was mostly Tea land.

A Study of Leases taken from Sikkim

The settlement of the territory after the annexation

of land in 1850 from Sikkim was mainly reserved for Tea cultivation. No farming leases were given to the Europeans previous to the introduction of the Waste Land Rules in 1859 and upto that time land does not seem to have been much sought after in the new territory. In 1860, however, there seems to have been more demand for land, as there were several leases granted for plantation. Two of these holdings, with an area of 260 acre were rent paying, two others with an area 2996 acres appear to have been given to European under Free Simple. One Mr. Barnes got a huge amount of land and from the records it is seen that he wanted to transfer this land for cultivation of tea. Another plot of land granted to one Mr. Barnes was intended for Cincona cultivation. In 1862 seventeen plots, comprising an aggregate area of more than 22,000 acres were sold under Free Simple Rule in 1862. Further in 1864 seventeen leases were given for tea promotion. The Forest department was given an area of 37269 acres for development and scientific management of forests. However, agricultural land to the extent of 22891 acres were distributed to farmers under ten years' lease, thirty years' lease.

Therefore, the pattern of land distribution in the old Sikkim territory is the following :-

(1) A large part of land was given to Europeans under different leases for the promotion of tea and cinchona. The area under tea was approximately 40,000 acres and area under different cash crops like Cinchona was approximately 37,000 acres.

(2) A large tract of the Sikkim hill territory was reserved for scientific management of forest and forest products. The approximate area for reserved forest was about 50,000 acres.

(3) A large area was given for agricultural development. This was mainly given to the Nepali farmers. The area given under Khasmahal or government land for cultivation was approximately 23,000 acres.

In the hill area taken from Sikkim tea was given more importance than agriculture.

Bhutan Hill Tract and Agricultural Land.

The area which was occupied from Bhutan was not used for plantation. Not even 2% of this land was given for tea plantation. The whole area occupied from Bhutan was mainly devoted to agriculture. There are apparently two reasons behind this policy - First, Bhutan area came under British control effectively, after tea plantation started in the Sikkim hill area. Secondly, the British were keen to make provision for the surplus rural Nepalis and supply of foodstuff for the Nepali Coolies of the gardens and hence, reserved this area mainly for cultivation.

The problem of this area could be best understood from a long quotation of Edgar in 1874. Edgar was sent by the government to make recommendation for the land-settlement in this area when Kalimpong-Garubathan came under British rule.¹²

"At the conclusion of the War with Bhutan in 1864, the hill tract to the east of Tista which formed part of the annexed territory was formed into sub-division called Dalingkot and placed under the Deputy Commissioner of the Western Duars. It was, however, transferred to Darjeeling District in October, 1866. The sub-division has apparently never been formally abolished, but there has been no establishment maintained since 1869, when first annexed, the population consisted almost entirely of Bhutans, who paid a poll tax in lieu of land revenue. The amount of this tax in 1865 was £ 64 which sum was collected by 19 mandals or village headmen, who seem to have held a similar part under Bhutan government. In 1872-73, the number of mandals had increased to 26 who collected from 832 households or revenue of £ 221 - 15s - 6d. The population has very much increased during the year 1873-74 and consequently, the collections from poll tax ought to have increased in proportion. But a custom has been allowed to grow up under which settlers are not taxed for the first year; consequently, the increase in demand for the past year was only about £ 60. ... But I am anxious to substitute an assessment on the land for a capitation tax and I think the time has now come for making the change. Very much of the land has been brought under cultivation and the use of plough is not uncommon where situation allows of it. The homesteads are substantial and comfortable looking and in many respects there are indication that people are advancing beyond semi-nomadic state which made a capitation tax the only practicable means of getting any revenue from them.

But while I am anxious to make settlement with the cultivators of land held by them I am quite certain that any such settlement made without careful preliminary inquiry and some kind of survey and demarcation would be a very mischievous thing. There has been topographical survey of the tract, but no attempt was then made to show the area of the cultivated holdings or even their situation, except in a very rare instances. In some parts these holdings are situated close together and nearly unbroken sheets of cultivation and clearances stretch for miles along with crests and sides of the hills; but many holdings are surrounded by jungles. There is much forest of value and some land which might be made suitable for cultivation. But the forest cannot be reserved nor lands granted for tea planting with safety until the existing cultivated holdings have been properly defined or marked off on the maps. After this has been done for the existing holdings, we shall be in a position to define the lands to be reserved for forest purposes and to decide what should be made available for tea.

Besides, this, there is a struggle going on between the Bhutias and Nepalis in the tract, which would require very careful attention when a settlement is being made. The Bhutias and Lepchas who were the early inhabitants of this tract resent what they think the intrusion of the Nepalis, who have for sometime being settling in great number and unless care is taken, the latter who are much stronger case, will drive the former out. At the same time, it is most undesirable that any

MAP OF DARJEELING DISTRICT SHOWING TEA GARDENS



precaution taken for protection of the Bhutias and Lepchas should have the effect of colonisation of the country by Nepalis."

However, tea plantation was not started in large scale in Kalimpong area or the area which came under British rule from Bhutan Raj.

The pattern of distribution of Tea land and crop land in the early period of the twentieth century is as follows :-

Distribution of Cultivated Land (1901)

| | <u>Tea Land</u> | <u>Crop Land</u> | <u>Total Land</u> |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Darjeeling-Kurseong-Jorebunglow | 70% | 30% | 36857 acres |
| 2. Mirik-Rangili Rangliot-Sukhiapokri | 74% | 26% | 138777 acres |
| 3. Kalimpong-Garubathan area | 4% | 96% | 61027 acres |

Kalimpong area was exclusively preserved for agriculture.¹³ The British thought that development of tea on the west side of Tista and agriculture on the east side will give a balance in the economy. The demand for food of the labourers can be met, at least partially from another part of hill areas. Hence the river Tista is very important to understand the land use pattern in the hill areas.

Land being limited in supply the British had a land-use policy in Darjeeling hill areas. The area which was under Sikkim Raj and which came subsequently under British rule, was designated for plantation of tea. The area which came under

British rule from Bhutan was mainly reserved for agriculture. Hence, in one side of Tista almost all the tea gardens are formed and on the other side only a few gardens are located.

Tea gardens were mainly developed by British Capital and entrepreneurship. Land was virtually given free of cost to the planters. This led to quick development of tea industry in this area. However, there was a scramble for land and land given for agricultural purposes were converted for tea plantation. A vast area was taken up for settlement and plantation. The interest of tea-lobby was the most important factor in assigning land when it was clear that tea plantation would play an important role in this area, rules favourable to the growth of tea were promulgated. In fact a wide area was declared as "Waste land". This "Waste Land" was not taken for "Ordinary cultivation".

While tea gardens were developed in Darjeeling-Kurseong area (i.e. West of Tista) agriculture was developed in the area which came to British from Bhutan Raj. The British thought that as large number of farmers are coming from Nepal, they should be suitably settled. As Kalimpong area came under British rule late, the area was reserved for agriculture.

The Deputy Commissioner wrote that "land cultivated by a Nepali husbandmen will yield as large outturn as the best lands in other hill areas (i.e. Nepal, Bhutan or Sikkim). ... It is not unusual to take a second crop from the same land in the same year".¹⁴ The progress of agriculture was the aim

of the British and this could only be achieved by the Nepali farmers. Another Report say - "When the District was first taken over by the British administration the hill portion was almost entirely under forest. The only cultivation was that of Jhumming or burning down of the forest in the interior of the hills by the Bhutias and Lepchas ... Expansion of cultivation was rapid in the middle of the last century; Jhum cultivation has now entirely disappeared owing to forest reservation, appropriation of land for tea cultivation and extension of plough cultivation to the remaining land. The last is a far more efficient method of cultivation than Jhumming but requires the application of considerable hard labour both to render the land suitable for this kind of cultivation (i.e. by terracing, rirretting and irrigating it) and in the performance of various operations in agriculture. The Nepalis were far more assiduous and skilful in this superior method and consequently displaced or speedily outnumbered the original inhabitants".¹⁵

In applicability of "Enclave" Theory in the context of development of Agriculture in Darjeeling Hill Area - Comparison between Sri Lanka and Darjeeling.

In some of the writings on Plantation economy it is pointed out that plantation creates "enclave" economy and apparently it has no impact on the surrounding area. Further, it is pointed out the wage labour in plantation is only available through "expropriation of peasantry". One aspect of the "enclave"

theory is that growth of tea or coffee plantation results in "pauperization of agriculture". Nawaz Dawood in a Chapter "pauperisation of the peasantry" argues that in Sri Lanka, the growth of plantation economy resulted in lack of growth of agriculture. Certain excerpts are given from the writing of Nawar Dawood to describe the situation of Sri Lanka.¹⁶

"In the initial stages... planters used mainly raja kariya labour to fell the forests and open up the land. Raja Kariya was abolished by laws in 1883 but the release from feudal chores did not transfer the surplus peasant labour from the subsistence to the capitalist sector. The 'emancipated' peasants huddled more closely in the deniyas at the bottom of the valleys and eked out a living as independent producers. The harsh labour of felling the forests, the inhuman conditions, and ruthless employers who often did not make the due payments, were sufficient causes to keep the Kandyan peasants away from the contractual work in plantations...."

"The planters thereafter began to complain about the indolence of the natives, who had earlier taken up arms against them, then built the roads and cleared the forests. Such allegations were not made when the Kandyan peasantry was busy in felling the forests. The planters seem to have realised that yoking an independent peasantry to salaried plantation work carried the risk of unrest and challenge by those who could always return to the land. Therefore, it was safer to

use migratory labour from India because they would not have a permanent interest in the land.

"It was no coincidence that imperialists made similar complaints about the Indians, the Malayas, the Indonesians, the Africans and the South Americans. These ~~are~~ so called "indolent" peasants were also partially evicted peasants, who were determined to retain their independence and dignity. Their refusal to co-operate was an act of resistance. The image which the coloniser thus spread did not correspond with the reality. It was an attempt to equate the coloniser's objective need to exploit labour with some imaginary theory about lazy humans in the tropics. According to this theory, a people who were once some of the industrious agriculturists in Asia had for some inexplicable reason, suddenly turned lethargic."

"The ordinance of 1840 (as amended in 1841) authorised the District Courts after Summary Inquiry, to eject any person 'without probable claim or pretence of title' was in possession of land claimed by the Crown, provided that his possession did not exceed five years. It was presumed that all forests waste, unoccupied or uncultivated land belonged to the crown until the contrary was proved. China land (land used for slash and burn agriculture) were similarly acquired unless a grant or services for 20 years could be shown."

"These alien rules of property ownership took thousands of land owners by surprise. Such capitalist notions of ownership

and title were unknown to the Kandyan peasantry and their lands were taken away by the Colonial State for nothing. Even today, the caricature of the Kandyan villager as the land litigant continues as a historical by-product of his losing battle against the original British land grab system.

"The title rights of most peasant property was not clear."

The clarity required by the new rules of ownership and the laws introduced from the "Mother Country" was alien to the existing legal system. Pre-capitalist property relations had required no such precise definitions. By a single legislative stroke thousands of peasants were evicted from the land which for generations had been theirs by right and custom. More important, their rights of expansion for chena cultivation in community lands were restricted. The new category of "Crown Lands" which had been encroached upon had to be surrendered unless uninterrupted possession for 10 years could be proved. In this way, the colonial state laid the land base for plantation economy. The conquest of Kandy was now beginning to pay dividends.

"The land had been expropriated from the peasants, but that was only one side of the coin. The next quest was for manpower. The search for cheap labour for the plantation began in India.

Capital's unending search for labour for the purpose of extracting the rawmaterials from the colonies in the form of plantation produce or minerals, resulted in the migration of workers from one country to another.

The British imperialists utilised workers from the Colonies in plantations, working people from one part of the Empire to another, without regard to the sensitivities of either the host countries or the migrant guests. These migrations were also used as a technique of control whereby tensions were created between the local people and the foreigners, which were then used by the colonizer to his own advantage in balancing power. The use of foreign labour in the colonial plantations was strategically helpful to the British, since the change of sustained opposition from throne who had only a temporary interest in the land was much less. It was also easier to control men they were in a foreign land and environment.

"The net result of the land legislation was that the peasant was left with microscopic silvers of land at the valley bottoms, the ownership of which had to be voluted among the many beneficiaries by the thattumaru system. Under the thattumaru the same strip of land was cultivated by different persons on a yearly or seasonal basis. Similar small holdings had existed even before the 1840 legislation, but now their numbers increased".¹⁷

From the above study certain features of plantation economy became clear to us :-

(1) With the growth of plantation agriculture suffered in Sri Lanka.

(2) Plantation labourers were ethnically and culturally different from the agriculturists.

(3) There is hardly any interconnection between agriculture and plantation and plantation remained an "enclave" economy in Sri Lanka.

The "enclave" theory needs substantial modification in the context of Darjeeling hill area. In Darjeeling hill areas there are various "forward" linkages between plantation and agriculture. It is necessary to point out that the growth of Darjeeling hill area is mainly due to the growth of tea plantation. The tea plantation led to growth of agriculture, rural settlement and other ancillary small scale industries. Darjeeling hill area was sparsely populated and growth of tea plantation and agriculture was parallel and simultaneous. River Tista is the dividing line between two types of economic structure. On one side of Tista most of the tea gardens are situated and on the other side of Tista most of the agricultural lands are located. In one side most of the people are engaged directly or indirectly on tea plantation and on the other side most of the people are engaged in agriculture. The people of the western side are mainly "plantation labourers" with all the characteristics of a capitalist economy; the people on the eastern side are mostly farmers and predominantly "owner cultivators". In fact, instead of "enclave" some economists

call this structure "dualistic".¹⁸

This "dualism" is, however, not as watertight as may be presumed. The growth of labour force in tea gardens created demand for agricultural products and foodstuffs. This resulted a type of revenue settlement which was consistent with the Planters' need for the quick development of tea gardens. The land settlement pattern, adopted by the British was "liberal" in this part of the hill area with emphasis on "land to the actual tillers". This policy led to heavy influx of population from Nepal which had "feudal" structure of land tenure system. The growth of population led to certain "demographic transformation" which created a new type of socio-economic transformation. The growth of monetisation of the economy and opening up of Darjeeling to the demand of international trade and commerce led to new type of relations of production.

As opposed to Ceylon and other places, where "enclave theory" has been developed Darjeeling hill area has certain important differences.

(1) Plantation and settled Agriculture more or less started simultaneously in Darjeeling hill area. This was because Darjeeling was not populated before the advent of the British. This was not true in case of Ceylon. (2) There is an ethnic similarity between plantation labourers and agriculturists in Darjeeling. All of them were Nepalese. This is different from other plantation areas. In Ceylon the plantation labourers were

Tamils and the farmers were Sri Lankans or Ceylonese. In Duars area the plantation workers were Santals, Oraons or Mundas or Tribals brought from Chotonagpur of Bihar whereas local agriculturialists were either muslims or Rajbansis or Meches. Hence homogeneity of background between labourers and farmers made experience different in Darjeeling.

(3) Because of same ethnic background planters and farmers had continuous social interaction which was not found in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the British policy was to settle excess Nepalese population of plantation in agriculture. Therefore, relationship between farmers and plantation labourers was direct. Very often it was stated that in order to help the growth of plantation agriculture was necessary. Therefore, there was action and interaction between two categories of Nepalese, namely plantation labourers and farmers.

(4) There was no evidence to show that with the growth of plantation, agriculture declined in Darjeeling. Rather the growth of these two sectors was supplementary and complementary to each other.

However, one thing need be mentioned with the need of plantation labourers came from adjoining areas of Nepal. But with the coming of Nepalese there was decline of another hill race, whom we call now Lepchas. O'Malley writes in 1907 - "With the reservation of forests and the advent of the more skilful Nepalese cultivators, the Lepchas have abandoned

jhoom (shifting) system of cultivation and have largely given up the hoe for the plough. The latter is now in universal use except where the mountain slopes are too steep or stony for the oxen, but in places the Lepchas may still be seen turning up the soil with a rude wooden stick. Before O'Malley Hunter writes in 1876 - "The Lepchas are considered to be the aboriginal inhabitants of the hilly portion of the district". According to Hunter the more progressive Nepalese outcompeted the Lepchas. Lepchas were reduced to minorities after the migration of Nepalese. But steps were taken to prohibit transfer of Lepchas land to Nepalese.

But agriculture as such was developed along with tea plantation. O'Malley writes, "In the hills, there has been extra-ordinary extension of cultivation, especially in the Kalimpong tract to the east of Tista, owing to the influx of new settlers. Here all the land available is fast being taken up and the country has developed at a rapid rate. In certain parts it has been recognised that cultivation has already reached its extreme limit. ... Orders have accordingly been passed that no new land is to be granted in the blocks concerned, while steps have been taken to guard against the dangers of overcultivation by establishing reserves for grazing, fodder and fuel, wherever suitable pieces of waste lands are left".¹⁹

Hence, one of the important aspects of the "enclave" theory which states that with the growth of plantation agriculture declines, is not borne out by facts in Darjeeling hill area.

SUMMARY

In this chapter we have tried to show how the growth of tea gardens influenced the availability of agricultural land. The development of tea and agriculture was simultaneous. With the growth of tea gardens agricultural land could not increase. But the British adopted a clear policy in this respect. Almost all the tea gardens were established in the territories occupied from Sikkim and almost all the agricultural land were started in the territories occupied from Bhutan. More than 90% of the tea gardens are found on the west of Tista river and east of Tista was reserved mainly for agriculture. It should be mentioned that the river Tista is important to understand the land use pattern of Darjeeling.

It is in this context the enclave theory very popular in the literature of plantation economy needs substantial modification in the context of Darjeeling hill area. There is no evidence to show that with the growth of plantation agriculture declined in Darjeeling. Rather because of historical reasons the growth of these two sectors was supplementary and complementary to each other.

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- 17 Nawaj Dawood, Tea and Poverty (ibid.), pp.43-47, pp.59-71.
- 18 M.Dasgupta, Socio-Economic Impact of Tea Plantation in Darjeeling Hill Areas in Historical Perspective (Paper Read in a Seminar in N.B.U., 1984)
- 19 L.S.S.O'Malley, Gazetteer of Darjeeling District (1907), p.63. In the hilly tracts rice cultivation is confined to the Nepalis "who generally select for tillage a comparatively level site near the banks of a river a water course and lay out in successive terraces, one above the other (A.Mitra's quotation from the old records in District Gazetteer - 1961 p.CXXIII). Further the Deputy Commissioner, Darjeeling wrote that land cultivated by a Nepali husbandman will yield as large an outturn as his best lands in other hills and from 5 to 6 maunds of paddy per acre. It is not usual to take a second crop for the same land in one year ... (Mitra p.CXXXIV). A.J.Dash writes in page 102 - "When the District was first taken by the British administration, the hill portion was about entirely under forest. The only cultivation was that of Jhumming or burning down the forests in the interior of the hills by Bhotias and Lepchas Expansion of cultivation was rapid in the middle of the last century Jhum cultivation has now entirely disappeared owing to forest reservation, appropriation of land for tea cultivation and extension of plough cultivation to the remaining land. The last is far more efficient method of cultivation than Jhumming but requires the application of considerable hard labour both to render the land suitable for the kind of cultivation (i.e. by terracing, rivetting and irrigating it) and in the performance of various operations in agriculture. The Nepalis were far more arsiduous and skilful in this superior method and consequently displaced or speedily outnumbered the original inhabitants".

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