

## Chapter II

### The Growth of Urban Informal Sector in the Historical Backdrop of Darjeeling District

#### 2.1 : A Brief History of Darjeeling District

Darjeeling, lying between 26°31' and 27°13' north latitude and between 87°59' and 88°53' east longitude, is the northernmost district in the state of West Bengal in India. In shape, its an irregular triangle. The name, Darjeeling, is a corruption of Dorje-ling and means the place of the Dorje, the mystic thunder-bolt of the Lamaist Monastery which stood on the top of the observatory hill.<sup>1</sup>

The history of Darjeeling shows a frequent change in its rulers. Upto the beginning of the 18th century, it was a part of the dominions of the Raja of Sikkim. During the reign of Chador Namgyal (1700-1716), areas in the southeast were lost to Bhutan. However, Chador Namgyal was able to clear much of the country under Bhutanese occupation.<sup>2</sup> But in 1706, what is now Kalimpong and Rhenock were annexed by the King of Bhutan. Towards the end of the 18th century (1788-89) the Gurkhas of Nepal overran Sikkim as far east as Teesta and annexed the terai.

After the termination of Anglo-Nepalese War (1816) the tract which Nepal had wrested from the Raja of Sikkim was ceded to the East India Company. As per the treaty of Titaliya (1817) between East India Company and Nepal, the whole of the country between the Mechi and Teesta was restored to the Raja of Sikkim and his Sovereignty was accordingly guaranteed by the company. Sikkim was thus maintained as a "Buffer State" between Nepal and Bhutan.

Ten years after this treaty, boundary dispute arose

between Sikkim and Nepal. According to the terms of the said treaty, the matter was referred to the Governor-General. Two officers, Capt. Lloyd and Mr. Grant were deputed in 1828 to settle the dispute. Lloyd spent a few days in February, 1829 at the "Old Gurkha Station" of Darjeeling and was attracted by the possibilities of Darjeeling Spur as a centre which would engross all the trade of the country and as a position of great strategic importance commanding the entrance into Nepal and Bhutan.<sup>3</sup> Grant reported accordingly to the then governor General, Lord William Bentinck, the numerous advantages to the British employees in India by a Sanatorium at Darjeeling and also recommended its occupation for military purposes as the key of a pass into Nepal territory.<sup>4</sup> In the same year Captain J.D.Herbert, Deputy Surveyor-General, was deputed to examine the country with Mr. Grant. He strongly justified its claim for such a purpose.

Lord William Bentinck directed General Lloyd (formerly Captain Lloyd) to start negotiation with the Raja of Sikkim. And in the pretext of enquiring into the causes of incursion from Nepal of Lepchas who had taken refuge to Sikkim, he succeeded in obtaining a deed of grant on the 1st February, 1835 executed by the Raja of Sikkim. The transition of the deed was worded as follows:

The Governor-General having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate for the purpose of enabling the servants of his Government suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, I the Sikkimputti Raja, out of friendship to the said Governor-General hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company that is all the lands South of Great Rangeet river east of the Balasun, Kahail and Little

Ranggeet rivers and West of the Rungno and Mahanadi rivers.<sup>5</sup>

General Lloyd and Dr. Chapman were sent in 1836 to explore the country to ascertain the nature of its climate and to investigate the potentialities of the place. On receipt of their report it was finally decided to build a sanatorium at Darjeeling in 1837.

The peaceful relation between Sikkim King and the East India Company lasted for almost a decade. There was no more cessation of Sikkim territory. But their relation strained in 1849 following the arrest and detention of Dr. Hooker and Campbell in Sikkim during their tour. As no protest on the part of the British Govt. could obtain their speedy release, a punitive expedition was forced over the borders in February, 1850. The surrender of Raja led the East India Company to annex the whole of the Darjeeling district which covered an area of 640 sq. miles. Thus did the district of Darjeeling pass into British possession and that too without a shot being fired.

Owing to constant violation of the treaty of Titaliya by Sikkim, in 1860 an expeditionary force first under Dr. Campbell and then under Colonel Gawler with Asley Eden as envoy was sent. In March 1861, a treaty was concluded at Tumlong, the then Capital of Sikkim. This treaty put an end to the frontier disturbance with Sikkim and helped flow of Commerce beyond the frontier. The annexation of Darjeeling was confirmed. Finally, the Dalimng Subdivision of which Kalimpong is the headquarter and which is bounded by Jal dhaka and Teesta rivers in the east and West respectively; together with the Bengal-Duars was annexed from Bhutan in 1864. These areas were included in the Darjeeling district in 1866, thereby increasing the area from 640 square miles to 1164 square miles.

The District then consisted of two sub-divisions: Dar-

jeeling and Kalimpong. In 1891, the Kurseong Subdivision was formed from the sadar subdivision. In 1907, Siliguri subdivision was formed from the Kurseong subdivision.

Hope Namgyal, formerly Gyalmo of Sikkim, held that Darjeeling was originally sought for use as a sanatorium, but after several years, pressed by the intensity of Anglo-Sikkimese clashes "the British had more cause to reflect on the wider aspects of the Darjeeling grant".<sup>6</sup> Indeed, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, commercial interests and strategic considerations of the British Government shaped the destiny of Darjeeling.<sup>7</sup>

A new administrative and political phenomenon, which created history in India, is the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988. A blood-bath political agitation was carried out under the leadership of GNLF Supremo, Mr. Subash Ghising for the creation of a separate state of Gorkhaland in the Darjeeling hills during the 80's. The demand for a separate state was thought to be the most urgent one in order to safeguard the national identity of the Indian Gorkhas. Ultimately in 1988, through a tripartite agreement between the Centre, State and the GNLF party, the DGHC was set up with a view to creating an idea of state within the state. The entire hill region along with a selected areas of plains of Garubathan police station in Kalimpong subdivision, Panighata from Naxalbari P.S. and Sukna in Kurseong subdivision have been included in the jurisdiction of DGHC. As per the tripartite agreement, some economic and political powers have been transferred from the State to the DGHC in order to allow it function effectively. After the creation of DGHC, the Zilla Parishad - highest body in the existing three tier Panchayati system became non-existent and as such after the amendment of Panchayat Act, Mahakuma Parishad with same power of Zilla Parishad has been set up for Siliguri subdivision. At

present, the entire district has been divided into the two distinctly separate areas of (i) DGHC and (ii) Siliguri Mahakuma.

## 2.2 : Some Interesting Features of Darjeeling District

The area of the district is 3149.0 square kilometers. The natural feature consists of a portion of outlying hills of lower Himalayas and a stretch of territory lying along the base of the hills known as the terai. The terai is only 91 meters high above the sea level but there are parts of the district in the hills which are nearly 3658 meters high. Darjeeling district has many characteristics which are not found elsewhere in India. A few of such characteristics are discussed below:

(i) The land-use pattern of Darjeeling is different from that is seen in other parts of West Bengal. The Himalayas are the source of many rivers and streams. Forests occupy a very significant percentage of the land. It covers nearly 40% of the total area of the district. But unfortunately, this percentage over the last couple of years is found to be declining. Due to illegal felling and mismanagement by the West Bengal Government's Forest Department the forest cover in the districts' hill areas has plummeted to a shameful 38% from 60% in the 50's. Local environmentalists say that a survey by NGOs in collaboration with Forest Department in 1989, actually found that forest cover had dropped to just 15%.<sup>8</sup> In West Bengal, however, forest covers a meagre 13.5% of the total geographical area. The interdependence between forests in Darjeeling and the economy is much greater than commonly thought of. The Water-Cycle, fertility, soil erosion, landslides, waterflow, degree of rainfall, moisture retention, crop physiology, evapotranspiration of the sensitive Himalayan region depend upon the quality of forest area and its quantum. The Himalayan region of Darjeeling district is equally responsible for maintaining a steady monsoon, water supply and above all the ecology system as a whole in the state of West Bengal.

(ii) The district of Darjeeling has a mixed population of both hill and plain people. According to the census report of 1981, 53.83% of the population live in the three subdivisions in the hill areas and the rest 46.17% in the plains.<sup>9</sup> The demographic composition of the people of the district is also quite interesting to look at. It is seen that the proportion of SC population in most of the blocks of the hill subdivisions of the district varies from 7 to 10 percent while the same is as high as 34% in the Kharibari - Phansidewa block in Siliguri subdivision. The ST population in the hill blocks of the district is slightly higher than that of SC population. On the other hand, the Kharibari - Phansidewa block only has 32% of its population under ST category. In the hills, Kami, Sarki and Damai form the major scheduled castes whereas in the plains of the district, majority of the scheduled castes are Rajbanshis next to which are Bagdis, Namasudras, Jatiya Kaibartyas etc. Among the STs Lepchas, Bhutias, Sherpas, Dukpas, Yolmos, & Kagatay Tibetans constitute the majority; their counterparts in the plains of the district are the adivasis (ie. Oraons, Mundas, Santals, Malpaharias, Kharias and Meches).

(iii) Among other typical characteristics of the district we can also speak of the population growth. It is interesting to note that population growth of the district has always been above the growth rate of the state population. Since its inclusion in East India Company's colony in the middle of the 19th century, there had been considerable immigration of people from neighbouring areas from time to time to take part in the development activity of the region and for employment in the tea gardens which were being opened one after another. The immigration in the hills initially was encouraged by Dr. Campbell, the then superintendent of Darjeeling. The largest increase in population in the district during the last couple of decades was

recorded in the ten-year period of 1951-1961. This period recorded 36% increase in population. In this context, it has also been observed that the three hill subdivisions have not grown so much as the Siliguri Subdivision in the plains. The migration of people from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and very recently from Assam and other North-eastern states due to political reasons had led to a very high rate of growth of population in Siliguri subdivision during 1951-61 and thereafter.

(iv) Although the growth rate of population of the district is above the state average, it is interesting to note that the district has a lower density of population in comparison to the West Bengal average. According to the 1981 census, the average density of population was 614 per square k.m. in West Bengal but it was only 327 per square k.m. in the Darjeeling district. The low density of population is obviously due to the difficult terrain and inaccessibility of mankind in the steep slopes of Himalayas in the district. The hills also represent considerable variations in this regard. Kalimpong town and Kalimpong rural blocks I and II and Garubathan are all located on the east of Teesta river. These areas together represent nearly 45% of the hill territory but only 30% of the hill population live in there. The areas to the West of Teesta occupy nearly 55% of the hills but account for nearly 70% of the total hill population.

(v) Density of population in the Darjeeling hills appears to depend largely on the location of tea gardens. Most of the tea gardens of the hills in Darjeeling are situated on the Western side of Teesta. This is evident from the fact that Kurseong block has the highest number of tea gardens (30), followed by Darjeeling (19), Jorebunglow (16), Sukiapokhri (11), Rangli Rangliot (9), Mirik (5) and Pulbazar (2). On the otherhand, in the whole region of Kalimpong-Garubathan, the total number of tea-gardens are only six.<sup>10</sup> The existence of around 95% the

gardens have invited more people to get settled to the western side of Teesta leaving Kalimpong-Garubathan area mostly dependent on agriculture which always exert a push of labour to the industrial belt. As a result, density of people is more to the western part of the hills.

(vi) It is already mentioned that forest occupies nearly 40% of the total area of the district - a large share of which is prevalent in the hills. The hills supply only 14.2% of land for plantation and cultivation. This is in sharp contrast to other parts of West Bengal. For example, in Nadia district 80% of the land is available for cultivation while in North and South Dinajpur districts land available for cultivation is nearly 84% of the total area.

(vii) Darjeeling district differs in the sex-ratio too. Since 1901, in West Bengal males have always out-numbered the females. The sex ratio in 1901, was 945. Upto 1931, this ratio was declining and it was only in 1941 that there was a slight improvement in the sex-ratio. This trend, however, did not continue and it was found, in 1961, that the number of females per 1000 males in West Bengal was only 891. This ratio in 1981 stood at 911 and 914 in 1991. Darjeeling district too had a fluctuating sex-ratio but surprisingly this ratio was always lower than that existed for the state as a whole. The sex-ratio of the district in 1981 was only 888 which has slightly increased to 896 in 1991. This alternating rise and fall in the sex-ratio is caused by the migration of people in the district from the neighbouring states and countries like Nepal and Bangladesh. This is an indicator of the fact that Darjeeling has a floating migratory population which is not very often found in many parts of our country.

### 2.3 : Growth of the Urban Informal Sector in Darjeeling Hill Areas

In the eastern Himalayas, Darjeeling hills have the

highest concentration of tea industries. Since the annexation of Darjeeling by the East India company from the Raja of Sikkim, tea industry along with chincona plantation industry had received the direct and indirect patronage of the rulers. Over the years, the plantation sector has absorbed the largest number of workers, both male and female, in the hill areas. The tea industry is not only the principal source of employment but also has played an important role in earning foreign exchanges. Side by side of the tea industry, agriculture and tertiary sector have also absorbed a large number of workers. In spite, majority of the workers of the hill areas are in the informal sector. Thus, it appears very necessary to go deeper into the past and present of the tea-industry and the agricultural network of the hills in order to highlight the growth of the informal sector in the wake of the deteriorating condition of the tea-industry, in particular.

### 2.3.1 : The Tea Industry -- Origin and Early Growth

The discovery of tea in Bengal dates from 1826 when Mr. Bruce found the plant growing indigenously in Assam and brought down with him some plants and seeds.<sup>11</sup> But the steps towards the cultivation of tea in India started when Warren Hastings, the then Governor General appointed a committee with a view to formulating a plan for tea cultivation in 1834. Attempt was made by the Govt. to establish experimental plantation in Lakhimpur in upper Assam in 1835 but the project failed.<sup>12</sup> By 1837, experimental tea plantations were again started in Punjab and Assam and in 1839 private enterprise took the field with the formation of the Assam Tea Company.

The introduction of tea into Darjeeling is due to captain James, who persuaded Govt. of India to obtain seeds from China which he distributed among the residents of the district to experience with.<sup>13</sup> In the mean time, in 1838 Dr. Campbell was posted as Superintendent of Darjeeling. Captain James' endeavour

was encouraged by him and started pleading with the govt. all along for establishment of experimental plantations in Darjeeling region. Finally, between 1840 and 1851, Dr. Campbell and Major Commelin were successful in setting up nurseries at Darjeeling and Lebong respectively.<sup>14</sup> Although the experimental planting had started, much headway was not made till 1853.

The development of tea industry in Darjeeling district on an extensive scale, however, started in 1856-57. The earlier planters, owing to lack of experience, made many mistakes. These mistakes were remedied and the next ten years marked a steady progress and prosperity as the suitability of the soil and climate became apparent thereby placing the industry on a solid footing of commercial enterprise. By 1866, the number of tea gardens were 39 with 10392 areas of land under tea cultivation. During the four years following 1870, the tea industry in Darjeeling continued to develop in an even greater ratio and by 1874, shown in the following table the number of gardens had been doubled from 56 in 1870 to 113 in 1874. The cultivated area too

Table 2.1 : Number of Tea Gardens, Area Under Cultivation, Outturn and Employment : 1866-1874

Year	Number of Gardens	Area under cultivation (in acres)	Outturn of tea in lbs.	Number of labourers employed
1866	39	10392	433715	N.A.
1867	40	9214	582640	N.A.
1868	44	10067	851549	6859
1869	55	10769	1278869	7445
1870	56	11046	1689186	8347
1871	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1872	74	14503	2938626	12361
1873	87	15695	2956710	14019
1874	113	18888	3927911	19424

Source : W.W.Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, 1877, P.165

rose in the same period from 11046 acres to 18888 acres, the outturn from 1689186 lbs. to 3927911 lbs and the number of labourers employed from 8347 to 19424. The growth is remarkable from the viewpoint of the fact that while during this period the area cultivated increased by 70.99%, the outturn and the employment had increased by 132.53% and 132.71% respectively.

It is to be noted that most of these tea gardens were established in the two subdivisions viz. Darjeeling and Kurseong. The Kalimpong subdivision was almost closed to tea. It was due to the government's policy to reserve the area for forest and ordinary cultivation.<sup>15</sup> As such, by the end of the century, there were only 4 tea gardens in the Kalimpong subdivision.<sup>16</sup> Even today, the position of the gardens in this area has not changed at all. At present, the number of tea gardens in the subdivision is only six of which the Upper Fagu Tea garden has been locked-out since 15th March, 1968.

By 1891, the number of tea gardens rose upto 177 which started declining afterwards. The reason was that from this time onwards, tea estates were more and more organised under big limited concerns so that although the total area under tea cultivation increased, the number of separate gardens decreased.<sup>17</sup> The number of gardens in 1941 had declined to 136 although the acreage, total yield and the total employment increased continuously. The yield was more than doubled. 1951, on the other hand, marked a fall in the acreage, production and also in the total number of labour employed.

The following table shows how the tea-industry grew in the district during 1881 to 1951.

Table 2.2 : Growth of Tea Gardens in Darjeeling District  
: 1881-1951

Year	No. of Tea Gardens	Total Area under tea (in hectare)	Yield (in lb)	No. of labourers employed
1881	155	11347	5160316	N.A.
1891	177	18234	10910487	N.A.
1901	170	20690	13535537	40451
1911	156	20595	14250615	39561
1921	168	23602	14030946	48710
1931	169	24471	20496481	63665
1941	136	25269	24815216	69699
1951	138	25032	29283499	69590

Source : District Census Handbook, Darjeeling, 1951

### 2.3.2 : Stagnation in Tea Industry Since 1951

Till 1951, it is very difficult to find a separate account of the tea industry in the hills and the terai of Darjeeling district. The table-2.2 represents the picture for the district as a whole. Nevertheless to say, the industry during the last 100 years had grown in the hills in such a way that the rural life style was determined by it. The tea-industry thus formed the back-bone of the hill economy.

But after 1951, during the last three decades, in particular, the industry has been infested by many diseases varying from low productivity to labour unrest and industrial sickness to final close down of many tea gardens. The problems of low productivity per hectare and per labourer employed in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills have become so acute that its scope as employment generating industry has become questionable and as such the increasing population finds no other way than to migrate to urban centres in search of alternative employment. The tea

gardens right from their establishment in the hills had absorbed a larger proportion of women workers than the male workers. This was inevitable as the field works such as weeding, sickling, plucking of tea leaves and many other jobs are well-handled by the women workers. The overall stagnation of the industry in respect of the "production" and "employment" led to continuous inflow of the women workers in the informal sector.

The productivity and employment aspects of the tea gardens of the hill areas are dealt in briefly here which would give us an overview of the problem.

During the last three decades, it has been noticed that the average daily number of labour employed in the tea gardens of the hills had remained more or less static. During the same period, the employment potential of the tea gardens of the neighbouring areas (Such as Terai and Duars in West Bengal) has moderately increased. The following table highlights this fact.

Table 2.3 : Estimated Average Daily Number of Labour in Tea Gardens of Darjeeling Hills, Duars, and Terai : 1961-1990.

Year	Darjeeling	Terai	Duars	All West Bengal	All India
1961	42432	17310	129900	189642	816262
1965	42236	18067	130459	191762	806152
1970	45549	19177	135554	200280	759646
1975	44021	20050	136059	200130	774897
1980	45987	23290	149571	218848	846659
1985	46275	24893	161563	232563	892954
1990	48116	37875	162680	248671	986781

Source : Tea Statistics of different years, Tea Board of India

It is quite disappointing to look at the rise in average

daily number of labour employed in the Darjeeling hills. Since 1961, these tea gardens have almost a static employment. Only a meagre 13.39% rise has been recorded during the last 30-year period. During the same period, Terai, on the otherhand, recorded 118.8% rise in labour employment. Duars gardens also have recorded a slightly higher (25.23%) rise in employment generation capacity. The hill areas have lagged drastically behind the average employment growth rate of both West Bengal (31.23%) and all India (20.89%) level.

Coupled with this, hill tea-gardens witnessed a low productivity per hectare as well as per labour. Though over the years productivity per hectare has increased from 473 Kg. in 1951 to 546 Kg. in 1961, 1965 recorded a fall. After 1965, productivity has continued to increase but it appears to be very marginal compared to the Duars, Terai and All West Bengal average. Table 2.4 helps understanding the comparative productivity per hectare in various years in tea growing areas of West Bengal. As seen in Table 2.4 : Productivity of Tea per hectare (in Kgs) : 1961-1990

Year	Darjeeling Hills	Duars	Terai	All West Bengal	All India
1961	546	1161	878	990	971
1965	519	1191	921	1015	1072
1970	557	1337	1117	1150	1182
1975	596	1470	1197	1338	1341
1980	659	1666	1383	1424	1494
1985	652	1853	1815	1606	1641
1990	723	1684	1583	1480	1729

Source : Tea Statistics of different years, Tea Board of India.

the table, the productivity per hectare in Darjeeling hills over the period of last 30-year had remained less than 50% of what the other tea-growing areas in West Bengal have experienced.

In this context we can refer the inference drawn by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) on the basis a sample study. It states that the productivity per hectare has a positive correlation with the size of the tea estates. This study found that 41% of the total tea estates in Darjeeling Hills have areas more than 200 hectares and have comparatively high productivity (2/3rd of the average All India productivity). But the average productivity of Darjeeling hill gardens has been pulled down by the extreme low-productivity of the estates having areas below 100 hectares particularly and more accurately by the estates having areas less than 50 hectares. These estates are found to be operating under great diseconomies of scale.<sup>18</sup>

The NCAER finding is further corroborated by the fact that Duars region where productivity rate has been higher than all India average, about 50% of the tea gardens have areas more than 400 hectares. The number of tea gardens falling under this high hectarage in Darjeeling hills is only 8% which itself explains the difficulties in economies of scale the hill gardens are facing.<sup>19</sup>

Not only the productivity per hectare but also the productivity per labour is inexplicably low in Darjeeling gardens. It is, in fact, very difficult to measure the labour - productivity as the exact number of the productive labourers is not easily countable because of the absence of the reliable statistics on manhours and employment. Also, it is difficult to evaluate the performance of the labourers because of their variety in skills and intensity involved at different stages of production. However, Tea Board of India, on the basis of the estimated average daily labourers employed in the tea gardens calculates it annually. The same has been considered here. Likewise, the productivity per hectare, productivity per labour are also the minimum in Darjeeling hills compared to other tea-

growing areas. Incidentally, productivity per labour stood to be less than 45% of that found in Duars and less than 50% of the all West Bengal average. Table-2.5 below compares the productivity per labour in various tea growing areas of West Bengal.

Table 2.5 : Productivity of Tea Per Labour (in KG) in Various Tea Producing Areas : 1961-1990.

Year	Darjeeling	Duars	Terai	All West Bengal	All India
1961	234	505	529	447	425
1965	222	522	509	454	454
1970	221	584	624	505	551
1975	243	647	656	559	629
1980	276	699	681	609	673
1985	279	755	882	677	735
1990	301	702	558	602	730

Source : Tea statistics of different years, Tea Board of India.

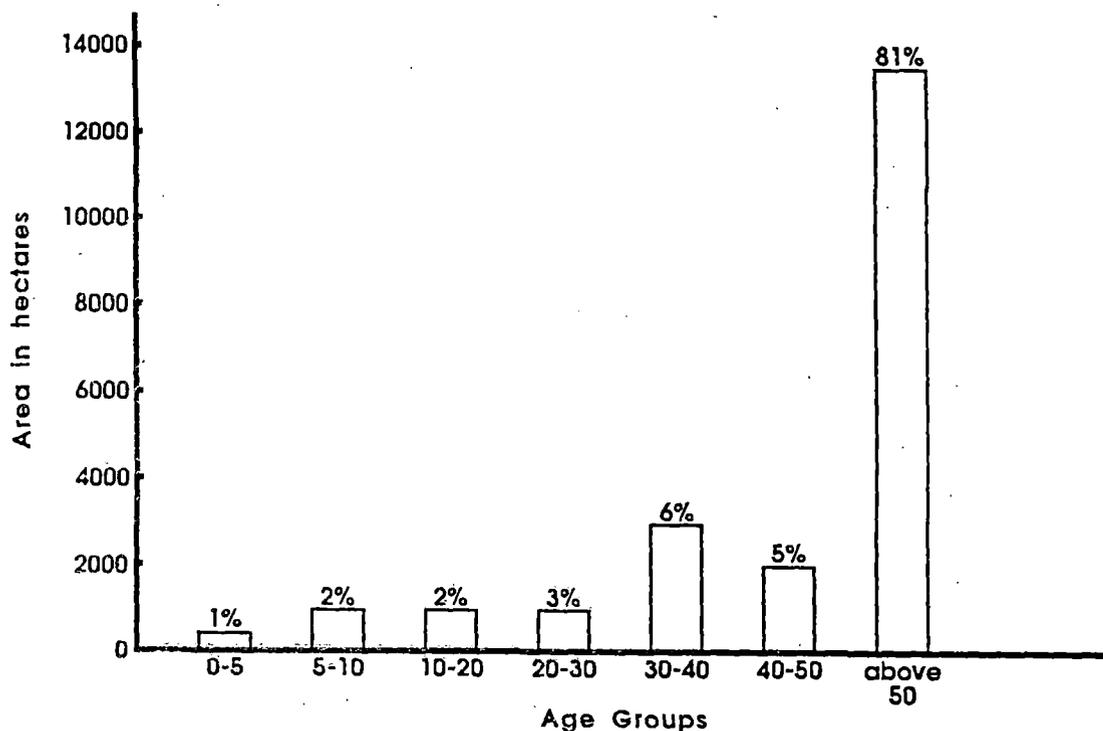
Between 1961 and 1970 Darjeeling hills witnessed a fall in labour productivity whereas all other tea-producing areas of the state witnessed a significant rise in it. A marginal increase in labour productivity in Darjeeling has been recorded during 70's & 80's. It was only in 1990 that the labour productivity crossed the 300 Kg mark in Darjeeling which seemed to be too little compared to the labour productivity of 702 Kg. in Duars and 558 Kg. in Terai in the same year. The All West Bengal average was also quite high (exactly double) to 602 Kg., All India level labour productivity being further high of 730 Kg.

Such a slow and negligible growth in employment, productivity etc. in Darjeeling tea gardens are attributed to a number of important factors. The owners of these gardens are not the local people and hence the profits are not reinvested there. The

profits are diverted to another areas. As a result, Darjeeling tea industry has extraordinarily lagged behind in the replantation, extension and infilling of the vacancy schemes. Most of the researchers have pointed out that the low productivity, in this region, is due to the ages of bush and decreasing fertility of the soil. More than 80% of bushes are more than 50 years old. The proportion of area under young bushes (up to ten years old) is less than 4%. The bushes after 50 years are generally characterised by diminishing returns and replete with frames riddled with pests and diseases. Generally highest yield is given by the tea bushes within the age 30-40 years. In Darjeeling only 6% of the total tea bushes falls under this category.<sup>20</sup>

The following figure shows the area covered by bushes according to their ages (as on 1992).

Fig. 2.1 : Area Under Different Age Group of Bushes



Source : Based on data from Tea Statistics, Tea Board of India.

In the span of last 40 years, the replantation rate has

also been very low (2% approx). As far as extension is concerned, during 1951-1990, the area under tea in Darjeeling hills had increased only by 21% whereas in the same period, in the Terai, it has increased by more than 58%. Here is table-2.6 that shows the growth of area under tea cultivation in various regions of West Bengal.

Table 2.6 : Area Under Tea Cultivation (in hectares).

Year	Darjeeling	Duars	Terai	All West Bengal	All India
1951	16569	54609	8402	79580	316840
1961	18605	54756	9344	82705	331229
1971	18245	59485	10769	88479	356516
1981	19239	63418	11314	93971	383629
1985	19804	65816	12395	98015	398966
1990	20065	67760	13345	101170	416563
% increase					
over 1951	21.10	24.0	58.83	27.13	31.43

Source : Tea statistics of different years, Tea Board of India.

The lowest growth rate of extension, as seen in table-2.6, is mainly due to the financial constraints faced by the planters as well as the high cost of production. In general, the cost of production in hills is higher than that in the plains. Construction costs of some basic infrastructure facilities such as roads is much higher than that in the plains. The topographical variation in the region has accentuated this. There is tremendous lack of transport and communication, energy and irrigation which have profoundly hampered the productivity in these tea gardens.<sup>21</sup>

Also responsible for this apparent stagnation in the tea industry is the frequent change of gardens from one set of directors to another. The frequency of change of ownership in

Darjeeling hill areas is much higher than either in Duars or in Terai. For example, in between 1951 and 1981, 56% of Darjeeling gardens were affected by this change of owners, where as in Duars and Terai only 36.54% and 22.72% gardens underwent change of ownership.<sup>22</sup> After the British left, most of the new planters came to tea business by accumulating wealth in wholesale trade or speculative business. Gardens had changed from one set of speculative owners to another set. In the meantime, the old owners had stripped the gardens off leaves and vitality. There had been cases of shade trees being cut and sold as firewood besides rampant "Strip plucking" at the time of change of ownership. This has certainly led to gradual fall in productivity of tea bushes. It is also stated that governments, both central and state, are more interested to take the surplus of the gardens in the form of various taxes but never cared positively to look at the health of the gardens. Some half-hearted measures were taken by the govt. for replantation of the bushes through different schemes of tea board. But at times it has been admitted by the tea board that money given to planters were not used in the gardens rather were shiphoned off to other speculative industries. Added to this is the bad management too. The frequent change of managers affected the long term stability of gardens and accountability became diffused.

Mid 80's was marked by continuous stoppages of works in the tea gardens due to the frequent and long strikes organised by the trade unions. This was inevitable in view of the spontaneous support of all classes of people of the hills, including the tea garden labourers towards the demand for creation of a separate state of Gorkhaland. During the period of political agitation in the hills, the leaves could not be plucked in time, as a result of which, the tea gardens suffered a setback in the production. This was, however, a temporary phenomenon and after the political

solution of the problem through this creation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), no such continuous halt has occurred in the production of tea.

As a result of these factors, quite a few tea gardens have become "sick" in Darjeeling. Five such tea gardens have been undertaken by the West Bengal Tea Development Corporation (WBTDC).<sup>23</sup> The net loss incurred by the WBTDC in running these gardens in the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 stood respectively at Rs.65 lakh, Rs.59 lakh and Rs.90 lakh. The cumulative loss during these three years stood at Rs.7.08 cr., Rs.7.64 cr. and Rs.8.54 cr. respectively.<sup>24</sup> Even the TTCI faces the same problem. It has undertaken five tea gardens of Darjeeling hills under its direct control and management in view of their deteriorating condition. But the condition could not be improved. Out of these five, Vah Tukvar Tea Garden has been facing tremendous crisis. It has remained closed for quite a few months since the mid 1994 but TTCI neither has declared lockout there nor has taken any positive step towards the payment of a huge due amounting to nearly Rs.40 lakh to the labourers.

In view of such problems leading to a state of stagnation in tea industry, it has lost its character of absorbing the excess labour force. It is estimated that 10%-12% of the labour force in tea plantations remains unemployed.<sup>25</sup> The increasing population in the rural areas of Darjeeling hills finds it too difficult to depend on tea-industry and the undeveloped agriculture. The result is the outflow of people from rural to urban centres seeking job somewhere. As the formal sector puts entry barrier for them, the urban informal sector is bound to grow.

### **2.3.3 : Falling Land-man Ratio in Darjeeling Hills**

Agriculture in the hills of Darjeeling district occupies the 2nd place after the tea-industry in absorbing the rural populations. The pressure of rising population on agriculture can

be understood from the fact that the agricultural labour category which was conspicuously absent in the hill areas till 1941, got recorded first time in the 1951 census and from 1961 onwards agricultural labourers assumed quite a prominent place. Incidentally, this is the most striking feature in all North Bengal districts. While the state of West Bengal as a whole recorded more than 80% increase in agricultural labourers, for four of the six districts of North Bengal agricultural labourers rose by more than 155% in 1971 as compared to the figure of 1961. The district wise break up for the three districts with unprecedented rise is as follows: Darjeeling 248.80%, Jalpaiguri 264.14% and Malda 156.75%.<sup>26</sup>

This sharp increase in the population of agricultural labourers requires some explanations. In the north, especially in Terai and Duars region, the institution of share cropping grew out of land system atypical of other permanently settled areas of West Bengal. These areas were mostly uncultivable at the time of settlement and was thus not considered for Zamindari settlement. The areas were leased out through auction in "lots". The lot-owners or jotedars induced the tribal and semitribal communities to get settled in the unclaimed areas. Being attracted by a better source of living, these settlers started working as share-croppers. Thus a *jotedari-adhiari* system emerged in the dominant form in cultivation in Terai and Duars.<sup>27</sup>

But Darjeeling hills differ socio-politically and topologically from both Terai and Duars. It has been already mentioned that areas of plantations industries and forests are more significant than that under food-crop cultivation in Darjeeling hills. Also, labour engaged in the agricultural sector is comparatively smaller than those engaged in plantations, forestry and other miscellaneous activities. The presence of large tracts of uncultivable land, shady, slanty and marshy areas and other

such physical handicaps have reduced the employment potential of hill agriculture. On top of all these, due to topographical peculiarities the average land-holding size is found to be much smaller in the hills.<sup>28</sup> The tea-industry has been unable to absorb the excess supply of labour and agriculture has no other alternative than to bear with the overcrowding on it. As a result, the land-man ratio became adverse overtime. The following table speaks about the falling land-man ratio in the Darjeeling hills.

Table 2.7 : Land-man Ratio in Darjeeling Hills

Year	1961	1971	1981	1991
Land-man Ratio	0.445	0.364	0.278	0.101

Source : M. Dasgupta, Project Report on Women Workers in the Informal Sector : A Case Study of the Hills and Plains of Darjeeling District, ICSSR, 1992

This diminishing land-man ratio has resulted in more intensive cultivation in the rural areas. The falling Land-man ratio has also resulted to work as the "push factor" encouraging the people to migrate to the urban areas and market places of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong in search of alternative employment. The migrating people mostly are less educated and unskilled and hence find the entry in the formal sector market very difficult. These labourers for the maintenance of their family or for their own survival are compelled to start doing something for self employment adopting absolutely labour intensive technique or get absorbed in part-time works or even full-time works in small establishments. The hill urban centres are the tourist centres too, where a large number of hotels, holiday homes, restaurants and transport means have come up. A sizeable section of the migrating people have managed to get part-time jobs in these hotels where they work as hotelboys, touts and even

coolies. The migrating women, on the otherhand, prefer to work as construction workers or domestic servants or roadside vendors. Thus, the urban informal sector has grown up in the hill areas of Darjeeling district and has remained a source of attractions to the rural migrants.

A few observations have been made, in this connection, in the hill areas and the plains of the Darjeeling district.

(i) That over the period the average size of landholding in the hill areas has declined. The 1931 census India recorded 7.21 acres as the average size of land holding in the hill areas. It declined to 5.21 acres in 1941 and by 1971 the same had come down to 1.19 acres. By 1981, the average size of land holding has further declined to a mere figure of 1.04 acre. Thus, during the last fifty-year period, total marginal holdings have increased considerably.

(ii) The proportion of small farmers has dwindled continuously and the small farmers have been relegated to the level of marginal farmers.

(iii) The concept of "agricultural labour" which was non-existent in the hills till 1951, has become prominent at present. The percentage of agricultural labourer in total workers in 1981 was 8.78% which is almost equal to the same for the district average of 8.96%.

(iv) The importance of the tea-plantations also appears to be declining in the hill economy so far the extra employment generation potential of the industry is concerned. Over the last forty years, the total number of labour force in tea-industry in the hills almost has remained stagnant.

(v) Small scale and cottage industries would have played pivotal role in mobilising the excess labour but no positive steps have been undertaken by the govt. in promoting these in the

pretext of topographical and communication difficulties in the hills. As such, not even 2% of the hill population is found to be engaged in small scale industry.

(vi) The "tourism", however, has a veery bright prospect. But the rural areas are not covered by the tourism network. The tourism network is centralised only in a few urban centres. Supported by it, the transport sector has been very dynamic. In fact, a large proportion of people in Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong depend upon the transport sector for their survival.

(vii) "Trade and Commerce", both medium, small & petty also have gained momentum over the years. And it must be mentioned here that this particular sector has absorbed quite a significant proportion of female workers.

(viii) There are 1046 inhabited villages in the district of which only 11 are identified, in 1981 census report, as villages with "concentration" of rural industries. And surprisingly all these villages are located in the plains and the industries are mostly concentrated in and around Siliguri town.

(ix) Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong are the three important hill towns and urban centres. But the importance of the hill urban areas has dwindled over the years with the increasing importance of Siliguri as a trade centre in the Terai area of the district. The rapid growth of Siliguri can be understood if we look at the population figures of the four important urban centres in the district.

Table 2.8 : The Growth of Population in Four Major Urban Centres of the District.

	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981
Darjeeling	21185	27224	33605	40651	42873	57608
Kalimpong	8776	11961	16677	25105	23430	28885
Kurseong	7451	8495	11719	13410	16425	18008
Siliguri	6067	10487	32480	65471	97462	154378

Source : Bengal District Gazetteers; A.J.Dash and District Census Handbooks, Darjeeling District, 1951,1961,1971 & 1981.

In the year 1931, the first time when Siliguri was considered to be an urban centre, it constituted only 14.28% of the total urban population of the district but by 1971, the proportion increased to 54.08% and to our surprise in 1981, 60.57% of the urban population of district were found in Siliguri.

Now it is not only the biggest urban centre in the district but also of North Bengal as a whole. Very recently it has been given the status of Municipal Corporation. In fact, after the partition, Siliguri emerged as the most important urban centre due to a certain strategic locational advantages. It is the gateway of the hills of Darjeeling, Sikkim, Assam, Bhutan, Nepal and other north-eastern states. The growing markets in all these areas have made Siliguri as the main centre of trading activities. Further, the ethnic trouble of 80's in Assam, recent communal upsurge in Meghalaya and other neighbouring states and the continuous migration of people from Bangladesh in and around Siliguri has increased its population so remarkably. Siliguri's urban conglomeration had about 3.5 lakh population in 1985 which has crossed a figure of five lakh at present.

It can be summed up that while growing informal sector

activities is the main feature of the hill urban centres, Siliguri is characterised by rapid growth of both the formal and informal sector activities. If the locational advantage had contributed so largely in the growth of Siliguri in Terai, the locational disadvantage followed by the closure of trade route from Kalimpong to China (formerly Tibet) had led to the declining importance of the hill urban centres.

#### **2.4 : The Informal Sector as Principal Source of Employment to Hill Women**

Informal sector employs a large segment of the female workforce in India. It covers marginal workers<sup>29</sup> as well as workers living on the border line of starvation and survival. Not only in India but in most of the developing countries of Latin America, Africa and even in some developed countries like Mexico almost throughout all informal economic sectors, the proportion of women is double that of men.<sup>30</sup>

The female work-force participation picture in Darjeeling hills is slightly different from that in the rest of India. Whereas the participation rate in economic activities for all-India women was 12.13% and 14.44% in 1971 and 1981 respectively, the same was quite high for the hill women. But a matter of concern in the Darjeeling hill is that their labour-force participation rate is declining sharply. The participation rate was 35.37% in 1961 which declined sharply to 28.64 % in 1971 and it further fell to 27.62 % in 1981. Table 2.9 below represents the picture of women workforce in Darjeeling hills from 1961 to 1981.

Table 2.9 : Women Work-force in Darjeeling Hills

	1961	1971	1981
Male Population	211431	248352	286556
Female Population	193361	231325	244818
(% of total population)	(47.77)	(48.23)	(48.03)
Total female Workers	68783	66243	73155
( % of female Workers in the female population)	(35.57)	(28.64)	(27.62)
Total <sup>women</sup> Workers in the Informal Sector	35812	32776	37416
(Women in Informal Sector as % of total working women)	(52.07)	(49.46)	(51.15)

Source : Darjeeling District Census Handbooks, 1961, 1971 & 1981.

The much higher work-participation rate of women in Darjeeling hills can be explained by the very fact of the existence of 102 tea gardens in the three hilly subdivisions. These tea gardens together with cinchona plantation industries in the hills have employed a large number of women. Roughly 55% of the total employees in the plantation industries are women.<sup>31</sup> This is the feature peculiar to the hill economy. In no other tea growing areas in India, the female workers outnumber the male workers in employment.

Barring the plantation industries, the scope of women's employment in other formal enterprises and govt. or semi-govt services is too minimum. For example, out of 35739 women employed in formal sector enterprises (table-2.9) in 1981, 26671 are absorbed by the tea-industries only. Hill women are thus found to be concentrated into a relatively limited number of specific occupations in the formal sector. In the rural areas, the only informal sector activity in which women are involved is the

traditional agriculture. They are working as cultivators and agricultural labourers. Cultivators are in a bit better situation than the agricultural labourers since agricultural labourers are the wage-earners and the wage payment to agricultural labourers although at times is decided by the govt. but is not being followed in villages. The agricultural labourers are compelled to supply their labour for agricultural purpose at a low wage-rate. In the urban areas, those having some capital have taken up the occupation of petty trade and homebased production while majority are found engaged in vending, construction work, domestic service and knitting & weaving. The employment in these typical informal sector activities is characterised to be highly exploitative, labour-intensive, discontinuous production, low-productivity, use of unskilled manual labour etc.

#### **2.4.1 : Causes of Heavy Concentration of Women in the Informal Sector**

[A] On Supply side, there are some handicaps which prevent women from spreading to the formal sector. These handicaps are as follows:

(i) Immobility of urban labour - This is the greatest handicap of the urban female labour in the hill areas of Darjeeling district that keeps them in low paying, irregular and local avenues of employment in the informal sector. Today, the immobility is not a big problem. But even if they migrate, their exodus take place in groups, with their family. The married women do not migrate separately and independently. This immobility or better to say, limited immobility of urban women has forced them to accept low paying jobs like vending, starting up of a Small restaurant, domestic services, local construction etc.

(ii) Natural factors - Most of the female work-force is in the age group of 15-40 years which happens to be the reproductive age of women. Usually women above 30 years in age

have more than 2-3 children for which they are not always available for continuous and regular type of work due to their child - bearing and child care roles. But to Supplement the family income, the hill women do not hesitate to take up part-time jobs in the informal sector.

(iii) Illiteracy and low skills - For higher paying jobs in the formal sector, education and training is a must. But for most of the women in Darjeeling hills, education and training are not easily available. The schools and colleges mostly are located in the urban and semi-urban areas. The vocational training facilities/institutions for vast majority of the rural women are beyond their imagination. Employment problem of women in the formal sector thus stems from lack of skill and training.

[B] On demand side, certain other factors are found to encourage the employers to employ more women in some specific informal sector activities. These are as follows.

(i) The immobility of female workers encourages the employers to employ them in low-paying jobs. This gives them somewhat stable work-force. If men are employed in such jobs, they would not stay for a long-time. In the English medium nursery schools and some other private schools in the urban centres of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong most of the teachers are women. They are being paid abnormally low salary but they have not left the job. With the same qualifications, male teachers are seen to leave this job as they form a mobile labour-force. They do not mind even to move to a distant place provided they can earn more there.

(ii) There are certain low paying jobs in the hills which are regarded as purely fit for women like paddy transplantation, harvesting, grinding, food processing, domestic service, handicrafts, knitting and weaving etc. These works are, therefore, carried out by the women, in general.

(iii) The mechanisation of formal sector activities is also responsible for women being switched over to the informal sector. The increasing capital intensity of the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills over the years has resulted in almost a stagnant female labour-force there. At weaving centres too, the replacement of handlooms by powerlooms has opened the scope for males to replace the female workers.

The informal sector in the hills is seen to shelter the unemployed and in general the less privileged in the society. Among them are women, children, the very young or the very aged people who have no chance of finding a job in the formal sector. But this sector is not only a place where the poor and marginalised are found, some activities involving women within the sector constitute the profitable source of income. It has been seen that earning of the workers such as the owner-weaver, the road-side restaurant owners, particularly those on the Tenzing Norgay Road (formerly Hill Cart Road) between Tindharia and Kurseong and the traders dealing in woolen garments and other consumer garments of tourist attractions earn much more than the workers would earn in the service sector. However, women workers such as the domestic servants, coolies and even the artisan workers are at a very vulnerable situations. It can thus be stated that the workers of Informal sector who can control their own finances in Darjeeling hills are privileged rather than obliged to do so.

In the next few chapters, the role and status of women in various informal sector activities in Darjeeling-hills would be discussed. The discussion would help us establish the fact that women in the informal sector can be located in a position of relative power but taken-for-granted notion is that it is a constant source of oppression for women.<sup>32</sup>

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29. In 1981 census any one who has done any work at all in a year has been considered as a worker. The main workers are those who have worked major part of the year. In other words, the main worker is somebody who has done economically productive work for at least 183 days during the year. The marginal workers, on the other hand, are those who have not worked for a major part of the year (ie. engaged in productive work for less than 183 days during the year).

30. Lorena Nunez, " Women on the streets : Vending and Public Space in Chile", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 28, No. 44, October 30, 1993, p. ws-69

31. The average daily number of male and female workers for a few selected years in the Darjeeling gardens are given below in support of the statement. (Source: The Statistics of various years, Tea Board of India)

Year	male workers	female workers .	adolescents	children
1965	15568	23606	1532	2530
1975	14561	26212	847	2315
1985	17339	27008	590	1338
1990	17885	29043	440	748

32. Lorena Nunez, op.cit., p.70