

## CHAPTER 6

RECENT CHANGES IN TRADE UNIONS AFTER THE GORKHA NATIONAL  
LIBERATION FRONT MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE TEA GARDENS

The history of the present day Darjeeling begins with the acquisition of a 'hilly tract' by East India Company in 1835 from the Raja of Sikkim. The land presented by Sikkim did not comprise the whole of Darjeeling. It was a narrow enclave of 138 sq miles, which included sites of the present Darjeeling and Kurseong towns and touched the plains near Pankhabari. The additional territory was acquired by the British in 1850-51. It comprised of the entire Sikkim, Morung Terai i.e. the present Siliguri sub-division and the hills of the whole southern part of Sikkim between the great Rangeet and the plains of India and from Nepal on the west to Bhutan frontier and the Teesta River in the East. The British government acquired Dalimkote i.e. present Kalimpong and adjacent plain areas (now in Jalpaiguri district) in 1866 under the Treaty of Sinchulia. With this, the district of Darjeeling assume the present shape and size (1)

The British policy of keeping the district under the separate administrative arrangement and outside the constitutional reform process coupled with regional and ethnic aspects have profoundly influenced the political process and political development of hill areas of Darjeeling. Darjeeling hill areas including Kurseong and later Kalimpong, belonged to the 'non-regulated scheme till 1874. Under the system, the Governor General possessed the power of adopting legislation for the non-regulated province by means of executive orders. The act of 1874 declared the district as 'scheduled district'. It was, therefore, quite clear that the districts, along with other scheduled districts, was not placed within the ambit of the general laws in application over the rest of India, such laws

applied only in part or with modifications. The Indian Council Act of 1909 also did not bring about any change in this respect.

Under the Government of India Act of 1919, the term 'scheduled District, was replaced by a new term backward tract'. So Darjeeling became a backward tract till the passing of the Govt of India Act 1935, which declared the district as a 'partially excluded area'. The district remained a partially excluded area till the attainment of Independence by India.

The district was kept outside the constitutional reforms which the British Government was introducing in the direction of self-government in other parts of the country to allow larger popular participation in the governance of the country. The persistent policy of the British rulers in this century to keep the district of Darjeeling segregated (2) had far-reaching implications in the political process of the hill areas of the district. This has, to significant extent, alienated the people from the mainstream of national polity which ultimately culminated into a feeling of insecurity and separateness.

#### Early Demand For 'Separation'

The Gorkha and agitation claiming separate statehood for the Gorkhas of the Darjeeling Hill areas has seeds rooted deeply in the developments in the turn of this century. (3)

The first recorded instance of the demand for separation of Darjeeling region from Bengal can be traced to the year 1907. In 1917, the Hillman's Association had demanded special safeguards for the Nepalese of Darjeeling. A deputation consisting of S.W.Ladenla, Y.Sitling, K.B.Chettri, Prem Kumar Kumai, Meghbir Singh, Lachman Singh, Nar Prasad Kumai Deonidhi Upadhaya submitted a memorandum to the Montagu-

Chemsford committee demanding the creation of separate administrative set-up for the district of Darjeeling.(4)

“In March 1920, the Darjeeling Planters’ Association, European Association, and the Hillman’s Association resolved in a meeting that the Darjeeling district including the portion of Jalpaiguri district annexed from Bhutan in 1865 should be excluded from Bengal when the 1919 Act will be introduced in India. However, not all people from Hill demanded separation from Bengal. The Kalimpong Samiti under Sardar Bhimdal Dewan and the People Association of Darjeeling opposed the exclusion of Darjeeling from the province of Bengal. (5)

These associations by their opposition to exclusion also gave vent to their resentment of the policy followed by the British Government in respect of Darjeeling district:

1. They emphasise their desire for the fullest measure of the Reforms Act for the district of Darjeeling.
2. They strongly protest against the exclusion of the district from Bengal as well as from the Reforms Act. (6)

They opposed mainly because they found a British plot to protect the commercial interests of the British planters.

The district of Darjeeling despite remaining expressly a non-regulated area or scheduled district for a long time did not make any noticeable advancement in any of the spheres. The difference over the issue of exclusion or inclusion immediately before and after the passing of Government of India Act 1919, among the hillmen and their associations, inclusive of the association of the Europeans, were more or less the sequel of the disillusionment of the sections of hill men over all the previous Act declaring the

district to be a scheduled or a non-regulated area supposedly for giving the district special treatment to ensure its speedy development. (7)

In between 1917 and 1940 there were various demands for separation of Darjeeling Hill area. "The All India Gorkha League, then an emerging political force even demanded the inclusion of Darjeeling and Dooars districts in Assam in 1943.

Against these fervent pleas to remain within India but with its own administrative unit, the Darjeeling District Committee of the then undivided Communist Party of India, demanded a 'sovereign state' in a memorandum submitted to the constituent Assembly on 6 April 1947, in the form of single union out of the feudal states of Nepal and Sikkim and British Administered district of Darjeeling known as 'Gorkhasthan' to safeguard the interest of Gorkhas. The motive behind this movement may be to create a popular base in hill areas, especially in the formation of trade unions - Mr. Ratan Lal Brahmin was vocal in this separatist demand. He was supported by leaders like Charu Mazumdar, Sourin Basu, and Ganesh Lal Subba. Some quotations are given from the memorandum :-

"In the opinion of the Communist party of India, the district of Darjeeling belongs to the Gorkhas and it is their homeland."

'In the opinion of the Communist Party of India, the only way to further the national development of the Gorkha people is by granting them their right of self-determination'.

'The Communist Party of India, therefore, demands that after making necessary revisions of the existing boundaries, the three contiguous areas of Darjeeling District, Southern Sikkim and Nepal be formed into one single zone to be called 'Gorkhasthan'(8).

The All India Gorkha League, and its president N.B.Gurung, submitted a memorandum to Jawaharlal Nehru in 1952 reiterated its demand and added that the

district and its neighbouring areas should be given the status of separate administrative unit, or a separate province.

### 6.1. AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Independent India did not find much change in the attitude and feeling of the hill people as they continued to remain segregated from the national mainstream. The All India Gorkha League and the Communist Party of India, Darjeeling unit, shared the common feeling of apprehension regarding the fate of the Indian Gorkhas in a free India, despite their ideological differences.

In the initial years that followed Independence, both the All India Gorkha League and Communist Party of India took radical stands on their demand for statehood for the Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri areas and their exclusion from Bengal. The All India Gorkha League appeared to be softer and in league with Communist Party of India, developed the concept of 'Uttarkhand' which was to be created consisting of the Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar district. During the sixties the All India Gorkha League seemed to be further softened up and campaigned for 'Hill Autonomy' within Bengal for the hill areas of the district of Darjeeling and Nepali speaking areas of Dooars.

The communist movement splitted during the sixties, but this did not affect the policy of the communist in the Hill areas. "Ratanlal Brahimin and Ananda Mohan Pathak remained with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) but Bhadra Bahadur Hamal, the important communist leader chose to stay with the Communist Party of India. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) from the late sixties stressed the concept of 'autonomy' rather than separate 'Gorkhasthan'". (9) The district committee of Indian National Congress also developed the concept of 'Hill Autonomy' on the lines suggested

by the 'Nehru Proposal' and the Pataskar Commission Report. Subsequently, the district committee of Indian National Congress, Darjeeling submitted memorandum to the Government for the creation of autonomous council for the hill areas of Darjeeling including the Nepali speaking areas of Dooars of the Jalpaiguri District. (10)

The language movement dominated the centre-stage of politics in the hill areas in the fifties till late seventies. Nepali was made the official language in the hill areas of the district with the passing of official language 1961 Act by the West Bengal Government. 'A significant event in this context was the setting up of the All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti in 1972, mainly to seek constitutional recognition of the Nepali language, which soon started to give economic issues an ethnic connotation.(11) After this, a number of social and political organisations sprang up, seeking separation from West Bengal. This turning point came in the wake of the disenchantment of the hill people with the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai, following his statement-given to the 10<sup>th</sup> delegation of the All India Bhasa Samity that Nepali is a "foreign language". This aggravated the feeling of insecurity and a concern for identity of Indian Gorkhas. A conference was organised in Sukiapokhari in 1979, attended by the representatives of all political parties, intellectuals, trade unions, students and others. As a consequence, Pranta Praishad was born in April 1980. The top ranking leaders of the language movement joined the Pranta Parishad. Gorkha National Liberation front was formed in 1980, which captured the sentiments of the hill people, which the traditional parties had failed to do. Thus many issues have contributed to the volcanic atmosphere. The whole history of Darjeeling since it became a part of British India in 1835 has recorded a chain of protests culminating in the present Gorkha National Liberation Front movement.

The indiscriminate eviction of Nepali-Speaking people from Assam and Meghalaya, Mr. Morarji Desai's dismissal of Indian Gorkhas by describing Nepali as a foreign language had already turned the identity question of India's ethnic Gorkhas into a national issue, hurting the very fabric of the existence and challenging the patriotism of the Gorkhas. The success of Gorkha National Liberation Front to spearhead the Gorkhaland Movement can be attributed to these factors; besides the economic stagnation of the hill areas simmering discontent remained hidden but vibrant.

The hitherto powerful Communist Party of India (Marxist) base was sharply eroded after the death of their veteran leader Ratan Lal Brahmin. The Congress (I) was disintegrated into smaller splinter groups; as such there was a leadership vacuum. The success of the Gorkha National Liberation Front can be attributed to the style and the kind of leadership provided by its leader, Subhas Ghising, who put emphasis on the Gorkha pride for achieving Gorkhaland, which had emotional overtones. Indian Gorkhas remained politically docile, economically exploited and educationally backward, which only helped the propaganda that every Nepali-speaking person in India is from Nepal. Thus the question of distinguishing Indian Gorkhas' identity from the Nepalese of Nepal origin arose. Subhas Ghising raised the issue of citizenship.

The Central Government never condemned the Gorkha National Liberation Front movement as 'anti-national' rather considered it to be the 'law and order' problem, whereas the State Government condemned it as 'anti national movement'. Left Front Government published an Information document on Gorkhaland agitation, and the Gorkha National Liberation Front alleged that the information is politically motivated and contained distortions of historical facts.

The Gorkha National Liberation Front movement in Darjeeling began in April 1986 and continued till September 1988, when it was finally called off after a Tripartite agreement between the Centre, West Bengal Government and the Gorkha National Liberation Front, to form the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. For nearly two years, the Gorkha National Liberation Front movement rocked the hills. The movement affected the life and economy of Darjeeling in various ways. Normal life was completely disrupted due to repeated strike calls for 72 hours, 108 hours, and once even for 40 days had destroyed the already fragile economy of the hills which depended upon tea and tourism. The flow of tourists to Darjeeling declined sharply and many hotels were closed down rendering hundreds of workers jobless. The tourist industry suffered a loss of revenue to the tune of Rs. 45 Crores in 1987. The industry used to earn revenue of around Rs. 60 Crores till the year before the agitation started. (12) The tea Industry suffered a crop loss of 1.1 million Kg. worth Rs. 8 Crores as a result of work stoppage during the 19 day bandh in 1987. (13)

For a later period of the first three months of 1989 the industry received a severe jolt during the bandh in February-March. About 1.5 million mandays had been lost. (14)

According to Darjeeling Planters' Association sources about 3 percent of the annual crop is harvested in March and the 40 day bandh resulted in a loss of 4 million kg. Contrary to these above quoted reports of the Staffman, the Ananda Bazar Patrika published a report stating that not only did the hill areas did not stand to lose, rather they had reaped a considerable profit. There were 75 gardens in the Darjeeling hill areas where 75,000 workers were employed. As daily employment they got Rs. 20/- each including Rs. 12/- as wage and Rs. 8/- as subsidy and other benefits. Owing to the 40 day bandh the owner had saved Rs. 15 lakh daily, which meant that the workers had lost Rs. 6

Crores as wages and the amount was an indirect profit for the owners. Virtually no plucking takes place from mid January to mid March. Normally strikes and lock-cuts occurred during this period and the loss due to non-plucking would be compensated by actual intensive plucking after March 15. (15)

The three sub-divisions, namely, Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong together occupy an area of 2417.3 sq km and has a population of more than 15 lakhs. The pressure on land arising out of an average density of 235 persons per square kilometre (1981 census) is simply distressing. The cultivable land consists of 14 percent of the total area and 24 percent of the area is a permanent waste. This 14 percent of cultivable land against the West Bengal's average of 65 percent supports more than 70 percent of the hill population. (16)

From the very beginning of the agitation, the tea gardens turned out to be the hotbeds of tension. Sporadic clashes and confrontations between the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Gorkha National Liberation Front, and the Gorkha National Liberation Front and security forces took place in various gardens.

An overwhelming majority of tea garden labourers had joined the Gorkha National Liberation Front from Communist Party of India (Marxist). The Communist Party of India (Marxist) openly admitted that it had ceased to be a political force not only in the towns, but in some of the tea gardens as well, where authority had passed on to the Gorkha National Liberation Front. (17)

The Centre for Indian Trade Union, which used to control most of the gardens had, in course of the agitation lost their control on all of them, with the exception of Maribong, Lingia, Chongtong, and Singtam, which were the strongholds of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). There were reports of attacks and counter-attacks between the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Gorkha National Liberation Front

cadres. Some of them were killed in course of such confrontations. Indrajit Pradhan, Head Clerk, Ambotia tea estate was killed in August 1986. This resulted in clashes between Gorkha National Liberation Front and security personals. Many labour houses were burnt down. The figures supplied by Darjeeling Planter's Association, reveal the following information in the various member tea estates, over the 2<sup>1/2</sup> years of violence.

Table VI.01: Report on labour houses damaged/burnt down

Name of the Tea Estate	Completely Burnt	Major Damage	Minor Damage
Rungmook&Cedars	71	20	35
Pashok	20	10	5
Kalej Valley	15	20	40
Happy Valley	7	10	15
Dooteriah	25	40	40
Tukvar	90	40	100
Tukdah	13	20	20
Mim	2	1	1
Margaret's Hope	74	100	100
Poogong	3	-	-
Arya	6	10	8
Phoobsering	10	5	4
Risheehat	20	10	8
Soom	5	10	100
Vah Takvar	5	5	6
North Tukvar	6	35	10
Singtam	80	40	60
	452	377	564

The Darjeeling Planters' Association has given the following estimate of rebuilding / repairing costs per unit of damaged labour houses.

Completely burnt house - Rs. 20,000/-

Major Damage " 5,000/-

Minor Damage " 1,000/-

The total loss is estimated at = Rs 1,14,89,000/-

(i)  $452 \times 20,000 = \text{Rs. } 9,040,000/-$

(ii)  $377 \times 5000 = \text{ " } 18,85,000/-$

(iii)  $564 \times 1000 = \underline{\text{ " } 5,64,000/-}$

1,14,89,000/-

Besides the labour houses burnt and damaged during the agitation even the bungalows of managers, assistant managers of Pashok Tea Estate, Ghaiyabaree Tea Estate, Phuguri Tea Estate and Tukvar were damaged.

The first well planned and successful 72 hour bandh in May 1986 called by Gorkha National Liberation Front came as a big surprise to all political observers. Strike took place in two phases in May and July in 1986. Following continued violence and firing at least 10 gardens had decided to declare lock - out. Badamtam Tea Estate under the proprietorship of Goodricks Company had closed operation following burning of houses by Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Gorkha National Liberation Front cadres. However, the Darjeeling Planters' Association sources contradict the statement by saying that no garden had been closed down due to the agitation.

The industry suffered a considerable loss of crop due to the agitation. "B.Bajoria stated that almost all the 72 gardens excepting 15 had been affected by the strikes.(18) This had caused a direct product loss of 2.3percent. Approximately 1 million kg. was reported to have been lost during the first and second flush". The production in 1986 was 96.07,034 kgs.

The Darjeeling Planters' Association sources reveal the loss due to Gorkha National Liberation Front agitation as under

Table VI.02: Loss due to gnlf agitation

	1986	1987	1988
Loss of Crop	1,000,000kg	11,00000kgs	3,30,000kgs
Loss of Value	5 crores	8 crores	2.15 crores
Houses lost Number	327	189	42
Loss of wages	41 lakhs	77 lakhs	1.44 cr
No.of mandays lost	330000	600000	11,00000

The losses "which could not be quantified were-

- (1) Complete breakdown of discipline,
- (2) Absence of any organised mode of industrial relations
- (3) Total insecurity for both managinal staff and workers"

The situation during the movement led to the impossibility of planning day to day business because of sudden and unscheduled disruptions, phenomenon of ever rising demands, accompanied by threats for large sums of money in the name of Gorkha National Liberation Front and the erosion of long accepted norms and practices.

For an industry that produces only 11 million Kgs. per annum, the loss of production is considerable. The entire region of Darjeeling hills was in a state of grim stress, ever since the Gorkhaland movement started. The towns of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong wore adeserted look and all sections, including shops transport agencies, hotels, Schools, and daily workers suffered a serious economic blow.

The Gorkha National Liberation Front movement entered its third year in 1988 amidst violence, bloody clashes between the security forces and the activists, arrests and large scale destruction of property all over the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling along with frequent bandh calls given by different organisations from different parts of the district. The disturbances reached its peak in course of the 40-day bandh during February - March (19), which was also, the crucial first flush period.

The calculations of losses made by Darjeeling Planters' Association and different authorities seemed to be varying and contradictory. Tea being a seasonal crop, production depends on weather condition, garden-to-garden, and from section to section even within the same garden. "Prediction of total yield that would have been, had not the strikes taken place is bound to be tentative. These immediate estimates, therefore, seems to give only a rough idea regarding the extent of losses incurred. (20) Production figures of the years of agitation along with those of the years preceding and following are prepared by the Tea Board of India are given below for comparison.

Table VI.03: Monthwise production of Tea in Darjeeling. (In thousand Kg.)

Months	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Jan	27	18	26	35	26	30	29
Feb	14	5	50	7	20	26	26
Mar	315	608	809	395	596	615	606
Apr	1760	1047	1275	1377	1217	1322	1353
May	1098	1438	1082	1060	1178	1134	1168
June	2068	1850	1664	1326	1592	1565	1592
July	1982	2099	1867	1538	1811	1781	1806
Aug	2427	2289	1563	1756	1845	1763	1788
Sep	1931	1840	1722	1372	1623	1611	1589
Oct	1526	1223	1150	766	1036	1008	994

Nov	829	821	890	593	758	731	754
Dec	285	253	822	137	397	463	457
	14,262	13,491	12,921	10,362	12,099	12,049	12,162

SOURCE: TEA STATISTICS - 1988 - 89

1989 - 90

The production figure of 1986 was the lowest in 1986, when the Gorkha National Liberation Front agitation began, 1986 also was a year of unfavourable weather conditions. The low production during the period was an all India trend, and was due to the drought. Since strikes had taken place in May and July, production also suffered because of unfavourable weather; hence it is difficult to say how much of it was due to the agitation alone. (21)

On the trade union front, Centre for Indian Trade Union, which used to control most of the gardens, was left with only four gardens under their control. These gardens were Maribung, Lingia, Chongtong and Singtam. The Indian National Trade Union Congress and other unions were virtually erased, and Gorkha National Liberation Front controlled most of the gardens.

The rivalry between Communist Party of India (Marxist) controlled Centre for Indian Trade Union and Gorkha National Liberation Front activities were frequent, and there were attacks and counter attacks. The Gorkha National Liberation Front was tactical in making a large number of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) cadres surrender in the middle of 1986, and made them surrender with their flags. The cadres, when they heard of such surrenders, the more they got panicky and surrendered in groups as well as individually. (22) At Som Tea Estate, a garden vehicle was blown up by Gorkha National Liberation Front activists on 5/6/88, killing three persons on the spot.

One of the victims was Rudra Tamang, the leader of Communist Party of India (Marxist) at Som. (23) On September 7 1986, the house of the then Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) Ananda Mohan Pathak at Sonada was completely gutted by the Gorkha National Liberation Front supporters. (24) Among the frequently mentioned gardens were Teesta Valley, Singtam, Tukvar, Arya, Rambuk tea estate and Beechgaon (Sonada), Sepaidhura tea estate. The Soureni tea estate was also badly affected by the turmoil. Heavy exchange of fire took place on 19/1/88 at Manju division of Singbuli where Nabin Tamang, one of the Secretaries of Gorkha National Liberation Front was killed.

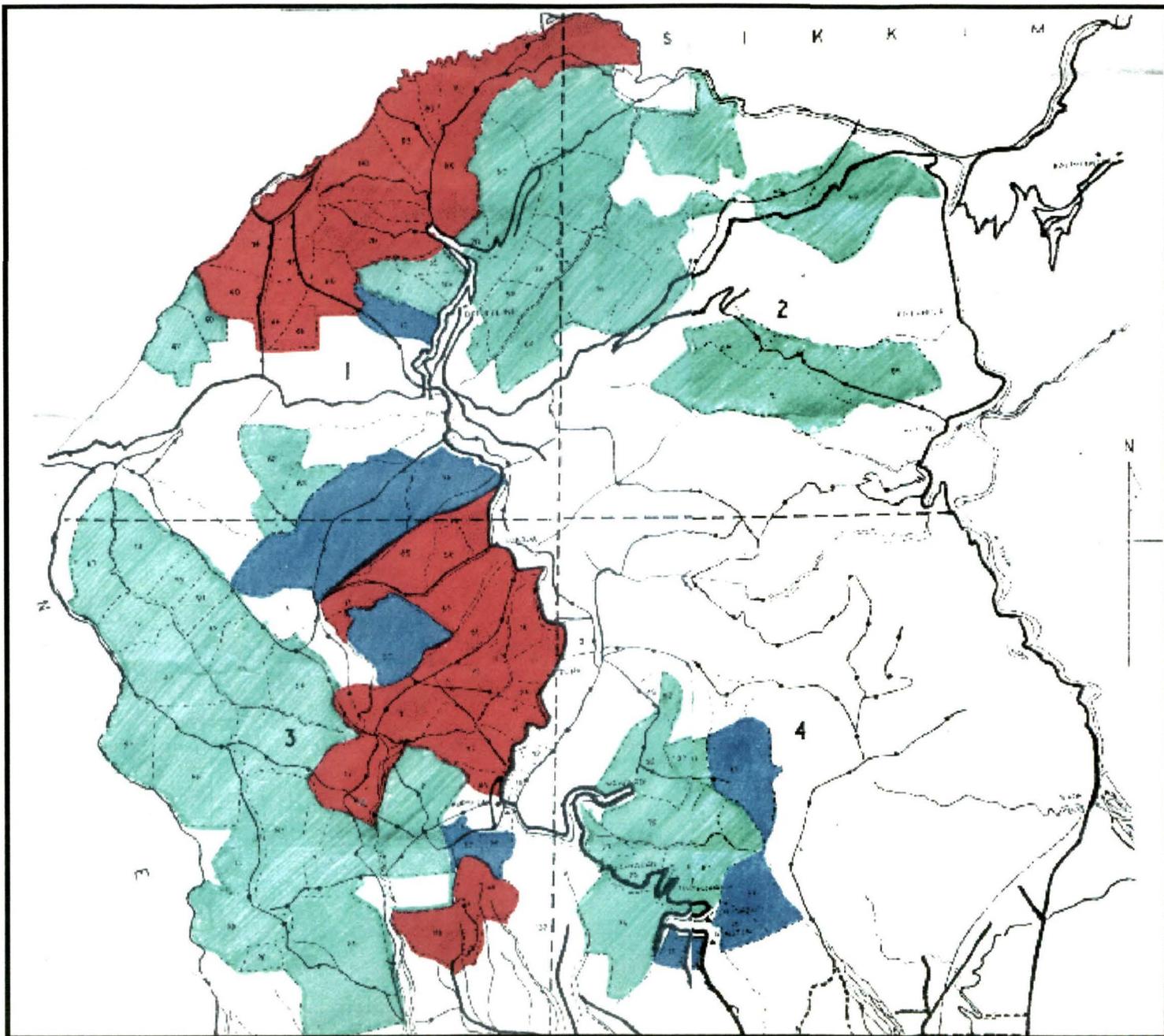
Various gardens like Nagri, Lopchu, Pashok, Teesta Valley, Ghaiyabari, Tukdah, Nagri Spur, were torn in the strife between Gorkha National Liberation Front and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) supporters. Around 40 percent of the labour force deserted the garden and took shelter in Sikkim and Nepal. By December 1987, more than 500 houses were set on fire and over 65 persons killed in violence. (25)

The two and half years of continuous disturbances disrupted social and economic life of the hills so much that peace loving residents of the area, despite their emotional support to the Gorkha National Liberation Front cause became wary of the agitation. Supply of essential commodities had become uncertain, prices of essential consumer goods escalated. Since the regular supply of commodities was affected by frequent bandhs, prices of essential commodities went up exorbitantly, and on the other hand, employment avenues had completely closed down even for unskilled workers. Educations of children were hampered and parents of students studying at residential schools in the Darjeeling hills withdrew their children. Tourism came to a grinding halt. Only 10 out of 200 odd hotels were open. The losses incurred by daily wage earners, shopkeepers and others could not be estimated. Nothing reflects this better than the plight

# MAP OF THE TEA GROWING DISTRICTS DAREELING (NOT TO SCALE)

## INDEX OF REGISTERED TEA GARDENS IN DARJEELING

GRID No.	SERIAL No.	TEA GARDEN	ITL C. REG. No.
1	1	ALDOORAKI	217
3	2	AMPOOTAR	2292
4	3	ANSE LUGUNGE	1580
1	4	ARYA	2192
5	5	AYONGROVE	8
1	6	BADAMTAM	B-89
5	7	BALAJUN	P-19
1	8	BARMOCKBURN	F-84
1	9	BAPPOSBUR	B-90
10	10	B-CWFIELD	4896
3	11	CEORAS	93
3	12	CHAITYAPANI	1805
5	13	CHAMONG	D-85
5	14	CHONGTONG	2313
5	15	DARJEELING TEA & CHIMONA (NAMING)	C-41
18	16	DILBAR	2296
17	17	DOTTERIAH	2555
5	18	DOV HILL	246
15	19	DUMSONG	953
20	20	DUMSONG	1995
21	21	DUMSONG	1996
22	22	DUMSONG	1997
24	23	DUMSONG	1998
3	24	EDIA VILL	7
3	25	JOGAIVYA	509
3	26	CFABRI & MILAETHONG	2517
3	27	C-OSAPARAR	31
0	28	DELLE	P-4
2	29	GINC	P-87
2	30	GLENJUN	D-66
4	31	G-TAGHREL LODGE & TUNDAN	F-84
1	32	GOOMTEE	2157
1	33	GOPALDHARA	6
5	34	GURISHANBAR	2624
1	35	HAPPY VALLEY	100
4	36	HAM & SHOOTKAM	2158
1	37	JINGPANI	2354
2	38	KALE HILL	1973
2	39	LEBONG & MINERAL SPRING	C-87
4	40	LINGIA	D-87
1	41	LITIA HILL	1954
2	42	LOPEHU	171
4	43	MAHALDEBAR	1805
5	44	MARABARA	E-47
1	45	MARGARET'S HOPE & MAHARANE	B-36
1	46	MARBYONG & KYEL	M-23
1	47	MIR	2047
4	48	MOMA MAJHA	73
3	49	MONTEVICI	237
3	50	MUNDARPOTE	1555
4	51	MULLOTAR	2411
2	52	MURHAN	D-69
1	53	NAGRI	218
3	54	NAGRI FARM	2054
5	55	NURBOG	2416
3	56	OAKS	F-105
3	57	OKATTI	2559
3	58	PANDAR	F-83
1	59	PASHON	2314
2	60	PHOOSERING	2279
1	61	PHUGURI	2513
3	62	POOBONG	2508
4	63	PUSUMING	2194
1	64	BANGARDOON	70
5	65	RINGTON & HOPE TOWN	F-41
1	66	RISHANBAR	5
3	67	ROMBONG	2351
2	68	RUNGLI & RUNGLIOT	414
3	69	RUNGLIOT	2357
5	70	SAMARONG	2434
3	71	SEEYI	1938
3	72	SELHONG	127
1	73	SELIM HILL	P-21
4	74	SEPOYMOOHAR	87
4	75	SINGBELLI	2021
1	76	SINGEL	1555
1	77	SINGTOM	D-70
4	78	SIVITAR	189
1	79	SODH	1801
3	80	SOURENT	301
3	81	SPRINGSIDE	E-50
1	82	STEINTHAL	P-17
3	83	SUNONG	B-44
2	84	TEESTAL VALLEY	45
4	85	THURBO	2318
3	86	TINDHARIA	P-19
4	87	TINDLING	632
1	88	TURVAR NORTH	710
1	89	TURVAR	2421
3	90	TURZONG	
5	91	UNITED MAJHA (BARBADA MAJHA)	
4	92	VAH TURYAR	
1	93	VAH TURYAR	



of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways, which lied neglected in the shades rusting, while the winding track broken and bent at innumerable places.

Violence continued for sometime even after the signing of 'Accord' in 1988. The tea garden labourers, who had taken refuge in Sikkim and Nepal during the violent period, started pouring in. The return of the labourers and their re-entry in their parent unions, led to bloody encounters. The Times of India reported that by January 19, 1988, as many as 126 Gorkha National Liberation Front activists were killed by police forces and 15 policeman were reported to be killed. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) regained the Tukvar valley, Risheehat, Orange valley which was the hot bed of tension between the Gorkha National Liberation Front and Communist Party of India (Marxist) Groups. The re-emergence of Communist Party of India (Marxist) introduced, a renewed phase of turmoil and uncertainty in the tea gardens. The trade unions, which were virtually non-existent during the agitation, slowly emerged. With the rapid emergence of Mazdoor Union, they took over some of the alienated work force. The National Union of Plantation Workers also regained prominence in some areas.

## 6.2. RECENT CHANGES IN TRADE UNIONS:

The Gorkha National Liberation Front felt the need for an organised trade union to channelise the representations of the majority body of workers in the tea estates. Subsequently, Himalayan Plantation Worker's union was formed in 1990 with the Registration Number NB/30 dated 8.6.90.

The union is based on the philosophy of free and democratic trade unionism under its parent body; Gorkha National Liberation Front. It has a four tier administrative set up democratically represented on all levels. The highest body is known as the Central

Committee. The next lower body is Branch Committee in sub-divisional level. Below it is Samasthy Committee (Constituency of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council) and the lowest is the unit committee. Every unit is composed of a President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Members. Elected representatives form the committee. The President and Secretary of each unit automatically become the members of Samasthy Committee. The office bearers of Samasthy Committee are elected representatives. The Samasthy Committee of a sub-division elects the office bearers of Branch Committee. President and Secretary of each Samasthy Committee automatically become the members of Central Committee. The tenure of the Central Committee is three years.

The Himalayan Plantation Worker's Union claim to have a membership of more than 50000 in tea and Medicinal Plantation units numbering 92 in Darjeeling Hills, Terai (partly) and Dooars (partly).

Immediately after the registration of the union, it participated in series of talks for Three-year wage Agreement of the tea garden workers. The Himalayan Plantation Workers' Union basically succeeded in removing disparities in daily wage of labourers of Darjeeling and their counterparts in Terai and Dooars. The daily wagers used to get Rs. 13.42 in Darjeeling, while in Terai and Dooars; it was Rs 13.74 and Rs. 13.48 respectively. The formula of 'One Industry One Wage' was adopted and the wages were paid at par, i.e. Rs. 13.74.

The union has so far handled efficiently 23 Concillatory Bipartite tea garden cases and succeeded in lifting lockouts in 2 gardens, Selim Hill and Okayti tea estates.

The following is the list of office-bearers of the Central Committee of Himalayan Plantation Worker's Union.

Shri - N.K.Kumai - President

Shri - A.B.Thapa - Vice-President

Shri -K.B.Gurung - General Secretary

Shri - S.Prakash Rai - Treasurer

Shri Dipak Gurung Councillor- Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council has been appointed convenor, Darjeeling sadar Branch on 17/12/1992.

The Himalayan Plantation Worker's Union has emerged as one of the strong trade union after independence, and in particular after the Gorkha National Liberation Front movement. The tea garden labourers switched their loyalty from Mazdoor union, to the National Union of Plantation Workers as because the majority of the labour force is Nepalis, and the emergence of Himalayan Plantation Worker's Union is an outcome of ethnic upsurge, which supported the cause of Gorkha National Liberation Front movement.

### 6.3. DARJEELING TERAI DOOARS CHIAKAMAN MAZDOOR UNION: - REGN. NO. 21364

The origin of Darjeeling Terai Dooars Chai Kaman Mazdoor Union has been initiated and its growth and development influenced by its Parents organisation, the communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist, which is a splinter political party of Communist Party of India (Marxist). The leaders of the new political party, which came in the horizon, after the Gorkha National Liberation Front movement, allege that the Communist Party of India (Marxist) central leadership wrongly handled the situation which cost the lives of hundred of workers during the two and half year of turmoil. They allege that a section of the leadership in the district level at the behest of chauvinist Central C.I.T.U leaders resorted to suppressive measures to dilute the essence of their organisation in the name of

discipline, they had no alternative but to form a new Trade Union Organisation named Darjeeling Terai - Doors Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union.

The Union came into existence on 14<sup>th</sup>. Jan.1997 in a meeting held at Kurseong Gorkha Public Library, Representatives, of 73 units elected a twenty-five member central committee, headed by Mr.H.B.Rai. Santosh Moktan and Kala Tamang as Vice-Presidents, and K.B.Subba its General Secretary.

#### 6.4. OBJECTIVES OF DARJEELING - TERAI - DOOARS CHIA KAMAN MAZDOOR UNION

Considering the great potentialities of the working class movement of the Darjeeling hills, the union has taken up the following tasks as its organisational goal.

1. Restoration of democratic rights and strengthening of democratic forces.
2. Protection of the rights of the backward and minority communities, ethnic groups, Tribals and Rajbansis from all sorts of discrimination and suppression.
3. To fight for strict implementation of the statutory provisions, stringent punitive measures like one year's imprisonment, and penalty upto Rs. 1,00,000 against tea garden owners violating Plantation Labour Act.
4. Fight against all anti-working class and anti-people economic policies of the government.
5. Necessary amendments to be made in the five decade old Plantation Labour Act in the interests of the working class.
6. Tea gardens to be brought under Panchayat System and Pattas to be issued to the workers for their homestead and agricultural lands.
7. Ceiling of the workers wage to be raised from Rs. 850/- p.m. to Rs. 1680/- p.m.

8. Tea Auction centre should be set up at Darjeeling to check scandalous marketing of Darjeeling Tea.
9. Immediate steps to be taken to patent Darjeeling tea to preserve its purity.
10. Concrete and comprehensive long term and short term measures should be taken up to recover the health of Darjeeling tea industry from the present condition and to ensure the use of its full potentialities.
11. To persuade the tea garden managements to spend a part of the profit earned from tea garden for setting up small-scale industries for solving the unemployment problem growing menacingly in the tea gardens.
12. To take immediate steps to reopen/dispose off the closed and abandoned tea gardens under the Tea Trading Corporation of India and other private companies. (26)

Amongst others, the union has envisaged two-pronged objectives, first, to fight for the genuine cause of the working class and second, to fight against all sort of discriminations perpetrated on the backward and minority nationalities and wage struggle for their right to self-rule. The union is affiliated to All India Trade Union Congress. They believe, All India Trade Union Congress would champion the cause of minority ethnic groups and tribals in their rightful struggles against all sorts of discriminations, neglect and suppression.

#### Organisation Structure

The union is formed into four-tier set up the central committee, the Regional Committee Zonal committee, and unit committee. The central committee consists of Executive Committee consists of Executive Committee members, consisting of 35 - 45 members, and the general council, consisting of 200 - 250 member. The Regional Committee is constituted of members from hill area, Terai and Dooars, whose membership runs

between 25 - 35 persons. The zonal Committee is formed taking into consideration the topography and organisational facilities. There were 12 such zonal committees in 1997 and 13 in 1988. They have categorised zones in the following manner -

- Zone I - Sonada I  
 II - Sonada II  
 III - Rangbull  
 IV - Pokhriabong  
 V - Tukvar - Lebong  
 VI - Kurseong  
 VII - Rangli Rangliot  
 VIII - Mirik  
 IX - Gorubathan  
 X - Terai Zone  
 XI - Dooars Zone  
 XII - West Zone (Chongtong)

Table VI. 4: A comparative analysis of membership in three different zones during 97-98

Year	Darj. Hill	Terai	Dooars	Total
1997	6408	652	491	7551
1998	7021	618	512	8151

Table VI.5: Member of Darjeeling Terai - Dooars Chia kaman Mazdoor Union, in the different zones for the year 97 - 98

Sl.No	Zone	No of Units		Total Membership	
		97	98	97	98
1)	Sonada	8	7	880	868
2)	Sonada II	2	3	86	266
3)	Rungbul	4	8	370	643
4)	Pokhriabong	6	4	936	464
5)	Tukvar	8	8	858	969
6)	Mirik	6	11	368	554
7)	Kurseong	5	8	333	389
8)	Chungtong	5	-	-	888
9)	Darj. West	11	6	1689	1006
10)	Gorubathan	3	3	429	499
11)	Terai	5	7	652	618
12)	Dooars	3	2	421	512
13)	Rangli-Rangliot	5	6	302	448
14)	Rangeroon	1	1	96	77

Source: - General Secretary's Report on the First Convention Dated 16<sup>th</sup> May 1999- Darjeeling.

The table signifies that the Darjeeling Terai Dooars Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union has made rapid strides in strengthening the labour base. The split of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in the post Gorkha National Liberation Front scenario has helped the

Darjeeling Terai - Dooars Chia kaman Mazdoor Union to make inroads into the tea garden belt, which was once known to be Communist Party of India (Marxist) bastion.

#### 6.5. JANASHAKTI PLANTATION TRADE UNION

The Janashakti Plantation Trade Union is inter-locked with Bharatiya Gorkha JanaSakti, a political party that came into existence in 1998. The Registration number is 21438. Its registered Head office is located at 26/2 H.D.Lama Road, Darjeeling. The Janashakti Plantation Trade Union is an outcome of division and redivision in the process of trade union movement after the Gorkha National Liberation Front movement. It is found that the split that occurred into the Communist Party of India (Marxist) had a far-reaching effect in giving rise to multiplicity of trade unions after the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. The Janashakti Plantation Trade Union had been successful in raising its units in Dooteriah tea Estate, Kalejvalley T.E. Pussimbing T.E., Tukvar Ging, Gielle, Sivitar and Nagri. The union is yet to make its inroads in other gardens.

The dissensions within the Communist party, which resulted into a vertical split in the trade union, gave rise to multiple trade unions. It is observed that the Himalayan Plantation Workers' Union and the Darjeeling-Terai-Dooars Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union have practically dominated the tea gardens in the hills. After the signing of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Accord in 1988, and the formation of Himalayan Plantation Workers' Union the Darjeeling-Terai-Dooars Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union, along with National Plantation Workers' Union and Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik

Sangha have been actively participating in all the wage negotiations with the representatives of employers the Darjeeling Planters Association in the hills.

#### 6.6. THE FORMATION OF DARJEELING GORKHA HILL COUNCIL

The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council was formed by the passing of West Bengal Act XIII of 1988 passed by the West Bengal Legislature, and assented by the President of India. The Act repealed the Hill Area Development Council Act 1976. The Act established the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council for the three sub-division of the hill areas of Darjeeling including thirteen mouzas (each mouza consisting of a number of villages) in the Siliguri sub-division. The mouzas are: -

1. Lohagarh Tea Garden
2. Lohagarh Forest
3. Rangmohan
4. Barachenga
5. Panighata
6. Chota Adalpur
7. Paharu
8. Sukna Forest
9. Sukna Part I
10. Pantapati Forest I
11. Mahanadi Forest
12. Champasari Forest
13. Salbari Chhat Part II

(Section 2 i) Darjeelling Gorkha Hill Council Act

#### 6.7. OBJECTIVE OF THE DARJEELING GORKHA HILL COUNCIL

The objectives for the establishment of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, the Act stated “the social, economic, educational and cultural advancement of the Gorkhas and other sections of the people residing in the hill areas of the district of Darjeeling” (28).

The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council may be regarded as an alternative political and administrative arrangement provided to the hill people of Darjeeling for their demand of a separate state. The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council was the result of political conciliation between the Central Government the State Government and the Gorkha National Liberation Front. This agreement may be regarded as a political understanding to end the crisis in the hill areas and an attempt to bring the hill people into the national mainstream.

#### 6.8. ORGANISATION OF THE DARJEELING GORKHA HILL COUNCIL

A general council was formed as per section 3 of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Act 1988 comprising the hill areas in the district of Darjeeling. The general council consisted of 42 members of whom two-thirds (i.e. 28) were elected by the people

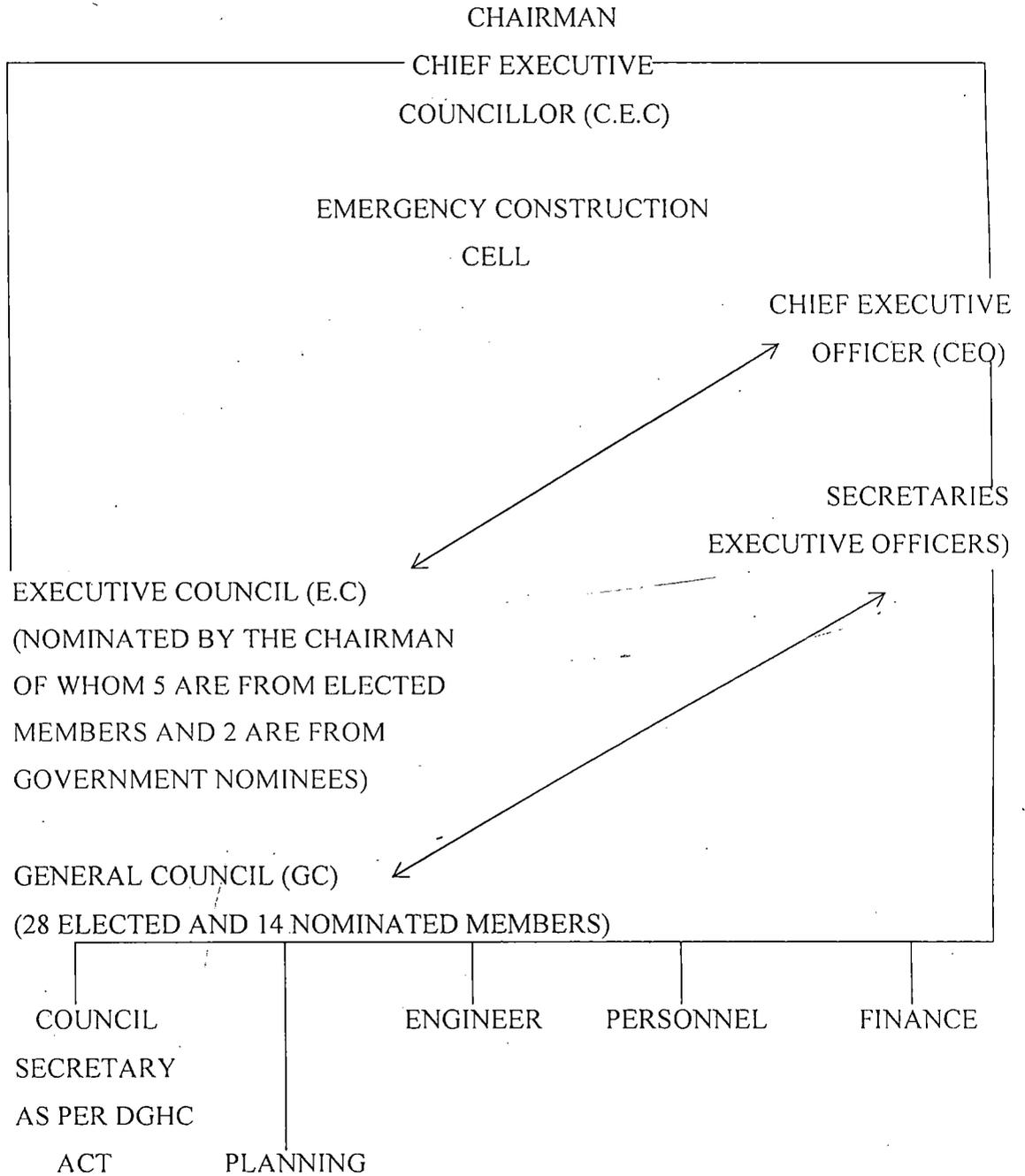
on the basis of adult suffrage, from the territorial constituencies, and one-third (i.e.14) of member nominated by the government.

The nominated members include:

- (I) The three members of the Legislative Assembly of the state of West Bengal elected from the Constituencies of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong and the member elected to the House of the people from the Darjeeling Parliamentary Constituency and
- (II) The chairman of Municipalities within the hill areas and others nominated by the State Government providing due representations of the non-Nepali Communities like Bhutias and Lepchas. (29)

The Chief Executive Councillor or the Chairman with a Vice-Chairman coming next in the hierarchy heads the council. There is an 'Executive Council' consisting of the Chief Executive Councillor and the Vice-Chairman as the ex - officers members and seven other members of the General Council of whom five are to be nominated by the Chief Executive Councillor from amongst the elected members of the General Council and two to be nominated by the Government from amongst the nominated member of the General council. (30)

Table VI.08: The organisation structure of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council.



The Chief Executive Councillor is assisted by the Chief Executive Officer who is the Principal Executive officer of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council

appointed by the State Government in consultation with the Chief Executive Councillor. A secretary has been appointed for the General Council under section 49 of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Act, who looks after the establishment section of the Council. (31) Four other Executive officers have been deputed to the Council from the West Bengal Civil Service cadre, to look after various departments. The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council had designated them as 'the Secretaries'. (32)

A careful analysis of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Act reveals that there is no structural arrangement for linking the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council and the State Government. The District Magistrate is not organisationally linked to the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. If the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council is to discharge its functions under sections 24 and 25 for formulating and implementing integrated development plans, the D.G.H.C. needs to be linked together with the sectoral departments. The transfer of departments from the State to the D.G.H.C. has failed to produce any effective working relationship. Hence there is a linkage gap between the D.G.H.C and the District administration.

The basic concept behind the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council was the creation of a viable self-governing institution for providing social, cultural economic and educational advancement with political stability. The Chief Executive Councillor, or the Chairman has hinted on several occasions, that the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council has been a total failure and needed upliftment

“The West Bengal (Panchayat) Amendment Act was also passed in December 1988, dissolving the Zilla Parishad from the hill areas and establishing the Mahakuma Parishad for the Siliguri sub-division.”(33)

The function of the Zilla Parishad were to be taken over by the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in the hill areas and by the Mahakuma Parishad in the Siliguri sub-division.(34)

The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council has also the power to supervise and guide the Panchayat Samiti's, Gram Panchayats and Municipalities in the hill areas. (35)

The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council has replaced the Zilla Parishad and by virtue of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Act enjoys the powers of implementing developmental activities under sections 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, and 162 of the West Bengal Panchayati Raj Act 1973.

In the absence of organisational development, the decentralisation of planning and development functions under section 24 and 25 of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Act has not been very effective and meaningful. (36) The tea industry has been left out of the Hill Council jurisdiction.

#### 6.9. SUMMARY

The Gorkha National Liberation Front movement in Darjeeling began in April 1986 and continued till September 1988, when it was finally called off after a tripartite agreement between the Centre, the State Government and the Gorkha National Liberation Front to form the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council.

The two and a half years of turmoil involving the labour, and Management, cost heavily on the tea plantations. The labourers have lost two and a half crores of rupees by way of wages alone for the days of bundhs when all work came to a grinding halt. The tea industry suffered total bundhs of 69 days, which accounted for the loss of some 24 lakh Kilograms of tea, which was roughly evaluated at Rs 15 crore or more. Over 800 labour houses which were destroyed during the agitation period, had to be rebuilt by the

management of the concerned gardens at an expense of fourteen to sixteen thousand rupees per unit.

The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council is a model blend of two erstwhile warring factions, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Gorkha National Liberation Front. The combination of these two parties in the chief body shall govern the area no matter what flag they owe their political allegiance to. Peace Committees were formed in various gardens where there are in existence both Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Gorkha National Liberation Front. These 'Peace Committees' have been the main source of strength and goodwill to have encouraged workers who fled as refugees from their homes out of fear of one another, to return to their places of habitation. Not only has their return to their homes been made possible by the efforts of Peace Committees, but also their continued stay on the gardens as well as their security is in large part due to the assurances and strength of the Peace Committees. Terrorism, personal enmity and revenge have given way to commendable task of rebuilding Darjeeling into a place where residents could walk freely. Shri Subash Ghisingh, Chairman, Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council remarked in the third annual general meeting of the Darjeeling Planters' Association, held at Gorkha Rang Manch Bhawan on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1989, that Gorkha National Liberation Front was opposed to aggressive trade unionism and looked forward for the development of the tea industry of Darjeeling.

With the return of normalcy, and the 'glimpse of the rainbow' after the storm, there has been rapid re-emergence of the Mazdoor union. It is certainly a sign of democracy that workers were free to choose the trade union that they wish to follow. Many changes have been witnessed in the Trade Union Front, and new Unions have come in the picture after the agitation. They are 1) Himalayan Plantation workers Union, 2)

Darjeeling Terai Dooars Chia kaman Mazdoor Union, 3) Darjeeling Terai Dooars Chia kaman Staff and sub-staff Association, 4) Janashakti Plantation Trade Union, 5) Darjeeling Dooars Shramik Sangathan, 6) Darjeeling Pahari Chiyabari Karmachari Sangathan.

The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, the Planters' Association and the Trade Unions have much in common by way of aspirations of the glory of Darjeeling. It is in transitional phase and definitely moving in the right direction.

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