

## **CHAPTER – I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Statement of the Problem:**

At the very outset, it is submitted that the present study does not claim to be a comprehensive review of the subject matters of Environmental History and all the issues it deals with. This study is also limited in scope in terms of time span and geographical area, with a focus only on Darjeeling hills and a specific time period or different moments within a specified time span. The discourses of modern Environmental History cover such a wide area that it is impossible to cover all these in a single dissertation. Accordingly, this study restricts to explore the impact of humankind on the natural world and the influence of the natural world on human history that is the all comprehensive transformation processes and their impact on the landscape. Putting nature back to the historical studies, this study explores the ways in which the biophysical world has influenced the course of human history of the region under study in a given time frame, and the ways in which people have thought about and attempted to transform their surroundings creating thereby a material landscape as a product of human history. The relevance of the present study lies in exploring how British colonialism made an overwhelming impact on the natural world of Darjeeling hills and held responsible for ushering in material transformations.

This study focuses primarily on the history of Darjeeling hills covering a period spanning the beginning of British rule in the early thirties of the nineteenth century till the independence of India. The primary thrust has been to understand the intricacies of the dynamics of state making, institution building, socio-economic formations, factors and forces, civic-political structural formations, power relations and application of colonial knowledge in using the natural resources by paying attention to environmental conditions of Darjeeling hills.

Precisely, the study has investigated the nature of colonial interventions and colonial mode of industrial resource use which helped building and transforming the politico-economic structures, socio-cultural institutions of Darjeeling under colonial dispensation. The study attempts to inquire in details how such material transformations were taken place in Darjeeling and how such transformed institutions did reshape the landscape of Darjeeling from its pre-colonial primordial natural setting to the colonially cherished ideas and institutions of modernity and its unique development path heralding the 'proto-modern' phase- a period that witnessed intensification of commercial expansion and inaugurated European knowledge revolution.<sup>1</sup>

The landscape of Darjeeling forming a part of the Eastern Himalayas is characterized not only by its distinctive climate, rainfall, soil, topography and ecological fragility but also by a deep historical, demographic, geographic and strategic sensitivity. The colonial official records inform us that Darjeeling tract had been sparsely populated if not "uninhabited". Captain Herbert described Darjeeling as a place "completely clothed with forest from the top to the bottom".<sup>2</sup>

However, Col. Lloyd reported that the spot so identified as Dorjeeling "was formerly occupied by a large village or town (an unusual circumstances in the country) and some shops were set up in it; one of the principal Lepcha Karjee's resided here, and the remains of his house, and also of a gombah or temple built of a stone are still extant; also several stone tombs or chatyas of different forms, Karjees and Lamas."<sup>3</sup> Captain Herbert reappraised the fact that twelve hundred able bodied Lepchas forming two thirds of the population of Sikkim, have been forced to fly from Dorjeling and its neighbourhood, owing to the oppression of the Raja".<sup>4</sup>

There has been unanimity among the Historians, Anthropologists and Imperial Officers that Lepchas (Rong) are considered to be the most

ancient of all communities and may be described as original indigenous tribe of Darjeeling and Sikkim. L.A. Waddel informs us that the mountainous tract of Darjeeling belonged to Lepchas. Historians like Gorer, E.C. Dozey, G.B. Mainwaring, J.C. White and many others have agreed to this argument. However, Lepchas in Darjeeling had been reduced to minority through the gradual process in the whole course of colonization phase. The census of 1891 is a good pointer of the rate of Nepali settlement under British patronage (mostly tea labourers and a few construction labourers and forest labourers). By 1931 Nepali population in Darjeeling constituted 52 percent whereas, Lepchas formed 4 percent of the population. The census of 1941 further shows the steady growth of Nepali population (67.6 percent) and gradual decline of Lepcha population. Till Darjeeling tract was brought under colonial control, the indigenous people were continued to be governed by their customary rules, rituals and practices. This material linkage of life of the native people with Nature came under strain with the advent of colonialism in Darjeeling Hills.

Being convinced by the Reports separately submitted by Captain Herbert, Deputy Surveyor General and Mr. Grant, the Commercial Resident at Maldah, the Court of Directors of the East India Company issued instruction to Colonel Lloyd to open negotiation with the Raja of Sikkim for the cession of Darjeeling to the British Government for the establishment of a Sanitarium and to create a permanent Cantonment for the British Regiment. Darjeeling was ultimately occupied by the British through a Deed of Grant issued by the Raja of Sikkim during early February, 1835. The British occupation of 640 sq. miles area of Dorjeling from the Raja of Sikkim was made complete with the inclusion Terai during 1850. The Daling sub-division of which Kalimpong was the headquarters together with Duars areas were annexed from Bhutan Raja under the Senchula Treaty on November 11, 1865 and the Kalimpong hill areas were included in Darjeeling constituting a total Darjeeling tract of 1164 sq. miles.<sup>5</sup>

The British occupation of Darjeeling and their unbridled interventions in this landscape had significantly altered the nature of subsistence of the indigenous people. The infusion of colonial capital in the expansion of tea gardens had replaced the physical and material nature of Darjeeling's landscape. The replacement of barter economy by the monetary economy ushered in new pattern of livelihood. The change in the mode of resource use had brought fundamental changes in the society and economy of this colonized landscape. The application of colonial knowledge of science accelerated the process of transformation. Colonel Lloyd's Proclamation on October 12, 1838 is well apt to quote here while it reads, "*the people settled on the Darjeeling tract were now subjects of the Company and the Laws of Sikkim would not apply to them.*"<sup>6</sup> Immediately in the next year Dr. Cambell's appointment as the superintendent, Darjeeling in 1839 was not only a new phase of officially asserting British political rights over Darjeeling but also had created an administrative space for the initiation of colonial state making and institution building.<sup>7</sup>

Immediately after the occupation, the entire Darjeeling tract was brought under the direct administrative control of the East India Company. The defined and designated Darjeeling land was initially administered by following the tradition of large 'non-regulation provinces' in which local level officials were given with huge executive discretionary powers to govern. Initially, Darjeeling was kept under the control of Bengal Presidency and was primarily administered by a Superintendent having tremendous executive discretionary powers within the broader legislative framework of Bengal Province and was kept under the control of the Court of Directors being Governor General on the Chair.<sup>8</sup>

It is to be noted that the nature of administrative governance witnessed several changes throughout the colonial period.

The advent of colonialism in Darjeeling and the application of Rules and Procedure to establish the institution of governance did always remain a hazard free exercise. The British established unquestionable legal proprietary hold over the entire forested tract of Darjeeling. The reasons are not far to seek. Neither the whole mountain tract including forest land was pre-defined as Zamindari Khas (self-cultivated holdings or under Raiyati (pre-defined occupancy rights of the cultivating tenants) nor the indigenous people of Darjeeling in the pre-colonial setting did even hear of the system of land holding under Permanent Settlement Act, 1793 or Bengal Tenancy Act 1885. The notion of land of the indigenous people was completely a different issue for they lived in and lived with nature. To them, land was not a commodity but a gift of Nature and a natural property of the commons.

The proprietary right over land and forest was a concept traditionally alien to the indigenous people. The forest based traditional subsistence economy was run on barter system and taxes due to the Raja of Sikkim were paid in kind or through labour. Hope Namgyal informs us that the land was not assessed and the subject was only obliged to give a small share of his labour, or the result of his labour to the state.<sup>9</sup> This system of paying the government through labour was prevalent in all the Himalayan Kingdoms till the close of nineteenth century. In such a historic juncture, the British held absolute proprietary rights over the entire land and forests of Darjeeling. The quantum of economic and material changes that had ebbed and flowed across the landscape of Darjeeling under colonial rule resulted corresponding dispossession of the indigenous people and creation of new land holding class of tea planters. The material linkage of life with forest came under complete strain with the advent of colonialism in Darjeeling hills and Terai (foot hills).

Neither any official records on colonial Darjeeling nor any folk narratives would have us believe that there had been forests conflicts or intensive local opposition to the colonial state sponsored forest

conservancy at the one end and forest clearance on the other. However colonial administrative records inform us that there had been occasional violations of prohibitory forests rules by the local/settled populations in and around the forests of Darjeeling which may be seen as 'everyday forms of resistance'. In the name of development activities in surface and tea garden expansion in sublime, the colonial extraction of Darjeeling forests went unabated. Tea being designated as "imperial cash crop" had been the driving force of colonial efforts of materialising and modernizing Darjeeling landscape. What the indigenous people of Darjeeling Hills had to witness as dormant spectators was the expansionist power play of the colonial state in reorganizing and reshaping the landscape by way of infusion of colonial capital. Roads and railways, buildings and offices, private hotels and resorts, military installations, government and private houses, bungalows, massive tea plantations and tea factories, cinchona plantation, forest governance structures, urban civic constructions, missionary educational institutions, social institution structures by way of forest clearance had impacted heavily on the flora, fauna and human land use in general and on the environment in particular.

The colonial mode of resource use had ushered in new production relations and brought fundamental material transformation in the landscape of Darjeeling which in turn replaced the pre-colonial mode of resource use and traditional production relations. The old clan based communities, traditional class hierarchies got dismantled in the process of material landscape transformation. The imported labourers principally migrated from eastern Nepal and such other neighbouring areas to work as wage earners for tea gardens, railways, road construction and forest conservancy formed a new working class, being majority however, had no meaningful voice.

All these new modes of resource use induced transformations in the landscape of Darjeeling resulted to a strong colonial political regime, installations based military regime, colonial forest regime,

colonial planters' regime, and missionary based neo-cultural regime and middle class urban regime in Darjeeling hills. All these regimes were mutually corroborative to each other and in aggregate gave rise to a new ecological regime and eco-imperialist bureaucratic order which drastically replaced the indigenous ecosophical order in the landscape of Darjeeling. Such a colonially articulated socio-cultural and politico-administrative power regime engineered by the European notion of modernity, attempted to invest the idea of 'difference' in the minds of natives of Darjeeling. The natural difference between the people of the hills and the plains was thus purposively indoctrinated through the system of colonial governability that distinguished Darjeeling as a unique socio-economic and cultural zone and finally as a separate 'other'.<sup>10</sup>

The history of material transformations in the colonized landscape of Darjeeling has not been well served and addressed by published or unpublished academic materials. Here lies the justification of the proposed study. A consideration of the Darjeeling tract (usually referred as "British Sikkim" by the colonial officers at the early years of colonization) in the face of colonial interventions would help understanding the roots of economy, politics and society of contemporary Darjeeling. Darjeeling hills experienced rapid transformations since the mid of nineteenth century owing to the massive expansion in the agro-based industrial frontier- a flourishing tea industry, cinchona plantation, military installations, urbanization, health resort, timber trade and tourism, labour import causing migration to Darjeeling hills from neighboring princely hill states from Sikkim, Bhutan and principally from eastern parts of Nepal. All these were taken place at the cost of forest. The official documents informed us too that the changes began with the incorporation of Darjeeling into the East India Company in 1835 and onwards, which stimulated such growth. Under the colonial rule, both roads and rails as means of communication with the plains were developed along with newly

evolved unique administrative governance under the strong colonial government.

The study of the colonized landscape history holds promise when Darjeeling hills landscape did develop in increasingly complex and materially meaningful ways. Here lies the relevance of historical and ecological enquiry of Darjeeling Himalayas. This region under study has been viewed as point of entry and place of departure for a larger sense of the environmental history of the peripheral India associated intimately with south-east Asian environmental history. Colonization has a vital decisive role to play in the evolution of material landscapes of Darjeeling hills. As colonial expansion proceeded, the environmental experiences of Europeans and settlers living at the colonial periphery played a steadily more dominant and dynamic part in the construction of new European evolutions of nature and in the growing awareness of the distinctive impact of European knowledge and economic activity on the people and environments of the newly 'discovered' and colonized Darjeeling hills. The mid-nineteenth century emerging global framework of trade and communication as well as commercial industrial use of natural resources provided the conditions for a process by which European notions about Nature were gradually transformed, or even submerged, by a plethora of information, impressions and inspirations from the wider world. In this way the commercial and utilitarian purposes of European expansion produced a situation in which both tropical and alpine environment was increasingly utilized as the symbolic location for the idealized landscapes and aspirations of the western imagination.<sup>11</sup>

The colonization of Darjeeling hills initiated in the thirties of the nineteenth century can be described as the transformation of a desolate country seen into an organized, densely settled and intensively exploited landscape through the mode of industrial resource use. The pressure of population on natural resources and on new modes of

resource use reached unprecedented levels with material interests participating in the colonization process.

### **Reviewing the Concepts:**

#### **The Eastern Himalayas:**

The Eastern Himalayas (EH) lie between 82.70°E and 100.31°E longitude and 21.95°N to 29.45°N latitude, covering a total area of 524,190 sq. km. The region extends from the Kaligandaki Valley in central Nepal to northwest Yunnan in China, and includes Bhutan, parts of India (North East Indian states, and the Darjeeling hills of West Bengal), southeast Tibet and parts of Yunnan in China, and northern Myanmar. These five countries have different geo-political and socio-economic systems as well as diverse cultures and ethnic groups.<sup>12</sup>

The Eastern Himalayan region, with its mountains, valleys, and flood plains, is physiographically diverse and ecologically rich in natural and crop-related biodiversity. It is also significant from geopolitical, environmental, cultural, and ethnic perspectives, and in terms of its ecosystems. The region reflects its position as a globally significant region for ecosystem biodiversity, and the enormity of its services command area in geopolitical, demographic, and socioeconomic terms. For all these reasons and more, the EH region warrants attention of Environmental history. The Eastern Himalayas are considered multifunctional because they provide a diverse range of ecosystem services (provisioning, regulating, cultural, supporting); this also makes them useful for studying the relationship between loss of biodiversity and loss of ecosystem services. At the same time landscapes and communities in mountain regions were being affected by rapid socioeconomic changes. A part of the latter has been the principal concern of this study.

### **Material Transformation:**

Before delving the history of material transformations in colonial Darjeeling let us have a quick browse on the idea of ‘transformation’ and ‘landscape’ so as to understand the material landscape transformation. Transformation is the creation and change of a whole new form, function or structure. To transform is to create something new that has never existed before and could not be predicted from the past. Transformation is what happens when people see the world through a new lens of knowledge and are able to create a material world, never before envisioned, to the future. Transformations represent a specific type of social change that may be grasped as an alternative way of formational change. Transformation occurs through a system of continual questioning, challenging, exploring, indoctrinating new knowledge and learning system, applying newly discovered science and technology, verifying and testing and creating new structure and function. It is a plural direction of system change.<sup>13</sup>

Transformation is a kind of social determinism inherent to the logic of history that shape individual and collective consciousness, and when necessary, justifies any act of violent or silent opposition. Transformation has been the continuous process of organic change in the structure of society as being propelled by several parallel factors. Transformations represent a specific type of social change, an alternative way of formational change like the formation of new governance structure, a new land-man relationship and evolving new political economy. Darjeeling hills under colonial rule witnessed post-feudalist transformations. In the process of ushering systemic changes, the role of British bureaucratic and military institutions, European planters and missionary institutions played a major role. Transformation of a particular space cannot take place in isolation rather it is intimately associated with external processes and forces including historical, structural, socio-cultural as well as extra-societal conditionality.<sup>14</sup>

While understanding material transformation over space and time, historical context matters inescapably for giving shape the localized socio-economic, geographic, anthropogenic processes into a trans-historical localized state formation. In fact, the range of transformation shapes the state-citizen relations involving extraction-resistance-settlement cycle wherein authority tries to extract resources to support its own activities from population living under its jurisdiction. Such extractions always subordinate survival of the local population. Sometimes, local population shows manifest or tacit resistance through their everyday form of resistances. Such struggle ensues in the transformed settlement producing synergic effects.<sup>15</sup>

Societal transformations possess specific *process structures* with own temporalities. Important elements are the *dilemmas of simultaneity*. These dilemmas refer to the complexity and the attempt of radical, holistic and fastest possible social change the transformations aim at. The politico-societal cycles are embedded in an overarching *three-period structure* of transformations:<sup>5</sup> (1) the period of *breakthrough* or *the change of power*; (2) the period of *institutionalization* of the new order and (3) the period of *re-structuring* for the long-term processes of materialization as well as culturalization of the formally implemented new institutions.

The focal points of the theory of transformations are :(1 ) *Societies are always in flux*: (2) The centrality of actors and institutions as well as the attempts to control or steer the radical change of society; (3) *The complex dimensionality and contextuality of societal transformations*; (4) *Modes of transformation and transformation paths*.<sup>16</sup>

If one accepts the politically projected character of societal transformations and the crucial role of macro- and mezzo-actors in (trans-)forming formal actor-institution-complexes by borrowing or transferring from hegemonic model-societies and re-combining them with remnants of the old order, it is conclusive that any transformation

theory must focus on these processes including their historical, structural, socio-cultural as well as world-societal conditionalities.

Apart the general distinction of *types of transformation* with respect to the formational starting point as well as the target envisaged, the (re-) construction of modes of transformation and transformation paths represent one of the crucial goals a theory of transformation aims at.

Taking the idea of transformation into consideration, it may be argued that from the beginning to the end of colonial Darjeeling, the process of transformation belonged to history of the period duly cushioned by the then contemporary factors and forces. Such process of history had taken two closely related forms. In the first, the courses of mediations and military conquests had brought British East India Company to power in Darjeeling hills. Soon after the occupation of Darjeeling hills, the British military and administrative officials involved heavily in gathering resources and extraction thereof by evolving colonial mode of resource use. In such process of resource extraction, the newly created imperial authority imposed taxes, settled lands and extracted revenues. In the second variant, a group of European Tea Planters, administrators and traders drew riches from mercantile activities and from commercial tea cultivation. In both versions of the subordination process of the local/settled people, critical mechanisms inhibited direct political and administrative control over the supply of resources required for the reproduction of British rule in Darjeeling.

### **Landscapes:**

In common parlance, landscape denotes the external world mediated through subjective human experience in a way that neither region nor area immediately suggest. Landscape is not merely the world seen; it is a construction, a composition of that world. Cosgrove writes, "Landscape is a social product and an ideological concept. It represents

a way in which certain classes of people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature, and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect to external nature.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, one can have three distinct dimensions of landscape: (i) a territory involving geographical stakes and a boundary, or a political structure with centers, cores and margins; (ii) an ecological and geographical structure, namely soils, vegetation, hydrology, climate, human density and communication networks; (iii) a geo-symbolism or the symbolic structure of a geographical setting or its signification – All these together with represent the spirit of a place.<sup>18</sup>

Till nineteenth century, the idea of landscape came to denote the artistic and literary representation of the visible world that is what is viewed by a spectator. In the twentieth century, landscape denotes the integration of natural and human phenomena which can be empirically verified and analyzed by the methods of scientific enquiry over a delimited portion of the earth surface.<sup>19</sup>

In his book Mcinig (1979) has elaborated the concept of landscape. To him, ‘Landscape is a unity of people and environment which opposes in its reality, the false dichotomy of man and nature which has been regarded as a Victorian aberration. Landscape is to be judged as a place for living and working in terms of those who actually do live and work there. Finally Mcinig exposes two structural elements of the landscape – the individual dwelling as the primary landscape element and the prototype of the larger world in a culture, and a primary attention to the vernacular in landscape. Landscapes undergo change because they are expressions of society, itself making history through time.’<sup>20</sup>

### **Environment and Landscape:**

While the term environment is composed of the objects that we encounter in the world: hills and valleys, trees and fields, towns and

villages, houses and streets that is the physical perspectives. A landscape, however, is a culturally produced model of how the environment should look like. Thus, landscape is not merely an environment but the projection of socio-cultural and material mosaic in a given time frame engineered by politico-administrative power. Environment gets transformed into landscapes as people of a given society transform them. Sometimes landscape models get complicated because they can escape their original cultural and historical origins. Cultural and historical contexts and often political ideological texts alter the text of a particular landscape over time and space.<sup>21</sup>

### **Biographical and Path Dependency Approaches**

Since late twentieth century, there has been marked change discernable in the interpretation of landscape. For example, Sharon Zukin (1991) writes, “landscape stretches the imagination from physical surroundings to an ensemble of material and social practices and their symbolic representation.”<sup>22</sup>

Mike Crang in his ‘Cultural Geography’, writes, ‘landscape above all implies a collective shaping of the earth overtime. Landscapes are not individual property, they reflect a society’s – a culture’s – beliefs, practices and technologies. Landscapes reflect the coming together of all these elements just as cultures do. Landscapes are seen as both a product of cultures and as reproducing them through time’.<sup>23</sup>

For historians, landscape is a treasure full of information having culture-political antecedents in a flux of continuity and change over time and space depending on the development of material culture and its corresponding transformation. The material transformation of the landscape of colonized Darjeeling needs to be reviewed from this point of view along with two principal methodological tools of cultural biography and path-development approaches such as (i) Landscape biographical approach and (ii) the Path-dependency approach.

As a reaction to large scale transformations of land tenure systems, scholars in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a growing need to reflect on the past in relation to the specific values of local, regional and national environments. Pioneering studies like those of Meitzen in Germany, Maitfield in England, Vidal de la Blache in France and Sauer in the United States laid the foundations for long and successful traditions of both historical geographical and landscape research. After the ecological deterministic and ethno-centric approaches of the 1920s and 1930s, historical geography of the post-war period mainly focused on morphological and morphogenetic approaches, in which the interpretation of settlement and perceliziion pattern played a major role.<sup>24</sup>

A major change came in the 1980s. Since this period, modern cultural landscape research mainly focused on landscapes as a social construct, with emphasis of study focused on the values, meanings and attitudes that people connect to landscapes as well as the key related roles of power, justice, wealth and gender.<sup>25</sup>

The British method of Historic Landscape characterization (HLC) focuses on the material landscape.<sup>26</sup> But, biographical landscape approach focuses that the idea of cultural landscape bears the multi-layered imprint of numerous generations of human “authors”, landscape as a palimpsest. From this point of view, landscapes may be explored from three ontological dimensions:<sup>27</sup>

First, there is the physical dimension of the landscape. The immediately tangible landscape around us is called ‘matterscape’. Second, there is the social dimension of landscape which may be called ‘socioscape’ or ‘powerscape’ comprising all the invisible norms, values, meanings and attitudes which surround the physical landscape or matterscape. Third is the individual dimension, the ‘mindscape’ in which individual perception of the landscape is the key. It is reflected

through art, literatures, music and such other forms of creative expression of the human mind.<sup>28</sup>

In this interpretation, a cultural landscape biography is both a description of the history of the material landscape and of the world of social meanings and individual ideas grafted onto that landscape during various periods. There developed an interdisciplinary dimension of regional landscape study by taking into considerations biographical approach and by combining geological, archaeological, historical, geographical, linguistic and anthropogenic approaches. While dealing with the landscape of the Darjeeling hills situated in Eastern Himalayas, one has to consider the colonial imprint in such landscape. Landscape thus consists of different time layers that are separated by time barriers. In order to understand the functioning of a particular layer one has to rely on the political situations of the time that created the very landscape. Lotman calls these borders or boundaries – a ‘cultural explosion’. Rapid landscape change is precisely such an explosion.<sup>29</sup>

Another way to look to landscape change is the path-dependency approach.<sup>30</sup> Path dependency in Zarina’s words, “*describes the stability of landscape in relation to changes, its development in accordance with the continuing traditions of previous generations, inherited meanings and the creations of a similar social geographical space*”. She concludes that “by using path-dependence theory it is possible to understand a processes, where landscape is created by a complex interplay of necessity and chance and by social practices.”

### **Material Landscape Transformation**

Darjeeling has had a primordial/feudal history of material landscape in pre-change, pre-explosion and pre-transformation period. In such a landscape, the system of land use must have been influenced by the agricultural politics of the tribal chieftains of the kingdoms of the Eastern Himalayas such as Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan. After

colonial occupation of Darjeeling the demand for constructional/civic services activities for new lifestyles as well as for physical infrastructure implies new driving forces, new demands and new perspectives on the land. Such colonial interventions brought radical changes, with new regimes, and kinds of explosions that create new meaning system. We have lack of information what had been happening in the vast mountain ridges that surround Darjeeling during the long pre-historic period and obscured pre-colonial past. The Darjeeling landscape did not create from scratch; it has its history that could assist in forming sustainable landscapes. This will help us in answering why are landscapes and their development paths in similar environmental, socio-economic and political conditions different? The development path of each landscape depends also on local situation, political decisions and practices.

The quantum of economic and material changes that ushered in colonial Darjeeling gradually resulted corresponding dispossession of the indigenous people and created new land holding class of tea planters at the one end and tea labour on the other. The Planters enjoyed Government patronage. There developed intermediary sections, lumpens and English educated enlightened middle class service people too. The material linkage of life with forest came under complete strain with the advent of colonialism in the landscape of Darjeeling. Agrarian changes, concomitant state making and institution building, clearance of forests for making connecting roads and rails with the plains, commercial plantation of tea through private British players, invitation to the aristocracy of the neighboring plains for investment in making summer resorts by providing land at a concessional rate, state sponsored cinchona plantation, establishment of sanatoriums, resorts, military installations, introduction of scientific forestry, commercialization of natural resources and etc, had been the economic and social changes that had ebbed and flowed across Darjeeling territory under colonial control.

As a part of grand imperial project, the nature and character of British interests in the Himalayas in general, reflects two distinct phases in the development of colonial economy: the first being the mercantile exploitation under the Company, and the second being the expansion of commercial agricultural investment under the civil administration of the Raj. Thus, the major influences of British rule – land settlement, roads construction forest settlement and tea plantation settlement, governance structure were firmly put in place. Moreover, the summer transfer of the Bengal provincial administration to Darjeeling in 1879, lent its social space glamour and urgency. The British interest of establishing a hill station nearer to Calcutta was also accomplished at the cost of wilderness of Nature of Darjeeling forested tract. It was not only the shift in mode of production but also changes brought in the mode of resource use that transformed the lands and the matterscape of Darjeeling.

The Darjeeling hills under British occupation had been subject to sea-change owing to infusion of colonial capital in extracting resources positing thereby material transformation of the landscapes including lands and forests. Transformations, so taken place, had been in the form and functions, human settlements, social ethnic formations, rural and urban formations, commercial tea plantations, cinchona plantations, reorganized land tenure system, scientifically reserved forestry etc. The human contributions to the material landscape transformations form the subjects of academic concern of this study. While reviewing landscape transformations, this study presents a generalized history of colonized Darjeeling territory that encompasses the record of colonized society's interaction with the land and corresponding material transformations under British rule. This study explores the impact of humankind on the natural world and the influence of the natural world on human history that is the all comprehensive transformation processes and their impact on the colonized landscape of Darjeeling. Putting nature back to the historical

studies, the present study searches the ways in which the material perspective has influenced the course of human history in Darjeeling and the ways in which the colonizers had thought about and tried to transform their surroundings creating thereby a unique 'other' nature of Darjeeling as cultural and political product of colonial history.

### **Modes of Production and Modes of Resource Use:**

Modes of production posit a combination of a system of productive forces with a system of relations of production. Mode of production presupposes the manner of appropriation of nature, while relations of production indicate the manner of appropriation of the economic surplus. The system of productive forces encompasses not only the means of production such as technological skill or knowledge but also social relations.<sup>31</sup> Productive forces refer to three essential facts: first, the personal activity of man, i.e, the work itself; second, the subject of that work; and finally, its instruments. The means of production include the subject and instruments of labour.<sup>32</sup>

### **Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP):**

There are scholars who hold that the pre-British India's mode of production was that what Karl Marx called, 'Asiatic Mode of Production. The principal ingredients of AMP are: (a) the absence of private ownership in land and so the non-existence of antagonistic social classes, viz, landlords and tenants; (b) the existence of self-sufficient village economy marked by an absence of commodity production, markets, etc.; (c) the stagnation of social formation because of the unity of agriculture and handicrafts, and because of the absence of antagonistic classes (d) oriental despotism of the king as the state.<sup>33</sup>

### **Modes of Resource Use:**

While a large section of scholars denounced the applicability of Marx's mode of production and Asiatic mode of production theses in interpreting India's pre-colonial and colonial social formation, Madhav

Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha have proposed an alternative mode to complement the concept of modes of production with the concept of modes of resource use. For them, *“most analyses of modes of production have ignored the natural contexts in which the field and factory are embedded—the contexts to which they respond, and which they in turn transform. The concept of modes of resource extends the realm of production to include flora and fauna, water and minerals. It asks very similar questions. With respect to relations of production, for example, it investigates the forms of property, management and control, and of allocation and distribution, which govern the utilization of natural resources in different societies and historical periods. And with respect to productive forces, it analyses the varying technologies of resource exploitation, conversion and transformation that characterize different social orders.”*<sup>34</sup>

The modes of resource use differs from the Marxian mode of production in one fundamental respect, as they argued, *“the industrial mode of resource use includes both capitalist and socialist societies, while there are significant differences between socialist and capitalist paths of development- for example, with respect to property and the role of the market- from an ecological point of view the similarities in these two developmental paths are more significant than the differences. For instance, there are structural similarities in the scale and direction of natural resource flows, the technologies of resource exploitation, the patterns of energy use, the ideologies of human-nature interactions, the specific resource management practices, and ultimately, the cumulative impact of all these on the living environment in capitalist and socialist societies. Consequently, it makes sense to treat industrial socialism and industrial capitalism as being, logically speaking, simply two variants of one industrial mode of resource use.”*<sup>35</sup>

This study proposes to argue that the historical significance of material transformation in Darjeeling hills lies in the dependent development of industrial resource use under the aegis of colonialism.

## **Literature Review:**

The new genres of writings on India's Environmental History have received impetus either from Annals School or from Post- Marxian Critical School and have been designated as Post- Colonial Critical scholarship on Environmental History. A good number of research works has been undertaken on North Western, Central Himalayas and Southern Hills relating to environmental issues which include colonial and pre-colonial forestry, forest rights of the indigenous forest people, development and displacement, colonial state making, socio-economic and politico-cultural changes. The Eastern Himalayas environmental history, especially, Darjeeling Himalaya has remained almost as a maiden field of research. Few landscapes in India have attracted as much least attention by the post-colonial scholarship in terms of material transformations and environmental enquiry as Darjeeling Himalaya. The history of material transformations in the colonized landscape of Darjeeling has not been well served and addressed by published or unpublished academic materials. Here lies the justification of the proposed study. A consideration of the Darjeeling hills tract in the face of colonial interventions would help understanding the roots of economy, politics and society of contemporary Darjeeling

The contemporary environmental history writing in India has attacked the imperialist notion and presented counter-opposing notion by initiating pioneering ideas and serious insights in this area. Ramchandra Guha and Madhab Gadgil in many of their articles and books challenged the central premises of the imperial scholarship. The works of Guha and Gadgil opens new area of interpretation and placed the subject closer to the central concerns of Indian History. Some of their arguments, however, have been criticized by Richard Grove, V. Damodaran, Mahesh Rangarajan, K. Sivaramakrishnan and few others. M. Rangarajan in his Book 'Fencing the Forest' and other essays argued that Guha's emphasis on the disjuncture owing to colonial rule

tends to neglect ecological changes in the period preceding British rule. In his recently edited book, Mahesh along with Vandana Shiva & Sivaramkrishnan attempted to provide a definite linkage between pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial environmental history of India.

Grove questioned the key assumptions made by Guha. He argued that as colonial expansion proceeded, the environmental experience of European and indigenous people living within the colonial periphery together, played a steadily more dominant and dynamic part in the construction of the new European evaluation of nature and in the growing awareness of the destructive impact of European economic activity on the peoples and environments of the colonized lands.<sup>16</sup> Some new interpretations came up in the recent years about different environment related issues vis-à-vis the role of the colonial government and the indigenous people.

The Book, 'The Origins of Himalayan Studies: Brian. H. Hodgson in Nepal and Darjeeling, 1820-1858' (2006), edited by David M. Waterhouse, has critically examined Hodgson's life and achievement, within the context of his contribution to British historiography of Nepal and Darjeeling. Brian Hodgson was a nineteenth century administrator and scholar who worked in Nepal from 1820 to 1843 and worked as an independent scholar in Darjeeling until 1858. The Book has been an example of serious scholarship in exploring Hodgson's writings which laid the foundations for the study of the Eastern Himalayan region especially Darjeeling. The Book consists of twelve chapters and each Chapter is well presented by covering different aspects of history, culture, ethnography, religion and ornithology of Eastern Himalaya including Darjeeling with reference to Hodgson's contributions. The Book is no doubt an addition to scholarship; however, it is restrictive to the form of a biography.

Widely most read Book of Fred Pinn, 'The Road of Destiny : Darjeeling Letters 1839' (1986), has been a strenuous exercise of his

decade long research in India Office Library, London and has filled up a major research gap in deciphering the early history of British occupation of Darjeeling. Starting from the Introduction to the Epilogue, the Book exposes to be a repository of original documents and official correspondences. Such documents speak for themselves. The Book is unique in its approach and presentation, however, is restrictive in providing message based on theoretical premises and is even inconclusive in content for purposefully making a balance of scale between colonizers and the colonized indigenous and exogenous people of Darjeeling hills. The Book has failed to relate the issues and events and material morphosis that took place in Darjeeling Hills under colonial rule.

In his Book, 'Modernizing Nature: Forestry and Imperial Eco-Development', (2008) Ravi. S. Rajan explores environmental history, analyzing forest discourses, policies and practices in continental Europe and the British Empire. The Book is divided into two parts; the first is a historical description of the development of colonial scientific policy and its application for commercial use in India. The second part examines the Empire Forest Conferences and shows the successes of such Conferences in establishing Forestry as a pan-colonial enterprise. Rajan's investigation clearly reveals the importance of colonial forestry and foresters in establishing a forest science in India, however, Rajan does not elaborate on the state-people conflict in his exercise. The principal limitation of the Book is it has avoided the existing theoretical debates on colonial forestry and it has been written on a macro scale, therefore, is devoid of any micro experiments.

In his Book entitled 'Becoming India: Western Himalayas under British Rule' (2008), Aniket Alam has attempted to explore the history of the Western Himalayan kingdoms, later to become the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. Covering a period spanning the beginning of British rule in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Alam has shown the way the local society, economy and politics have been transformed and shaped

through colonial intervention within the regional environmental conditions. In his book, Alam focuses on the dynamics of socio-economic and political structures, institutions and power relations in the Western Himalayas under British rule. Alam makes a strong argument for the historical distinctiveness of the Western Himalayan states, geographically, culturally and socially. He argues that it was British rule that provided the “enabling tools for the social and political integration of the region” into the Indian nation. The author has tried to establish a link between the social and cultural landscape of the Western Himalayas and the plans of India. While doing so, Alam has failed to establish the intricacies of cultural identity dynamics with his functional interpretation. Alam’s Book is therefore remains ambiguous in focusing tensions between distinctness and belonging.

In her Book entitled ‘Landscapes and the Law: Environmental Politics, Regional Histories, and Contests Over Nature’ (2008), Cederlof Gunnel has examined the role of law in consolidating early colonial rule from the perspective of people’s access to nature in forests and hill tracts and is concerned with the social history of legal processes and the making of law. Based on archival documents and field work, in her Book, she has focused on the colliding claims to land and resources, and the complex ways by which customary rights in Nature are redefined and codified for securing colonial sovereign rule with reference to Nilgiri Hills. The Book is a major contribution to research on changing spatial relations and transactions, transformation of hill-plain relations and collisions between synoptic political visions and local knowledge systems and their implementation on particular landscape and people. The Book, however, fails to provide a general theoretical premise to be used to understand the notion of imperial law making and the response of indigenous societies having indigenous social orders of the pre-colonial times. Variations of regional histories and the corresponding contests over Nature have not been properly addressed.

Foning's Book on 'Lepcha, My Vanishing Tribe' (1987) is one of the serious academic venture ever undertaken by the scholars on Lepchas. In his exercise, Foning has attempted to delve into the details of the past, present and future possibility of the Lepchas as the original tribe of the Eastern Himalaya. Locating such area as 'Myel Lyang', Foning equates the land with the Garden of Eden. Throughout the chapters of his Book, Foning has attempted to explore how the Lepchas through ages have been the targets of exploitation, firstly by the pre-colonial Himalayan principalities and thereafter by the colonial rulers and even by the postcolonial state. Precisely, the Book presents the historical processes of marginalization of the Lepchas. However, the Book lacks methodological inquiries and is conditioned by subjectivity.

In her Book entitled 'Contested Landscapes: The Story of Darjeeling', (2007), Aditi Chatterji has attempted to explore the contested landscapes of the Indian hill station of Darjeeling ranging from the period of British occupation of Darjeeling to contemporary times as a form of urban and socio-cultural construction. In this Book, landscape has been viewed as a symbolic representation that developed due to power relations among the various ethnic and migrant groups who settled in Darjeeling at different period of time. In differently poised six chapters of her Book, the theoretical postulates have been unable to reach a definite conclusion that what led the altered landscape formation in Darjeeling. Her emphasis on urban Darjeeling to understand the processes of transformations is a kind of one-sided method of presenting the argument. The changed method of resource use, the altered propriety hold over land and forest, the infusion of colonial capital, the altered demographic pattern, the settlement change, the immigrated people from Eastern Nepal, the emergence of a renewed local language, primarily Nepali and thereafter Gorkhali, emergence Gorkha nationalist identity have not been given deserving due attention.

The widely read and referred Book of E.C.Dozey, 'A Concise History of Darjeeling District Since 1835 With a Complete Itinerary of Tours in Sikkim and the District' (First published in 1916, Reprinted in 1989), is an important repository of information to the researchers interested in British historiography of colonial Darjeeling. The principal purpose of the Book is to provide a guide to the visitors interested to visit Darjeeling. In fact, the Book is the collection of governmental documents guiding researchers to know the past. Indeed the Book reflects the institution building in colonial Darjeeling and expresses unequivocally that everything in colonially constructed early Darjeeling was unquestionably positive in nature.

The well researched Book of Prafull Goradia and Kalyan Sircar, "The Saga of Indian Tea", Vol.I, (2010), is primarily based on materials collected from British Library, British India House, London, Centre For South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, The James Inchcape Tea Library and other such august tea sources in the U.K. In this Book the authors have painstakingly explored an all India scenario of tea with a focus on Darjeeling as well. The British interest involved in the expansion of tea in India, the British ethos and the Indianisation have well been explored by the authors. The authors inform us that the credit for bringing tea to Darjeeling goes to Dr. Campbell. In 1841, there was successful cultivation of the plant at an altitude of 213.36 metres. The Book has presented extensive data on Tea gardens of Darjeeling since beginning of the tea plantation in Darjeeling and has analysed the techno-economic survey data on Tea of Darjeeling. This Book is indeed a store-house of information for the researchers working in the tea field. The Book remains silent on the tea workers working in Darjeeling Tea gardens and their uniqueness. The book has avoided to present any theoretical insights in its whole exercise.

In his Book, entitled "Contested Belonging: An Indigenous People's Struggle for Forest and Identity in Sub-Himalayan Bengal", (1997) Karlsson describes the development of the Rabha people, their

ways of coping with the colonial regime of scientific forestry and the depletion of the forests, as well as with the present day concern for wilderness and wild-life restoration and preservation. The principal argument of this Book relates to the question of identity as a form of subaltern resistance. The principal theoretical problem dealt with in the Book concerns the agency/agencies involved in the making of cultural or ethnic identities. Such theoretical issues can well be tested in identifying the ethnic identity issues of both the Lepchas and the other ethnic communities immigrated in Darjeeling Hills under British rule. The basic limitations of the Book is to identify Rabha people in a specific location of Jalpaiguri which is basically a misconception. Secondly, the Book suffers from theoretical dilutions in focusing cultural identity of Rabha people in isolation of other ethnic realities.

Thus, the study of the interrelationships of cultural-anthropogenic, politico-economic and environmental factors in the process of colonial institution making in Darjeeling has remained hitherto unattended. The general notion of modernity presupposes that nineteenth century colonial state making and the unquestionable colonial right over colonized land was powerfully influenced by the emergence of modernity. However the impact of such general notion of modernizing process must be varied in variegated regions and different patterns of landscape in different environmental settings. While applied to Darjeeling hills, this dimension of academic research has remained still unaddressed. No study has attempted to explore the fact that forest conservancy in Darjeeling received priority at a later juncture when forested land was adequately depleted and cleared for the purposive efforts of colonial mode of resource use in augmenting revenues and resource extraction. No study has attempted either to trace the root of land-man relationship in Darjeeling Hills. No study has so far been attempted to understand how did British 'imagined landscape' begin to get shape in Darjeeling Hills and how did such European notion of Nature, culture and development exert influence on

the indigenous people of Darjeeling Hills? No study has also been attempted to trace the history of change in the mode of resource use which played most crucial role in bringing corresponding material and cultural changes in the colonized landscape of Darjeeling Hills. The present study proposes to address such research gaps.

**Research Questions:**

1. How does landscape as an organic part of environmental history hold promise when the specific landscape did develop in increasingly complex and materially meaningful ways?
2. What were the motives of the British to occupy Darjeeling tract from the Rajah of Sikkim?
3. What were the colonial motives behind the early clearance of forests in Darjeeling?
4. How the colonial scientific forestry did meshed with imperial agenda influence one another?
5. What was the impact of colonial forest policy on the indigenous people of Darjeeling?
6. How did fundamentally altered mode of resource use bring changes in the demographic pattern and in the society, economy and politics of Darjeeling hills?
7. How did institution making take place in Darjeeling under British rule?
8. How did massive expansion of Tea Plantation and Urbanization impinge on the lives of indigenous people and exogenous immigrated labour force?
9. How did capital formation of colonial economy take place in Darjeeling?
10. Was there any continuity and change for Darjeeling landscape under colonial rule?

### **Hypotheses of the Study:**

1. Colonization has a vital role to play in the material transformation of the landscape of Darjeeling hills. Colonialism had been the principal driving force in shaping and reshaping the landscape of Darjeeling hills. The colonization of Darjeeling hills can be described as the transformation of a desolate and partly devastated countryside into an organized densely settled and intensively exploited landscape.
2. For Darjeeling, colonial equilibrium between natural and social systems remained harder to sustain. Darjeeling witnessed sharp transformations in agrarian relation with noticeable and potentially irreversible changes in all other attendant relations due to fundamentally altered mode of resource use under British rule.
3. Agrarian changes in Darjeeling hills within the framework of colonial state making and corresponding ecological consequences and environmental implications should not be taken as a radical dispossession of the indigenous people, rather the establishment of unquestionable colonial proprietary hold over Darjeeling tract, colonial science based forest conservancy, commercialization of forest resource and lands, expansion of tea gardens, continuous immigration of Nepalis from the neighbouring states, imposition of prohibitory rules on shifting cultivation and grazing, cinchona plantation, rapid urbanization and such other corresponding politico-economic and cultural-anthropogenic changes that had ebbed and flowed across the colonial landscape.
4. The commercial and utilitarian purposes of British expansion produced a situation in which Darjeeling tract was increasingly used and utilized as the symbolic location for the idealized landscape and aspiration of the British imagination.

5. As colonial expansion proceeded, the environmental experiences of colonizers and colonized living at the colonial periphery played a steadily more dominant and dynamic part in the construction of new European evaluations of Nature and in the growing awareness of the implying impact of colonial material transformations on the people and environment of the colonized landscape of Darjeeling.
6. The differences between the hills and plains were implanted and indoctrinated through the system of colonial governability that distinguished Darjeeling landscape as a unique other.

**Methodology:**

A methodology is the theory of knowledge that tells us how to organize an academic discourse. In particular it lays the format for expressing the explanations. It is distinct from a method which is only a tool in the application of methodology. The methodology applied in this study has been somewhat eclectic borrowing ideas and concepts from different branches of social science and natural science which would share many ideas among them but are mostly consistory in nature regarding their positioning vis-à-vis social formation and the ideological structure within it. While applying such methodology, the specific methods used in this study have been historical and analytical taking both primary and secondary sources of information into cognizance. Primary source of information has been collected from archival documents, government records, rules and proceedings, working plans, unpublished documents, dispatches, acts etc., while the secondary materials have been collected from the published academic materials such as Books, Memories, Articles, Monographs, Newspapers, Census Reports, Gazetteers, Specific Forest Acts and Rules, Reports, unpublished Ph.D. Theses, Websites materials and such other relevant academic materials.

### **About the Chapters:**

The study has been organised in seven chapters. The introductory chapter initiates with the statement of the research problem focusing specific academic thrust, principal concepts, literature review identifying research gaps, hypotheses, research questions extracting there from the objectives of the study cautiously dealt with by the methodology of research duly supported by both primary and secondary sources of historical information essentially relevant for the study. The second chapter entitled 'Colonial Occupation of Darjeeling Hills' examines the evolution of different phases of British occupation of this eastern Himalayan hill tract, the reasons behind such occupation, the resultant unquestionable proprietary hold over the entire forested hilly tract and terai plains. This chapter also examined how under British rule, lands of the commons, usually a pasture, waste land or forest or both had disappeared as a result of direct political intervention and regularization of the lands of the commons by the colonial interventionist state.

The third chapter, 'Colonization of Darjeeling Forest', examines how commercialization and commoditization of forest as mode of resource use were introduced in colonial Darjeeling at a later stage. By then massive forest clearance was taken place for expanding tea industries, cinchona plantations, roads constructions, railways and physical infrastructural developments for its geopolitical and strategic importance as a military station and for its climatic value as sanatoria, and as colonial growth centre. This chapter explored the material-social, cultural-economic, political and ecological transformation of forests and corresponding social relations of people living in Darjeeling. The British introduced rapid, widespread and irreversible changes at the cost of forest in making and shaping Darjeeling a location of importance which had concomitant ecological and social ramifications. The chapter further reviewed whether imperial forest policy efforts were

socially unjust, ecologically insensitive and legally without a basis in past practice.

The fourth chapter 'Expansion of Commercial Tea Plantation in Colonial Darjeeling' has extensively dealt with the history of plantation in Darjiling hills and in its Terai part revealing the effects on the demographic profile of Darjeeling and on the nature of its economy. The fifth chapter entitled 'Urbanization and Development in Colonial Darjeeling', has principally focused on the processes, factors and forces actively operated behind the growth and development of Darjeeling as a colonial hill station and its corresponding effects on the society, economy and polity; as well as corresponding ecological consequences on Darjeeling hills under colonial rule. The sixth chapter named 'Indigenous and Exogenous People in Colonial Darjeeling' has elaborately discussed different historical situations in colonial Darjeeling wherein such populations witnessed the high dozed imperatives of colonial interventions in their livelihood, society and economy. Finally, chapter seven has dealt with the 'conclusion' of the study. Conclusions have been reached on the basis of research questions and hypotheses verified and addressed by the different chapters of the study and have been placed systematically in the concluding chapter.

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