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## CHAPTER – VII

### EPILOGUE

The present study entitled “Socio-Economic and Political Transition of Darjeeling Terai (1864-1994)” is practically an unexplored area to the scholars, academicians as well as political and administrative domain of West Bengal nay India. The researcher has presented an analysis of the overall transformation of a sleepy hamlet of Darjeeling district in the field of social, economic, educational and political dimension during the concerned time period. The study primarily focuses on the changes and development which were occurred in Terai during about hundred years of colonial rule and about fifty years after Indian Independence. Though, the study begins with 1864, the year of the formation of Terai sub-division but all the subjects’ deals from 1850, the year of the colonial annexation of Darjeeling Terai.

The study begins with the geographical location and historical profile of Darjeeling Terai. Most of the scholar believes that Terai means foothills of the great Himalayan Mountain situated in Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Nepal and Assam etc region. The Terai area of Darjeeling district is little known to them. In such a situation best efforts have been made to provide an illuminating account of the transition of social, economy and politics of the Terai area of Darjeeling district. The Darjeeling district was known to the world by the name of Darjeeling, an important hill station but the significance of Terai was not known to anyone. It was in fact a place which falls on the way to Darjeeling, the Queen of Hills.

During pre-colonial period, the three powers namely Cooch Behar, Sikkim and Nepal had confronted with each other to establish a political hold in Darjeeling Terai region. Though the study has concentrated itself in the Terai region but it has also focused in its discussion the adjacent region of Nepal and northern part of Purnea because though at present they form different states or country but in the colonial and pre-colonial period they were attached to the Terai region of Darjeeling district politically, culturally and historically. Yet the above mentioned three powers namely Cooch Behar, Sikkim and Nepal were engaged in political struggle to established control over this region but due to dense forest, ferocious animals, uncomfortable weather and the fear of dacoits did not provide them to establish a firm political hold over the region. In fact the non-existence of any strong ruling dynasty or princes and also any strong

feudal lords deprived the Terai region of Darjeeling district to come into the limelight in ancient, medieval and even in early part of modern Indian history. But due to the circumstantial events the Company gradually went to adopt a policy of imperial expansion in Terai region of Darjeeling district. Presumably, a safest and shortest trade route through Sikkim to Tibet was the main reason for annexing the Darjeeling Terai by the Company. It is also true that the British wanted to cheque the growing power of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim in this region because they wanted to expand their political boundary in the Himalayan region. So in the first place it was annexed by the Company for her commercial purpose but due to the policy of expansion in latter period adopted by the British in the eastern part of India as well as in the Himalayan region was reflected in the establishment of a clear cut political boundary in the Himalayan Terai region of Darjeeling.

After the British established their political hold in this region, they adopted various policies of land settlement through acts and enactments to attract people to settle in agricultural occupation in this region. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the British adopted a policy of green imperialism in the form of tea garden. With the growth of tea gardens there were the developments of roads and railways which improved the methods of communication in this region. As a result of which there started the process of migrations which brought the Oraons and the Mundas as tea gardens labourers and the Santals as labourers in railway constructions and agriculture. Due to the establishment of railways and tea gardens on the one hand and the influx of population the indigenous population of Terai like the Tharus, the Dhimals and the Meches were marginalised and they left their lands and forced to move towards Nepal, Jalpaiguri and Assam. But the predominant section of the population of Terai, the Rajbanshis who remained attached to the agriculture was no affected by the sudden structural change in the social and economic condition during the early part of the colonial rule in Terai. The caste Bengali Hindus had immigrated to this region prior to the colonial period. Though the establishment of colonial institutions like Government administrative offices, in the railways, jobs in the tea gardens as well as the timber business attracted more Bengalis to come and settle in this place. With the gradual growth of the urbanization the Marwaris and the Biharis started to migrate to this region, though the Biharis came into this region much earlier than the Marwaris. There were Nepalis who were attached to the tea gardens and cattle rearing. During the colonial period with its process of urbanization

and growth of economy which acted as a pull factor to transform this area into a land of settlers who were mostly migrants in this region. There were also push factors from their own home land which was responsible for the migration of the settlers in this region. Thus the migration in this region can be well termed as induced migration or invited migration during the colonial period which became a part of historical process of this region. These migrants during the colonial period gradually became a dominant section during post-colonial period in society, economy and in politics. The demographic pattern changed during the colonial period not so much effected in the life of the people of Terai but in the post-colonial period the social structure changed apart from the partition of India in 1947 the political disturbance in Nepal, Bangladesh and in Tibet also acted as factors for demographic transformation in Terai. Again Siliguri being one of the growing town of North-Eastern part of India after Independence and in any disturbances which caused in Assam, Nagaland and in Manipur there was inflow of population into this region. But the rise in population did not increase the resources of land in this region. As a result of which the social structure is greatly disturbed and it caused various ethnic problems which take the shape of political character. It is again true that the concept of indigenous population or “son’s of the soil” or *bhumiputra* is non-existence in Terai region. Some had migrated hundred years ago or some two hundred or three hundred years ago, but all are migrants. The increasing demographic structure in post-Colonial period created various ethnic problems but the seeds of the problem were sowed earlier in the continuous migration process started from the beginning of the Colonial rule in Terai. Thus the character of the ethnic problem which developed in post-Colonial period was basically a movement of the migrants against another group of migrants who were in a better social, economic and political position.

The land revenue system introduced by the British Government never took a permanent shape in the Darjeeling Terai. There were many experiments and changes which was mostly political in nature. The land system which developed in the pre-Colonial period not completely disappeared in the Colonial period. Again the systems of land revenue in the Colonial period also existed in the post-Colonial period though not in a very prominent shape. The land revenue settlement in Terai was an assimilation of a system which was introduced in the pre-Colonial period by the Rajas of Cooch Behar and also the Rajas of Sikkim and which later went under some alteration under the East India Company and after the British Government in 1858. It is also true that the whole of

Darjeeling Terai was not governed under Non Regulation Act. During the eighties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the areas which were added from Jalpaiguri district to Darjeeling district as already stated in chapter III, settings A, and also in the post-Colonial period, during the 1950s the areas which were added from Bihar to Darjeeling district were under the Permanent Settlement. The rest of the areas of Darjeeling Terai under Colonial period were governed under the Non- Regulation Areas whose owner was “*Bharat Samrat*”.

The main feature of the land settlement in Darjeeling Terai was the *Jotedary* system. The *jotedary* system was not a Colonial development but it existed during the pre-Colonial times, though not in a very prominent form. Actually the British were not acquainted with the culture, tradition, and customs of this area, therefore they without making much changes of the pre-Colonial land system introduced the new revenue system in the colonial period which aimed primarily to collect land revenue as much as revenue possible without spending minimum expenditure in administrative set up. As stated earlier that during pre-Colonial period the entire Darjeeling Terai was densely populated and it was covered with dense jungle and ferocious wild animals. The earlier migrants during Colonial period expanded agriculture in this area by clearing the jungles and converted the huge fallow lands into a cultivable one. Since there was no proper measurement system of the land, the lands were measured on the basis of land marks and ideas like a tree, pond, temple, roads, orchards etc. Thus the lands did not have any proper demarcation. As there was less people and lands available was more, therefore there was not much botheration regarding the demarcation of land. On the other hand the three major indigenous population of northern part of the Darjeeling Terai namely the Tharus, the Dhimals and the Meches were not settled agriculturist and mainly practiced *jhum* cultivation. But the most predominant indigenous population of Darjeeling Terai who were mostly inhabited in the southern part of the river Mahananda, the Rajbanshis were settled agriculturist and many of them became prominent *jotedars*. These *jotedars* were socially and economically took a dominant character in the society and therefore the names of the *jotes* or villages or areas were named after them like Rajrajeswari *Jote* (now known as Deshbandhupara), Kaliprasanna *Jote* (now known as College Para), Gazal Singh *Jote* (now known as Hakimpara), Nipurbigar *Jote* (now known as Bidhan Market), D.N.Roy Sarkar *Jote* (now known as Mahabirsthan), Rangedas Mohan *Jote* (now known as Mahanandapara) etc. On the other hand the names of the *jote* in northern bank of the river Mahananda recorded in revenue department as Ketugabur *jote* ( in

Hatighisa), Amarsing *jote* ( in Hatighisa), Budhkaran *jote* (in Hatighisa), Bharatsing *jote* (in Patharghata), Huchai Mallik *jote* (in Hatighisa) etc and some of these names certainly a big proof of the Dhimal and the Meche domination over these areas.

Under the *jotedary* system, who was the actual owner of the land was a complicated question in Darjeeling Terai. In Permanent Settlement the *zamindar* was the proprietary owners of the land as has been refereed in various writings of historians and others. In Permanent Settlement the real motive of the Company was to extract large amount of land revenue rather than became the owners of the land. In this land system the revenue demanded annually was more or less permanent without not much of increased in percentage. On the other hand under the *jotedary* system the British East India Company and therefore British Government had full freedom to increase or decrease the land revenue to its will. Moreover if the *jotedars* imposed fifty percent of the revenue charged by the Company or British Government upon the sub-tenants it was not accepted by the British authority. Thus it can be well said that in this *jotedary* system which was prevailed in Darjeeling Terai the *jotedars* did not received the ownership right of the lands but to collect revenue and dominance in the area, the actual owner of the land was the “*Bharat Samrat*”. The *jotedars* also gave their right to cultivate land and collect revenue to the sub-tenants like *chukanidars*, *darchukindars* and *dara-darchukanidars* etc and others who were in the hierarchical structure in the land revenue system in Darjeeling Terai during Colonial period. During Colonial period one of the important feature in the *jotedary* system in Darjeeling Terai was the relationship between the *jotedars* and the sub-tenants i.e the haves and the have not’s was not in the character and exploited. The relationship was more or less good and healthy because both the sections belong to same community and both participated in agricultural activities.

But during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the rapid expansion of the green imperialism in Darjeeling Terai the caste Hindus, the Biharis, the Marwaris and many others people with some capital migrated into this area and they purchased many *jotes* or parts of *jotes* and converted themselves into a middlemen and these new *jotedars* created a new class of tenants within their areas. As a result these new class of *jotedars* were gradually converted into a profit making landed bourgeois class who did not have any direct connection with cultivation of land. In these reasons gradually the Rajbanshis, the predominant sections of population in this region became landless and they became tenants in their own land. Moreover in the post-Independence period the Rajbanshis, the

only community who were largely effected by the Estate Land Acquisition Act in 1953 which abolished the *jotedary* system in West Bengal because they could not attached themselves to any other profession then agriculture as they were traditionally agriculturist and conservative in their outlook. After the partition of India in 1947 the then Central Government of India and as well as the West Bengal Government to rehabilitate the refuges these *khas* land acquired by the Estate Land Acquisition Act in 1953 for their resettlement. Further in 1960s under the J.L. Nehru's regime due to change of the economic policy a large part of these lands went into the hands of the *adivasis* and the tea garden labourers in Darjeeling Terai. Despite constitutional safe guards in the field of political system, they could not retain their whole upon the overall political landscape of the area. Thus the predominant sections of the population, the Rajbanshis has lost their lands as well as their social status and prestige and in course of time entered into movements like "*Bhatia Khedao*", "*Uttarkhand Movement*", "*Kamatapur Movement*" etc.

Though the tea plantation industry in Darjeeling Terai was started in the sixties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but in the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century more specifically in the early period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a large number of the Bengali caste Hindus and Muslims had invested their capital in the tea gardens of Terai. Unlike the others parts of North Bengal there were the lawyers, muktears, timber merchants and many others had invested their money in the tea gardens but in Darjeeling Terai many *jotedars*, *sardars*, the managers of the European tea gardens also purchased the tea gardens in the later period of the Colonial rule. Thus during the Colonial period there was the growth of Bengali entrepreneurs in the tea garden industry in Darjeeling Terai which could not continued for more than three or four generations and from 1960s gradually became transfer into the hands of the non-Bengali entrepreneurs mostly belong to the Marwaris. It is interesting to note that while during last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Bengali entrepreneurs disappeared from the Indian business scenario the rise of the Bengali entrepreneurship in the tea gardens of North Bengal as well as in Darjeeling Terai is very significant.

The educationally backward tract in Colonial period like Darjeeling Terai transformed into an educational hub of the adjoining districts of North Bengal within fifty years of the Colonial rule is very interesting and significant. Though there was a huge difference between the rural and urban sectors of education regarding the numbers

of educational institutions, even professional institutions which is mainly set up in the urban areas of Terai after Indian Independence. The people of the urban areas of Terai are the main beneficiaries of such educational transition of Terai but the rural Terai is far away from the urban Terai. The educational status in rural Terai and urban Terai is a hard proof of this observation.

The growth and expansion of Siliguri police station of Darjeeling Terai is meteorically rise from a sleepy hamlet of few settlers to a second Metropolitan City of West Bengal. Soon it began to be comparing with Calcutta and came to be known as the second capital of West Bengal. During the early part of the Colonial rule it was basically a halt station for the travellers, traders and British officials to Darjeeling and other parts of the hills and very soon due to rapid urbanization it was transformed into fourth Municipal Corporation of West Bengal. In the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the expansion of tea, transport and timber in Terai the urbanization began and in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it expanded trade. But in the post-partition period due to reorganization of the political boundary Siliguri was converted into a transit point for the transport and communication in North-East India as well as hill and other district of North Bengal. After the Chinese aggression of India in 1962, the then Government of India first time became aware of the strategic importance of the Darjeeling Terai. In later period with the development of education i.e. teaching and medical facilities i.e. treatment Siliguri was converted into a second important town of West Bengal after its capital, Calcutta. However, this transformation of Siliguri from a sleepy hamlet to a Municipal Corporation occupied a significant place but the strategic and geographical location of the area is more important in this development than any other factors

In 1862 the Colonial Government with the introduction of green imperialism had began the process of transformation of society, economy in Darjeeling Terai and after a century in 1962, the Chinese aggression further transformed the Terai politically.

In the conclusion it can be said that the study has concentrated on the society, economy and politics as its primary objectives. It has highlighted particularly the Colonial period, the urbanization and expansion of the British Colonial economy, society and changes in the politics. It has also given stress to the changes taking place in the post-Colonial period but except post colonial rapid urbanization in Siliguri and post-Colonial ethnic conflicts in Terai all the themes is focused mainly during the Colonial period.