



Mount Everest from Sandakpu,
Darjeeling.

Snow peaks in the North of
Darjeeling.

Objective of the Thesis

Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong Sub-Divisions are the hill areas of West Bengal. These hill areas are famous for tea plantation. A voluminous literature has grown on the problems of tea industry in this area. But hardly any investigative work has been done on agriculture. Agriculture of the hill areas in contrast to the plantation sector has relatively remained an unexplored field. In respect of employment of hill people, agriculture occupies an important place in the economy of the area. The purpose and objective of this thesis is to study the problems and prospects of agricultural development in the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

Any study of agriculture of this region requires an analysis of its historical and political perspectives. This is because the hills of this part of the Himalayas were isolated, uninhabited and full of forests before the advent of the British in the area. The British Raj consolidated its position by taking some hill tracts from the Sikkim Raj and some areas from the Bhutan Raj. Commercial agriculture in its proper sense of the term was started after the British conquered and introduced their administration in the region. In Chapters I and II we have discussed the beginning of agriculture and nature of migration of people from Nepal. Darjeeling hill area is inhabited mainly by the immigrant population. In these two chapters we have tried to trace the early growth of agriculture in this area.

There was simultaneous growth of tea plantation and agriculture in the hill tracts of Darjeeling. The land use pattern shows that most of the tea gardens are situated in the tract taken from Sikkim and most of the farming land in the tract taken from Bhutan. The division is not water-tight and there was considerable interaction between tea plantation and agriculture. In this area the British introduced a land tenure system which was different from the Zamindari system of the plains. In the Chapters III and IV we have discussed the relevant issue of interconnection between tea land and crop land and the land tenure system. The growth of agriculture was rapid and accordingly certain policy measures were adopted to safeguard the interest of the Lepcha and Bhutia owner cultivators, the original inhabitants of the area. In the Chapters V, VI and VII certain differences in the mode of cultivation in comparison to cultivation in the plains area of West Bengal have been shown. Terraced cultivation at a high altitude in the rugged mountain terrains creates important differences. There are certain unique characteristics of crop pattern also.

The situation drastically changed after independence of the country. Various problems arising from marginal land holding, intensive cultivation, cropping intensity and other relevant matters of agricultural development have been discussed. The ecological disaster due to deforestation and soil erosion and its impact on agriculture of the area have also been discussed. In the Chapters VIII and IX we have discussed some of the

special problems of marketing with reference to cash crops in particular and other crops in general.

Problems of rapid growth of population, absence of any alternative employment opportunity, widescale deforestation etc. became very prominent in the post-independence period. Government measures undertaken in these contexts have been discussed in the Chapters X and XI. We have attempted to show how far the measures undertaken are sufficient to solve the problems of agriculture in the area. The Government approach has also been scrutinised by a study of certain villages and areas.

Cultivation in the slopes of the hills differs from ordinary cultivation in the plains not only in respect of altitude, soil composition, climatic conditions and natural hazards but also in many other respects. It is in this context an attempt has been made to evaluate the approach of the Government to develop agriculture in the region after the British left India. The objective of this thesis is to study the problems of agricultural development in the hill areas of West Bengal with special reference to period after independence.