

CHAPTER II

2.1. LOCATION

Darjeeling Himalaya is the hilly and Himalayan part of the district of Darjeeling and northernmost in West Bengal. It lies between 27° 13' 05" and 26° 17' 10" north latitude and between 88° 53' 00" and 87° 59' 30" east longitude. The total area of the district is 3254.7 sq.km, which is 3.68 percent of the total area of West Bengal state. Within the limit of the district, the hilly region covers 2320 sq.km and the remaining 934.7 sq.km of the area fall under terai and plains. There are four sub divisions in the district of which the three are in the hills. The hilly subdivisions are respectively Darjeeling, 935.5 sq.km, Kalimpong 1056.5 sq.km and Kurseong 425.3 sq.km. Siliguri sub division falls under the terai and plain region, which covers an area of 837.4 sq.km. The altitudinal variations of the district range from 150m at Siliguri to 3636m at Sandakphu with the sharp physiographic contrast between the plain and the mountainous regions.

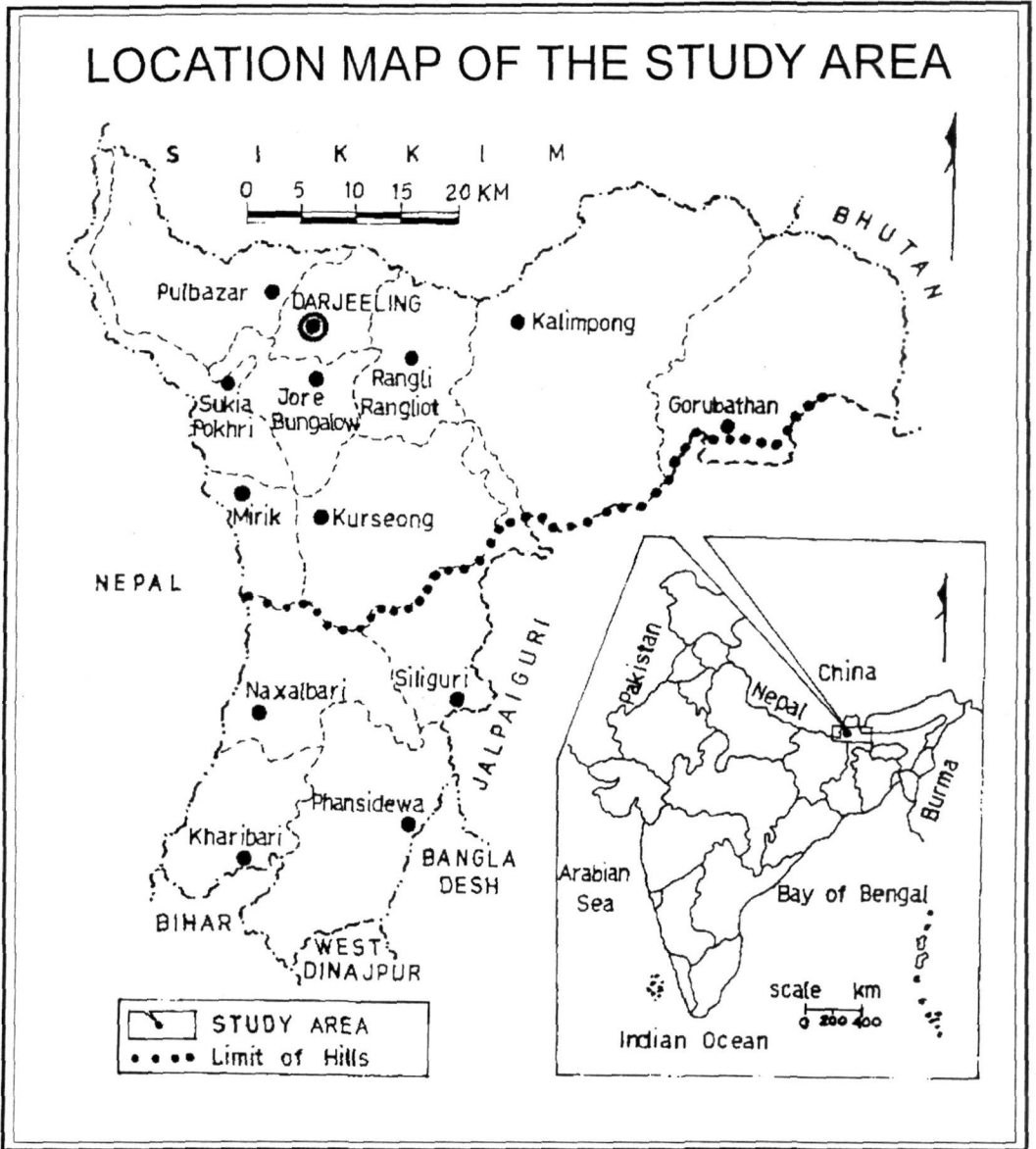
Of all the frontier districts of India, the boundary of Darjeeling district is complicated. It shares its eastern boundary with Bhutan being separated by the river Jaldhaka and the western boundary with Nepal and the terai region by the river Mechi and Siddhi. It shares the northern boundary with the state of Sikkim, separated by the rivers of Ramam, great Rangit, Rangpu and Teesta at different locations. The southern boundaries are somewhat complicated and shared with the districts of Jalpaiguri and West Dinajpur of West Bengal state, Purnea district of Bihar state and Bangladesh (Map-1). The boundaries of Sikkim and Bhutan meet with Darjeeling district at Rachela (Tinsimana-3150m) of Kalimpong sub division forming a tri-junction. Another similar tri-junction is formed at Phalut (3600m) of Darjeeling sub division where the boundaries of Sikkim and Nepal meet with that of Darjeeling.

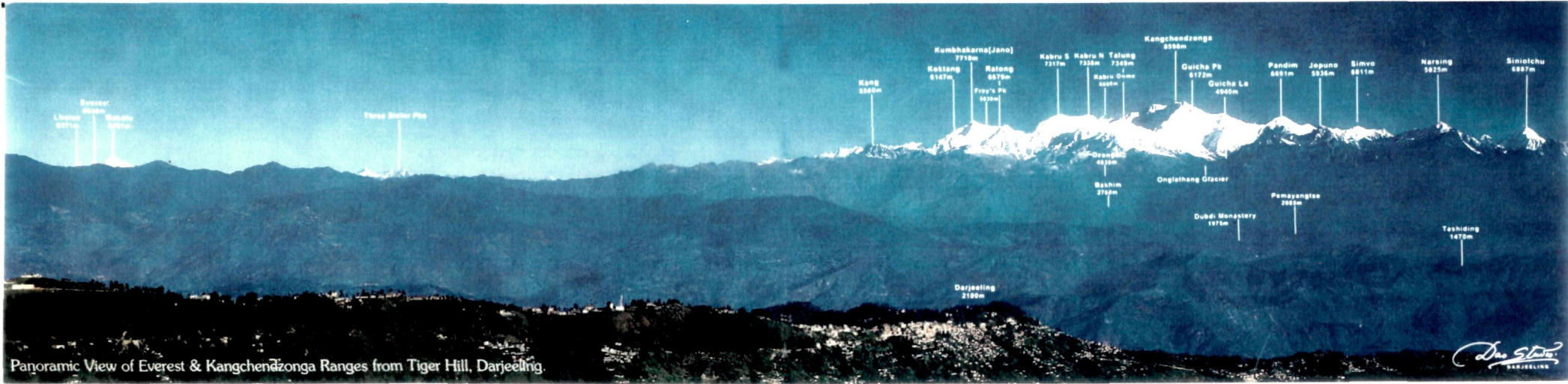
2.2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF DARJEELING

Darjeeling sustains a controversial history over the years of its known existence. The present district of Darjeeling is a creation of the nineteenth century, and is a result of an almost accidental involvement of the British India Government in the affairs of neighbouring Himalayan states. The partition of 1947 left this district intact and as a part of West Bengal (Banerjee 1980).

The present Darjeeling district was a part of dominions of the Raja of sovereign state of Sikkim. In 1706, Kalimpong sub division of the district

Map - 1





1. Panoramic view of Mt. Kanchandzonga and her sister peaks from Tigerhill (2450 m). Photo courtesy Das Studio, Darjeeling.

was taken from Sikkim by the Bhutanese king including some parts of terai and plains falling east to river Teesta. During that time Kalimpong was ruled by the Lepcha king Gaeboo Achook Pano who is still remembered as the last king of Kalimpong by the Lepchas. Darjeeling was conquered and occupied by Nepal from 1788-1816 and restored to Sikkim by the British in 1817 (Pradhan 1991). The Gorkhas who seized the power in Nepal first invaded Sikkim in 1780. During 1788-1789, the Gorkha army under the command of General Jahar Singh and commandant Damodar Panday invaded Sikkim and incorporated the land area of Sikkim falling west to river Teesta including plains, to Nepal defeating the then king Tenzing Namgyal. At that time Gorkhas were spreaded throughout due to the annexation of territories held by the king and East India Company was established in the Indian territory. Owing to the disagreement over the frontier policy of Gorkhas a war was declared between Gorkhas and the East India Company who were on behalf of the Raja of Sikkim to the close of 1813 (Subba 1992). In 2nd December 1815 the treaty of Sugaullee was signed and as a result Nepal handed the terai area and Darjeeling part of its possession over to British India Government. Shortly followed the treaty of Titalya on 10th February 1817, and the same region between river Mechi and Teesta was restored to the Raja of Sikkim by the British and guaranteed its sovereignty, making it a buffer state between Tibet and British India (Bhujel 1996).

In 1828, Captain William Lloyd and Mr. Grant visited Darjeeling and discovered its hygienic climate. As a result of their proposal and persuasion and with a view to establishing a civil sanatorium and summer capital, Lord Bentinck the then governor General of British India initiated the dialogue with the king of Sikkim who handed over this area as a token of friendship to the British Government on the 1st day of February 1835. This unconditional cession was later converted to a rental system (1841-1846). At that time the Gorkhas were the major inhabitants in Darjeeling.

On the wake of internal rebellion led by *lamas* and other leading men of Sikkim a punitive expedition was sent by the British in February 1850. As a result, the British annexed the terai (foot hills of the Himalayas) a portion of Sikkim hills (bound by the rivers of Ramam and great Rangit on the north, by the river Teesta on the east and the Nepal frontier on the west with an area measuring 1657.6 sq.km), to Darjeeling. The terai and the hill territory annexed to Darjeeling from Sikkim was managed by the superintendent who from 8th May 1850 was called the Deputy Commissioner (Banerjee 1980). Attracted by its cool climate and natural beauty many British families settled in Darjeeling between 1835-1852. In 1854 the tea plantations were established in this area, and many people including Bihari tribal also came to work in the tea gardens who later settled here (Census of India, 1991).

In 1864 a war broke out between East India Company and Bhutan, and the treaty of Sinchula followed on 11th November 1865 by which Kalimpong subdivision was ceded to East India Company on lease and was

notified then as a subdivision of Jalpaiguri district for one year and finally transferred to Darjeeling district in 1866 (Subba 1992).

The present geographical dimension of the district is retained since 1880 when Siliguri was taken out from district of Jalpaiguri and included in Darjeeling. But the administrative placements were changed from time to time. The district was once included in the Rajshahi division (now in Bangladesh) until October 1905. As a result of the partition of Bengal, it was transferred to the Bhagalpur division (Bengal, Bihar and Orissa then being undivided). With the rearrangement of the provinces, it was re-transferred to Rajshahi division again in March 1912. The final inclusion to West Bengal was an automatic incident in August 1947 when India got her freedom and since then the placement remains unaltered. However, some portion of Phansidewa police station of the district was included in Bangladesh.

The district was 'non-regulated area' till late 1874. This was a scheduled district till 1919, and a backward tract up to 1935. From 1935 to till India's independence it was a partially excluded area under the Government of India act 1935. It was because of the Indo-Nepal treaty of 31st July 1950 the Nepalese or Gorkhas were treated as reciprocals as the Indians in Nepal. The treaty does not clarify the status of Indian Gorkhas living here from the time unknown. After the independence of India the identity of Indian Gorkhas remained a low key affair till 1980. A violent agitation in mid 1980s, questioning the identity, gave a momentum for the separate statehood especially in Darjeeling district its terai and dooars region. The matter was settled after the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council on 22nd August 1988 in the purview of autonomous administration (Liwang 2000).

The name Darjeeling is derived from the corruption of Lepcha name *Darjyu-Lyang* meaning abode of the God and Goddesses. It is also said to be named after *Dorjee-Ling* the Buddhist monastery that was established in 1767 on the observatory hill of present day *Mahakal danra* near *Chowrasta*. The Gorkha army under the commandment of general Jaharsingh during 1788-1789 destroyed it. This monastery was later shifted to the present day Bhutia Busti (Foning 1987). The word *Dorjee* also means the celesiastical scepture of double-headed thunderbolt of the Lamaist faith and an emblem associated with priestly faith. Darjeeling boasts of having panoramic snowy ranges at its head of significance which the chief peaks from left to right are Kumbhakarna (Jano-7710m), marked as rainbow hues, Kabru south (7317m) and Kabru north (7338m) marked as the horn of protection, Kanchandzonga (*Kong-Chen-Kongbu*-8598m), the fore head of God and Mt. Pandim (6691m), the kings minister (PI-1). The immensity of this range of Himalayas with the majestic appearance leaves the visitors with a lifelong impression.

The present day town of Darjeeling was a small market of few mat roofed houses till 1886 with the name *Goondri bazaar* (Bhujel 1996). Similarly Kurseong originated from the Lepcha name *Kur-song* meaning orchid and the word Kalimpong derived from the Lepcha word *Kalenpung* meaning hillock

of assemblage. In the course of time this word was distorted to *Kalebung* meaning ridges where we play. However the hill people called it *Kalebung* meaning black spurs.

2.3. POPULATION AND ADMINISTRATION SET UP

The total population of the district is 12, 99, 919 (Census of India 1991) of which 903,859 are in rural area and 396,060 in the urban. The percentages of rural and urban population are 69.53 and 30.46 respectively. The percentage of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population were 16.15 and 13.78 respectively where the total area occupied by the district ranks 13th in the state. According to the provisional census of India 2001, the population of Darjeeling district is 16, 05, 900.

For the administrative convenience, Darjeeling district is subdivided in to four sub divisions with their head quarter at Darjeeling. There are 710 villages of which 620 are inhabited and 90 are uninhabited. The district has one municipal corporation town, four municipal towns and four non-municipal towns. There are 12 community development blocks and 15 police stations.