

ABSTRACT

The thesis entitled “**Demography, Economy and Political Tensions: A Study of Darjeeling Hills (1907-2007)**” studies the changing demography, economy and growing political tension in the hills of Darjeeling from the memorandum submitted by the Hillmen’s Association in 1907 for the separation from Bengal to the rise of Gorkha Janmukti Morcha in 2007. The year 1907 marked as a landmark in the history of Darjeeling as for the first time people in this region started their separate state movement within free India. Simultaneously, year 2007 also indicate the same movement launched by newly formed political party Gorkha Janmukti Morcha. Geographically, ethnically and linguistically, the history of the hills of Darjeeling is totally different from the rest of Bengal. In this thesis, discussion will be done on the changing pattern of demography and economy of Darjeeling hills as well as the political tensions both in State and in Central level.

Darjeeling was ceded to the British as a gift in 1835 and then it has changed its status several times. The Raja of Sikkim was persuaded to give away Darjeeling to the British on 1st February, 1835, the deed of grant was signed which just comprised 357.4sq.km. L. S. S O’Malley opined that, "It was wholly covered by forests and it has been said that there were not even twenty resident families or households in the area." From the beginning of the 19th century the English East India Company began to take active interests in Darjeeling, and the whole territory came under the British occupation in three phases during the thirty years from 1835 to 1865. The most striking aspect of the history of Darjeeling is the issue of “migration” because; Darjeeling was sparsely populated when the British set their foot here.

Darjeeling district offers the most remarkable example of growth of population stemming mainly from immigration from outside India. There was a tendency of migration between this region and less virgin lands to its westward, which began with the centralization of Rana rule in Nepal at the beginning of the century. The reason for the boom in population in this district evidently was due to the large labour migration from Nepal when the British opened the tea gardens. Darjeeling had been made into a sanitarium for the weary British soldiers. But one of the most important factors for the large inflow of the Nepalis was the establishment of the tea industry which required a large labour force. One attempts to cover such movements under a general heading of the 'push-pull hypothesis'. It suggests, "migration” is due to socio-economic imbalances between regions, certain factors 'pushing' persons away from the area

of foreign, and other 'pulling' them to the area of destination". J. A. Jackson in his edited book "Migration, Sociological Studies, Oxford University Press, Volume 2, March 4, 2010" used this concept for 'international migration' where he considered "geographical movements of the population in two ways: a) moves caused by necessity or obligation; b) moves caused by needs (mostly economic) of receiving countries. An interplay of certain exogenous and endogenous factors led to such a large influx of population in Darjeeling hills. These can be broadly termed as the 'push' and 'pull' factors. Therefore, we are elucidating the Nepali caste system to understand the social composition of the labour force and most important, the intercommunity relations were a strict taboo. Such caste rigidity along with the disintegration of land imposed on certain ethnic groups led to a large-scale exodus towards the neighbouring lands.

The first census was taken in the hill areas after the formation of the district in 1869 and it was found that the population was around 22,000. Lepchas and Bhutias, the early inhabitants of this region area tribal community of the Darjeeling hills have recently been described as the single biggest community amongst the agricultural labour of the region. Mitra states that it was a leap forward in the population within the period of thirty-four years between 1835 and 1869. After the annexation from Bhutan in 1865, this region was estimated to have a population of 3,530 souls. In 1901, the population had grown to 41,511 or by 55.9 per cent. W. W. Hunter wrote that the Nepali who form 34 per cent population of the district, are all immigrants from the state of Nepal.

Strategically, Darjeeling district safeguarded the northern Indian border from China, Bhutan and India Sikkim also commanded the historic Kalimpong-Lhasa trade route which was the shortest route to Tibet. There also developed a settlement in nineteenth century of small Bengali middle class families for administrative services and clerical jobs. Plantations like tea, timber and cinchona have been treated as a separate entity within the agricultural sector. Since Darjeeling's integration in modern India, a composite culture has grown up best on the social needs of plantation and cash crop agriculture and of associated trade, commerce and communications network.

The roads and railways of the district was the creation of the British rule. It is a major source of economic activity in Darjeeling hills. Tourism Department of West Bengal was opened in 1958 as a part of the Forest Department and it provides some basic information like climate, roads, hotel to the tourist. Tourism in Darjeeling for the first time systematically organized

since November 1975 when West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation (WBTDC) came into being.

Along with the growth of literary movement for Nepali cultural identity, ethnic exclusiveness was expressed through demands for autonomy in Darjeeling. The Lepchas and Bhutias, who have now become the ethnic minorities, when compared to the major Nepali community, but have been living here since time immemorial, are keen on bringing revivalism of their own respective ethnicity, traditions and culture. This demands for separation from Bengal date back to the early 1900s, but they came to national prominence at the beginning of the 1980s. As during the last ten years (1988-1998) the performance of Subhas Ghising and GNLF in the autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) has turned out to be unsatisfactory and as the basic economic problems of Darjeeling are yet to be solved with a comprehensive approach, the demand for ethnic exclusiveness in terms of a separate province has recently surfaced again. The process of democratic decentralization of power, which has started with the functioning of the elected and autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, nourished further to include all relevant aspects of Nepali ethnic aspirations. This process is more comprehensively enshrined not only in the urban middle class of the hills of Darjeeling but also in the plantation workers and poor peasants of the hills who actively involved in the grass-root decentralization of power.

Demographic changes helped to transform every region into several socio-economic and political perspectives. The historical background and changing scenario of the hills of Darjeeling is not exception to this. The question of identity among the Nepali people in the hills and the demand of statehood is the nucleus objective of the movement. Economic backwardness finally makes these demands strongest under Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in the hills of Darjeeling. Because, the hills of Darjeeling before and after independence more or less remain economically backward and urbanization failed to solve of the majority people's basic needs. Both male and female counterparts of the society actively participated in this violent movement for the demand of separate state of Gorkhaland as well as economic development in this region. Though the decision makers and sole representatives always belong to the upper-class elitist and middle class bourgeoisie and even though the people from every family from the three hills actively joined in this movement. After the fall of DGHC for its unsatisfactory economic development of the hills, the movement lost its backbone and emerged a new political organization in 2007.