

Transformed Human- Nature Relations: A Saga of Darjeeling under Early Colonial Dispensation

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ABSTRACT: *This Article focuses on the transformations of human-nature relations as a result of colonial occupation of Darjeeling in the mid nineteenth century. The study explores the applicability of the contending theses of “modes of production”, central to materialist historiography, and “modes of resource use”, central to post- colonial nationalist historiography in understanding environment, ecology and culture of colonial Darjeeling as a form of human interaction with nature. Arguments of post-colonial critical scholarship on environmental history central to continuity and change have also been tested to understand the processes of transformations of human-nature relationship in colonial Darjeeling. While making a conscious attempt to stay away from ecological determinism, this Article, nevertheless, is tied together through the rubric of ecological premises that defined and structured the socio-political history of Darjeeling. The study has attempted to discern how the pre- colonial instinctive and natural ecological concerns for Darjeeling tract were overrun and ecological premises were modified by the colonizers. This Article firmly affirms that amidst human- nature relations, Darjeeling has been a unique experience of environmental and material transformation. The study, at the end, intends to strike at the cog of the colonially evolved political economy of human-nature relationships.*

KEYWORDS: *Transformation; Modes of Production; Modes of Resource Use; Post-Colonial Critical Scholarship; Environmental History; Modernity, Political Economy.*

Date of Submission: 20-02-2018

Date of acceptance: 07-03-2018

I. INTRODUCTION

The human-nature interactions as the means for human existence, the end of which is located in its socio-economic and historical context, specifically, within the nexus of power-relationships, have been explored from various perspectives by the scholars having concerns for both human and nature. Contemporary relevant discourses have amply shown that in understanding human-nature relationships, the issue of non-compatibility does occur, and the issue of reconciliatory balance has always been in question due to growing anthropogenic pressure on Nature and the unreasoned extraction of resources through gradually developed technology. In such a process, Nature has always been largely affected. Since the mid-nineteenth century, there was a spurt of European writings on the notion of an imbalance brought about by the reckless consumption of natural resources, particularly in the form of massive deforestation. This notion of human responsibility that has come to dominate the discourse on environmental degradation, at least, two factors ensured the adoption of such position: (i) the uncertainty that characterizes our understanding of many environmental processes; (ii) the opposition that conservationists and others have to deal with in implementing any policy that curbs the consumption of natural resources. The interaction between ecological uncertainty on the one hand and opposition to conservation on the other produces a specific alarmist discourse on environmental degradation questioning thereby the delicate balance between human nature relationships.¹

While making a conscious attempt to stay away from ecological determinism, this Article nevertheless is tied together through the rubric of ecological premises that defined and structured the socio-economic and political history of Darjeeling hills. The history of colonial occupation of Darjeeling tract, history of settlements, establishment of unhindered colonial rights over the entire natural resources, forests, agricultural lands, grasslands and wastelands, expansion of tea gardens, cinchona plantation, absorption of immigrated population, development of urban and rural settlements, introduction of monetized markets and society of composite culture, missionary educational efforts and such other factors and forces etc., are intrinsically connected through the underlying theme of inter-linkages between Nature of Darjeeling and the colonially constructed Human based territoriality. Such territoriality and the economic efforts of the colonial state, since the mid-nineteenth century, must have to be bounded by ecological constraints. Amidst such processes of growing statization, the community-commons relationship, which had evolved and sustained itself over centuries, began to undergo fundamental changes under British rule. The pre-colonial instinctive and natural ecological concerns were

¹ Vasant. K. Saberwal, , *Ecological Uncertainty, Institutions and Myths* in Seminar, No. 486, Feb.2000, p.69.

overrun and ecological premises were largely modified by the colonizers. The paternalist colonial state aided and abetted the manipulation, encroachment, allotment and plunder of common pastures, wastelands and forests.

Barring some minor occasional rule violations in the form of so called “everyday resistance”,² neither any official records of colonial Darjeeling nor any folk narratives would have us believe that there had been forest conflicts or local opposition to the colonial forest conservancy at the one end and forest clearance on the other. In the name of development activities for building Darjeeling station in surface and extraction of Nature’s resources, tea garden expansion at the cost of depletion of forested zones, grass lands, waste lands for instance, in sublime, the colonial plunder of Nature of Darjeeling hills went unabated. Tea being designated as colonial cash crop had been the principal driving force of commercializing Nature and materializing the landscape of Darjeeling hills. The colonially constructed sense of modernity as reflected through expansionist power play of the colonial state in reconstructing Darjeeling as an ‘European other’³ by way of random plunder of Nature had impacted heavily on the indigenous natives, flora, fauna and human land use in general and on the ecology and environment in particular. While doing so, there had been no local centre negotiations. To treat the ‘why questions’ academically, the reasons have been many and are not far to seek.

Darjeeling hill tract is situated between 28°21i – 27°13i North and 87°59’ – 88°53’ East in the Eastern Himalayan region of India. Forming an intrinsic part of the Eastern Himalayas Darjeeling tract stands distinct in respect of climate, topography, flora and fauna. Darjeeling hills have always been considered as a distinct phyto-geographical region with its distinctive climate and ecological system. Lulled in the lap of Singalila range, Darjeeling hills thus forms a distinct ecological zone in terms of specific variables of elevation, vegetation, climatic category, soil, topography, slope contours, precipitation and patterns of socio-economic adaptation. The vegetation and forests in Darjeeling Himalayas due to its distinctive climate, rainfall, soil etc. gave birth to tropical rain forests to mountain temperate forests. The Darjeeling tract, till thirties of the nineteenth century, was covered with forests from the bottom to the top, characterized not only by ecological fragility but also deep historical and geographical sensitivity. Such a distinguished part of the Himalayas needs to be traced back in historical search as a part of colonial encounter in general and the anthropogenic and archeological historical processes in particular.

While writing on British conquest of the Western Himalayas, Aniket Alam argues, “the generic causes of territorial conquest by the British East India Company can be understood and explained through the global context of colonialism based on the requirements of ascendant British Capital, which first needed to monopolize trade and latter the source of raw materials and captive markets for emergent industries. Any account of colonial conquests in one particular region needs to base itself on these, in the first instance, otherwise it has a tendency to become a study of colonialism without perceiving colonialism.”⁴

The history of colonial conquest on Darjeeling hills may well be placed keeping in line with Alam’s argument. It was thus not the control over the natural resources but the attraction of climate, physiographic and some major political and economic concerns had made the East India Company interested in the Darjeeling hill tract. Notwithstanding the attraction of the natural scenic cite and healthy ‘other’ of the dirty diseased plains of India, Darjeeling was actually conceived as a part of the colonial mainstream and was included into the greater colonial politico-economic project. The natural spatial features of colonial Darjeeling can well be identified with respect to its link with colonial political economy in which the Nature’s resources of all sites, however scenic, were subject to colonial capitalistic utilization. Therefore, a constant inherent tension between Darjeeling’s natural exotic and its functional elements persisted throughout.⁵

The East India Company officials identified the potentiality for a sanatorium town at the site of a Lepcha village (Dorje-ling) in the eastern Himalayas. In 1828, Captain Lloyd, an army official, and J.W. Grant, the Commercial Resident, Maldah, under the instruction of the Governor General, arrived at Chongtung near Darjeeling and found the place ideal for the establishment of a sanatorium. Lloyd reported that the spot so identified as Dorje-ling “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 stone are still extant; also several stone tombs or chatyas of different forms, Karjees and Lamas.”⁶ In 1829, the EIC Board of Directors sent Captain J.D. Herbert, Deputy

² James Scot, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Delhi, 1990, the Concept has been used by Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, eds., *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, Delhi, 1991.

³ Nandini Bhattacharya, *Leisure, Economy and Colonial Urbanism: Darjeeling, 1835-1930*, in *Urban History*, No. 40, 2013, pp. 442-461, doi:10.1017/S0963926813000394.

⁴ Aniket Alam, *Becoming India, Western Himalayas under British Rule*, Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Ltd. Under the Foundation Books imprint, New Delhi, 2008, p. 305

⁵ Bhattacharya N, op.cit., p. 447

⁶ H.V Bayley, *Dorje-ling*, Calcutta, G.H. Huttman, Bengal Military, Orphan Press, 1838, p. 12

Surveyor General, to the site to explore possibilities for the establishment of a sanatorium for British Troops. Herbert described Dorje-ling as a place “completely clothed with forest from top to the bottom” and pleaded for the establishment of a sanatorium. Herbert reported, “twelve hundred able bodied Lepchas forming two thirds of the population of Sikkim, have been forced to fly from Darjeeling and its neighbourhood, owing to oppression of the Raja.”⁷

The British encounter with tropical environment gave rise interest in Darjeeling. The principal reason for seeking sanctuary in the Indian highlands was to escape from the heat of the plains. J.T.Pearson, an Army Surgeon, who arrived in Darjeeling in 1839, informs “there is an elasticity of the air in these mountains, and freshness..., exercise gives all the pleasant glow of an English walk on a frosty morning.”⁸The tropical plains had divested the English constitution of its natural self. The mountains were posited to restore it. The temperate climate, and the familiarizing and domesticating of the mountains and dense forests rendered the British engaged in India, similar to British landscapes and to the Alps, an availability of leisure pursuits added to the appeal of the Darjeeling sanatoria. Brian Hodgson, formerly the British Resident at Kathmandu, and a polymath on eastern Himalayas, who spent a considerable number of retired years at “Brianstone”, Jalapahar, Darjeeling, wrote, “The fearful epidemics of the plains seldom penetrate the Himalayas, which, moreover, seem to have a positive exemption from epidemic diseases. For forty years cholera has ravaged the plains continually...But in all that period Nepal has been visited only twice and Darjeeling scarcely at all.”⁹ Hodgson’s view validated the need for high altitude sanatorium town for the British in India. Hooker endorsed the rejuvenating qualities of Darjeeling for Europeans.¹⁰ The British health authorities, however, were not able to proclaim the highlands fully free from the so called diseases of the tropics.¹¹

To put the argument differently, the nostalgic sense of loss of European vision of Nature and natural beauty of the landscape came to be identified with the beauty of Nature of Darjeeling hills which was marked as an insulated colonial retreat both for the Europeans and civic personnel engaged in East India Company affairs with Calcutta at its Headquarters. However, with the passage of building Darjeeling with its administrative and commercial possibilities, the British sense of making European landscape were gradually intruded upon by the neighbouring natives settled widely in and around Darjeeling. Thus, the political control and extension of the geopolitical boundary had been the primary principal concern of the British ruler keeping aside the issue of Nature. The British wanted to control and to have direct access to trans-Himalayan trade for extracting profit and for establishment of strategic control over trans-Himalayan border by making Darjeeling a buffer zone.¹²

Before the beginning of colonial conquest, there had been a process of nascent society-state formation in Darjeeling Himalayas viewed in terms of small scattered settlements of native Lepcha population, more specifically culturally distinct Tibeto-Burman language speaking population of Mongolian racial stock, principally out of Hindu religious and cultural fold.¹³ These people practiced shifting cultivation, herding and a small portion was directly or indirectly occupied with trans-Himalayan trade. Originally belonging to Sikkim, Darjeeling tract was conquered by Nepal and was kept under Nepali occupation till 1816. However, whatever small in number the population of Mongolian racial stock available in Darjeeling were associated culturally and religiously with the Buddhist Monastic principality of Sikkim. The Buddhist ruling institution of Sikkim had received back the Darjeeling hill tract from the British soon after the defeat of Nepal in the Anglo-Gorkha War. The Raja of Sikkim derived allegiance of this non-Hindu Population living in Darjeeling tract and extracted revenues largely from yielded agricultural produce or physical labour.¹⁴ Land in Sikkim including land of Darjeeling tract was not defined but was attached to monastic estate control and down-level management was vested with Kat zees.¹⁵ Such an attachment provided the basis for political consolidation.

⁷ Waddell .L. Austine, *Among The Himalayas*, Constable Press, London, 1899,p.21

⁸ Bhattacharya, N ,op.cit, P. 33)

⁹ David M.Waterhouse, *The Origins of Himalayan Studies, Brian Houghton Hodgson in Nepal and Darjeeling, 1820-1858*, Routledge Curzon, London,First Indian Reprint, 2005,p.217

¹⁰ Joseph Dalton Hooker, *Himalayan Journals: Notes of a Naturalist in Bengal, The Sikkim and Nepal Himalayas*,1854 p.9

¹¹ C.A.Bayly ,*Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India,1780-1870* ,Cambridge University Press,1997,p.36

¹² Atis Dasgupta, *Ethnic Problems and Movements For Autonomy in Darjeeling* in *Social Scientist*,Vol-27, No.11/12, Nov-Dec,1999,pp.47-68

¹³ Richard English, *Himalayan State Formation and the Impact of British Rule in the Nineteenth Century* in *Mountain Research and Development*, Vol.5, No.1, Feb. 1985, pp.61-78), Stable URL; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3673223>, accessed: 04.06.14, 01.55

¹⁴ Ibid, p.62

¹⁵ Hope, Namgyal, *The Sikkimese Theory of Land Holding & the Darjeeling Grant* in *Bulletin of Tibetology*,3,November, 2, 1966, p.56

Col. Lloyd informs us, “Lepchas are migratory in their habits and quit the spot they have been cultivating at the expiration of the third year and take up a new location, often many miles from their former one on fresh land where they clear the forest and jungle and remain for three years after which they consider the soil exhausted and remove again to a third place. The institutions of the country are feudal, and the people belong to the same one or other chief or lama, or to the Rajah. To whomever they belong or are attached, they pay whatever revenue they have to pay, and do feudal services. In fact, the people are taxed and not the land, and each family is subservient to its own feudal chief, and no other but under him; to the Rajah the revenue they pay is a mere nominal one, generally in kind, as a man’s load or two of paddy, and fermented murva for making shiab. Sometimes it is in money to about the value of eight annas per family, but the chief imposition is the necessity of giving personal services in whatever way the chief requires.”¹⁶

From British historiography on early colonial phase of Darjeeling, it has been assumed that in pre-colonial Darjeeling, there were two centers of political authority. Whatever little might be the number of native Lepcha population inhabiting in Darjeeling tract, the population were associated with two kinds of political authority—the Sikkim Rajah and the clan deity, while the latter ruled over population belonging to clan or clans, living in different parts of the territory, the former had control over territory. There was no direct rule of the Rajah of Sikkim over the population inhabiting in Darjeeling tract but rather one which was mediated through the relation between his patron God and the clan deity, was a clear reflection of the vulnerability of the state and its institution in pre-colonial Darjeeling. The nature of the revenue and labour demands on the peasantry were made by the deity and the Sikkim state. Land belonged to the commons and there was no personal propriety hold over land. Thus, this was not based on the peasant’s ownership of land or even on his ability to produce and harness various use values, but was based on his belongings to the clan which had certain obligations towards its protectors and patron, the clan deity, and towards the overlord of his deity. It was for this reason the Sikkim Rajas like other Himalayan Kings were always either personifications of some divinity or its regent on earth designating the nature of rule as “divine kingship.”¹⁷

Owing to very low level technology of primitive conventional mode used in shifting cultivation, the low amount of yielded production was not even equal to the necessities of the communities informing that there were only very little that could be appropriated by the Sikkim Raja or clan deity. There were two principal forms of appropriating the surplus produced – in kind and through labour. Begar or labour service, was an integral part of the demand on the peasant family by the Sikkim state and the local deity. There were basically two types of “Begar” that are classified in British records. The first was called ‘athwara’ beggar used for portage, including carrying the revenue collected in kind to the ruler’s household or the store of the deity, meaning the choukis along travel routes and defending the resources of the ruler or deity, providing labour, food and other requirements for officials of the state and the deity, and service in the household of the ruler or the temple of the deity. The second form is called ‘hela begar’. This was the demand made on the subjects on specific occasions like birth, marriage, death, and festivals in the ruling family, or some special ceremony of the deity. This consolidation included labour, goods, and cash.¹⁸

Darjeeling had remained as a military garrison of the Gorkhals as well as also the direct recruitment centre of the Gorkha Brigade of the British Indian Army before Darjeeling tract was restored to the Chogyal (Raja) of Sikkim from Nepali’s occupation at the end of Anglo-Gorkha War in 1816. Darjeeling tract including hills, Terai and Doars parts were brought under direct colonial control through three distinct phases. The first phase of colonial occupation of Darjeeling was thus initiated during February 1835,¹⁹ when Col. Lloyd was directed by the Governor General to negotiate with the Rajah of Sikkim to have Darjeeling, a place of land as grant for the establishment of a sanatorium. Col. Lloyd was empowered by the East India Company to work in three capacities, firstly, as the Government Agent-in-charge of relations with the Rajah of Sikkim; secondly, as in-charge of the establishment of a sanatorium or hill station of Darjeeling, and thirdly, as the in-charge for the construction of Darjeeling road.²⁰ As a mark of respect to British ruler and on receipt of a proposal for establishing a sanitarium and to create a permanent cantonment for the British regiment by a Deed of Grant, the Chogyal of Sikkim ceded to the British rulers a portion of Sikkim hills which covered the areas south of the Great Rangit river, east of the Balasun, Kahel and Little Rangit rivers and West of the Rangnu and Mahanadi rivers.²¹

¹⁶ Fred Pinn, *The Road of Destiny, Darjeeling Letters, 1839*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1986, pp.14-15

¹⁷ A. Alam op cit, p.71

¹⁸ Ibid, p.77)

¹⁹ A. Dasgupta, op cit, p.47

²⁰ F.Pinn, op cit, p.12

²¹ E.C.Dozey, *A Concise History of Darjeeling District Since 1835*, Jetsun Publishing House, Calcutta, 1922, reprinted version 1989, p.81

The second phase was resulted in the annexation of Sikkim's 'Morang' or Terai at the foot-hills and a portion of Sikkim's mid-land hills which was bounded by the Rammam river on the north, by the Rangit and Tista rivers on the east, and by the frontier of Nepal on the West. It is to be noted that this portion of Darjeeling hills and terai originally belonged to Sikkim but was conquered by Nepal during 1788 and was under possession of Nepal. Only in 1816, this tract was ceded to EIC by the Treaty of Sagauli (1816) following the defeat of Nepal in Anglo-Gorkha War. However, the East India Company returned this tract back to its original beholder that is the Raja of Sikkim by the Treaty of Titaliya (1917). Ultimately, however, this territory was occupied by the British by a war with Sikkim followed by the Treaty of Tunlong (1861).²²

The third phase of colonial occupation of Darjeeling was marked by the annexation of Kalimpong hills and Doars, a natural forested and agricultural and mercy land space which originally belonged to Sikkim but wrested by Bhutan excepting a small tract still belonged to Sikkim. By virtue of the Treaty of Sinchulia (1865) concluded immediately after Anglo-Bhutan War, the Kalimpong Tract both hills and doars was brought under British rule. This tract of land situated to the east of the Tista river, the west of the Ne-Chu and De-Chu rivers and the south of Sikkim. After all these three phases of occupation the British occupied Darjeeling constituted a total land-mass of 1164 sq. miles²³.

Till Darjeeling tract was brought under colonial control, the pre-colonial Darjeeling was thus a forested landscape of differentiated mountain ridges, grasslands, wastelands, mercy lands and pastures of low, medium and high ridge mountains and terai lands of undulated nature. As Jhoom or shifting cultivation was the mode of agricultural produce, there was infact no defined agricultural land and system of land tenure. The indigenous people were continued to be governed by their customary rules, rituals and practices. These people lived in and lived with nature. In fact, the notion of land of the indigenous people was intrinsically linked with Nature. To them, land was not a commodity but a gift of nature and was a natural property of the commons. Since this forested tract was never measured and defined, there was no personal proprietary hold over this entire forested land.

Immediately after the cession of Darjeeling, the British ruler established unquestionable supremacy over the entire Darjeeling tract. Col. Lloyd issue a Proclamation on October 12, 1838, which reads, "the people settled on the Darjeeling tract were now subjects of the Company and the laws of Sikkim would not apply to them".²⁴With the declaration of such Proclamation, Lloyd imposed revenues on the native Lepchas. However, the intention of the East India Company was markedly different. Instruction was issued to Lloyd by His Honour in Council which stated clearly, "Your purpose of it was intended merely to fix the term on which settlers of native tribes should be permitted to locate would have been sufficiently answered by a notice addressed to such persons in a different form requiring them, when desirous of settling, to state their intention and obtain from you an order for permission of the lands selected by them. The terms on which locations ought to be assigned to settlers of this description must depend upon the purposes for which they come to settle as well as upon the localities selected by them."²⁵ Certain points crop up from the Instruction of the Company Government, for example, the Government did not appreciate the hasty imposition of revenue and such unilateral action of Col. Lloyd. Since there was no land map or no land settlement in pre-colonial Darjeeling, the East India Company's Agent was given the authority to allow people to settle with an affirmation of the Agent only. The Proclamation of Col. Lloyd did thus remain non-ratified. Lloyd could no longer remain in the good book of the Company Government due to complaints against him from various corners. After Lloyd had initially organized the labour for building the road to Darjeeling and to organize market in Darjeeling, he was replaced by Surgeon Major, Dr. Arthur Cambell, formerly and Assistant Resident in Nepal. Dr. Cambell was vested with the civil charge of Darjeeling as Superintendent and was empowered with wide ranging fiscal, civil and judicial powers for the expansion of Darjeeling.²⁶Dr. Cambell remained in office for a long twenty two years at a stretch. The efforts of Cambell made Darjeeling a station fit for leisure seeking Europeans and an important trading centre and tea producing zone.

In pre-colonial setting, the Darjeeling tract was neither pre-defined as Zamindari Khas or self-cultivated holdings nor was put under Raiyati (occupancy of the cultivating tenants). Moreover, there had been the absence of Jungle Zamindars. For Darjeeling, the system of land holding under Permanent Settlement Act, 1793 or under Bengal Tenancy Act 1885 had always remained as misnomers. The proprietary right over land and forest was a concept traditionally alien to the indigenous people of Darjeeling. People were only obliged to give a share of their labour or the result of his labour to the Raja of Sikkim. This system of paying the state

²² Ibid,p.79

²³ Ibid,p.79

²⁴ Bayley, op cit, pp.21-22

²⁵ Consultations, Fort William, 16th January,1839, No. 61 (r/195/Vol.7) cited in Fred Pinn, op cit,p.16

²⁶ Bhattacharya Nandini, op cit,p.21

through labour was prevalent in all the Himalayan principalities till nineteenth century.²⁷ The material linkage of life of the indigenous people with Nature came under strain with the advent of colonialism in Darjeeling hills. The application of colonial knowledge of science and administration based on utilitarian philosophy initiated the process of transformation of human-nature relations in Darjeeling hills. Immediately after the occupation, the entire Darjeeling tract was brought under direct administrative control of the East India Company. The British established unquestionable propriety hold over the entire Darjeeling hills. Darjeeling was initially administered by following the tradition of 'non regulation scheme' in which local level officials were provided with huge executive discretionary powers to govern. Darjeeling was kept under the control of Bengal Presidency and was primarily administered by a Superintendent who was given huge executive discretionary powers within the broader legislative framework of Bengal province. The Superintendent was kept under the control of the Court of Directors being Governor General on the Chair.

From 'Bengal Hurkaru', it is known that most of the plots of the 'identified station', Darjeeling, were initially distributed by the EIC Government from Calcutta. The Company Government attracted the attention of the European officials, traders, hoteliers and indigenous elites, Rajas, Zamindars and aristocrats to purchase plots at a very low cost in the form of revenue by projecting the possibilities of Darjeeling as a health station. People of social and administrative rank and file started responding to the call. The grantees/ lessees of such plots formed Darjeeling Association Committee. To put differently, the members of such Committee were the principal stake holders of Darjeeling station. The Editor of 'Hurkaru', Samuel Smith was the grantee of two plots of land at Darjeeling; Prince Dwarkanath Tagore had been the lessee of location no. 11 along with Darjeeling station's main street.²⁸ Major E.Grastin, the Chief Executive Engineer of the Lower Provinces was the lessee of two locations of Darjeeling²⁹, From the sketch plan of Darjeeling drawn in 1840, it is shown that out of forty five identified locations forty three plots were granted to thirty two number of grantees. Col. Lloyd, Grastin, Martin and Sam Smith owned two plots each. Dr. Pearson had three plots and Mr. Hepper four. Twenty eight plots of Lebong, the northern extension of Darjeeling were provided to Mr. Hepper and one Mr. Martin. Most of the grantees and lessees of Darjeeling plots were interested in speculation and gamble with the plots.³⁰

In his Report, usually called Grastin Report, submitted to H.M.Low, Esq., Secretary to the Darjeeling Committee, Major Grastin stated, inter alia , "...all such ground as may be required for public purposes be at once resumed and set apart, and that to prevent future disputes a committee be formed to mark out all the allotments and to see that their boundaries are clearly defined, and to settle the ground rent to be paid for the same."³¹ Mr. Low forwarded the Grastin Report in its entirety with his observations. The response of the Government was positive as was discerned from its subsequent actions. Two of first applications for grants of land to reach Dr. Cambell, the newly appointed officer in civil charge, Darjeeling, came from H.M.Low and Col. Lloyd. The Officer in civil charge sent those applications to the Government for consideration. In reply to Col. Lloyd's application asking for a land of more than one square mile at Kurseong, the Secretary of the Political Department wrote, "... I am desired to state that the President-in-Council declines to interfere with the discretion necessarily vested in the Officer in Civil Charge of Darjeeling with respect to the admission of claims to particular localities, and likewise in respect to the extent of land which a single individual is to be allowed to occupy on any spot favorable to the erection of houses, for farming or garden purposes. This Officer has been called upon to frame and submit for the approval of the Government a detailed set of rules applicable to grants of all description and you will be entitled to the full benefit of them, but His Honor-in-Council declines to make any pledges as anticipated as to hold out to you the hope of many more than will be offered to all"³²

From the above Communication, it transpires that Lloyd's hope of getting a square mile land at Kurseong was not realized. The Government was sincere to establish a civic system in granting lands through a set of rules. Dr. Cambell was authorized to frame such rules and to work upon it with the approval and authority of the Government. Accordingly, on 1st August 1839, Dr. Cambell sent his draft rules for regulating the assignment of building locations and grants of lands in the hill tract of Darjeeling for the consideration of Government. The draft was sent by the Government to Darjeeling Association Committee, with negligible amendment, the Committee sent back the draft to the Government expressly showing its satisfaction. The Government approved the draft rules and issued Notification duly signed by H.T.Prinsep, the Secretary, Political Department, dtd., 4th September 1839 and the Rules came into force from the date of issuance of the Notification.³³

²⁷ H.Namgyal, op cit, p. 59

²⁸ Fred Pinn, op cit, p. 27

²⁹ Ibid, p.37

³⁰ Ibid, p.180

³¹ Ibid, pp.37-62

³² 24th July-Consultations, Fort William, 24 July, 1839, No. 114 cited in Fred Pinn, Ibid, p.182

³³ Ibid, p.207

For the first time in the land settlement history of Darjeeling, Rules for Regulating the Assignment of Building Locations and Grants of Lands in the Hill Tracts were put in place. By virtue of the above promulgation, Dr. Cambell was provided with huge revenue power and police and magisterial authority to settle any dispute on land. In order to maintain a status quo the said Rules expressly stated that “it will not apply to ancient Residents and parties in possession at the time when the territory of Darjeeling was made over by the Rajah of Sikkim.”³⁴To elaborate the rule further, the Officer on Civil Charge was vested with huge authority in assigning/ granting lands on the basis of revenue defined and fixed by the Rule. Thus the principal source of Nature—the land resources were administered, preserved, reserved, distributed, granted and leased out by the British sense of justice as codified through the rules ignoring naturally customized traditional methods and practices followed through centuries in the eastern Himalayan principalities.

It is to be noted that the nature of administrative governance experienced several changes throughout the colonial period on the premise that the British ruler had an objective mind to administer Darjeeling differently from the general administration of British Indian Plains. Darjeeling was a part of the non-regulation areas since British occupation till 1861. It was kept under the direct responsibility of the Governor General in regard to legislation from 1870 to 1874. After this, it brought within the purview of the Laws Local Extent Act 1874 known as the Scheduled Districts Act. It was a Scheduled District from 1874 to 1919. Darjeeling was designated as a backward tract by the Government of India Act 1919 and remained so till 1935. Darjeeling remained as a partially Excluded Area from 1935 to the end of the British rule.³⁵

Lord William Bentinck, Governor General of India, proposed in his famous Minutes to the Court on the East India Company in 1833, that a committee should be formed to investigate the possibility of growing tea in India. Bentinck informs, immediately after his appointment to India, one John Walker had made his acquaintance and given his considered views regarding the possibility of tea culture in the Nepal hills.³⁶ Although without being a botanist, Hodgson, the Resident of Nepal, introduced tea cultivation into the Himalayas, establishing a plot in the Residency garden using seeds obtained from China by Kashmiri merchants.³⁷ Later on Dr. Cambell, formerly, Assistant Resident of Nepal, who was given the civil charge of Darjeeling as the first Superintendent in 1839, repeated the experiment at Darjeeling, which led to the establishment of commercial tea estates initially at Lebung area adjacent to northern part of Darjeeling. In 1841, there was successful cultivation of tea plant in Darjeeling at an altitude of 213.36 metres, from the seeds of a Chinese variety (*Camellia sinensis*), brought from Kumaon. Out of the other early planters in Darjeeling were Dr. Whitecombe, a civil surgeon, and Major Crommelin, a civil engineer. It was established that land around Lebung, a little below Darjeeling was particularly suitable. By the mid of 1940's, Pankhabari and Kurseong gardens were developed by pioneers like Martin and Captain Samler. In fact, Samler founded Makaibari garden at Pankhabari- Kurseong road. By the 1850's, the commercial potential of Darjeeling was proved beyond doubt and several other gardens were established.

The uniqueness of the process of commercialization of tea in Darjeeling was that all the tea gardens were promoted either on the basis of proprietorship or as joint stock companies. The colonial Government offered land on favourable terms to entrepreneurs of European origin. In 1856, the Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company opened the Alubari garden. Captain Samler was principal pillar planter of the Company. This Company further established Ging, Ambotia, Takdah and Phoobsering tea gardens between 1860 and 1864. The Dhutana garden owned by Dr. Brougham was opened in 1859. During the early 1860's, several reputed companies like Darjeeling Tea Company and the Lebung Tea Company, opened a number of gardens at Badamtam and Takdah. In 1862, James White, the owner of Singel tea garden, opened the first garden in the Terai at a place called Champta. The New Champta Tea Garden was established in 1883. By 1880's, tea in Darjeeling had proved to be a profitable venture and there were 113 tea gardens. By 1905, tea was grown in 148 gardens covering an area of 20,000 hectares—nearly 80 square miles.³⁸

The basic ownership structure of the tea industry was of two types—(i) the typical unit was a sterling company registered in U.K. having plantations in India; (ii) the plantation company registered under the Indian companies Act with Indian rupee capital. The overwhelming majority of stake holders of both these companies were British nationals.³⁹ Most of the tea gardens of Darjeeling were under European ownership. Till 1901, there developed 71 tea gardens within Darjeeling police station. In fact one seventh of the total area of Darjeeling

³⁴ Ibid, p.207

³⁵ D.B. Gurung, '*Darjeeling District: Struggle for Administrative Status*', in the compiled volume, eds., Pradhan Rukeshmani, "*Continuous Political Struggle for a separate Constitutional Status of Ceded Land of Darjeeling and Leasehold Land of Kalimpong*", Mahakali Press and Publication, Darjeeling, 1996, p.310

³⁶ P.Goradia and K. Sircar, *The Saga of Indian Tea*, Vol.1, Contemporary Targett Pvt. Ltd., Vadodara, 2010, p.630

³⁷ Waterhouse, op cit, p.7

³⁸ Goradia and Sircar, op cit, pp. 57-59

³⁹ Ibid, p.653

district was covered with tea and no less than one third of the population lived off the tea industry. The Census of 1901 recorded that 64000 persons were engaged as tea plantation workers. Being backed by colonial capital whether Pound/ Sterling or Indian Rupee, the tea plantation industry was essentially labour intensive which required considerable number of labour. In quest of subsistence, poor, retarded, destitute, low caste people of the Hindu hierarchical caste structure belonging to eastern part of Nepal, began to immigrate, and settled in Darjeeling tea gardens and surrounding areas. Besides the major demands for labour came from tea gardens, the ancillary economic activities in Darjeeling created a demand for immigrants who took part in agriculture, orchards, forestry, live stock, construction, mining, trading and such other various service based activities connected with the growth process of Darjeeling as an urban centre , tourist and trading centre. Another factor which accelerated the process of Nepali migration to Darjeeling was the opportunity to get entry in Indian army through the recruitment centers situated in Darjeeling hills.⁴⁰

The British official records suggest that in 1863, the sappers and miners stationed at Darjeeling were composed almost entirely of the migrant Nepalis. The Census data, 1881, recorded that out of 1,55,179 of the total population of Darjeeling District, 88,000 people were recorded to have been born in Nepal. The same Census recorded that the total number of Nepal born population in India was 2,23,314. This huge influx of population brought fundamental changes in the demographic profile of Darjeeling. In fact, the Nepali settlers ultimately outnumbered all natives and other exogenous people settled in Darjeeling. By 1941, the population figures of the Europeans, Bengalis, Non- Nepali and Non- Bengali speaking people coming from the plains did not constitute more than 5.10 per cent of the total population of Darjeeling District, while 86. 80 per cent of the populations were Nepali speaking. The other hill men constituting of indigenous tribes formed the rest 8.10 per cent.⁴¹

With the expansion of tea gardens in Darjeeling hills, the natural forest wealth had been subjected to virtual plunder. A considerable portion of forest land was alienated by government for tea plantation. The growing pressure of population had a direct bearing on nature. Forest wood was largely used as fuel both for tea factories and for house hold purposes. The primary purpose of house building materials was served by forest wood. Interestingly to note here that at the initial three decades of colonial expansion, natural forests were considered as an obstruction to development. In fact, scientific forestry or concern for preservation of nature came at a later stage. Such concern for Nature in the form of forest policy/Acts and rules for protection of flora/fauna and such other natural resources became operational since the mid sixties of the nineteenth century.

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. 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 greater 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.⁴² Thus, the major influences of British rule – land settlement, roads construction forest settlement and tea plantation settlement, governance structure were firmly 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.

To conclude, the study has attempted to inquire preliminarily, how human led 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. The whole course of materially ridden human development processes in Darjeeling hills, invited irreconcilable balance in the Human-Nature relations validating thereby the ecological concerns such as climatic change, soil erosion, innumerable landslides, drying natural springs, devastating floods in the foot-hills and the plains, irregular rain fall and such other related issues. In aggregate, the sustainability of this ecologically fragile zone

⁴⁰ A. Dasgupta, op cit, p. 51

⁴¹R. English, op cit, p.67

⁴²Ibid,p.62

has been called in question, the answer to which is rooted not in its being but by its becoming. The contending arguments of ‘mode of production’, central to materialist historiography, or ‘modes of resource use’, central to nostalgic nationalist historiography, or ‘continuity and change’, central to post-colonial critical scholarship, while applied to Darjeeling, remain harder to sustain. For Darjeeling, the saga is uniquely different and to be academically treated differently. Darjeeling witnessed sharp transformations in agrarian relations with noticeable and if not irreversible changes in attendant relations between forest forms, and demographic settlements and fundamentally altered patterns of land use and politico-economic control. To adumbrate, any attempt to understand the colonially evolved political economy of Human-Nature relationships of Darjeeling hills lies neither in the material determinism nor in the colonial palimpsest, but in the linear processual perspective of history of this region of distinction.

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Tahiti Sarkar." Transformed Human- Nature Relations: A Saga of Darjeeling under Early Colonial Dispensation.”. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention(IJHSSI)*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2018, pp. 14-22.