
Urban Centres and Tea Gardens in Darjeeling: History, Development and Challenges

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Abstract: Since its inception Darjeeling as a hill station and a hub of tea gardens progress tremendously under the colonial government. The main Darjeeling town was plan to accommodate about ten thousand population of that time. These colonial urban structures and infrastructures are proving insufficient and incapable to accommodate the growing population of the place in post-colonial period. The most of the towns and semi urban places of Darjeeling hills are surrounded by reserve forests and tea gardens. In such environment and circumstance a new town planning is a huge challenge in this region.

Keywords: Darjeeling, Indian Medical Service, Rangit River, Tea Gardens, Town Planning.

Date of Submission: 05-09-2023

Date of Acceptance: 11-10-2023

Introduction

It was on 1st February 1835 the King of Sikkim officially handed a strip of hill territory through Grant of Deeds that included all the south of Great Rangit river, east of Balasan, Kahali and Little Rangit rivers and West of Rungpo and Mahanadi rivers, that was Darjeeling hills, as a mark of friendship to Governor General Lord William Bentinck for the establishment of sanatorium, with the view to enabling the British servants avail the healthy weather of the place. In return the King received the allowance of Rs 3000 as compensation and this was raised to Rs 6000 per annum in 1946 (O'Malley, 1907). Kalimpong which was part of Bhutan was annexed by British and included in within Darjeeling administration in 1866.

After the cession, the region started developing in its various forms. In 1839, Dr. Arthur P. Campbell, a member of the Indian Medical Service and the British resident of the court of Nepal was appointed as the first Superintendent of Darjeeling. He turned the area into an excellent sanatorium with his effort and also improved the communication system. By 1940 road was constructed from Pankhabari, hotels for the tourists were started in Kurseong and Darjeeling, European houses, bazaar, jail and accommodation for

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sick were built by 1850. Darjeeling Municipality was established on 1850 (Hunter, 1916). Further road connecting Siliguri with the Grant Trunk Road measuring 126 miles starting from Karagola Ghat opposite Sahibgunge on the East Indian Railway were completed in 1866 (Dash, 1947). At the same time the opening of railway in 1881 brought an important addition to the road communication system in Darjeeling. In 1841 Dr. Campbell started the experimental growth of tea plant which was also followed by the establishment of tea plantation industry on a commercial basis within the due course of time and the this place became the hub of tea industry.

Objectives of the study

This small introspection is intending to discuss the problems and challenges the Darjeeling as a small urban area is undergoing and the role of tea gardens around Darjeeling sub-division in fostering other sub-urban centres. How the small towns around some tea gardens developed and what are their future prospective are some serious questions this paper will try to discuss.

Development of Tea Gardens in Darjeeling

Tea is considered a typical British drink, but the fact is that tea history dates back to ancient China, almost 5,000 years ago. In early 1823, explorers had discovered indigenous tea plants growing in Assam. Northern India became a promising location for tea cultivation because of its high altitude and climate. Before, Indians became experts on growing tea plants but lacked the knowledge of tea processing. Credit goes to Robert Fortune, a Scottish botanist, for spying on China's ancient sacred tea processing techniques and returning to India with knowledge, equipment, and a small team of experienced Chinese growers (Tea emporium, 2023).

Due to its climate and topography Darjeeling seemed the ideal place to experiment with tea cultivation. So after acquiring the tract of land in Darjeeling the effort to grow tea locally was spearheaded by Dr. Campbell, newly appointed Superintendent of the District who also happened to be an avid horticulturist. In 1841 he planted tea bushes in his garden in Beechwood in Darjeeling that had been cultivated from seeds brought by Fortune from China. The results were so good that just six years later, in 1847 the first tea nursery, the plants from which were used to set up the first tea garden (O'Malley, 1907). According to records, the first commercial tea gardens planted out by the British interests were Tukvar, Steinthal and Aloobari tea estates. This was 1852 and all the tea estates used seeds that were raised in government nurseries.

By 1866 Darjeeling already had 39 tea plantations of 1000 acres producing 133,000 lbs of tea. The growth was rapid. In the next ten years the number of gardens tripled, the acreage increased by 80 per cent, while production increased tenfold. It appears that in 1866, Darjeeling had 39 gardens producing a total crop of 21000 kilograms of tea. In 1870, the number of gardens increased to 56, producing about 71000 kilograms of tea harvested from 4400 hectares. During 1860-1864, the Darjeeling company was established with 4 new gardens. By 1905 there were 79 gardens in Darjeeling and Darjeeling tea was found to be a profitable venture. Today, Darjeeling produce the world's best aromatic teas. Presently Darjeeling has 86 tea gardens which produces about 10 million kgs of tea annually. Tea is grown in Darjeeling from a height of 100 mts. to 2000 mts (Dash, 1947)

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Tea Gardens and its population

Darjeeling was then a sparsely populated hamlet that was being used as a hill resort by the army and the affluent people. Tea, being a labour intensive enterprise, required sufficient number of people to plant, tend, pluck and finally manufacture their produce. For this employment was offered to the local people of Darjeeling and people across the border of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan etc. The British encourage the immigrant workers for the development of the place for cultivation, tea plantation, construction of roads and buildings. As a result, the immigrant population started growing rapidly in Darjeeling. While immigration to Darjeeling took place from all neighbouring places, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim (Hunter, 2017). The population of Darjeeling district according to 2011 Census is 1, 846, 823. Darjeeling urban agglomeration has a population of 132,016. Within Darjeeling Sub division there are altogether 46 tea gardens.

Population Chart of Tea Gardens under Darjeeling Subdivision (Blockwise)

1. Tea Gardens located under Darjeeling Pulbazar Development Block

Tea gardens	Households	Population
Alubari	27	116
Arya	293	1236
Banockburn	354	1725
Barnesbeg	315	1381
Bloomfield	640	2901
Chongtong	1340	5802
Lebong	521	2276
Liza Hill	356	1439
pandam	932	3959
Phubsering	690	3208
Puttabong	506	2347
Rishihat	407	1651
Singla	746	3400
Singtam	1289	5792
Tukvar	1043	4791
Total=16	Total=9459	Total=42024

Source: Government Census 2011

2. Tea Gardens located under Jorebunglow Sukhiapokhari Development Block

Tea Gardens	households	Population

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Chamu	527	232
Dhajea	351	1394
Dhotre	1166	5113
Kalej Valley	596	2640
Lingia	415	1841
Mangarjung	1224	5644
Marrybong	607	2404
Mim	402	1842
Moonda kothi	882	3972
Nagri Farm	810	3655
Balansom	559	2402
Pubong	450	2170
Pulung Dong	127	622
Pussingbong	651	2879
Ragaroong	320	1423
Ring Tong	183	820
Rongmook	1216	5150
Sangma	516	2229
Salu	155	677
Seyok	458	2207
Soobongs	509	2196
Tarzum	501	2232
Tumsong	374	1700
23 T.G	Total=12999	Total= 55444

Source: Government Census 2011

3. Tea Gardens located under Rangli Rangliot Development Block

Tea gardens	Households	Population
Gielie	776	3410
Lapchu	397	1809
peshok	910	4200
Rangli Rangliot	581	2347
Tukdah	777	3861
Total=5	Total=3441	Total=15627

Source: Government Census 2011

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Tea Gardens and adjacent Bazars in Darjeeling hills

There are small markets or bazaars for every cluster of tea estates that supply the basic needs of the people of tea gardens. The development of such markets started with the supply of basic or essential supplies to the people of the gardens but in course of time these markets developed as a main centre for commercial activities not only for those tea gardens for the entire area. Below is the list of towns and markets which are very much dependent on the nearby tea garden population for their business and vice versa.

Market/Bazar	List of Tea Gardens
Jorebunglow	Dhooteriah, Kalej Valley, Ragaroong
Sukia Pokhari Bazar	Tumsong, Mim, Marrybong, Pussinmb Pubong, Pulongdoong
Bijanbari/ Pulbazar	Liza hill, Lingia, Chontong, Marybong
Darjeeling main Town	Arya, Bloomfield, Badamtam, Bannockb Barnesbeg, Ging, Happy Valley, Tuk Pandam, Phoobshering, Puttabong, Rung Singtom, Soom, steinthal, Risheehat
Sonada	Rungmook/Cedars, Balasom, Mundakothi
Pokhrebong	Chamong, Dhajea, Nagri, Nagri Farm, Selimb Sungma, Turzum
6 Mile Bazar	Takdah, Lapchu, Peshok, Gielie, Rangli Rangli

In fact, these towns or bazaars are Census towns under Darjeeling sadar division at present or Block level markets. In the initial phase of the colonial establishment in Darjeeling and in their tea gardens there were no factories and proper godowns. Until 1859 there was no factory to process the tea from the Gardens. They were manually and incorrectly done. Finally, a botanist named Robert Fortune went to China and brought back several Chinese tea makers who imparted the knowledge of how to pluck the leaves selectively and then correctly process the tea. Gradually the demand started increasing and the need for mechanizing the tea processing was inevitable. In 1859, the first tea processing factory was established in Makaibari. Today there are 72 operational factories in Darjeeling districts. Such processing centres used to collect unprocessed tea leaves and the tea collection centres in many places led to the concentration of population and in course of time these places developed into a semi urban areas.

During the early days, the gardens were segregated by Seven valleys of Darjeeling district. A group of gardens would belong to a valley. And each valley had its own unique charm and picturesque settings. Still today some of these places in Darjeeling have been referred with such

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valley names like Kaleje Valley, Happy valley, Teesta valley etc. In course of time tea collection centres within a cluster of tea gardens or valley there developed a semi urban centres.

Factors that led to the development of markets around tea gardens:

- The requirement of basic goods of the people of tea gardens
- To sell surplus agricultural produce from surrounding villages in the tea collection centres
- Within tea gardens the business class were not allowed to enter so they settled in the nearby areas for the business.
- The distance of the main Darjeeling town was too far which necessitated the development of small haats and market around tea garden areas.
- Lack of proper transportation to main town

Development of Markets and Tea Gardens

The total area of Darjeeling Hills comes to 2417 sq. Kms of which about 40 per cent is estimated to be under forest, 40 per cent under khasmahal and municipalities, 2 per cent under Cinchona plantation and 18 per cent under tea plantation. Most of the tea gardens are located in Darjeeling and Kurseong subdivision. There are only 4 tea gardens in Kalimpong subdivision (now district). Historically, Plantation of Tea and Cinchona are the main sources of livelihood in the district Darjeeling. As per the guidelines of Census 2011, the workers engaged in the production of Plantation Crops like tea, Cinchona etc. are recorded as 'Other Worker' and thus, Other Workers constitute the main work force i.e. 76.8 percent of total workers of the district of Darjeeling(Census, 2011).

It was during such period that the above mentioned small urban centres developed as the tea leaf collection centre. For instance Jorebunglow, a small town near Ghoom railway station used to be a collection centre of tea leafs from Teesta valley, Takdah, Rangaroong, Dhotrre, Kalle valley etc. In course of time this place developed as a small bazar or market. Although there were other factors also which help in the emergence of this market like the famous temple of Tiger hill and sunrise view point, it is the cross roads for the way toward Sikkim, Kalimpong, and Siliguri etc. But still today the nearby tea gardens people are very much dependent on this market and vice versa. It is because of the growing urban nature of this place many infrastructural developments also taking place like today there is a Police Station there, a block level health centre, two government schools, one college, a veterinary hospital and few private schools.

Some serious challenges town/markets around tea gardens have been facing

- There is an urgent need to manage and accommodate the rapidly growing population in the main town (from ten thousand to more than one lakh)
- Need of some strong plan and policy to control the growing number of houses and buildings within the town most of which are unplanned (both in Darjeeling main town and towns around tea gardens).
- There are no new proper plans for drainage and sewerage for growing population in these towns and bazars which are creating several problems

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- The roads are narrowing due to the encroachment by public and also due to the incompetency of the concern authority.
- There are acute water crisis in almost all such towns. Since independence government has hardly taken any durable policy to settle this water problem.
- Sanitation problem is there due to growing population and congestion in these semi urban areas.
- No space for the expansion of town in future to reduce the congestion and to accommodate growing pollution. So only way to settle this problem is to negotiate with tea industry within the area.

The colonial town of Darjeeling were designed by the Colonial Government during the early 19th century for the population of 10,000 people of that period, but according to Census of India 2011 the population of Darjeeling town has now increased to 1,20, 414 people and 1,32,0168 when the population of Darjeeling urban agglomeration is included (Census, 2011).

In such circumstances the small markets around tea gardens playing more significant role as an alternative town in supplying the essential goods and commodities to the people of tea gardens and khasmahal areas. Gradually population has been increasing in these areas also and so the requirement of space for towns to expand also is an urgent need. The towns and markets around tea gardens were developed without proper town planning and the changes and development that are taking place are also without any proper plan. There is very less scope for these markets to expand in future due to the non-availability of land because these market areas are covered either by tea gardens land or by reserve forests. So these markets are land locked areas in one sense. With the growth of the population there is also require a proper infrastructural development, like proper roads, water supply, Health centres or hospitals, number of schools etc. which is not taking place at the moment. In some Block level markets some basic infrastructures have developed like Health Centres, Government Schools, Police Station or outpost, post office, vet nary hospitals etc. But even today for more major works and supplies people have to depend upon either to Darjeeling main town or Siliguri. The lack of such basic facilities is also one of the reasons of the migration of population from these areas to big towns.

Even Darjeeling town, itself is covered with tea gardens and reserve forests and because of its landscapes it is not possible to expand further the main town. Thus, in one sense we can say that the urbanization in Darjeeling is in its saturated point. Because of the non-availability of land and location, it will be very difficult to implement future government projects in both main towns and towns developed around tea gardens. With time population is growing and there will also increase the demand for essential goods and basic infrastructures. But in absence of adequate land, it will be impossible to meet the demand as the markets will remain insufficient to meet the requirement of the growing population.

After the British nationalized the East India Company it only ever leased the lands to tea garden owners on 30 year basis and maintained the practice of only permitting 40% to be used for tea crops with 40% being left natural and 20% for housing and facilities (Koehler, 2015). Following Indian independence in 1947, practices shifted as British began to sell their stakes in the gardens to Indians and the 1953 Tea Act put the tea industry under the regulatory jurisdiction

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of the Tea Board of India. After independence the enactment of Land Reform Laws modified possession of tea garden lands from freehold to a leasehold status. The Government of West Bengal owns the land on which the tea estates are located and administer 30 to 90 year leases under the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act to companies operating the estates. The West Bengal government is also involved in providing regulatory supervision of numerous aspects of estate operations, including land use and labour agreements. The Darjeeling Tea Association (affiliated with the Indian Tea Association) is the trade association that represents the tea estates and exporters in business and labour affairs. They jointly negotiate together with the various unions and the government regarding the problems of the workers. Thus these concern authorities and organisation must take adequate measures to this land issues. The West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC) framed the policy of allowing 15% land use inside tea gardens to develop tourism back in 2019 and the implementation of this policy will definitely have a major socio-economic impact the life of the tea garden people. Since the State government is the sole authority of the tea garden lands, thus the small towns and bazars of colonial period around tea gardens can be replanned and redeveloped to meet the needs of the growing population of those areas.

Conclusion

The colonial town of Darjeeling and town and markets around tea gardens have been witnessing the growth and development of only population and concrete buildings within the same area of land. As a result of it crowd, congestion, pollution, administrative difficulties, problems of sanitation and environmental problems are rampant in the towns and bazars. These small towns and markets are further supporting the floating increasing population in the form of tourists, students, visitor's wage earners etc. Such a spurt of population has led to immense pressure on the socio-economic life of the people of the area and made these towns more prone to environmental problems in the recent decades. Thus government and policy making bodies should think and come out with a permanent, futuristic and viable plan and policy to resolve this problem.

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