

## **Constructing Colonial Urban Space in the Darjeeling Himalayas: a Re-reading in History**

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***Abstract:** This article argues that, for the making of Darjeeling as a colonial urban space, considerations like racial distinctions, climatic value, and strategic importance received priorities. The principal concern was to facilitate the recuperation of European bodies from the heat and diseases of the plains. However, European residential sanctity was intruded upon in the late colonial Darjeeling. By then, the hill station of Darjeeling posited a unique form of colonial urbanism. The study reveals that Darjeeling formed an integral part of the colonial political economy. Once this was accomplished, the integration of its resources into the larger colonial economy sustained the expansion and consolidation of the town. Importantly, plant capitalism, that is the infusion of colonial capital in commercial tea plantation, that had incorporated Darjeeling into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalist world system, heralded large socio-economic and demographic transformations, resulting in ecological and landscape changes.*

***Key Words:** Colonial Urban Space, Recuperation of European Bodies, Colonial Political Economy, Plant Capitalism, Ecological and Landscape Changes.*

### **Introduction**

Studies on colonial hill stations in India evoke a nostalgic sense of loss and appear to look askance at contemporary violation of their idyllic beauty due to population increase and gradual overcrowding. Urban hill station Darjeeling, like such other hill stations, has been understood as a specific development in colonial social history. Primarily, it was viewed as an urban space for colonial leisure and recreation; it was a temperate place that represented socially, culturally, and architecturally, derivations of metropolitan and imperial symbols of leisure.<sup>1</sup>

While focusing on Darjeeling as a space of colonial urbanism, the primary purpose of this paper is to unravel two critical issues: a) the spatial segregation of Darjeeling between the native and European residential areas and how such European residential sanctity was intruded upon by affluent Indians in the late colonial period creating thereby, a continuous overlapping of urban spaces which was constantly negotiated<sup>2</sup> and b) the urban space of Darjeeling was integrated with the colonial political economy producing a unique form of colonial urbanism in which the resources of all sites were subject to the mode of colonial resource use leading ultimately capitalistic utilisation of natural resources.<sup>3</sup> The study has been divided into three sections to understand such issues following both descriptive and analytical methods.

### ***Conceptualising colonial urban hill space***

Researches on hill stations have shown how colonial hill stations in India evoke a nostalgic sense of loss due to an ongoing violation of their idyllic beauty through a rise in population and overcrowding as an inevitable urban phenomenon. Urban hill station Darjeeling like such other hill stations has been understood as a specific development of colonial social history. Dane Kennedy's exploration for the eventual 'despoiling' of the hill stations in the late colonial period is worthy to mention here. He argues that 'colonial sustenance required legions of subordinates and attracted the aspiring Indian elite, whose presence subverted their pristine quality dislodging the private public distinction between the cities in the plains and the hill stations in British India'.<sup>4</sup>

The expansion and growth of Darjeeling had experienced with a distinctive spatial dichotomy between the idyllic hills and the disease-ridden plains in official discourse and public culture. This dichotomy was not only occasioned by the accommodation of Indians in menial and clerical capacities within the municipal limits of the exclusive hill station but also was intrinsically linked with Darjeeling as a colonial urban space. The function of such urban space being not only to serve as a site of health care, leisure for the British and the Indian elites, but also to transform the surrounding newly colonized districts into commercial, revenue yielding settled economic sites. Once this was accomplished, the integration of its resource pull into the

larger colonial economy sustained the expansion and consolidation of the town.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, at the one end, the tropical mountain location, air and water of Darjeeling deluded Europeans; they looked similar to the Alps; on the other, the urbanized, lively, lucrative Darjeeling hill station attracted investments, labour and visitors. In the process, the segregation and social exclusivity were both violated and contested by the British residents as well by affluent Indians. The notion of colonial exclusivity could not be sustained and maintained owing to the introduction of plant capitalism in the form of huge investment of colonial capital in the expansion of tea plantations and corroborative settlement patterns of different sections of people connected with tea industry.

The process of urbanization under British rule was intrinsically linked with the colonial economic policy. Such process has been appropriately classified into three phases – the mercantilist (1757-1813) phase, free trade industrial capitalist (1813-1850) phase and financial imperialist (1850s onwards) phase.<sup>6</sup> As a matter of fact, the historical process of urbanisation in Darjeeling falls in between the last two periods of the colonial rule, wherein the colonial primary urbanization transformed ‘little tradition’ (as was existing in the name of indigenous/natural population and culture) into great traditions (as claimed by the colonial power of their own) expanding thereby

the normative zone for territorial integration by way of universalizing colonial cultural consciousness. More specifically, during colonial urbanization, there developed a hiatus of communication between the town and the country, living apart from each other. Urban influence did not filter much beyond its immediate environs into the areas of its administrative jurisdiction. It may thus be argued that Darjeeling was grown as a town of technical order and not of moral order.<sup>7</sup>

The process leading to monetized economy facilitated the social and economic integration of this urban space. Tea profit, timber extraction were other ways of bringing money to the Himalayan Darjeeling. Darjeeling was shaped by the specific characteristics of late 19<sup>th</sup> century British colonialism. Darjeeling expanded at a time when the British were far more concerned about immediate extraction of natural resources as well as land revenues and international trade; and Darjeeling was appropriately fit into their project.

In contemporary researches on urbanization and material transformations, the dialectic of space and time; the dual socio-economic processes have assumed a renewed significance.<sup>8</sup> Research studies have been conducted on the construction of the urban landscape by capitalism<sup>9</sup> that have helped to develop a thorough understanding of the urban system with distinct temporal, functional and spatial forms being integrally associated with the historical process of development of various modes of production.<sup>10</sup> During colonial

phase of Indian history, capital rebuilt space and reconstructed environment in its own image gave rise to a distinctively urban space for Darjeeling and its concomitant transformation. Central to the theme is the link between ideology and socio-spatial formations and the role of power in controlling such urban space. The colonial historiography suggests that ideology along with power went on to create patterns of domination and intensified class divisions and appropriated space. In the Marxist analysis, resistance is integral to such domination (read restructuring) which may also get shaped in distinct forms while in Foucauldian framework, resistance (read counter domination) is near absent as there can be no such effort without power.<sup>11</sup> Unquestionably, both colonial power and colonialism reflecting cultural coloniality had been largely represented in the urban landscape images of colonial Darjeeling.<sup>12</sup>

For colonial Darjeeling, urbanization was not the expression of a process of modernization but the manifestation of the level of socio-spatial relations, of the accentuation of the social contradictions inherent in the mode of development determined by a specific dependence within the monopolistic capitalist system<sup>13</sup> Marxists have viewed urbanization and corresponding urban settlement as instrument of capitalist domination, and which function as centres of power of the regional, national and international bourgeoisie.<sup>14</sup>

Referring R.H. Johnston, Professor S.K. Munshi <sup>15</sup> provided a three part model of urbanisation in the Eastern Himalayas. The first relates to upward quantitative demographic change, involving enhancement in the proportion of population living in urban areas in which migration is a stimulating factor behind urban growth. The second deals with the structural change in society resulting out of the development of capitalism in which towns grow as centers of production, distribution and exchange processes. The third connects with the psycho-behavioral urbanization, bringing in changes in attitudes in behavioural patterns and in values giving rise to a form of urbanism distinctly different from what a rural society holds.<sup>16</sup> In this three part model of urbanization, demographic changes are the dependent variable driven by material structural imperatives such as specified context of time period and the place or location. This three-part model while applied in Darjeeling seems highly relevant with the qualifiers that the identification of Darjeeling as a prospective location for the establishment of military installations, sanatoriums, leisure-spots, and health resorts had been essentially the decision of the imperial powers to create a socio-political space what they imagined to be identical with the European notion of nature.

However, with the creation of Darjeeling as a hill station and with its designation as the world's best quality tea production settlement, Darjeeling in the Eastern Himalayas became closely linked with the colonial urban

processes since mid-thirties of the nineteenth century and had become the most urbanized settlement located in the Eastern Himalayas.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the colonial period, tea, tourism, transportation, health resorts, missionary led English educational institutions grew in pace resulting in a distinctively colonial urban cultural space for Darjeeling. A study of colonial urbanisation and urban development in Darjeeling based on political economy approach aptly validates its unique history of colonial resource extraction, infusion of colonial capital in tea plantation industry, eco-imperialist positioning, depletion of forests for providing and extending urban infrastructural facilities at the one end and forest conservation at the other.<sup>18</sup>

### ***The making of colonial urban Darjeeling***

The East India Company (EIC), at its head quarters in Calcutta, had the desire to have a hill station nearer to Calcutta and Darjeeling was their ultimate choice despite initial hesitations amongst members of the EIC Board of Directors. Under the Instruction of the Governor General, in 1828, Captain G.A. Lloyd, and J.W. Grant, the Commercial resident at Malda arrived at the Dorje-ling site with adequate hardship and separately reported back to the company Authority on the merit of the site as an ideal location for a sanatorium town.<sup>19</sup> In 1829, the EIC Authority sent Capt. J.D. Herbert, Deputy Surveyor General to the site to explore possibilities for the establishment of a sanatorium for British troops.<sup>20</sup> On behalf of the East

India Company, in 1835, Lloyd had leased the Darjeeling tract from the king of Sikkim for an annual payment of Rs.3000.<sup>21</sup>

For the first five years Captain Lloyd, under the authority of EIC, had organised labour for building the road to Darjeeling, however the EIC replaced him with Surgeon Major A. Cambell, formerly, Assistant Resident in Nepal.<sup>22</sup> Cambell was vested with wide-ranging fiscal, civil and judicial powers and oversaw its expansion.<sup>23</sup> Darjeeling town was gradually established to provide a place of rejuvenation to British troops and civilians away from the heat and dust of the plains of Northern and Eastern parts of Gangetic plains.

Military or defense strategic functions formed a significant factor towards the development and growth of Darjeeling town. Darjeeling being located in a frontier zone, adjacent to Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, the EIC military officials had an anxiety of intrusion by the regional/local mountain rulers. The principal intention of the British to provide assistance to Sikkim in 1817 was to reduce the possibility of Nepal-Bhutan intrigues against the East India Company.<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that after 1835, no attempt was made by Gorkhas and so to speak no other ruler of the hills to intrude into the Darjeeling frontier, however, sense of anxiety did continue to prevail.<sup>25</sup>

By 1857, the prospect of Darjeeling as a centre for the recruitment of Gorkha soldiers attracted the attention of the Government. The initiative of E.

Drummond, Officiating Magistrate, Dinajpur is relevant to mention while in his letter of 10 Sept., 1857, he suggested to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal that “the Sebundie Corps at Darjeeling should be raised to the strength of ten full companies with British Officers...”<sup>26</sup> The importance of Darjeeling as a potentially vulnerable strategic location was also highlighted by A. Eden, Secretary to the Government of Bengal.<sup>27</sup>

In 1865 there was a proposal to construct a cantonment and barracks for European troops in Darjeeling. Beadon suggested that any patrol in Darjeeling would have to be nearer the frontier than Jalapahar. Senchal was considered advantageous as a military position. There were road linkages, accesses to the defence of all points likely to be attacked and good communications with the plains. The land belonged to the government, the climate was healthy and there was abundant space for building, exercise and recreation. Beadon felt, ‘...as a military position, it is on the whole as good as any other, if not the very best, in the hills, that it affords equal protection to Darjeeling as it stands...’<sup>28</sup>

The Commander-in-Chief recommended the proposal and the Governor General-in-Council considered the matter and directed the adoption of necessary measures for early and permanent construction of accommodation at Senchal for a wing of British Infantry and a Battery of Garrison Artillery. It was suggested that the Senchal barracks should be arranged so as to be

defensible in the event of a crisis so that a portion of the troops could move out for offensive operation.<sup>29</sup>

Newall wrote in 1873 that this Report of 1872 had pointed merely to a defence of the Town and Station of Darjeeling but as much valuable property was included within the district, he had thought it expedient to acquire knowledge of the frontiers where it was possible that an enemy might be met with advantage.<sup>30</sup> Newall<sup>31</sup> strongly advocated for the military colonization of the hills.<sup>32</sup> It is evident that Darjeeling occupied a very important strategic location in the British Indian defense perimeter.

In 1835, the original village of Darjeeling had scarcely 100 inhabitants. The population grew to over ten thousand in 1849. Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker visited Darjeeling in the middle of April 1848 and stated: 'At the former period there was no trade whatsoever, there is now a considerable one, in musk, salt, gold dust, borax, soda, woolen clothes and especially in ponies.'<sup>33</sup> He also reported that many thousands of natives flocked from all quarters to the fair established by Dr. Campbell at the foot of the hills, exercising a beneficial influence throughout the neighbouring territories<sup>34</sup>. Trade became a major form of economic activity in Darjeeling. W.B. Jackson of the Bengal Civil Service submitted an encouraging report on the trade between Darjeeling and Tibet, published in 1854.<sup>35</sup> Charles Bell (1928) also

mentioned that half the entire trade between Tibet and India had passed through this thriving town.

In the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dozey saw in the Darjeeling market a diverse ethnic mix: Marwaris (engaged in the money lending business), Kashmiris and Punjabis (dealers in silks, skins and furs), Nepalis (dealers in turquoise-ware, coral, amber, jade ornaments, kukris, knives and brass-ware), Parsis (dealers in Japanese silver-ware and oilmen's stores) as well as grocers from the plains and Bhutia pawn brokers and cheap jacks.<sup>36</sup>

On 20 May 1864, the Bengal Government wrote to the Superintendent of Darjeeling, pointing out that the Indo-Tibetan trade would be greatly promoted if a suitable place near Darjeeling was assigned to the Tibetan traders where they would find proper accommodation for themselves and their cattle during their stay and suggesting that land at the end of the Lebong spur was a good site. The Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling was instructed to facilitate the enlistment of a serai (inn) and bazaar on the Lebong spur and repair important communication links through Sikkim. The Bengal Government was also most interested in the potential of tea trade. The country beyond Sikkim was one of the greatest tea consuming countries in the district.<sup>37</sup>

After the formation of the Darjeeling district by 1866, the British government considered it a non-regulated district, not a regulated one. The

difference between regulated and non-regulated districts lay in the fact that in the case of the former all laws and regulations relating to land and land revenue were enforced while in the case of the latter, all such powers were in the hands of the executive. Subsequently, the terms ‘excluded’ and ‘scheduled’ area was also applied to the Darjeeling district.<sup>38</sup> In the midst of the process of eventualities taken place in Darjeeling keeping both of its spatial and functional specificities for the first fifteen year, the Municipality of Darjeeling was established in 1850.

Initially, the Municipal physical delimitations were interestingly co-extensive with those of the tract ceded in 1835 – the tract extended from the hills below Pankhabari to the borders of Sikkim to the North. The primary intention was to bring Darjeeling under a municipal cantonment model so as to provide fund for conservancy and police establishment in the station of Darjeeling and the maintenance of roadways. With the passage of twenty-five years following the establishment of Municipality, the municipal boundaries of Darjeeling were proposed to bring in a manageable size.<sup>39</sup> On 22 July 1873, the Chairman laid before the Meeting a minute of a meeting held by the Lieutenant Governor on 31 May 1873 and asked for the necessary compliance of the Direction of the Lt. Governor. Accordingly, the proposal was sent to the Government for rescheduling the boundary of Darjeeling municipality.<sup>40</sup>

In 1866, rates of lands were discussed and it was proposed and carried unanimously that the Municipality levy a tax estimated to cover the cost of Police and that for the present a tax of 3 percent of houses be levied from May 1867. It was also proposed and carried unanimously that a house tax should be levied on all houses within the Municipal limits whose estimated rental exceeded Rs.40/- a year. It was also proposed and carried that such portions of the Convent Buildings as were used for educational purposes should be assessed for house tax. In 1879, it was resolved that the annual value of a house should be held to be the highest rent paid for it by the owner or occupier during the year except as provided in section 99 of the Municipal Act. In 1881, the proceedings of the Assessment Committee were brought up and it was resolved that the committee be requested to suggest certain rates of rent, which might apply to houses at different elevations along the hillside and to different kinds of houses. It was pointed out that it would tend to encourage the building of substantial houses, to give the builders such favourable terms for Ground Rent.

Attempts were made to delineate 'status' of neighborhoods. In 1883, the report of the Assessment Sub-committee and their recommendation to raise the rates of rent for land within certain boundaries were read. It was proposed by the Chairman that the Sub-committee's recommendation of a rate not lower than one rupee per month should apply to all leases issued for

occupation within the next financial year within the following boundaries: East Auckland Road, West Victoria Road, North Hospital Jhora, South the Beechwood property, and the Jhora, skirting it on the north.<sup>41</sup>

In 1907, the area of Darjeeling Municipal town was 12.5 square kilometers. It began at Jorebunglow to the south and extended to a point on the road to Tukvar below St. Joseph's College to the north. It was bounded by the Calcutta Road and some land below it to the east. The boundary line ran past and below the Chaurasta and Bhotia Basti until it joined the boundary below St. Joseph's College. It was bounded by the Cart Road and land below it to the west and the boundary line continued past and below the bazaar through the Happy Valley Tea Estate until it reached the boundary below St. Joseph's College.<sup>42</sup> Activities undertaken by the Municipal authorities in the nineteenth century included church improvements, the division of the town into wards, matters relating to forests and the supply of wood, the improvement of the 'Native town', the rates of rent of lands, the improvement of roads, the construction of the new Town Hall and water supply.<sup>43</sup>

O'Malley informs us that the administration of the Municipality was governed by the Bengal Municipal Act and by a Special Act [Act I (BC) of 1900], which was introduced to prevent the recurrence of landslips such as those of 1809. The municipal law in force in Darjeeling until then was the

ordinary Municipal Act, III (B.C.) of 1884, which was in many respects in suitable to hill conditions. It was found that the landslips were in many cases due to defects which the Municipality had no power to deal with, such as the defective supervision of building sites and drainage, neglect to reduce or protect steep slopes and quarrying in unsafe localities. A bill was introduced which passed into law as Act I of 1900, to give the Municipality the power to take measures necessary to ensure the safety of the town as well as control all roads, bridges, drains and building construction, particularly where construction threatened the security of a hill-side or bank. A complete set of building rules was also provided.<sup>44</sup> In 1907, the Municipality was administered by a Municipal Board consisting of 25 members, with the Deputy Commissioner as Chairman: 22 members were nominated by Government. Nearly all the Commissioners were Europeans.

The town was divided into nine wards for administrative purposes and a Committee consisting of Commissioners reported on and attended to the affairs of each ward. There were a number of consultative committees formed for the various departments of the administration, such as the Appeal, Legal, Audit and Finance, Assessment, Executive and Works, Sanitary and Conservancy, Water Supply and Electric Light Committees. The total number of rate payers was 2,035 or 12 percent of the population within municipal limits. The average income of the Municipality for the decade ending 1901-

1902 was Rs.219000. The main sources of income were a rate levied on holdings in the town at 7 percent of their annual valuation; the rents of lands and houses owned by the Municipality, including 18.2 hectares of land in the bazaar, buildings leased out as shops and residences, a Town Hall rented by the Amusement Club and two covered markets where sites were let out for the sale of meat, fish, poultry, vegetables and other items; a lighting rate, water rate, conservancy rate and the municipal market.<sup>45</sup>

The Municipality building on the present Laden La Road was built in 1917. The foundation stone was laid by the Earl of Ronaldshay, Governor of Bengal. By 1939, the number of European Commissioners had decreased. Prominent names such as D.E. Avari, B.M. Chatterjee, C. Tenduf La and J.N. Mitra featured on the list of members while the Chairman remained A.S. Larkin.<sup>46</sup> Matters discussed ranged from the pony allowance and construction of a new motor stand to supplying the public with ice. Detailed reports were kept of deaths due to diseases, the quality of food and water and the T.B. Hospital. The opening of more roads to vehicular traffic was sanctioned and Brabourne Park was laid out.<sup>47</sup>

In 1878, Franklin Prestage, an agent of Eastern Bengal Railway proposed a hill tramway of 2ft gauge following the alignment of the Hill Cart Road. The construction started in 1879 under the name of the Darjeeling Himalayan Tramway Co and the work was carried out in a simultaneous process on

unconnected sections. In March 1880, the then Viceroy of India, Lord Lytton, visited the line. The same year in August, the line opened for public use between Siliguri and Kurseong. The line was connected to the Darjeeling main station and the title of the company was changed to the DHR Co. in September 1881. In the following years, the DHR developed remarkably with the introduction of loops and reverses to ease the gradients and with B-class locomotives brought on to the line in 1888. By 1914, the DHR was carrying an annual average of 250,000 passengers and 60,000 tonnes of freight. The intense traffic of World War I led to an all time peak of 300,000 passengers. The famous 'Batasia Loop' was constructed in 1919, eliminating problems by creating an easier gradient on the ascent from Darjeeling. During World War II, Darjeeling became a 'rest and recuperation' centre for the British armed forces and thus, the traffic on the DHR line increased significantly.<sup>48</sup> Since then, the DHR has evolved both as a mode of transport and as the first, and still the most outstanding example of a hill passenger railway. Weise tries to put this in some detail: The railway begins on the plains of Bengal and soon begins climbing through a remnant of lowland jungle, including stands of teak. As the railway climbs, so the flora changes and its upper sections are dominated by enormous Himalayan pines, which in misty weather give a surreal quality to the landscape.<sup>49</sup>

In accordance with colonial objectives, military garrisons, cantonments were first established in the top hills of Jalapahar at the South East end and at Lebung situated at the North End after keeping space at the middle locations meant for administrative centre, residence of the British officials, church institutions, missionary educational institutions, hospitals, post-offices, markets, the mal area at the top hills of the middle section of the demarcated urban space of Darjeeling. The social scope of Darjeeling witnessed the initiation of sports and game by the Army and British administration, the Gymkhana Club, Lebung race course ground for example. The socialscape experienced the creation of plantation culture as an extension of European social life. The consolidation of British rule led to the establishment of temporary summer residence of the Governor General. The corresponding administrative offices and other social institutions were created. New systems of water supply, sanitation, civic amenities and urban electrification were kept in place.

Like other British-built hill stations, Darjeeling was established by the British from the scratches to provide variety of functions, principally to serve British troops and administrative officials. Urban formation of Darjeeling was primarily responsible for two purposes; establishment of sanatorium and installation of strategic military station. Eden sanatorium meant for Europeans and Lowis Jubilee Sanatorium for the natives were established in

1882 and 1887 respectively <sup>50</sup> and for the latter the land for such erection was gifted by Maharaja of Coochbehar, located down to Railway Station. The sanatorium of Darjeeling served as a refuge to British officials from the burning heat of the plains. Darjeeling was shaped as a healthy location for European troops and officials. Darjeeling evolved gradually as a growth centre of trades and services and marketing centre of tea and cinchona plantation produce.

Christian missionaries played most pioneering role in institutionalizing basic education for common people both in vernacular and Hindi in the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic Darjeeling. Initially, the municipal authorities as well as the Government reposed faith on the Church of Scotland Mission and the government fund for education had been entrusted to the Mission for expenditure. Except Darjeeling High School, all the primary schools were kept under control of the Church of the Scotland Mission. Lower primary, upper primary Schools and middle vernacular schools and two training schools were established in the late eighties for spreading education amongst the lower class and tea labour children and working class people under the apt leadership of Mr. Macfarlane. However, at the beginning of twentieth century, primary education scenario had shown a positive tilt in the face of well established European system of education.<sup>51</sup>

Darjeeling School was raised to the status of a High School in 1892; originally it used to be known as Bhotia School. It was made open to common people children composed of immigrants from the plains, such as the Government clerks, Bengali and Hindustani residents in Darjeeling, while the rests were mostly Nepalis and very few Lepchas and Bhotias. The school was practically divided into two departments, one being a High School, and the other an elementary school for boys in belonging to the hill tribes.

Once Darjeeling town was connected with plains both by roads and rails, attempts were made to make it the home of European Education in India. Bishop Cotton advocated for the establishment of hill schools for Europeans in and around Darjeeling. His efforts were supported by Lord Canning and he pointed out in his Minute: 'how the domiciled English and Eurasians would, if neglected, become profitless, unmanageable, and a glaring reproach to the Government, while, if properly cared for, they might become a source of strength to British rule and of usefulness to India'.<sup>52</sup> As a result of such movements from the highest office, several English medium schools were established. The Loreto convent, the oldest school in Darjeeling, was founded by the Loreto nuns in 1846. St. Paul's School was transferred in 1864 from Calcutta to Darjeeling and became premier educational institution both for the Europeans and Eurasians. Another chief educational institution was the St Joseph's College under the management of the Jesuit Fathers was founded in

1888.<sup>53</sup> There established two girls' schools, the Diocesan Girls' School for Protestants and the Loreto Convent School for Roman Catholics and St. Michael's School for girls, under the management of the Sisters of the Order of St. John Baptist was founded in 1887. Mount Hermon School conducted by Methodist Episcopal Church of America was founded in 1895. By the end of nineteenth century, there were at least ten schools committing European education were opened in Darjeeling town.<sup>54</sup>

As a result, Darjeeling town was grown and established as a prerequisite of East Indian Company, at its head-quarters at Calcutta, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Darjeeling hill station was considered to be nearest to East India Company head-quarters, for example, Shimla at the North and Shilong at the East, which were developed as hill stations before Darjeeling, were situated reasonably far off Calcutta. In the establishment and growth of Darjeeling, the discourse and praxis of climate, health and commerce were inseparable; the expansion of its trade was achieved by poaching territories from Sikkim and Bhutan. The area of Darjeeling tracts were primarily annexed from the Gorkha kingdom of Nepal<sup>55</sup> and the Kalimpong hills and Dooars parts were annexed from Bhutan.

Like other British Indian Hill Stations, Darjeeling was established around the nucleus of a church, Cutchery (administrative office), bazaar and a few houses.<sup>56</sup> Initially, Darjeeling was considered as a frontier zone opening

opportunities to enterprising Europeans. There arrived the Wernicke-Stolke family, for instance, in 1841 as Morevian Missionaries, one of three families.<sup>57</sup> Johann Wernicke began supplying timber from the nearby forest to government, and then providing bricks from his own kilns for building construction. He prospered with the town. His grandson was sent to England to receive an expansive public school education.<sup>58</sup> Gradually, Darjeeling had become the base for the exploration of the eastern Himalayan frontiers of the British Empire in India, both for its rich natural history as well as untapped resources and trading networks.

Joseph Dalton Hooker, a botanist of repute, visited Darjeeling in 1848 and found it a pleasant town with a resident European population. During his eventful visit of long two years, he compared Darjeeling's growth with Australian colony, 'not only in amount of building, but in the accession of native families from the surrounding countries'.<sup>59</sup> Thus, while Darjeeling had been proved popular with convalescent or leisure seeking Europeans, the efforts of Campbell further established its position as a trading centre for the surrounding areas. Such trades also encouraged immigration from Nepal.<sup>60</sup> J.T. Pearson, an army surgeon who arrived in Darjeeling in 1839, observed, 'there is an elasticity of the air in these mountains, and a freshness...exercise gives all the pleasant glow of an English walk on a frosty morning'.<sup>61</sup> Thus the well established common assumption was that the tropical plains had

divested the English constitution of natural self. The mountains were posited to restore it.

Brian Hodgson, formerly British Resident at Kathmandu, who spent a considerable number of years of his retired life in Darjeeling, explained clearly, 'The fearful epidemics of the plains seldom penetrate the Himalayas, which, moreover, seem to have a positive exemption from epidemic diseases...'<sup>62</sup> Hodgson's observation validated the need for high altitude sanatorium towns for the British in India. Hooker also endorsed the rejuvenating qualities of Darjeeling for Europeans.<sup>63</sup> The Jalapahar convalescent depot for British troops was built in 1848 located on a narrow ridge above the Mall in Darjeeling. By 1859, it included barracks, a hospital and officers' quarters.<sup>64</sup> A second cantonment was built in 1844 at Senchal, close to Darjeeling.<sup>65</sup> The Senchal cantonment was abandoned in 1867 and was shifted to Jalapahar owing to its isolation and bitter cold.

### ***Contesting colonial expectations***

The 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial urbanization in Darjeeling characterised all the dichotomies reflected either through race and climate or hill plains differences. Like other important colonial hill station, Darjeeling experienced a conflation of the spatial and the racial dichotomies characterised through hill plains dichotomy and white versus native dichotomy in terms of habitation location and functional privileges. However, at the same time, they

had their limits and were often breached. The cherished dichotomies have been widely reflected in the writing of Hill Stations of Kennedy while he argued, ‘the rush for these hill stations in the nineteenth century reflected the need to carve out a social space that was European and sanitized, as the towns in the plains of India increasingly came to be identified with dirt and filth. There was an architectural and social distancing between Indians and Europeans in these towns’.<sup>66</sup> Urban Darjeeling replicated sites of leisure in Europe but was ultimately subverted by colonial realities arising out of colonial commercial and revenue enterprises.

The colonial hill station Darjeeling was the abode of the realisation of the notion of leisure revolving around clubs. The forests around Darjeeling also inspired sporting men as much as it did naturalists. When the Darjeeling Natural History Society was founded in 1923, the articles mostly comprised hunting anecdotes. With its characteristic architecture and topography as a distinct urban colonial space, Darjeeling carried forward a tradition of European segregated space from the urban spaces in the plains. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial mind, the idea of sport was associated with leisure and a sporting world came to constitute the various outdoor pursuits of ‘hunting, racing, shooting, angling, cricket, walking’.<sup>67</sup>

After 1857, medical opinion and political and administrative expediency encouraged the sustenance of Darjeeling hill station. Although functionally

similar to the 'white towns' of the plains, the topographically unique hill station Darjeeling evoked a romantic idyll that was scenic and yet were intensely urban. The temperate climate, and the familiarizing and domesticating of the mountains and dense forests that rendered them similar to British landscapes and to the Alps. Moreover, the summer capital of the provincial administration to Darjeeling town lent its social space glamour and urgency.<sup>68</sup>

During colonial rule, Darjeeling retained its reputation as a sanatorium town where leisure, governance, and a healthy lifestyle all appealed to the British and, eventually, to the Indians as well. The Eden Sanatorium Hospital was founded in 1882 to cater exclusively to Europeans and the Lowis Jubilee Sanitarium for Indians was set up in 1887<sup>69</sup> with donations from the Indian landed aristocrats. Thus the contest for social space in health occasionally brought tussles between European and Indian elites.<sup>70</sup>

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bengalis, principally the landed aristocrats and successful professionals like doctors, barristers, business men, and bureaucrats had made their stake felt in Darjeeling. Both the Maharajas of Coochbehar and Burdwan possessed their respective summer palaces in Darjeeling.<sup>71</sup> Many others visited during summer, staying at one of the several boarding houses that sprang up to cater to Indian visitors.<sup>72</sup> The demography of the entire Darjeeling area as well as the town itself changed

drastically due to large immigration from Eastern Nepal. This was the consequence of a policy adopted by Campbell to populate and settle the entire district and to provide the labour to sustain the European habitation in the town. Thus, Darjeeling kept expanding in concert with extension of imperial control over eastern Himalayan economy and trade. The town of Darjeeling became the hub of Material transformation of the entire region.<sup>73</sup>

Nepali immigration received tremendous momentum, when the tea plantation took off commercially in the Darjeeling tract by 1856. The rise of tea industry and the growth of immigrated Nepali population went hand in hand and had exposed Darjeeling critical to the colonial economy, apart from its distinctive landscape. Indeed, Tea industry and its growth contributed most to the transformation of the functional and spatial bases of the entire Darjeeling hills. Tea industry brought about the demographic transformation and encroachment within the town itself.<sup>74</sup>

It has been aptly argued that ‘the fundamental tension between the romantic sanatorium town and the colonial hill station was heightened in magnitude from the turn of the century, when its absorption within the larger colonial economy was entrenched with the successes of the tea and timber industry, its popularity as a resort and the ever increasing business of the colonial bureaucracy. These tensions were played out in negotiations for urban spaces within the town’.<sup>75</sup> By the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Darjeeling,

as a colonial urban settlement, had started suffering from 'overcrowding'. The issue of European exclusivity was put in question.<sup>76</sup>

Indian aristocrats and land lords of the plains such as the Zamidar of Darbhanga and the Maharajah of Coochbehar owned large houses located on the road skirting the Mall. By the 1920s, 'Southfields' was the property of the Bengali Industrialist Sir R.N. Mukherjee. By this time, the Coochbehar mansion was transferred back to the Government.<sup>77</sup> While Indian zamindars such as the Rajah of Digpatia or the Maharaja of Burdaran preferred to build palaces with reasonably huge land at a distance from town centre, affluent Bengalis preferred residences closer to the Mall, the European part of the town. An increasing population composing of residents and seasonal visitors presented a critical multi-cultural character to the town. Growing number of visitors, both Europeans and elite natives, managers and babus of the burgeoning tea plantations, a huge number of Nepali migrant labourers in Darjeeling town, gave rise to a critical demographic character. During World War I, Darjeeling became an important strategic location from defence point of view the town was designated as military and air base for British troops.<sup>78</sup>

Retention of social exclusivity of Darjeeling played a major role. One way of retaining such exclusivity of the town of Darjeeling for the Europeans and affluent India elites was to develop alternative hill sanatoria for them. In 1903, the municipal Commissioner of Kurseong, a small location at a lower

height, appealed to the government to develop it as a hill resort.<sup>79</sup> The Government responded positively and stated that Darjeeling was ‘greatly in need of relief from overcrowding’ and that the climate of Kurseong’ is better adapted than that of Darjeeling’.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, Maharaja of Burdwan contributed Rs.20000 for the extension of the hill cart road to Kurseong and offered further assistance.<sup>81</sup>

British as well as the Indians attributed to deforestation within the town. As a result, the ‘native’ settlements within Darjeeling were pushed to new areas. In 1906, the district officials appealed to the Government for permission construction at the Toong Soong Basti as declared condemned as an unsafe area by the Landslip Committee.<sup>82</sup> The Government flatly denied the proposal of new construction or reconstruction on the said area.<sup>83</sup>

Despite population exodus at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Darjeeling remained an exclusive urban space represented through well maintained roads, provisions for sewerage, and electricity with generous grants to maintain the facilities. In 1921, the Government noted that ‘improvements were effected in the water-supply, drainage, electric lighting and municipal buildings’.<sup>84</sup> The same year witnessed the Government making special efforts preserving greenery of Darjeeling towards making it more environment-friendly, ‘arboriculture, as carried out in the town of Darjeeling differed from that work as done elsewhere in Bengal. The Darjeeling Improvement Fund

devoted attention to planting up the slips and other bare areas, with a view to ensuring safety of the hill slides which added to the beauty of the town.<sup>85</sup> In 1923, facilities within the municipal area of Darjeeling were extensive; improvements were effected in water supply, drainage, electric lighting and municipal buildings.<sup>86</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Darjeeling remained as an exclusive urban station both in administrative and socio-political terms. The colonial state maintained the difference of the hills from the plains for politico-economic reasons. The hill people of Darjeeling from the very beginning of colonial days were thus trained in the logic of difference of being other, however, hardly realized the hidden colonial design of exploitation camouflaged by differential politico-administrative arrangements.<sup>87</sup> The development and expansion related initiatives had integrated Darjeeling with larger colonial economy. Darjeeling became the nodal centre of trade based on tea, timber and tourism of the region. Taking all the socio-economic and demographic dynamics into consideration, Darjeeling witnessed huge material transformations at the cost of nature which in turn shaped its ecological and landscape changes.

The investment of colonial capital in commercial tea plantations located in and around Darjeeling town heralded massive socio-economic, political and demographic transformations. In short, the spontaneous factors of plant

capitalism had largely disturbed the balance of colonial exclusivity of Darjeeling. The colonial capital as was invested in commercial tea plantation had incorporated Darjeeling into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalist world system. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century tourism started flourishing in Darjeeling which provided further jolt to such colonial exclusivity. Thus Darjeeling under British rule did no longer remain purely as an exclusive space for the Europeans, it was also meant for the colonial elites for leisure's, planters for making money, common people for subsistence and babus and clerks for making fortunes. Darjeeling received fame as a sanatorium towns and a socio-economic hub of the elite, inhabited by coolies (labours), clerks, railway men and traders as well as major administrative and commercial hub of tea.

It has been adequately approved by the study that the hill station of Darjeeling was a unique form of colonial urbanism. Colonial administrators planned the hill stations in the nineteenth century to create an idyllic social space away from the tropical climate and the cities in the plains. Therefore, the Darjeeling hill station represented topographical, climatic, social and architectural ideals that were radically different from the cities in the plains. Like other colonial hill stations as visualized by occidental imaginations and built under the aegis of colonialism, Darjeeling had shown major shifts in its nature and form from major urban centers of the plains of colonial India.

Darjeeling was a part of the colonial mainstream. Its urbanization and inclusion into the greater colonial economy was effected ever since its establishment followed by subsequent material transformations. Therefore, a constant tension between its exotic and its functional elements persisted throughout the colonial period. The study has extensively substantiated the fact that this British built town in the Eastern Himalaya was integral to the colonial political economy in which the resources of all sites were subject to capitalistic utilization.

Dane Kennedy provided us an explanation for the eventual '*despoiling*' of the hill stations in the late colonial period. He has argued that 'their sustenance required legions of subordinates and attracted the aspiring Indian elite, whose presence subverted their pristine quality dislodging the 'private-public distinction' between the cities in the plains and the hill stations in British India'. Our study suggested for a different argument that the change of character that Kennedy has referred to was not anomalous, rather symptomatic of urbanization of the Darjeeling hills. The expansion and growth of Darjeeling subverted another spatial dichotomy; that was between the idyllic hills and the disease ridden plains in official discourse and public culture. This subversion was not only occasioned by the accommodation of settlers in menial and clerical capacities within the municipal limits of this exclusive hill station. It was intrinsic to Darjeeling as a colonial outpost; its

function being not only to serve as a site of medicalised leisure for the British and Indian elite, but also to transform adjacent newly colonized areas into commercial, revenue yielding, settled economic sites. Once this was achieved, thereafter, the integration of its resources into the larger colonial economy sustained the expansion and consolidation of Darjeeling town. Thus colonial town of Darjeeling has been projected in this study as a part of the continuum of colonial urbanism in the context of its colonial urban history.

***Endnotes:***

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>82</sup> IOR/P/1520, APAC, 49.

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