# SIKKIM
# &
# DARJEELING

## DIVISION & DECEPTION

Dr. SONAM B. WANGYAL

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# CONTENTS

# PREFACE

This is a story of how the British annexed south Sikkim to their vast Empire and for quite sometime called the annexed portion British Sikkim while the left over of the kingdom was referred to as Independent Sikkim. The area was later named Darjeeling after a village that existed there and subsequently formed into a district by the same name. It therefore surprises me the least bit when a few of my friends call Sikkim, in reference to Darjeeling district, a 'mother state' and refer to West Bengal as a 'surrogate mother'. In this book I have borrowed the term 'mother state' but at the same time avoided the epithet 'surrogate' for reasons entirely personal.

Whatever be the terms used, Sikkim and Darjeeling are historically inseparable. The sheer unchangeable contiguity of their borders provide for the sharing of language, culture and religion. Politically, there are some differences and the most obvious one is that of political parties active in Sikkim are as good as not having any representation in Darjeeling and vice versa. Nevertheless, no two contiguous places in India can claim to share so many things in common as the people of Sikkim and Darjeeling. It is because of this peculiar relationship that there appears to be a strong current of bonding between the people of these two places. Nevertheless, it is precisely because of the shared culture, religion and history that arouses apprehension in a good number of people

# CHAPTER – 1

# PLACE-NAMES

## Meanings of the names of Sikkim and the three Sub-Divisions of Darjeeling

### SIKKIM / DENZONG / MAAYEL LYANG

The names of this fairy tale state of butterflies, orchids, mountains, monasteries and mysteries have tested the brains of eminent scholars like Col. L.A. Waddell who remarked that it was not easy to etymologize the name 'Sikkim'. In fact he does not commit himself but begins by writing, "*This I think, is the etymology of the Nepali name for the country (namely 'Sikhim' and not 'Sikkim' as is sometimes misspelt in English books).*" He further stressed his uncertainty by writing, "*This seems to me to be derived from the Nepalese or Parbatiya*

***Sikin**, 'the crested', which well denotes the leading feature of the country as seen from Nepal, where its mountain ridges running transversely to those of eastern Nepal seem to form a bristling series of **crests**."*[1] Risley, *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, quoting an earlier work of Waddell agrees adding that the name's probable derivation came from the Sanskrit *Sikhin*. Risley ridicules the suggestion by some that the name resulted from a translation of "*Bhutea name for the country, viz., 'Demo-jong' or 'the happy country' from – **sukhi**, happy, as the word is never spelt with a* **u** ..."[2] The latter explanaion does not stand up well to scrutiny for even today the old-timers prefer 'Sookhim' (or Sukhim) to Sikkim (or Sikhin). It probably was Sookhim in Waddell's time as well, the error cropping up because of excess leaning on Parbatiya and Sanskrit, for even as far back as 1793, Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul*, used 'Sookhim'.[3] Even Rahul Sankritiyan, the inexhaustible writer and traveler, in his 1950 *Darjeling Parichaya* mentioned that the Nepalis use the term 'Sukhim'.[4]

Risley gives us another and a reasonably agreeable suggestion that in the language of eastern Nepal, the Limbu people use *su* for 'new' and *khim* to mean a 'house'.[5] P.N. Chopra, *Sikkim*, agrees with a supportive statement: "*In the remote past, the Lepchas of Denzong and the Limbus of Eastern Nepal freely mixed with each other...Marriages within the two clans were common. When a Limbu girl married a Lepcha and arrived at her husband's house she*

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[1] Waddell, L.A: *Among the Himalayas*, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1978 (1899), p. 432.

[2] Riseley, H.H: *Gazetteer of Sikhim*, Sikkim Nature Conservation Foundation, Gangtok,1989 (1894), pp. 39-40

[3] Colonel Kirkpatrick: *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1986 (1811). p. 280.

[4] Sankritiyan, Rahul: *Dorjeling Parichaya*, Parmananda Poddar, Calcutta, 1950, p. 4.

[5] Riseley, H.H: p. 40.

*would call it 'Su Him", i.e., new house.*"[6] Chopra is more accurate regarding the Limbu word for house which is *him*[7] and not *khim* as given by Risley. Jaya Dhamala, Head of the Department of the Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University, provides a historical colour to the above interpretation. Sikkim king, Tensung Namgyal, married the daughter of Limbu ruler of Arun-Tambar region, Yamohang. Several Limbu chiefs' were also married of to Sikkimeses Kazis (noblemen). Those Limbus who had come for the marriages called the place '*sukhim*' or 'bride's new home', 'comfortable home' etc. The Nepalis who came to Sikkim could not relate to the Limbu word and thus corrupted the name to Sukkhim which underwent further distortion under the British to Sikkim.[8] J.R. Subba, a Limbu writer, provides us with alternatives like 'Song Khim', 'Su Khim' and 'Su Him' for 'New house' or 'happy home' but at the same time he is wary to give a Limbu origin to the name Sikkim.[9]

As far as the Lepha and Tibetan names are concerned Waddell has it that, "*the abroginies, the Lepchas, call it Nelyang or 'The Place of Caves', while the Tibetans call it Den-jong or Demo-jong, or 'The Country of Rice and Fruit' as it is a granary for bleak Tibet.*"[10] For a Lepcha version from a Lepcha writer, K.P. Tamsang writes, "'"*This region was known in the ancient times as Myel Lyang, which means "the land of hidden paradise or the delightful region or abode.*"'[11]

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[6] Chopra, P.N: *SIKKIM*, S Chand & Company Limited, New Delhi, 1985 (1979), p. 1.

[7] Senior, H.W.R: *A Vocabulary of the Limbu Language of Eastern Nepal*, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1977 (1908), p. 32.

[8] Dhamala, Jaya: *Sikkimko Itihas*, Shyam Prakashan, Darjeeling, 1983, p. 11.

[9] Subba (Pondhak), J.R: *The Limboos of the Eastern Himalayas*, Sikkim Yakthung Mundham Saplopa, Gangtok, 1999, p. 115.

[10] Waddell, L.A: p. 432.

[11] Tamsang, K.P: *The Untold and Unknown Reality about the Lepchas*, Lyangsong Tamsang, Kalimpong, 1983, p. 1.

Another Lepcha authority, A.R. Foning, airing similar views equates Myel Lyang with the Garden of Eden.[12] Tapan Chattopadhyay, a Bengali scholar, provides us with yet another name, *Nemayel-Renjong* meaning '*the new rocky land of a worthy people*'[13] but Lyangsong Tamsang, another Lepcha authority, gives us a sounder opinion saying that Sikkim has two Lepcha names. In a similar vein to Chattopadhyay he also gives the first name as *Nye Maayel Lyaang* but differs in interpretation asserting *Nye* means holy, sacred or paradise, *Maayel* hidden and *Lyaang* land, country or earth. This would make the meaning 'The Hidden Holy Land'. The second name is given as *Renjong Lyaang* where "*'Ren' means honourable, respectable. 'Jyong' means living, or 'those who live in'. 'Lyaang' means land, country, or earth.*" The composite Renjong Lyaang is therefore rendered to mean 'The Land of the Honourable People'.[14]

For the Tibetan name it is best to stick to the one most commonly used, *De(n)jong*, which in the complicated Tibetan spelling would be spelt as *hBres-lJongs*[15] despite the numerous variations viz., *Gres-giogn* (rev. Della Penna: 1717), *Bra-ma-scjon* (Van de Putte: 1730) and *Bras-jong* (Graham Sandberg: 1904). How problematical Tibetan orthography can be is demonstrated by Risley who writes, "*The Tibetan names for Sikkim are pronounced Denjong, Demojong and Demoshong, though actually spelt hBras-lJongs, lBras-ma-lJongs, and hBras-gShongs, and mean 'The*

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[12] Foning, A. R: *Lepcha, My Vanishing Tribe*, Sterling Publishers Private Ltd., New Delhi, 1987, p. 118.

[13] Chattopadhyay, Tapan: *Lepchas and their Heritage*, D.K. Publishers and Distributors Private Ltd., New Delhi, p. 1.

[14] Tamsang, Lyangsong: *Sikkim with Love, Respect and Pride*, HIMAL, Himalayan Magazine, Vol. 8, No. 6, Kathmandu, Nov/Dec 1995, p. 50.

[15] Das, Sarat Chandra: *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, Gaurav Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991, (1902), p. 928.
Bell, Charles Alfred: *English-Tibetan Colloquial Dictionary*, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1989 (1920), p. 446.

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[12] Foning, A. R: *Lepcha, My Vanishing Tribe*, Sterling Publishers Private Ltd., New Delhi, 1987, p. 118.

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[15] Das, Sarat Chandra: *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, Gaurav Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991, (1902), p. 928.
Bell, Charles Alfred: *English-Tibetan Colloquial Dictionary*, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1989 (1920), p. 446.

*country or valley of rice.'''*[16] The spellings even confounded Sir Richard Temple who ended with the rather inaccurate *Dinjing* and *Dinjang.*[17] As already mentioned the Tibetan name for Sikkim is *De(n)jong* and Jaya Dhamala believes *Denjong* came about because the early Tibetan settlers could not associate any Tibetan word with the original *Renjong* and seeing the land blessed with fertile paddy fields called it *Denjong* or the place with abundant grain.[18] The place of honour for simplicity, brevity and accuracy must be accorded to Nari Rustomji who simply stated that the traditional name is *Denjong*, or the "Valley of Rice."[19]

## THE THREE SUB-DIVISIONS

### DARJEELING

Darjeeling sub-division is the head quarter of the district bearing the same name.

The most widely accepted meaning is '***the place of dorje***'.[20] ***Dorje*** among the Tibetans and to those who speak languages akin to Tibetan (Lhasa dialect is now generally accepted as Tibetan language) could be just a name of a person, a

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[16] Risley, H.H: p. 39.

[17] Temple, Sir Richard: *Travels in Nepal and Sikkim*, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1997 (1881), p. 1. (from: *The lake Regions of Sikkim, on the Frontier of Tibet*, Proceedings of the Royal Geological Society, No. VI, June 1881)

[18] Dhamala, Jaya: p. 11.

[19] Rustomji, Nari: *SIKKIM, A Himalayan Tragedy*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1987, p. 3.

[20] O'Malley, L. S. S: *Bengal District Gazetteers DARJEELING*, Logos Press, New Delhi, 1989 (1907) p. 214.

branch of the Phodang Monastery of Sikkim.[26] Today, except for a makeshift arrangement the monastery does not exist on account of the historic structure being removed by the conquering Gorkhas in order to accommodate a temple to house the Hindu ***Shiva-linga***, in the year 1775.[27] The question remains who is this enigmatic ***lama***, after whom Darjeeling could have been named, where did he come from and when was he at Darjeeling? As late as January 1999 there was a mention in a national daily that the name of this mysterious character was Lama Dorje-rinzing.[28] However, I would like to think that the monastery was built by another Dorje named Lama Kangchen Ralpa Dorje who settled at Rishihat (around 1736-41), where, according to Risley,"***the Tasong monks of Pemiongchi had a branch established.***"[29]The Sikkimese link with the monastery and the latter's link to Darjeeling's name is supported by the first Indian Tibetologist, Sarat Chandra Das, who interpreted Darjeeling as, "***lit. place of ritual***

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[26] Dozey, E. C: *A Concise History of Darjeeling District Since 1835*, Jetsun Publishing House, Calcutta, 1989 (1922), p. 79.

[27] Pradhan, Ambar: *Khoj Mato ani Chinariko,* Kurseong, 1989, p. 110. The monastery, or what was left of it, was later shifted to a sight near the Gymkhana Club but it was removed once again, this time to Bhutay Busti (Officially called Bhutia Busti) where it still stands today, to allow the St Andrews Church to be built. Despite the shifting of the monastery twice, firstly by the Hindus and then by the Christians, there is an exceptional religious tolerance and the Hindus and the Buddhists worship together at the Observatory Hill without any trace of bitterness or ill will. The Sikkimese connection still endures with the lama, the Buddhist monk, always being a Sikkimese.

E. C. Dozey in *A Concise History of the Darjeeling District Since 1835* gives the year of the Gorkha plunder as 1815: "*It was looted and sacked by the Nepalese in 1815.*" (page 79) This was the second time the monastery was plundered. (O'Malley: p. 186.)

[28] NB*plus* (The Statesman) Calcutta & Jalpaiguri,1st January 1999, p. 1. Parthapratim Mukherjee: The name apart from meaning the thunderbolt is also attributed "*Lama Dorje-rinzing, the founder of the Buddhist monastery that once existed on top of the Observatory Hill.*"

[29] Risley, H. H: p. 16.

name is ***Daar-jyu—lyang*** where ***dar*** means god, ***jyu*** to sit, to live (in honourific expression), and ***lyang*** a place.[32] L.D.T Sitling, not drifting too far from the above explanation renders the meaning as, "***the abode of the heavenly goddess of beauty.***"[33]

The recent additions to the interpretations of the meaning of Darjeeling are not very encouraging. They appear to be more like the cultural heavy weight of the majority community gradually molding the past to suit the community's present hegemony. Consider a suggestion put forward by a writer in 1992 where he claims that the name stems from '***Durjayat-ling***', a place in the kingdom of Prag-Jyotishpur, which finds mention in the Hindu epic, the Puranas.[34] If such phonetic approximation is to be given its undue credit then a later claim, with no historical rationale or philological pedigree, should take the cake and all. In ***The Tourist Guide to DARJEELING AREA*** it claims that the name is derived from the Sanskrit word '***Durjay-ling***' meaning, "***Shiva of invincible prowess, who rules the Himalayas.***"[35]

The early Nepali settlers affectionately called Darjeeling '***Gundribazar***' and perhaps this name survives in the truncated "*Bazaar*" which is what the population of the surrounding locality call Darjeeling. Despite the suburban population adopting the abbreviated name it is still possible to hear the name Gundribazar amongst the old folks living in, the neighbourhood.

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[32] *Aachulay: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Kalimpong, March 1998, p. 7. (Ed. Lyangsong Tamsang)
Dhamala, Jaya: p. 57.

[33] Sitling, L.D.T: *Darjeeling*, Samjhana, International Tea Festival Organising Committee, Darjeeling, 1992, p. 30.

[34] Pradhan, Shiva: *Bhasik Andolan: Safaltako Goreto Samma*, Gangtok, 1992, p. 15.

[35] Agarwala, A. P: *Tourist Guide to DARJEELING AREA*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 49.

Lepcha one meaning, "***The ridge where we play***".[39] He narrates that when the Bhutan ruled Kalimpong the Bhutanese tax collectors would descend upon the present day site of the town to collect their levy. The Lepcha vassals would provide entertainment for the overlords in the form of women, songs, dances and sports. This annual affair took on a carnival like transformation and the area came to be associated to a ridge where the Lepchas played and made merry. Foning's deconstruction runs thus: ***ka*** (we or our), ***lem*** (play), and ***pung*** (ridge). There is some controversy regarding the ***pung*** and it seems that it was spelt both as ***pong*** and ***pung.*** We have, as far back as 1884, Colman Macaulay, the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, heading an entry in his official report with 'Kalimpung' while elsewhere reverting to the official spelling of 'Kalimpong'.[40] Professor R. K. Sprigg has this to say on the controversy with the second moiety *pung/pong*:

> ***"I would like to go to the earliest mention of the name 'Kalimpoong' by Sir Ashley Eden (Report on the State of Bootan and the Progress of the Mission of 1863-64). On the basis of this spelling 'poong' might represent the Lepcha p'ung (Tibetan equivalent of spun[-ba] with the 's' silent) meaning 'size, bulk, a crowd, herd, flock, a number, many' {as given in G. B. Mainwaring's, 'A Grammar of the Lepcha (Rong) Language', Baptist Mission Press, 1876}. Meanwhile, 'kalim' could stand for the Lepcha ka-lim or ka-lim-bi, a species of solanium found in Kalimpong."***[41]

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[39] Foning, A.R: p. 13.

[40] Macaulay, Colman: *A Report of a Mission to SIKKIM and the Tibetan Frontier – 1884*, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1977(1885), pp. 54 & 55.

[41] Sprigg: *Per. Com.*

*"Kursiong..is superbly placed, on a narrow mountain ridge. The west window looks down the valley of Balasun, the east into that of the Mahanuddee..."*[43]

One of the earliest maps of the district shows a place named Kursion and another named Kursiongurree, the latter is given an emphasis with letters in bold print. Though we can find several references to 'Kurseonggurry' and 'Kurseongoree' around the year 1839,[44] Kursion is more likely to be our Kurseong not simply on account of the similarity in spelling but more so because the map shows the place to be situated along the road west of the Balasun River which is where the town is now located. The emphasis on Kursiongurree, which is shown to lie on the banks of the river, is probably because of the stationing of a few security personnel (Nep: ***gari*** = a fort/ stronghold) and also on account of the town being just a small village then.

O'Malley's gazetteer presents us with two possible interpretation of the name:

*"It has been suggested that the name is a corruption of kurson-rip, the small white orchid, which grows plentifully round Kurseong and that it means 'the place of the white orchid'. Another suggestion is that it refers to a cane which used to grow there in rich profusion, and which the Lepchas in their 'Rong-ring,' as they term their language, call kur, and that 'seong' is a corruption of sheang, a stick. There are still a few of these canes to be found in the forest behind Eagle's Crag."*[45]

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[43] Hooker: Vol. 1, pp. 100-101.
[44] Pinn, Fred: *TROD* 57, 74, 96, etc.
[45] O'Malley: p. 216.

My consultant, Dr. R. K. Sprigg, whose major contribution to this chapter is very apparent, agrees with the '***white orchid***' rendition but he has something else to say about the '***stick***' version. He comments that though the word *shang* means wood in the sense of firewood or fuel-wood (as in Nepali ***daura***), he adds, "***I have not been able to trace a word kur meaning 'a cane'.***"[46] The orchid version finds endorsement in Mainwaring's Lepcha dictionary which defines ***kur-son rip*** as '***a spec. of air plant (orchid)***'.[47] A. R. Foning adds that that Kurseong was originally 'Kursong' which in Lepcha is the "***star of Venus or a variety of orchid ... found in abundance in that area.***"[48]

The Europeans anglicized the name to Kurseong and the plainsmen went a step ahead with Koorsiang. The locals, however, prefer to call the place Kharsang which is, of course, another corruption.

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[46] Sprigg: *Per. Com.*

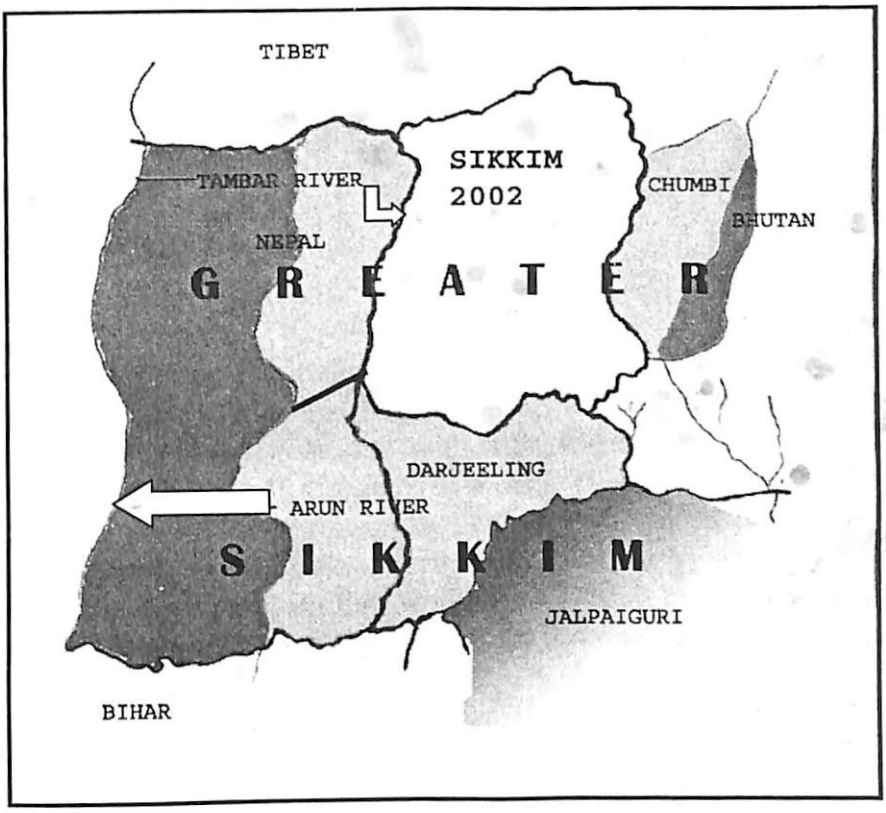
[47] Mainwaring, G. B: *Dictionary of the LEPCHA LANGUAGE*, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1979 (1898), p. 23.

Lyangsong Tamsang (Ed.) in *Achulay: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Kalimpong, March 1998, p. 7, also gives the meaning of '*kur-song*' as Lepcha for orchid'.

[48] Foning, A.R: p. 23.

# GREATER SIKKIM

(a sketch map)




**White Area: SIKKIM TODAY**

**Shaded Areas: PARTS OF GREATER SIKKIM**

Historians differ in the extent of Greater Sikkim. Like the Nepal historians who may not agree to Sikkim having ever possessed the areas around Arun and Tambar Rivers the Bhutan writers also disclaim loss of jurisdiction over parts of Ha region. Similarly the authority of Sikkim extending over Jalpaiguri is challenged and so is the sovereignty of Sikkim over Chumbi Valley. Sikkim historians naturally think otherwise.

## CHAPTER - II

# THE GRANT OF 'DARJEELING'

### INTRODUCTION

Professor Jaya Dhamala described Sikkim as a region lying between 27°5' - 28°15' North and 88°4' - 88°58' East. The state is a mountainous one with hills and mountains scaling 800 feet to 28,148 feet/8,579 metres (Kanchenjunga). She commenced the description by stating that Sikkim is a small state just tipping 2818 square miles or 7,300 square metres[1] and this is the Sikkim that we know of today but in reality it only forms a miniscule part of what it once used to be. By

[1] Dhamala, Jaya: *Sikkimko Itihas*, Shyam Prakashan, Darjeeling, 1983, p. 12.

defining what Sikkim was will, of course, not change the course of history and neither cause a realignment of its boundaries but it will give a perception of the vastness, in comparison to its present status, of what it once was. The British historians write about the British Empire, the French love to revel in the past glory of France and the territorial conquests of Napoleon, the people of Mongolia do not tire of recollecting the historical enormity of their province and the Nepalis in Nepal look back in awe at the extent of the Gorkha dominions that Nepal once governed. For some peculiar reasons the Sikkimese rarely talk of, and write much less of, the degree their realm extended to, despite the fact that like every state or nation Sikkim too has a past that its citizens can be proud of. Possibly the answer to the enigma lies in the passive character of the people who are at peace with themselves and so not given to pick quarrels nor bask in the reflected glories of the past. It appears that precisely because of such a character, Sikkim's neighbours, with entirely different temperament verging on shrewdness and belligerence, chewed away bits and pieces of the passive kingdom reducing it to a mere skeleton. Rao in *SIKKIM The Story of its Integration with India* referring to the 17th century wrote, "*The Kingdom of Sikkim in those times was very extensive and included the Chumbi Valley of Tibet.*"[2] About the rest of Sikkim, Francis Buchanan Hamilton wrote the following:

> "*At one time the princes of Sikkim had extended their dominion far south, into the district of Puraiya, and possessed the low country on the east of the Mahananda, as far as Krishangunj, a part of the country*

[2] Rao, P. Raghunanda: *SIKKIM The Story of its Integration with India*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1978, p. 3. (see also J. Claude White: *SIKKIM & BHUTAN Twenty Years on the North-East Frontier, 1887-1908*, F.C. Sharma at Lakshmi Printing Works, Delhi, 1971 (1909), p. 1.

*which was originally possessed by the Koch and Paliyas, the natives of Kamrup and Matsya, now the districts of Ranggapar and Dinajpur. ...Although the Kankayi, in the upper part of its course, was nearly the boundary, they never would appear to have possessed the plain between the Kankayi and the Mahananda; but they were lords of the lower hills, occupied by the tribe called Dimali...*"[3]

Considering that Sikkim stretched for some distance into Tibet in the north, ran with and possibly into Bhutan in the east, ruled a good part of Nepal's Arun-Tambar Valley in the west and went a short way into today's Bangla Desh and down all the way to Purnea in the south, the nibbling away by her neighbours seem pretty enormous. The extension of the British Empire brought a new power right to the fringes of Sikkim and like all the neighbours it too could not remove itself from having a piece of the cake. Ever famished for land and perpetually in search for trade prospects, Sikkim lying directly in the route to Tibet and the rest of central Asia, the new neighbour could not resist the ease and comfort of a simple conquest. Consequently, when the opportunity popped up the British not only took a reasonably appreciable bite instead of a nibble but also subdued the kingdom into a protectorate State.

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[3] Hamilton, Francis Buchanan: *An Account of the KINGDOM OF NEPAL and of the Territories annexed to this Dominion by the HOUSE OF GURKHAS*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1990 (1819), p. 119. (N.B. *Puraiya* refers to Purnea, *Ranggapar* to Rungpur which is now in Bangla Desh, and *Kankayi* refers to Kankai River in Nepal.)
H.H. Risley quoting Dr. Oldfield in *Sketches from Nepal*, Vol. I, 1858, pp. 53-54 gives the area east of the Arun River i.e., Limbuana, as a part of Sikkim. Ashley Eden (*Political Missions to Bootan*, Bibliotheca Himalayica, Manjusri Publishing House, New delhi, 1972 [1865], p. 112) supports Oldfield's observation adding that Kishengunj in Purnea also was part of Sikkim.

# THE AREA

It will be appropriate to commence with a general description of the annexed area that eventually formed the district of Darjeeling and then go into the details, from the time the British first cast its eyes on Sikkim and on to how a large area of Sikkim was annexed and made into *British Sikkim* or the district of Darjeeling.

The district is bounded in the north by Sikkim and in the east by Bhutan while the southeast boundary runs with Jalpaiguri district and Bangladesh. In the south lies North Dinajpur district and in the west the kingdom of Nepal limits Darjeeling's frontier.[4] The southern parts of the district (Siliguri and the terai) consist of foothills and flat lands (340ft) and the northern parts (Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong) are mountainous (12,000ft). Because of this great range of altitude the district possesses different climatic zones that support a wide variety of vegetation and an equally diverse wealth of zoological life. This immense diversity is further supported by the fact that the district lies directly in the path of the southwest monsoon rains. Being situated between

[4] Chatterjee,Siba Prasad: *Known Yet Unknown Darjeeling/Siliguri (Facts & Figures)*, Siliguri, 1997, p.2.

## THE SEARCH AND DISCOVERY

The East India Company, henceforth the British or just the Company, had been looking for a sanitarium/hill station for its employees and the European residents of eastern India. Calcutta the then capital of British India and the *second city of the British Empire* had no hill station, hill resort or a sanatorium while even provinces hugely smaller in size and infinitely smaller in importance had places for its residents to cool off: places where one could comfortably eat, drink and dress like a European.[13] Calcutta for all the power it exercised, and the trade it controlled, required its high and mighty to travel to lesser provinces to enjoy the comforts of a hill station. A hill station in eastern region of India had therefore become an absolute necessity not just to obtain the obvious advantages but also to shake off the embarrassment of an enormous province that had no hill station. Towards the end of 1820s Calcutta had reasons to rejoice. With the British

[13] Dahal, Dharnidhar: *Sikkimko Rajnaitik Itihas* ("Political History of Sikkim" written in Nepali), Subba Prakashan, Gangtok (Sikkim), 1984, p. 56. Dahal says that the British found Darjeeling attractive for spending holidays because of the cold climate, enchanting environment clothed in greenery, for the purpose of housing, cantonments and to open schools for children under Darjeeling's healthy atmosphere. It is interesting to note the order of the reasons, holiday resort coming first, and the absence of any mention of a sanitarium.

## NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE GRANT

The letter to Captain Taylor had its desirable effect on the Governor-General who was at that time on a visit to Buxa Duar, along the southern border of Bhutan. From there he communicated to Captain Lloyd that the authority to construct the line of road to Darjeeling would be issued "*the instant that public feeling unequivocally manifests itself in favour of the occupation of the Sanatarium.*"[51] However, the actual proceedings commenced much later with a meeting on 23 January 1835 where the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck, proposed that "*orders may be sent to Major Lloyd to open negotiations with the Sikkim Rajah for the transfer of Darjeeling to the British Government.*"[52] A letter dated the same day was sent to Major Lloyd by W.H. Macnaghten, Secretary to the Government of India, with instructions to:

> "*...proceed to obtain an interview with the Rajah of Sikkim and procure the cession of Darjeeling to the*

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[51] Bayley, H.V: p. 25.

[52] *Foreign Political Correspondence* (Henceforth *F.P.C*): *23 January 1835, No. 1.*

For about five months no significantly important correspondence regarding Darjeeling took place between the government and the Major and this was probably taken by the government to mean that the Major was abiding by the instructions of the letter of 23 May 1835. But the Major had not given up on his obsession and on 31 October 1835 the government received another bombshell of a message stating:

> *"I beg to report that in August last the Sikkim Rajah's officers forwarded to me the grant of Darjeeling in the form which I had requested him to draw it out, in fact, the very paper I had forwarded to him was returned with his seal affixed as I had requested he would do and is now in my possession."*[97]

The letter contained a lot of truth but the Major had yet again lied in claiming that he had received the deed only in August. Despite the lie the suspicion of the government should have been aroused as to why Major Lloyd had not informed the

[97] F.P.C: 9 November 1835, No. 55 (dated 31 October 1835).

## CHAPTER - III

# THE PRELUDE TO THE ANNEXATION

"No community tribal or otherwise will readily welcome in its midst the intrusion of a population practicing a way of life which is at complete variance with its own." Nari Rustomji[1]

## DARJEELING GROWS AMIDST SIKKIM'S WOES

The British with the deed of Darjeeling grant took no haste in occupying the area that seemed to promise so much to them. The much needed hill station had taken many years of

[1] Rustomji, Nari: ***Imperiled Frontiers,*** *India's North-Eastern Borderlands,* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983, p. 7.

searching and in the midst of failures and frustrations Darjeeling's discovery had come like a blessed rain after a long period of draught. Yet very little was done till 1839. It was claimed that the delay was caused because "*the Government had not sufficient experience of the beneficial nature of the climate of Darjeeling to warrant its incurring immediately any considerable expense for the establishment of a Sanatarium.*"[2] However, there were other factors involved also. Beside the climatic criterion there were other criteria like the terrain being naturally difficult of access and relatively unexplored, virtual lack of infrastructure like roads and other means of communication, difficulty in procuring labourers, harshness of the winters and the impossibility of making any real progress in construction work during the monsoons. The government could have also been preoccupied with other more pressing matters and the lack of adequate knowledge of the lie of the land must have also contributed to the numerous existing problems. However, to this long list of reasons one must necessarily add another which probably outweighed all the above causes, that of a series of protests and pleadings by the Sikkim *Chogyal*. The ruler's insistence that the transfer of the territory was a conditional one and that the British were honour-bound to fulfill the conditions he had laid down certainly came in the way of any major and hasty development of Darjeeling. One must also take into account that the *Chogyal* was not the only one protesting and even as the negotiations for the grant were in progress there were protests from within the British administration also.

A quiet beginning was made with "*...a view to test the climate of Dorjéling and to ascertain other local peculiarities*" where it was decided "*...to depute Lieutenant Colonel Lloyd to that station...accompanied by a Medical Officer of*

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[2] Bayley, H.V: *Dorje-ling*, Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1838, Calcutta, p. 6.

## THE THREE MEN AT THE CENTRE STAGE

Dr. (later Sir) Joseph Dalton Hooker, a contemporary of Charles Darwin, was a botanist son of a much respected and acclaimed botanist Sir William Hooker. The events leading to his and the Superintendent's arrest as well as of the incarceration of these two gentlemen were recorded in a great detail in his much-celebrated travelogue, *Himalayan Journals*. This wonderfully written travelogue has been quoted more than often to justify British aggression and annexation of Darjeeling and over the years it became the central reference source for future writers and historians studying the processes that culminated the annexation of Darjeeling and its foothills. It is rather surprising that historians have not questioned the fidelity and motives of Dr. Hooker's accounts. Despite being an excellent travelogue it must be said that the accounts are also a carefully camouflaged document to defend Dr. Campbell and British interests. Gazetteers and historians have gobbled up and re-reported from the *Himalayan Journals* to such an extent that the document has, unfortunately, acquired an air of authenticity and authoritative reporting.

Dr. Hooker's travel companion in Sikkim for a considerable period of time, Dr Arthur D. Campbell, was the first Superintendent of Darjeeling having been appointed to the job in 1839 from his previous assignment as the Assistant

# THE INTRUSION

The entry of Hooker and Campbell into Sikkim and their subsequent arrest set the ball of annexation of Darjeeling rolling. The two gentlemen made their way into the interiors of Sikkim twice and on the second time invited incarceration at the hands of Sikkim authorities. The establishment at Darjeeling and its superiors in Calcutta always claimed that the gentlemen had the required permits issued by the Sikkim ruler and therefore their confinement was illegal and the treatment they received an insult to the Empire. A punitive force that was sent to redress the insult but it was badly mauled by the Sikkimese using simple booby traps and by rolling boulders down the hill. The injured British pride could not take this humiliation of salt being rubbed on its wounds. Troops consisting of an original force numbering 329 men and 1,591 as reinforcement armed with muskets, mountain gun and howitzers descended upon the small kingdom that did not even possess a standing army. Unwilling to take chances hundreds of troops were kept in reserve at Titalya, Jalpaiguri and Purnea. Sikkim succumbed and the whole of Darjeeling was annexed to the Empire. The key issue to the invasion was that the arrested gentlemen had the required permits to enter Sikkim while all evidences point conclusively to the fact that the *Chogyal* had not issued the permits. The finger of suspicion for the injustice strongly points to the government and the men that steered the affairs of so vast an empire like

## THE SECOND INTRUSION

Hooker undertook a brief spell in the plains and was back in Darjeeling by March. The whole of April was spent on preparation for another trip to Sikkim while Campbell communicated to the *Chogyal*, in the name of the Governor-General of India, Hooker's intention to visit the Sikkimese frontier, north east of the Kanchenjunga mountain. After sometime it was claimed that the *Chogyal*'s permission had been obtained.[70] The Sikkim officials' reaction was entirely contrary to that claim and Lasoo Kazi, the proposed Sikkimese Agent to Darjeeling, warned that he was prepared to use strong measures should they cross over to Sikkim. The British reaction was that unless orders to the contrary were received from the *Chogyal*, through a proper accredited agent, Hooker would proceed as planned. There was no '*proper accredited agent*' since the Sikkim's representative, Lasoo Kazi, had been twice rejected by the Darjeeling officials on the grounds of *insolence* and *incapacity*. But most of all the onus of proving that Hooker had the permit to enter Sikkim was set aside and the burden transferred on the Sikkim authorities to prove that he had not. For the Sikkim officers, as in any place in the world, the difficulty was to be impudent enough to ask the King if he had issued such a permit. As crafty as the move

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[70] Hooker, J.D: Vol. 2, p. 29.

## THE ARREST

Every time Campbell did something he hurt the Sikkimese officials. The defiant entry into Tibet from Sikkimese soil became the proverbial last straw on the camel's back. Having exhausted all means of trying to show their eagerness to hold the meeting the Sikkimese officials sent two groups of *sepoys* to bring Campbell back to the *Durbar* for the conference he had come to conduct. Of what happened next Hooker wrote:

> *"On our return* (from Tibet) *we were accompanied by the Dingpun of the Tibetans and a few of his people, and were soon met by more Sikkimese sepoys, who said they were sent from the Durbar, to bring Campbell back to transact business; they behaved very rudely, and when still half a mile from Sikkim frontier, jostled him and feigned to draw their knives, and one of them pointed a spear-headed bow to his breast."*[76]

The Sikkimese may seem a bit over-reactive but there was no intention to hurt anybody and Hooker noted that *the possibility of danger of violence never entered my mind.* The *sepoys* could have tied him down with ropes around his hands, feet

[76] Hooker, J. D: Vol. 2, pp. 204-205.

## Chapter - IV

# THE ANNEXATION

### The First Assault on Sikkim: Partial Annexation

The grand drama had been enacted and, fortunately for Campbell, the Sikkimese had made every mistake that they should not have. To have Hooker, who could carry a word or two to the right ears, as a witness was an additional advantage. Campbell had orchestrated the prelude with a fine precision and a grand finale was at hand, the annexation of a large portion of Sikkim was just a matter of time. The period was imminent when the British would not have to reach Darjeeling by passing through the *Chogyal*'s territory "*acknowledging the*

## THE LULL AND THE STORM

For about a decade the relationship between Sikkim and Britain progressed without hostility. Britain maintained an official policy of avoiding any provocation that might force Sikkim into a closer alignment with Tibet. However, at the same time Britain was looking for an opportunity to consolidate its influence and though hostilities ceased for some time it was only a lull before the storm. Sikkim was deceived into believing that British would not point its guns at her and that peace would prevail. Sikkim did not realize that for Britain "*Tibet as a potential centre of trans-Himamalayan trade was irresistible. Surrounded by Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, Darjeeling*" provided "*splendid opportunity to develop as an entrepot of Central Asian trade*".[18] For Sikkim the 'grant' of Darjeeling was a routine exchange where Sikkim gave Britain something and received another in return. To Britain it became "*an event of the greatest importance in the history of northern frontier of India. Not only did it place the British in close contact with the hill states, their peoples and their politics, but also it provided a constant reminder of the*

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[18] Sen, Jahar: *Darjeeling A Favoured Retreat*, Indus Publishing Co., New Delhi, 1989, p. 13.

The invasion force was supported by 100 Gorkha Policemen, 620 men of the Coolie Corps and 250 Dhanga coolies, 93 mules from the neighbourhood and 35 government mules and yaboos, 93 ponies on record as procured from 460 indented, along with 'tikka' (spot hired on hour / job basis) coolies.

Gawler bought a copy of the *Himalayan Journals* by Hooker and obtained a map of Sikkim by the same author to study them on his journey to Darjeeling. At Darjeeling he proposed that the troops would proceed to the capital, Tumlong, leaving 400 men, as a part of reassurance to the frightened folks, to garrison Darjeeling. The approach was decided through Namchi which after occupation would be guarded by 300 men while the remainder were to be the main assault force, advancing through Took Ghat, cutting off Sikkim's communication with Tibet, and finally on to Tumlong.[37] Gawler planned every move in detail taking stock of not just the arms and ammunitions but also the chain of supplies he would require and of how much load was feasible on a coolie or a mule. Blankets, uniforms, and even seemingly unimportant details like an extra pair of shoes[38] for the soldiers were not omitted.

The New Year's day in 1861 commenced with Dr. Campbell receiving orders to occupy the territory to the west of Greater Rangit River in preparation for an assault on Tumlong. In the meanwhile hectic preparation went on to get the whole expedition to run like a well-greased machine. Campbell was expectedly involved in the preparation of the support team but having disastrously erred previously the

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[37] Gawler, Col. J.C: p. 13 & 14.

[38] The extra pair of shoes were to save a large amount of money and a good amount of time. When the soldiers marched into Darjeeling most of them were wearing shoes damaged well beyond repair. Without the extra pair the mission would have been badly delayed costing time, money and possibility of surprise attack on Sikkim.

## THE TREATY OF HUMILIATION

The treaty[45] begins by decrying the Sikkimese for "*continued depredations and misconduct*", "*the neglect of the Maharajah*" etc. along with the Maharajah expressing his "*sincere regret for the misconduct of his servants and subjects*". Article One revoked all previous treaties and the next Article restored all the recently occupied territories to Sikkim. Article Three required the Maharajah to do his best to return within one month the property abandoned by the British troops. Article Four sought compensation for '*British subjects who were pillaged and kidnapped*' including indemnity for the British invasion at the threat of losing more territory if Sikkim failed to oblige.

Article Five and Six made it necessary to extradite to Darjeeling any British criminal taking refuge in Sikkim

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[45] Aitchison, C.U: *A Collection of TREATIES, ENGAGEMENTS AND SANADA relating to India and Neighbouring Countries (Revised and Continued up to 1929) Vol. XII: Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim, Assam & Burma*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1983, pp.61-65. (Full text in the Appendix)

# Darjeeling

*"The one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once – even by a glimpse – would not give that glimpse for the shows of the rest of the world combined."*

**- Mark Twain**

## CHAPTER - V

# POLITICS IN THE DARJEELING HILLS

### A BACKGROUND

If the process of annexation of Darjeeling from Sikkim to British India was muddled with intrigues, deceit and betrayal then the eventual story of the territory Sikkim so painfully lost is no better. If the British refused to understand the pains of Sikkim then the aches of Darjeeling district have also not been understood by the governments that ruled the district. If Sikkim was betrayed by her native son, Chhibu Lama, then

one cried '*Et tu G.....!*' and a confused community celebrated jubilantly knowing not why.

Let us begin, very briefly, with the beginning. The present day three sub-divisions of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Siliguri belonged to Sikkim till Nepal annexed them.[3] The East India Company, following the Anglo-Gorkha War, possessed the subdivisions for a short period[4] and then returned them to Sikkim, *in full sovereignty*,[5] only to reclaim them militarily in 1861.[6] Kalimpong, a sub-division today on the other side of the Teesta River, also belonged to Sikkim and subsequent to a conflict the territory came under the authority of Bhutan.[7] The British in its bid to take over the eighteen *duars*[8] leading into Bhutan conveniently stretched its conquest to include

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[3] Stiller, SJ., Ludwig F: *The Rise of the House of Gorkhas*, Kathmandu, 1973, p. 150

Risley, H.H: *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, Cal, 1894 (Gangtok, 1989), p. 18.

[4] The Treaty of Sagauli (2 December 1815) Article 3:

See also the Sunnud granted to the Rajah of Sikkim (& April 1817) Paragraph one.

[5] Aitchison, C.U: *A Collection of TREATIES, ENGAGEMENTS, AND SANADS relating to India and Neihbouring Countries (Revised and continued up to 1929) Vol. XII: Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim, Assam & Burma*, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1983 (reprint), p 58: The Treaty of Titalya (10 February 1817) Article 1. See Appendix for full text.

Dozey, E.C: *Darjeeling Past and Present*, Calcutta, 1916 (1922), p. 6.

O'Malley, L.S.S: *Bengal District Gazetteers-DARJEELING*, Calcutta, 1907 (1989), p. 27.

[6] On 16 April 1861 Sikkim signed the Treaty of Tumlong. *Sikkim A Concise Chronicle*, Publicity Department, Govt. of Sikkim, p. 14: "*Another expedition followed next year. The Treaty of 1861 was forced on Sikkim and the annexation of Darjeeling confirmed.*"

Professor Jahar Sen writes that with this Treaty "The annexation of Darjeeling was also confirmed.", (*Darjeeling – A Favoured Retreat*, p. 16)

[7] Risley: p. 12.

[8] *Duar* is the Sanskrit for door. The *duars* were the passes leading to and out of Bhutan.

# THE FIRST STIRRINGS

The relative newness of the district, the numerous administrative changes, differences in laws and many other reasons must have stemmed the early initiation of political consciousness in the hill people of Darjeeling. It is true that, even several decades after the district was formed the people of the district were not politically vigorous and in comparison to the great political upheavals that took place in the plains of India the activities in the hills look modestly diminutive. It took quite a while for political awareness to arrive and when it did it was not directed to grandiose dreams of independence from foreign shackles for that was to come much later on and on a comparatively limited scale. Ultimately, when a small amount of politics was indulged upon, it was in demand for the basic, down-to-earth and minimal requirements for safeguarding one's own people living in the immediate surroundings i.e., the interests of the people and their property in the hills of Darjeeling district.

The majority of the hill people in the 19th Century were settlers from Nepal and the Darjeeling hills were just a source of employment rather than a place of settlement. They still looked to the country of their origin for security and eventual

In this segment of the chapter the contribution of native freedom fighters who valiantly fought against the oppression of British rule is not included. This has not been done to belittle their glorious contribution, some of them having even laid down their lives, but to limit the writing entirely to local issues.

The Government of India Act of 1935 transformed Darjeeling District into a Partially Excluded Area and the apprehension expressed by the Hillmen's Association, a year ago, became a sinister reality for the district was now required to send a representative to the Bengal Legislature.[44] The election was conducted on limited franchise basis where only those who were educated and had certificates of land holding in the hills could vote. In a strange display of ignorance a large group of these educated people approached Raja Sonam Topgay Dorji to be the unanimous candidate. The Raja declined reminding the delegation that he was a Bhutanese official and not a citizen of British India. Eventually four of the best educated citizens joined the fray: Sardarbahadur Ladenla, retired Assistant Superintendent of Police, Rai Saheb Hariprasad Pradhan, the first Nepali law graduate from the district, Gyan Tshering Sitling, a graduate from Duff College and an ex-Padre of Scottish Mission and Dambar Singh

[44] Narbula, Dawa: p. 3.
Gurung, Nar Bahadur: p. 10.

India became independent of British rule on 15 August 1947. Under the changed circumstances the hill leaders expected widespread changes. Keeping in tune with the current political mood in 1949 Rahdhir Subba, one of the most influential Gorkha leaders to emerge after the death of Dambar Singh Gurung as well as the editor of the AIGL mouthpiece, *Gorkha*, along with Roop Narayan Sinha proposed the creation of Uttarkhand formed of Darjeeling District, Sikkim, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar.[60] A meeting was held on 29 October 1949 with representatives of these four places, a committee was constituted and on the next day a public meeting was held to explain and create awareness amongst the public. On 15 December 1949 Pandit T.D. Bhargava raised a question seeking to know whether the government had received any representation in this regard and if so what was the policy adopted in that regard. Sardar Vallabbhai Patel, the Home Minister replied that he had not received any representation but that he had read Press reports about it. Regarding the government's policy he informed the House:

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[60] *Gurkha*, Vol. 5, No. 44, 1949 pp. 718-20

## PERPETUATING A MOVEMENT

Without going into elaborate details it might be useful to understand what keeps the separatist movement alive. Besides the several reasons put forward, elaborating the differences between the hills and the plains, by the Hillmen's Association there seem to be other subtle reasons that justify and nurture the movement for a separation. Strangely enough the life-sustaining nutrition has been and is being provided by none other than the politicians from the plains of West Bengal. Presently, West Bengal rests blissful that there has been peace for the last one decade but how long will the calm hold on! It does seem rather peculiar to believe in a hypothetical concept that Darjeeling district's hills may erupt, violently or otherwise, in the foreseeable future especially after Shri Subhas Ghising having put a strong nail on the coffin of a separatist movement. The non-hypothetical question is what is the use of a coffin if there is no corpse and this is exactly what the successive governments in West Bengal have failed to realize: to kill the basic need to aspire for a separation and thereby make a corpse out of the issue. This could have only been achieved through a sincere desire to see the hill people develop to their full potential even if it meant a little less nursing to the plains of West Bengal. After all the history of the hills is replete with pleas for severance of political ties from the plains and under the circumstances a softer handling and a more generous loosening of the purse strings would have worked wonders. It should have dawned on to the politicians in the plains that even with a gentler and a more

## The Cover

The photograph is an illustration of the ties that bind Sikkim and Darjeeling. At the extreme left foreground the Bhutia Busti Monastery in Darjeeling can be seen. Despite its geographical location being Darjeeling it is considered a Sikkimese Monastery and, in fact, it is claimed to be a branch of the famous Pemiongchi Monastery of Sikkim. The background has the Kanchenjunga Mountain, which is located in Sikkim and forms the boundary between Sikkim and Nepal. Nevertheless, because of the stupendous views of the massif obtained from Darjeeling, the world of tourism likes to think of the mountain as a part of Darjeeling district, disregarding its geographical location.

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