Colonial Intervention and Agricultural Conditions in Kalimpong Region under the British Rule (1865-1936)

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In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the

Degree of Masters of Philosophy

By

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Declaration

I, **Shital Khawas**, hereby declare that the research work embodied in my M. Phil dissertation entitled "**Colonial Intervention and Agricultural Conditions in Kalimpong Region under the British Rule (1865-1936)**" submitted to **Sikkim University** for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** in History, is my own original work. The dissertation has not been submitted to any other university.

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This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled "**Colonial Intervention and Agricultural Conditions in Kalimpong Region under the British Rule (1865-1936)**" submitted to Sikkim University for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in History, by Shital Khawas under my guidance and supervision. No part of the dissertation has been submitted for other Degree, Diploma, Association, and Fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by her.

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Shital Khawas

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Glossary

Athara Duars	The Eighteen corridors to enter Bhutan.
Adhiars	The sharecroppers entitled to half of the total production.
Bazar	A market place in India.
Chi	A fermented liquor prepared by the Lepchas.
Deb Raja	The temporal head of Bhutanese Monarchy.
Dhurma Raja	The spiritual head of Bhutanese Monarchy.
Dwar or Dooar	Gateway to enter Bhutan.
Dzongs	Forts in Bhutan.
Dzongpen	The Governor of the forts in Bhutan.
Jotedars	The wealthy peasants with large tracts of land in the colonial Bengal.
Karbaris	The unofficial assistant to the Mandals.
Khas (land)	Designated wasteland under the Government.
Mahajan	The community in India engaged in trade and money lending.
Mandals	The village headmen and the intermediary officer between the British and the raiyats of the Kalimpong region.
Minaps	Free peasants in Bhutan.
Panikhet	Cultivation carried with the help of irrigation.
Patta	A legal document recording the conditions on which a raiyat holds his land.
Penlop	The Governor of the Provinces in Bhutan.
Raiyat	Cultivator who acquired the right to hold land under the British Government.
Rongs	The Lepchas called themselves as Rongs.
Sanad	The deed on which the terms of Mandals were written.
Sudyom-prek-shyon	Shifting agriculture in Lepcha language.
Sukhakhet	Dry cultivation or cultivation without irrigation.
Tehsildars	A revenue officers.
Tehsils	Administrative parts in India.
Zo	Rice cultivated by the Lepchas without irrigation.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The initial encounter between the British Colonial Rulers and the Indian rural society was through the introduction of different land revenue policies such as Permanent Settlement, Ryotwari Settlement and Mahalwari Settlement in the different parts of India. These policies aimed to secure and maximise the state's share in the country's produce. Several arguments have emerged over the years on these colonial interventions' impact on Indian rural society. Some scholars argue about the continuance of the pre-colonial systems under the colonial Government while others believe that there had been a significant change under the British rule. The focus of analysis has been growing ever since. This study aims to amplify this growing part of the literature by focusing on the agricultural conditions, specifically the method of cultivation, property relations and the agrarian structure that developed in the Kalimpong region after its annexation by the British colonial Government of India. Following the Treaty of Sinchulia, the Kalimpong region was annexed by the British Colonial Government in India from the Bhutanese Government and was brought under the Darjeeling District of Bengal (Bell 1905:1; Sunder 2013:41-42). This research specifically aims to emphasize the changes brought under British colonial rule, in the pre-colonial agricultural conditions of the region characterised by shifting agriculture with simple productive forces, and communal ownership of land, with very little differentiation among the peasantry.

In the pre-British period, the Kalimpong[1] the region was called Dalimkote and formed the westernmost district of Bhutan. Kalimpong also was one of the *Athara Duars*[2] of Bhutan. The Dalimkote Dzongpen[3] under the Penlop of Western Bhutan was the administrator of the region. Each village headman of the region was responsible for the collection of taxes (capitation tax and cattle tax) from the inhabitants of the region and remitting the same to the officials of Dalimkote Dzongpen. The decentralized power in Bhutan prior to modernization often led several scholars to believe in the existence of feudalism in Bhutan. However, Bhutan was not feudal in the real sense (Wangchuk 2000:54-84). Rather there existed a mixture of landholding systems in Bhutan where there were *minaps* or free peasants, *zazen* or slaves and *zab* or serfs existing at the same time (Wangchuk 2000:54-84).

Similarly, the pre-British economy of Kalimpong was more or less a tribal economy where the techniques of production were simple, with little differentiation among the cultivators that determined the economic and social relations. Occupancy of the land was recognized through their traditional association with the land (Fonning 1987: 19). The land due to its abundance did not form the most valuable asset during this period, however, the inhabitants largely depended upon the land and the forest for their

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[1]Under the Bhutanese rule, the Kalimpong region was called "Dalimkote " derived from the Lepcha word "Dalim" a fort situated in the southern part of the region where the Governor of this region resided. The Lepcha interpretations suggest that during the Bhutanese period, the camps were set in present-day Kalimpong town, where the people of the region paid taxes in the form of kind to the Bhutanese officials. During the collection of taxes, various sports used to be organized for entertainment, and it was in this context that the name of the place became Kalimpong, derived from the Lepcha words Ka-Lem-Pung, "ridge where we play" (Fonning 1987: 13).

[2] The word "*duar*" or "*dooar*" an anglicized form of the Hindoostanee word "*dwar*" literally meant "gate" to enter Bhutan. However, contrary to its meaning the Duars referred to the whole tract ranging from River Dhumshree in the east in Assam to Teesta River in the west in Bengal. There were Eighteen Duars collectively called *Athara Duars*. (Rennie 1866: 2-3)

[3] The word *Dzongpen* or *Jungpen* is derived from the word 'dzong' or 'jung' literally meaning 'a fort' and pen meaning 'keeper' or 'governor'. They were appointed by the Penlops (Governor of Provinces of Bhutan) from among their own followers and were responsible for the administration of the districts of Bhutan (Rennie 1865:20; Roy 2013:15).

survival. The whole region came to be annexed to the British colonial Government in India following the Treaty of Sinchulia concluded on 11th November 1865 (Bell 1905:1; Sunder 2013:41-42). It was designated as the Dalimkote sub-division under the Western Duars[4] and was placed under the Deputy-Commissioner of the Western Duars until it was transferred to the Darjeeling District of Bengal in 1866 (Hunter 1876:121). After the transfer to the Darjeeling District, initiatives were made by the colonial government to transform the agriculture of the region while the rest of the hilly regions of Darjeeling was witnessing the extension of tea plantations (Subba 1983:122-125; Ghosh 1987: 27). A new decennial land revenue settlement was introduced in the region in the year 1882. It was revised after ten years in 1891,1901, and 1921 respectively. In 1916, the whole area from the east of Teesta up to the Bhutan frontier came to form the Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling District (Roy 2015:41). The settlement of 1921 was made for 15 years until it expired in 1936 (Dash 1947:219-220).

In order to understand the colonial intervention in the agriculture of Kalimpong and its impact, it is necessary to have an overview of different trends of argument on the impact of British rule in Indian agriculture. The traditional view that emerged in the late nineteenth century argued that the British intervention in Indian agriculture through their land revenue administration brought about a quantitative transformation in rural Indian society (Chaudhury 1983: 86; Stein 1992: 3). Against this general belief, one opposing view emerged in the 1970s, which argued that the British agrarian policies did not actually lead to any qualitative changes rather what appeared

[4] After the annexation of the *Athara Duars*, the whole tract was divided into two parts. The eastern part stretches from the Sankosh River attached to the Goalpara district of Assam. The area west of the Sankosh River was attached to the newly created Western Duars district. The Western Duars were further divided into three *tehsils*: Sadar, Buxa and Dalimkote (Roy 2013: 41).

to be a transformation was a mere continuation of the pre-British systems (Ray and Ray 1975:82). This view has been criticised by several historians like B.B Chaudhury and later by Neeladri Bhattacharya who asserted that British initiative through the policies inevitably implied changes in the social fabric, and the system which appeared to be continuous were not the same as it became under the British rule (Chaudhury 1983: 174-175; Bhattacharya 1992:49). B.B Chaudhuri especially focuses on the agrarian relations in eastern India and interprets against the traditional interpretations of the impact of British rule concluding that there was no mere continuation of the old order during the British rule in eastern India. In fact, British rule brought changes in the composition of the landed society and the agrarian relations in the rural society of eastern India. There were changes in the composition of moneylenders as well as the appropriation of credit by the creditors (Chaudhury 1983: 174-175).

In the context of Bengal, the most significant colonial intervention in agriculture in Bengal is the introduction of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 which is said to have brought about a drastic change in the Bengal agrarian society (Bandyopadhyay 2004:83-86). In the 1970s emerged the *jotedari-adhiars* thesis which came to be regarded as the central agrarian structure in colonial Bengal (Bose 1986:11-15). This thesis focussed on the conflict between the *jotedars*,who were a new category of large landowners that emerged after the Permanent Settlement and the *adhiars* or the sharecroppers employed by them. These *jotedars* with their substantial land, the social authority of village headship and the authority over credit exercised supreme power over the sharecroppers (Ray and Ray 1975:82). This agrarian structure was believed to be the dominant form of agrarian structure in the whole of Bengal. However, Sugata Bose in the 1980s refuted its presence in the whole of Bengal and argued that

the jotedari-adhiars thesis does not represent the agrarian structure of the whole of Bengal but rather is concentrated only in the districts of North Bengal[5] (Bose 1986:11-15). According to Bose, North Bengal developed this model due to some factors such as the late nineteenth-century reclamation of land, the existence of the pre-colonial classes of rich peasants or *jotedars*, and a low density of population (Bose 1986: 11-12).

It can be said that most of the studies on the effect of colonial interference on Indian agriculture have specifically focussed on "settled agriculture" which does not satisfactorily represent the impacts made on the other forms of agriculture and the agrarian relations governing them. Therefore, the study of agricultural conditions during colonial rule requires looking beyond the conventional analysis of "settled peasantry", to address their impacts in the frontier regions of North Bengal like Kalimpong where the pre-colonial economy was largely dominated by shifting agriculture. Such a shift would require us to demystify the colonial notion of shifting agriculture as "wasteful", and "primitive", and to understand it as a "form of cultivation" with certain techniques of production and certain agrarian relations governing it. Also, it is necessary to understand the forests from the perspective of the shifting agriculturists whose rights came to be curtailed under the new forest policies. This approach will not only help us to understand the nature of changes in the agriculture of these regions under the British but also help us to realize how this colonial concept of shifting cultivation assisted the colonial authorities to overhaul the existing forms of production and to justify the changes brought by it in the region.

[5] The large tracts of *wastelands* in North Bengal were leased to the *jotedars* before and after the Permanent settlement. The labourers for reclamation were provided by the semi-tribal *Koches* and *Paliyas* and immigrant Santhal tribes who, after the reclamation, were settled as the sharecroppers with no right of continued occupancy of land they tilled (Bose 1986:11-13)

Also, prior studies on the agrarian conditions of the Kalimpong region during colonial rule have suggested the continuity of the pre-British system during the colonial period (Subba 1983: 122-125; Sarkar 2010: 81-121). Such assertions were made mainly on the basis of the continuation of the *Mandal system* or the village headmen without realizing the changes in its composition and their relation with the other cultivators. Also, these have not focussed on how the new land revenue policies brought about changes in property relations and the agrarian relation in rural society. Meanwhile, it is also necessary to scrutinize whether the *jotedari-adhiars* model as prepared by Bose (1986: 11-12) for Darjeeling and that of North Bengal aligns with the agrarian structure of the Kalimpong region where the necessary condition like the pre-colonial class of *jotedars* was virtually absent.

Statement of the Problem

The Kalimpong region witnessed a shift in sovereignty from the Bhutanese Government to the British Colonial Government in India after the Second Anglo-Bhutanese War. The shift in the regime along with the changes in the pattern of dominance led to an absolute transformation in the method and techniques of agriculture, new land revenue system led to changes in property relations and led to the emergence of a particular kind of agrarian structure in the region.

The pre-British agrarian economy of Kalimpong primarily revolved around shifting agriculture and pastoralism. The sophisticated land systems which the British encountered in most parts of India did not prevail here; rather poll tax and cattle tax were paid by the inhabitants to the Bhutanese Government. The headmen of each village were responsible for collecting the taxes and remitting them to the Bhutanese officials. The economic possession of the inhabitants and the agrarian relations was

not complex and diversified as they became under British Rule. The region witnessed the colonial intervention in the agriculture of the region through several forest policies and the agrarian policies which ultimately transformed the pre-existing agrarian condition of the region.

Initially, an effort was made to establish the supremacy of settled agriculture over the existing method of agriculture, buttressed by the idea that the prevalent shifting agriculture was ‘wasteful’ and ‘primitive’. This conception along with the ongoing immigration of the Nepalese population in the Darjeeling District, known to the British for their enterprising nature and settled agriculturists, were deliberately encouraged to settle as raiyats in the region. These new settlers brought about new agrarian methods and techniques, ultimately transforming the region's production process. The colonial authorities introduced a new decennial land revenue system in which the Government directly held land and leased it to the cultivators in lieu of the annual cash rent. The system vested the power of rent collection as well as settling new settlers by providing some privileges to the existing institution of village headmen or the *Mandals*. However, their function in the agrarian economy of Kalimpong tremendously changed along with the change in production techniques. All lands were appropriated by the British in the name of the Forest Reserves, land for plantations (both tea and cinchona), and wastelands which waned the earlier existing relation of the inhabitants with land and the forest. The land revenue system introduced property rights to the cultivators, as it was based on the payment of the annualtax, failing which would lead to the cancellation of his lease and the sale of his moveable and immovable property. Therefore, the new land revenue system ultimately introduced insecure property rights that often led the cultivators to fall prey to the fortune-seeking money lenders and the rich peasants turned money lenders of

the region and the distress sale of their lands to the rich peasants. The new agrarian methods, continuous immigration of the Nepalese and the subsequent shortage of wastelands, the introduction of the landed system led to the evolution of a particular kind of agrarian structure in the region.

Review of the Literature

The abundant research on the colonial history of Darjeeling has often been concentrated on the study of tea plantations. This has often led to oversight of the region's agricultural history of the region. There are very few works that have dealt with the agricultural economy of the region. Some of those works will be reviewed below

Virginius Xaxa (Xaxa 1980) in his article "Evolution of Agrarian Structure and Relations in Jalpaiguri District (West Bengal); A Case Study of Subsistence Setting" stated that a rudimentary form of agrarian hierarchy with the zamindars and the tenure holders had already emerged in the Western Duars during the pre-British period. New land revenue settlement during the British led to the emergence of a particular kind of agrarian structure in the region where *jotedars* at the top of the hierarchy leased land to *chakunidars*, and the latter further leased land to *dar-chakunidars*. While the actual tilling of the land was done by the raiyats and *adhiars* (Xaxa 1980: 63-85). His works however do not put a light on the pre-colonial agrarian relations among the shifting cultivators and on how the colonial rule impacted their agrarian economy.

T.B Subba's (Subba 1983) "Caste, Class and Agrarian Relations in the Nepalese Society of Darjeeling and Sikkim" analysed the relationship between the Nepalese Caste system and the agrarian class structure in Darjeeling and Sikkim. He found out

that the individual role rather than the established caste structure determined the people's economic performance, for which the middle class comprised all castes and tribes of Nepali heritage in Darjeeling. Kalimpong was developed mainly as an agricultural area, unlike the rest of the Darjeeling hills clad with tea plantations under the British, leading to the consequent different forms of agrarian relations in the region. There was a continuity of the pre-British land management system and the village administration in the Kalimpong region (Subba 1983:122-123). However, the changes in the pre-British agricultural systems due to the British colonial policies in the region have not been elucidated.

B.B. Chaudhury (Chaudhury 1983) analysed the impact of British rule on the agriculture of eastern India. Arguing against the debate on the continuation of the pre-British systems under British rule, Chaudhury argued that the old orders could hardly be preserved in eastern India. In fact, there was a change in the composition of the landed society, the relationship between the *zamindars* and the cultivators, the composition of money lenders and credit organizations and appropriations. Therefore, it was not the mere continuation of the old order as had been argued by many scholars (Chaudhury 1983:174-175). However, his work has specially focussed on the settled peasantry where the agrarian hierarchy had already been established much before the British rule.

Buddhadev Chaudhuri (Chaudhuri 1985) in "Agrarian Relations in a Hill Region" conducted a study on Ecchey *khasmahal* under the Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling District where he tried to assess the trends of change following the rural development programme initiated in the middle of the nineteen seventies. It was found that the land was owned by a small number of big farmers and absentee

landowners thus, enduring the 'feudal character' who gave land to the landless labourers and the sharecroppers. Dealing with agrarian relations in the region, the author believed that these big landowners extended their exploitation on the sharecroppers and the landless labourers through money-lending activities. Therefore, it is necessary to replace the traditional *mahajani* system to initiate any reform in the region (Chaudhuri 1985). However, further research is required in order to understand how existing land-holding patterns and agrarian relations emerged in the region.

Tushar Kanti Ghosh (Ghosh 1987) in the *Tea Gardens of West Bengal A Critical Study of Land Management* also noticed that when the rest of Darjeeling was witnessing the extension of tea plantations, the lands in Kalimpong was withheld for tea cultivation and the policy of the Government was for forest reservation and the native cultivation (Ghosh 1987: 27). However, he has not discussed why the Kalimpong region was exclusively made into an agricultural region.

Viney Krishin Gidwani's (Gidwani 1992) work "'Waste' and the Permanent Settlement in Bengal" attempted to acknowledge the ideological richness and the political significance of the concept of "waste" in the Permanent Settlement of Bengal (Gidwani 1992: 39-40). He argued that 'waste' during the Permanent Settlement did not merely represent a form of 'land use', rather it came to represent the cultural inferiority of the Indians (Bengali zamindars). This idea of waste was generated through the discourse of modernism that influenced Europe in the 17th century when the works of John Locke gave waste its ascriptive quality and constructed 'waste', 'value' and 'property' as a divinely ordained triad. This ascriptive form of waste became politically significant as it led to perceive idleness, extravagance, and indolent behaviour of the Bengali zamindars which contrasted with the industry and economic

qualities of the English. The abundance of waste in Bengal marked the cultural superiority of the English, which could be eradicated through the laws and administrative measures to transform this indolent behaviour. Through this idea of waste, the English established their cultural superiority, justified laws, and legitimized colonial rule in Bengal (Gidwani 1992: 43-44). The work of Gidwani surely enriches and broadens the lens to analyse the land revenue settlement by the colonial rulers in India.

Swattasidhha Sarkar in the "Land Question and Ethnicity in the Darjeeling Hills" conceptualized Darjeeling as a "social formation", and has attempted to deal with the factors behind the rise of the ethnic movement of "Gorkhaland". Sarkar asserted that Kalimpong was agriculturally dominated because it was annexed to Darjeeling later when the planters were less interested in further promoting the tea plantation. He also argued that poor communication in Kalimpong discouraged investment in the tea plantation (Sarkar 2010: 89-90). However, Sarkar failed to notice the extension of tea cultivation in the rest of Western Dooars (now Jalpaiguri District and Alipurduar Districts) which was annexed with Kalimpong in the same year 1865 and 82% growth in the area under tea cultivation between 1866-1874 in Darjeeling (Ghosh 1987: 27). He reiterated Subba (Subba 1983:122-123) and argued for the continuation of the pre-colonial systems in Kalimpong under the British without recognizing the huge changes brought under the colonial period.

Tapan Kumar Das (Das 2015) in his article "On Colonial Ethnopolitics; Bell's Survey and The Settlement Report (1905)" analysed how the British strengthened their position in the region through "pampering" and developing a "symbiotic relationship" with the Nepalese settlers to counterbalance the Lepchas and the other indigenous

communities who were disloyal in the eyes of the colonial officials. He stated that Kalimpong was under the Sikkimese rule He pointed out the changes made in the role of *Mandals* under the British to serve the imperial interests (Das 2015: 1-22). However, unlike Das concluded Kalimpong was under the Bhutanese and not Sikkim prior to the British occupation with differences in the agricultural conditions. Apart from the changes in the role of the *Mandals*, it is necessary to recognize changes in the method of production initiated by the colonial policies in the region.

D.C Roy (Roy 2015) in "Search for Identity of a Tribe through Administrative Reform; The Case of the Lepchas of West Bengal"pointed out that large immigration of Tibetans and Nepalese at different periods of history, the Land Settlement Act and the Forest Reservation Act and others were responsible for the marginalization of the Lepchas. The British took the transfer of Lepcha lands to the non-Lepchas with much concern which he considered as worrisome (Roy 2015: 131-143). Roy's work however, overlooks the fact why the colonist being aware of the marginalization of Lepchas adopted ambiguous and contradictory policies to create revenues out of a region, employing one section of the population (Nepalese)and recognising them as hill tribes eligible to become *raiyats* while eventually marginalizing the native communities, Lepchas in particular.

Sarah Besky (Besky 2012) in her article "The Plantation's Outsides: The work of Settlement in Kalimpong India"deals with the different notions of 'settlement' and described it as an experimental process rather than a predetermined one. The work revolves around the extension of agriculture through the "Demonstration Farm" which was considered to be one of the techniques of settlement from the 1880s onwards (Besky 2021:1-31). However, the analysis of the new land revenue system under the

British has received minimal emphasis in her work. The agricultural history of the region was the main reason for the British to emphasize the extension of agriculture in the region.

The existing body of works on Kalimpong has not emphasized the changes and impact they brought to the region's agrarian economy.

Objectives

1. To trace the changes in agricultural methods and techniques after the British occupation of the Kalimpong region.

2. To discuss the introduction of the new land revenue system by the British Colonial authorities in the region.

3. To analyse the changes in the property rights of the cultivators following the new land revenue system in the region.

4. To examine the emergence of a new agrarian hierarchy in the region during the colonial period.

Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been applied. Archival documents, which largely contain the region’s colonial history, were one of the major sources that supported the study. Studying archival sources threw a great deal of light on the region. However, keeping in mind that many of the colonial accounts and official sources, as argued by Ranajit Guha, are elitist, an attempt has been made to analyze the “hidden meaning” of the archival documents. The critical method towards the

sources as suggested by Niebuhr and Leopold von Ranke has been applied during the research. Similarly, several secondary sources have been reviewed during the process of research with both acceptance and criticism.

Chapterisation

Chapter 1 **Introduction**

In the first chapter, the topic of the research is introduced and justified. Apart from the general introduction, it consists of a statement of the problem, a review of the literature, the objectives, the methodology, and the chapterization.

Chapter 2 **Agrarian Methods and Techniques**

The second chapter deals with the changes in the method and techniques of production after the region came under British rule. This chapter specifically deals with the establishment of the supremacy of settled agriculture over the existing method of shifting agriculture and the large immigration of the cultivating population from Eastern Nepal.

Chapter 3 **The Introduction of New Land Revenue Settlement**

This chapter deals with the introduction of new land revenue policies and their nature. Throwing light on the reason that led to the introduction of the new land revenue system in the region, the chapter also deals with the different features of the new land revenue system. Ultimately, the chapter aims to emphasis on the changes that were brought by the new land revenue system.

Chapter 4 **New Property Relations in Kalimpong Region**

In this chapter, the changes in the people's property rights with the introduction of the new land revenue system is analyzed. Further, the chapter attempts to show the consequences of the introduction of the insecure property rights such as the rise of rural indebtedness and the unequal distribution of land that ultimately changed the earlier existing property relations.

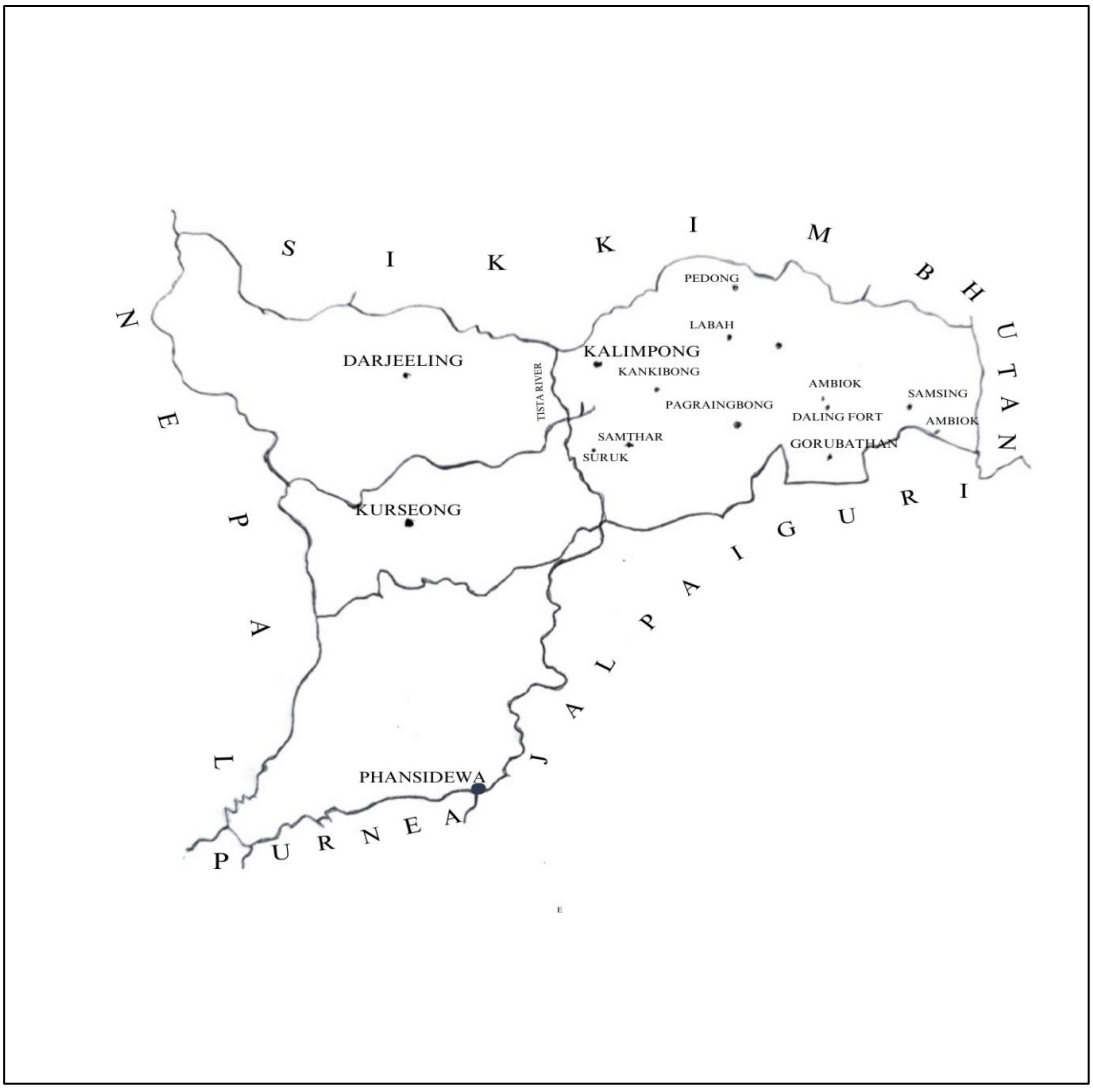
Chapter 5 **The Emergence of a New Agrarian Class Structure in the Kalimpong Region**

This chapter deals with the emergence of a new agrarian structure in the region and the role of the *Mandals* in the region's agrarian economy. It also examines the applicability of the *jotedari-adhiars* thesis in the region.

Chapter 6 **Conclusion**

This chapter aims to summarize and highlight all the important features and points of the previous chapters, thereby presenting this research's main ideas and output.

1.1 Map of Darjeeling District



Source: O'Malley 1907: 251.

Chapter 2

AGRARIAN METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

This chapter is an attempt to provide a brief political history of the region, its geographical area, its agricultural history, and the colonial intervention in the agricultural techniques that was initiated in the region right after its annexation.

History of the region

To begin with, the Kalimpong region was historically a part of Sikkim, Bhutan and British India at different periods of time. The shift in the sovereignty and their pattern of dominance have ultimately led to several changes in the economy of the region which revolved around shifting agriculture, pastoralism and hunting and gathering. However, the major alteration in the pre-existing agriculture and agrarian relations began with the British colonial intervention in the region through different agrarian and forest policies.

Kalimpong region was historically a part of Sikkim or which was called *Myel Lyang* meaning "the land of hidden paradise" by the *Rongs* or *Rong-kup* meaning the "children of the snowy peak" who are considered to be the original inhabitants of Sikkim. The Rongs were later called *Lapche* by the Nepalese meaning the vile speakers which were later anglicised as *Lepcha*. Sikkim was invaded by the Tibetans which led to the founding of the Namgyal dynasty in 1642 by Phuntsok Namgyal. The *Lho Mon Gtsong Gsum* or the Blood Brotherhood Treaty signed in 1663 between the Sikkimese Tibetans, the Rongs and the Limbus or Tsongs established the authority of the Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim (Mullard 2011: 140). The reign of the second king

Tensung Namgyal (1670-96) was of utmost importance to the Kalimpong region. The general history follows that in order to forbid any external and peripheral threats, Tensung Namgyal married women from three different regions of Bhutan, Tibet and Limboowan respectively. His death in 1696 brought a war of succession between his daughter Pende Ongmu and son Chagdor Namgyal. The minor son Chagdor Namgyal born from the Tibetan wife was chosen as the rightful heir in 1700 while Pende Ongmu born from the first wife who was from Bhutan claimed the throne. Therefore, when the throne passed to minor son Chakdor Namgyal, Pende Ongmu sought the intervention of Bhutan to attack Sikkim.

Under the attack of Bhutan, Chagdor Namgyal had to flee and seek refuge in Tibet. The Sikkimese capital Rhabdentse (located in the western part of Sikkim) remained under the Bhutanese rule till 1707 when the Tibetan Government intervened and convinced the Bhutanese force to return to Bhutan (Upadhyay 2017: 46-47; Pradhan 1991: 137). The deposed rule of Chagdor Namgyal was accordingly restored to the Sikkimese throne. While the Bhutanese forces retreated from the Sikkimese capital however they still retained their position at Damsang Fort in Kalimpong up to the hill of Tegong- La (Pradhan 1991:137). It is said that from this date, the Kalimpong region became a part of Bhutan. The whole tract of land captured from Sikkim in the east of River Teesta was called *Dalingkote* or *Dalimkote*[6] by the Bhutanese, the name being derived from the *Daling* or *Dalim* fort situated in the southern part of the region.*Dalimkote* formed the westernmost part of Bhutan and one of its eighteen Duars or the *Athara Duars.*[7]It formed the Sikkim-Bhutan border (Pradhan 1991:137).

[6]Here onwards Dalimkote.

[7]The word Duar is said to be the anglicized version of the Bengali word *Dwar* literally meaning 'gate' or 'entrance'. Contrary to its meaning the term Duars was used to refer to the whole tract stretching

The exact geographical extent of Dalingkote under the Bhutanese is however not clear. However, it can be established that the region roughly formed the hilly mountainous part that stretched from the eastern bank of the river Teesta (with Darjeeling hills lying in the west) to the Dalim fort lying above the plains (Roy 2013:41).

Bhutan was administered through a dual monarchical system comprising *Dharma Raja*, the spiritual or religious head of the state, and *Deb Raja*, the temporal head of the state (Roy 2013: 15). Under the *Deb Raja*, Bhutan was divided into three administrative regions namely, Eastern, Central and Western Bhutan which were under the administration of *Penlow* or the *Penlop*.[8] Each of these regions had one or two *dzongs* or forts each under *Dzongpens*. *Dzongpens* literally meaning the 'governor of the forts' was under the *Penlop* who were responsible for collecting revenue and maintaining law and order within their jurisdiction (Labh 1974:5-6). Kalimpong which was known as *Dalimkote* was administered by *Dalimkote* Dzongpen from the *Dalim* fort and was under the administration of the *Penlop* of Western Bhutan. The *Damsang* fort which was a smaller fort located near Pedong was under *Neiboo* which literally meant 'the keeper of the smaller forts.' The Lepchas were the inhabitants who came under the Bhutanese rule in 1707. They lived primarily on shifting agriculture, pastoralism and hunting and gathering. Also, the Bhutanese settlers came to inhabit the region when it came under their rule (Awasty 1978:14). With the long-term association of both the communities in the Kalimpong,

from the river Teesta in the West to the Dhumshree river near Assam in the West. They were collectively known as *Athara Duars* or the Eighteen Duars.

[8] Here onwards Penlop. They were the Chiefs of the Provinces or Governors (Roy 2013:15)

the region resulted in a considerable synthesis of their culture, religion and economy (Fonning 1987: 61).

The expanding British colonial frontier in India touched the Eastern Himalayas[9] when they got hold of Bengal following the Battle of Plassey 1757, which was further extended in 1817 by the Anglo-Nepalese War and the consequent Treaty of Segauli, in 1826 by the Anglo-Burmese War. The first encounter between British India and Bhutan began right after Warren Hastings became the first Governor General of Bengal (1772-1785). It is important to understand that British India and Bhutan were confronted in the First Anglo-Bhutanese War in 1772 when the Raja of Cooch Behar was abducted by the Bhutanese forces and therefore the claimants of Cooch Behar sought political aid from the British. Warren Hasting, the then Governor General of Bengal accepted the request and was successful in defeating Bhutan in the First Anglo-Bhutanese War. This war is said to have happened not only in the plains but also in the hilly part of *Dalimkote* which then formed the Bhutan-Sikkim border. In exchange for this help, Cooch Behar became the Protectorate under the East India Company (Roy 2013: 16; Pradhan 1991:137).

The peace between the British and Bhutan was breached after the Anglo-Burmese War in 1826 and the subsequent annexation of Assam brought the British frontiers closer to Bhutan. After this, border disputes and incidents of encroachments, theft, and abductions of the subjects started to be a common phenomenon. It was under this circumstance the mission from British India was undertaken by Captain R.B Pemberton in 1837 and 1838 with the prime motive to settle the border dispute

[9] Eastern Himalayas lay between 86 degrees to 88 degrees E latitudes. They cover the eastern part of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh (Harvir Sharma, 'Determinants of Modernization and Human Response in the Eastern Himalayas', The Himalayas: Profiles of Modernization and Adaptation ed. S.K Chaube, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1985, p.10)

between Assam and Cooch Behar as well as to initiate commercial relations with Bhutan (Roy 2013:20). However, it failed to bear any positive results. Also, the ceding of the Darjeeling region by the British through the Grant of Deed 1835 from the kingdom of Sikkim has consequently brought the borders between the British and Bhutan closer. Cooch Behar and Sikkim which now had become a Protectorate of the British Government also lodged a number of complaints against the Bhutanese attacks, thefts etc. Therefore, the complaints of the British officials against the Bhutanese attacks, thefts started to increase day by day.

The Superintendent of Darjeeling Archibald Campbell in 1845 complained to the Governor of Bengal about grain theft, encroachment, abduction of British subjects and others (Ahmed 2005:365). It was in these circumstances that Ashley Eden's Mission to Bhutan was sent. It carried a draft of instructions to the Bhutanese Government in order to establish "friendly relations" with it and demands to surrender the captives as well as to secure free commercial intercourse between Bengal and Bhutan (Rennie 1866:58-59).

The mission, however, failed miserably due to a number of reasons and the British officials had to face immense ill-treatment by the *Deb Raja* of Bhutan[10]. Ashley Eden, therefore, had to return to Darjeeling, he submitted the report of his mission to the Governor General and strongly proposed either to permanently occupy the whole of Bhutan or to destroy all the forts of Bhutan or to annex all the Duars and Jalpesh (Roy 2013:31). Accordingly, on the 12th of November 1864, the Governor General in Council announced war against Bhutan to annex the Bengal Duars of Bhutan and the

[10] It is stated that at the time of the dispatch of the Bhutanese Government was dominated by the Chiefs who were mostly anti-British in attitude mainly due to the recent annexation of the Assam Duars (Labh 1974: 73).

hill territory of *Dalimkote*, Punakha and Dewangiri, which might have been necessary to command the passes and to prevent hostile and predatory incursions of Bhutanese into the Darjeeling District or into the plains below (Roy 2013: 31). The Second Anglo-Bhutanese War, therefore, continued for five months from November 1864 to April 1865. On 5th December 1864, Dalimkote was brought under British control. After the capture of Dewangiri in Bhutan the Second Anglo-Bhutan War finally was brought to an end. Bhutan, therefore, lost not only the territories captured from Cooch Behar and Sikkim but also some of its own sovereign territory in the hills (Roy 2013:36-37). At the end of the Second Anglo-Bhutanese War, the Treaty of Sinchulia was signed between Bhutan and the British on 11th November 1865.

The Treaty of Sinchulia with its ten articles focussed on the establishment of friendship and peace between the British and Bhutan. The second article stated that in order to maintain peace in the passes, the British captured the *Athara Duars* of Bhutan. In consideration of the capture of the Athara Duars and for fulfilment of the conditions placed by the British Government to the Bhutanese Government the latter was promised to receive Rs.50,000. The conditions stated were to restrain the Bhutanese to commit crimes (theft, border disputes, kidnapping etc.) within the vicinity of the British territory and to give full and prompt redress to the crimes committed in their (Bhutanese) command. This allowance could be suspended on the misconduct from the Bhutanese side. The disputes between the state of Sikkim, Cooch Behar and Bhutan now were to refer to the British Government. Also, the treaty opened free trade and commerce with no levied taxes between the two governments (Sunder 1895:36-37). The treaty of Sinchulia posed a great loss to Bhutan as the articles mainly favoured British interests.

After the annexation of the *AtharaDuars*, the whole tract was divided into two parts. The eastern part stretching from the Sankosh river in the east was attached to the Goalpara district of Assam, while the area to the west of the Sankosh river was attached to the newly created *Western Duars* district. *Western Duars* was further divided into three tehsils (administrative parts) and *Dalimkote* formed one of the three tehsils under the Western Duars District (Roy 2013:41).

Darjeeling, a huge tract of land lying in the west of River Teesta which once formed a part of Sikkim had been annexed by the British in the year 1835 through the Grant of Deed. As *Dalimkote* (Kalimpong) formed mostly the hilly parts, the region was transferred to the district of Darjeeling in 1867 under the administration of the Commissioner of Darjeeling Sadar subdivision (Roy 2013: 41). While the entire plains of Western Duars came to form a separate district of Jalpaiguri in 1869. After this transfer, the Darjeeling district was divided into two subdivisions, with the 960 sq. miles mostly located in the hilly parts of Darjeeling (including Kalimpong 410 sq. miles) and Terai subdivisions with 274 sq. miles. In 1917, the Kalimpong sub-division was created (O'Malley 1907:94). The district was formally designated as a non-Regulation district[11] (Roy 2013: 43). The region has often been referred to as British Bhutan or Bhutan Hill Tract, Damsang sub-division[12], in the colonial accounts (Hunter 1876:120; Powell 1892:500).

[11] Non-Regulated area or district technically meant that the Acts and Regulations that were in force in the other Regulated areas or districts of Bengal did not necessarily apply to these areas unless they were extended to. The Deputy Commissioner performed as the head of the local administration and was vested with a number of responsibilities which did not constitute the responsibilities of the Collectors who headed the Regulated districts (O'Malley 1907:156). As pointed out by Middleton, this special provision meant that the region could be administered according to the special needs of the district or the area (Middleton 2018:31)

[12] Letter from C.T Metcalfe, Officiating Commissioner, Cooch Behar Division, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, No.2393, Dated. July 2, 1873, PRD.

It was after the transfer to the Darjeeling district; colonial intervention was initiated in order to transform the agriculture of the region. However, before turning the attention towards the changes brought in agriculture by the colonial initiatives it is necessary to understand the traditional non-sedentary method of production and agrarian relations governing the region in the pre-British period.

Traditional Methods of Production and the Structural Arrangements

Every society has its own way to meet its basic needs for its existence. Economic activities, therefore, comprise all those activities performed for their physical survival. Natural resources, human cooperation and technology are brought together through some sort of structural arrangements and relations that govern the process of production and its appropriation (Vidyarthi and Rai 1976:95-96). The economy of Kalimpong witnessed an absolute transformation after its annexation by the British colonial government in India. The agrarian and forest policies of the colonial administration, directly and indirectly, intervened with the prevalent form of the agrarian economy and its structural arrangements. However, a study of the colonial agrarian policies necessitates an overview of the impact of the British intervention on pre-colonial agricultural production and the well-being of the rural people (Stein 1992:5). Therefore, in order to understand the impact on the agriculture of the region by the British intervention, it becomes pertinent to analyse the pre-British agrarian setting of the region.

Forthrightly, the vivid accounts of the Kalimpong region were mainly recorded by colonial writers from the nineteenth century. Apart from these sources, there are only a few oral sources recorded by the writers of the region that can be used to reconstruct the agrarian conditions of the region. From these sources, it can be known that prior to

British rule, the economy of inhabitants of the region, namely, the Lepchas and the Bhutias revolved around shifting agriculture, pastoralism and hunting and gathering.

The method of cultivation followed by the inhabitants has been recorded in several colonial accounts. The accounts of Campbell (1840:7), J.D Hooker (1855:146), and Rennie (1866:322) have described the cultivation methods followed by the Lepchas in Kalimpong. The description of the prevalent shifting agriculture was, however, consistently conjunct with "primitiveness", "wastefulness", and "backwardness". This colonial notion of shifting agriculture and the necessity to "advance" towards sedentary cultivation was not an uncommon perception noticed in almost all colonial writings of the period. In fact, this kind of viewpoint was not only limited to the colonial writings alone, rather it has been adopted by many Indian scholars who have undertaken the study. The result of such observations, therefore, has been disastrous as it has successfully side-lined the colonial political interests or motives lying behind the perception. Also, it has justified the attempt to "improve" through the colonial agrarian policies and forest policies in the region, however, without analysing the disruption caused to the existing society. In other words, the outcomes of the agrarian change following sedentary agriculture, and the emerging social conflicts on resource rights, access and distribution have been largely neglected. Such negligence by the colonial discourse depicts the subalternity of the subject.

Therefore, it is very necessary to understand the shifting agriculture, the resource utilization and the agrarian relations governing prior to the coming of the British. Such a shift in the method would not only lead us to understand the kind of agrarian change that took place following certain agrarian policies but also to understand how the colonial authorities utilized the perception to justify their actions in the region.

The shifting agriculture is believed to have originated in the Neolithic period and ever since has been one of the several forms of agriculture with its own land management. H.C Conklin rightly states that this type of cultivation within the given geographical area is largely dependent on several variables such as the land availability, settlement pattern of the people, types of crops normally grown, rotation of crops, fallow time, tools and techniques used, climate, soil conditions etc. (Conklin 1961: 27). Therefore, the character of shifting agriculture is widely varied in different places and at different times. However, the overall cultivation more or less follows certain steps which include the initial selection of the site, clearing the sites, and then burning the site. This clearance through burning provided the nutrients necessary for the soil. The soil was then scratched with a wooden stick, machetes stick or *ban,* hoes or knives. With the arrival of the rain, the seeds were thrown or dibbled into the ground. After a few years, the land was abandoned and the land was left to re-establish its fertility through natural reforestation and forest enrichment. A new spot was chosen to repeat the agricultural cycle. The abandoned spot was kept fallow for many years in order to get its fertility back. This practice of shifting cultivation still continues in parts of Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America (Jarosz 1993:368). Shifting cultivation is called by different names in different parts of the world. In northeast India, it is widely called *jhum* cultivation. The Lepchas called it *sudyom prek shyon* or *sudyom hong shyong* (Khaling and Lepcha 2022: 254).

Ashley Eden, a British envoy to Bhutan who passed through this region in 1864 has especially thrown a great deal of light on the agriculture of the region. His report has described the region as "fairly cultivated" with a number of villages. Further, he mentioned how these inhabitants presented the fowls, oranges and vegetables to him (Eden 1865: 57). Rennie (1866:321) has observed in the book "*Bhootan and the*

Dooar War" that there were a lot of villages scattered in the region practising agriculture in the small patches of land. Geoffrey Gorrer's (1938:110) anthropological work on the Lepchas of Sikkim documented that the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty led to a considerable change in the religious rituals of the Lepchas, however, the agricultural calendar of the Lepchas remained unaffected. This religious calendar affected the Lepcha population of Darjeeling, Sikkim, Illam (a place in eastern Nepal) and Kalimpong. The Lepcha's form of cultivation consisted of choosing fresh land then the chosen land was burnt, the burnt surface was then scratched using a wooden stick or *ban* and the cultivation was carried on for two or three years. After the completion of two or three years when the land had given up fertility, it was abandoned for a new land where the cycle would continue (Campbell 1840: 7; Hooker 1855:146; Rennie 1866:322).

Different types of crops were cultivated by the inhabitants of the region. The most important of them were dry rice, millet, buckwheat, wheat and maize. The vegetables like brinjal and cucumber and herbs like ginger and capsicum were also mentioned in the colonial sources. Campbell also recorded that the Lepchas were known to dry rice, wheat, maize, and millet however, dry rice was their favourite (Campbell 1840:5). J.D. Hooker also noted that the Lepchas produced rice without irrigation, the grain used to be flatter and coarse that became gelatinous and pink when cooked (Hooker 1854:123). Rennie (1866:322) recorded that the rice grain of the region was flatter in shape than that of the plains. He recorded the cultivation of wheat, buckwheat, plantains and the rich black soil of the region. Lepchas called the dry rice '*zo'*. Siiger (1967: 83) believed that the Lepchas used to grow twenty-six varieties of dry rice. Fonning (1987: 52) also wrote about '*dunbra'* and '*ongrayzo'* the types of dry land rice, which were later replaced with the wetland paddy. Dry rice was also cultivated

by the Bhutias and was called *lama* (*Bell 1905*: 23). Rennie (1866:323) observed the buckwheat was used as an article for food. From millet, maize and wheat were made their traditional liquor *murwa* and *chi*. Eden (1865:68) mentions the fine orange groves near the monastery of the region. The chief implements utilized in this form of cultivation were *takchi* or hoe, *tari* or an axe, *so-o* or a curved knife or bill hook, and *ban* (Hunter 1876:101).

The agricultural practices were interwoven with religious ceremonies. The crops generally intertwined with the religious ceremonies were dry rice and millet. Halfden Siiger (1967:92) in his work *The Lepchas Culture and religion of a Himalayan People* mentioned that these crops and the religious ceremonies were dedicated to the legendary *ma yel rum*[13]. The folk story in Siiger's work mentions a ceremony called *sa kya rum* which was performed twice a year at the time of sowing the seeds and after the harvest. In Kalimpong, he says, the prayers were not only directed to the legendary *ma yel rum* but also to *zo nyo kung*[14].The elders of the village officiated the ceremony using four bamboo tubes containing water, rice beer, millet beer[15] and *tham bo* (yeast for fermenting). A similar mention of these "divine beings" has also been mentioned by Fonning (1987:55) under the name of '*Zo-Mu-Nyu*' who was regarded

[13] In one version of the folk story, he recorded that the Lepchas believed that there was a place called *ma yel tong* located near the Tibetan border which was created by their mother Goddess *It mu.* This place was very fertile and a variety of crops and plants grew there from the very beginning. The Lepchas believed that it was from this place that the crops had spread to other parts of the world. In this *ma yel tong* there lived some peculiar beings who were both human as well as *rum* or spirits. Thus, the Lepchas when performing agricultural ceremonies, performed to these beings from *ma yel tong* and were called *sa kya rum* (Siiger 1967 89-90). Molommu records that this ceremony still continues among the Lepchas under the name of *Saykoo rum fat* (Molommu 2017: 13)

[14] The Lepcha word *nyo kung* literally means grandmother, old lady or ancestor and *zo* means dry rice. It is said that the Lepchas of Sikkim, Illam and Darjeeling and Kalimpong dedicated their agricultural ceremony to the legendary *ma yel rum.* However, in Kalimpong, this ceremony was dedicated to their ancestors as well (Siiger 1967: 92).

[15] *Chi* or *che* (here onwards *chi*) are alcoholic beverages mainly made from rice, millet, wheat etc. and are considered to be the traditional drink of the Lepchas. According to the Lepcha tradition, *chi* is of divine origin and are traditionally used in all the religious and the sacrificial ceremonies of the Lepcha culture as well as their daily food article (Molommu 2017:11-13)

as the mother-aunties who provided the Lepchas food. The domesticated white cock and hen were sacrificed to *sa kyu* and to *so nam*[16]who were considered the creators of agricultural fertility (Siiger 1967:92). All these religious ceremonies and the divine beings (*ma yel rum*, *zo nyu kung* or *zo mu nyu*, *sa kyu*, *so nam* and several others) especially attached to the agriculture and the food crops clearly depict the importance of agriculture among the Lepchas.

Pastoralism served as a major appendage to the shifting agriculture. Eden (1864: 119-120) was of the opinion that the owner of the cattle was better off than the agriculturists. Though there is no strong evidence to prove this point yet Eden's reference can be drawn to understand the importance of cattle in the lives of the inhabitants. Rennie (1866:324-326) also mentioned a lot of cattle in the different villages of the region, he mentions a village near Dongra (located in present-day Kalimpong district) where they passed a small farm where a number of cows were confined inside a bamboo fence. He further describes the cows returned at sundown and were milked. While near a village called Labah, he mentioned the presence of about a herd of fifty cows that were grazing upwards. He says that these were the finest cows that he noticed in the east (Rennie 1866:324-326). As the access to the forests was open during the Bhutanese period and was communally used by the inhabitants, the resting place that Rennie mentioned could be the resting place of the cattle herders who would rest while the cattle were grazing. It is crucial to understand that this open access to the forests and to the grazing lands was totally curbed after the annexation of the British.

[16] The literal meaning of the *sa kyu* and *so nam* were not given in the work of Siiger. However, a similar mention of *Sakyu Rum*, "the God of food" and *Sakyu Thing* regarded as "the honourable food master" has been mentioned in the work of Fonning. The Lepchas regarded them as divine beings who provided them food and had special ceremonies dedicated to them (Fonning 1987:55)

The use of plough was not prevalent, the cattle were mainly used for butter, meat and manure. In fact, butter formed an important article of every life of the Bhutanese. Eden (1864:119) also reported that on the way to Bhutan, it was not an uncommon sight to meet carrying several maunds of butter to the Durbar or to the Penlop[17] . The breed of the cattle was not mentioned by Rennie and Eden however, it could be assumed that the main breeds were the *Siri* breed which was held by the Bhutias even after the region came under British rule. The bulls were primarily used for reproducing meat while the cows were primarily for milk. Also, the *mithun* breed known as Gayal wild cattle in Bhutan was caught and tamed by the Bhutias (O'Malley 1907: 70). Rennie (1866: 328) while passing through the region found at one place some cows going loose in a jungle which he suspected to be wild could be the *Mithun* breed of cattle. Therefore, the economy of the inhabitants of the region was based on shifting agriculture and pastoralism; the inhabitants predominantly were dependent on the forest cover around it. The calculated use of the forests and their management can easily be understood from the fact that when the British arrived in the region and when there was a large-scale practice of shifting agriculture the region was under thick forests.Also, the crops were rotated and seeds sown in the calculated intervals (Debojyoti Das 2006: Note no.1).

The settlement pattern was not the same throughout the region. Rather it showed that in some places the houses were closely located to each other, while some houses were located in the middle of the forests. The reports of both Eden and Rennie record that in the western part of the region, several villages were located in close proximity whereas in the east the cultivation, as well as the villages were scanty. In fact, this

[17]Under Deb Raja, Bhutan was divided into three administrative units each under Penlop. The butter collected from the people were taken to the Durbar of Deb Raja or to the Dzongs of Penlop.

feature itself became the main reason for the introduction of the new land revenue settlement in the western part where the cultivation, as well as villages, were closely located.

At the time of the British annexation of the Kalimpong region, it was found that the arrangement of the surplus appropriation or the tax collection at the district level worked through the hierarchy of Bhutanese officials and the local agrarian society. Hence, under the Dalimkote Dzongpen, the poll tax was collected by the village headmen who were the local authorities of the agrarian society. These village headmen came to be popularly called the *Mandal* under the British colonial system. The office of the headmen was hereditary and it had a territorial character. In other words, different *Mandals* had different jurisdictions and their respective responsibilities. The village headmen were responsible to collect the taxes from the cultivators and remit them to the higher Bhutanese officials. In lieu of this service, they were exempted from tax payment[18]. It is not clearly known the precise responsibility of the village headmen in the pre-colonial agrarian setting of the region; however, it can be understood that this class occupied a higher position in the region's socioeconomic ladder. The *karbaris,* who assisted the village headmen were also exempted from capitation tax payments[19].

A. R Fonning (1987:12) writes that all the villages were under the village headmen or the chief of the village, each of them in turn, responsible for the collection of taxes from their respective villages. He further writes that under the Dalimkote Dzongpen, the tax in the Kalimpong region was collected once a year during the dry season after

[18] Letter from C.R Marindin, Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector, in charge of Kalimpong Settlement Work, No.15, dated 24th July 1882, PRD, No.16S/1, March 1883, p.10.

[19]Op.Cit.p.11.

the harvesting period when the Dalingkote Dzongpen used to come and camp just above his village on the Rinkingpong Hill and used to camp for a few weeks. The different village headmen or the chiefs of the village were asked to be present. The villages had to collect and bring grains and *chi*, beef, butter, pigs, chicken, goats etc to feed the Dzongpens and his officials during their stay in the camp. Also, T.B Subba (1983:123) records the stories told by the old people of Kalimpong region about how the Dzongpens and the officials were to be provided with the best *chi*, meat and entertainment. Failure to meet these demands used to cause severe punishment to the village headmen as well as the local people. It is often perceived that the office of *Mandals* and their role in production witnessed the continuance in the British period too. However, such assumptions did not pay regard to the additional changes in their role and the composition of the *Mandals* in the economy of Kalimpong.

These agricultural practices and the arrangements came to be directly and indirectly intervened after the region came under British rule through different agrarian and forest policies. These interventions will be discussed and analyzed throughout this work.

The Immigration of Nepalese and the Changes in the Methods of Production

The traditional method of shifting agriculture received a serious setback after the region came under the British. There were several factors that led to the subsequent replacement of shifting agriculture with sedentary agriculture which ultimately transformed the agricultural setting of the region. Of them, the most noticeable factors were the immigration of the large Nepalese population who practised settled agriculture, the Forest Conservancy Acts and the promotion of the tea industry in the region which would be discussed below.

Discussing the immigration of the Nepalese it might be very beneficial to briefly discuss how the notion of empty land or the lack of population in Darjeeling was utilized by the colonial administrators to encourage the rapid influx of the Nepalese population in Darjeeling after it was annexed in 1835 from Sikkim. Rune Bennike (2017:6-7) has pointed out that the European expansion indirectly utilised the notion of *Terra Nullius*[20]in the annexation of Darjeeling. He argues Darjeeling was constantly shown by the colonial records "as a wooden spur with so far no inhabitants with just a few villages". However, the belief encompassing this notion could be witnessed in how territorialism and commercialization unfolded in Darjeeling. Therefore, even when the colonial records acknowledged the presence of some population in the region, however, the lack of private property in the region was constantly highlighted in order to justify their actions in the region. However, recent researchers have shown that the uninhabited condition of Darjeeling was more the aftermath of the Kotappa Insurrection because of which 400-800 families or 1000-1200 people fled to Illam into the Gorkha territory and there the virtually uninhabited condition was more a recent phenomenon and not because it was nobody's land[21].

A similar kind of perception was also adopted in Kalimpong when it was annexed. No doubt the colonial rulers could not outrightly deny the population existing in the

[20] In Latin the word Terra Nullius meant "nobody's land". This concept is said to have theorized and legitimized the territorial expansion of the Europeans in Australia and Antarctica by showing the lack of population, lack of private property and resource exploitation in these parts of the world (Bennike 2017:6-7).

[21]According to the sources, the Barfung clan of the Lepchas had been controlling the court politics of the Sikkimese monarchy since the very beginning of the Namgyal rule in Sikkim. They occupied significant positions of military leaders as well as had a large power in the matter of landed estates which lay between Darjeeling and eastern Nepal. However, following the Gorkha conquest of this area in the 1770s and 80s. members of the Barfung were given the power as the local landlords of this area and they paid allegiance and taxes to both the Gorkha and Sikkimese king therefore decentralizing the power of the Sikkimese monarchy. In 1826, the seventh Chogyal ordered the assassination of Bholod, a Lepcha minister belonging to the Barfung clan to wrest power from the Barfung and centralize Sikkimese which ultimately led to the Kotappa Insurrection (Bennike 2017:6-7)

Kalimpong region. In the census report prepared from 1871-72 the population of the Kalimpong sub-division was estimated to be 3,530 souls (3,546 in the settlement report of 1892). The accuracy of this number, however, has been considered to be faulty by the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling. The reasons stated for this inaccurate census was that the closely knit villages which the colonial administrators were prone to understand were not to be found in Kalimpong region. Here, the houses in some places were located close to each other while most of them were distant to each other which made it difficult for the colonial administrators to prepare the accurate census (Hunter 1876: 40-41). Although this number cannot be taken as accurate however, it manifests the utilization of this "meagre" or "scanty" notion of population by the colonial rulers to supplant by way of encouraging the immigrating Nepalese population. The result was that within a few years, the population witnessed an increase to 12,683 in 1881, 26,631 in 1891, and 41,511 in 1901 (*Bell 1905*:4-8; Philpot 1925:7). The large-scale increase in the population was solely due to the immigration of the Nepalese from Nepal.

In the *Census of 1891 of Darjeeling District*, out of a total 2,23,214 population, 88,000 were recorded to have been born in Nepal. This large-scale Nepalese immigration was not only limited to Darjeeling only rather they constituted 35.72% of total foreign-born persons in India in 1891, 37.72% in 1901, 43.25% in 1911, 45.39% in 1921 and 44.77% in 1931 (Pradhan 1991:212). The *Census Report of 1901* recorded that the Darjeeling district as a whole witnessed a growth of 11.5% from 1891-1901. This increase was the greatest in Kalimpong where the wastelands were

rapidly being brought under cultivation by new settlers who were chiefly from Nepal[22].

Table 2.1 Population of Darjeeling District in 1901

Thana	**Population in 1901**
District Total	2,49,117
Sadar Sub-division	1,33,386
Darjeeling……..	66,362
Kalimpong……	41,511
Jorebangla……	22,513
Kurseong Sub-division	1,15,731
Kurseong…….	45,265
Siliguri……..	70,466

Source: *Census of India, 1901, Vol. VI. The Lower Provinces of Bengal and their feudatories, Part I,* by E.A Gait, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1902. p.62.

The colonial sources held that the primary cause for the large-scale immigration of the Nepalese in the Darjeeling District was due to the increased population in Nepal and the consequent impoverishment of the soil which pressurized them to look for alternative places to settle (*Bell 1905*: 8-9; O'Malley 1907:29-31). Similar views have

[22]*Census of India, 1901, Vol. VI. The Lower Provinces of Bengal and their feudatories, Part I,* by E.A. Gait, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1902. p.62.

also been held by many scholars who emphasized the pressure of population on land and the opportunities that the industries (tea, mining and later agriculture in Kalimpong) developing in the adjoining regions provided them with the opportunity for such a large population. Kumar Pradhan (1991:213-221) however asserts that on the basis of the groups among the Nepalese who largely emigrated, it was found an overwhelming majority of the emigrating Nepalese population belonged to the Tibeto-Burman groups or the Mongoloid groups. While the high caste Brahman and Chetris did not constitute any sizable part of the Nepalese population who emigrated from Nepal. The population of Brahmans (not only the Nepali Brahman) in 1901 in the Darjeeling district was only 2% of the total Nepali population. In 1941 Chettris constituted little more than 1% of the total Nepali population in Darjeeling. Therefore, the pressure on the land in Nepal and the alternatives available outside Nepal, cannot be taken as the major decisive force behind the large-scale emigration. Rather the major cause was the political unification of Nepal or the Gorkha conquest and the consolidation of the caste system and the consequent high caste (Brahman and Chhetris) domination (economic, social and political) over the other communities of Nepal, which left no other option to other communities (belonging to the Mongoloid stock) than to leave their land and look for other alternatives.

It is widely believed that the arrival of the Nepalese in the region was especially important from the agricultural point of view as the settled form of agriculture of the region was developed solely by the Nepalese. In fact, the Nepalese have been mostly associated with the "assiduous" cultivator, "capital agriculturist", "thrifty", "industrious" and other similar attributes by the colonial rulers (Hunter 1876:53; *Bell 1905*:7; Dash 1947:104). They were credited for introducing plough cultivation, which was considered to be a "far more efficient", "advanced", and "higher" method

of cultivation than the prevalent shifting agriculture (Hunter 1876: 94; Dash 1947:102). It is stated that terrace cultivation and settled agriculture were introduced in the region by the Nepalis (Subba 1985: 65). Terrace cultivation is the most distinctive feature of agriculture followed in the Himalayan belt. The steps known as the terraces are cut on the slopes of the hill and mountains to use for crop cultivation. This farming is generally regarded to be labour-intensive. The built terraces then were ploughed with the help of the bullocks. While in the narrower terraces, only hoe or *kodalis* are used to break the soil clods (Dash 1947:103). C. A Bell (1905:22-23) describes the method of making the terraced field. The terraced fields are mostly made in the place where the slope is easy and is near the stream which can facilitate the irrigation.

> For making a terraced field (*khet*) an easy slope within reach of a stream is required. First, contours are marked out roughly with a plough on the hill-side, each being one to three-feet higher (vertically-measured) than the other, according to the steepness of the ground. The intervals between these contours are ploughed up, leaving the contour-lines themselves from four to six feet broad. By these ploughings the spaces between the lines are partially levelled. One to three ploughings are required according to the steepness of the slope. After these ploughings the spaces (*garra*) are levelled with *kodalis*. In the second and third years the banks (*ali*), which being soft have been partially washed away by the rain, have to be repaired. The repair entails cutting them narrower. By the third year the earth has settled, and further repairs should not be required (Bell 1905:22).

However, against the general belief, terrace cultivation and the use of plough were not an altogether alien concept in the region. Eden in fact had reported about the "beautiful terraces" made on the side of the hill to cultivate in Bhutan with the use of plough earlier before the region was not even annexed. He described the terraces and how every field was carefully fenced and a complete system of irrigation supplied water to the cultivated parts of the village (Eden 1865:120). The different types of crops namely wheat, barley, buckwheat, mustard and chillies of great quality were cultivated in these fields (Eden 1865:120). He even added that the Bhutanese would surely be great agriculturists if they were able to enjoy certain years of tranquillity (Eden 1865:122). In fact, even the inhabitants in the western part of the region were mentioned as "thriving" agriculturists.[23] However, their method of agriculture came to be associated with "wastefulness" and "primitiveness" right after the region came under British rule. This contradictory perception was mainly adopted by the colonial rulers as the prevalent agriculture only aimed to produce the crops that were enough to pay the poll tax levied on them.

The colonial administration's main goal was to extract as much revenue as possible which could be obtained only through the large extension of settled agriculture. As the population was meagre to carry out such large-scale cultivation, it became necessary to encourage the Nepalese to settle permanently in the region. Such encouragement could easily be noticed in the initial colonial policies when the settling cultivators were exempted from tax payments in the first two years[24]. The large-scale marginalization of the Lepchas has solely been blamed on the immigration of the

[23] Letter from C.R Marindin, Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector, in charge of Kalimpong Settlement Work, to The Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, Darjeeling, No.15, dated 24th July 1882 PRD, No.16S/1, March 1883, p.4.

[24] Op.Cit.p.2.

Nepalis by the colonial authorities and such a narrative has also been adopted by several scholars undertaking the study.

One of several works as D.C Roy's article in Search for Identity of a Tribe through Administrative Reform; The Case of the Lepchas of West Bengal, has attributed that due to the immigration of the Tibetans and the Nepalese at different points of history,the Land Settlement Act and the Forest Reservation Act the Lepchas were marginalized in their own land. However, Roy made another point, where he stated that the British took the transfer of Lepcha lands to the non-Lepchas with much concern, which he considered worrisome (Roy 2015: 131-143). In other words, he meant that the British were actually concerned about the marginalization of the Lepchas caused by the immigrating population. Such a plain argument thus merely shows the Nepalis (also the Tibetans) as the main culprit behind the marginalization of the Lepchas by ignoring the nexus of colonial interests behind it. Or in other words, the British colonial authorities, even though they were aware of the marginalization of the Lepchas at the hands of the Nepalis and called the Lepchas a "dying race" however, adopted ambiguous and rather contradictory policies to encourage the colonization of the Nepalis in the region.

The insistence to practice the settled agriculture that was followed by the Nepalese eroded the prevalent shifting agriculture of the Lepchas. It was from the very beginning of British rule in the region, they were aware of the disagreement between the Lepchas and the Bhutias on the encroachment of their lands (Hunter 1876: 121-122). But no policies were adopted that would discourage or restrict the large-scale immigration of Nepalese into the region and the consequent land alienation. In fact, following the new land revenue settlement in 1882, to create revenues out of a region,

employing one section of the population (Nepalese)and recognized them as hill tribes eligible to become *raiyats* while eventually marginalizing the native communities, Lepchas in particular. Such colonial policies were in fact, the most important factor behind the differentiation in resource distribution and access.

It is for this reason that the change in the method of agriculture in the region cannot be simply dealt with by the internal dynamics of how the changes occurred. Rather it is necessary to understand how external colonial capitalism benefitted from such transformation. It is to point out that the region which was stated to be a “fairly cultivated” area with “thriving agricultural communities", while its agriculture has been criticised for being “inefficient”, “wasteful” and “primitive”. The former view was mostly made prior to the annexation of the region and in the initial British administration in the region where they stated that the agriculturist of the region can be more developed if they come to enjoy certain years of the tranquillity of the British administration. This view significantly contrasted after the first settlement was made. This contrast in the colonial view can be understood in terms of the justification of the large-scale immigration of the Nepalese who were hyped as the agriculturist who would transform the “inefficient” shifting agriculture prevalent in the region. The coming of the Nepalese into the region and settling as cultivators were especially important for the colonial treasury.

The important feature of the agriculture brought by the Nepalese in the region was therefore the practice of sedentary agriculture in which the cultivation was carried on in the same fields every year. The immigration of the Nepalese, it can be stated, popularized and insisted on the practice of terrace cultivation in the region with which two methods of agriculture came to be practised in the region namely *sukhakhet* (dry

cultivation) and *panikhet* (wet cultivation). *Sukhakhet* or dry cultivation was the method through which the crops such as dry rice, wheat, millet, buckwheat, and maize were cultivated without irrigation. This type of cultivation was quite popular prior to the coming of the British in the region and cultivation was carried out in the newly cleared and burnt site. While *panikhet* or wet cultivation needed irrigation, the water was drawn from the nearest streams or *jhoras*. Mainly paddy and cash crops like cardamom were cultivated in the irrigated fields. Therefore, the arrival of the British in the region and the consequent policy of encouragement of Nepalese settlement in the region led to the popularization of wet cultivation or *panikhet*.

The superiority of the method or the popularization of plough cultivation and irrigated fields were not just the basis for what the colonial authorities considered to be "advanced" cultivation. However, it was the use of the total land on which the cultivation was carried out or practising settled agriculture. And it was more on this basis that the superiority of the Nepalese in settled agriculture was calculated in terms of Lepchas and Bhutias. It is because, before British rule, the region's inhabitants only cultivated fields that would produce a certain quantity of grain sufficient to pay the taxes upon them and maintain their subsistence (Eden 1865:119-122). Conversely, the land use for cultivation was drastically changed after the immigration of the Nepalese. C. A Bell argues that the cultivation of the Nepalese was more intensive as they cultivated all the fields and used all the bullocks for agricultural purposes. While the Bhutias kept on the traditional method of keeping fallow land for years to regain fertility. While Lepchas only cultivated a certain portion of their holdings and used the small spade[25] (Bell 1905: 21-23). In addition, new cash crops like cardamom

[25] Spades were called *kutte* by the Nepalis while the Lepchas called it *ku-teu*. Spike were locally called *pal-hum* by the Lepchas (Bell 1905:21-23)

cultivation were introduced in the region. The Lepchas and the Drukpa communities did not altogether leave their traditional form of agriculture.

Forest Reservation Policy and its Impact on the Agriculture of the Region

Another major colonial intervention that directly impacted the production process in the region was the introduction of Forest conservation policies and the tea plantation. From the middle of the nineteenth century, the colonial government passed several forest regulations for imperial interests that interfered with the traditionally held rights of the population dependent on the forests.

Indra Munshi (2012:4) writes that agriculture (both shifting and settled) is predominantly associated with the forest. The method of shifting agriculture particularly cannot be perceived without the forest. The pre-British economy of Kalimpong revolved around shifting agriculture necessarily connected with the forest. Their method consisted of preparing the field by cutting and burning down the forest cover and cultivating for a few years and later abandoning the area to allow natural reforestation. The forest was the source of other food items as Campbell's (1840:5) records that the Lepchas were dependent on ferns, bamboo shoots, mushrooms and different kinds of plants when there was a scarcity of grain. Apart from this, pastoralism formed a major appendage to their economy and was also solely dependent on the forest for grazing and for providing fodder. Rennie in fact has mentioned how the cattle of the region were sent to the forests for grazing during the day and how he found a large number of cows grazing in the forests. From there, it can be established that the forest formed an integral part of their economy. It is most important to understand that the Bhutanese Government so far had not imposed any kind of restrictions on the utilization of forest resources. The forests, therefore,

remained a very important source to the people for agricultural purposes as well as other purposes. Guha (2012:27) rightly points out that the dependence of the shifting cultivators upon the forests was carried out within the boundaries which were established and respected by tradition.

The Bhutias and the Lepchas of the Kalimpong region therefore, had some cultural and religious norms to regulate the use and management of the forests and their traditional conservation. The concept of the "sacred sites" as argued by Tamang (2021:197) among the Lepchas served to regulate the calculated use of the forests during the pre-British rule. Fonning (2003:56) states that the Lepchas believed in the special guardian spirit called *Lungzee* who took abode in different objects of nature. This spirit could be present in any object of nature such as a tree, a cluster of trees, a hillock, a cave or any other such natural object. If these objects were defiled or polluted in any way, they believed that it would cause suffering for the whole village or the people who committed it. If it was the forests or the jungle where the spirit *Lungzee* had taken abode, Fonning writes that the Lepchas would not dare to cut or chop the forest. This traditional management of the forests and the dependence of the inhabitants on the forests came to be severely intervened and disrupted after the British annexed the region.

Under the British, forests were utilized for colonial interests and the forest acts made them the property of the Government paying no regard whatsoever to the pre-existing rights of the inhabitants. As Neeladri Bhattacharya (1992:124) argued, that the colonial administration and the inhabitants perceived the forests from two different points of view. For the villagers, the forests formed an integral part of their economy. From agriculture, grazing lands, forest products, and firewood the villagers were

dependent on the forests for several activities. Also, the forests were significant to their social and religious aspects. To the colonial authorities, the forest formed a reserve of commercial timber which needed to be protected so that the timber could be reproduced for imperial use. However, the conservation of the forests which was central to the economic interest of the colonial administration was portrayed as the general interest of the society.

It should be understood that the forest conservancy was initiated under the British in Bengal and in the other parts of India, Asia or Europe in order to safeguard the timber supply needed for imperial uses (Sivaramakrishnan 1997:76; Guha 2012:26-28). It was in the middle of the nineteenth century that forest conservancy and management caught the serious attention of colonial rulers. In fact, at the beginning of colonial rule, Indian forests had witnessed an unprecedented onslaught mainly for military purposes, timber export (mainly *teak*), and the extension of agriculture to augment revenue demand. Due to this early colonial policy, the customary rights of the people in the forests continued to be enjoyed or were less interfered with during the early British rule (Guha 2012: 26-28). It is widely held that the construction of the railways came as a watershed in the history of forest conservancy in India. The railway network was introduced in order to support the colonial trade by allowing the extraction of raw materials from the remotest corner of India to supply to England and to sell the English-finished products in these areas. Also, the Revolt of 1857 necessitated the communication of the troops to the distant corners of India. Therefore, it is said that the early years of railway construction saw an unprecedented feeling of trees for the sleepers of railways. This over-exploitation was undertaken by several private contractors. Therefore, it was this mismanagement and open exploitation of the forests in the middle of the nineteenth century that led the

administration to introduce measures to conserve the forest to safeguard the imperial interest (Sivakrishnan 1997: 76; Guha 2012:26-28).

The Forest Department was established in 1864 to legislate the curtailment of the previously exercised free access to the forest often called the "progressive curtailment" of these rights and its regeneration for imperial purposes (Guha 2012:26-28; Munshi 2012:3-9). The Indian Forest Act of 1865 declared any land covered with trees and brushwood or jungle as forest. This act by way of authorizing several local governments under the British Indian administration to declare any part of these lands as state forests with its own local rules for the management as well as preservation asserted the Government's monopoly on the forests of India. The main aim of this Act was to assert the monopoly of the British regime over the Indian forest land and it gave the government indisputable power to regulate forests and pastures (Mukherjee 2017:569). Therefore, the Indian Forest Act from the very beginning was directly against the traditional practices of the people over the forest. It was later revised in 1878, by making the government the sole master of the forests, directly curtailing the traditionally held rights of the people over the forest. This Act also reserved the right to demarcate valuable forests (to supply timber for Railways). These Acts could be revised from time to time depending on the colonial interest. Therefore, these Acts vested the monopoly of the forests solely into the hands of the Government while the customary rights of the inhabitants of the villages in the forests were now based on "privilege" rather than "right" (Guha 2012:30).

Later the Indian Forest Act of 1927 imposed more restrictions on the collection of forest produce and the prohibition on shifting agriculture. While in many cases, the grazing lands of the people came under the protected and reserved forests where the

inhabitants were restricted to graze their cattle. Therefore, it can be stated that by way of monopolizing the use of the forests by the Government and demarcating the forests as "reserved" and protected" forests, the customary rights of the people and their dependence on the forests for their survival were severely disrupted (Munshi 2012:5).

In the case of Bengal, forest conservancy was first initiated in Darjeeling (which was then also referred to as British Sikkim) in 1864. In Bengal and Assam referred to as Lower Provinces, the forest exploitation and preservation had not caught the attention of the administrators until 1862. The timber demand of Calcutta was supplied from northern India and forests. The other thickly populated areas had also supplied timber from the forests which was accessible by river. Due to the over-exploitation of the forests in the places nearer to the towns, the prices of firewood and timber were alarmingly increasing day by day. It was in this situation that the Government in the Lower Provinces decided to follow the examples of other provinces to introduce measures against the over exploitation of the forests and to save the remaining forests (Dash 1947:123-124). Under such circumstances, the Government decided to take the instructions of Dr Brandis who was on his way from Burma to take the position of the Inspector General of Forests, India and requested to inspect some of the forests of Bengal.

After the inspection of some parts of the forests of Bengal, Dr. Brandis discussed the future forest policies with Dr. T Anderson, the Superintendent of the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta. In 1864, Dr. Anderson was accordingly entrusted to do preliminary inquiries and inspection which was confined to the northern part of the province consisting of the Eastern Himalaya i.e Sikkim, the belt of *sal* forests in the Terai and the Duars at the foot of the hills. It is said that the Second-Anglo Bhutanese

war taking place at that time invariably interfered with his work. Due to this preliminary work, Dr. Anderson was appointed as the Conservator of the Forests, Lower Provinces in addition to this duty as the Superintendent of the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta. The forest conservancy was inaugurated in Bengal in 1864, with the first forest reserve Darjeeling Division being notified in 1865. The Indian Forest Act of 1865 provided momentum to the British local authority in the forests of Darjeeling. At the end of 1867, Dr. Anderson was succeeded by Mr. Leeds who was appointed as the full-time Conservator of the forests. Till 1870, Darjeeling forests were under the Bhagalpur Division. From 1870 to 1876 it was administered as the Cooch Behar Division. In 1877, Darjeeling Forest Division was formed with Darjeeling, Teesta and Kurseong. In 1879, the Teesta division was reconstituted as the Kalimpong forest division (Sarkar 2020:27-28).

Out of the total area of 412 sq. miles of Kalimpong sub-division, 210 sq. miles were reserved for the forest (Cowan 1929: 3). These forests in Kalimpong were reserved during the years 1879-1882 when the remaining area was reserved for the native cultivation and the tea estates (O'Malley 1907:119). When the region was first annexed it is stated that a greater portion of the area between 3000 and 6000 feet above sea level was under cultivation (Cowan 1929:4). The *sal (Shorea robusta)* forests extending from the left bank of River Teesta up to the elevation of 3000 feet above sea level, however, are said to have been declared as reserve forests right after the annexation of the Kalimpong region in 1865. However, no demarcation had been made until 1876[26]. Accordingly, the Conservator of the Forests, Dr Schilich reorganized the division in 1878 and Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong Divisions

[26] Letter from C.R Marindin, Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector, in charge of Kalimpong Settlement Work, No.15, dated Darjeeling, the 24th July 1882 in the PRD, No.16S/1, March 1883, p.4.

were formed (Dash 1947:123-127). The *sal* forests extending from the left bank of River Teesta to 3000 feet, together with the part of Lulygoan (present-day Lolaygaon) ridge, were declared by the Government to be the reserved forest in 1879 (Cowan 1929:4). In 1881 the remainder of the belt surrounding the cultivated land and an area of some 60 sq. miles in the eastern side of the sub-division was also reserved for the forest. Ritchie who was made to report on the division of the tracts reported that the division made in 1876 had already taken much of the grazing lands of the inhabitants which further decreased during 1881. O'Malley writes that these forests, especially the top of the forests, were reserved to prevent soil erosion while the other parts were reserved for timber and fuel reserves and for the grazing grounds for the tenants (O'Malley 1907:119).

The forest in the Kalimpong subdivision stretched from the left bank of River Tista and along the northern boundary of the Jalpaiguri District where they descent to 300 feet elevation and also extend towards the greater part of the higher ground of the sub-division ranging between 5,000 to 10,300 feet in elevation (Dash 1947: 127). In the figure given below, it can be seen that the area reserved in the Kalimpong division with about 1,35,000 acres out of a total l 1,35,000 nearly comprising 48.2% of the total area reserved for the forest in the whole district. While Darjeeling and in Kurseong reserved for the forest, it was nearly 26% and 25.7% respectively.

Table 2.2 Areas of Reserved Forest in the Darjeeling District as recorded in the Darjeeling District Gazetteer 1947

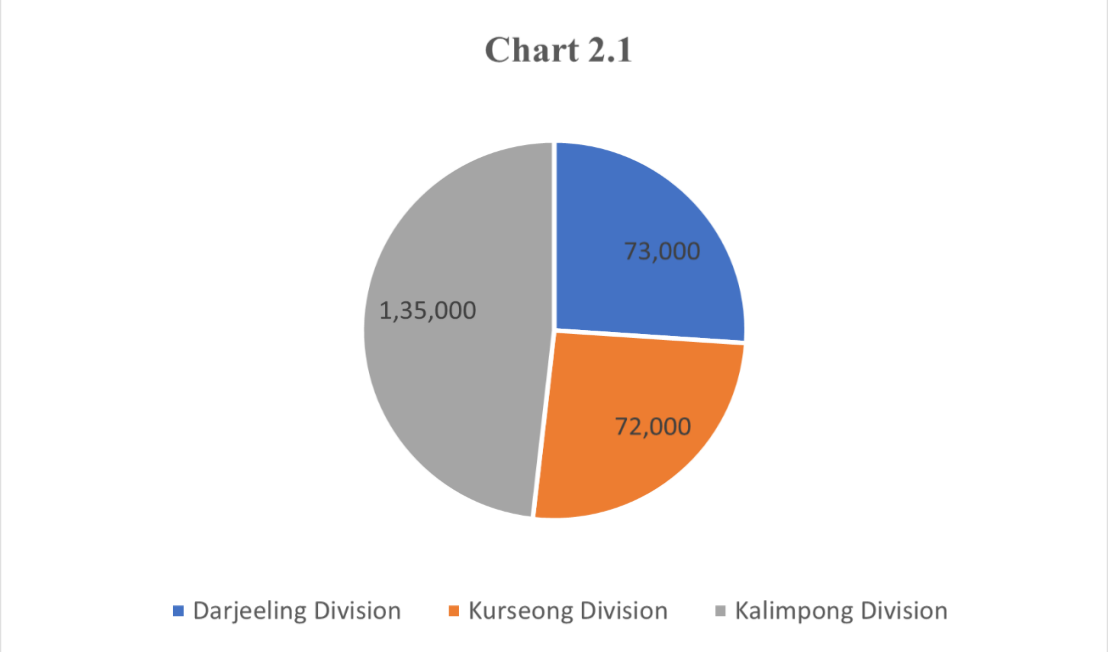
Division of Darjeeling District	Area reserved for Forest in Acres
Darjeeling Division	73,000
Kurseong Division	72,000
Kalimpong Division	1,35,000
Total	2,80,000

Source: Dash 1947: 127.

The demarcation of forests as pointed out by Subhajyoti Ray (2002:78), created special enclaves for the production and supply of timber (solely for imperial use) which ultimately had a considerable impact on the pre-colonial mode resource utilization. It is not the point of this argument on how the authorities used and made a profit out of the forests of the Kalimpong region however, it is to analyse how this intervention and curtailment caused a disruption to the pre-existing system of forest utilization and most importantly agriculture. The negligence of the colonial authorities towards the dependence of the inhabitants in the forests can be depicted by the fact that immediately after the annexation of the Kalimpong region, the *sal* forests extending from the left bank of River Teesta up to the elevation of 3000 feet above sea level, were declared as reserve forests.

While it was proposed that the land lying in the east of the sub-division was sparsely populated, therefore, much more of the land could be used for forests and tea plantations. The implications of this policy meant a death blow to the open access of the local communities to the forests. When the forest policies and the demarcations of the forest reserves and tea reserves were made, the dependence of the shifting

agriculturists on the forests was not paid any special attention that it needed. Rather, it was proposed that the eastern part of the sub-division was sparsely populated, therefore, provided an excellent ground for forest reservation and tea plantation. The demarcation that was then made apparently forced the shifting agriculturists to carry out their cultivation in the small patches that were left after the reservation. Besides, the forest also served as the major grazing ground for the pastoral communities. So, when the forests were reserved, an alternative had to be made for the grazing grounds or *gorucharan*.



Source: Based on Table 2.2

Initially, the need for reserving the village grazing grounds was felt by the colonial authorities in 1882 and was initially proposed to reserve a village grazing ground wherever possible. It is also to note that while making such arrangements the colonial authorities also made superficial assertions that the inhabitants did not possess any grazing lands as such. The grazing lands during the Bhutanese period was not permanent grazing lands as the land could be taken for cultivation by any new or old

settlers.[27] In making this consideration, the colonial authorities failed and ignored to analyse that in the pre-colonial period, the large forest covers nearby were the major alternative to serve the grazing demands, the alternative which was totally curbed through the forest policies under British rule. However, the colonial authorities ironically found that no sufficient land was available which would be reserved for this purpose. For this purpose, the forests were the only answer to this situation.

Initially, the rules and regulations regarding the use of the forests for grazing were put into discussion between the Conservator and the Government. The Inspector-General of the Forests, in fact, recommended closing some of the forests from grazing which contained the valuable timber while other forests can be opened for grazing. The authorities held entirely in the hands of the Government to curb the rights whenever felt necessary[28]. However, in making such rules a very little importance to the fact that the inhabitants had been grazing their cattle in those proposed reserve forests for ages.

The consideration of the Conservator was that the Forest of Kalimpong was to be classified into upper forests and lower forests. The upper forests were to be thrown open for grazing while the lower forests were to be totally prohibited from grazing except after permission was granted by the Forest officers of the region, and upon the monthly fee payment to the Conservator of the Forests. This suggestion of the Conservator, therefore concerned the Settlement officers who were replacing the poll tax with the land tax and anticipating some kind of disagreement from the inhabitants. Therefore, the revenue officers held that some of the portions of the reserves should be thrown open for grazing. The portions were the Rinkingpong, Tunang and

[27] Ibid, p.10-11.

[28] Ibid. p.9.

Dumsong reserves which had been used by the cultivators of Kalimpong, Bong, and Pringtam for ages. The Upper portions of these reserves were useless for the cultivators for the grazing activities due to the scarcity of water as well as due to the sloping nature which was in fact very important determinant for good grazing grounds.

It was proposed by the settlement officer Paul that the line might be made from the edge of Kasheem to Chumsering which would give a good deal of grazing for the inhabitants of the west Mayrong slopes subject to the forest rules. This view was then supported by the Government and accordingly, the portions of the Dumsong, the Rinkingpong, and Tunang reserves were classed as upper forests and grazing permitted in them. The grazing rules, therefore, followed that in the upper forests grazing shall be primarily reserved for cultivators being tenants of the Government in the Kalimpong sub-division. The Forest Department fixed the blocks or compartments in which the grazing may be to be permitted provided that at least half the area of the upper forests is made available for grazing.

The pre-existing cattle tax was six annas annually per head of the cattle which the inhabitants paid along with the capitation tax. Now with the new land revenue settlement, this cattle tax was to be discontinued. Now the cultivators were required to take out quarterly permits from the Divisional Forest Officer on payment of fees upon the following scale for each buffalo 4 annas, for each bullock, cow and pony 2 annas and for sheep and goat 1 anna. While the *Mandals* were given free permits for the grazing of their private cattle. The continuation of the privilege depended upon the satisfactory performance of their duties generally under the settlement, and their affording all reasonable assistance to the Forest Officer in exacting the observance of

the forest rules by the cultivators within their respective circles. A large block of the forest land had been granted free to the Pankhasari mandal, the principal grazier in the subdivision. Grazing was regulated through the rules that were laid down for the Darjeeling district in 1884. Half of the area of the reserved forest was open to grazing but not more than one cattle was permitted for every ten acres as open access (O'Malley 1907: 122).

From Dash's (1947:138) account it was found that by 1891-92 a total of 8,114 permits were issued by the Department of Forest. Of the total 589 were the free grazing annual permits of the *Mandals*, 3,031 quarterly permits were issued to the cultivators, Government raiyats in the open blocks of the upper forests and 4,494 monthly permits to those graziers applying for grazing in the open blocks of lower forests. The permits generated Rs.1,488 for the Forest Department and four maunds of butter were supplied weekly to Darjeeling throughout the year by the Bhutia graziers. Grazing camps (*bathans*) could be established with the permission of the Divisional Forest Officer. Occupiers of *bathans* were required to establish nurseries for replanting trees. Also, the rights of shooting and fishing in the Reserved Forests of the District were leased to the Darjeeling fishing clubs which had about 120 members and employed guards to prevent poaching. It had not been very successful.

However, by 1901, the need for grazing grounds had worsened by the large increase in the population and the extension of agriculture. There increased the population of the agricultural stock. The use of plough cultivation increased the number of plough cattle. The list of agricultural stock is given by Bell and Philpot in their report. In the table given below, it can be seen that the total number of agricultural stocks in the Kalimpong Government Estate was 35,751in 1901 which increased to 43,965

(excluding the data on pigs which were not provided in the 1921 report) in 1921. The category of plough cattle which was directly linked to agriculture numbered 3,186 in 1901 and 3,356 in 1919[29].

Table 2.3 Statement of Agricultural Stock in the Kalimpong Government Estate in 1901 and 1921

Agricultural Stock	**1901**	**1921**
Bulls and Bullocks	6,497	8,428
Cows	6,520	9,507
Male buffaloes	157	445
Cow Buffaloes	829	629
Calves including buffalo calves	5,252	6,992
Sheep	1,152	907
Goats	7,603	12,114
Horses and ponies	479	698
Mules and donkeys	95	733
Pigs	3,964	NA
Ploughs	3,186	3,356
Carts	20	156
Total	35,751	43,965

Source: Bell 1905: Appendix I (g)p. xiii; Philpot 1925: Appendix VII, p. xvii.

Note: NA means Data not available.

[29] Bell 1905: Appendix I (g)p. xiii; Philpot 1925: Appendix VII, p.xvii

The third settlement of 1901-1902, therefore, made the provision to reserve certain lands as village grazing grounds. These village grazing grounds were mapped and demarcated in the settlement where 55 reserve grounds were made in 38 blocks with a total area of 7,900 acres which decreased to 7,761 acres in the fourth settlement[30] (Bell 1905: 11-14; Philpot 1925: 11).

Table 2.4 Areas reserved for grazing, fuel and fodder in the 1919 revenue settlement

Blocks	Acres	Blocks	Acres
1.Kalimpong	81.50	25.Maria Basti	26.40
2.Bhalukhop	83.03	26. Ladam	191.10
3. Sangser	….	27. Lengse	230.25
4. Bong	….	28. Lengsekha	645.15
5. Dungra	….	29.Yang Makung	200.49
6. Sindipong	…	30. Nobgong	114.97
7. Pudung	……	31.Pabringtar	114.10
8.Echha	87.09	32. Nimbong	274.78
9.Dolepchen	95.20	33. Pemling	123.49
10. Payong	….	34.Pagriangbong	415.50
11.Sawtuk	192.89	35.Dubling	91.67
12.Lole	69.93	36.Pagang	33.69
13.Pala	295.44	37. Git Beong	140.00
14.Kaukibong	122.30	38. Pankhasari	772.84

[30] This decrease was mainly caused due to the inaccuracy in the report of 1901 and also due to the exclusion of certain grazing grounds of Lava and Gorubathan blocks (Philpot 1925:11)

15. Yok Pumtam	….	39. Nim	272.46
16.Siokbhir	191.36	40.Gorubathan	62.12
17.Samalbong	67.60	42.Mal	…
18.Sinji	174.34	43. Samsing	240.30
19.Samthar	346.63	44.Kumai	201.30
20. Suruk	223.39	45.Paten-gotak	330.00
21. Kashyon	318.76	46.Todey-Tangta	733.05
22. Pedong	56.30	47. Dalingma	70.15
23. Sakyong	…	48. Pasheting	61.45
24. Kage	…	**Total**	**7,761.04**

Source: Philpot 1925: xxiv.

Tea Estates and its Impact on the Agriculture of the Region

The full-fledged commercial development of the tea industry is said to have been initiated in Darjeeling hills from 1856 onwards. In this year, the Alubari tea garden was opened by Darjeeling and Kurseong Tea Company, another was opened in the spurs of Lebong by Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank. From then onwards several tea gardens namely, Dhutaria garden, Ging, Ambutia, Takdah, Phubsering, Takbar, Badamtam and others were established by different tea companies. All these tea estates were situated in the hills and now the planters also started getting interested in introducing tea in the Terai region of Darjeeling. Accordingly, in 1862, the first garden in the Terai opened at Champta by Mr.James White (Malley 1907:93). By the time Kalimpong region was annexed to Darjeeling, a full-fledged development of the tea industry in the Darjeeling district had already begun. In Kalimpong also 10 sq. miles out of 412 sq. miles were reserved for the tea estates. These tea estates were

mainly located in the lower slopes of Kalimpong adjoining the Duars (Malley 1907:95; Dash 1947:114). The four tea estates were Sama Beong, Ambiak, Phagu and Kumai[31] (Ghosh 1987:27).

The area demarcated for the tea garden in Kalimpong has always been mentioned as meagre and almost insignificant in colonial writings. In fact, most of the colonial writings have displayed the importance given to the native cultivation and the reserved forest by the British colonial Government in the region. Such narratives have therefore successfully cast aside native's loss of land to create these tea spaces. Therefore, the development of the tea industry in the region necessarily interfered with the pre-existing land rights of the people and its appropriation. The inhabitants lost their common lands under the pretext of *wastelands* which now became a private property of the planters developing its own means of exploitation and governing relations.

Therefore, following the British rule in the region, several changes were made which necessarily waned their pre-existing agrarian economy of the region.

[31] By 1975 the tea gardens in Kalimpong increased to six: Sama Beong, Ambiak, Kumai, Upper Phagu, Lower Phagu and Mission Hill (Ghosh 1987:27).

Chapter 3

THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW LAND REVENUE SETTLEMENT

The British colonial administration's most significant and direct intervention in the agriculture of Kalimpong was the introduction of the new land revenue system in 1882. This new land revenue system ultimately brought significant changes in the property relations, taxation system and the agrarian hierarchy of the region.

The terms ‘land revenue system’ or ‘land tenure system’ generally alluded to the arrangements made by the British colonial administration to collect the revenue from the cultivators. This system mainly defined who had the right over the land on the basis of payment of land tax to the British Colonial Government or who had the “property rights” on land (Banerjee and Iyer 2003:7). The revenue system became a prime concern to the British East India Company following the Grant of Diwani in 1765 which gave the Company the rights related to revenue collection of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Basically, the English East India Company founded in 1600 through a royal charter was a joint stock company formed by the merchants of London to face the Dutch competition in Eastern trade. The Company was given the monopoly to carry out all trade from England to the East. The British initiated their trade activities in India in 1613. A grant made by the Mughal emperor Jahangir permitted the establishment of their factories in different parts of India consequently their first factory was set up in Surat. Gradually they extended their trading activities to the other parts of India and by the end of the seventeenth century Bombay, Calcutta and Madras grew up as the centre of their trading activities (Chandra 2009:102).

The Company started its political consolidation and conquest of India with the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the Battle of Buxar in 1764 and within a hundred years almost the whole of India was under its control. Consequently, through the Diwani rights of 1765, the Company obtained the exclusive right over the land revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa (Chaudhury 1983: 88). The immediate concern of the Company after the Diwani rights was to enlarge the revenue demand mainly aimed to augment the investment in trade and commerce and also to fulfil the capital needed for Company's conquest and war, to pay salaries to the administrative and military officers and to meet the charges needed to penetrate the colonialism in the Indian rural society (Chandra 2009: 102; Chaudhury 1983:88). Such diverse needs apparently necessitated more revenue demand.

Under these circumstances, mainly three types of land revenue systems came to be introduced by the British in India namely the Zamindari system, the Ryotwari system and the Mahalwari system. The *zamindari* system or the landlord-based system (as Banerjee and Iyer point out) was introduced in the initial phase of the British administration in India. With the primary concern of tax collection, the landlords or the zamindars were given the proprietary rights of the land and were given the right to collect taxes from the cultivators. The land revenue to be paid by the zamindars to the Company was fixed for "perpetuity" and was to be paid to the Company on a fixed date, failing which would lead to the auction of his zamindari estate. However, the rent to be paid by the cultivators was not fixed which meant that the zamindars could rack-rent the cultivators (Bandyopadhyay 2004: 83-86; Banerjee and Iyer 2002: 7)). This type of revenue system was introduced in Bengal, Orissa, the Central Provinces and some parts of the Madras Presidency. Critics of the Permanent Settlement mostly

argue that the settlement was pro-zamindar as it entirely left the cultivators at the mercy of the zamindars.

The second type of settlement was the Ryotwari settlement which was made directly with the *raiyat* or the cultivator. In this settlement, a cadastral survey of the land was taken on which a detailed record of rights was prepared. A legal title of the land right or *patta* was given to the cultivator in lieu of the payment of a certain amount of rent to the British administration. This share of the rent was based on the soil types and the productivity of the land and therefore was not uniform but varied from place to place. This type of land revenue settlement was introduced in the areas of Madras and Bombay Presidencies and also in Assam.

The Mahalwari revenue system was a village-based system where the village bodies jointly owned the village and were responsible for the land revenue of part of the village to several villages. The composition of the village bodies varied from place to place. In some areas, it was composed of a single person or family, while in other areas, village bodies were larger and each person was responsible for a fixed share of the revenue (Banerjee and Iyer 2002: 7).

As established in the earlier chapter, the pre-British agrarian economy of the Kalimpong region largely was dominated by shifting agriculture. This form of cultivation had its own tools and techniques of production and its own governing agrarian relations. The Bhutanese authorities charged the poll tax and capitation tax. Therefore, the basis of taxation was not land during the pre-British Kalimpong. However, a new decennial land revenue settlement was introduced in the Kalimpong Government Estate in the year 1882 which made land as a basis of taxation. This settlement was revised after ten years in 1891,1901 and 1921 respectively. The

settlement of 1921 was made for fifteen years until it expired in 1936 (Dash 1947:219-220). The chapter will discuss the factors that led to the revenue settlement in the region and its provisions.

Reasons for the introduction of the new land revenue settlement in the Kalimpong Region

In most parts of India, the British colonial administrators encountered sophisticated land revenue systems that were based on the feudal tenure systems (of the Mughals) with more or less detailed records of land holding (Home 2013:410). However, in the Kalimpong region, no such systems were found; rather the revenue was extracted through the poll tax (Hunter1876: 121; Powell 1892:500-501). The arrival of the British in the region also marked the beginning of new land revenue systems. Boundaries were demarcated through the supervision of the land through their "systematic methods" which were ultimately aimed at creating individual property rights on the land. The reason behind the introduction of the land revenue system in the Kalimpong region needs special attention mainly because much of the land in the hilly parts of the Darjeeling district unlike Kalimpong was reserved for tea plantations under British rule. While only in the Kalimpong region, much of the land was held under the forests for native cultivation (Dash 1949:114). The area for tea gardens was set as 10 sq. miles while the agricultural areas covered 178 sq. miles out of 402 sq. miles. It was in these 178 sq. miles or 114,216 acres tract named Kalimpong Government Estate that a new land revenue system was introduced (Bell 1905:1; Philpot 1925: 1).

There are several arguments regarding the causes that led the British colonial Government to reserve much of the land for native cultivation and the forests in the

Kalimpong region. T.B Subba in his work "Caste, Class and Agrarian relations in the Nepalese Society of Darjeeling and Sikkim" acknowledges the agrarian history of the region that may have influenced the agrarian process under colonial rule and lays a greater emphasis on the later annexation of Kalimpong sub-division to the Darjeeling district, topographical and climatic conditions as the most probable factors for agricultural development in the region during the British rule. He states that the land in Kalimpong, unlike in the other parts of Darjeeling hills, was not steep and the climatic conditions in Kalimpong were more favourable for cultivation (Subba 1983: 122). S. Sarkar (2010:89-90) in his article "The Land Question and Ethnicity in the Darjeeling Hills" also places two historical conditions that led to the development of Kalimpong as an agricultural area under the British. He states the reason was that the later entry of Kalimpong into Darjeeling was the first of the two reasons. He argues that by the time Kalimpong was annexed to the British region, the tea plantation in the other hilly parts of Darjeeling had shown business potential making the planters less interested to promote the tea industry further. The second reason was the poor communication system that discouraged the further deployment of colonial capital in the Kalimpong tract for plantation. The first consideration of Sarkar however, overlooks the fact that a large number of tea gardens were promoted in the Western Duars (Jalpaiguri district) which was annexed at the same time as the Kalimpong tract.

Sarah Besky (2021:8) in her article "The Plantation's Outsides: the work of Settlement in Kalimpong India" points out that the development of Kalimpong as an agricultural area was to resolve the bio-political challenges growing out of plantation development in Darjeeling. The growing demand for food grains that could not be produced in the small plots of plantations and the seasonal administrative class

flocking to the Summer Capital of British required “productive, governable and settled outside ".Therefore, the stance of Kalimpong subdivision to be an agriculturally dominated area under the British unlike other hilly regions of Darjeeling has mainly dealt with either the limitation faced to extend the plantation (as Sarkar argued) or the needs arising out of the tea plantation of Darjeeling (argument of Sarah Besky). However, the pre-existing agrarian conditions of the Kalimpong sub-division and its governing relations have been largely neglected by these scholars. Such oversight might largely be the result of the colonial perception of shifting agriculture as “inefficient” and “primitive” and therefore of little significance. This negligence has made it rather difficult to understand the colonial motives in the sub-division and the overall disruption it caused in the pre-existing agrarian conditions of the region. Therefore, a closer look into the agrarian history of the region is worthwhile for consideration.

As a matter of fact, the pre-existing agrarian economy of the region became the main determining factor for the development of the sub-division as an agricultural area under colonial rule. As already established in the previous chapter, the region was already an agricultural region prior to the coming of the British. Here, a considerable number of natives (Lepchas and Bhutanese Bhutias) were already cultivating the region and their economy largely revolved around shifting agriculture and pastoralism (Eden 1865:57; Rennie 1866: 321). The report of C.R Marindin gives evidence that the special factor which led to the introduction of the land revenue settlement in the region was the presence of “thriving communities of native cultivators” who were

occupying the western part of the subdivision[32]. These inhabitants paid capitation tax and cattle tax to the Bhutanese Government. The poll tax amounted to Rs.640 in 1865 and had increased to 2,212.12 in 1872-73[33]. Among the inhabitants, there were sections that were exempted from the tax payment. The village headmen and their assistant *karbaris* were exempted from the tax payment[34]. However, this exemption cannot be comprehended with the ownership of the land. The land was abundant in proportion to the inhabitants on it and the land tax as the basis of taxation was implausible. However, it is also not to argue that there the concept of land ownership had not taken root in the region rather it was different from the private property recognized under British rule.

Given the thriving cultivating population and the probable revenue generation, the idea of substituting the poll tax with the land tax had arisen in the mind of Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling J. Ware Edgar in 1874 while discussing the land tenure of Darjeeling[35]. The surplus produced by the increasing population and their expanding agriculture was not extractable if the poll tax was to be continued. The expanding agriculture and the growing population in the region due to the large-scale immigration after its annexation in 1865 had subsequently increased the collection of the poll tax; Edgar expressed his anxiousness to replace the capitation tax with the land tax. He believed that this change had to be done cautiously by surveying the lands under cultivation and demarcating it from the forest reserves and also keeping certain lands for tea (Hunter 1876:121-122).

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[32]Letter from C.R Marindin, Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector, in charge of Kalimpong Settlement Work, to the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, Darjeeling, No.15, dated 24th July 1882, PRD, No.16S/1, March 1883, p.4.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

The *Tehsildar* system was introduced in 1873 in the region without interfering much with land ownership and continued the system of the poll tax and cattle tax. The holdings of the cultivators were not demarcated and the land supervision was not carried on. The *Tehsil* system is said to have worked well enough, however, by 1877, J. Ware Edgar the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling expressed that due to the increase in population and cultivation, the tehsildars were unable to work effectively. Due to the increasing population, the *Tehsildars* were seen as unable to maintain the capitation rolls as the immigrating population paid some allowance to *Mandals* to avoid the taxes. Therefore, the *Tehsildar* and the *Tehsil* system in itself were seen to lose their power and respect in the region[36]. Therefore, the need for a class was felt by a larger number than a *Tehsildar* who were able to have a closer look at immigration, cultivation, the question of forest reserves, grazing questions and tea plantations.

The desire of Edgar to substitute the poll tax with the land tax in the Kalimpong region came in connection with the general survey that was being carried out in the Darjeeling District[37]. The first survey of the Darjeeling District had been undertaken by Captain S. Sherwill in 1857 and the next survey was taken in 1861-62 by Major T.L. Sherwill. Kalimpong sub-division was annexed in 1865 and the third survey of the district apparently was taken in 1866-67 by E.T S Johnson (Bell 1901: 31-32). However, this survey was not considered useful as it was roughly prepared giving no inner details of village cultivation. Therefore, a detailed survey was thought to be necessary before any settlement was to be undertaken. When the condition of the

[36]Letter from J. Ware Edgar, Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling to The Commissioner of the Rajshahye and Cooch Behar Division; Darjeeling No.235, dated 21st/23rd July 1877, PRD, June 1878.

[37]Letter from C.R Marindin, Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector, in charge of Kalimpong Settlement Work, To the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, Darjeeling, No.15, dated,24th July 1882, PRD, No.16S/1, March 1883, p.4.

survey was brought to Sir. Richard Temple, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, issued a minute on 15th September 1875 about the nature of the survey that was to be carried on in the district. It was at this minute, that along with the other survey works to be carried on in the other parts of the Darjeeling District, it was notified that in the Kalimpong sub-division, the boundaries between the reserved forests and the cultivated lands were to be separated.

In 1878, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling J. Ware Edgar informed that a considerable part of the tract in the Kalimpong sub-division had been taken under the Forest Reserve, and it was proposed to reserve more for tea as well as cinchona. It was stated that these demarcations have to be taken very cautiously and the well-cultivated parts of the comprising Rilli, Rusheet, and Mayrong valleys were to be wholly reserved for the cultivation surrounded by the actual and proposed reserved forests[38]. The recommendation made by Edgar was approved by the Government and accordingly, J.G Ritchie was deputed in 1878 to make a preliminary division of the sub-division into tracts for native cultivation, tracts for tea and proposed new forests and cinchona. With this, it was also proposed to substitute the existing poll tax with the land tax. Accordingly, the Government approved the three main divisions into native, forest, cinchona and tea lands. It was proposed to survey land available for tea and native cultivation in a detailed 8-inch-to-mile survey and the survey of the forest and cinchona (Bell 1905:31-33).

The major question that arose while dealing with the substitution of the poll tax with the land tax was the pre-existing land rights of the inhabitants in the tract. Edgar believed that the secured property rights recognized by the British administration

[38]Ibid.

were absent in the region. However, some sort of land arrangement was revealed by him where he mentioned that even though in theory the inhabitants did not possess the land and its right of occupancy but they do perform cultivation in certain lands claimed to be under their possession[39]. The practice of non-sedentary agriculture or shifting agriculture was perpetually considered to be a short-lived attachment to the land thus not enough to claim its ownership. Hence, their pre-existing proprietary rights were not recognized nor were their method of production or the land use (including the forests) ever considered feasible by the colonial administration. The right over the land was only recognized when these lands were privately owned and practised settled agriculture. Therefore, it was proposed that the prime objective of the British administration should be to give some kind of legal recognition to these land arrangements. It was stated to be the objective to give security to this right which had been enjoyed by the people without permission in lieu of fixed rent.[40]

From the very beginning of the survey, inhabitants were alienated from their lands even if the colonial authorities manoeuvred "cautiousness" and "carefulness" while demarcating the lands. In order to begin the land assessment, initially the holdings were to be divided to form different blocks. In each block, all the land -cultivated, fallow and jungle enjoyed by cultivators were to be included. The blocks again were allowed to be divided among the members of the blocks under the supervision of the Collector and the members be jointly or severely liable for the rent assessed. The administration sought the assistance of Lord Ulick Browne, the Commissioner of Rajshahi and Cooch Behar where under him the substitution of the poll tax to the land tax had been undertaken. On the basis of the suggestions made by him, the

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

Government directed that the ten-year lease of land should be given to the cultivators in lieu of the amount fixed by the settlement officer. With the imposition of land tax, the existing poll tax and the cattle tax were to be abolished. At the end of the ten years, the lease was to be renewed with the amount fixed by the Settlement officer. The *Mandals* were to be held responsible for the rent assessed upon their respective circle. For the fulfilment of this duty, he was to receive a certain amount of concession and certain privileges[41]. Accordingly, A.W Paul was placed in charge of the survey and settlement operations and the work began in 1878-79. Slacke separated blocks from each other through permanent marks and natural boundaries to form *Mandals*hips (Bell 1905:31). Accordingly, 25 mandal ships were formed in the first settlement which later increased to 48 blocks (Philpot 1925:29).

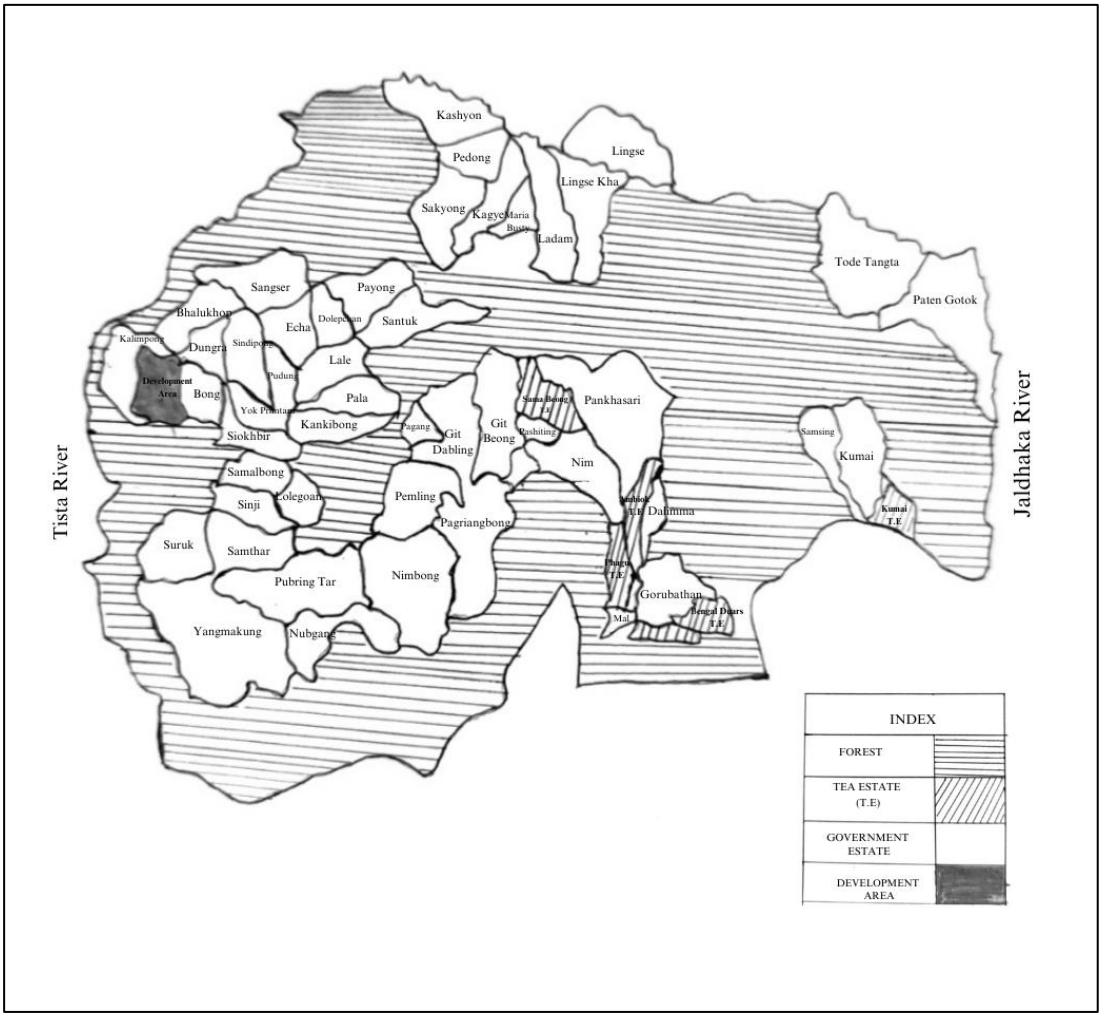
Features of the new land revenue settlement

The distinctive feature of the land revenue settlement that was introduced in the Kalimpong sub-division was that the Bengal model of Permanent Settlement was not applied here. At the time of the annexation of the Kalimpong sub-division, the British authorities had already understood the unprofitability of the Permanent settlement and its rent fixation for perpetuity. Iyer and Banerjee believe that this landlord-based system or Permanent Settlement was only favoured in the initial period of British rule in India as this system of revenue extraction needed less administrative machinery. However, with the further consolidation of British rule, a more interventionist revenue policy was necessitated by the empire. After the failure of the Permanent Settlement, two critical events in the beginning of the nineteenth century ultimately led to the ascendancy of the non-landlord-based revenue systems. First was Munro's victory

[41] Ibid. p.5.

over the Board of Revenue which ultimately led to the Ryotwari system in Madras Presidency and second, was the decision made by Holt Makenzie to make a successful plea for settlements with the village bodies in the North West Provinces in 1819 (Iyer and Banerjee 2003:7). This specific trend of ideas as well as the pre-existing agrarian condition of Kalimpong combined to disfavour the Permanent Settlement in the Kalimpong sub-division at the very outset. Rather, a revenue system which resembled the *ryotwari* system with some regional variance was introduced and was popularly called the *Mandal* or *Mandali* system.

3.1.Map of Kalimpong Government Estate in 1919-1920



Source: (Philpot 1925)

This system marks the significant colonial intervention made in the agrarian economy of the region. However, this system varied from the joint ryotwari settlement introduced in the few areas of Darjeeling District. In the joint ryotwari settlement, a settlement was made with the *Mandals* and the tenants with the blocks divided into three classes with different rates of rent. Here, the raiyats had a nominal right of occupancy and were left entirely at the mercy of the *Mandals* who could rack-rent and oust them at pleasure. The *Mandals* were given a commission of the 10% of the profit from the collection of taxes and settling wastelands[42] (Dash 1947: 212).

In the Kalimpong Government Estate, the ownership of the land was reserved for the Government leased land to the "tenants" of the region. The Government directly dealt with the tenants with so far, no intermediary in between. Accordingly, the Government recognized five classes of tenants, namely,

1. Raiyats
2. *Mandals*
3. *Llamas* or monasteries
4. Bazar tenants and
5. Scottish Mission[43].

Among these classes of tenants, the first three with a special emphasis on the Raiyats and the *Mandals* who were directly related to the agriculture of the region will be the major point of discussion in this work. The Scottish Mission held 16 ½ acres of land for 20 years lease solely for missionary purposes subject to the payment of ten annas

[42] The joint ryotwari settlement in the Darjeeling District was given up in 1894 (Dash 1947: 212)

[43] Letter from C.R Marindin, Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector, in charge of Kalimpong Settlement Work, Darjeeling, No.15, dated 24th July 1882 PRD, No.16S/1, March 1883, p.11.

an acre. In 1899 the mission again obtained a fresh lease for 32 acres of land for the period of 20 years (Bell 1905:32).

The new land revenue system that was introduced in the Kalimpong Government Estate resembled the Ryotwari settlement and some of its own regional peculiarities. In this system, the tract was divided into blocks under the jurisdiction of each Mandal. In these blocks, the fields of each cultivator were demarcated and separated from the other holdings and also from the grazing lands, as well as *khas* lands or wastelands. The lands that were not found in the possession of any cultivator were designated as *khas* land *or wasteland.* Therefore, *khas* lands were land that was not leased to any cultivator but rather kept under the Government (Bell 1905:34). Each cultivator received a lease of his holdings written in a deed called *patta* on which his occupancy rights on the land depended (Bell 1905:31-32; Philpot 1925:29-30) It may be argued here that the Raiyat's land occupancy was based on this very *patta*. The rights and obligations of tenants were regulated by Act X of 1859 and the terms of the leases granted to the tenants. Settlements of land revenue were made under Act VIII of 1879 and it was to be noticed that the Bengal Tenancy Act did not apply to these areas or indeed to any part of the district. Under Act X of 1859, a tenant got the heritable right of occupancy in any land held by him for 12 years.

The *patta* of the raiyats consisted of sixteen clauses in which the provisions of the settlement were written. Of sixteen clauses, the second and third clauses marked down that the annual rent was to be paid to the *Mandals* by the raiyats in several instalments. The raiyats agreed on the resettlement of the occupied land after the expiry of the ten years lease and the new rates to be fixed by the Government in the resettlement. The fourth clause, ascribed that the raiyats had no exclusive rights over

the use of streams, *jhoras* or irrigated channels but rather had to agree upon what had been assigned to them by the officer-in-charge of Kalimpong. The fifth clause prohibited the sale and hypothecation of the land of the raiyats without the permission of the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling. In addition, this selling was to be carried among the "cultivating ryots". Further, the clause also prohibited subletting of the land. Clause six gave the Government the authority to take any land required for any public purposes in exchange for some compensation. Clauses seven and eight stated that the boundaries of the holdings were to be built by each cultivator within six months of the settlement and also to assist the officers deputed to survey the land. Clause nine and eleven maintained that every dispute arising in the land of the raiyats like boundary dispute was to be notified to the *Mandals* who would do the same to the Deputy Commissioner. Clauses ten and twelve said that the raiyats were to give labour at the market rates to the government and two days of free labour for making the road and other governmental laborious activities. While Clauses thirteen put restrictions on the cutting of trees, Clauses fourteen, fifteen and sixteen laid out that in case of failure of rent payment, breach of any of the clauses the officers were authorized to sell the moveable and the immovable properties of the raiyats, even the cancellation of the lease or even evict the raiyats from the land.[44]

Meanwhile, the *Mandals* were given a *sanad* (or deed) which comprised thirteen clauses. The second clause gave the *Mandals* the authority to collect all sums of money due from the raiyats and remit it to the *tehsildar* or the officer of Kalimpong on the fixed date and they were prohibited to collect any sum other than due from the Government. Clauses three, four, five and eight gave the power to the *Mandals* to

[44]Ibid, p.17.

preserve the public order within their circle and report all the crimes to the officer in charge of Kalimpong and maintain roads within their circle, also to provide the coolie facilities asked by the Government. Clause six held that in lieu of the duty assigned to him, the *Mandals* were promised 10% of the total collected sum. Clause seven entitled the *Mandals* to receive the rent of the holdings, cultivated by him, his servant, or by the hired agency. Clause nine informed that the *Mandals* have to inform them about the absconding raiyats immediately to the Kalimpong officer. Clause ten allowed the *Mandals* to settle the new raiyats in the wastelands within his block with the previous permission of the Settlement Officer. Clause eleven and twelve held that if the *Mandals* failed to punctually pay the rent due from his blocks, any misconduct or breach of any clause would lead to his dismissal by the Deputy Commissioner and only be allowed to keep the land which the Deputy Commissioner finds suitable for you. Clause thirteen prohibited the transfer of his grant and the absolute right of appointing a new Mandal was reserved by the Government[45].

Rates of the New Land Revenue Settlement

The settlement aimed at replacing the existing form of shifting agriculture with settled agriculture which would ensure the regularized colonial economy. It is very clear in the letter of Mr Paul dated 29th June 1881 to the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling in discussing the rates to be charged in the region where he stated that the prime objective to change from the poll tax to the land tax was to encourage the nomadic hillmen to settle in a permanent place.

[45] Ibid.

It is important to understand that the land settlement was not introduced in the Kalimpong Government Estate all at once. Rather, the survey was performed and the first settlement was made with only the "most developed "portions of the sub-division. This portion was located in the western portions of the district comprising the Rilli, Rusheet, and Mayrong valleys. The whole surveyed tracts were divided into 25 blocks and were placed under each Mandal. The rate of rent was calculated by dividing the blocks into two kinds: productive and less productive. The more productive blocks were assessed at 8 annas per acre while less productive blocks were assessed at 4 annas. The word productive in the Ryotwari settlement areas fixed the rent according to the quality of the soil, proximity to the market, irrigational facilities and communications (Thangellapali 2018: 86-87). However, it may be noticed that, unlike the other ryotwari areas, the detailed survey and investigation of the nature of the soil and the different rates according to each kind were initially not performed here. Rather, it was assessed as it was done in the case of a wasteland lease for the cultivation of tea.[46] The result was there, the rate was charged according to the block so even if there was bad soil in the block the rates were the same. It was only in the third settlement that a more scientific method was introduced.

In the first settlement, it was proposed not to charge a higher rate, therefore, 8 annas and 4 annas for the productive and less productive blocks respectively[47]. Accordingly, the due poll tax of Rupees 10,314 for the surveyed area was replaced by the annual land revenue demand of Rupees 8,260 in 1882. This reduction, however, was subject to increment after five years and was mainly aimed to encourage the raiyats to

[46] Letter from A.W Paul., Assistant Commissioner (on Special Duty) of Kalimpong to the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, Darjeeling, dated 6th of February 1879, PRD.

[47] Letter from H.J S Cotton, Officiating Secretary to the Board of Revenue, Lower Province, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, No. 539 A, Calcutta and Darjeeling, dated, September 1st. 1881, PRD, No.1. September 1881.

permanently settle. While in the unsurveyed parts of the Kalimpong Government Estate, the poll tax of Rupees 1,487 continued (Bell 1905: 32; Philpot 1925: 29-30; Dash 1947:219-220). The method of payment was necessarily the money rent that initially was to be paid in two instalments or *kists*. The 1882 settlement made the rent to be paid in two instalments. One-third in the month of June and two-thirds in January[48]. However, from the resettlement in 1892 onwards the rent had to be paid in a single *kist* to the Mandal due on 15th December.

By the second settlement, the population of the region had reached 26,631 and with that, the area under cultivation had increased. When the settlement was revised in the year 1891 under J.G Ritchie, the settlement officer, the rate of rent increased from 8,260 in 1882 to 16,499 in 1892 in the surveyed tract. There was also an increase in the poll tax demand from 1,487 in 1882 to 4,461 in 1892. Therefore, the rate increased by 50% in almost all the blocks excluding six blocks. In addition, the cash crop cardamon lands were measured and assessed at the special rate of Rupees 10 per acre (Bell 1905:32-33; Philpot 1925:29-30; Dash 1947:219-220).

In 1901, the revision of the settlement was made and the whole area of the Kalimpong Government Estate was surveyed through the cadastral survey and all the lands amounting to 53,349 acres were brought under the land assessment. The population by then had risen to 36,164 and lands were being brought under cultivation. Accordingly, 48 blocks came into being in this settlement. The poll tax prevalent in the non-surveyed tracts was replaced with the newly assessed land tax. Additionally, in this settlement, the uniform rate applied to all the lands within a block were

[48] Letter from C.R Marindin, Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector, in charge of Kalimpong Settlement Work, to The Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, Darjeeling, No.15, dated 24th July 1882, PRD, No.16S/1, March 1883, p.11.

abandoned and rents were based on the classification of land. Four classes of land were recognized namely, cardamom lands, *panikhet*, *sukhakhet* and *waste*. With this, the blocks were divided into five categories with different rates of rent charged for each class of land according to fertility.

The third settlement of 1921 was made for 15 years. The population had increased to 41,203 and the total area assessed was 63,119 acres. There was no enhancement on the rate for cardamom lands but on the ground that prices of production had increased. Rates of revenue for the other classes of land were increased. On paddy (*panikhet* lands 25 per cent to 31 per cent, on *sukhakhet* from 50 percent to 60% and on wastelands from 33 per cent to 50%. The total annual demand thus rose to 59,620(Bell 1905: 36-42; Philpot 1925:29-30; Dash 1947: 219-220).

The third settlement expired in 1936. Three new blocks opened after the 1927 settlement. There were 63,727 acres and 10,608 tenancies, the average size of the holding was 6 acres and the average rate of rent was Rupees 1 per acre. The 48 blocks of the 1901 settlement were reduced to 47 in 1921 where the Labah block which was found too high and infertile for cultivation was included in the reserved forests. In 1921 three new blocks were opened at Kaffergoan, Lolaygaon and Rechila. Lolaygaon and Kaffergoan were opened to provide land for tenants displaced from lands acquired for the Kalimpong Development Area. Thus, there were now 50 blocks in existence.

Table 3.1 Annual Rent Demand fixed 1936 for the term of 15 years

Name	Annual Rent Demand	Name	Annual Rent demand
Bhalukhop	814.68	Pagang	531.18
Bong	1,390.68	Paiyung	2,918.50
Dalapchan	1,004.31	Pala	9498.00
Dalim	277.68	Pankhasari	2,632.94
Dungra	1,050.62	Pashiting	420.62
Ecchay	1,350.12	Patengodak	1,200.25
Gitbeong	2,566.62	Pedong	880.06
Git Dubling	3,637.81	Pemling	1,087.68
Gorubathan	1,158.06	Pokhriabong	886.12
Kaffergoan	232.68	Pudung	1,209.50
Kagay	1,483.87	Rechila	114.50
Kalimpong	2,280.75	Sakyong	3,531.00
Kankibong	1,138.50	Samalbong	876.87
Kashyong	1,714.94	Samsing	473.75
Kumai	705.06	Samther	866.31
Ladam	2,726.25	Sangsay	1,371.12
Lingsay	1,633.62	Santuk	2,621.95
Lingsekha	1,867.12	Seokbir	683.81
Lolay	1,214.56	Sindipong	2,055.00
Lolaygoan	559.31	Sinji	796.12

Mal	134.68	Suruk	760.50
Maria	812.62	Today Tangta	1,656.12
Nim	911.50	Yangmakung	1,184.87
Nimbong	1,089.25	Yokprimtam	665.31
Nabgaon	427.50	Santolay	5.25
Pabringtar	1,243.94		

Source: Dash 1947: 221.

The new land revenue system in the Kalimpong Government Estate therefore, ultimately made the Government the sole proprietor of the land who leased land to the tenants whose right over the land was secured as long as they paid the rent to the Government. The colonial rule attempted to introduce an impersonal administrative modern form of property rights in the Kalimpong region through the new land revenue settlement that would be dealt with elaborately in the fourth chapter. The insistence on cash payment ultimately forced the cultivators to produce and sell their products in the markets. The subsistent agrarian economy in the Kalimpong region during the Bhutanese period did not require too much trading activity. Besides, the brisk trade between Kalimpong and Darjeeling during the Bhutanese period was carried out in the mutual exchange of commodities with no proper sense of profit. This peculiar character of trade and market was tremendously altered during the British period. With the coming up of the British and the communication lines several new markets began to emerge and in no time Kalimpong became the linking point between Bengal and Lhasa or Tibet. Several tradesmen started coming and engaging in the trade.

Enakshi Majumdar (1994:630) writes about how the communication lines developed in Kalimpong which led to the development of the commercial routes in Kalimpong. In 1861, Sikkim became the Protectorate of the British following which an outward route connecting Sikkim and Tibet was constructed in Kalimpong. This Kalimpong-Lhasa route became the shortest trade route from Bengal to Tibet. Along these there emerged various markets in Kalimpong Government Estate namely, Pedong and Sombari. C. A Bell (1905:6-7) stated that the towns grew up because of the Tibetan trade and other advantages and the surrounding regions of the town took part in the local trade. The construction of the roads connecting the different blocks of Kalimpong Government Estate was made by each male and female raiyat who were to give two days of free labour to the Government according to the clauses of the *patta*Different articles such as wool, yaks, and musk, ponies were imported from Tibet along the cart roads and cotton goods and copper implements were exported to Tibet. However, the chief method through which agriculture came to be connected with ongoing trade activities was facilitated by the annual fair called the Kalimpong Mela which was initiated by Rev.J.A. A Graham in 1891[49]. The agricultural exhibition with the prizes was used to attract a lot of raiyats of Kalimpong Government Estate to participate in the competition of the finest grain, poultry, mules, ponies and all kinds of livestock.

There were other small markets in Pedong and Sombari while there were also some trading centres outside the Government Estate such as Rhenock and Rangpo in Sikkim and Duars in the plains. Different articles that were sold were maize, buckwheat, rice, pulses, potatoes, salt, kerosene oil, piece goods etc. The Government

[49] Kalimpong Mela was initiated by Rev.J.A. A Graham in 1891 which was held on Wednesday and Thursday of each November. This Mela was attended by a large number of people coming from Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim as well as from Tibet.

looked after Kalimpong and Pedong markets whereas the block headmen looked after the smaller markets. The rise in the markets and the use of cash in revenue payment both acted as push and pull factors for the cultivators to engage in the market. With this, also began the cultivation of cash crops such as cardamom. The trade of this article was solely in the hands of the Marwari merchants who used to procure it from the cultivators and take it to Calcutta.

The comparison of the new rates and the old rates leaves no doubt as to the rise in the cash demand within a very short time. The people were left with no other option than to produce cash crops that would fetch money to pay the rent. The compulsion on the money rent ultimately forced the cultivators to sell their produce in the market. The cultivators who turned towards the cultivation of the cash crops such as cardamom found out that from 1892 onwards, the rates of cardamom were charged at the rate of 10 rupees per acre.

Table 3.2 Annual Revenue Demand and Poll Tax in Kalimpong region from 1882 to 1901

Year of Settlement	Population	Annual revenue demand on surveyed land	Annual poll tax on unsurveyed land	Total revenue demand
1882	12,683	8,260	1,487	9,747
1892	26,631	16,499	4,461	20,960
1901	36,164	23,041	8,548	31,589

Source: (Bell 1905: 31-35; Philpot 1925: 29-35)

It has been mostly pointed out that the new land revenue settlement, the Ryotwari system in the Kalimpong region witnessed the continuation of the pre-colonial agrarian class of the *Mandals* who held a similar position under the Bhutanese. However, as B.B. Chaudhury argued it was not a mere continuation rather there was a tremendous change in the position, composition and function of the *Mandals* in the agrarian setting of the region. An even more important index of change that the region witnessed was that land was chosen as a unit of taxation. The difference between the raiyats and the *Mandals* was fairly established that ultimately came to affect the agrarian relations in the region which will be discussed in the fifth chapter. The basic difference is that the raiyat's right on the land was based on the *pattas*. While the rights of the Mandal over his lease and office were based on the *sanad*. Further, later on, *Mandals* along with the rent-free lands also held additional lands in their names as raiyats who paid rent to the Government. As pointed out earlier, the revenue settlement was made with raiyats who were considered to be the actual tiller of the soil. From the very beginning the colonial policy was against the sub-infeudation and any intermediary cropping between the Government and the raiyats. Therefore, both in theory and practice, the raiyats and *Mandals* were different agrarian classes participating in the production process of the region. Therefore, such provision ultimately was favourable for the *Mandals* in the agrarian economy of the Kalimpong region.

Thus, following the British land settlements there took place a lot of transformations which as stated above completely altered the pre-existing agrarian conditions. The British found that the natives were not able to meet the expected agricultural output due to their system of traditional agriculture which the British defiled as being 'wasteful' and 'uneconomic'. To meet these colonial expectations the British

followed the policy of encouraging a large number of immigrating Nepalese settlers who were emigrating from the plains of Nepal due to pressure on land there. Kalimpong provided them with a wonderful opportunity with fresh virgin forests with a smaller population than the forests they had and practised settled agriculture. The new settlers popularized new technology and the system of agriculture, the new agricultural implements which altered the pre-existing agrarian economy of the region. Further, the most important change that the land settlement brought was that it introduced new property rights in the region which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

NEW PROPERTY RELATIONS IN KALIMPONG REGION

Many of the colonial writings have compared Bhutan with the feudal society that existed in Europe (Eden 1865:119). The fragmented power structure between the Central and the Provincial level and the subject peasantry in Bhutan has led Western scholars like Hutt, Aris and others to speculate that there was indeed the existence of feudalism in Bhutan. The applicability of feudalism in the history of Bhutan has been questioned by Tashi Wangchuk (2000:52-84)). Against this argument, Wangchuk argues that no wonder the society of Bhutan manifested some of the feudalistic elements such as the fragmentation of power and subject peasantry however the tenurial system and the property rights of the people in the Bhutanese society were not feudal in any sense (Wangchuk 2000:54-84). Especially emphasizing the property rights of the people, he argued that unlike in Europe, property rights in Bhutan have always been held in private by the peasantry. He drew this analysis from the manumission of the slaves and serfs in 1959 by the Royal authority of Bhutan where the liberated serfs and slaves numbered only 10% of the total population. While the rest, Wangchuk argued, were the *minaps* or freemen. Thus, he argued that there was a mixture of land-holding systems where there were private estates granted to a few aristocratic families where the serfs cultivated through a share-cropping system, monastic lands and public property meant for the collective use (Wangchuk 2000: 52-84). However, these property rights were different from what came to be understood under British colonial rule.

The argument of Tashi Wangchuk may be applied to the Kalimpong region because here there existed land under the private possession of the cultivators, land under the *Mandals*, land under the monasteries and the forests. However, these property rights varied differently from what they came to assume under the British. The concept of pre-colonial land tenure in the Kalimpong region has been unknowingly captured in the words of J. Ware Edgar, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling. He stated

> … there are no recognized and recorded holdings, and no interior divisions known to us. The people pay the capitation tax instead of rent, and in theory they have no permanent occupancy, but really they do go on year to year on the same spot, interchanging cultivation with fallow within certain limits which they seem to understand and observe, though we take no notice of them.[50]

Therefore, when the British arrived in the Kalimpong region, there was the presence of some kind of arrangement of land holding which the cultivators or the inhabitants recognized but it did not have any official recognition as "private property" as the British administrators were prone to understand. Or in other words, it was found that the land did not belong to individuals as the colonial state was accustomed to understanding and recognising but to the community (monasteries), family or lineage which are often given different names such as tribal, customary, indigenous or native rights etc (Home 2013:406). The practice of non-sedentary agriculture or shifting agriculture was perpetually considered to be a short-lived attachment to the land thus not enough to claim its ownership. Hence, their pre-existing proprietary rights were not recognized nor were their method of production nor the land use (including the

[50]Ibid, p.4.

forests) ever considered feasible by the colonial administration. The right over the land was only recognized when these lands were privately owned and practised settled agriculture. Therefore, the colonial authorities aimed to introduce the formal bureaucratic modern form of property rights in the land where the rights on the land were based informally on the different traditional customs and were complex and sometimes overlapping (Kapur and Kim 2006:4-5).

All types of land were appropriated by the colonial administration. Initially, through the Forest reservation policies, the colonial government asserted a right of property over large tracts of the forests. The forest tracts were demarcated into 'reserved' or 'protected' which imposed several restrictions as well as prohibited free access to the forests by the villagers. As Neeladri Bhattacharya argued, the colonial administration and the inhabitants or villagers perceived the forests from a different point of view. For the villagers, the forests formed an integral part of their economy. From grazing lands, forest products, and firewood the villagers were dependent on the forests for several activities (Bhattacharya:124).

Also, the forests were significant to their social and religious aspects. To the colonial authorities, these traditional practices were totally contrary to the principle of property. Also, the forest formed a reserve of commercial timber which needed to be protected so that the timber could be reproduced. However, the conservation of the forests which was central to the economic interest of the colonial administration was portrayed as the general interest of the society (Bhattacharya:124). Therefore, when 210 sq. miles out of 412 sq. miles of the Kalimpong region were demarcated as forest reserves consisting of both protected and reserve forests managed by the forest

department ultimately resulted in the prohibition of the customary rights (including their very method of cultivation) of the inhabitants of the region (Cowan 1929:3).

Apart from the forest reserve, the property rights of the people were intervened when the colonial authorities declared the uncultivated fallow lands as *khas lands* or wastelands. In fact, a closer look at the history of *wastelands* in the Darjeeling district is of utmost importance before moving on to the case of Kalimpong. From the beginning of colonial rule in Darjeeling, the land and its distribution (by the colonial authorities) enjoyed unrestricted freedom solely rooted in capitalist expansion. As Townshend Middleton writes, the general story of the district goes on with the "discovery" of an "uninhabited" piece of land called Darjeeling by Captain George Llyod and J.W Grant. It was in 1829 that they were passing through this region in order to settle the Onto Border dispute between Sikkim and Nepal (Middleton 2018:30).

Shortly, after that occurred the controversial Grant of Deed in 1835 through which the British acquired Darjeeling from Sikkim. Darjeeling was notified as a "Non-Regulation" District which meant that the region can be administered according to its special needs. Therefore, the task of transforming this "uninhabited" land into a "hill station" began under the Superintendent-ship of Dr Campbell in 1838 (who held this position for two decades) who was given enormous power of administration of the region ranging from the land matters, collection of revenue, acquisition of labour and laws and police and to oversee the overall development of this tract. It was under his Superintendentship that the Darjeeling region acquired the attention of different investors such as tea planters by the 1850s. While this whole sort of "development" was taking place in Darjeeling, Middleton writes that hardly any attention was given

to the rights of the native people and their traditional common lands which were rapidly being converted into the private property of the European investors. In fact, all these "uninhabited" and "uncultivated" lands which were crucial for the shifting agriculturists of the region were designated as *wastelands* which were not paying the revenue to the Government. Therefore, in order to generate revenue from these lands these lands were sold to private investors without paying any attention to the customary rights. This definition of the wastelands, Middleton writes fitted well with the "discovery" narrative of the Darjeeling which totally dismissed the presence of native cultivators who had been living in the Darjeeling hills. In fact, he states that the land records from the 1850s and 1860s hardly mentioned the raiyats of the region (Middleton 2018:33).

It was only after the end of Campbell's Superintendentship and under his successor B.W Morton after the 1870s that revealed the uncultivated tracts which were declared as wastelands and sold to the private investors were in fact inhabited by the native cultivators. This ultimately meant that the use of the notion of *wastelands* in the Darjeeling district was involved with the dispossession of a large number of native people from their land had caused large-scale land alienation (Middleton 2018:33).

Given the history of abuse of wastelands and the large-scale land alienation of the native cultivators for tea leases in the hilly parts of the Darjeeling, Rennie in his account 1865 had suggested putting checks in appropriating the *wastelands* in the newly acquired tract after the Second Anglo-Bhutanese War. He stated that the *wastelands* are plenty in this part of Darjeeling, therefore, the tea speculations and granting of the lease should be done without encroaching on "a single acre" of the agricultural lands and the pastoral lands of the existing population (Rennie 1866:369-

370). Vinay Krishin Gidwani (1992:43-44) in his work *'" Waste' and the Permanent Settlement in Bengal"'* argued that the idea of 'waste' was generated through the discourse of modernism that influenced Europe in the 17th century when the works of John Locke gave waste its ascriptive quality and constructed 'waste', 'value' and 'property' as a divinely ordained triad. This ascriptive form of waste became politically significant as it led to perceive idleness, extravagance, and indolent behaviour of the Bengali zamindars which contrasted with the industry and economic qualities of the English. The abundance of waste in Bengal marked the cultural superiority of the English, which could be eradicated through the laws and administrative measures to transform this indolent behaviour. It was through this idea of waste that the English were able to establish their cultural superiority and justify laws and legitimize the colonial rule in Bengal. This idea of waste was extended to the frontier regions where the revenue settlement was not permanent and it caused a disastrous impact on the pre-existing non-sedentary agriculture.

As rightly pointed out by Gorky Chakraborty in the article '*Wastelands' as a Colonial Construct Was it 'Waste' At All!* rightly pointed out Britain was accustomed to sedentary cultivation much before it became a colonial power (Chakraborty:488). In many ways settled agriculture was reflected as the epitome of civilization. So, when Britain became a colonial power, the same kind of perception was carried on to the colonies. Naturally, when the areas were not found in the permanent occupation of the people and the cultivation is carried out in these lands, such lands were designated as "waste" which could be transformed into a land of "value" through the practice of settled cultivation by the owner through the hired labour (Gidwani 1992:43-44; Chakraborty:488). This idea of waste led to large-scale land alienation in the Kalimpong region where the form of agriculture was non-sedentary.

Right after the annexation of the Kalimpong region by the British colonial Government, the abuse of the traditional rights over land and forests was initiated. In fact, all kinds of land be it fallow, uncultivated (*khas lands* or wastelands), or forest lands were appropriated by the colonial authorities for their colonial interests. As established in Chapter 2, the Kalimpong region's inhabitants depended on the forests for shifting agriculture and pastoralism. From the very beginning, the encouragement of large-scale immigration in the region to take up agriculture and the ever-increasing exploitation of the region's natural resources had initially alienated the inhabitants of their traditional rights. The encroachment of the land by the new settlers remains an undeniable fact. While the establishment of the forest reserves and the restrictions largely led to a great setback to their method of cultivation and pastoralism.

The task of demarcating the precise boundary of landed property was done through land supervision and what they called "systematic" methods. Individual property rights required defined or fixed property boundaries enforced by the state. From the very beginning of the survey, inhabitants were alienated from their lands. To remind it once again, shifting agriculture necessarily needed forest cover or uncultivated lands. These uncultivated lands, therefore, formed a crucial element in the practice of shifting agriculture. However, through the survey and demarcation, the tract was to be divided into blocks. This block was to consist of all the land, cultivated, fallow, and uncultivated (what the colonial authorities named as *khas* lands or wastelands). However, these officers and apparently the Government were quite unconcerned about the pre-existing land use in the region. It is important to understand that his holdings were separated from the "uncultivated" communal lands that he had been using for several generations. These communal lands were not found to be in individual's possession and were therefore marked off as *khas* lands or wastelands

directly under the ownership of the Government. Not only that but these *khas* lands were put in charge of the *Mandals* who were vested with the power of settling the new raiyats in the blocks. Therefore, not only the inhabitants lost their open access to the forests but also to their communal lands. Now, the inhabitants were cornered into the enclosed fields and forced to practice settled agriculture.

Under the new land revenue settlement, the government leased land to the cultivators for a term of ten years in lieu of which the raiyat was to pay a certain amount of rent annually. On paying the rent the raiyats were given *patta*s on which their right of occupancy over the land was based. The *patta* also had other provisions which impacted the property relations of the inhabitants. On failing to pay the rent on specified time the Deputy Commissioner had the full right to realize the rent through the sale of the moveable and immovable property. That in case of negligence of any of the conditions written in the *patta* the Deputy Commissioner had the power of cancelling the lease and even evicting from the land. Therefore, the new land revenue system directly associated property rights with the payment of land revenue. This insecurity of property relations led to several outcomes which would be discussed below.

Land Transfers

As each cultivator's holdings held a separate lease for each plot of land in his possession, it naturally facilitated the transfers of land. In fact, the introduction of the new property rights was directly responsible for the emergence of the land market in the Kalimpong region for the first time.

The revenue settlement in Kalimpong took place after there was a certain change in the land transfer policy. Anand Swamy (2010: 12-17) argues in his article *Land and Law in Colonial India* that the extension of agriculture and its commercialization in the nineteenth century was aided by the enhanced credit markets and alterations in the legal systems which ultimately provided the non-resident moneylenders with a way to recover their burrowed loans by seizing the land of the defaulting borrower. Therefore, the market fluctuations could badly affect the indebted peasants as a result were likely to be alienated from their land. The colonial legal systems and the costs required in the courts to resolve the land disputes further strengthened the hands of the moneylenders more than the indebted peasants. So, this situation led to the emergence of concern among the colonial authorities questioning the problems of indebtedness and land alienation arising from the land transfer from the cultivators to the non-cultivating moneylenders. This situation was also politically aggravated after the revolt of 1857.

The official response to this came in two forms. First was the direct intervention in the legal system and second, the direct restrictions of the land transfer. The Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act (DARA) passed in 1879 can be taken as an example of direct intervention in the legal system by the colonial authorities. The causes behind the Deccan Riots which witnessed the collective rebellion of the peasantry against the moneylender were inspected by the colonial administration and several officials accepted the view that the existing legal systems were detrimental to the peasantry. Ultimately DARA introduced checks and balances in the operations of the civil courts. While direct restrictions on land transfer were promulgated in Punjab through the Punjab Land Alienation Act passed in 1900 where direct restrictions were made in the land transfers from the agricultural to the non-agricultural tribes in Punjab. Some

scholars argue agricultural tribes engaged in *benami* transactions wherein they acquired control of the land via a nominal transfer to the members of an agricultural tribe. Still, it appears to have had an impact report that over time, the wealthier sections of the peasantry displaced the professional money-lenders in the rural credit markets.

The colonial inspection of the Deccan Riots had already shown the causes being the plight of the peasants and their indebtedness at the hands of the moneylenders. The 1857 events which had troubled the British colonial administration in India pressured the colonial administration to investigate the causes of the riots. The new land revenue settlement in the Kalimpong Government Estate put restrictions on the transfer of land to the *Mahajans* or the money lenders. Clause 5 of the raiyat's *patta*s in the Kalimpong Government Estate directly restricted the transfer of land from the raiyats to any other except for the cultivators themselves. Even this transfer was only to be taken with the prior permission of the Sub-divisional officer. This anti-money lender legislation and the need to protect the peasants appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, according to Iyer and Banerjee (2003:15), mainly as the colonial administrators had more stake in the prosperity of the non-landlord areas or in other words, the economic prosperity of these regions directly promised higher rents to the British administrators. However, as Swamy argued it was more a result of the anti-moneylender legislation that had already taken root in the colonial agrarian policy after the Deccan Riots.

Clause 5 of raiyats *patta* restricted the land transfers to the Marwari money lenders. This rule, the colonial authorities believed, was not only putting checks on the land falling into the hands of the moneylenders but also on their money-lending activities

(Bell1905: 18). However, the clause merely sought to protect the transfer of land from the agricultural population to the non-cultivating money-lenders or the *Mahajans* while such transfer among the cultivating populations was recognized and allowed if done according to the law. Therefore, the clause ultimately opened avenues for the rich agriculturists of the region and the concentration of the land in their hands. The motive behind the clause, therefore, contradicted its very nature. It is because the clause allowed the transfer of land if it was done with the prior consent of the sub-divisional officer. In its initial phase, there were no restrictions on land transfers among the agricultural population themselves and the consequent land alienation due to this. The result was the concentration of the land in the hands of a few rich cultivators who invested in the land market. H.C V Philpot in 1921 records the creation of the large holding under one raiyat despite the settlement being against it. He informs that the Mandal of Sakyong had rent-free holdings of 27 acres and also 83 acres holding in his own name. Besides the other members of his family also held land. There were several cases like this where the amount of land exceeded 100 acres (Philpot 1925: 23).

The initial concern in the first and the second settlement was to restrict the creation of large holdings in the region but from the third settlement, the transfer from the Lepchas and Bhutias to Nepali started to be seen as a problem. While unauthorized transfers were found difficult to check from the second settlement itself. However, it was not altogether forbidden; rather a petty fine of 8 annas started being charged from 1892 onwards to get the transfer registered (Ritchie:35). In the next settlement, Bell recorded that 1040 cases of unauthorized transfers were recorded between the years 1900-1901. Even though all these cases were liable to be fined, only 6 cases were fined (Bell 1905:15). In the third settlement rules of the transfers of land were revised.

The new rules permitted any transfer that was made by a Nepalese to Bhutia or the Lepchas. Where a Nepali purchased the land from a Lepcha or Bhutia was only recognized if the settling raiyats were settling in the region three or more years before the settlement. It is for this reason that by the fourth settlement report recorded in 1921, the total number of unauthorized transfers was 497 (Philpot 1925:22). The result of numerous transfers by the fourth settlement showed that the greater part of the land was held by relatively small groups of large landholders.

Table 4.1 The average holdings of the raiyats Lepcha, Bhutia or Nepali recorded in the fourth settlement

Race	**Less than 20 acres**	**Over 20 acres**	**Over 30 acres**	**Over 40 acres**	**Over 50 acres**	**Under 60 acres**	**Under 70 acres**	**Under 80 acres**	**Under 90 acres**	**Total number of Holdings**
Lepchas	1,257	113	28	8	3	2	1			1,412
Bhutias	483	33	9	8	6	4	1		1	545
Nepalis	4,474	283	65	14	11	7	2	2		4,858
Christians	115	1	2							118
Muhammadans	8									8
Up-countrymen	6									6
Total	6,343	430	104	30	20	13	4	2	1	6927
Percentage	*91.56*	*6.20*	*1.50*	*0.433*	*0.288*	*0.187*	*0.057*	*0.028*	*0.014*	
Others										46
Total										6,993

Source: H.C.V Philpot, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement of Kalimpong Government Estate 1919-1921*, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot,1925, p.8.

In the table given above. Out of the total 6,927 holdings, 6,343 holdings held less than 20 acres of land. This consists of around 91.56 percent. The average holdings of the raiyats (whether Lepcha, Bhutia or Nepali) possessing land less than 20 acres was 7.2 acres. The holdings ranging between 20 to 40 acres consisted of around 8.14 percent. While the large holdings ranging between 50-100 acres numbered only 40 consisting of only 0.57 percent of the total population. Out of these 40 holdings, 22 were under the Nepalis, 12 under the Bhutias and 6 under the Lepchas. In the Kalimpong region, the Nepalis were not only able to settle as raiyats and perform the duties of *Mandals* but were also able to grab a large amount of land in their hands. If the holdings ranging between 50-100 acres were designated as large holdings, out of the total Nepali population (4858) nearly 0.45 percent, the Bhutia population (545) 2.20 percent and the Lepchas population (1412) only 0.42 came to occupy the large holdings. So, if the concentration of the large holdings is taken in proportion to the total population of the respective races, then the Lepchas held the least of three races. Therefore, following the new land revenue settlement there was a differentiation in the distribution of the land which ultimately led to the economic disparity in the region which was rather not seen prior to the advent of the British in the region.

The Problem of Rural Indebtedness

One of the worst effects of the land revenue system and the introduction of new property rights was the growth of rural indebtedness. The colonial administration asserted that the tenants in the Kalimpong Government Estate were in good condition and were prosperous. There was an absence of poverty that infested the plains of Bengal. The increase in the population and the growth in the number of pucca houses were taken as the index to measure the prosperity in the region (O'Malley 1907:142).

It was stated that in spite of general prosperity the tenants were highly indebted. According to the colonial documents, the indebtedness was caused due to reckless manner in which the money is debited, overspending on marriage funerals, other ceremonies, gambling, and others. To spend on this, they turn to money lenders who in turn charge them (O'Malley 1907:147). The raiyats were driven to borrow for various reasons. The government's fixed and high rates of revenue demand drove the peasants to the money lenders who charged them very high.

As already pointed out above, the Marwari money lenders or any plainsmen were not authorized to procure land in the sub-division. This restriction was believed to have checked their money-lending activities as well. In the initial period, the colonial authorities did not provide any alternative credit facilities to the struggling cultivators or the new settlers in the region. In fact, the *Mandals* were expected by the colonial authorities to provide some credit facilities for new settlers. The result was the growth of the money lenders from among the agriculturist populations who served as the easiest source of credit. However, the huge money rent and the insecurity of the lease ultimately forced the raiyats to cultivate cash crops like cardamom. This crop was solely produced for export and was in the hands of the Marwari merchants in the Bazaars who exported it to Calcutta. This served in fact as the best opportunity for the Marwari moneylenders to indebt the raiyats. These money lenders by paying the cultivators on the unreaped produce (cardamom) made advantageous bargains for themselves. The result, therefore, was that even though the huge profits of the cardamom were taken by these Marwari merchants while the cultivating raiyats were solely in debt (O'Malley 1907:147). Graham (1897:35) writes that 75% compound interest was not an uncommon rate that the Marwari money lenders charged the

raiyats. Therefore, once the raiyats fell into their clutches it was almost impossible to get out of the debt.

To show the relative indebtedness of the three races namely Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis and the races from whom they lent, Bell prepared figures of the five blocks of Kalimpong Government Estate namely, Bong, Sakyong, Kage, Nim, Kumai and Tode Tangta of the three races namely, Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis and the races from whom they lent.

Table 4.2 Peasant burrowing in the five blocks of Kalimpong Government Estate in 1901-1902

Name	Population (in hundreds)	Total Area in acres	Number of raiyats in Debt	Percentage of raiyats in Debt	Amounts borrowed from (in rupees)					Total Borrowings
					Marwari	Lepcha	Bhutia	Nepali	Others	
Lepcha	134	1599	52	42	347	303	792	793	60	3,295
Bhutia	110	1439	43	39	72	---	2619	230	10	2381
Nepali	573	5645	215	38	10,224	24	435	3,126	217	19,026
Total	817	8,683	310	37.9	10,643	327	3,846	4149	287	26,702

Source: Bell 1905: Appendix I(l), p.xvii

Drawing from the figure, Bell argued that the Nepalis borrowed most of all, largely from the Marwari merchants, and the Lepchas lent least of all. The amount of money borrowed was rather less because three of these blocks namely Tode-Tangta, Nim and Kumai were far from the marketplaces. However, the most important data to notice in the figure is that even though the Lepchas borrowed the least of all, 52 out of 134

Lepcha raiyats were in debt. Accordingly, 42% of the Lepchas were in debt, 39% of the Bhutia raiyats were in debt and 38% of the Nepalis raiyats were in debt. If the racial figures are side-lined and the calculations are made on the average amount altogether borrowed by the raiyats including all the races (Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis), the amount borrowed from the Marwari merchants surpassed all the amounts borrowed from the other races. The amount borrowed was 10,343, 4,049, 3146 and 327 from Marwari moneylenders, Nepalis, Bhutias and the Lepchas respectively. So, the assumption of Bell that the Marwari moneylenders were unnecessary for the raiyats was inaccurate since the figure showed that the largest amount of money was borrowed from the Marwari moneylenders. Also, it can be drawn from the figure the strong presence of Marwari moneylenders in the blocks that were in fact far away from the markets.

As Mridula Mukherjee stated that to solve the problem of indebtedness of the small cultivator and to rid him of the money lenders hold had to either abolish his necessity to borrow or provide easier and cheaper sources of credit. The first was never attempted and the second was a failure (Mukherjee 1980:50). An attempt was made to provide an alternate source of credit through cooperative credit sources in the Kalimpong Government Estate. Since 1902 numerous agricultural cooperative banks have been started in the estate. In 1902 there were 4 banks, in 1915, 50 and in 1919, 62. There are two central banks, one at Kalimpong and one at Pedong, with a working capital of about Rupees 3 lakhs. In 1919 the total number of members of 58 rural societies was 2,396. Therefore, it can be seen that out of the total 6,973 raiyats (recorded in the 1919 settlement), not even half of them borrowed from these agricultural banks (Philpot 1925:8). The reason for not attracting a lot of members could be because the rules for the membership of these credit societies were quite

strict. Bell records that the loans were only given to the members of the bank who were willing to pay 8 annas as the entry fee. Further, the rate of interest on deports was 6 ½ percent per annum and on loans it was 12 ½ per annum. The raiyats at that time lend among themselves at 37 ½ per annum. The rich cultivators stayed away from these agricultural banks because they themselves were able to lend at market rates. From the reports, it appears that from 1914 to 1918 loans were granted too freely and the amount overdue to the central banks increased. And by the 1940s, Dash (1947:241) records the banks did not prove to be successful in removing the rural indebtedness.

Therefore, following the new land revenue settlement and introduction of the bureaucratic property rights there arose a lot of phenomena in the agrarian setting of the region which was quite unheard prior to the coming of the British into the region.

Chapter 5

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW AGRARIAN CLASS STRUCUTRE IN THE KALIMPONG REGION

The British intervention in Indian agriculture necessarily brought about major changes in almost all the agrarian aspects. The different land revenue settlements through redefining the rights of certain classes ultimately brought about a series of structural changes in the use of land and the cultivators (Dhanagere 1983:31-32). The agrarian class structure broadly refers to the varied kind of agrarian relations among the different classes and the social composition of groups occupying definite class positions dependent on the control of the land. Dhanagere writes that the agrarian structure in Indian rural society is so diverse and complex that it is difficult to include all in a general model (Dhanagere 1983: 13). However, some scholars in India and outside have attempted to incorporate the diverse agrarian class structures into some general categories of which mention can be made of Daniel Thorner who suggested that the Indian rural population can be divided into different class categories by adopting the criteria. Those criteria are i. type of income acquired from land (rent or fruits of cultivation or wages), ii. The nature of rights (proprietary rights or tenancy or sharecropping rights or no rights at all) iii. The extent of field work actually performed (absentee landowners or cultivating landowners or work done entirely for others to earn wages) (Thorner 1956:4). On the basis of these criteria, he suggested the following model of the agrarian class structure where he divided the Indian agrarian population into three different categories namely *Malik* at the top, *Kisans* at the intermediary and the *Mazdoors* at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

There are scholars like A.R Desai, D.N Dhanagere and others who also tried to analyse the agrarian structure of India. The Dhanagere model is said to be the extension of Daniel Thorner's model influenced by Mao Tse Tung. He classified five strata occupying different positions in the agrarian class structure of Bengal. i)Landlords ii) Rich Peasants iii) Middle Peasants iv) Poor Peasants and v) the landless agricultural labourers (Dhanagere 1976: 361).

In the context of Bengal, the introduction of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 is said to have brought about a drastic change in the Bengal agrarian society (Bandyopadhyay 2004:83-86). In the 1970s emerged the jotedari-adhiars thesis which came to be regarded as the central agrarian structure in colonial Bengal (Bose 1986:11-15). This thesis focussed on the conflict between the *jotedars*,who were a new category of large landowners that emerged after the Permanent Settlement and the *adhiars* or the sharecroppers employed by them. These *jotedars* with their substantial land, the social authority of village headship and the authority over credit exercised supreme power over the sharecroppers (Ray and Ray 1975:82). This agrarian structure was believed to be the dominant form of agrarian structure in the whole of Bengal. However, Sugata Bose refuted its presence in the whole of Bengal and argued that the *jotedari-adhiars* thesis does not represent the agrarian structure of the whole of Bengal but rather is concentrated only in the districts of North Bengal[51] (Bose 1986:11-15). According to Bose, North Bengal developed this model due to some factors such as the late nineteenth-century reclamation of land, the existence of

[51] The large tracts of wastelands in North Bengal were leased to the jotedars before and after the Permanent settlement. The labourers for reclamation were provided by the semi-tribal *Koches* and *Paliyas* and immigrant Santhal tribes who, after the reclamation, were settled as the sharecroppers with no right of continued occupancy of land they tilled (Bose 1986:11-13)

the pre-colonial classes of rich peasants or *jotedars*, and a low density of population (Bose 1986: 11-12).

Partha Nath Mukherji and Manabendu Chattopadhyay (1981:153-154) are of the view that these jotedars held lands individually or jointly and paid the revenue directly to the Government. The original jotedars were, therefore, the initial settlers who cleared the land and made it arable. This plot of land was called their *jote*. Therefore, in the context of North Bengal, the *jotedars* were the landowners or the peasant landlords having the liberty to cultivate by themselves, or through their tenants. They could technically operate as the superior landlord to their tenants (Mukherjee and Chattopadhyay 1981:153-154). This being said, there are certain other works which have tried to apply this *jotedari-adhiar* structure in the Jalpaiguri district. Jalpaiguri district was a newly formed district from the parts of Bhutan Western Duars (excluding the Kalimpong region) which was annexed after the Second Anglo-Bhutanese War.

The work of Virginius Xaxa (1980:63-85) interestingly asserts that in the Jalpaiguri District of North Bengal, a rudimentary form of agrarian hierarchy with the zamindars and the tenure holders had already emerged in the region during the pre-British period. New land revenue settlement during the British led to the emergence of a particular kind of agrarian structure in the region where *jotedars* at the top of the hierarchy leased land to *chakunidars*, and the latter further leased land to *dar-chakunidars*. While the actual tilling of the land was done by the raiyats and *adhiars*. While the work of Subhajyoti Ray (2002:6-7) accepts that the *jotedar/adhiars* structure formed the dominant mode of expropriation in North Bengal. He argues that the land-revenue policies adopted in the district deliberately and successfully

attempted to create an agrarian class structure which had evolved in the permanently settled estates or the Chaklajat Estates[52] of Jalpaiguri. The new land revenue settlement in the Jalpaiguri district varied from the Permanent settlement as it was made with the presumed actual tiller of the soil (resembling the ryotwari settlement) and the temporarily fixed rents. In spite of this basic difference in the land revenue settlement, Ray argues, that the agrarian conditions came to resemble that of the permanently settled parts of the Jalpaiguri district as the new land revenue settlement interpreted the local agrarian structure of the Chaklajat estates as the traditional agrarian structure of the whole region. While he admits that the jotedari-adhiar structure was the dominant agrarian structure in North Bengal however, he argues that the rural population in the Jalpaiguri district did not wholly comprise these two extremes. In fact, Ray argues that most of the peasants in the region occupied an intermediary category. His work, therefore, remains important for the fact that it urges us to go beyond the traditional mode of expropriation in North Bengal that is said to have characterized the agrarian structure of the region.

Writing about the agrarian relations in the Darjeeling district, T.B Subba (1983:125-126) rightly pointed out that the dominance of the tea plantations in the hilly parts west of River Teesta and non-plantation or the large agricultural areas in the Kalimpong region led to the emergence of different forms of agrarian relations in the district. It is stated that in the Darjeeling and Kurseong region, the relations were exploitative and semi-industrial in nature where the *maliks* (owners) of the plantations occupied the top position, the Managers or assistant managers an intermediary class and the labourers were at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. While he pointed

[52] Chaklajat Estates were permanently settled estate in the Jalpaiguri district.

out that the agrarian class relations in the non-plantation areas of the Darjeeling district like Kalimpong were quite different. T.B Subba has outrightly said that the three-tier agrarian structure as suggested by the other scholars cannot be applied to the area (in the post-reform period) as the single households in the area sometimes represent all three tiers at the same time. In other words, the landlords or the land owners are sometimes found to be working as sharecroppers as well as agricultural labourers at the same time. Therefore, it is very difficult to identify the class affiliation of the agrarian population. Also, there are other limitations where there is no local term to denote the 'agricultural labourers". The closest term used is '*khetala'* which is not limited to the landless labourers engaging in agriculture but rather to any person with land or landless who works in other fields. He points out that under the local labour exchange systems such as *parma* and *huri*, even the landowners work as *khetala*. Further, there is no local term for sharecroppers or tenants. He points out that if the landowner is engaged in sharecropping, then he is called an *adhiawal* or *adhair*. But if the landowner leases his land for sharecropping, then he is called a *Malik* of the lease. But if a landless person is engaged in sharecropping, he is called *pakhurey*. Due to all these, T.B. Subba has suggested two types of classification of the agrarian population of the Darjeeling district the *Pattadars* (who had landed) and the *Pakhureys* having no land as this classification he says is free from confusion as a householder cannot be *pattadar* and *pakhurey* at the same time in the same village (Subba 1983:123-132). His work remains the most important one since it pioneered the works on the agricultural conditions and more specifically of the agrarian structure of the Darjeeling district. However, his work mainly is based on the post-reform period which makes it rather difficult to understand the colonial agrarian condition of Kalimpong.

Buddhadev Chaudhury (1985:99) has classified the agrarian population in Kalimpong (in the post-reform period) into three broad groups with sub-types. Those are as follows,

Landowner or *Malik*

i) Absentee landowners

ii) Non-Cultivating landowner

iii) Cultivating landowner

   a) Performs agricultural operations

   b) Supervises agricultural operations

iv) Cultivating landowner cum sharecroppers/agricultural labourers.

Sharecroppers or *Pakhurey*

i) Share-cropper

ii) Share-cropper cum landowner

iii) Share-cropper cum agricultural labour

Agricultural labourer or *Khetala*

i) Labourer

ii) Labourer cum landowner

iii) Labourer cum share-cropper.

The work of Sarkar is more an extension of T.B. Subba's work. These works are mainly based on the post-reform era and therefore cannot satisfactorily exhibit the conditions during the colonial period. After independence, several British systems had

been replaced. Such as the *Mandals* who occupied rather a distinguishable position under the British saw their administrative downfall after the introduction of the Panchayati Raj system where the Pradhan headed the power structure.

The criteria to analyse the agrarian class structure have varied from scholar to scholar. Some scholars have chosen the criteria to be the rent paid and the kind of rent paid or the kind of tenancy or the actual field work or the size of the landholdings performed by each class of the agrarian population. The size of the holdings has rather been discarded by many scholars and has been criticized for providing erroneous results. While some have used the rent paid by the individuals in order to analyse their class affiliation in the agrarian order (Thangellapali 2018:306). In the Kalimpong region, the rent paid by the individuals cannot be taken as the criteria to identify the different agrarian classes mainly because of the lack of individual records of rent payment. Here, the rent records show the data according to the blocks making it rather difficult to take the rent paid by the individual cultivator as the criteria. Therefore, here the only possible way to know the class affiliation would be to take the nature of rights of the different groups over the land following the new land revenue system. In fact, the same kind of criteria has been used in the post-reform period as well.

The discussion on the agrarian stratification and the relations that developed in the Kalimpong sub-division under British colonial rule necessitates the overview of the pre-colonial agrarian stratification of the region and how it was incorporated or eliminated under the new land revenue settlement by the colonial government. As Neeladri Bhattacharya (1992:149) writes, it is very necessary to understand how the different agrarian classes perceived and reacted to the implementation of the new land

revenue settlement and how the colonial administration sought to resolve these issues to ensure long-term interests.

Rudimentary agrarian hierarchy in the region

John and Karma Ura have tried to analyse the socioeconomic structure of Bhutan using the document based on the distribution of gifts to the state officials, monks and ordinary tax-paying subjects during the celebration of the enthronement of Zhabdrung Jigme Draga I (1765-47). They are of the view that the tax-paying families or *khral-pa* were organized by sub-district under the control of a particular district Dzong or fort. The district Dzong was under the command of the Penlops (Ura 1994:44). Each local authority collected the due taxes in kind and transferred them to the Dzongs where it was stored. Some of these goods were deposited in the dzong quite close to the sources of production. But a large number of goods had to be transported to the larger Dzongs with the use of human labour and animals.

Tashi Wangchuk also talks about the taxes determined by the animal census. However, Kishen Kant Bose's report in the year 1825 stated that all the other Dzongpens under the Paro Penlop delivered cash, grain, etc to him with the exception of the Subah of Dalingkote Dzongpen who kept the grain for him for the military charges and maintaining the garrison of Dalingkote (Bose 1825:138). Therefore, it can be assumed that the taxes collected from the cultivators of this region were normally procured for the local consumption of the Dalingkote district. There was a hierarchy of officers for the collection of this revenue. Under the Dalingkote Dzongpen, the tax was collected by the village headmen who later came to be popularly called *Mandals* under the colonial administration. The office of *Mandals* was hereditary and it had a territorial character where different areas fell under the

jurisdiction of different *Mandals*[53]. His superiority in the agrarian ladder can be acknowledged through the fact that he was exempted from the payment of capitation tax[54]. The *karbaris,* as the Mandal's assistant, were also exempted from capitation tax payment[55].

A.R Fonning (1987:12) and T.B Subba (1983:123) in fact have recorded how the village headmen were responsible for the collection of taxes during the Bhutanese period. Therefore, there existed some among the inhabitants who were required to pay the poll tax to the Bhutanese government, while there were others such as *Mandals*, *karbaris*, monasteries and hermitages who were exempted from the tax payment. The taxation itself had resulted in some kind of hierarchy in the agrarian production process. It is because a certain amount of surplus produced by the population was appropriated by the Bhutanese Government or Dzongpen in the local sense. While there were some within the agrarian setting such as *Mandals* and *Karbaris* who were exempted from this taxation as well as were left with certain collected amounts therefore were naturally left with more surplus than the rest of the population. It is therefore, to argue that unlike Subba (1983:132) held, there was in fact a rudimentary agrarian structure which was further accentuated during the British rule. The pre-colonial rudimentary agrarian structure of the region (not of the whole of Bhutan) manifested that the Dzongpen at the apex who realized the taxes from the cultivators, *Mandals* and *karbaris* (assistants of the *Mandals*) as the intermediary class and the cultivators at the bottom of the agrarian ladder. Also, there are a few sources which

[53] Letter from C.R Marindin, Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector, in charge of Kalimpong Settlement Work, Darjeeling, No.15, dated, 24th July 1882 in the PRD, No.16S/1, March 1883, p.38-39.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Ibid.

mention the population of slaves or servants under the *Mandals* who were cultivating the land. However, it cannot be comprehended with the extensive form of leasing in and leasing out of the land.

From the above contention it can be understood that during the pre-colonial period, there was some degree of differentiation among the agrarian population. There is no doubt that the arrival of the British and their colonial intervention in agriculture further accentuated this differentiation which ultimately led to the emergence of a particular kind of agrarian structure in the region. After the region was brought under colonial rule, the office of Dzongpen was scrapped and later in 1873, an effort had been made to introduce the *Tehsildar* to look after the collection of the revenue. However, by 1879, his office alone was found unsuitable to take over all the administrative duties in the region. In the 1870s a large influx of Nepali settlers began to settle permanently in the Kalimpong region. Subba, in fact, argues that the agrarian structure as such had not taken root in the Darjeeling district till the large-scale immigration of the Nepali settlers and the consequent popularization of settled agriculture (Subba 1983:132).

The census report of 1901 recorded that the Darjeeling district as a whole witnessed a growth of 11.5% from 1891-1901. This increase was the greatest in Kalimpong where the *wastelands* were rapidly being brought under cultivation by new settlers who were chiefly from Nepal[56]. The population increased from 12,683 in 1881, to 26,631 in 1891, to 41,511 in 1901, and to 55,653 in 1921 (Bell 1901: 7; Philpot 1921:7). The increase in the population was solely due to the large-scale immigration of the Nepalese who not only came and settled in the region but in no time, they emerged as

[56]*Census of India, 1901, Vol. VI. The Lower Provinces of Bengal and their feudatories, Part I,* by E.A Gait, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press,1902. p.62.

the majority of the population in the sub-division occupying a majority of the land. This huge immigration had a tremendous impact on the agrarian relations of the region. There was a large-scale land alienation of the Lepchas at the hands of the Nepali settlers as discussed in the previous chapter. From the very beginning of the British rule in the region, they were aware of the disagreement between the Lepchas and the Bhutias on the encroachment of their lands, but no policies were adopted that would discourage or restrict the large-scale immigration of the Nepalis in the region. Contrary to this, the right to settle as raiyats were only reserved for "hill tribes" which included Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepali. While the Marwaris and the other plainsmen were restricted in the region. A vast area of land was brought under cultivation by these new settlers and by 1901 out of the total cultivated area of 53,349 acres 36,839 acres was in the hands of the Nepali cultivators. While the Lepchas held 11,986 acres, 3917 acres were held by the Bhutias while others held about 697 acres (Bell 1905: Appendix I (f), page. xii). As the population continued to increase the per capita holding of the raiyats decreased from 13 acres in 1891 to 9.7 acres in 1902 to 8.8 acres in 1921 respectively (*Bell 1905*: 9; Philpot 1921:10).

With all this, a new kind of agrarian structure had taken root in the Kalimpong region. The Big Zamindars or landlords as evident in the other permanently settled parts of Bengal did not exist in the Kalimpong region. This of course did not apply to another hilly region of Darjeeling which had indeed the Zamindars such as Chebu Lama and his permanently settled estate. This region was temporarily settled as Government Estate where the Government became the big landlord leasing out lands to the tenants. While the agrarian population or in the words of the British administration the "actual tiller of the soil" who became the tenants under the colonial Government cannot be equalled with the *jotedars* of the plains of North Bengal. It is because the *jotedars* of

North Bengal as held by Mukherjee and Chattopadhyay had the liberty to cultivate by themselves or lease out to their sub-tenants. Or in other words, the jotedars could act as the superior landlord to their tenants (Mukherjee and Chattopadhyay 1981:153-154). Contrary to this, the new land revenue settlement in the Kalimpong region prohibited subletting the land from the very beginning. The breach of this condition could lead to the cancellation of the lease of the cultivators and the *sanad* of the *Mandals*. Therefore, it is very important to understand that neither the *Mandals* nor the raiyats equalled the position of the *jotedars* of the plains of North Bengal. It might be the reason why the raiyats or the *Mandals* in the region were not designated as the *jotedars* by the colonial accounts as they did in the Terai of Darjeeling. Also, in the Kalimpong region, even the new settlers came to be recognized as the raiyats eligible for the lease of land under the Government.

Here, rather a different kind of agrarian structure had started emerging which had taken roots in the pre-British agrarian setting. However, it is not to argue that there was an absolute continuation of the pre-British agrarian setting under the British, rather, the adopted structures were remodelled according to the needs of the colonial Government.

Position of the *Mandals*

With the introduction of the new land revenue system, the Kalimpong Government estate was divided into 25 blocks which later increased to 48 blocks (Bell 1905: 1; Philpot 1925:29-33). These blocks were under each Mandal. During the prevalence of the Tehsildari system, the Mandal system or the power and responsibilities of the village men in the tax collection continued to be performed. However, a need for the class was felt that would not only look after the collection of the revenue but also look

after the forest reserves. The class would serve as an intermediary class between the Government and the cultivators. The taxation and its imposition were likely to create disputes when introducing a new revenue system. Therefore, the British government decided to fabricate the system or arrangement to dissociate the inevitable disputes arising out of land right intervention by using the prevalent Mandal system. The village *Mandals* suited the necessity of the colonial authorities for their remarkable presence among the inhabitants. The colonial authorities saw the *Mandals* as having the ability to convince the cultivators and thus, prevent and solve any sort of discontentment among the inhabitants arising from the intervention in forests and land rights.

Also, the Nepalese who brought the families of new settlers into the region came to be designated as *Mandals* and have superior power over the common raiyats[57]. Therefore, in order to maintain the colonial stability in the region the *Mandals* were chosen as the intermediary class between the Government and the raiyat. In order to win the confidence of the *Mandals*, the colonial administrators were even ready to give rent-free lands and certain other concessions to the *Mandals*. It was also felt that if the concession given to the *Mandals* were denied it would hamper the only machinery of the colonial government for introducing the new settlement. Therefore, in the initial period of the new land revenue settlement, the *Mandals* were positioned rather in a superior position to that of the normal raiyats. Unlike the prevailing thoughts, the functions of the *Mandals* and their composition were tremendously transformed under the British.

[57]Letter from C.R Marindin, Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector, in charge of Kalimpong Settlement Work, Darjeeling, No.15, dated, the 24th July 1882 in the PRD, No.16S/1, March 1883, p.10.

Unlike what S. Sarkar stated, the British accepted the Mandal system that prevailed in Bhutan (Sarkar 2010:90-91). However, as B.B. Chaudhury and Neeladri Bhattacharya pointed out these institutions were not merely adopted; rather there was a huge change in the function, composition and position of the *Mandals* under the British. It is to be understood that the Mandal system of the peculiar nature in the British period did not exist during the Bhutanese period and rather there was an absolute alteration in their responsibilities and their position in the agrarian hierarchy of the region.

The Ryotwari arrangement of the revenue system continued the rudimentary pre-colonial agrarian structure by keeping the *Mandals* in a superior position to the normal raiyats. As pointed out earlier the revenue settlement was made with the raiyats who were considered to be the actual tiller of the soil. From the very beginning, the difference between the raiyats and the *Mandals* was fairly established. The basic difference was that the raiyat's right on the land was based on the *pattas*. While the rights of the Mandal over his position were based on the *sanad*. From the settlement report of Philpot, it also appears that the *Mandals* along with the rent-free lands also held additional lands in his name as raiyats who paid rent to the Government. For instance, the Mandal of Sakyong is said to have possessed almost 27 acres as his rent-free holding while also 83 acres in his own name. In total 652 acres of land in Sakyong blocks were said to be under the Mandal and his relatives (Philpot 1925:10). Therefore, such provision ultimately was favourable for the *Mandals* in the agrarian economy of the Kalimpong region. Both in theory and practice, the raiyats and *Mandals* were different agrarian classes participating in the production process of the region.

The functions of the *Mandals* in the agrarian setting were considerably transformed under colonial rule. The blocks were put under the discretion of the *Mandals*. They

were given the right to settle new cultivators within their block and realize the rent from them until the next settlement was made with the cultivators. They were expected to lend money to the settling raiyats in the designated wastelands or *khas lands* in order to augment the settling process. Therefore, till the new settlement was made the new settlers became the tenants of the *Mandals* and were left entirely at the mercy of the *Mandals* who counted and appropriated the surplus in whatever manner they felt right. While they also received rent-free land, were vested with revenue responsibilities and maintenance of peace and order and supervised the overall development of their block, ultimately putting them in a higher social and economic position than the other raiyats of the region.

On the fulfilment of all the conditions stated on Mandal's sanad, they received 10% of the total revenue collection of his block. Their power was largely different and more than the *Mandals* in the other parts of the Darjeeling district where they neither enjoyed revenue-free lands nor free grazing lands (Mitra 1954: CVI). *Mandals* suited the colonial idea of a "capitalist farmer" who would improve the agriculture of the region. Therefore, there was a vast change in the function of the village headmen who as Tapan Kumar Das says were mostly remodelled according to the needs of the colonial policy and the new functions were quite in contradiction to the tribal ethos prevalent in the pre-British days and largely varied from their earlier responsibilities and income in the British days (Das:8). With the greater responsibilities and income, the *Mandals* in the agrarian setting of the region ultimately led to the greater economic disparity in the region between the *Mandals* and the raiyats. Also, in the pre-British days, the *Mandals* were mostly the Lepchas and the Bhutias. However, with the larger immigration of the Nepalese, there emerged among them the *Mandals*

who brought new families to settle in the region. With the continuous immigration of the Nepalese, a large number of *Mandals* arose from among these new settlers.

The Nepali *Mandals* were later considered more efficient than the Lepcha and the Bhutia *Mandals* in the fulfilment of their responsibilities. C. A Bell reported that the *Mandals* should be able to read and write in *khaskura* which had become the common language of the region by then (Bell 1905:14). In fact, when Waddell wrote that the Church of Scotland Mission was doing good services to the Lepcha people however, he stated "I was surprised, however, to find that the Lepchas were being taught through the Nepalese language and not their own vernacular" (Waddell 1900:245). Therefore, in the Kalimpong region, the dominance of the *khas* language was directly linked with the agrarian setting during the British period. The colonial authorities were aware of the vanishing Lepcha population and the culture however, adopted rather a contradictory policy of choosing the *khas kura* as the language to be used in the decrees and the documents in the region.

This class, therefore, held rent-free lands and was vested with the several administrative powers of the blocks. They numbered only 19 in 1865 when the region was annexed. In 1872-73 their number increased to 26. 48 *Mandals* in 1902 (Bell 1905:1). The total area under their possession was 740.13 acres as against 1,264 acres in 1902. The decrease was mainly due to sales, gifts or inheritance by persons who are not *Mandals* (Philpot 1925: 12). This class became the substantial landlords owning large acres of rent-free land as well other agrarian populations in the region. On this agrarian economic pedestal, the *Mandals* were able to focus on and develop other societal and cultural relationships. For instance, the report of C. A Bell records that even though the *Mandals* were illiterate but with their improving power and position in the agrarian society of Kalimpong were now feeling the necessity to send their sons

to school. This relationship between landownership and the new cultural outlook has also been pointed out in the article of Sarkar. For instance, Dhanbir Gurung popularly called Bheriwala Mandal, the Mandal of Bhalukhop block had produced many well-educated political leaders. Namely, Dambar Singh Gurung, Ari Bahadur Gurung[58], Nar Bahadur Gurung and Gajendra Gurung (Sarkar 2010:96).

Therefore, the agrarian hierarchy of the region manifested the *Mandals* at the top of the agrarian hierarchy with the substantial land and with the power over the overall development of their blocks. This group consisted in fact a handful of the total population of the region. Apart from the economic advantage, the *Mandals* were also exempted from the extensive form of free-labour system that was compulsory for the raiyats and also the *Mandals* were chosen to supervise the smooth functioning of this system. Tamlong writes about the presence of the *Jharlangi* system (in his village Kashyon) where the villagers had to volunteer as labourers for road repairs and other works. Also, he pointed out the system called *Bethi* where a few villagers had to work as free labourers in the fields of their Mandal for at least two days a week (Tamlong 2012:49). It can be stated that the system is similar to the *Jharlangi* system that developed in Sikkim where the British Government in order to facilitate trade with Tibet developed a free labour system. The *Bethi* system was also similar to the system in Sikkim through which the *Mandals* and the Zamindars in Sikkim used to obtain wage-less labour from the peasants (Upadhyay 2015:196).

[58] Ari Bahadur Gurung signed the approved copy of the Indian constitution (on behalf of the Gorkha Community of Darjeeling hills) when it was adopted (Appendix A, National Gorkhaland Committee, *Vision Document-3,* p.20).

Table 5.1 The rent-free land held by each Mandal of the Kalimpong surveyed tract in 1901

Serial No.	Name of the Mandal	Block	Area of rent-free land in acres
1	Chewang Mandal	Kalimpong	69.96
2	Dhanbir Mandal	Bhalukhop	67.13
3	Tamding Mandal	Sangser	41.80
4.	Kurmal Mandal	Bong	19.22
5.	Jasan Sing Mandal	Dungra	14.05
6.	Jimpa Tenduk Mandal	Sindipong	31.45
7	Abhiman Mandal	Echa	13.94
8	Akhay Mandal	Pudung	16.20
9	Birbal Mandal	Dolupchen	25.00
10.	Pasang Golay Mandal	Payong	10.75
11.	Dadu Mandal	Santuk	126.26
12.	Sipchudubo Mandal	Lole	10.75
13.	Hasanraj mandal	Pala	23.56
14.	Sangser Mandal	Kankibong	12.29
15.	Narbir Mandal	Yok Primtam	22.46
16.	Ram Lal Mandal	Siokbhir	80.93
17.	Akalman Mandal	Samalbong	42.50
18.	Mantaray Mandal	Sinji	72.50
19.	Samdup Mandal	Samther	13.64
20.	Bharta Sing Mandal	Suruk	50.17

21.	Lapon Mandal	Kashyon	17.68
22.	Dorje Mandal	Pedong	20.44
23.	Chang Dorje Mandal	Sakyong	28.84
24.	Pasang Mandal	Kage	27.07
25.	Ambiok Mandal	Ladam	47.27
26.	Jasandhoj Mandal	Lingse	21.38
Total			918.70

Source: Bell 1905: xxxvii.

Position of the Raiyats

Below the *Mandals* were the raiyats who were also the direct tenants of the Government as the *Mandals*. They were given leases from the Government and the *pattas* they received defined their rights on the land held by them. As already stated above, unlike the *jotedars* of the other parts of Bengal or North Bengal, they as per the rules of the land revenue settlement were not authorized to sublet their lands or give any part of the land to any intermediary. The introduction of the new property rights was directly responsible for the emergence of the land market which ultimately was responsible for the differentiation of land among the agricultural population. As already pointed out in Chapter 4, the legislation concerning the land transfer even put restrictions on the land transfer between the hill tribes (Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis) and the other plainsmen of India (more specifically the Marwari money lenders). However, in the initial period, there was no restriction among the agriculturist population which ultimately led to the concentration of the land in the hands of a few agriculturists of the region. The presence of this substantial peasantry has been recorded by Bell and Philpot in their settlement records. Philpot in 1921 records the

creation of the large *jotes* even if the settlement is in sharp opposition. He informed that the *Mandals* of Sakyong had rent-free holdings of 27 acres and also 83 acres of holdings in his own name. Besides the other members of his family also held land. There were several cases like this where the amount of land exceeded 100 acres (Philpot 1925: 23). Therefore, this class in itself can be further divided into three sub-groups on the basis of land held by them.

Holdings over 50-100 acres- Out of the total 6927 holdings, the holdings with land under 50-100 acres numbered just 40 holdings. Of these 40 holdings 6 belonged to the Lepchas, 12 holdings belonged to Bhutias, and 22 holdings belonged to the Nepalis.

Holdings over 20-40 acres- The land of 564 holdings ranged between 20-40 acres. Of which 149 holdings belonged to the Lepchas, 50 belonged to the Bhutias and 362 belonged to the Nepalis.

Holdings under 20 acres- Out of the total 6,927 holdings, 6,343 holdings held less than 20 acres of land. The average holdings of the raiyats whether Lepcha, Bhutia or Nepali) possessing land less than 20 acres was 7.2 acres. 4474 belonged to the Nepalis, 1257 belonged to the Lepchas, and 483 belonged to the Bhutias.

Sub-tenancies

Below the raiyats existed the three kinds of sub-tenants who cultivated their lands. Due to the rising revenue demand as well as the gradual rise in demand for land due to the increasing population the raiyats in the Kalimpong region also started to sublet their land. Despite the prohibition on subletting the land, the practice of leasing in and leasing out emerged in the region. This class even though were prohibited in either the

rent-free land or the raiyat lands emerged in the region. Among the subtenants were the protected sub-tenants while others were solely working as the tenants at will. Only the sub-tenants cultivating the rent-free lands of the *Mandals*, monasteries and hermitages were given *parchas* which promised some inferior raiyat rights. This class of sub-tenants even though were prohibited in the initial settlement came to be recognised in the third settlement. Their *parchas* demonstrated some kind of terms and conditions which safeguarded them from ejection unless on good grounds. Their terms of possession differ widely. Their actual number has not been disclosed in the reports however, there is no denying the fact that this class existed in the agrarian economy of Kalimpong. This class of sub-tenants differed from the under-tenants holding land in the raiyat land who were tenants at will and were solely left at the mercy of the raiyats. In other words, this class of tenants did not have any tenurial rights but could be ejected at the will of the raiyats.

In the raiyat land, three kinds of sub-tenancy grew. When a subtenant paid all the costs of cultivation except for the rent, reaped all the profit and in return paid a fixed amount of money rent to the raiyat, he was called a *pakhuria*. When a subtenant paid all the cost of cultivation except for the rent, and in return paid a fixed produce rent to the raiyat, he was called a *kuthdar*. When the seed was deducted from the outturn and the produce divided equally between the raiyat and sub-tenant, then the latter was called *adhia*. In all the cases the Raiyats paid the rent to the Government (Dash 1947:182; Bell 1905:15). In all these cases, they were legally tenants at will who were liable to be ejected at the raiyat's will. H.C Philpot, a settlement officer of 1921 records that the rates of rent for these under-tenants were very high and records that the *Pakhuria* paid considerably more than the rent fixed by the Government and *kuthdar* paid over 12 times the Government rent and the *adhai* still further.

Despite the mention of the sub-tenancies in the report of Bell and Philpot, the colonial accounts did not provide the number and the condition of this class who were participating in the region's production system by working as under-tenants. Also, it has not been clarified whether all these kinds of sub-tenants were landless classes or the peasants sharecropping in the fields of the other cultivators. As pointed out by Subba, the lack of the local term to denote the tenant or sharecroppers makes it rather difficult to put a clear-cut demarcation between the classes of sub-tenants. Despite the absence of any local term to denote the sharecroppers or tenants in the region, it can, however, be assumed that the *pakhuria* were mainly the landless classes who came to designate the same landless class even after British rule. While the landowners could also become the *adhiar* or the *kuthdar* but the landowner could never become a *pakhuria*. Therefore, it may be surmised that the *pakhuria* were a landless class and were the most exploited ones in the agrarian hierarchy of the region. Unlike the other two kinds of sub-tenants, *pakhuria* were to pay in cash and therefore, more likely to be affected by the market prices. Also, the *Pakhurias* were as a rule had to perform mandatory free-labour duties of their respective *Maliks* (Bell 1905:15). Therefore, there can be no doubt that this class of sub-tenants were the most exploited in the agrarian ladder of the Kalimpong region. They were left entirely at the mercy of the raiyats who rack rented them. The money rent to be paid to their *Maliks* forced this class to depend on the local Marwari traders for selling their crops in advance and often cheated with low prices. It is also important to understand that the landlessness of the *pakhureys* was not the result of the dispossession of the poor peasants and their conversion into landless cultivators. Rather they mainly were migrants mostly coming from Nepal.

T.B. Subba mentioned that the category of agricultural labourers was not noticed in the census of Darjeeling till 1961. He stated that only after 1961 onwards, this category saw steady growth and by 1971 came to form a significant proportion of 7.5% of the whole population in the Darjeeling district. While in Mirik and Kalimpong it was 51.4% and 24.3% respectively. It is stated that the high proportion in the Kalimpong region was due to the construction of the Military cantonment following the Chinese Aggression of 1962. Therefore, all those labourers working in these areas also came to be categorized in the Census report as agricultural labourers making it rather difficult to know the actual agricultural labourers working in the field of others as wage labourers. However, there is no denying the fact that this class existed in the agrarian setting of Kalimpong during British rule. This mere presence of the agricultural labourer cannot be taken to prove the development of the capitalist mode of production in the region (Patnaik 1972:17).

Therefore, the agrarian hierarchy consisted of the *Mandals*, who numbered just a sizable number holding large acres of land. They practised a huge power in the region and formed the elite class by the dawn of independence. Below this class were the raiyats who paid rent to the Government and were put locally under the *Mandals*' discretion. This class was further divided into three groups based on the amount of land held by them. Below this class would be the under-raiyats who were sharecroppers under the rent-free lands of the *Mandals* having some inferior raiyat rights. Their actual number, however, has not been shown in the records of the Government. However, there is no denying the fact that this class existed in the agrarian economy of the Kalimpong region. They differed from the under-raiyats in the lands of the raiyats because they were recognized in the third settlement and certain conditions were followed to safeguard their position. However, the under-ryots

in the raiyat land were purely tenants at will who could be ejected at the will of the raiyats and were rented relatively at higher rates. They had no tenurial rights so far.

In terms of Kalimpong the big landlords or the Zamindars as evident in the other parts of Bengal were considerably absent in the region. While the rest of the agrarian population who were the tenants directly under the Government cannot be designated as *jotedars* as were in the case of other parts of Bengal as in here the power to sublet the land was not given to either the *Mandals* or the Raiyats from the very beginning. It was only in the third settlement that the sharecroppers working under the rent-free holdings of the *Mandals* and hermitages that these sharecroppers were given some kind of rights that saved them from ejection only on good grounds. Therefore, the *Mandals* or even the raiyats of the region cannot be seen as the *jotedars* who had full authority to use the land in whatever way they liked. Therefore, the colonial intervention in the agriculture of Kalimpong further accentuated the agrarian hierarchy in the region. It led to economic polarization and gave power to certain classes. There emerged a landless class which was rather unheard of in the region in the pre-British days. Further, the Nepali settlers here could not only acquire lands to cultivate and were able to be designated as raiyats but in no time they also could become the raiyats holding large acres of land. The economic polarization and the creation of the elite in the Kalimpong region were in fact directly related to the new land revenue system that was introduced by the British.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

The Kalimpong region came under British rule following the Second Anglo-Bhutanese War. The changes in the methods and techniques of agriculture and the introduction of the new land revenue settlement in the region ultimately led to changes in property relations and agrarian relations in the region.

The new land revenue system and the forest policies of the colonial administrations, directly and indirectly intervened with the prevalent form of agrarian economy and its structural arrangements. Unlike the earlier existing perception among the scholars held the ecology of the region, the limitations in the extension of tea cultivation or the requirements arising from the tea plantation do not do justice to the pre-existing agrarian economy in the region which was the actual cause why large areas demarcated for the agriculture in the region. This negligence might be the cause of the colonial view of associating the shifting agriculture as primitive, backward and wasteful. This notion, it is argued in this work, has necessarily concealed the colonial political and economic motives by justifying the attempt to "improve" the agrarian condition in the region.

The contradiction in the colonial narratives of the shifting agriculture can be easily seen from the fact that the agriculture in the Kalimpong region was praised by colonial agents like Ashley Eden before the annexation of the region but it came to be described as "wasteful" right after the annexation of the region. This contradiction can only be understood by the fact that the colonial administrators popularised the notion in order to justify the intervention in the rights of people on their land through the

various forests and land revenue policies. This kind of concept has not only been limited to the colonial accounts but has lingered in the writings of the Indian scholars who hold a similar view where the replacement to settled agriculture has been perceived as "advancement" without even analysing the grave disruption in the land rights it caused in the society where the economy revolved around shifting agriculture. This perception led to the successful application where the rights of the people over their forests and their land were getting curtailed and the shifting cultivators was being cornered in the patches of enclosed fields. In addition to the popularization of this concept began the encouragement of the large-scale immigration of the Nepali settlers in the region who cut down the forests and settled for cultivation. These new settlers, in sharp contrast to the Lepchas and Bhutias, were conjunct with the 'assiduous', 'capitalist' and 'enterprising' cultivators, the character which suited the colonial interests. These new settlers were encouraged to settle in the region even at the cost of alienating the natives, particularly the Lepchas of the region. In fact, if we see the British even though they were aware of the marginalization of Lepchas and tend to sympathize, they have adopted rather contradictory steps. As already elaborated earlier, the Nepalese were recognized among the hill tribes not only were eligible to be the raiyats but many of them came to occupy the position of the *Mandals* in the region. The free hand given to the Nepalese settlers to settle in the region often led to the encroachment of the native's land which the British were aware however, did not provide a necessary check which led to the land alienation of the natives especially the Lepchas who often had to leave their land and settle in the rugged terrain. Also, if we see the history of agriculture in Kalimpong or that of Bhutan, terrace cultivation which is said to have been introduced in the region by these new settlers was not altogether an alien concept in some parts of Bhutan. But

what is more important is that, this type of cultivation was encouraged and insisted upon over the shifting agriculture with the coming of the British.

Also, the colonial forest policies have successfully side-lined the age-old rights of the people over their means of production or their source of livelihood. The forest policies, in particular, impacted the population as nearly half of the total area i.e., 210 sq. miles out of 412 sq. miles were reserved for the forests of the Government for commercial use without even analysing how the inhabitants were dependent on it for their very survival and waning the pre-colonial mode of resource utilization. As the forests were reserved and with the growing population and the growing number of cattle used in terrace cultivation an alternative had to be made for the grazing grounds or *gorucharan* where the cultivators had to pay the Government to graze a limited number of cattle. Even though the colonial authorities manoeuvred "cautiousness" and "carefulness" while demarcating the lands, however, the inhabitants were alienated from their lands from the very beginning. The land was now chosen as the basis of payment of cash taxes.

Following the new land revenue policies, the ryotwari arrangements where the whole region demarcated for cultivation was divided into blocks placed under each Mandal. In these blocks, the fields of each cultivator were demarcated and separated from the other holdings, grazing lands as well as *khas lands* or wastelands. The lands which were not found in the possession of any cultivator were designated as *khas land or wasteland.* Therefore, khas lands were land that was not leased to any cultivator but rather kept under the Government. The inhabitants were now tenants under the Government while the actual proprietary rights of the land were reserved for the Government. Their right over ten-year lease was dependent on the *pattas* where the

cultivators agreed to pay a certain amount of money rent to the Government. The cultivators could be evicted from their land if they failed to pay the rent. The *Mandals* were to be held responsible for the rent assessed upon their respective circle. For the fulfilment of this duty, he was to receive a certain amount of concession and certain privileges. The insistence on cash payment and the rise of the market both acted as the push and pull factors for the cultivators to engage in the market. Now, the cultivators started to cultivate cash crops like cardamom which were produced solely for the market. This crop was especially in the hands of the Marwari traders who exported it to Calcutta. The comparison of the new rates and the old rates leaves no doubt as to the rise in the cash demand within a very short time. The people were left with no other option than to produce cash crops over food crops. The compulsion on the money rent ultimately forced the cultivators to sell their produce in the market. This development ultimately led to the emergence of a new agrarian class structure in the region

Unlike the general belief, there was indeed some kind of arrangement of land rights even before the coming of the British which was different from the "private property" that the British administrators were prone to understand. Hence, their pre-existing proprietary rights were not recognized nor were their method of production nor the land use (including the forests) ever considered feasible by the colonial administration. The right over the land was only recognized when these lands were privately owned and practised settled agriculture. Therefore, the colonial authorities aimed to introduce the formal bureaucratic modern form of property rights in the land. The property rights of the people on the land were secured only till they paid the rent. This insecurity was the main reason why the raiyats were forced to fall into the clutches of the moneylenders. Also, the growth of the markets and the towns led to

considerable commercialization of the crops. There was a change in the taxation system and its form after the British land settlements. The region where the trade was merely the exchange of commodities started producing directly for the market. Not only this but also it led to the dependence of the inhabitants of the region to depend on the market for the regular supply of food thus breaking the earlier existing subsistence economy. The existing economic polarisation was further accentuated during British rule. The indebtedness of the cultivators under colonial rule was in fact a totally new phenomenon in the agrarian economy of Kalimpong.

Talking about the agrarian class structure, in Kalimpong the big landlords or the Zamindars as evident in the other parts of Bengal were considerably absent in the region. While the rest of the agrarian population who were the tenants directly under the Government did not show the character of typical *jotedars* as were in the case of other parts of Bengal as in here the power to sublet the land was not given to either the *Mandals* or the Raiyats from the very beginning. It was only in the third settlement that the sharecroppers working under the rent-free holdings of the *Mandals* and hermitages that these sharecroppers were given some kind of rights that saved them from ejection only on good grounds. Therefore, the *Mandals* or even the raiyats of the region cannot be seen as the *jotedars* who had full authority to use the land in whatever way they liked. Therefore, the colonial intervention in the agriculture of Kalimpong further accentuated the agrarian hierarchy in the region. It led to economic polarization and gave power to certain classes. There emerged a landless class which was rather unheard of in the region in the pre-British days. Further, the Nepali settlers here could not only acquire lands to cultivate and were able to be designated as raiyats but in no time they also could become the raiyats holding large acres of land. The economic polarization and the creation of the elite in the Kalimpong region were in

fact directly related to the new land revenue system that was introduced by the British. This colonial attitude was very much responsible for the demographic, economic, social and educational dominance of the Nepalese over the interest of the natives who by the beginning of the twentieth century had become marginalized and a minority.

In this work, it has been found that the notion of shifting agriculture, the low population and the lack of private property has been utilized by the colonial authorities to justify the agrarian changes that they brought in to the region. These concepts were used in justifying the large immigration of the Nepalese into the region even if it was at the cost of the marginalizing the natives, particularly the Lepchas. Also, it justified the colonial authority's insistence on the settled agriculture which according to them were the "advanced" form of agriculture. This justification, it has been argued in this work, totally sidelined the disruption caused by the colonial intervention in the pre-existing agrarian setting where their age-old rights were curtailed by their policies. It has been found that the main reason behind the introduction of the new land revenue system in the region was the presence of the cultivating population when it came under the British rule. The new land revenue policy however, did not recognize the earlier existing property rights of the people and aimed to introduce the "secured" property rights. However, in real as already stated earlier, by attaching the property rights with the payment of rent it made the property rights more insecure. No doubt, the cancellation of lease did not take place because now the raiyats stated lending money from the Mahajans and the rich peasant turned moneylenders of the region. The result of this was the emergence of the rural indebtedness in the Kalimpong region which was not heard of during the pre-British period.

Also, the individual property rights facilitated the transfer of land among the inhabitants. The Mahajans were restricted to buy lands in the region. However, similar restrictions were not put in the land transfer among the raiyats and the Mandals. Under the circumstance, the rich peasants and Mandals started transferring the land ultimately leading to the concentration of large acres of land in the hands of few. The result of this was the unequal distribution of land among the inhabitants of the region. Almost 91 percent of the total tenants held less than 20 acres of land. While the huge tract of land ranging between 50-100 acres were possessed by a very small number who only consisted 0.57 percent of the total population. Therefore, it has been found that there was the unequal distribution of land following the British occupation of the Kalimpong region. As already stated earlier, the new land revenue system ultimately brought about the new agrarian structure in the region which was more polarised and exploitative in native. The growth of landless class in the region's agrarian economy was a new phenomenon in the history of Kalimpong region. Therefore, following the British occupation of the region there led a considerable change in the agrarian conditions of the Kalimpong region. The new land revenue system brought about the change in the agrarian methods and techniques, property relations and led to the emergence of the new agrarian structure in the region.

This study thus, has tried to look into the colonial history of Kalimpong with the special significance given to the impact of British intervention in the agriculture of the region. This topic has gained very little attention from other scholars till now, even though this colonial space is historically significant in order to understand the whole colonial picture of Darjeeling and of North Bengal. Therefore, this study has tried to identify the colonial intervention and understand the disruption it caused in the agrarian setting of the region. However, a greater analysis of this topic in relation to

the whole agrarian history of Darjeeling is still necessary to be analysed and understood.

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