

BOOK REVIEW

Middleton Townsend & Sara Shneiderman, *Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories, Politics & Environments*, (Oxford University Press, 2018), Rs. 950, pp. xviii+316, (ISBN 9780199483556).

Darjeeling has always been the centre of attraction for people from different corners of the world. Being an integral part of Eastern Himalayas, it often mesmerises people with its lofty view of Kanchenjunga invigorating fresh air and splendid valleys which fetch flavoured tea. Darjeeling is not only famous for its divine bliss of natural beauty and the precious tea leaves but also for its uncertain socio-economic and political scenario. Therefore, many renowned scholars have made immense effort to explore the latent subaltern history and have tried to understand the dynamics of ethnic-identity of this region. Middleton Townsend and Shneiderman Sara have attempted to give a systematic direction to the countless whispers and conversations from this region. Scholars from Europe, North America and different regions of India have contributed their insightful articles in this edited volume, commenting on the tremendous influence it has had on the colonial and post-colonial discourse. The editors of this volume attempt to explore the colonial and post-colonial history of Darjeeling by employing contemporary theories of social sciences and humanities. They analyse the ways in which Darjeeling could contribute to the available resources of the subaltern and post-colonial history of Eastern Himalayas, South Asia and to the world. Colonial Darjeeling was leased from Sikkim by the British for the purpose of building up a sanatorium and also for setting up a strategic military outpost for monitoring the Himalayan frontier. The authors strongly adhere to the history of Darjeeling as one of the important trading centres of the Trans-Himalayan trade networks be it in Nepal, Sikkim or Tibet. Bennike Rune has expressed the implications of economic and political issues on tourism and the tourists. In her article, she has tried to show the reflected impact of political uncertainty in tourist's gaze. Darjeeling has earned the title 'a summer place' because it offers tranquillity to tourists from the entire globe. This is the reason why it is also denoted as the 'land of magic potion'. Here, tourists can gobble serenity with the mesmerising beauty of nature with the sip of Darjeeling tea. But the political situation has left horrible and awful impact in the mind of some tourists, which has also affected the image of Darjeeling internationally. She narrates the presence of a blonde tourist in front of the Madan Tamang's memorial where 20-30 locals had assembled to pay tribute to their leader. Madan Tamang, the leader of All India Gorkha League (AIGL) and an ardent critic of Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) was brutally murdered leaving unhealed wounds in the political scenario of Darjeeling.

Sharma Jayeeta explores labour and mobility in Darjeeling in her article. The discovery of soil and climate of this region was exactly like the discovery of latent treasury. This is because it has paved its way to commercial plantation of tea and cinchona. The scholar provides basic information regarding how the colonial interest paved its way to the creation of new identity for this region. Highlighting the role of

Dr. A. Campbell she dwells on the great challenge before the British to convert the rugged topography of Darjeeling into the land fit for tea plantation. For this reason Bhutias and Nepalese migrated into Darjeeling with the grace of British government to transform the said topography. British government engaged these people for expedition, mountaineering training and they were also recruited into British army. The people gradually discovered new identities on the basis of their shared colonial experiences and from this phase a new era of history was engraved in this region.

The second section of this edited volume put forward the discourses on politics and social movements. It provides insights on identity and identity politics of this region drawn around the themes of Gorkhaland movement, underdevelopment etc. It starts with Lacina Bethany's article which elaborately and critically analyses the electoral competition and Gorkhaland Movement. She refers to the different phases of Gorkhaland movement under the leadership of Deo Prakash Rai, Subash Ghising, Bimal Gurung etc. Formation of Hill men's association during British regime indicates the political consciousness of Gorkhas for separate administrative unit from the colonial days. This was followed by the formation of All India Gorkha League (AIGL) and Communist party of India (CPI). The original demand of these parties was to merge Darjeeling with Assam, but their demand was opposed by the West Bengal government. Despite changes in leadership from Deo Prakash Rai to Bimal Gurung, Darjeeling Hill Area Development Council, Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), and Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA) are all they could bargain for. The rise and the fall of political leaders have tremendously affected the demand for separate statehood landing into dreary desert of self-interest pursuing the carrots offered by the State apparatus.

Wenner Miriam discusses virtuous movements and Dirty Politics in Darjeeling in this article. This article can be analysed through Darwin's theory of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest. Struggle for existence is reflected when the Gorkhas from this region tried to survive with their ethnic identity followed by their rights on their resources. On the other hand, survival of the fittest is reflected when people from the same region stands against each other at the cost of individual's life. The best suited example is the brutal assassination of Madan Tamang in the crowded place which picturize dirty politics in Darjeeling. Furthermore, the leaders who were directly or indirectly involved in that conspiracy tried to disguise themselves as saints and saviours of the people. The scholar has remarked this entire scenario as 'the art of camouflage'. Moreover, the concern of a commoner, who said that 'Gorkhaland is not a movement for money' is also reflected within this article. Therefore the scholar has also tried to observe the implication of moral and immoral activity in politics from the perspective of the commoner.

Chettri Mona a local scholar from this region has also contributed an article in this edited volume. Her work dwells on how local rowdies are channelized or given shape by the political parties. Her claim is that the politics in Darjeeling cannot be read by keeping aside the rowdies, because politics and rowdies are associated through a complex network. The politicians will make sure that higher the crime higher the position offered for the rowdies. Their reputation is based mostly on the amount of

violence they are involved in. The scholar has made stark differentiation between the rowdy and the criminal, because the criminal would try to hide their crime and wants to keep it as a secret. But violence created by the rowdies is referred as the performative act, whose main intention is to spread fear among the people. Some political leaders in Darjeeling evolved from the local rowdies to be the saviour of the people. The scholar has identified possible causes for the birth of rowdies and among them economic factor seems to be the base. Many popular rowdies are from the tea gardens, they were once the victim of class exploitation and vicious circle of poverty. When they tasted the magic of power and coercion, they began to evolve in order to occupy important positions in society. They were also being used by various political parties to serve their selfish interests and in return the political parties condoned their degree of violence. The demand for ethnic identity has consistently echoed from this region. Although their demand based on identity has been bargained with some alternative measures, the issue remains unresolved in Darjeeling.

Chettri Nilamber in his article explores changing pattern of ethnic identity in this region which consequently affected the shift in identity politics. British encouraged Nepalese and Bhutanese migration for human resources which they employed in plantation and mountaineering expedition. When the people migrated into the Darjeeling Hills they not only came with the human resources, but they also brought their own ethnic-identity. Gradually, these various ethnic-groups started sharing the common experience of the melancholy of the migration and the bitter experience of the bonded labour in the colonial regime. For them Nepali language became the common medium of communication and later they started to identify themselves on the basis of this common lingua-franca and shared experiences of colonialism. Therefore, based on such common factor between these ethnic-groups they also started demanding the separate homeland within the territory of India. They also preserved their ethnic-identity which they possess from their ancestry and their family deities. Many ethnic associations were formed in order to preserve and protect their ethnicity. For instance, Bhai Larke Thami Samaj (BLTS) was formed in 1943, which also started Thami Jyoti Primary School in 1945. The BLTS was formally registered as Bharatiya Thami Welfare Association in 1990. These very ethnic-groups within Gorkhas started demanding Scheduled tribe status within the constitution of India. Consequently, Bhutia, Lepcha, Tibetans and Yolmo were constitutionally recognised as Scheduled Tribe in 1950s. During 1990s and early 2000s the entire hill was echoed with the voices of the demand for Scheduled Tribe status. Therefore, the demand for ethnic-identity on the shared basis of colonial experience gradually inclined towards community culture based identities. A repercussion of this trend represents a new discourse of identity politics. Swatasiddha Sarkar and Khawas Babika analyse Kumar Pradhan's work in order to explain Nepali National identity in Darjeeling. The scholars hold that Pradhan's work indicates the relevance of Nepali nation formation in Darjeeling.

The third section of the book has three articles which explores the issue of tea garden management, water crisis and women tea workers. Besky Sarah in her article illustrates the subnational occupation in Darjeeling where she refers to the Darjeeling Tea Management Training Centre (DTMTC). Gorkhas are considered as one of the

valorous and hardworking racial groups who are very much fit for military service and manual labour. On the other hand, Gorkha women are depicted by others as alluring. Such notions consequently stigmatised their identity. The main objective to start DTMTC classes in Roy Villa (Sister Nivedita's Cottage in Darjeeling) was to train the Gorkha youth for tea garden management. Indirectly the founders of DTMTC wanted to repeal the stigmatised identity of Gorkhas as manual labourers. Dating from the tea plantation days, DTMTC was not affiliated to any university. Although the training institute was supported by GJM (the ruling party), the students raised the issue of longevity in the event of changes in the ruling party. Ultimately DTMTC failed to gain confidence of local youth creating a contrast between the rooted plantation 'economy' and its 'liberalizing national forces'.

Drew Georgina and Rai Roshan illustrate water crisis in this region. Water crisis is the major problem in the entire globe. In Darjeeling infrastructure for water reservoir was built during British regime for a population of 10,000, which has increased to 120,000 (2011 census). The new plans to set up more reservoirs were rarely discussed. The locals from Muldara, Jawarhar Busti and Mangalpuri have expressed their grief on water crisis. As the water connection constructed under Darjeeling municipality is very limited, people have to fetch water from the nearest natural stream. People take trouble to fetch water and carry the load of it till they reach their respective homes. The 'samaj' which consists of members belonging to various religion, caste and ethnicity try to solve water dispute among the people. Therefore, this particular article succinctly analyses how inequalities and identity politics cut across local spaces.

The last article of this volume tries to draw attention towards gender-based structured inequalities in tea gardens. Within the purview of this article Sen Debrati has explained how the women workers in tea garden try to grab the opportunities provided by Fair Trade campaign. Fair Trade specially helped them to avoid the burden of loans and it indirectly tried to limit patriarchal dominance in their lives. The article precisely illustrates the contemporary economic and social lives of women tea workers in Darjeeling.

T.B. Subba has provided an afterword in this volume where he has critically analysed each of the articles. He has pleaded that Sikkim has developed tremendously in many fields and there offers multiple discourses on its merits and demerits. It may attract the world to explore such discourses and he surmises that this volume 'Darjeeling Reconsidered' might probably be the last tribute to Darjeeling. The colonial intervention in Darjeeling did make the town beautiful with sophisticated well designed roads, parks and buildings. Yet many scholars have reviewed colonialism as a means of suppression and are carried away more by the prevailing notions of colonial enterprise than by viewing those very premises critically. He lauds this insightful volume as it focuses and explores the place more than the people and society. Hence, the book *Darjeeling Reconsidered* traces the impact of colonialism in the post-colonial era. It would be interesting to continue to trace this region and its evolution as a test case of the impact of neo-colonial and pre-colonial tendencies coalescing to shape its present as much as its future.