

## **Editorial:**

### **Darjeeling and Eastern Himalayas**

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The region called Darjeeling and Eastern Himalayas has now come to acquire some kind of respectability in the world of academia. Those who ply their trade on the region will generally agree that their wares are now more freely displayed in the book racks of university libraries and sometimes even cited by an odd researcher from a metropolitan university. But these are first tender shoots that will require constant care and attention before they fully bloom some day in future. This is so because the journey from respectability to that of becoming a mainstream academic vocation is long, arduous and fraught with the possibility of being counterproductive.

The reason for this guarded optimism or even a refusal to acknowledge the initial success is because the scholarship from the region has not fully confronted the manner and style of knowledge production in the metropolitan locations. To drive the point home let us take the case of the pedagogical construction of the object called Darjeeling and the population that inhabit the region in Eastern Himalaya. Just like 'East' was a career once upon a time, the study on Darjeeling and Eastern Himalaya has become a profitable venture for a large number of Western researchers as well as mainstream researchers from our own country. A whole range of researchers have descended to Darjeeling and the Eastern Himalayan region. Armed with the latest theories and metropolitan academic rigour they hire young students from local colleges and universities to work as 'data collectors' and 'native informants'. These young students, who often get handsomely remunerated, feel a deep sense of academic vindication to be working for metropolitan – mainly white – researchers.

The moot point here is not about who can do research on the Darjeeling or Eastern Himalaya, though such questions are quite legitimately being asked these days. The point one is labouring to make is that the very political economy of knowledge production is an unjust system favouring the metropolitan scholars and academia at a heavy cost of native and vernacular scholarship. This stratification could have been acceptable if it were on the grounds of academic merit alone. But this hardly seems to be the case. The whole economy of knowledge production, as we know, is deeply tied with international academic networks, seminar circuits, funding agencies as also the economics of the large publishing houses. It hardly bears elaboration of the fact that the ideological and economic agenda of global capitalism gets routed through their funding agencies via some of the major universities on both sides of the Atlantic. There is a renewed focus of global capitalism on South Asia generally and India in particular. The academic agenda follows suit and redirects its focus. A field of specialisation like 'South Asian Studies', which for a very long time remained marginal and ghettoised in the Anglo American universities, has now become very much part of the academic

mainstream in these universities. And in this whole renewed academic focus on South Asia, there is some purchase for those plying their trade in Darjeeling and Eastern Himalaya. And yet we are crucially aware that within this gigantic field called South Asian Studies, studies on Darjeeling and Eastern Himalaya would represent a very specialised niche area taken in the context of the total funding, research output of these metropolitan universities as also the academic titles these universities as well as leading academic publishing houses generate at any given point.

It is in this broad context that this special issue on 'Darjeeling and Eastern Himalaya' makes a courageous attempt to intervene almost against the tide if you will. The challenge is almost insurmountable but the contributors are game for it. They have, through their writings, sought to appropriate the right to represent their case. Enacting the political act of 'writing back', the articles here seek to subvert received knowledge on the region. The articles in the volume, fourteen in all, come in a neat packaging of studies that are standard social scientific investigation dealing with the material realities of life in the region. Questions of labour and livelihood, rural entrepreneurship and governmental interventions or the lack of it are investigated here. There is a fair share of literary and historical studies that seek to map the temporality of the region and the people and also the manner in which it has come to be represented in high literature.

Sharadhanjali Tamang presents the indigenous oral tradition of Tamang community from the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. She focuses on the *Tamba* tradition of the Tamang community. Tamba is one of the social leaders in a traditional Tamang community who is a living embodiment of oral tradition. Discussing on the modes of composition, transmission and source of the oral literature she elaborates on the question of authorship and the dynamics between the written and the spoken. Parjanya Sen in his article showcases how Darjeeling and Kalimpong served as crucial place for British to understand and generate knowledge regarding Tibet. Sen probes the contribution of Sarat Chandra Das, an explorer and collector, and Himalayan Tibet Museum in Darjeeling in the production of the colonial pedagogy of knowledge production vis-à-vis Tibet, which led to the rendering of Tibet as a knowable 'archive-state'.

Bedika Rai, through her case study of Sampurna Rai, draws attention to the gradual change in the course of the development of Nepali literature in India post Gorkhaland Movement of 1980's. She projects Sampurna Rai as representing the common Indian Nepali community and yet her writings provide the literary depth that surpass the boundary of time and space. Resha Berman in her paper 'Creating New Borderlines: Women and Marginality in Mamang Dai's Novel *Stupid Cupid*' focuses on presenting North-East women and their the problems from the perspective of neo-liberal studies. The author tries to explore through Dai's novel 'Stupid Cupid' the new modes of neoliberal subjectivity as having empowered North East migrant women in the cities of India. This paper is an attempt to look at two contrasting images of women: village women and city women. City women are assertive, elegant and sophisticated whereas village women are innocent, submissive, simple, rustic and hard working.

Socio-economic aspects in the life of a village woman may seem to liberate her but to what extent, is what Dai poignantly poses in her novel exploding somewhat the myth of women's power in the North-East. Smriti Singh reads with a critical mind Kiran Desai's representation of the political and cultural aspirations of the Indian Nepalis in her much celebrated *The Inheritance of Loss*. She points out how the author has made literature a part of the dominant official narrative by using the official developmentalist paradigm for understanding the political and cultural aspirations of the Indian Nepalis. She argues that Desai has committed a hermeneutical violence and has attempted to fictionalise history having distant reference to fact. She presents Desai's failure to understand the political aspirations of the Indian Nepalis in her equation of the Gorkhaland movement with violence and anarchy, with communalism and primitivism. She reveals Desai's continuation of her legacy of stereotype and problematises her developmentalist approach to redress the political crisis of the Indian Nepalis.

Imnuksungla Pongen in his study of the Konyak tribe of Nagaland highlights the crisis in tribal livelihood systems wrought by the adoption of western model of development. Pongen critiques the dictates of Eurocentric view on 'notion of development' and argues for 'subaltern model' in which context and region specific facets and attributes of development are acknowledged. He calls on both State and Civil Society to come forward and address the crisis.

Sushna Subba's research imparts insight into the transitions in the Limbu community of Darjeeling. She opines that though religion and culture are neatly interwoven making one composite whole in a tribal community, yet it is possible to determine religious and cultural elements separately for our studies. Focussing on the religio-cultural aspects of the Limbu tribal community she points out significant aspects of religio-cultural transitions in the Limbu community of Darjeeling. Terence Mukhia takes forward the outcome and interplay between the assertion of ethnic identities and development with reference to many development and cultural boards that have been established in the Darjeeling hills. He intends to point out how an exaggeration of community spirit can lead to ethnicism creating a closed society. He opines that Darjeeling has been witnessing a series of developments based on the assertion of ethnic identities not without problems. In a similar vein, Biswanath Saha and Gorky Chakraborty's article 'Mirroring the Past into the Future: Analysing Self-Rule in Darjeeling Hills' throws further light on the history of Gorkhaland movement of Darjeeling Hills and the emerging contradictions within the movement. There have been attempts to recreate the past and live in it. This has led to the creation of two contrasting and conflicting images of the ethnocentric insider and the intruding alienating outsider. Darjeeling Nepali speech community apparently seems one though multiple sub-identities lurk within.

Privat Giri in his article traces the historical roots that led to the development of the early Nepali public sphere in colonial Darjeeling. He argues that the Nepali public sphere in Darjeeling emerged within the context of three significant changes viz. the adoption of Nepali language as the *lingua franca* of the Darjeeling Hills, spread of western liberal education, and the development of Nepal literature, all enabling the

creation of a discursive space for the people of Darjeeling. Ugyal T. Lama Yolmo carries forward the above argument with a contextual reference when he discusses how social media has become a platform for providing voice to the section of the nation whose voices remained unheard until the emergence of the social media and networking. Though media has always acted as the facilitator of information for its consumers in the form of readers, listeners or viewers, news from Darjeeling Hills (Darjeeling District) is not sufficiently covered. He shows how this scenario is changing with the emergence of social media. His research reviews the effect of social media, the way in which Darjeeling connects and communicates socially and politically.

Finally, Susan Rai in her paper 'Gender Based Violence and Human Rights' turns our attention towards gender-based violence as one of the most pervasive human right violence in the world. According to her such violence mainly stems from women's subordinate position in society. She explains how gender based violence violates the rights of women including right to life, right to equal protection under law, right to equality in family or the right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health. Her submission that different aspects of violence are rooted in power inequalities between women and men are drawn from significant data provided by World Health Organization (WHO), National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), Global Gender Gap Report.