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# Darjeeling, the hill capital of British India

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#### Abstract

Beauty as we know it, Darjeeling has had a very interesting past. The Darjeeling name has been coined in Tibetan Language, Dori meaning "thunderbolt" and ling meaning "Land or Place". It literally means "the land of thunderbolt". It has been an area of dispute between the British East India Company, Nepal, and Sikkim for many years. The name 'Darjeeling' is derived from a monastery called 'Dorje Ling', built by Denzongpa tribals in 1765, on behalf of the Chogyal or King of Sikkim. It was a part of the kingdom of Sikkim and a native tribe named 'Lepcha' were the original inhabitants of the place, before being invaded by the Gorkhas of Nepal in the 1790s. Under the Sugauli Treaty of 1815, Nepal yielded one-third of their lands to the British, who established Darjeeling as a sanatorium. Dr. Arthur Campbell of the Indian Medical Service, started tea plantation in the town, in 1841. This gave rise to several tea estates being started in the area. The differences between the British and Sikkim led to the annexation of Darjeeling into the British Empire. During the 19th century, immigrants from Nepal were recruited to work in the tea plantations and construction sites. The district grew as a popular tourist destination and started to be known as 'Queen of the Hills'. After independence, in 1947, Darjeeling was merged with West Bengal. Migration of thousands of Tibetan refugees happened in 1950, when Tibet was annexed by the People Liberation Army of China. This led to a surge in population of Darjeeling. In the 1980s, the ethnic population demanded for a separate state for Gorkhas, leading to political tensions and the issue is still being hotly debated.

**Keywords:** Darjeeling, West Bengal, Gorkhaland, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, British, Kalimpong, Treaty of Sinchula, Tibet, Himalayas, Sugauli Treaty

## Introduction

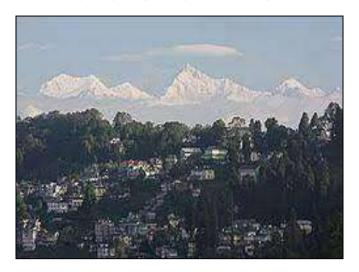
Darjeeling is located at an altitude of about 6710 feet and is one of the most beautiful destinations in India. The name Darjeeling came from two Tibetan words 'dorje' meaning and 'ling' meaning land. So Darjeeling literally means 'the land of thunderbolt'. Previous to its acquisition by the British East India Company in 1835, Darjeeling was a part of Sikkim (Sikkim was an independent kingdom then) and also of Nepal for a brief period of time. In 1827, there was a dispute between Sikkim and Nepal again and the Sikkimese King asked the British Governor-General in India for help as per the Treaty of Titalia signed in 1817. The British then sent two of its officers Captain Lloyd and Mr Grant to settle the dispute. It was during this time when Caption Llyod sent a few days in Darjeeling in February 1829. The place was then known as the "Old Gorkha Station of Darjeeling". The place was nothing like what it is today. It was a deserted region with dense forests and mountains. Caption Llyod realized that Darjeeling can become a great sanatorium or health resort for the British officers. Soon a proposal was sent to the British Governor-General and it was soon approved as well. Caption Llyod who was by then promoted to the rank of General was sent again to negotiate with the Chogyal (King) of Sikkim to handover Darjeeling to them. General Llyod was successful in his mission and finally, in 1835 the Chogyal was persuaded to hand over Darjeeling as a gift to the East India Company as a friendly gesture. In return, the company granted an allowance of Rs. 3000.00 to the Chogyal which was later increased to Rs 6000.00 per year. It might sound a meagre amount now, but it was quite a large sum during those days. In 1839, Dr. Archibald Campbell, a British resident in Nepal was brought to Darjeeling and given the charge of administration. Dr Campbell was largely responsible for the initial development of Darjeeling. He was responsible for building roads, establishing Hill Corps to maintain law and order. He also abolished bonded slavery in Darjeeling. There were still minor skirmishes between the Sikkimese and the British during the preceding years. Finally, after 1866, Darjeeling became much peaceful and that brought an all-round development of the hill station. Farming was improved and so was communication.

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In 1881, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways was introduced that connected the hills to the plains in a convenient fashion. Finally, Darjeeling was growing and flourishing.



# **Research questions**

- 1. What is the history of Darjeeling and what made it a place of keen British interest?
- 2. How did the Britishers capture Darjeeling?
- 3. Who were the original inhabitators of Darjeeling?
- 4. How did it become a home to the Nepalese and Tibetians?
- 5. What were the developments made by the Britishers in Darjeeling?
- 6. How did it become a major centre for tourist attraction?
- 7. Why is Darjeeling recently fighting for a separate homeland of Gorkhaland?
- 8. What are the present political conditions in Darjeeling?
- 9. Does Darjeeling still hold its past glory?
- 10. What are the initiatives taken by the West Bengal Government to preserve the glorious heritage of Darjeeling?

## Research objective

- 1. To find out the reasons which led to the Britisher's choice of Darjeeling being the hill capital of British India.
- 2. To talk about the out the rich history of Darjeeling and its original inhabitors.
- 3. The treaties signed between Darjeeling and the neighbouring states and nations.
- 4. Reasons that led to Darjeeling being the refuge for the Tibetians.
- 5. The developments made by the Britishers in Darjeeling.
- 6. Cultural and economic contributions made by the 'Queen of Hills' for the overall nation as well as globally.

## **Review of literature**

No path in Darjeeling is straight: Memories of a Hill Town by Parimal Bhattacharya is a book which provides a deep insight on the history of Darjeeling. For a few years in the early 1990s-at a time when the embers of a violent agitation for Gorkhaland were slowly dying down-Parimal Bhattacharya taught at the Government College in Darjeeling. No Path in Darjeeling Is Straight is a memory of his time in the iconic town and one of the finest works of Indian non-fiction in recent years. Parimal evocatively

describes his arrival, through drizzle and impenetrable fog, at a place that was at odds with the grand picture of it he had painted for himself. And his first night there was spent sleepless in a ramshackle hotel above a butcher shop. Yet, as he tramped its roads and winding footpaths, Darjeeling grew on him. He sought out its history: a land of incomparable beauty originally inhabited by the Lepchas and other tribes; the British who took it for themselves in the mid-1800s so they could remember home; the Darieeling Himalayan Railway-once a vital artery, now a quaint toy train-built in 1881 and the vast tea gardens with which the British replaced verdant forests to produce the fabled Orange Pekoe. In the enmeshed lives of his neighbours of various castes, tribes, religions and cultureslived at the measured pace of a small town, Parimal discovered a richly cosmopolitan society which endured even under threat from cynical politics and haphazard urbanization. He also found new friends: Benson, a colleague whose death from AIDS showed him the dark underbelly of the hill station; Pratap and Newton, whose homes and lives reflected the irreconcilable pulls of tradition and upward mobility; and Julia and Hemant, with whom he trekked the forests of the Singalila mountains in search of a vanished Lepcha village and a salamander long thought extinct. With empathy and in shimmering prose, No Path in Darjeeling Is Straight effortlessly merges travel, history, literature, memory, politics and the pleasures of ennui into an unforgettable portrait of a place and its people.

Darjeeling: A History of the World's Greatest Tea by Jeff Koehler is set against the backdrop of the looming Himalayas and drenching monsoons, this is the story of how Darjeeling developed its tea industry under Imperial British rule and eventually came to produce the world's finest leaves. A fascinating portrait of the region and a story rich in intrigue and empire, full of adventurers and romance, it illuminates the historic, arcane and changing world of this celebrated tea. It's the story, too, of the measures being taken to counter challenges-dropping production, a violent struggle for independent statehood, labour unrest and the devastating effect of climate change and save India's most exclusive and iconic brew that are nothing short of radical.

**Darjeeling:** The Unhealed Wound by C.R. Rai talks about the beautiful hill district of Darjeeling has been in the throes of political uncertainty for several decades now. Mr. CR Rai, a retired administrator with rich experience who also led his political outfit after resigning from service, had access to some of the prime political actors and events at the height of the Gorkhaland agitation and brought his unique perspective on the issue in this unusually interesting book.

Darjeeling: The Unhealed Wound discusses the people and circumstances responsible for creating political uncertainty. There are fascinating insights into the roles played by the local leaders and the main players as well as Dr BC Roy and Shri Vallabhai Patel in determining Darjeeling's post-independence position. What influence did Nepal have? How did Sikkim's annexation influence regional politics? These and other questions are discussed with great passion. Darjeeling enthusiasts will also be fascinated by the references to the many known and lesser-known figures who played a crucial role in the establishment of the original "Queen of the Hills". About the Author: C.R. Rai is a

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former civil servant who served in several executive posts. He resigned from the West Bengal Civil Services to form a new political party, hoping to solve the Darjeeling imbroglio and other problems. In this capacity, he led several delegations to New Delhi. He has also been actively involved in various social, cultural and literary organizations. His involvement in administration and politics gave him a unique insight into the affairs of Darjeeling as well as Sikkim, Nepal, and Bhutan. Though this book calls for an inclusive solution to the Darjeeling conundrum based on pragmatism and non-violence.

Darjeeling: A History of the World's Greatest Tea by Jeff Koehler talks about the economic importance of Darjeeling. Winner of the 2016 IACP Award: Literary Food Writing Set against the backdrop of the looming Himalayas and drenching monsoons, this is the story of how Darjeeling developed its tea industry under Imperial British rule and eventually came to produce the world's finest leaves. But today the industry is battling dropping production, a violent struggle for independent statehood, labour unrest and the devastating effect of climate change. It's the story, too, of the measures being taken to counter these challenges and save India's most exclusive and iconic brew that are nothing short of radical. A fascinating portrait of the region and a story rich in intrigue and empire, full of adventurers and romance, it illuminates the historic, arcane and changing world of this celebrated tea.

The Living Mountain by Amitav Ghosh is a new story from internationally renowned author Amitav Ghosh, The Living Mountain is a cautionary tale of how we have systematically exploited nature, leading to an environmental collapse. Recounted as a dream, this is a fable about Mahaparbat, the Living Mountain; the indigenous valley dwellers who live and prosper in its shelter; the assault on the mountain for commercial benefit by the Anthropoi, humans whose sole aim is to reap the bounty of nature; and the disaster that unfolds as a result. The Living Mountain is especially relevant today when we have been battling a pandemic and are facing a climate catastrophe: both of which are products of our insufficient understanding of mankind's relationship with nature, and our sustained appropriation and abuse of natural resources. This is a book of our times, for our times, and it will resonate strongly with readers of all ages.

Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling by L.S.S. O Malley is another important detail on Darjeeling. Bengal District Gazetteer Darjeeling The preparation of district, provincial and imperial gazetteers was part of a tradition set up by the Raj. British civilians in India undertook the preparation of these enormously useful projects under their supervision. District Officers of Deputy Commissioners assisted in the collection of material and often wrote entire reports themselves. These Official records provide a wealth of material on all aspects of the regions covered by their districts or provinces. They also include detailed information about the inhabitants, their way of life, habits, customs, religious rites and rituals, festivals and indeed everything concerning them. The Darjeeling district gazetteer by L.S.S.O. Malley was first published in 1907. Named after the Buddhist monastery of 'Dorje Ling' or 'the place of thunderbolt', this district forms an irregular triangle 1164 square miles in areas, its base resting on Sikkim in the north while its apex stretches into Bengal in the south. It is

demarcated form Nepal in the west by the Singatita mountain chain and its northeastern mountain chain and its northeastern boundaries are with Bhutan and the districts of Jalpaiguri and Purnea respectively. Ranging in altitude form 3,000 to 12,000 feet above the sea level, this largely hilly region is drained by the Mechi, Balasan, Mahanadi, Tista and Jaldhaka rivers. Its vegetation ranges from pine, oak, maple and cheastnut forests and tea gardens at the higher altitudes to palm and plantain in the marshy terai. This timely reprint provides an excellent reference tool to researchers in all social science disciplines.

Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories by Middleton Townsend; Shneiderman Sara says that Darjeeling occupies a special place in the South Asian imaginary. With its Himalayan vistas, lush tea gardens, and brisk mountain air, Darjeeling was the consummate colonial hill-station. The romance with the "queen of the hills" lives on, as thousands of tourists (domestic and international) annually flock to the hills to taste its world-renowned tea, soak up the colonial nostalgia, and glimpse mighty Mount Kanchenjunga. Darjeeling's fame has now gone global and its legacy continues to fuel Hollywood and Bollywood fantasies. But this is only part of Darjeeling's story.

Gorkhaland: Crisis of Statehood by Romit Bagchi is an attempt by a journalist to unravel the various layers of the ongoing crisis in the Darjeeling hills, where the Nepalispeaking community is locked in a political struggle with the state of Bengal, of which it is a part. The author endeavors to delve into the deeper recesses of the psyche of the Gorkha community settled in these restive hills and attempts to put the prevailing stereotypes under a subjective scanner.

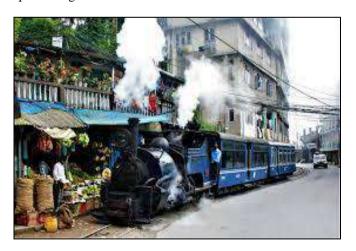
# Analysis of study

It all started in the 1700s, Darjeeling was originally a part of the kingdom of Sikkim. It was under the administration of the king of Sikkim. It was inhabited by the tribe Lepchas. That is until the Gurkhas, Nepalese army, attacked Sikkim in 1780. The Gurkhas sustained their way of capturing land after land. Until, in their spree of capturing lands, they stepped into the land of the British army. In 1814, war broke out between the British army and the Gorkhas which continued till 1816, in which the British emerged victoriously. On 2nd December 1815, Nepal was forced to sign the treaty of Sugauli which authorized the British control over some of Nepal's territory including Sikkim and Darjeeling. Subsequently, in 1817, the British East India Company and the king of Sikkim signed a treaty "Treaty of Titalia" giving full control of Sikkim, including Darieeling. over to the king. In return, the king had to refer all foreign disputes in the area to the British government for adjudication.

Until the beginning of the 18th century, the area between the present borders of Sikkim and the plains of Bengal, including Darjeeling and Kalimpong, belonged to the kings of Sikkim. In 1706 the king lost Kalimpong to the Bhutanese. And control of the remainder was wrested from them by the Gurkhas who invaded Sikkim in 1780, following the consolidation of the latter's rule in Nepal. These annexations by the Gurkhas, however, brought them into conflict with the British. A series of wars followed, eventually leading to the defeat of the Gurkhas and the

ceding of all the land they had taken from the Sikkimese to the British. Part of this territory was restored to the king of Sikkim and the country's sovereignty was guaranteed by the British in return for British control over any disputes which arose with neighbouring states.

One such dispute in 1828 led to the dispatch of two British officers to this area, and it was during their fact-finding tour that they spent some time at Darjeeling. The officers were quick to appreciate Darjeeling's value as a site for a sanatorium and hill station and as the key to a pass into Nepal and Tibet. The officers' observations were reported to the authorities in Calcutta and a pretext was eventually found to pressure the king into granting the site to the British. The transfer, however, rankled with the Tibetans who regarded Sikkim as a vassal state. Darjeeling's rapid development as a trading centre and tea-growing area in a key position along the trade route leading from Sikkim to the plains of India began to make a considerable impact on the fortunes of the lamas and leading merchants of Sikkim. Tensions arose and eventually the British annexed the whole of the land between the present borders of Sikkim and the Bengal plains and withdrew the Raja's annual stipend. These annexations brought about a significant change in Darjeeling's status. Previously it had been an enclave within Sikkimese territory, and to reach it the British had to pass through a country ruled by an independent king. After the takeover, Darjeeling became contiguous with British territory further south and Sikkim was cut off from access to the plains except through British territory. This eventually led to the invasion of Sikkim by the Tibetans and the British military expedition to Lhasa. The immigration of Nepalispeaking peoples, mainly Gurkhas, into the mountainous areas of West Bengal, eventually led to political problems in the mid-1980s. Resentment had been growing among the Gurkhas over what they felt was discrimination against them by the government of West Bengal. Their language was not recognized by the Indian constitution and government jobs were thus only open to those who could speak Bengali.



However, due to the development in Darjeeling, the leading business community of Sikkim was going down the path of loss. Business and slaves from Sikkim fled to Darjeeling to be under the British administration. By 1849, the dispute between Sikkim and the British government became so hated that, when, in November 1849, Dr. Campbell and sir joseph hooker were traveling in Sikkim, they were arrested and made prisoners. Sikkim faced a lot of pressure from the

British government and was forced to release the prisoners in December 1849.

Due to this incident, the British government took measures to inflict punishment on Sikkim. First, the annual allowance was discontinued which was 6,000 rupees. Second, some part of Sikkim was taken under control, including the area which was already under the British, and was joined with Darjeeling. Due to this, the king could not get access to the plain areas without stepping into the British territory and he was completely isolated.

The dispute continued for many years, by then the king retired and the administration was handed over to Dewan Namgay. He was the one who was responsible for abducting Dr. Campbell. After Dewan Namgay became the king, the conflicts got more heated. British officers were abducted and were sold off as slaves in Sikkim. When all negotiations failed, the British decided to take over another part of Sikkim. When the British army entered the Sikkim capital in March 1861, the king, Dewan Namguay, abandoned his forces and fled. After him, his son was given the administration of Sikkim. On March 28th, a peace treaty was signed between Sikkim and the British, resolving all border disputes. This treaty enabled free trade between Sikkim and Darjeeling. However, the Kalimpong district was still in captivity of the Bhutanese. The situation there was tense. Innocent people lost their lives and properties were pillaged. In 1865, the British and Bhutanese signed a treaty in which the British were allowed the authorization of the Kalimpong district and in return, they were to pay an annual subsidy to Bhutanese.

The British, however, decided to return the land to Sikkim and in 1817, they signed the Treaty of Titalia with The Chogyal of Sikkim. According to this treaty, Chogyal was not only declared the sovereign ruler of Sikkim, but the tract of land between River Mechi and River Tista was returned to him. However, after ten long years dispute arose between Sikkim and Nepal once more and the matter was referred to the British Governor General. In 1828, a delegation of British officials, headed by Captain Lloyd and Mr. J. W. Grant came to the hills. Both Capt. Lloyd and Mr. Grant were attracted by the position as well as the climate of Darjeeling and decided that it was an ideal place for setting up a sanatorium for their soldiers. They could also see other strategic advantages for the British. For example, they immediately saw that Darjeeling could act as a Himalayan outpost for the British and serve as a base for the defense of the trade route to Tibet through Sikkim. Nonetheless, the grateful Chogyal gifted what was a useless tract of land to the British and got one double barreled gun, one rifle, twenty yards of red-broad cloth, 2 pairs of shawl in return. Later the Chogyal was awarded a compensation of Rupees six thousand for the tract of land.

The tract of land the British thus received did not comprise the whole of Darjeeling district. However, 1836, Gen. Lloyd and Dr. Chapman was sent over for assessment of the situation. In 1940, the first road from Pankhabari in the plain to Darjeeling was built. Soon, they had hotels built in Kurseong as well in Darjeeling. By and by, thirty houses came up in Darjeeling. The actual progress began to take place when Dr. Campbell, the Resident of Nepal was brought over to Darjeeling as the Superintendent. That was in 1839. He attracted immigration and encouraged cultivation of mountain tracts as well as trade and commerce. Moreover, Dr. Campbell undertook quite a few

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welfare measures and consequently the importance of Darjeeling began to grow. By 1849, the population reached 10.000.

However, this antagonized Sikkim and in 1849, they arrested Dr. Campbell and his deputy Joseph Hooker. The British naturally did not take it lying down. A war broke out between Sikkim and the British Government in 1850. The British not only won the war, they also annexed additional 640 square miles. However, it was not until 1861 that peace returned to the hills. On 1st February Col. Gowler and Ashley Eden marched into Sikkim and defeated the Chogyal, who abdicated in favor of his son. The British signed a new treaty with the new Chogyal. This new treaty was more advantageous and ended all kinds of annoyance for the British, at least from Sikkim.

However, the real peace was established after Bhutan was defeated in a war in 1864 and the Treaty of Sinchula was signed. According to this treaty, Kalimpong as well as parts of the Duars, which hitherto belonged to Bhutan, ceded to the British. Thus the shape and size of Darjeeling District became what it is today and peace reigned for a long period. The tensions finally came to a head in widespread riots throughout the hill country which continued for several years, and in which hundreds of people lost their lives and thousands were made homeless. Tourism came to a grinding halt. The movement was led by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), led by Subash Ghising, which demanded a separate state to be known as Gorkhaland. A compromise was eventually hammered out in late 1988 whereby the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was given a large measure of autonomy from the state government and fresh elections to the council were held. Darjeeling remains part of West Bengal but now has greater control over its own affairs.



### Conclusion

India became independent in 1947 and Darjeeling became a part of the State of West Bengal. However, 1980s again saw conflict of another kind. People of Darjeeling started agitating for a separate state of Gorkhaland. In 1988, an act was passed by the Government of West Bengal that enabled formation of autonomous region within the state of West Bengal. The Act also provides for the formation of an autonomous council with power to oversee social as well economic development of the region. Thus a new era began in the history of Darjeeling.

Peace was established in Darjeeling in 1866. Darjeeling

paved the way for all-around development in the hills. Darjeeling hill area was declared as a partially excluded area in the provision of the 1935 act of government. In the second parliamentary elections in 1957, Darjeeling was considered as a separate constituency and a single Lok Sabha seat was allotted to it. As Darjeeling has had its fair share of revolving powers and growing businesses for British India, it has also been one of the regions that provided the world with the 'fine wine' of teas as the tea lovers across the globe like to call it today.

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