

## **A Chronological Study of the Formation of Darjeeling District Till 1954**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The word “Darjeeling” comes from the Tibetan words “Dorji”, meaning the thunderbolt of Indra, the king of the Gods, and “Ling”, meaning a place or land. Thus, “Dorje-Ling” means the land of thunderbolts. The Darjeeling district is the only district in India which is surrounded by three international countries and is different from other parts of the state. Different treaties were signed between different countries to cede parts and certain territories. Government of Sikkim, the Government of Nepal, the East India Company, British India, the Government of Bhutan, and the Government of India. Treaties such as the Treaty of Sugaulee, the Treaty of Titalia, and the Treaty of Sinchula were signed for the formation of the district of Darjeeling. The deed of grant was signed between the Sikkim raja and the British Government. Although Darjeeling is one of the districts of West Bengal, is entirely different from the rest of Bengal in terms of social, economic, political, historical, cultural, religious, ethnic, Demographic, geographical, Anthropological, Educational, and climatic aspects; there are no similarities between the Darjeeling district and the rest of Bengal. Suppose we examine the chronological history of Darjeeling through the lens of treaties and contracts among the Government of Sikkim, the Government of Nepal, the East India Company, British India, the Government of Bhutan, and the Government of India. Then, we can relate to the real formation of the Darjeeling district.

**Key Words :** Treaties, Sikkim, Nepal, Darjeeling, British Govt.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Darjeeling district of West Bengal is the only district surrounded by three International boundaries, i.e., Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. The state of Sikkim, located in the north, and India's new trade route with China make it a vital and strategically important location, which can also claim the title of gateway to northeast India. Which is again totally different from the rest of Bengal socially, economically, politically, historically, culturally, religiously, ethnically, demographically, geographically, Anthropologically, Educationally, and climatically; there are no similarities between the Darjeeling district and the rest of Bengal. The background history of Darjeeling, as shaped by treaties and contracts among the Government of Sikkim,

**How to cite this Article:** Subba, Jamuna (2017). A Chronological Study of the Formation of Darjeeling District Till 1954. *Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, 4 (11 & 12) : 801-808.

the Government of Nepal, the East India Company, British India, the Government of Bhutan, and the Government of India, contributed to the formation of the present-day district of Darjeeling. We started the history since in 1642 because it was a landmark in the history of Sikkim and Darjeeling. This paper also marks a significant landmark in the history of West Bengal, as Darjeeling is now one of its districts. Where there is political turmoil and a solution has yet to arrive. What was the product of the British policy of colonialism? Is it the negligence of the state or the central govt.? Can we attribute it to the dominance of the majority community over the minority community? I hope that this paper will be a significant contribution to understanding the historical background of Darjeeling and its development as a territorial entity.

#### **Research objectives:**

- To disseminate information about the Darjeeling district to the general public,
- To find out the chronological history of Darjeeling,
- To discuss the various treaties and agreements for the Darjeeling district,
- To assess the actual scenario of the annexation of the Darjeeling hills.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The entire research paper will be based on secondary sources of information, including books, journals, official records, census reports, newspapers, and magazines. We have also used the historical, analytical, observational, comparative, and qualitative methods to discuss the chronological history of the formation of the Darjeeling district.

#### **Background History of Sikkim:**

“The History of Sikkim” was restated by Kazi Dao samdup and first written by Maharaja Thodup Namgyal and Yeshey Dolma during their imprisonment (1898- 1901) by the British at Kharsang. In their handwritten book, the boundaries of Sikkim are defined as follows:

“They were Dibdala in the North, Shangsa Dag- Pay, Walung, Yangmak, Khangchen, Yarlung, and Timar Chorten in the west, down to Mahanodi, Naxulbari, Titalia in the south. On the East Tagongla, Tangla. These boundaries were defined after the enthronement, coronation, and the appointment of the Chogyal (Cho = holy and gyal = king) of Sikkim, Phuntshog Namgyal, in 1642.

“Historian J.R. Subba draws the boundary lines saying that “The land mass lying between the Arun river in the west and the Tista river in the east, before the establishment of the Namgyal Dynasty in Sikkim, was known as Limbuwan (The land of the Limboos). In 1641-42, most of the petty kings of Limbuwan (limboos/ Tsongs) also accepted the kingship of Shri Phuntsong Namgyal, the first king of the Namgyal Dynasty in Sikkim, along with the Lepcha chiefs and Bhutias, which ended in the historical tripartite agreement of “ Lho-Mon. Tsong-Sum” The Kirat chiefs of Tamur, Yangworok, Northern Pachthar, Ilam, Phakphok and Darjeeling agreed to regard Phuntshog Namgyal of Sikkim as their king and paid him a nominal tribute”

From these two statements, we can now conclude that the present-day district of Darjeeling in West Bengal, India, was formerly part of Sikkim. From a historical standpoint,

the boundaries of the present-day four subdivisions of the Darjeeling district are located here. *i.e.* Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong and Siliguri.

### **Sikkim loses Kalimpong:**

An interesting story took place in Sikkim: the story of three wives. This story begins after the death of the first king of Sikkim, Phuntshog Namgyal (1644-1700 AD). Tensung Namgyal became the next Rajah. The Rajah had married three wives; his first wife, Nambiwangmu, was from Bhutan and had a child (a daughter was born from her side), Pendu Omgmu. His second wife, Debasam Serpa, was from Tibet, and she gave birth to a son named Chagdor Namgyal. Third wife was Inku Hangma, daughter of a limbu chief named Yong-yong Hang (She had no Child)

After the death of Tensung Namgyal, the eldest daughter, Pendu Omgmu, daughter of a Bhutanese wife, claimed her stake over the kingship of Sikkim. Chogdor Namgyal succeeded to the throne, but he was a minor at the time, while she was an adult. In this matter, the Bhutanese Rani sought help from Bhutan, and the Bhutanese king Deb attacked Sikkim. Then the small and only son, Chogdor Namgyal, fled to Tibet with his ministers. In 1707, the Bhutanese withdrew but retained all Sikkimese territories to the east of the Tista River, where the Kalimpong hills became part of Bhutan. Sikkim lost Kalimpong forever. In this way, Sikkim lost its crucial areas in the fight for the gaddi.

The present Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling district was part of Sikkim and later became part of Bhutan.

### **Sikkim loses Darjeeling and the southern parts:**

The rise of the Gorkha also posed a threat to Sikkim. The Phuntsok II witnessed Gorkha's inroads in Sikkim under the leadership of Prithivi Narayan Shah, the king of the state of Gorkha (presently only a small district in Nepal), who wanted to unify all the Himalayan states into a single country from 1744 to 1768. He launched the campaign to consolidate petty kingdoms. He died on 11 January 1775, but his successors continued his policy. In Sikkim, Tenzing Namgyal, who ascended the throne in 1780, the Gurkhas occupied large chunks of territory during his reign. Dr S. Wangle writes in his paper that Purna Ale led a group of Gorkha who came through Ilam and penetrated as far as Reling, Karim and Chakung (1788). Another Gorkha force under the command of Johar Singh stealthily advanced through the Singalila and took over the palace at Rabdentse in a surprise swoop. It can be said that the Gorkhas had captured Rabdentse, Darjeeling, and Nagri by the war and annexed them to the Gorkha state (Nepal). Thus, Darjeeling and its southern parts were briefly ceded to Nepal.

### **“Treaty of Sugaulee”:**

1<sup>st</sup> November 1814, the British declared war against Nepal because Nepal had attacked the British territory of Butwal and Sheoraj. So, they opened their campaign simultaneously on five fronts, all of which were dismal failures. Because they were unfamiliar with the hilly terrain, they were unable to fight in the mountainous fields. War with Nepal again started from the winter of 1815-16, and ultimately, the Gorkhas sued for peace, and thereafter, the

“Sugauli treaty” was signed in March 1816. By the “Treaty of Sugaulee,” the East India Company’s gains were significant. The borders of Nepal were confined to the Mechi to the East and the Mahakali river to the west. By the Treaty, Nepal lost all the flatland of southern Nepal. Like, Garhwal, Kumaon, Simla, Mussorie, Ranikhet, Nainital, to the East India Company. The most important thing is that Nepal also ceded all the lands of Darjeeling to the East India Company.

#### **Treaty of Titalia:**

Following the Sugauli treaty of 1816, the East India Company and Sikkim signed “the treaty of Titalia” on the 10th of February, 1817, which, under article one, restored to Sikkim all the Darjeeling hills and its southern parts. Because of this restoration of Sikkim by the East India company “the treaty of Titalia” article 3 states that he (sikkimputtee Rajah) will refer for the arbitration of the British government if any disputes that may arise between his subjects and those of Nepal or any other neighbouring states, and to abide by the decision of the British government (EIC).

#### **Discovery of Darjeeling:**

The summer months for Britishers were suffocating due to the unbearable heat, and they needed to find a summer retreat as early as possible to escape the humid heat of the Bengal plains. During the summer, an unhealthy climate in Britain compelled them to search for a hill station to overcome health problems. Rich and royal Britishers used to travel to South Africa and London, but middle-class Britishers from the Bengal Presidency had different positions and conditions. After the annexation of the Khasi and Jaintia hills in 1829, the British opted for Cherrapunjee, near Shillong. However, 600 inches of annual rainfall washed out that option.

#### **“Ontoo Dara disputes”:**

In 1829, disputes arose between the governments of Nepal and Sikkim regarding the occupation of “Ontoo Dara,” which led to arbitration by the East India Company under the terms of an earlier treaty. Thus, to solve this problem, J.W. Grant and Andrew Lloyd stayed at the Darjeeling hills in February 1829. Then, seeing the magnificent view of Kanchenjunga, the Britishers were so taken up with the place that they pressed for its immediate acquisition immediately after their return. The hill tracts were set aside for a sanitarium for people from Bengal and Burma suffering from various health problems.

J.W. Grant and Andrew Lloyd again went to settle the same disputes. In 1834, they stayed in Darjeeling and camped at Ghoom Bhanjyang for six days. The Ontoo Dara disputes were settled and ultimately given to Nepal.

#### **Deed of Darjeeling Grant:**

*Fred Pinn* writes in his book “The Road to Destiny” that

“A detailed analysis of the correspondence between three parties, the Rajah, Lloyd, and government at Calcutta, will reveal the truth and change the general colour of the scheme: more white in some places and more black in others.”

The entire chronological sequence of events regarding the deeds of grant of Darjeeling is vital.

On 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1835 Lord William Bentinck, (Governor General) wrote a letter (accompanying deputation of Lloyd too) to the Rajah of Sikkim stating that “I have deputed to your court, Major Lloyd ... to propose to you the cession of Darjeeling to the British Government offering such as an equivalent as may seem to both to be responsible.

On 19<sup>th</sup> February 1835, a ceremonial meeting took place without any business between the Rajah and Lloyd. However, he (Lloyd handed over a formal request for the cession of Darjeeling.

The following day, there was no longer a Durbar, and the rajah put forward his request, which is as follows

1. The western boundary of Sikkim is to be extended up to the Tamber River in eastern Nepal.
2. The arrest of “Kumoo Pradhan”, who surrendered to Sikkim.
3. Dabgram in the tarai (now in Jalpaiguri) be ceded to Sikkim.

In 1891, 19<sup>th</sup> Maug (25<sup>th</sup> February, 1835), the Rajah of Sikkim sent his Dewan to deliver the deed of grant with red seal, drafted in the shortest version in History. This was a license for the British government to erect houses.

#### **Annexation of Sikkim Morung or Siliguri sub-division:**

The Raja appeared before the Governor General for compensation. In 1841, the Government granted the Raja an annual allowance of Rs. 3,000 as compensation. This amount was raised to Rs. 6,000 in 1846. British and Sikkim relations soured. The Raja of Sikkim was a mere cypher in the hands of the powerful Pagla Dewan (PM). The increasing importance of Darjeeling under free institutions was a constant source of jealousy and annoyance to the Diwan. According to Sir Joseph Hooker, every obstacle was thrown in the way of a good understanding between Sikkim and the British Government. In 1849, when the Pagla Dewan arrested Campbell and Hooker, the British sent a fugitive expedition against Sikkim in 1850. An annual grant of Rs. 6,000 was discontinued, and the British annexed an additional 640 square miles of territory from Sikkim. It comprised the entire ‘Sikkim Morung or Terai’, *i.e.*, the Siliguri sub-division, and in the hills, the whole southern part of Sikkim, between the Great Rangeet and the plains of India, and from Nepal on the west to the Bhutan frontier and the Teesta River on the east.

#### **The Treaty of Sinchula:**

After settling the dispute, trouble soon arose with the adjoining state of BHUTAN. The Bhutanese were constantly engaged in aggression on the frontier, and there was a series of outrages in which property was plundered and destroyed, lives were taken, and many innocent persons were carried off into captivity. At the beginning of 1862, news arrived that the Bhutanese were making hostile preparations to enter the territory, and an attack on Darjeeling was anticipated. Troops were hurried up from Dinaspore, and confidence on the frontier was restored. This was followed in 1863 by the dispatch of a special mission to Bhutan under Sir Ashley Eden, who was charged with proposing conciliatory measures but was also

instructed to demand the resolution of plundered property. The Bhutan government promptly expressed its inability to receive the mission. Nevertheless, Eden forced his way into Bhutan in what the modern Bhutanese term as a “mission of enforced intimacy” – meaning somebody’s mission was getting screwed. However, once the mission arrived in Punaka, in the heart of their virtually inaccessible country, the Bhutanese let loose their anger at the uninvited visitors.

The British envoy was openly insulted. Tonga’s chief demanded the Assam Dooars’ return in the Durbar. Ashley Eden replied that he did not have the authority to do so. An enraged Bhutanese chief replied that Ashley Eden was then no more than a “Chaprasi” and rubbed wet dough on Eden’s face, and another rubbed a half-chewed pan on his face.

However, the supreme insult had to come from the Bhutanese. The Bhutanese compelled Eden to sign a treaty for the making of Bhutan. Harassed, humiliated, and somewhat afraid for his very life, Eden affixed his signature, but he did not forget to write “under compulsion.” Luckily, the Bhutanese could not read English. They were finally freed and managed to leave Punaka and reach Darjeeling in April 1864.

A conflict between the Bhutan king and the British started in 1864 over the atrocities that the Bhutanese carried out against the inhabitants of Sikkim and Cooch Behar, whom the British protected—accordingly, Sd. John Lawrence’s notice of June 9, 1864, declared that the district of Ambaree Fallacottah would be annexed to the British dominions and that all Assam Doars’ revenues would be cancelled and given to the Bhutan government (Moktan, 2004). However, the Bhutanese government gave a vague response. The Anglo-Bhutanese War concluded with Bhutan’s defeat, and on November 11, 1865, the Treaty of Sinchula was signed. Under this treaty, Kalimpong was transferred to Darjeeling by the British in 1866 (Moktan, 2004). Following the incorporation of Kalimpong, the district was divided into two subdivisions: the Terai subdivision, which covered 274 square miles and encompassed the entire country at the base of the hills, and the Headquarters subdivision, which covered 960 square miles and included all the hills on both sides of the Tista. From 1864 to 1880, the headquarters of the Terai subdivision were located in Hanskhawa, near Phansidewa. Following that, it was moved to Siliguri (Dash, 1947). Thus, after the annexation of Bengal Dooars and Kalimpong, the area of Darjeeling Territory increased from 640 to 1,164 square miles, and the district assumed its final shape.

#### **Non-regulated Area:**

Before 1861 and from 1870 to 1874, the Darjeeling District was a “Non-Regulated Area” (where the acts and regulations of the British Raj did not automatically apply in the district, in line with the rest of the country, unless specifically extended).

Scheduled district: “Non-Regulated Area” was changed to “Scheduled District” in 1874.

Backwards tract: Non-regulated areas became the backwards tract from 1919 to 1935.

#### **Partially Excluded Area since 1935:**

The Government of India Act of 1935 designated the Darjeeling district as a “partially excluded area” under section 92 of the Act, specifically through provisions related to “excluded” and “partially excluded” areas. The Act, in its application to Darjeeling, aimed to maintain British administrative control over the region.

Indian Independence Act (1947). India gained independence from the British Government and became a sovereign country.

**Absorb Areas (Laws) Act, 1954:**

An Act to extend specific laws to the areas which, before the commencement of the Constitution, were administered as excluded or partially excluded areas and which, on such commencement, were absorbed in certain States.

Under the Fifth Schedule of the Absorbed Areas (Laws) Act, 1954, the Darjeeling district was absorbed into West Bengal in the name of the Requisitioned Land (Apportionment of Compensation) Act, 1949 (LI of 1949).

**Conclusion:**

The formation of the Darjeeling district reflects a complex historical evolution shaped by regional conflicts, colonial interventions, and administrative reorganisations. Originally, Darjeeling was part of the Kingdom of Sikkim until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Gorkhas of Nepal invaded and annexed the region. Following the Anglo-Gorkha War (1814-1816), the “Treaty of Sugaulee” was signed between the East India Company and the Gorkhas of Nepal and the borders of Nepal were confined to the Mechi to the East and the Mahakali River to the west. By the Treaty, Nepal also ceded all the lands of Darjeeling to the East India Company. Subsequently, the Treaty of Titalia (1817) restored the land between the Mechi and Teesta rivers to Sikkim by the East India Company. However, in 1835, the hill of Darjeeling was ceded to the East India Company, marking the beginning of its transformation into a colonial hill station and administrative district. The district expanded further after the Anglo-Bhutan War (1864), with the annexation of the Bhutanese Dooars and Kalimpong subdivisions, thereby enlarging the boundaries of the Darjeeling district. Under British rule, Darjeeling was developed as a hill station and a hub for tea plantations, with infrastructure including schools, municipal governance, and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (1881), all of which contributed to its growth. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Darjeeling had evolved from a sparsely populated tribal region into a significant urban and cultural Centre in the Eastern Himalayas. Administratively, Darjeeling had a unique status, often designated as a Non-Regulated or Scheduled District, reflecting its distinct cultural and ethnic composition compared to mainland Bengal. This special status persisted until India’s independence in 1947, after which Darjeeling became part of West Bengal in the Indian Union by 1950.

Thus, the formation of the Darjeeling district was a gradual process influenced by geopolitical struggles between Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and the British, culminating in its integration into India post-independence while retaining a distinct identity shaped by its diverse demographic and colonial legacy.

The Darjeeling district of West Bengal is distinct from the rest of the Bengal districts, and it has been advocating for its separate state since 1907. The Darjeeling hills have already witnessed a violent revolution for separation from Bengal in 1986-88, and peaceful agitation was conducted in 2007-11 and 2017. Darjeeling is the only district in India that has not received the constitutional recognition it deserves, given its historical background. All the excluded and partially excluded areas of the pre-independence period have been upgraded

to full states. At the same time, the Darjeeling district continues to fight for its identity and recognition under the Constitution of India. I hope the people of the Darjeeling hills will get their due justice in the coming days.

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