KEY WORDS:
Darjeeling, Mayel Lyang, Kamaan, Colonial Cartography, Erasure, Subaltern Geographies, Spatial Control

Decoding Darjeeling: The Politics of Maps and the Erasure of Space in its Narratives [1816-1940]

Sonali Gurung

Tekton Volume 12, Issue 1, June 2025, pp. 34 - 47

ABSTRACT

Maps are not a neutral depiction of space but active instruments of power that construct redefine, and often erase landscapes. This essay examines colonial cartography's role in reshaping Darjeeling's spatial and cultural identity, reinforcing hegemony by erasing indigenous place names, redefining boundaries, and transforming the land into a colonial site of interest. Analysing maps from 1815 to 1940, it foregrounds the erasure of Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali toponyms, which carried deep cultural and spiritual meaning, as a central to this reconfiguration. The imposition of colonial nomenclature and infrastructure, including plantations and military camps, emerges as a deliberate strategy to marginalize local identities. Juxtaposing the Lepcha concept of *Mayel Lyang*; a sacred borderless perception of land with the colonial impulse to fix boundaries, the essay situates tea plantations (*kamaans*) as sites of subaltern geographies and suppressed indigenous histories. Drawing on postcolonial theory, semiotics, and spatial historiography, this study critiques colonial maps as mythmaking tools that obscured indigenous spaces and asserts the need for a decolonial reading to recover the region's layered histories of resistance

Sonali Gurung is a PhD candidate under the mentorship of Dr. Meghal Arya and a visiting faculty member at CEPT University, Ahmedabad. Her research lies at the intersection of heritage studies, postcolonial theory, and colonial urbanism. Her current doctoral work investigates the absent and subaltern spatial narratives of hill stations, with a particular focus on Darjeeling. She brings over eight years of combined experience in academia and professional practice.

sonali.gurung.phd23@cept.ac.in

Introduction

Historically, maps have not only depicted urban landscapes but have actively shaped and transformed them. In colonial contexts, cartography was an essential tool for control, restructuring landscapes, erasing indigenous identities, and imposing colonial narratives. Darjeeling, a region with deep indigenous, spiritual, and cultural significance, was systematically transformed through mapping, which sought to establish colonial dominance over both land and people. The essay examines the way British colonial cartography redefined Darjeeling through erasure and spatial restructuring. By tracing the transition from indigenous place names to anglicised colonial maps, it highlights the way spaces were reimagined and controlled. Drawing on three key historical maps; Jean-Baptiste Tassin's 1816 map, an 1840 map, and 1914 map, this study illustrates the way cartographic representations evolved alongside colonial agendas, marking distinct phases of territorial claims and landscape transformation.

The 1816 map, is one of the earliest found cartographic records of the region, and played a crucial role in delineating colonial territorial claims, marking the beginning of spatial transformations that intensified under British rule. Through an analysis of linguistic changes, the semiotics of cartography, and the contested landscapes of *Mahakal Dara* and tea plantations, this study uncovers the colonial agenda embedded in maps. The paper is structured as follows: first, it outlines the theoretical frameworks supporting this research, followed by a historical analysis of cartographic erasure in Darjeeling. It then explores the implications of colonial mapping on *Mayel Lyang*, *Kamaan* and *Mahakal Dara*, examining how indigenous spaces were overwritten by colonial geographies. By analysing the changing representation of Darjeeling through maps, this essay highlights cartography as a tool for manipulation, marginalisation, and erasure particularly through the displacement of indigenous place names and examines how tea estates, as colonial enterprises, became instrumental in transforming indigenous landscapes. Finally, it considers whether erased spaces can be reinterpreted as subaltern geographies, reclaiming lost histories.

Theoretical Framework Supporting Colonial Cartography, Spatial Politics, and Indigenous Resistance

J.B. Harley argues that maps are not neutral; they shape spatial narratives through the perspectives of their creators. This essay deconstructs the map as a text, focusing on the colonial erasure of indigenous place names deeply rooted in cultural memory. Language functions not only as a marker of space but also as an assertion of agency. The term *kamaan*, still visible on Google Maps in reference to tea gardens, derives from the colonial command 'come-on', used to drive laborers to work. A single word encapsulates the power dynamics embedded in language, where tea plantations, occupying nearly one-third of Darjeeling, are more than landscapes, they are sites of historical erasure.

By framing the land as 'virgin territory' (Bayley, 1838; Dozey, 1922; Malley, 1907), the British obscured spiritual and cultural histories, rendering *kamaan* a stark imprint of colonial dominance. Darjeeling's geography positioned at the confluence of Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet historically fostered fluid boundaries[1], shaping a shared cultural and spiritual landscape. The Lepcha concept of *Mayel Lyang*, where Mount Kanchenjunga remains omnipresent, highlights this interwoven relationship with space. *Mahakal Dara* (Observatory Hill) embodies this convergence, where Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali traditions are intertwined in a dynamic spatial realm beyond rigid cartographic divisions. Colonial maps, with their emphasis on fixed borders, failed to grasp this fluidity, instead imposing an administrative logic that sought to control rather than understand the lived realities of these communities.

The 1816 map reflects this colonial imposition, neglecting the layered meanings of indigenous names *Jhar* (forests and watercourses) and *Gompah* (sacred sites) which signified more than geographic features. Similarly, Mall Road, now an urban relic of colonial planning, was once a network of indigenous paths repurposed to serve imperial interests. These shifts were not merely infrastructural; they altered the cultural fabric, transforming mobility and access into instruments of governance.

Darjeeling, once a hybrid landscape of negotiation and exchange, was reconfigured into a colonial frontier, where indigenous identities were sidelined. The question then may not be seen just about mapping loss but recognizing how space itself can function as a counter-narrative to colonial authority. As Roland Barthes suggests in Mythologies (1972), maps construct myths of control, replacing lived geographies with imposed narratives. The absence of indigenous names aligns with Harley's concept of 'black boxes' (1989) deliberate

[1] Darjeeling's position kept on shifting from 1700s till 1947. The Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814–1816, followed by the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816 and the Treaty of Titalya in 1817, paved the way for the annexation of Darjeeling from Sikkim. Through the Treaty of Sinchula in 1860, Kalimpong was added from Bhutan, completing the map of Darjeeling in its distinctive 'Y' shape. The Treaty of Lhasa in 1904 further facilitated trade with Tibet. Situated strategically amidst Bhutan, Tibet, Nepal, China, and Sikkim, Darjeeling's location was ideal for commerce and cross-border traffic (Bayley, 1838). In 1947, it became part of West Bengal.

erasures in colonial cartography. Yet, these voids are not empty; they are spaces of persistence, where memory and resistance endure. Could these erased spaces; *Mayel Lyang*, *kamaans*, *Mahakal Dara* (Observatory hill)—be seen as subaltern geographies? Perhaps, within these contested sites, a 'third space' emerges, resisting colonial fixity and redefining the landscape beyond imposed histories.

The History before Colonial Dominance Imbued in the 1816 Map

The 1816 map by Jean-Baptiste Tassin serves as a tool to uncover the hidden layers of history that are often obscured by elite narratives. The Lepchas, one of the original inhabitants of Sikkim, part of Darjeeling long before colonial interventions. Historically, Darjeeling was an integral part of Sikkim, whose borders once extended from *Donkia* in the north to *Titalia* (Jalpaiguri) in the south, *Peru* (Bhutan's border) in the east, and the *Aruntambur* rivers (Nepal's border) in the west. The Lepchas, traditionally classified into three regional groups; *Rinjong Moo* (north and northwest Sikkim), *Tamsong Moo* (east and southeast Sikkim), and *Illam Moo* (west and southwest Sikkim) witnessed the gradual fragmentation of their homeland (Das & Banerjee, 1962). The confluence of the *Teesta* and *Rungit* rivers near *Peshoke* marked a significant geographical division, and Nepal's occupation of *Illam* redefined territorial boundaries (**Figure 1**).

Sikkim's history is deeply interconnected with Tibetan migration, culminating in the establishment of a monarchy. Early tensions between the Lepcha and Tibetan rulers gave way to a strategic alliance under Phuntsog Namgyal, Sikkim's first *Chogyal* (king), and fostered the spread of Buddhism and strengthened ties through royal intermarriages (Das & Banerjee, 1962). However, Sikkim's sovereignty was repeatedly compromised by internal disputes that invited external aggression. Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal exploited these conflicts, leading to territorial losses. Bhutan annexed regions east of the Teesta, including *Damsong* and *Dalim,* while Nepal encroached from the west.

Nepal's repeated treaty violations forced the Sikkimese Maharaja to seek British intervention. The *Kotapa* Revolt, fueled by royal infighting, further destabilized the kingdom. A faction's alliance with the *Gurkhas* intensified hostilities, prompting British forces to step in. This intervention resulted in the 1835 via Deed of Grant, cession of Darjeeling to British India and the 1865 annexation of Kalimpong from Bhutan following the Bhutan War (Das & Banerjee, 1962). While these historical shifts are recorded, they are often overshadowed by dominant narratives and buried beneath elite documents that have shaped mainstream historiography.

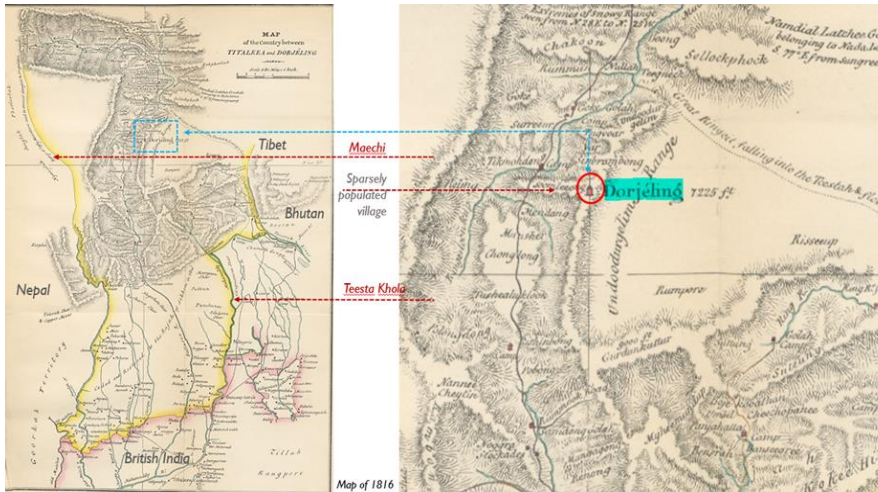

Figure 1: *Map of 1816 by Jean-Baptiste Tassin and its detail (Bayley, 1838). Figure on left highlights the land between the Mechi and Teesta rivers, a buffer between Nepal and Bhutan, later forming part of Darjeeling under the 128 sq. mile Deed of Grant. Figure on Right, highlights the Observatory Hill (Dorjeling), marking the original Bhotia monastery and the area negotiated for the sanatorium.*

The Impact of Colonialism on Indigenous Settlements and Land Use in Darjeeling before 1835

The study presented below is based on observation of 1816 map and reading from Lepchas of Darjeeling District by Aman Kumar Dar. Before 1835, Darjeeling was home to indigenous communities such as the Lepchas, Bhutias, and others, whose villages were integral to the region's socio-political and cultural life. These settlements, called *bustees* (e.g., Gnaste Bustee, Sindipong Bustee), were strategically located on hill slopes near water sources and fertile land, essential for agriculture (Tamlong , 2008). However, continuous invasions by Tibetans, Bhutias, and Gurkha kingdoms frequently displaced primarily Lepcha communities, leading to smaller, scattered settlements. British forest reservations further restricted their access to land, pushing them into remote, difficult-to-reach areas. Traditionally, villages were organized for protection, featuring guardhouses to defend against enemies and wild animals. Over time, these defences disappeared, and villages became naturally shielded by hills and dense forests, with limited access and barely visible lanes. Typically, the villages consisted of fewer than ten clustered houses, with separate granaries, farmhouses, and cattle sheds. Central to village life were the *Gumphas*, places of worship that also served as spaces for ceremonies, festivals, and community gatherings. These worship sites were adorned with bamboo poles and Buddhist flags, inscribed with teachings in archaic Tibetan script, reflecting the cultural and spiritual values of the communities.

Water sources such as rivers, tanks, and waterfalls; *Jhari* or *Jhora*, were shared by the villagers, and the hilly terrain naturally alleviated drainage issues. Traditional agricultural practices included shifting cultivation, or *Jhum*, where patches of jungle were cleared and cultivated for a few years before moving to new areas. However, British colonial policies disrupted these practices. Forest regulations restricted shifting cultivation, forcing communities to adopt settled agriculture on marginal lands. Colonial mapping, which prioritized tea plantations, military camps, and European-style towns, often omitted or ignored indigenous settlements.

The introduction of new land ownership laws conflicted with indigenous communal practices, displacing many communities from fertile land, leading to the fragmentation of indigenous settlements and the disruption of traditional land-use patterns. This reshaping of the region's geography prioritized colonial interests, leaving lasting effects on the diverse populations of Darjeeling. The 1816 map of Darjeeling, featuring indigenous place names rooted in Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali traditions, contrasts sharply with later colonial maps (1840 and 1920), in which these names disappear(**Figure 2**). This erasure coincided with the British restructuring of the landscape, introducing settlements, roads, and plantations that displaced indigenous communities and redefined spatial realities. Place names, deeply connected to cultural identities, reflected the relationship between communities and the land. Suffixes like -*ong* (rivers or wetlands in Lepcha), -*ang* (open spaces or valleys), and -*ing* (streams, hollows, or spiritual places) highlighted the region's agricultural and communal significance. As Ganesh Devy notes in The G.N. Devy Reader;

> *"After Amnesia, linguistic erasure is a form of cultural marginalization. Colonial cartography imposed a hegemonic narrative, transforming Darjeeling into a colonial tool of exploitation while silencing its indigenous histories and spiritual significance. The erasure of place names and their cultural connections not only obscured indigenous presence but also reshaped Darjeeling's identity, turning it into a colonial resource rather than a land deeply tied to its people's cultural and spiritual roots."*

Vanishing *Mayel Lyang* and the Spiritual Geography of Darjeeling

Mayel Lyang, a sacred land beyond time, nestled deep within the sacred peaks of Mount Kanchenjunga, is not just a geographical space but a profound expression of cultural, spiritual, and ancestral continuity (Ganguly, 2022). It transcends the confines of colonial cartography and modern maps, existing as a primordial sanctuary, an untouched space where nature and divinity coexist in harmony. Revered by the indigenous people, it is a land of abundance, with rivers like Teesta and Rungit carrying the sacred essence of the glaciers and mountains. These rivers are not just waterways, but the lifeblood of the land, maintaining a spiritual connection between the people and their surroundings (Tamlong, 2008).

The mountains themselves, with each peak (Chyu), cave (Le), and lake (Da), are regarded as sacred guardians, symbols of survival and spiritual journey (Tamlong, 2008). The untouched

summit of Kanchenjunga, sacred and inviolate, stands as a beacon of this reverence, with no climber daring to scale it due to the deep respect for its sanctity. This respect is woven into cultural practices, such as the festivals of *Pang Lhabsol* and *Tendong Lho Rumfat*, which celebrate the relationship between the people and the divine guardians of the land (Tamlong, 2008). Despite colonial forces' attempts to erase indigenous realities, *Mayel Lyang's* spirit has endured.

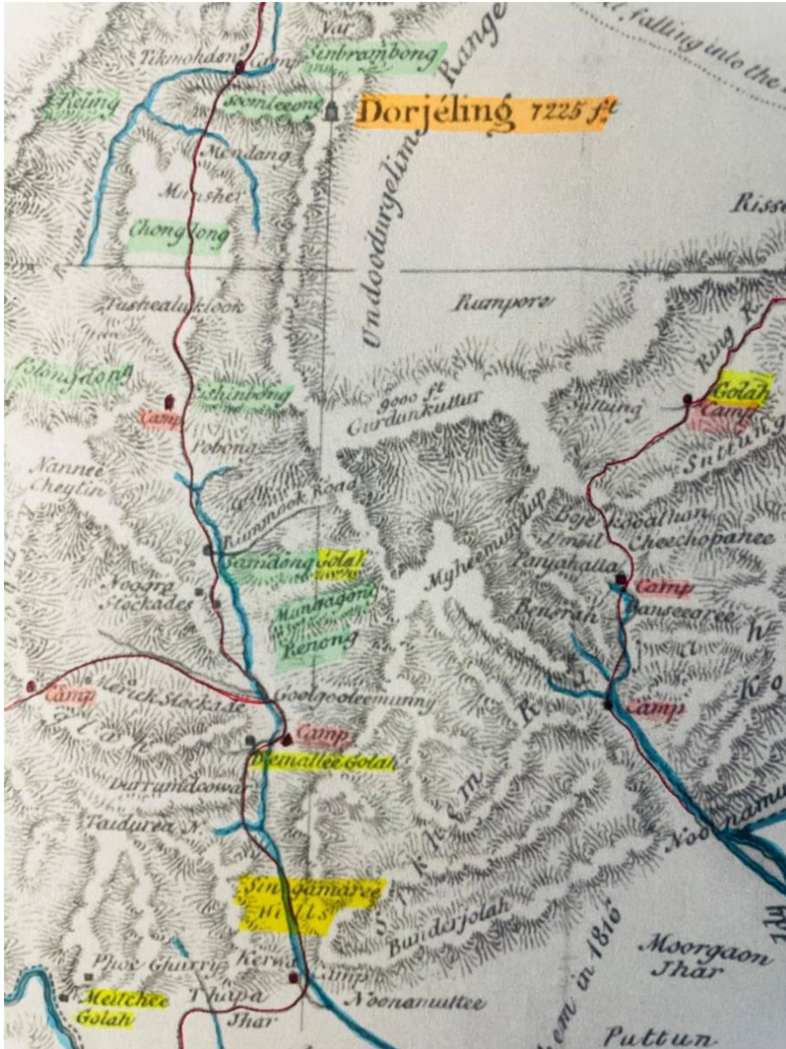

Figure 2: *Detail from the map of 1816 by Jean-Baptiste Tassin (Bayley, 1838). Colour coding by the author to indicate surveyed camps and the Gollah in red, based on site surveys by Capt. Lloyd and Capt. Herbert; existing water bodies shown in blue.*

The sacredness of *Mayel Lyang*, its people's deep ties to the land, were overwritten in favour of a sanitized colonial vision. Yet, this erasure was never complete. The land's significance continued to live on in oral histories, rituals, and the unwavering reverence of its people, and its legacy may be seen as a testament to the resilience of indigenous knowledge and cultural memory. It challenges our understanding of geography and history by showing that true connection to a land cannot be confined by borders or maps. While colonial cartographers imposed artificial boundaries, *Mayel Lyang* remained a living memory, preserved through generations. It is a land who's spiritual and cultural essence endures, a reminder that the power of a place lies not in its physical boundaries but in the deep, unbroken connection between its people and the natural world. *Mayel Lyang* is more than a land hidden in the mountains of Kanchenjunga; it is a paradigm of resistance to colonial erasure. In 1835 Darjeeling had already been ceded to the British, and the colonial government was in the process of transforming it into a hill station (**Figure 3**).

Everything indigenous; the Lepcha settlements, the traditional routes, and the spiritual sites, were removed from the cartographic record. New maps prioritised British military, administrative, and commercial interests, effectively redrawing the landscape to suit colonial control. The 1924 map and further 1940 cartographic manipulation, marking European settlements, cantonments, and roads while omitting indigenous socio-spatial networks. This deliberate visual omission was more than an oversight it was an act of political and territorial assertion, reinforcing the notion that British rule was bringing order to a previously unclaimed or undeveloped land. The cartographic demarcations erased this spatial ontology, replacing it with plantation grids, bungalows, and cantonments that fractured traditional land relations. Further, missionary architecture such as Loreto Convent, St Joseph's school, built on sacred sites, further reinforced this territorial disruption, making colonial architecture an active instrument of cultural erasure. *Mayel Lyang*, as a counter-spatial claim, may represent a third space of identity negotiation, where Lepcha cultural preservation resists both colonial and postcolonial territorialisation. This struggle illustrates the multiplicity of subaltern specialities, revealing that no singular claim can fully encapsulate Darjeeling's complex spatial identity.

Ethnographic Classification and Colonial Hegemony

Following the British acquisition of Darjeeling in 1835, the colonial administration sought to categorize its population through ethnographic studies and gazetteers. Dr. Campbell's Tribes of the Himalayas (1868), commissioned by Lord William Bentinck, and systematically mapped the physical, social, and occupational characteristics of the Nepalis, Bhutias, and Lepchas. Similarly, the Bengal District Gazetteer (O'Malley, 1913) classified Darjeeling's population as predominantly of 'Mongoloid' origin, identifying Nepalis as the dominant group, followed by Lepchas, Bhutias, and Tibetans. These classifications were not neutral observations but colonial constructs designed to legitimize labour control, land redistribution, and military recruitment. Nepalis, recorded as the majority (134,000), were portrayed as capable and hardworking, ideal for agricultural expansion and celebrated as a

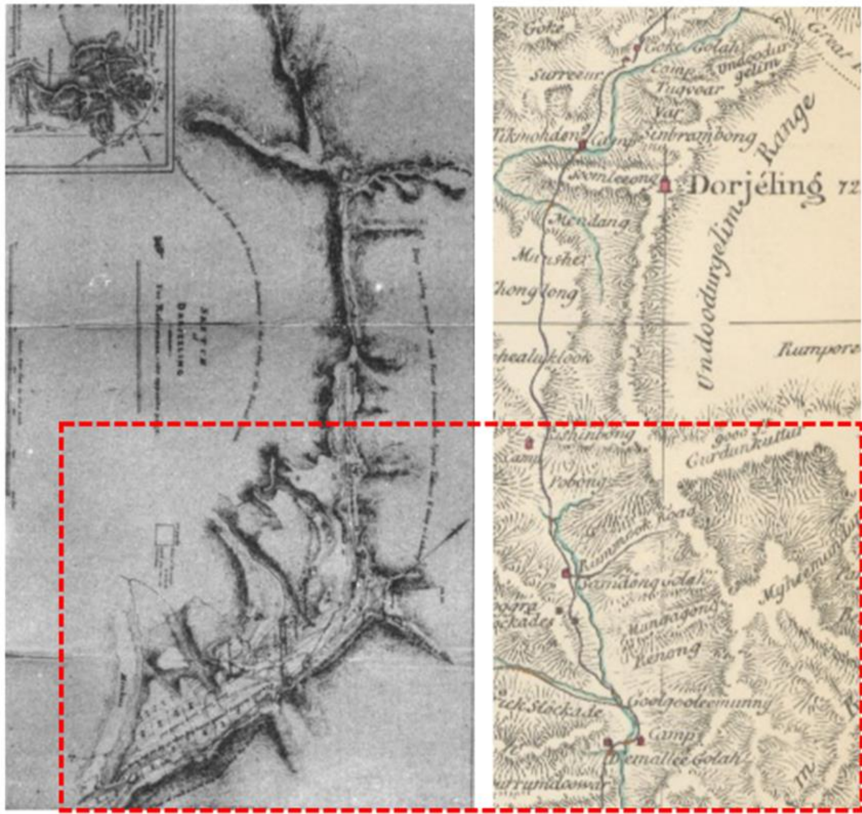

Figure 3: *The map of 1840 by Pinn (1987) and the map of 1816 by Jean-Baptiste Tassin (Bayley, 1838). The comparison of the two shows plot divisions inserted in the later map*.

virile race. A racialised trope that justified their recruitment into Gurkha regiments and reinforced their subordinate loyalty as disciplined yet governable. Lepchas, described as the aboriginal people of Darjeeling and Sikkim, were cast as timid, nature-bound squatters, whose shifting cultivation practices obscured the ways colonial land policies had displaced and marginalised them. Bhutias were subdivided into Sikkimese, Sherpa, Drukpa, and Tibetan groups, valued for their physical endurance but caricatured as quarrelsome and prone to gambling-stereotypes that commoditised their strength while excluding them from governance. The often-repeated anecdote of a Bhutia carrying a grand piano up a 50-mile hill epitomizes this reductive colonial gaze.

These ethnographic classifications produced liminal identities and interstitial spaces: the Nepalis, for example, were neither fully assimilated as British subjects nor granted indigenous status like the Lepchas, leaving them both essential to the colonial economy yet perpetually precarious, visible in census records and labour reports but absent in spatial governance and political recognition. As Spivak (1988) critiques, this subaltern silencing constructed identities through archival discourse while erasing lived experiences.

Darjeeling's urban morphology thus became an extension of this epistemic violence, defining spaces in ways that denied local agency and reconfigured indigenous landscapes to fit colonial imperatives legacies of which persist in the region's ethnic hierarchies and territorial politics today.

Tea Plantation and Colonial Command 'Kamaan'

The term 'Kamaam' originates from the British phrase "come on," used to drive the labourers to work, addressing the colonial command embedded in everyday life. This term, possibly reflecting the coercive labour dynamics of the time, suggests that tea estates were not just sites of production but also spatial instrument of control, regulating movement, settlement, and economic dependency.

The Planter's bungalow[2], strategically placed at higher elevations along Mall Road, overlooked the tea estates, offering uninterrupted visual and administrative oversight of labourers. Their wraparound verandas and elevated platforms could be seen as architectural manifestations of colonial dominance, reinforcing social hierarchy and surveillance. In contrast, the coolie-lines or Dhuras (Peripherized Labour Settlements), were placed in lower areas, mostly near the plantation area or the railway construction areas, segregated from the central estate, and built of bamboo, thatch and mud, unlike planters areas (Ray & Roy Chowdhury, 2022).

The spatial arrangement of pathways leading to these settlements suggests a deliberate restriction of mobility. These narrow routes, branching off from the Old Military Road and Hill Cart Road, may have reinforced social segregation and physical distance from colonial authorities. The strict circulatory patterns of Kamaan-workers, confined between dhuras and plantation rows, further hint at an urban structure designed to minimize disruption to the colonial economy while restricting independent land claims. While the roads connecting planters club and residences were well maintained (mall road), the worker's settlements remained disconnected, physically reinforcing their economic entrapment.

Probably, Kamaan was not just a command; it may have been a spatial construct defining where workers lived, moved, and laboured, ensuring minimal disruption to the colonial economy while preventing autonomous land claim. Such linguistic distortions hints the ways colonial figures left an indelible mark on local memory, intertwined with both the land and the labour they oversaw. To this day, one can still hear folksongs about the gold growing on the tea bushes of Mughlan (The Nepali term for India)

[2] The Planter's club or the Darjeeling club was founded in 1868, and was first located in 'Thorn Cottage', then 'Alice Villa', and finally in the present location in 1898 (Dozey, 1917), the land being gifted by Maharaja of Cooch Bihar . In 1908 it was converted into a limited liability co. and styled "The Darjeeling Club, Ltd" (*The Darjeeling Club Ltd - 100 Years*, 2020). The club was built for the planters and their wives to enjoy the cool climate of Darjeeling. It was a meeting place for the planters and an escape for the others, the original patrons of the club were those visiting from *Doars* and *Terai* regions, as well as government officials, and the officers of the British Indian Army (*The Darjeeling Club Ltd - 100 Years*, 2020).

Erasure and Marginalization of Mahakal Dara (Observatory Hill)

The transformation of Darjeeling from an indigenous landscape to a colonial stronghold exemplifies the marginalization of local identities. The British imposition of authority is evident in their strategic restructuring of space, notably through the establishment of Observatory Hill. As reflected in the phrase 'replacement of the unsightly structure' (Dozey, 1922), the British sought to erase indigenous presence and traditions. Observatory Hill, locally called *Mahakal Dara*, sacred to Shamanic and Buddhist practices, became a site of colonial power, displacing local communities and silencing cultural expressions (**Figure 4**). The dismantling and relocation of the *Bhutia* monastery, initially positioned on the 1816 map but moved in stages until its final displacement to *Bhutia Basti* in 1870, illustrates this erasure. The British discomfort with indigenous practices (Lama, 2008) led to its removal, stripping the Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali communities of a crucial cultural landmark.

By 1911, its omission from colonial maps signified the near-total marginalisation of indigenous traditions. Observatory Hill, transformed into a surveillance point, reinforced British dominance, accompanied by the construction of Mall Road and the bandstand; symbols of colonial leisure and control. Despite these shifts, the cartographic core of Darjeeling remained unchanged. The 1816 map labelled the highest point as Dorjeling, while the 1911 map renamed it Observatory Hill, highlighting the colonial repurposing of space. While the original topography was preserved, vast forests were cleared to facilitate British settlement. Few locals today understand the etymology of Darjeeling, yet its layered meanings persist (**Figure 5**). Oral histories (as recounted by JB Bal, LD Moktan, and Dr. Sonam Wangyal) reveal narratives of displacement, resistance, and survival.

The name 'Darjeeling' itself encapsulates competing historical narratives. The commonly accepted Tibetan etymology, 'Dorje' (thunderbolt) and 'Ling' (place) presents it as the 'place of the thunderbolt' (Dozey, 1922). However, Sonam Wangyal's research suggests a link to Lama Rinzing Dorji Laden La and the Dorjeling Monastery in Sikkim, from which Darjeeling derives its name. The monastery, destroyed and relocated, left its name to the hill and region. Meanwhile, Lepcha interpretations associate Darjeeling with "Darjyu lang," a sacred resting place of gods after creating *Mayel-Lyang* (Wangyal, 2023), while the Gorkha conquest (1760–1814) introduced the Hindu rebranding of the site as *Mahakal Dara*, the abode of Shiva (Lama, 2008).

The toponyms of Darjeeling are more than mere names; they are markers of colonial erasure, cultural resistance, and an ongoing struggle for identity. Restoring indigenous names and narratives is not just an act of historical correction but a necessary step toward reclaiming a lost heritage. Contemporary spatial planning and digital mapping projects must engage with these silenced histories, ensuring that Darjeeling's indigenous past is acknowledged, preserved, and reintegrated into its present and future landscapes.

Figure 4: *Plan of chowrasta (source: author) . (1) shows the original Bhutia monaster (Newman, 1901, p. 11) (2) Chowrasta and bandstand (3) The commercial shops around Chowrasta (Old Darjeeling Photographs, n.d.)*

Figure 5: *The map shows the erasure and renaming of the place names*

Conclusion

This paper attempted to examine few cases through which the colonial cartography in Darjeeling functioned as an instrument of erasure, redefinition, and control. The analysis of historical maps from Jean-Baptiste Tassin's 1816 survey to British maps of the 1840s and 1920s revealed a systematic removal of indigenous place names, the restructuring of sacred sites such as Mahakal Dara, and the imposition of rigid territorial boundaries aligned with colonial economic and military priorities. The analysis suggests that these maps did not merely depict the landscape but actively produced a colonial geography, legitimizing the displacement of locals, especially the spiritual land MayelLyang, and reimagining Darjeeling as a sanatorium, plantation economy, and a strategic frontier. Yet, despite these interventions, indigenous spatial knowledge, cultural practices, and memories persisted. While subaltern geographies offer a lens to recover erased spaces, the complexity of Darjeeling's past shaped by multiple cultural, religious, and political forces complicates any singular reclamation. However, this does not diminish the urgency of critically engaging with the colonial foundations of its spatial history.

Beyond the specific case of Darjeeling, this study highlights the broader politics of cartography as a tool of power not only during the colonial period but also in the postcolonial state. Maps are never neutral; they construct spatial identities, legitimize authority, and silence alternate histories. Unravelling the narratives embedded in colonial and later state-produced maps can open up more nuanced understandings of contested spaces and identities. Moving forward, architectural and spatial studies must reckon with these entangled histories, ensuring that contemporary urban planning does not perpetuate past erasures, which continue to obscure and fragment the cultural identity of these places. Comparative studies with other colonial hill stations and digital mapping initiatives could further help recover lost geographies, making these histories more visible and accessible. Ultimately, acknowledging Darjeeling's colonial past is only a starting point. The challenge remains in using its layered histories of displacement, survival, and negotiation to imagine a more inclusive and historically conscious future.

References

Baedeker. (1914). Darjeeling. Retrieved from Get archive: https://garystockbridge617.getarchive.net/amp/media/darjeeling-baedeker-1914-ac585e

Bayley, H. V. (Ed.). (1838). Dorje'-Ling. Calcutta: G. S. Huttmann, Bengal Military Orphan Press.

Campbell, D. (1868). On the tribes around Darjeeling. Calcutta: s.n.

Das, A. K., & Banerjee, S. K. (1962). The Lepchas of Darjeeling District. Calcutta : Tribal Welfare Department of West Bengal.

Devy, G. N. (1998). Of many heroes: An Indian essay in literary historiography. Orient Longman

Dozey, E. (1922). Concise history of Darjeeling district since 1835. Calcutta: Art Press.

Foning, A. R. (1987). The Lepchas: My vanishing tribe. Sterling Publishers.

Harley, J. B. (1989). Historical geography and the cartographic illusion. Journal of Historical Geography, 15(1), 80–91. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0305-7488(89)80066-0

Harley, J. B. (1989). The myth of the map. Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization, 26(2), 1–20.

Lama, R. P. (Year). Across the Teesta. [Publisher].

Morris, J. (1938). Living with Lepchas. William Heinemann Ltd.

O'Malley, L. S. S. (1913). Bengal and Sikkim administrative volume V. Bengal Secretariat Book

Ray, D. C., & Roy Chowdhury, S. (Eds.). (2022b). Darjeeling. Taylor & Francis.

Tamlong , D. (2008). Mayel Lyang and the Lepchas . Mrs. Amina Tamlong .

Tamsang, K. P. (Year). The unknown and untold reality about the Lepchas. [Publisher].

Wangchuk, P., & Zulca, M. (Year). Kanchenjungha: Sacred summit. [Publisher].

Wangyal, S. B. (2019). Darjeeling stories: Sahibs, natives & oddalls. Siliguri: Graphic Printers.