Darjeeling Reconsidered
Histories, Politics, Environments

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9 Subnational Occupations

A Year in the Life of the Darjeeling Tea Management Training Centre

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On 4 July 2008 a large group of 20-something men sat on a concrete patio outside an office suite in the bustling bazaar in Darjeeling. They had been lured by an advertisement for a new management-training institute. The advertisement had appeared the day before in the local Nepali language newspaper. Retired Indian-Nepali (or 'Gorkha') tea plantation managers, supported by a host of Gorkha dignitaries hailing from the local political party, West Bengal state offices,

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and nearby universities, were forming the Darjeeling Tea Management Training Centre (DTMTC). In Darjeeling, there are many privately run training institutes, from computer programming to English language accent-reduction courses, and even a local air stewardess-training program. But the DTMTC was different.

Many of the other institutes were aimed at training Nepalis in jobs for which they were seen to have a particular racial proclivity. Since the British colonial period, Nepalis in India have been profiled as suited for low-level service work like masonry, gardening, and nursing.¹ For example, common racial stereotypes include the belief that Nepalis speak English with less pronounced accents. Nepali men, consistently portrayed as both courageous and physically tough, have long been steered into military service and manual labour. Meanwhile, Nepali women, depicted in popular discourse as unusually alluring and sexually available, have been pushed into domestic service and hospitality work. At the time of the DTMTC’s opening, most of the job training institutes in Darjeeling focused on these kinds of work, perpetuating racial division and exclusion. The DTMTC’s explicit purpose was to correct this long history of racial discrimination and profiling. The institute would prepare Gorkhas (particularly men) to be plantation managers.

Darjeeling tea is world-renowned for its light body and muscatel taste. Expert tasters insist that the distinct sensory experience provided by the tea is connected to the geographical location in which it is grown. Tea bushes (and tea workers) are also well known across India as the landscape backdrops for Bollywood dance scenes. Within India, tea plantations are a space apart, both ideologically and materially. The mode of production on the tea plantations that blanket Darjeeling’s foothills has changed little over the last 150 years. Darjeeling tea can sell for hundreds of dollars per pound, but the workers who pluck, process, and package it on plantations make as little as Rs. 132.50 per day.

Since the inception of the Darjeeling tea industry in the 1860s, Nepalis have dominated the field and factory labour force, but their ability to advance beyond manual labour in the plantation labour hierarchy has remained severely limited. During the colonial period, plantations employed British managers (and to a lesser extent, Bengalis, Punjabis, or other non-Nepalis). The exclusion of Nepalis from the management ranks continued after the takeover of plantations by Indian companies. This history of poverty and discrimination undergirds a longstanding movement to separate Darjeeling from the state of West Bengal and form a new state of Gorkhaland within the Indian union.

Tea plantation fields and the workers within them are prominent in the political symbolism and discourse of the Gorkhaland Movement. The movement seeks both to undo the political economic inequities of the plantation system and to vigorously counter racial stereotypes that portray Nepalis in Darjeeling as exotic outsiders, rather than rightful residents. The tension between these two aspirations was palpable in the youth sitting outside the DTMTC on that summer day. Many of the would-be students hailed from tea plantations. Some had worked in call centres elsewhere in India, but had returned home because they were unsatisfied with nocturnal urban work. Most had finished high school, or even college, but had been unable to find employment. When I talked with them outside the inauguration, students did not frame their decisions to attend the DTMTC within the overtly political rhetoric of the Gorkhaland Movement. Rather, they described themselves as unemployed and looking for work. Management training, which offered translatable, compartmentalizable, and commensurable knowledge, would land them a job. A job, in turn, would enable them to become upwardly mobile citizens of India, but not necessarily of Gorkhaland.

The students huddled together; nervously chatting, as official speeches inaugurating the DTMTC proceeded inside. They knew the story that the speakers would tell. They would talk about how, on or off the plantations, few skilled jobs were available to the growing number of young men and women with high school or college educations. The DTMTC would answer a growing call by the GJM, the leading local political party that advocates for an independent federal state of Gorkhaland within the Indian union, to create jobs in Darjeeling for what politicians called the educated unemployed. With Gorkha sovereignty, quality local jobs would go to Gorkhas, to whom they rightfully belonged. According to the DTMTC’s founders, Gorkhas, by virtue of building, occupying, and maintaining Darjeeling’s plantation landscape for generations, possessed an innate knowledge of the tea industry. This knowledge was valuable, but it needed to be honed. Training Gorkhas to be managers would also contribute to the GJMs larger political project of exerting territorial sovereignty over an area controlled by capital interests that politicians and laypeople alike identified as sitting in Kolkata, not Darjeeling.

¹ See Newman & Company (1900: 66–91).
The notion of linking subnational recognition to education is not a new one in Darjeeling. Indeed, the idea of locally sourced and locally appropriate education has long been at the core of Darjeeling politics. The idea dates back as far as the 1960s, to the Nepali Language Movement’s efforts to make Nepali a recognized state language in government and educational contexts. More recently, however, Gorkha politicians have tended to describe the region’s educated youth as wayward and in need of discipline. In this, the situation in Darjeeling is distinct from the situation in other parts of India, where subnational subjectivity and education have been closely linked, or in Nepal, where student political activism is strong.

Across India, subnational struggles have consistently been articulated on the basis of underdevelopment. The newly formed states of Uttarakhand and Telangana are good examples. In the Gorkhaland Movement, however, issues of unemployment, precarity, and distribution of resources have consistently taken a back seat to rights based on the recognition of identity, whether ethnic, tribal, or Gorkha. As I describe below, the DTMTC was thus an attempt to reconcile the tension within the movement between an aspiration of economic development and an aspiration of ethnic recognition.

For the DTMTC to be successful, teachers and students alike had to find a way to see themselves as both potential managers and as proud Gorkhas. Over the course of the single year in which the DTMTC operated, these two subject positions proved to be difficult, if not impossible, to occupy at the same time. In what follows, I situate the story of the institute within a broader history of tea management in India. An analysis of colonial era texts aimed at would-be plantation managers reveals deep-rooted tensions over how tea management should fit into politics and over who should occupy managerial positions. I trace these tensions into the present through my own ethnographic observations of the DTMTC’s inauguration, its classes, and—most importantly—a series of charged exchanges between DTMTC instructors and students.

These in-class debates underscore an abiding concern among the educated unemployed about those same questions—how management should fit into politics and who should occupy managerial positions. The students at the DTMTC were born and grew up during the years between the first major Gorkhaland agitation in the mid-1980s, and the second, which began in late 2007. It was these young people who were often portrayed in GJM rhetoric as the main beneficiaries of territorial sovereignty, but as the case of the DTMTC highlights, they were also the group perhaps most cynical about the movement’s potential to effect change. Students had to reconcile a spatial disjuncture between Gorkhaland and management training as an educational genre. They had to figure out how to be subjects of both a place-based movement for ethnic recognition that valued territorial fixity, and a national trend in vocational and managerial training that valued mobility over identity.

The students’ vision of training required a suppression of politics, while the teachers’ vision saw training as always already political. The assertion that education has non-political value, as Matei Candea has argued, is not simply a sign of the anti-politics of the market or of development discourse. In Candea’s account of Corsican education, teachers who identified elsewhere as Corsican nationalists insisted that the classroom was a non-political space. In Darjeeling, by contrast, it was students who resisted the politicization of education. The educated unemployed I met at the DTMTC believed in the idea of Gorkhaland, but they were less convinced of its potential to effect meaningful change in their lives. GJM rhetoric couched the struggle for Gorkhaland as a long-term goal that might take generations to achieve and as a revolution to which youth might need to sacrifice years of their lives. Managerial training, on the other hand, oriented students to what Jane Guyer calls the near future. Across India, students seeking management training thought not in terms of distant political horizons but in terms of the monthly, weekly, and yearly economic planning and personal discipline required to advance through the ranks of corporate and social hierarchies. Management training was one step in planning for the near future. At the DTMTC, it was ultimately students—not teachers—who had to reconcile these temporalities. Maintaining a distinction between education and politics, between the near future and the abstract future, mattered greatly to students. The DTMTC, however, was based on a collapse of these very ideas.

2 Singh (2015).
4 Candea (2011); Ferguson (1990).
5 Guyer (2007).
6 See Jeffrey (2010).
The Right Kind of Man? Or the Right Kind of Training?

A central justification for the founding of the DTMC was the continued dominance of non-Gorkhas in the ranks of management in Darjeeling. That dominance was facilitated—indeed underwritten—by tea management training centres located outside Darjeeling. By the time the DTMC opened, such centres were in operation at Assam Agricultural University, North Bengal University, and the National Institute of Tea Management. The founding of these centres is a relatively recent development in the history of the Indian tea industry. Before the mid-1990s, getting a job as a plantation manager was as much a matter of honing social connections and demonstrating a dexterity with middle class manners and speech as it was about mastering technical skills.

Tea management was cloistered in a closed, guild-like circle of experts. It was what Julia Elyachar, drawing on the work of Michael Polanyi, calls tacit knowledge. Training institutes promised to make tacit knowledge explicit—to package and distribute it to anyone who desired it regardless of background, language, or ethnicity. This tension between tacit knowledge and technical training dates back to the days of British colonialism. Beginning in the early 1800s, tea plantations were established in Assam, the North-West Provinces, and later Darjeeling, the Dooars, and south India. By the 1830s, books were circulating around Britain and colonial India that not only demystified the tea production process, from propagation to factory finishing, but also attempted to lure European men to tea management, popularly called tea planting. These texts reveal a history of the linked projects of capitalist accumulation, management, and colonial territorial sovereignty.

In these texts, tea management is described as a means of social and economic mobility. An early account instructs:

To those (and the class is numerous in England) who, possessing but a moderate sum of money, wish, nevertheless, to maintain the position in life to which they have been educated, to whom trade or the professions are obnoxious, who, having no military tastes or nautical tendencies, are still anxious to use that energy and enterprise which are said to belong to the British—to such, tea planting offers peculiar inducements.

In addition to details about the technical challenges of tea planting (from climate and altitude, to soils, to labour costs), these texts describe the qualities of work with a view to reassuring potential European planters, of the viability of planting as a career path. Indeed, the authors of these manuals frame the aspiration to tea planting almost exclusively in terms of self-cultivation and individual mobility. Authors address a range of concerns that might be preventing the would-be tea managers from embarking on a life in tea. They touch on issues ranging from how to save money for a trip home, to how to read under a mosquito net, how to burn down a forest to plant tea, to which ethnic group's women might make the best nannies.

Alexander McGowan, an army surgeon serving in the North-West during the mid-1800s, describes the attractively low amount of upfront capital expense that was required for an individual to purchase, clear cut, and seed a tea plantation. He portrays tea planting as:

An employment in itself agreeable, entailing no hard physical labour, but merely sufficient exercise for both body and mind as is essential to their healthy preservation, and eventually so lucrative as to amply repay the anxieties incidental on the earlier years; with a property safe against the many ills that other crops are liable to, [planting can allow] ample time for recreation, or even ... permit a prolonged absence.

Many of the early manuals describe European social life, including the social clubs and domestic accommodations in the tea districts, that would allow managers to maintain and hone their English manners, perhaps even to a higher degree than they would in England.

To succeed, one needed not wealth, but character. Tea planting was best suited for men who would appreciate the opportunity to better themselves not only economically but in terms of what scholars today might call cultural capital. Former tea planter Samuel Baildon's widely

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7 Elyachar (2012).
8 See Sharma (2011). See also Middleton, this volume, for historical detail and contrasts between Assam and Darjeeling.
9 McGowan (1860: 33).

10 See Tea Cultivation (1865); Papers on Tea Factories (1854); Notes on Tea (1888); Tea Cyclopaedia (1881).
11 Baildon (1882).
12 Tea Cultivation (1865: 23).
14 McGowan (1860: 37).
16 Baildon (1882: 60).
circulated The Tea Industry in India: A Review of Finance and Labour, and a Guide for Capitalists and Assistants explains: 'Now, it is, of course, a very essential thing that only the right kind of men should become tea planters, both for their own sakes, and also for that of the industry. 18 Baildon outlines a typology of men and dispositions, and the degree to which each type was suited to the lifestyle. He describes the lifestyle in painstaking detail, so that the reader will be able to determine whether he is the right kind of man for such a life. 19 He fills one entire chapter with descriptions of his own ability to occupy his mind, without all mediums of resource for occupying leisure that I might possess—musical instruments, paint-boxes, drawing materials, etc. 20

Baildon's purpose here is to hedge against the romanticism that can accompany colonial adventure narratives. Certainly, a manager could have a social life beyond the plantation on which he was posted, but given the demands of the job and the distance that would need to be travelled, such a life would be sporadic. Even more sporadic would be trips back home to Europe. Considering this, he explains: 'One fact should receive the earnest consideration, primarily, of all persons thinking of leaving home for India. It is that the only possible recompense for so leaving home is money. For this they will have to give up almost everything which, to the studious, makes life enjoyable.” 21 Almost everything. For his leisure would be to participate in the cloistered social institutions and practices that came to define British social life under the Raj. Tea management in colonial India was about economic mobility. A pre-existing appreciation for the virtues of music, manners, and art was a prerequisite to the social clubs and houses that provided a facsimile of English life in the tea districts. It was in settings like the Darjeeling Planters' Club, that upwardly mobile young managers could demonstrate their manners and share knowledge about the technical and economic process of growing tea. It was in clubs and house parties that tacit knowledge changed hands.

As the industry grew in the years leading up to Indian Independence in 1947, a new wave of tea planting books came to the market. This later group of books aimed to unveil and codify the managerial secrets that had been cloistered in spaces like the Planters' Club. 22 By the early twentieth century, when the Indian tea industry was at its peak, the number of managers and assistant managers across India (nearly all of whom white and male) had swelled considerably. With this expansion came a need to make tacit knowledge about the industry more explicit. Tea planters frequently moved from region to region. A person might start in Assam before finding a more lucrative post in Kerala or Sri Lanka.

Such mobile managers were the target audience for this second wave of tea planting texts. While earlier texts by the likes of McGowan and Baildon were dominated by vivid narrative descriptions of burning down forests and reading under mosquito nets, this second wave of tea planting manuals took on a more scientific tone, working to make tea cultivation techniques—including pruning, planting, fertilizer application, and pest management—not only explicit but also commensurable across space. 23 They are filled with lists and charts of an array of procedural concerns regarding numbers (from temperature figures to wages), timings (for pruning, planting, and plucking), and inputs (of urea fertilizers, irrigation, and labour time). 24

Many of these texts were written by experts who had done agronomic research, most notably at the quasi-governmental Tea Research Association (TRA), the main arm of which is located in Jorhat, Assam. Still in existence today, the TRA has been conducting field experiments on tea cultivation for over 100 years. 25 The TRA’s research and publications aim to support managers as they move from post to post.

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18 Baildon (1882: 39).
19 Baildon (1882: 39).
20 Baildon (1882: 41).
21 Baildon (1882: 42).
22 By the late 1880s, the entrepreneurial land acquisition that McGowan and early writers describe gave way to a corporate plantation landscape (complete with social clubs, golf courses, and sprawling manager’s bungalows). With this shift, the entrepreneurial planter became integrated into a hierarchical management structure in which there was a manager (often referred to as a planter) and one or many (depending on a plantation size) assistant managers. This model of organization persists. Today, there are 87 plantations in Darjeeling, and each plantation has a head manager and a number of assistant managers, who oversee the field, office, or factory (or subsections of these on a larger plantation).
23 These later books can actually be divided into two categories. In addition to technical how-to manuals, a series of memoirs written by retired planters were published. The purpose of these books was less to inspire new planters than to capitalize on British readers’ desires for nostalgic tales of life under the Raj. See: Fraser (1935); Longley (1969); Hetherington (1994); Ramsden (1945).
24 See Bald (1903); Johnson (1953); Ukers (1935).
between plantations across India and to other British tea producing post/colonies. In the manuals based on TRA research, the manager is not the right kind of man, but any man willing to be trained. Indeed, as British planters were replaced by Indian managers in the 1950s and 1960s, the codification of management in such manuals could be seen as a democratizing trend.

The conversion of management knowhow from a genre of tacit knowledge to one of technical training was not limited to the tea industry. Indeed, the tea management training institutes of Assam Agricultural University, North Bengal University, and elsewhere were founded well after other similar institutions. Despite the proliferation of tea management training centres since the 1990s, the tea industry has not been so easily divorced from a past in which race, manners, language, and cultural capital mattered. Indeed, if training manuals developed through organizations like the TRA made management thinkable as a scientific or technical skill, they also created space for management to become a focal point for the operations of ethno-nationalism. The DTMTC, whose curriculum was modelled on those of other technical training institutes, was also designed as a space for the cultivation and celebration of ethnic identity. A key tenet of the DTMTC’s charter was that the right kind of man for Darjeeling plantations must also be a Gorkha man. Turning now to ethnographic material, I will show how colonial ideas about cultural capital, modern notions of technical proficiency, and an emerging ethnic consciousness intersected in Darjeeling.

Inaugurating the DTMTC

It was a rare sunny morning in the midst of the monsoon. Attendees of the DTMTC’s inaugural ceremony milled around a rooftop patio, enjoying the unusually dry conditions. Among those assembled were several prominent GJM leaders, whom I had come to recognize from party rallies and meetings, as well as a slew of suited men I had never seen before. The dignitaries were seated in a circle of plastic chairs, while the potential students stood together on the far side of the patio, looking over the bustle of Darjeeling’s main bazaar. At the appointed hour, one of the suited men called for the attendees to come inside. ‘But not you,’ he said to the future students, ‘we will call for you in a minute.’

A minute turned into over two hours. With everyone seated around a small conference table, the DTMTC’s principal welcomed and introduced the honoured guests. These included Gorkhas who had become

high-level civil servants, professors, politicians, and business owners in Darjeeling. They also included the DTMTC’s staff of teachers. One was a retired factory manager who would teach classes on bookkeeping. Another was still employed as a factory manager at a remote plantation on the eastern side of the Teesta and would teach classes about manufacturing while he was on extended sick leave. A third was a retired field manager who would lecture on plant biology and pests, including how to deal with blights and properly manage pesticide application. The principal was a retired assistant manager who had run a small, remote garden on the Nepal border. In addition to leading the DTMTC, he offered a class on pruning and planting tea bushes.

In his opening speech, the principal described the origins and objectives of the DTMTC. He gave a scathing critique of the current state of Darjeeling’s tea plantations before explaining how he and his colleagues intended to fix it:

The reason why we are starting such a tea management institute in Darjeeling is out of necessity, because since 1820 ... the planning and cultivating has been done by our ancestors only. But our people are still labourers, and they [non-Nepalis] are still occupying the executive posts. Today most of our [Nepali] young brothers and sisters are educated. They are all competent ... If we open such an institute here, then these kinds of youths will get an opportunity.

The audience was sympathetic. The DTMTC’s principal and the other teachers had all succeeded in becoming assistant managers (chota sahibs [little sahibs]), but none of them had managed to reach the rank of head manager (bura sahib [big sahib]).

Still the DTMTC’s staff were all inordinately successful. When I interviewed them later, I asked how they had been trained. They each insisted that they had made it into the management ranks through discipline and hard work. There was a posting. They applied for it. They got it. In a way, then, the teachers were implying that they were the right kind of men for management jobs. They had honed skills in speaking, deportment, and manners that allowed them to overcome the systematic racial discrimination that kept most other Nepalis out of the management ranks. When these men were seeking employment in the 1970s and 1980s, tea management institutes did not exist. They had learned how to manage plantations by exploiting personal connections and economic capital to work themselves into the spaces where tacit knowledge
was exchanged—spaces like the Planters' Club and the local private colleges. Despite this success, outsiders still took most management jobs. Today, they told me, outsiders were succeeding not because of cultural capital but because of formal training. What they sought to do with the DTMC was provide Gorkha youth with such training. By doing this in Darjeeling, rather than in Siliguri, Assam, or Kolkata, they could prove that the right kind of man could also be a Gorkha man.

The speech by the principal was followed by a series of lectures by other distinguished guests, some from the tea industry, some from elsewhere—but all Gorkhas. A rhetorical pattern emerged. Just as colonial tea manuals shifted between the 1800s and the 1900s from anecdotal stories of personal triumph to technical outlines of best practices, each inaugural speech at the DTMC morphed from the personal to the technical. Each person began by recounting their own individual experiences, telling stories about how perseverance allowed them to be successful. Their resolve was rooted in their Gorkha identity. Gorkhas were brave, cunning, and resourceful, but that was not enough. For the good of the Gorkhaland Movement—and for Darjeeling's tea industry—discipline and resolve rooted in ethnic identity had to be combined with technical training.

The lone woman speaker at the inauguration, a former high-level regional bureaucrat and active member of the women's wing of the GJM, was particularly vehement in her insistence that Gorkhas pursuing jobs on tea plantations were being systematically sidelined by outsiders. The basic knowledge that we have had from our parents, she said, 'they [outsiders] do not even have that. They just have the degrees.' The degrees to which she was referring were not bachelor's or master's degrees in language or science. These degrees were from tea management training institutes.

Tea gardens were at the heart of Darjeeling, she went on, and the DTMC would keep them alive. This new crop of Gorkha managers, by virtue of having grown up in Darjeeling, would understand the particular demands of growing tea in the hills. She and many of the speakers repeated this point. A premise of the DTMC was that Gorkhas possessed not only courage and dedication but also their own kind of tacit knowledge about how to cultivate tea. She broadened this argument further, explaining that Gorkhas didn't just have an innate sense of when to prune, when to pluck, and when to apply fertilizer; they also had an intimate understanding of the plight of plantation workers. This understanding would be a trait that only Gorkha managers would have. The DTMC, she maintained, was a vehicle for blending politics with ethical values.

While this bureaucrat saw the DTMC as a means of keeping Gorkha youth on Darjeeling plantations, not all of the dignitaries who spoke at the inaugural event shared this vision of the spatial boundedness of management training. For example, a former professor at Darjeeling Government College drew on plantation history to argue that the DTMC's success might lie in its ability to provide the educated unemployed of Gorkhaland not just with economic mobility in the form of higher-paying, higher-ranking jobs, but also with geographic mobility. Certainly, the graduates would make excellent tea managers for the 87 tea plantations in Darjeeling, but the possibilities that might come from managerial training were expansive. He compared the new cohort of trainees at the DTMC to their British predecessors: 'Just as the sahibs sacrificed their lives by leaving their homes in England, our young men must also make sacrifices ... Not just here, but in Assam. They could run the Tata company too.' For the professor, part of linking economic development to ethno-national recognition was carving out a presence for Gorkhas on the national economic stage. For him, training must put Gorkhas into the upper tea management structure across India, including (but not limited to) Darjeeling.

After almost two hours and several speeches, the students were invited inside to introduce themselves. Each prospective student was asked to state his name, where he came from, and what his qualifications were (that is the highest educational degree he had received). Having read the DTMC's recruitment materials and listened to the series of speeches, the students astutely tailored their introductions to the centre's mission. Most students began by naming the plantation on which they grew up. Those who did not grow up on plantations were quick to name not only the villages or peri-urban settlements in which they were born but also the nearest plantation. Identification with plantations was not enough. The students also trumpeted their technical backgrounds. Nearly all students had at least a B.A. pass from a local college, and some had master's degrees, in subjects ranging from biology to Nepali literature. Like the speech givers who preceded them, each person told his/her individual story while at the same time trying to bind himself/herself to an institutional and political mission.

26 Ellyachar (2012).
They faced the challenge of positioning themselves as both Gorkha subjects and as (potential) managerial subjects. As I show in the next section, this dual positioning proved more and more difficult to maintain as the year of DTMTC training progressed.

**Between Affiliation and Recognition**

The DTMTC’s classes took place at Roy Villa, a stately turn-of-the-century building perched on a hillside overlooking a tea-covered valley. The most famous occupant of the building was Sister Nivedita, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who died in 1911. After Sister Nivedita’s death, the building was converted into a youth hostel. Classrooms were added to the original structure, complete with chalkboards and writing desks. Inside were several dormitory rooms in which students unable to commute back and forth from college in Darjeeling could stay for a modest fee. By 2008, however, Roy Villa had long sat unoccupied, and it was rumoured to be haunted by Sister Nivedita’s ghost. In the summer leading up to the DTMTC’s inauguration, the GJM commandeered the house from the state of West Bengal.

In early October 2008, I sat in the back of a room, squeezed into a tiny wooden school desk and scribbling notes as a DTMTC teacher droned on about the different techniques of tea bush pruning. He read in English from photocopies, stating the intervals between LP (light prune), MP (medium prune), LS (light skiff), and DS (deep skiff) prunes. Each of these different cuts was differentiated by a particular—the number of centimetres from the top of the bush or mark left by the last prune. Like many DTMTC teachers, he read his lesson from the tattered texts and photocopies of circulars he had received from the TRA when he was an active assistant manager. The technical information in these documents was heavily geared to environmental conditions in the plains of the Dooars and the gentler foothills of Assam.

When students interrupted the lectures to ask about how the techniques described in the TRA materials would apply to Darjeeling, the teachers did their best to provide an extemporaneous response. While the lectures I observed proceeded in English—the standard for both tea planting and the science of agronomy—the teachers’ attempts to tailor information to local conditions tended to be in Nepali. As students pressed (in Nepali) for more instruction, teachers would (switching to English) remind them that even though planting conditions varied, it was important to know the standards and the theory.

By the time of that class in October, students had begun to complain regularly of a lack of practical education at the DTMTC. It was all well and good, they told their instructors, to discuss the ways in which planting tea on a steep mountainside might present challenges that went unaddressed in manuals written for the plains or Assam, but in order to understand these differences, students needed to be allowed into the field. In response, teachers told students that they did not need practical training. After all, they had grown up playing around the tea bushes. As one teacher suggested, if they wanted to know how to pluck or prune, they could go ask their mothers.

In these debates about the relationship between theory and practice, and between agronomy and embodied knowledge, a discord between the cultivation of a Gorkha subjectivity and the cultivation of a managerial subjectivity became evident. Was tea management something best learned on the job, or was it a set of discrete skills that could be corralled in books and taught in standard modules? In some moments, the DTMTC’s curriculum seemed overly rigid and excessively deferential to the techniques laid out in TRA circulars. In others, it seemed excessively dependent on vague ideas about the deep connections between Gorkhas and Darjeeling plantations. How would a student’s completion of a year at the DTMTC be recognized by would-be employers? Would their work be recognized outside of Darjeeling at all? And if students did secure jobs on Darjeeling plantations, would they be regarded as managers, or as Gorkha managers?

For students, these mounting concerns became crystallized in an unfulfilled promise the GJM leadership made early in the school year. When they matriculated, students were assured that the party would help the DTMTC secure an affiliation. The students reasonably took affiliation to mean accreditation by a university or other technological training institute. For students, affiliation would increase the chances that training would yield job placement. To be recognized as a trained manager, they reasoned, a person needed a certificate from an accredited institution.

Despite the party’s promises, the question of the DTMTC’s purpose had never been fully resolved by the school’s leaders. For some,

\[27\] Two women students were accepted to the DTMTC, but they quickly realized that the teachers did not see them having a future in tea management. They (and I) were fed a steady line about how they could be tea tasters in the plantation factories. They stopped showing up when the second tuition payment was due in November 2008.
like the bureaucrat who spoke at the inauguration about ethical values, the DTMC’s mission was one of territorial development. The very founding of a tea management training centre in the heart of Darjeeling was already a powerful form of placement. It would keep the educated unemployed from seeking work elsewhere. Moreover, Gorkha managers would care more deeply about improving the lives of lower-level tea workers who comprised the party’s rank and file membership. For others, like the professor who spoke at the inauguration about the need for Gorkhas to leave home and make sacrifices for the movement, the DTMC’s mission was one of national and subnational recognition. The centre’s purpose was to propel Gorkhas into the managerial ranks in plantations outside Darjeeling.

As the school year proceeded, this unresolved debate about the DTMC’s ultimate purpose—and about the relationship between development and recognition—coalesced around the question of affiliation. In and out of class, many teachers began to talk of affiliation not as alignment with another institute of higher education, but as alignment with the GJM itself. If the DTMC were affiliated with an outside university, it would need to admit students from outside Darjeeling. The territorial and developmentalist mission of the DTMC prohibited this kind of inclusion. Even those who favoured seeking affiliation saw a risk. On the one hand, a denial of affiliation by the likes of the National Institute of Tea Management (NITM), North Bengal University (NBU), or Assam Agricultural University would call the centre’s legitimacy into question. On the other hand, if affiliation were to be granted, teachers would find themselves subsumed to another institution’s bureaucracy. They would risk being recognized not as teachers in the management training system, but as Gorkha teachers.

As in Candea’s Corsican case, the question of the limits of the political in education was played out performatively in classroom debates. By November, DTMC lectures were punctuated not only with questions about how theory written by TRA experts conflicted with the practice of Darjeeling plantation workers but also with breakout discussions in which affiliation, placement, and recognition alternately took on political and technical meanings. In one typical such debate, the principal responded to a student’s questions about the DTMC’s affiliation with a reminder that, affiliation or no affiliation, students had to pass the course before they could ever get a certificate. Unfazed by discussions of grades, students pressed for assurance that the certificate that was said to await anyone who passed the training would mean something in the tea industry, and that this certificate would continue to mean something over the course of their careers.

Another DTMC teacher responded to questions about certificates by telling the students to go and ask the managers on their home tea plantations where their certificates were: ‘Please ask them to show you their certificates. From which institution did they get it? What is their educational background?’ The students were well aware that DTMC teachers did not have certificates. They also knew that most managers across India and beyond did not have them either. But times had changed. The students were headed out into a world in which certificates from training institutions were now critical to securing jobs. As the previous generation of plantation managers aged and retired, they would be replaced by managers who held training certificates. Since new jobs might crop up not just in Darjeeling but across India, these certificates and the training to which they attested had to be commensurable.

In one class I observed, a student posed a hypothetical situation to the principal. What if, after completing the DTMC training course, he secured a job on a plantation? ‘Suppose,’ he suggested, ‘I leave that company because I may not want to work in the same company for a long time. To go to another company, I have to have a certificate.’

The principal responded: ‘It is completely up to you. Once you have joined any tea garden, then it is up to you whether you progress or not. Another other company will pull you from your company. They will say that you are doing great, please come and join here.’

The principal then tried to change the subject and scope of the discussion. The student’s hypothetical example concerned the fate of a single individual in a relatively depoliticized marketplace. The principal wanted to talk about the fate of the student body as a whole.

I have been saying from the beginning that even if you do the training, there can be no guarantee of a job. Nobody can guarantee a job. But there is one thing. And that is that we are putting forth a sincere effort. And our boys here—and not boys from somewhere else—have to get placement. Maybe it will be quick or slow; this is what we have to do.
What was significant for the teacher was the physical location of the DTMTC. He was adamant that the act of training Gorkha men to be managers here at Roy Villa, in the heart of Darjeeling’s colonial centre, was of paramount importance. While the student’s hypothetical scenario concerned one man’s career, measurable in the weeks, months, and years of salaried service to a company, the principal’s counter-hypothetical approach reached for a more distant time horizon. No one knew exactly when Gorkhas would be granted their separate state. From one temporal perspective, the students were affiliated with a system of management training in which certificates were passports for economic and geographical mobility. From the other, they were affiliated with a social movement in which grounding oneself in place was both an ethical and a political stance.

But sir, there has to be an affiliation, one student pleaded.

What is this thing called affiliation? The principal asked.

It’s like this. Say you are affiliated with Assam [Agricultural University]. If we are affiliated with Assam, [then] we have to comply with their terms and conditions. We would have to run our classes according to their syllabus. We have to work according to their holidays. But our main problem is here, in Darjeeling. In the tea gardens of Darjeeling.

As long as the GJM stayed in power, an affiliation to the party might be beneficial, but the students had seen one politician and party, Subhash Ghisingh and the GNLF, ousted. They were far from confident about the longevity of the GJM. As the GJM intensified its campaign for a separate state throughout 2008 and 2009, DTMTC teachers doubled down on their desire to be linked to the party. Over the same period, the GJM backtracked on concrete development schemes like the DTMTC in favour of more symbolic projects, such as month-long cultural programmes: performances of Gorkha-ness in dance and song as a means of proving to the rest of India that Darjeeling and its people were different and thus deserved their own state.

A couple of weeks later, during the height of the month-long puja celebrations in Chowrasta, when townspeople were required to wear traditional dress, (daura suruwal and chaubandi choli), a student asked pointedly: ‘What if the political party changes—’. The principal cut him off: ‘No matter what political party comes in, the garden will still be there. The garden is always there. And what can be said about political parties? Another student interjected: ‘Sir, it can be said that the political party cannot influence anything.’ To which the principal replied:

We have to convince everyone... A person from a place is supposed to be employed in the same place. We can tell owners to put our people in the tea garden. We can say that they have to put 80 per cent of our people in the tea garden. If we cannot fight against them, then we will be the suppresser and we will be the suppressed. We have to face this, because it is our mother and father working and we are not doing anything for them.

We do not do anything, even when we have the ability to do something.

In this exchange, a generational divide between students and teachers became a divide about the role of politics in education. The student saw political affiliation as ineffective at best, while the teacher saw a suppression of politics in the classroom as tantamount to a betrayal of mothers and fathers.

The principal confided: A student just came to me and said: “Sir, I got a job in the call centre, so I am going.” He paused. ‘Do you understand? It is because he has no confidence in his future.’ He continued:

When boys like you have been trained, you have to revolt. You have to bring revolution... You can’t just wait and think about whether you are going to get a job. I am fully dependent upon you. If you all become slackers and think that you will not get a job and lose hope, then you will be nowhere. You all should have guts. You all are being trained. The tea estates are here and we have to get the outsiders out. With this determination of mind, if you study hard, then it can happen.

This shut down the discussion momentarily. The principal portrayed employment in a call centre—underwritten by training in English pronunciation and perhaps a degree from an affiliated university—as surrender. A young man’s concern for a near future of steady pay cheques and marginal economic gains was at the same time a lack of faith in the promises of a more distant future of territorial sovereignty. The principal continued:

Whether there is a certificate, or not... Take training from here as your certificate. That is affiliation, because you are the son of the soil, and you

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30 Guyer (2007).
31 See Besky (2013); Golay (2006). See also Chetri (2016); Middleton (2015); Shneiderman (2015), for a discussion as it relates to ST/SC political action.
32 Guyer (2007).
have had every right to get a job in a tea garden. In ... the tea gardens in this district, because you have the training of the tea garden... Are we so weak? If you are asking me to give you a guarantee, I cannot do that. You have to give it to yourself.

In this exchange, as in the others, two different subjects are in conflict. The 'I's, 'we's, and 'one's of the students' discourse are individual managers. The 'you's of the principal's discourse comprise the collective class of Gorkha educated unemployed.

The principal paused as the students murmured and shifted in their chairs. Then continued: 'So you should all give me a decision, should this institution be an independent one or should it be supported by the local university?'

In this way, the principal left the decision about the DTMTC's fate and its ultimate purpose in the hands of the students. Soon, he had his answer. After the long winter break, a fraction of the students came back to class. Some of those who left had taken insecure clerical positions—neither managerial nor on plantations—around town. Others told me that they did not feel that making the final tuition payments would yield any benefits. In the summer of 2009, Roy Villa was taken back by the GJM and allocated to the Gorkhaland Personnel, an informal organization of men and women that patrolled Darjeeling wielding lathis and clad in green and yellow jumpsuits, enforcing the dress and behavioural codes that were part of the GJM's cultural programmes. In 2013, the state government, having re-exerted control over the building, facilitated the turnover of Roy Villa to the Ramakrishna Mission. At the time of writing, the Ramakrishna Mission runs skills development projects and language classes out of the building, much as it does on its main campus in Kolkata.

As I have argued here, the story of the DTMTC's rise and fall illustrates fundamental contradictions embedded in two concepts that are central to the Gorkhaland Movement: development and recognition. In the discussions about the purpose and operations of the DTMTC, development sometimes referred to the aspiration among the educated unemployed of Darjeeling for economic and social mobility. As it was elsewhere in India, management training was seen as a means of individual improvement. Among older GJM activists, including the DTMTC's teachers and founders, development indexed something different.

Training meant not mobility but stability—what the bureaucrat at the inauguration referred to as an ethical investment in Darjeeling's plantations. Training was a form of collective solidarity and territorial control.

Among some students and teachers involved with the DTMTC, recognition came in the form of accredited certificates. As economic and geographical passports, certificates would permit the advancement of the Gorkhadacle cause by permitting more trained Gorkhas to work, in more places, with higher degrees of responsibility. Among others involved with the DTMTC, it was the institution, not its certificates, which must be recognized. From this point of view, the DTMTC would only succeed if those outside Darjeeling recognized the capacity and right of Gorkha people to devise their own homegrown forms of training.

Ultimately, the story of the DTMTC provides a more general lesson about the problem of occupation in Darjeeling. Management is an occupation in several senses. Management is about filling and controlling physical and institutional space. The post of manager is one that individuals can fill interchangeably, but it is also a location in political economy, between labour and capital. It is a location on a plantation. The promise of a comfortable bungalow and membership in a social club once lured men from Europe, just as it now lures young Nepali men raised in plantation villages. Finally, management is the institution that enables the occupation of space by corporations and states. Tea plantation management positions in Darjeeling continue to be filled by those whom Gorkha activists consider to be outsiders. Although management is occupational in all these senses, it has tended to be somewhat immune from politics. It is hard to imagine management as a position from which to take political action or as an institution through which to assert political beliefs. Management remains largely a function of politics rather than a set of political actions in itself.

Over its short lifespan, the DTMTC thrust management and subnational politics into an awkward relationship. In India, the idea of management is both bigger and smaller than the Gorkhaland Movement, or any movement for territorial sovereignty. Management is bigger in that it pulls young people away from their homelands, luring them to other states and other countries with promises of individual mobility, underwritten by certificates and affiliations. Management is smaller in the sense that its economic appeal—the offices, the houses, the salary, and the petit bourgeois social clubs—is individual rather than collective. The recent rise of management training centres in India, predicated on
unmasking the tacit knowledge once housed in guilds and social clubs, changes little about this individual appeal. Like management based on the right kind of gender, race, or character, management based on training produces individual economic mobility through geographical flexibility, rather than place-based commitment. In this way, management could easily be seen as undermining subnational movements. In the end, the DTMTC put students in a double-bind, between training and tacit knowledge, between development and recognition, and between economy and identity. Though the DTMTC was ultimately a failure, the story of how its students faced this bind can provide insights into the articulation of Darjeeling politics with both India’s colonially rooted plantation economy and its liberalizing national economy.

10 Connection amidst Disconnection

Water Struggles, Social Structures, and Geographies of Exclusion in Darjeeling

Georgina Drew and Roshan P. Rai*

It must be a relief for tourists visiting Darjeeling in the heat of the Indian summer to ease into the cooler temperatures of the former hill station. The lush green mountain landscape, fed by monsoon

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