

The Darjeeling Distinction

*Labor and Justice on
Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*

Sarah Besky



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley Los Angeles London

AUTHORS IMPRINT

Dedicated to discovering and sharing knowledge
and creative vision, authors and scholars have endowed

this imprint to perpetuate scholarship of the highest caliber.

Scholarship is to be created...by awakening a pure interest in knowledge.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the following:

The Authors Imprint Endowment Fund of the University of California Press Foundation, which was established to support exceptional scholarship by first-time authors

The Asian Studies Endowment Fund of the University of California Press Foundation

The Anne G. Lipow Endowment Fund for Social Justice and Human Rights of the University of California Press Foundation, which was established by Stephen M. Silberstein

The Director's Circle of the University of California Press Foundation, whose members are:

Clarence and Jacqueline Avant
Nancy and Roger Boas
Lloyd Cotsen
Richard E. Damm and Sara Duryea Damm
John and Jo De Luca
Harriett and Richard Gold
Betty Hine and Holly Suich
Marilyn Lee and Harvey Schneider
Thomas and Barbara Metcalf
Robert J. Nelson and Monica C. Heredia
Margaret Pillsbury
Lucinda Reinold

The Darjeeling Distinction

CALIFORNIA STUDIES IN FOOD AND CULTURE

Darra Goldstein, Editor

1. *Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices*, by Andrew Dalby
2. *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, by Ken Albala
3. *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, by Marion Nestle
4. *Camembert: A National Myth*, by Pierre Boisard
5. *Safe Food: The Politics of Food Safety*, by Marion Nestle
6. *Eating Apes*, by Dale Peterson
7. *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet*, by Harve Levenstein
8. *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, by Harve Levenstein
9. *Encarnación's Kitchen: Mexican Recipes from Nineteenth-Century California Selections from Encarnación Pinedo's El cocinero español*, by Encarnación Pinedo, edited and translated by Dan Strehl, with an essay by Victor Valle
10. *Zinfandel: A History of a Grape and Its Wine*, by Charles L. Sullivan, with foreword by Paul Draper
11. *Tsukiji: The Fish Market at the Center of the World*, by Theodore C. Bestor
12. *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*, by R. Mar Griffith
13. *Our Overweight Children: What Parents, Schools, and Communities Can Do to Control the Fatness Epidemic*, by Sharron Dalton
14. *The Art of Cooking: The First Modern Cookery Book*, by The Eminent Maestro Martino of Como, edited and with an introduction by Luigi Ballerini, translated and annotated by Jeremy Parzen, and with fifty modernized recipes by Stefania Barzini
15. *The Queen of Fats: Why Omega-3s Were Removed from the Western Diet and What We Can Do to Replace Them*, by Susan Allport
16. *Meals to Come: A History of the Future of Food*, by Warren Belasco
17. *The Spice Route: A History*, by John Keay
18. *Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World: A Concise History with 174 Recipes*, by Lilia Zaouali, translated by M. B. DeBevoise, with a foreword by Charles Perr

19. *Arranging the Meal: A History of Table Service in France*, by Jean-Louis Flandrin, translated by Julie E. Johnson, with Sylvie and Antonio Roder; with foreword to the English language edition by Beatrice Fink
20. *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir*, by Amy B. Trubek
21. *Food: The History of Taste*, edited by Paul Freedman
22. *M. F. K. Fisher among the Pots and Pans: Celebrating Her Kitchens*, by Joan Reardon, with a foreword by Amanda Hesser
23. *Cooking: The Quintessential Art*, by Hervé This and Pierre Gagnaire, translated by M. B. DeBevoise
24. *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century*, by Laura Shapiro
25. *Of Sugar and Snow: A History of Ice Cream Making*, by Jeri Quinzio
26. *Encyclopedia of Pasta*, by Oretta Zanini De Vita, translated by Maureen Fant, with a foreword by Carol Field
27. *Tastes and Temptations: Food and Art in Renaissance Italy*, by John Varriano
28. *Free for All: Fixing School Food in America*, by Janet Poppendieck
29. *Breaking Bread: Recipes and Stories from Immigrant Kitchens*, by Lynn Christy Anderson, with a foreword by Corby Kummer
30. *Culinary Ephemera: An Illustrated History*, by William Woys Weaver
31. *Eating Mud Crabs in Kandahar: Stories of Food during Wartime by the World's Leading Correspondents*, edited by Matt McAllester
32. *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*, by Julie Guthman
33. *Why Calories Count: From Science to Politics*, by Marion Nestle and Malde Nesheim
34. *Curried Cultures: Globalization, Food, and South Asia*, edited by Krishnendran Ray and Tulasi Srinivas
35. *The Cookbook Library: Four Centuries of the Cooks, Writers, and Recipes That Made the Modern Cookbook*, by Anne Willan, with Mark Cherniavsky and Kyri Claflin
36. *Coffee Life in Japan*, by Merry White
37. *American Tuna: The Rise and Fall of an Improbable Food*, by Andrew F. Smith
38. *A Feast of Weeds: A Literary Guide to Foraging and Cooking Wild Edible Plants*, by Luigi Ballerini, translated by Gianpiero W. Doebler, with recipes by Ada De Santis and illustrations by Giuliano Della Casa
39. *The Philosophy of Food*, by David M. Kaplan

40. *Beyond Hummus and Falafel: Social and Political Aspects of Palestinian Food in Israel*, by Liora Gvion, translated by David Wesley and Elana Wesley
41. *The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America*, by Heather Paxson
42. *Popes, Peasants, and Shepherds: Recipes and Lore from Rome and Lazio*, by Oretta Zanini De Vita, translated by Maureen B. Fant, foreword by Ernesto I. Renzo
43. *Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History*, by Rachel Laudan
44. *Inside the California Food Revolution: Thirty Years That Changed Our Culinary Consciousness*, by Joyce Goldstein, with Dore Brown
45. *Cumin, Camels, and Caravans: A Spice Odyssey*, by Gary Paul Nabhan
46. *Balancing on a Planet: Critical Thinking and Effective Action for the Future of Food and Agriculture*, by David A. Cleveland
47. *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*, by Sarah Besky
48. *How the Other Half Ate: A History of Working-Class Meals at the Turn of the Century*, by Katherine Leonard Turner
49. *The Untold History of Ramen: How Political Crisis in Japan Spawned a Global Food Craze*, by George Solt

The Darjeeling Distinction

*Labor and Justice on
Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*



Sarah Besky



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley Los Angeles London

University of California Press, one of the most distinguished university presses in the United States, enriches lives around the world by advancing scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Its activities are supported by the UC Press Foundation and by philanthropic contributions from individuals and institutions. For more information, visit www.ucpress.edu.

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

© 2014 by The Regents of the University of California

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Besky, Sarah.

The Darjeeling distinction: labor and justice on fair trade tea plantations in India / Sarah Besky.

p. cm. — (California studies in food and culture ; 47)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-520-27738-0 (cloth, alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-520-27739-7 (pbk, alk. paper)

eISBN 978-0-520-95760-2

1. Tea trade—India—Darjeeling (District) 2. Tea plantations—India—Darjeeling (District) 3. Competition, Unfair—India—Darjeeling (District). I. Title.

HD9198.I43 D3733 2013

338.1'7372095414—dc23

2013021968

Manufactured in the United States of America

22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with its commitment to support environmentally responsible and sustainable printing practices, UC Press has printed this book on Cascades Enviro 100, a 100% post consumer waste, recycled, de-inked fiber. FSC recycled and certified and processed chlorine free. It is acid free, Ecologo certified, and manufactured by BioGas energy.

For the tea workers of Darjeeling

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

Acknowledgments

Notes on Orthography and Usage

Introduction: Reinventing the Plantation for the Twenty-first Century

1. Darjeeling
2. Plantation
3. Property
4. Fairness
5. Sovereignty

Conclusion: Is Something Better Than Nothing?

Notes

Bibliography

Index

ILLUSTRATIONS

MAPS

1. Map of India, with inset of Darjeeling district
2. Map of Darjeeling, with plantations shaded

FIGURES

1. *Dui patti ek suero*: “two leaves and a bud”
2. Female tea workers plucking tea under the watchful eye of their male supervisor
3. Male field supervisors collecting leaf to bring up to the factory
4. Tea withering in specially designed troughs in a tea factory
5. Rolling machine in a tea factory
6. Darjeeling tea logo
7. Certified trademark (CTM) billboard at the entrance to a tea plantation
8. Chowrasta in the 1920s
9. Bhanubhakta Acharya statue in Chowrasta
10. “Tea garden coolies” with planter
11. Women carrying baby tea bushes in *tāukoris*
12. Female laborers planting baby tea bushes in a new section of a plantation
13. Female laborers plucking tea in the field
14. A female laborer pruning a tea bush on a winter day during the dormant period of tea production
15. Tea Board of India promotional poster
16. Female tea laborer, clad in a *chaubandi*
17. Tea buyers in a tea factory snapping pictures of women sorting tea in proactive clothing donned for the occasion
18. Billboard outside of the Darjeeling Tea Association office in Darjeeling
19. Female laborers proceeding to the factory from the *kamān busti* for a gate meeting
20. Waiting for a gate meeting
21. India side of a border marker

22. Nepal side of a border marker
23. ~~Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM) flag on the Chowrasta stage at a rally~~
24. "Let Us Protect Our Heritage," a float at a 2009 GJMM rally
25. *Daurā sural* and *topī* (with *khukuri* pin)
26. The Nari Morcha
27. The Nari Morcha marching into Chowrasta

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not have been possible without the help and support of numerous people and institutions. I was fortunate to receive funding for my field research from the American Institute of Indian Studies (2008–9), Fulbright Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program (2007–8), the Graduate School at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2009), and the Land Tenure Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2009–10). My fieldwork would not have been as productive without the support of multiple Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowships in Nepali, Hindi, and Tibetan from the Center for South Asian Studies (2005–7), as well as predissertation fieldwork funding from the Center for Global Studies (2006) and the Graduate School (2009), all at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The writing of this book was supported by an Andrew W. Mellon American Council of Learned Societies Dissertation Completion Fellowship (2011–12) and a Michigan Society of Fellows Postdoctoral Fellowship (2012–present).

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my graduate advisor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Kirin Narayan. Kirin painstakingly read drafts of this and many other pieces of writing, but more importantly, she taught me how to narrate the lives of others in a rich and respectful way. My mentors and dissertation committee members Jane Collins, Katherine Ewing, Jill Harrison, Paul Nadasdy, and Claire Wendland all provided comments and critiques that helped usher the project from dissertation to book.

Over the life of this research, I have greatly appreciated conversations with Sandy Brown, Nicholas D'Avella, Gina Drew, Phillip Lutgendorf, Laura-Ann Minkoff-Zern, Jonathan Padwe, Peter Rosenblum, Ashwini Sukthankar, Paige West, and Bradley Wilson. In Wisconsin, a number of friends and colleagues shaped my thinking about tea, food studies, India, and political ecology: Chris Butler, Chelsea Chapman, Jake Fleming, Jim Hoesterey, Erika Robb Larkins, Chris Limburg, Larry Nesper, Natalie Porter, Mary Rader, Susan Rottman, Lillian Hsiao-Ling Su, Noah Theriault, and Denise Wiyaka. I owe Abigail Neely a great debt of gratitude for so carefully reading every page of this manuscript in its final stages. I am also grateful to the organizers and participants in the SociETA Seminar in the Department of Community and Environmental Sociology, where I was able to test early versions of the arguments herein. Finally, the Center for Culture, History, and the Environment provided a vibrant intellectual community while I wrote up my dissertation.

The Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan has been a warm and stimulating intellectual environment. My special thanks to Stuart Kirsch for reading multiple drafts of the material presented within, as well as the students in his graduate-level environmental anthropology class for reading an early draft of chapter 2. Krisztina Fehérváry, Tom Fricke, Matthew Hull, Webb Keane, Erik Mueggler, Eric Plemons, Elizabeth F. S. Roberts, and other participants in the Socio-Cultural Workshop all carefully read and commented on an early draft of chapter 5.

The Michigan Society of Fellows has created a one-of-a-kind interdisciplinary community. Thank you to Donald Lopez and Linda Turner as well as the junior and senior fellows for pushing me to think of ways to communicate across disciplinary boundaries. I would like to extend particular appreciation to Lydia Barnett, Elis Lipkowitz, and Damola Osinulu for reading and commenting on chapter 1, and to Clare Croft and Eric Plemons for their readings of chapter 2. Laura, Randolph, and Astrid Miles provided much-needed outdoor diversions; and Erik, Sheela, and Napa Linstrum sheltered me and my extended family during the final stages of writing. Also at Michigan, the Center for South Asian Studies and the School of Natural Resources and Environment made great intellectual second homes. I am particularly grateful to Rebecca Hardin, who inspired me to think more expansively about gender and the moral economy.

I gave lectures on sections of this book at Bowdoin College (2011); the Columbia University School of Law (2012); and the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan (2012). I also presented pieces of this book in various stages at a number of conferences. A special thanks is due to the participants and audience members at: the Annual Conference on South Asia (2007); Central States Anthropological Society Meeting (2007); the Dimensions of Political Ecology Conference (DOPE) at the University of Kentucky (2011, 2012); the Workshop on the History of Environment, Agriculture, Technology, and Science (WHEATS) (2010), with thanks to Ashley Carse, Jess Gilbert, and Matt Turner for their helpful comments; the Roy Rappaport Prize Panel at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (2010), with particular thanks to Lisa Gezon, Laura Ogden, Laura Zanotti, and Rebecca Hardin for reading some of the first writings on this project; and the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies Meeting (2011), with particular thanks to Tina Harris, Debarati Sen, Sarah Shneiderman, Mark Turin, and Mélanie Vandenhelsken for a lively discussion of the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas.

Other interdisciplinary conversations have shaped this book. Thank you to Mike Goodman and Christine Barnes, organizers of the 2012 “FoodMediaPolitics” sessions at the Association of American Geographers (AAG) Annual Meetings. And thank you to the organizers of the 2013 AAG panel “Value Chains, Neoliberal Regulation, and Global Restructuring,” Jennifer Bair and Marion Werner. My conversations with geographers over the years have helped me think more critically about the concepts of landscape, place, and circulation. Though I was unable to attend the conference, Peter Vandergeest and Derek Hall kindly delivered my paper at “Certifying Asian Food: International Expectation

Domestic Priorities, Nationalist Discourses” at the 2012 Association for Asian Studies Conference. The critiques of the discussant, Adam Sneyd, were particularly insightful. Finally, I thank Jill Didur and Jayeeta Sharma and their attendants at “Foodways: Diasporic Dinners, Transnational Tables, and Culinary Connections,” at the Annual Conference of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies, University of Toronto.

Three wonderful panels at the American Anthropological Association (AAA) Annual Meetings helped me think through much of this book. Sarah Lyon, who organized “What’s Fair: Environmental and Social Justice through Markets,” at the 2007 AAA meetings allowed me to present a paper that became chapter 4. An early version of it was published in an edited volume that came out of that panel, *Fair Trade and Social Justice: Global Ethnographies* (edited by Sarah Lyon and Mark Moberg [New York: New York University Press, 2010]). At the 2010 AAA meetings, I was pushed to think about the complexities of circulation and the production of environmental commodities. Thank you to Molly Doane and Paige West for organizing the panel, “Natural Circuits: The Political Ecology of Environmental Commodities,” on which I presented a draft of chapter 5, and to June Nash and Jane Collins for their comments. Lastly, I wish to recognize my co-organizer on the panel “People Plants and Practice: Garden Variety Investigation of Domesticated Nature” at the 2011 AAA meetings, Jonathan Padwe. With the help of Jonathan, our discussant Virginia Nazarea, and the other panelists, I was able to discuss a draft of chapter 3 and think with the idea of the “garden.”

I trace the roots of this project back to an undergraduate class at Connecticut College, Authenticity in Art and Culture, taught by Chris Steiner. Chris, I thank you for showing me where anthropological inquiry could go. I would also like to thank Sarah Queen and the beloved Harold Juli for their encouragement.

Part of the writing of this book was conducted while I was a Visiting Scholar at Franklin and Marshall College (2011-12). In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, I would like to thank Tania Ahmad and Roberta Strickler for their friendship and support. My research assistant, Hang Pham, did an excellent job; and Victoria Galanty, Ellann Benabou, and Mia Damiano also provided research assistance.

Over the final months of writing this book, I thrived on correspondences with James Sinclair, the great-great grandson of one of the first tea planters in Darjeeling. I have relished hearing his stories and look forward to hearing many more. James kindly provided two of the photographs in this book. The first (figure 8) is a beautiful image of an old postcard of Chowrasta. The second (figure 10) is a picture of his tea planter father at Steinthal Tea Estate in Darjeeling. I am grateful to James for allowing me to use these images in this book. I would also like to thank the phenomenal photographer and tea merchant, Benoy Thapa, owner of Thunderbolt Tea, for allowing me to use his photograph for the book jacket.

In Darjeeling, I wish to extend the biggest *dhanyabad* to the tea-plucking women with whom I shared many days and afternoons. Without their warmth and openness, this project would not have been possible. I refrain from naming these

workers here. I also refrain from naming the planters, plantation owners, and GJMM activists who were kind enough to talk with me. B.G., R.S., U.R., V.P., N.C., S.S., P.S., and G.S. were crucial to my work in Darjeeling. The University of North Bengal in Siliguri, the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Kolkata, and my CSSS supervisor Bodhisattva Kar, provided institutional support for this project. My time in India would not have been nearly as productive and enjoyable without the assistance of the Fulbright Commission in Delhi and the American Institute of Indian Studies, particularly Subir Sarkar. For guidance and perspective in Darjeeling, I must extend a special thank you to Ranen Dutta and Khemraj Sharma. My fieldwork benefitted from the support of the Indian Tea Association and Darjeeling Tea Association in Darjeeling and Kolkata, especially Kaushik Basu, Monojit Das Gupta, and Sandip Mukerjee, as well as Aninditta Ray of the Tea Board of India.

I continue to find inspiration in my colleagues working in Darjeeling, in particular Keera Allendorf, Ida Benedetto, Siddhartha Gyaltzen, Rhys Fookler, Barbara Gerke, Thomas Shor, C. Townsend Middleton, Nayomi Sajan, and Debarati Sen. I would also like to extend a very special thanks to Mary Boland, Niraj Lama (now the owners of Happy Earth Tea in Rochester, New York), Tara and Rory-Dorje for friendships and conversation in the field. The International Trust for Traditional Medicine (ITTM) in Kalimpong and Glenary's provided a crucial writing sanctuary. To Aama and Pala: thank you for always being there with tea, biscuits, and a wonderful story.

Some text in this book appeared earlier in the following form: "The Labor of *Terroir* and the *Terroir* of Labor: Geographical Indication on Darjeeling Tea Plantations," *Agriculture and Human Values* (forthcoming); "Colonial Pasts and Fair Trade Futures: Changing Modes of Production and Regulation on Darjeeling Tea Plantations," in *Fair Trade and Social Justice: Global Ethnographies*, ed. Sarah Lyon and Mark Moberg, 97-122 (New York: New York University Press, 2010); "Can a Plantation Be Fair? Paradoxes and Possibilities in Fair Trade Darjeeling Tea Certification." *Anthropology of Work Review* 29(1) (2008): 1-9. Thank you to *Agriculture and Human Values* for allowing me to republish selections of my article.

At the University of California Press, I would like to thank the editor of the California Studies in Food and Culture Series, Darra Goldstein, for encouraging this book in its nascent stages. Thank you too to my editor, Kate Marshall, for her helpful feedback and kind assistance through various stages of this book's life. Andrew Frisardi provided careful copyediting on the manuscript. I am grateful to Sarah Lyon, Phillip Lutgendorf, and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments for revisions. Cindy Fulton carefully guided this book to completion. Thérèse Shere meticulously compiled the index.

Thank you to my parents, Andrea and Edward Besky, and to Susan and Alex Nading for their support. Finally, I am most deeply grateful to Alex Nading, whose love and encouragement propelled this project and supports all my other endeavors. Kitty, Sidney, and Floyd provided crucial emotional support and healthy distractions during many hours of writing.

NOTES ON ORTHOGRAPHY AND USAGE

English, Tibetan, Hindi, and Bengali words are folded in to the Darjeeling dialect of Nepali; it is distinctly different from the Nepali spoken in Nepal. All translations and transliterations of Nepali in the text follow Ralph Lilley Turner's (1996 [1931]) *Comparative Entomological Dictionary of the Nepali Language*. For words that do not appear in the Turner dictionary, I consulted Ruth Laila Schmidt's *Practical Dictionary of Modern Nepali* (1993), as well as Mahendra Caturvedi and B. N. Tiwari's *Practical Hindi-English Dictionary* (1970), for spelling guidance. In the case of words that do not appear in any of these dictionaries (as many Darjeeling words do not), I have transliterated them to best reflect their pronunciation.

In my transliterations of Nepali and other South Asian languages, I have striven for readability over technical precision. In cases where Nepali words are commonly used in English (e.g., bazaar, Nepali, coolie), they are not italicized or rendered with diacritics. Place names, organizations, and personal names are also not rendered in italics or with diacritics. English words used in Nepali appear in italics and are phonetically written out (e.g. *industri* for "industry"). Similarly, *Chowrasta* and *Chowk Bazaar* are used in their popular spellings (substituting *chau* with *chow*). The word *Nepali* is used to describe both people and language. *Calcutta* is used for the colonial city, while *Kolkata* is used for the contemporary city, in congruence with the city's official renaming in 2001. Other words translated and transliterated from Tibetan, Hindi, or Bengali are noted in the text.

A quick guide to commonly used letters with diacritical marks: The letter *ā* is pronounced like the vowel sound in *cat*. The letter *ī* is pronounced like the vowel sound in *tea*. And the letter *ū* is pronounced like the vowel sound in *food*. For ease of pronunciation, the letter *ś* is rendered as *sh*. Instead of *c* and *ch*, I use *ch* and *chh* to better reflect pronunciation. Vowels with a tilde (e.g., *ã*) indicate nasalization.

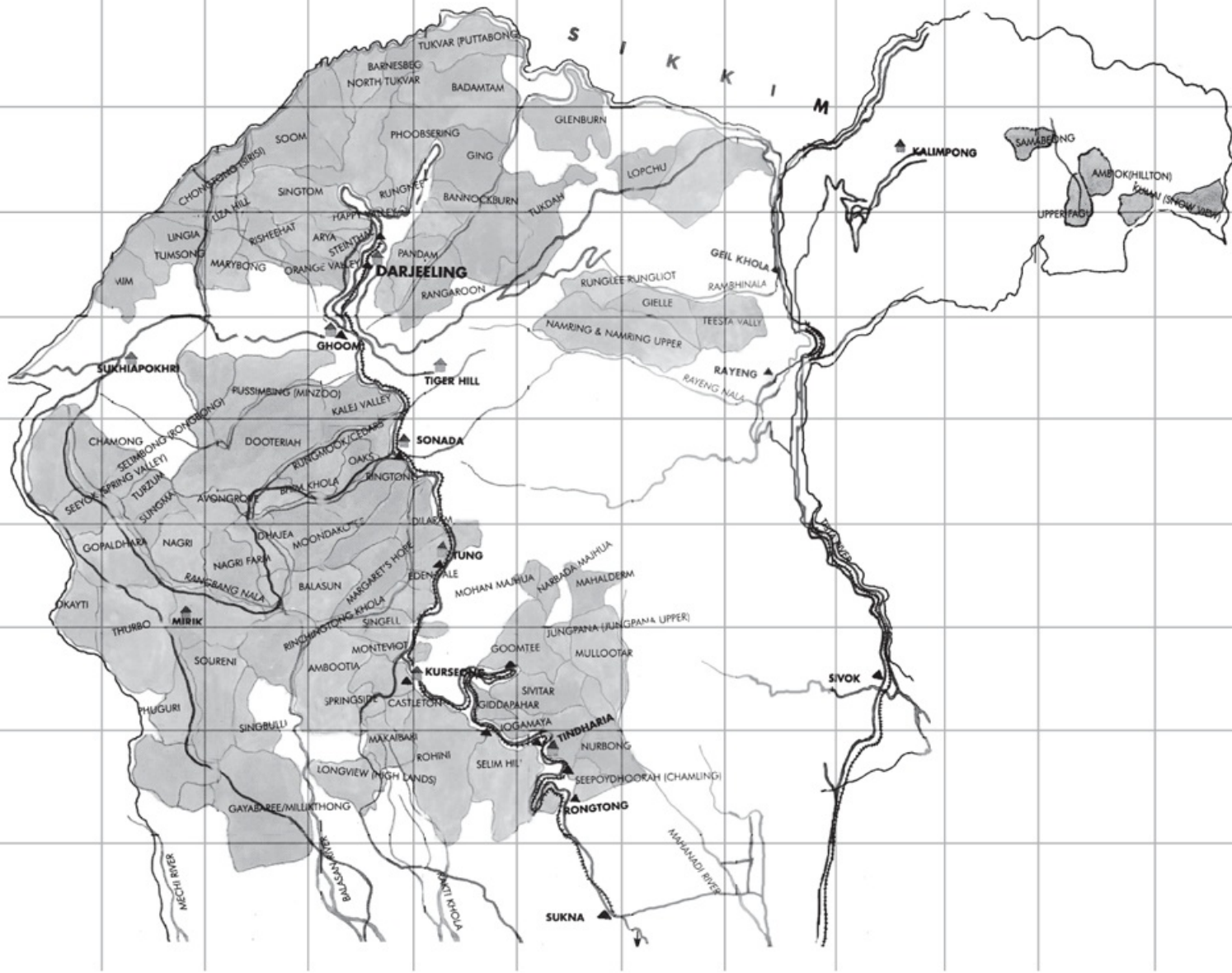
Plurals of Nepali words have an unitalicized *s* at the end of them. A select few words I wish to emphasize have the Nepali plural marker and postposition *-han* at the end of them.

In general, all personal names and plantation names in this book are pseudonyms. The exceptions are well-known public figures (i.e., Madan Tamang, Subhash Ghisingh, and Bimal Gurung), and two plantations briefly mentioned in the text (Aloobari and Steinthal), neither of which were included in my field study.

Given that they are readily searchable, I also use the real names of plantation
profiled in media reports I quote in chapter 3.



MAP 1. Map of India, with inset of Darjeeling district.



MAP 2. Map of Darjeeling, with plantations shaded. Courtesy Tea Board of India.

Introduction

Reinventing the Plantation for the Twenty-first Century

Darjeeling town, perched on one of the highest ridges in the northernmost part of West Bengal, is connected to the rest of India by a rough and bumpy road that begins in the dusty market town of Siliguri. At Siliguri, the railroad from West Bengal's capital, Kolkata, gives way to a narrow gauge, steam locomotive known locally as the "Toy Train," which carries tourists up the ridge on a smoky six-hour journey to Darjeeling. By car, the journey from Siliguri to Darjeeling takes just three to four hours, traversing through the foggy forests and tea plantations that fall off the road and plummet into the valleys below. Cars zig and zag back and forth up the mountain, weaving in and out of the path of the Toy Train, and passing a few villages precariously clinging to the sheer hillsides. Dense forests of *duppi* (*Cryptomeria japonica*) trees hug the road in a moist evergreen shade. They are planted in military-like formation—perfectly spaced, with impeccable posture—their armlike branches presenting bulbous clumps of needles straight up toward the sky.

The drive is mesmerizing (and for many, nauseating), and the landscape is striking. The tea plantations are immediately recognizable. Green and orderly like the *duppi*, the fields of tea go on for miles over and around the undulating landscape. But Darjeeling's is a beauty of a manufactured kind: the product of over 150 years of extensive capitalist extraction. The vivid greenness of colonial rooted tea plantations and *duppi* forests obscures the acute environmental and social effects of a long history of monoculture and marginalization. Long brown streaks left by landslides on the verdant slopes are reminders of the precariousness of people and plants here. These scars evoke questions about the sustainability of the entire place. This is the landscape of the twenty-first-century plantation.

This book tells a story about the social life of some of the world's most expensive and sought after tea. Darjeeling's tea laborers, planters,¹ and townspeople all know that Darjeeling and its tea are famous all over the world. Some trace the distinction of Darjeeling and its signature product to the misty mountain climate or the loamy soils; others talk about the work ethic of the laborers; and others mention the importance of the region's general *vāst* (meaning "property" or "place," in Hindu spiritual geography).² Whatever the

reason, since colonial times, Darjeeling tea has been associated with luxury and refinement, and the Darjeeling region has been a romantic “outside” within India—a cool, mountainous complement to the plains, and a home to exotic Nepali-speaking tea pluckers, recruited by British plantation owners beginning in the 1850s to staff what came to be known as “tea gardens.” This book narrates how Darjeeling tea workers’ ideas about value, plantation life, and social justice emerge through their encounters with tea’s colonial legacy. It shows how these ideas have been reshaped by strategies to reinvent Darjeeling tea for twenty-first-century consumers seeking not only escape and refinement, but also, through “fair trade” and other agricultural certification schemes, a sense of social solidarity in their daily cup.

Today, Darjeeling is a district of the Indian state of West Bengal.³ The descendants of the Nepali migrant laborers recruited to work on British plantations constitute its majority, with migrants from across India, Tibet, and beyond making up the remainder of the population. The Darjeeling district sits in the northernmost part of West Bengal, pinned in by international borders with Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan (Chinese-occupied Tibet sits just to the north above the small Indian state of Sikkim). In this unique and ecologically vulnerable mountain landscape on the periphery of modern India—populated by Nepali-speaking tea laborers, elite Indian planters, a multicultural *mélange* of immigrants, and the Anglo-Indian descendants of the British Raj—transnational movements for ethical trade have converged with a colonially derived system of tea production and a heated postcolonial discourse about economic and social rights. Over the past 150 years, consumers and marketers have given Darjeeling tea a specific territorial distinction as a luxury beverage. It is “the Champagne of teas.” At the same time, Indian Nepali, or “Gorkha,” laborers on tea plantations have developed a geographically and historically distinct identity, ideas of social justice, and feelings about the value of Darjeeling as both a product *and* homeland.

In this book, I trace the ascendancy, decline, and revitalization of Darjeeling tea—born in British colonial India, transformed through Indian independence, and thriving today as a globally recognized crop. Consumption of this delicate, expensive brew has long been a marker of class distinction. Since the earliest days of British colonial production, Darjeeling has been exceptional because of its delicacy and because, unlike other teas, it has *not* normally been consumed with milk or sugar. Darjeeling tea tends to be light in color, and its flavor tends to be smoky and slightly floral. (Indeed, the controlled vocabulary professional tea tasters and graders use to describe Darjeeling—with vivid adjectives like cheesy, biscuity, and knobbly—is reminiscent of the words sommeliers use to describe fine wine.)

Ideas about place tie labor firmly to distinguished commodities like Darjeeling tea. As an anthropological study of a luxury beverage, this book is also about the relationship of taste and value to place, of labor to product, and of production to consumption. It tacks back and forth among stories about a *place* (Darjeeling) about *labor* (how tea is produced there); and about *meaning* (what makes tea-

and Darjeeling in particular—special to tea drinkers and tea pluckers). This book melds a social ecology of tea, a study of the intimate relationships between laborers and the Darjeeling landscape, with a “food system perspective.” As geographer Julie Guthman explains, taking a food system perspective entails “incorporating the entire array of ideas, institutions, and policies that affect how food is produced, distributed, and consumed.”⁴ An ethnography that adopts a food system perspective must look not only at production and circulation, but also at the spaces in between that make production and circulation possible and meaningful. To do so, it is important to be clear about the material conditions under which Darjeeling tea is produced. It is significant not only to this book, but to an understanding of Indian tea’s place in the global food system more broadly, that the vast majority of tea grown in the world, from Kenya to Sri Lanka to Indonesia to India (with the notable exception of China and Japan) is produced on *plantations*. And plantations are landscapes of empire, governed by processes of colonial consumption, production, and expansion. While plantation agriculture still predominates in India and much of the postcolonial world, we know little about how plantation workers themselves understand the plantation as a social and ecological form. This book is an attempt to answer that question.

THE EMPIRE OF TEA

Records show that tea was cultivated and drunk as early as the fourth century B.C.E. in Taoist monasteries in China, where it was plucked locally from tall trees and processed by hand rolling the leaves against a screen perched over a fire. Tea consumption spread through China and into Japan in the late sixth century C.E. As in China, in Japan it was cultivated largely in monastic gardens to rejuvenate and purify the minds and bodies of mediating monks.⁶ Over the centuries, tea cultivation and consumption spread beyond monastic contexts in China and Japan, as wider publics began drinking it with an eye to improving health and mental acuity. Despite being native to the Eastern Himalayas, tea was not cultivated on the Indian side of the range until the 1830s, and not adapted as an everyday drink in India until decades later.⁷

Exploration and trade throughout the seventeenth century introduced Portuguese, Dutch, and British sailors to the exotic materials of the Far East, such as spices, silk, and tea.⁸ The Dutch East India Company began trading Chinese tea in the 1600s, and the British East India Company soon followed. Traders quickly realized that tea, like coffee and cocoa, gives the drinker a little kick. As a result, tea, like these other drinkable stimulants, was initially marketed as a pharmacological product. Though tea has long been considered the “national beverage” of England, in the early eighteenth century, there was little tea consumed there. Coffee and cocoa were initially more popular beverages, and these remained favored in the court and elite English social spheres. But by early nineteenth century, tea had become a commonplace beverage in households across social classes in Britain.

sample content of The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India (California Studies in Food and Culture)

- [click Anna Karenina \(UK Edition\)](#)
- [Constructing the World pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [read Ultimate Magic \(Merlin's Dragon, Book 3\) online](#)
- [read **Perfect Love \(Celestra, Book 8.5\) pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub**](#)

- <http://academialanguagebar.com/?ebooks/75-Floral-Blocks-to-Knit--Beautiful-Patterns-to-Mix---Match-for-Throws--Accessories--Baby-Blankets---More.pdf>
- <http://econtact.webschaefer.com/?books/Constructing-the-World.pdf>
- <http://paulczajak.com/?library/Demon-Child--Celestial-Battle--Book-2-.pdf>
- <http://cavalldecartro.highlandagency.es/library/The-Food-Lab--Better-Home-Cooking-Through-Science.pdf>