

## **Environment and rural development in Darjeeling Himalaya: Issues and concerns**

Vimal Khawas

Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology. Ahmedabad, India.

2002

vimalkhawas@yahoo.co.uk

**Keywords:** mountains, environment, politics, community development, rural development, Himalaya, India, Darjeeling.

Darjeeling Himalaya suffers from a vicious cycle of development process. Along with a burgeoning population, there has been a constant increase on the area under subsistence crops followed by an increased dependency on livestock farming. Such sequences intensify the demand on the fragile mountain land. Excessive encroachment of forest lands to meet the mushrooming demands for fodder, fuel wood, and other requirements has led to unprecedented damage to forest lands, livestock grazing more than often in this fragile environment has led to overgrazing impacting the environment. Tourism in the area is another factor that has its share in the degradation and pollution of environment in this mountain area. Besides, the physical isolation, economic backwardness, social heterogeneity and unstable politics have a bearing on the social life of the hill folk which is often ventilated through disbelief, frustration and demand for linguistic and political autonomy. This paper attempts to briefly look into the above stated issues and concerns. The paper should not be seen as a problem solving technique; rather it is an attempt to highlight the major environmental and developmental issues in the Himalaya.

Environment is a stage on which human drama is enacted and includes mainly the physical and biotic setting all around us, land (soil, scenic and aesthetic beauty), climate, water bodies, minerals, natural vegetation and animal kingdom. This habitat is of immense value to mankind because the modern material civilization is entirely based on the exploitation and utilization of the existing resources drawn from the environment and created through human efforts. Since the dawn of human history man- environment relationship has been an inseparable entity (Chakraborti, P. K. 1998). In mountain areas this is more pronounced; terrain inaccessibility, climatic inhospitability, soil infertility, and transport availability, scarcity of basic amenities and facilities make life nature oriented (Chakraborti, P.K. 1989).

The mountains separating Indian sub-continent along its north-central and north eastern border lying within geographical limits of about 26°20' and 35°40' North and 74°50' and 95°40' East are commonly referred to as Himalayas (Ives and Massereli, 1989). It covers fully or partly eight Asian countries namely,

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. The Himalayas lying in Indian Territory is spread over a length of about 2500 kilometers with an average width of 240 kilometers and covers fully or partly eleven states of India lying in the northern frontier. The entire region is seemingly backward and politically sensitive.

## **STUDY AREA**

Darjeeling district is the northernmost district of west Bengal. It is located on the lap of the Himalayas. The district comprises of four subdivisions namely, Darjeeling Sadar, Kalimpong, Kurseong and Siliguri. Darjeeling Himalaya forms a part of eastern Himalayan ranges and is bounded by Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan on the north, west and east respectively. It consists of the first three subdivisions of the district while Siliguri is mainly characterized by the tarai and foothills of the district. Therefore, the paper does not include siliguri in the study. The area covered by Darjeeling Himalaya is about 1721 Sq. Kms. while the total area of the district is 3202 Sq. Kms. Darjeeling Himalaya consists of a portion of the outlying hills of lower Himalayas and a stretch of territory lying along the base of the hills known as the Terai. The Terai is only 91 meters high above the sea level but there are parts of the districts, which are as high as 3660 m. at Sandakpu. The exquisite scenic grandeur and invigorating climate in the area have earned the title of "Queen of the Hill Stations" (Chakraborti, P.K 1989.). River Teesta is the master stream in the area while the Rammam and Rangit are the two important tributaries of the Teesta. Besides, numerous rain fed rivulets in the hills become the most dominating factor of environmental control during rainy season. Tourism is a climate-based industry while tea plantations that earned fame for Darjeeling Himalaya is largely a contribution of the climate. The climate of Darjeeling is especially noteworthy. Springs and autumns are the seasons most favoured by visitors. The monsoon is a period of continuous rainfall while the winter after December is too cold and unpleasant. The local climate in fact depends largely on the elevation and aspect. The first access of the man in the Darjeeling Hills and when who fell down the first tree to establish a living has not clearly been brought to book. But when British came here, it was inhabited merely by a few hundred souls in the pure natural environment, between the undiscovered flora and fauna.

## **NEED TO STUDY THE AREA**

The backwardness of the area in terms of socioeconomy, politics and infrastructural facilities and their variations within the area has called for a distinct study of the different social, economic and political progress that the area has achieved. Secondly, its geo-strategic location is a reason in itself to evoke concern for the region. Darjeeling Himalaya's vulnerable position has made it pass through different events in history, each having a marked effect in the region. Moreover, the historic movement of the 1980s for a separate

state that shook the state of West Bengal inflicted far-reaching impacts on the ecology and environment and development in the Queen of the hills. Large-scale environmental, social, economic and political problems in the 1990s are in many ways related to the agitation of the 1980s. Besides, the recent concerns of environment in the Himalayan region demand detail study of the region.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The name Darjeeling is thought to be a derivation of 'Dorjeling', meaning the place of the Dorje, the majestic thunderbolt of the Lamaistic Religion. Along with a part of Kalimpong and Dooars (Terai), Darjeeling was under the King of Sikkim prior to 1706. The Bhutanese snatched the present Kalimpong area in the same year. During the middle of the 18th century the Gorkhas won Sikkim along with the Terai. While the East India Company was busy expanding their territories in the south, Nepal had already become a strong nation by expanding its areas from Teesta to Kangra along with several plain areas in 1800. In 1816 Sugauli Treaty was signed and thus Nepal handed over Sikkim and its Terai part to the British. Shortly followed the Treaty of Titledya, and on the 10th February 1817 Sikkim and the Terai was returned to the King of Sikkim making it a buffer State. At this stage Darjeeling (proper) was a small village under the Kazi (minister) of the King of Sikkim. It was in 1827 when Captain Lloyd and Grant, on the way to settling a dispute between Nepal and Sikkim, visited Darjeeling and discovered its invigorating climate. The healthy climatic condition was favorable for the establishment of the winter capital and military base. On the effort of Lloyd, the Governor General Lord Bentick started the dialogue with the King of Sikkim. On the 1st of February 1835, the king of Sikkim, with a view to enabling the British servants avail the healthy weather of the place, presented Darjeeling, what was to him a worthless uninhabited mountain, to the British Government, as a token of friendship. Darjeeling in 1836 was a small market of a few mat roofed houses popularly known as GOONDRI BAZAR. Kalimpong then a part of Bhutan was snatched away by the British to include it in Darjeeling and in 1880 Siliguri area was taken out from Jalpaiguri district and included in Darjeeling District. This shape of Darjeeling remained unchanged but the political placements kept on differing from time to time. The district of Darjeeling was annexed to Rajshahi (now in Bangladesh) after 1850. In 1905 the region in the present shape was included in the Bhagalpur of Bihar (Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa being undivided) but to be taken away to Rajshahi again in 1912 and for that matter to Bengal after independence.

## **POPULATION**

The then superintendent Dr. Campbell had reported the population of Darjeeling to be 1900 in 1850 and 2200 in 1869. The years that followed saw the rapid growth in the population of the district. Darjeeling district offers the

most remarkable example of growth of population stemming mainly from immigration from outside. Since the inception of immigration into the district, people from Nepal belonging to various castes, tribes, religions and speaking various languages have always been in majority. It can be said that Darjeeling is an ethnographic museum and a cultural melting pot.

YEAR	POPULATION
1872	94712
1881	155179
1901	265780
1941	376369
1981	1024269
1991	1299919
2001	1605900

Source:

Census of India (1961), Language Tables, Vol.1, Part II - C (II), Pp - CL VII-CL IX.  
Census of India (1981), District Census Hand Book, Darjeeling District, West Bengal.

Census of India (1991), District Census Hand Book, Darjeeling District, West Bengal.

Census of India (2001), Provisional Population Totals, Series - 1

Two important factors that encouraged large-scale immigration in the area need to be highlighted -

- The most potent factor contributing to the growth of population in the area has been the tea industry.
- Another potent factor, which also encouraged immigration in the district, has been the general agriculture (this is especially true in case of Kalimpong Sub-division with relatively low altitude and comparatively high potential for agriculture).

Besides, immigrations due to political reasons (mainly from Bangladesh, Tibet and Bhutan) have played role in the growth of population in Darjeeling.

The rapid population increase has caused the expansion of the area of cultivated fields. Natural pakhas (slopes) and jungles have thus receded to greater distances from the original settlement. The daily transportation of fodder leaves and grasses, as well as firewood has become far more difficult

and painstaking. This has reduced the number of animals per household over the period of time, which has in turn impacted the agricultural productivity in the Himalaya.

Such situation has forced the local folks to construct new terraced fields on more and more inappropriate slopes. Vast areas of forests have shrunk and many pakhas have been turned into cultivated fields. Consequently, the jungles around the villages have begun to disappear. This nibbling effect is apparent in around the hill villages and its diameter is increasing day by day. In consequence, soil erosion has accelerated. In areas where the cover of natural vegetation has been stripped off, the cycle of successive landslides has been abruptly shortened. Thus a number of landslides have begun to destroy fields and threaten the areas of inhabitants. Sources of water have begun to decrease in quantity. Consequently, the burden of everyday task of carrying water has become far more severe than before impacting the rural women. In number of cases, the quality of water has also dropped and as a result sickness increased. This simply means additional distress and economic burden.

## **SOCIETY**

Darjeeling Himalaya is a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-lingual area. The society in the area is made up of various elements drawn from diverse origin. The social diversity is perhaps the most powerful manifestation of the area. The social groups with diverse ethnic and linguistic origins, representing various racial stocks and social status have found a place for themselves at different points of time adapting themselves to the different ecological niches offered by the physiographic and climatic setting of the area. The waves of immigration have drawn the ancestors of the majority of the present population of the area from the surrounding territories across the Himalayas. Their dispersal has resulted in a creation of a social mosaic with ethnic distinctiveness.

Approximate ethnic group wise composition of the population of Darjeeling district may be mentioned as follows -

- Nepalese (this is a generic term and subsumes more than 15 ethnic groups under it. Various castes and tribes (like Sherpa) that immigrated to the area in the 19th and early 20th century from Nepal are subsumed under this group)
- Lepcha (they are the autochthonous tribes in the area)
- Bhutia (tribal that includes both Bhutanese and Sikkimese Bhutia)
- Tibetan (refugees that came to the area after 1961)
- Bengali (includes both permanent residents and migrants of south Bengal and refugees from Bangladesh)
- Other Indians

Over the period of time such situation has caused political and socioeconomic tensions between the autochthonous and the outsiders in the area. Frequent ethnic clashes sometimes assume a serious turn in this Himalayan area. Besides, there is a constant movement for separate state of Gorkha Land. The people in the region, mostly Nepalese want a separate entity of their own outside West Bengal.

## **ECONOMY**

Environmental conditions play a major role in conditioning the livelihood and economy of the people in Darjeeling Himalaya. The topography, climatic variations, soil condition have all influenced human occupancies. Subsistence agriculture, livestock, forestry, plantations and allied activities are the major activity of the rural folks. Darjeeling Himalaya has only over 13% cultivable land in proportion to its total geographical area. No effort has been made by the government to maximize the utilization of the land.

Physiography in the area has made agricultural conditions extremely diverse. Agriculture is greatly impacted by altitude and slope aspect. On account of cold no crops are grown above 9500 feet asl. Such situation in Darjeeling Himalaya has made cultivation extremely difficult and needs considerable input of human labour. Large section of people who are living in Khamsal areas are practising traditional agriculture, more than 35 % of land falling under such category. Bare rocky and steepness restrict agriculture operations to a great extent.

Broadly, agricultural crops in the Himalaya can be grouped into two categories - Food crops and cash crops. Food crops include rice, maize, potato, wheat, barley etc. while the cash crops are tea, cinchona, ginger etc. The methods of agriculture change with the crops. Fruits such as orange, papaya, peaches, guava, plums and even mangoes are grown in the valleys and in areas with low altitudes. Livestock and animal husbandry engages a measurable proportion of rural folks in the area. Grazing of livestock is a regular practice in the valley area of the Darjeeling Himalaya.

Usually agriculture is practiced on irrigated terraces called "Khet" or rain fed terraces termed as "Bari". Khets are mostly seen on the lower altitudes (below 1500 meters, approximately) and is meant mainly for paddy cultivation although winter or dry season crops are also grown in addition to paddy in many cases. Bari on the other hand are prevalent both at lower and higher altitudes (up to 3500 meters, approximately). With the increase in altitudes, the proportion of Bari to Khet increases, as a result of cooler dry season conditions, increasing slope gradient and inaccessibility of water. Livestock supply draught power and serve as the primary and perhaps the most important source of fertilizer. The villagers use the pairs of oxen to cultivate the terraced

fields. Animal manure is indispensable for field fertilization as artificial fertilizers are hardly used.

Tea, tourism and timber are much talked about establishment here. Cinchona and other medicinal plants have its base here. Sericulture is another section, which has been spreading with time. Darjeeling Himalaya has been producing finest quality tea in the world fetching the highest price. Starting on a commercial scale in 1856 the present area under Tea Gardens is 19239 hectares producing 11-12 million Kgs. of tea per year. Cinchona was introduced between 1861 and 1869 on trial; large-scale production started from 1887. The best of Indian quality mulberry silk is being produced in Darjeeling Hills. Forestry is an important occupation of the people of Darjeeling. Darjeeling has about 38.91 % of its area under forest. Many forest-based industries have come up and there is huge potential for further development. Cultivation of aromatic medicine, and exotic plants and orchids has been a source of income in the regional economy. Tourism is one such industry, which is most promising in a place like Darjeeling. Darjeeling Himalaya is a familiar place for tourists since historical past. It attracts a large number of tourists from all corners of the country and even from abroad.

Over the years the influence of heavy human and livestock population in the Himalayas, like many other parts of the country, has led to large-scale destruction of both renewable and nonrenewable resources in this sensitive area. Moreover, routine damages through faulty agricultural practices, overgrazing of the hill slopes in the catchments areas, cutting and lopping of natural forests for fuel, fodder and timber for house building and agricultural implements are other forces contributing to Himalayan degradation. The forest areas in the hills have diminished considerably in recent years. Owing to high rate of population increase, the per capita agricultural and forest areas have shown a sharp decline. With increase in harvesting practices and shrinkage in open Pakhas and Jungles the practice of grazing has also been increased. The continuous and regular practice of grazing has exposed the rock and soil layers. This has reduced the compactness of the soil paving the way for soil erosion. Unplanned growth of tourism has led to deterioration of environment and ecosystem, which has in turn been affecting the tourist traffic in the area. Tourism as an industry is no doubt a part of the socio economic development of any nation but from the point of view of sustainable development; this industry has been yielding many negative results.

Unfortunately, the economic status of rural Darjeeling is very disappointing. Darjeeling is excluded from the industrial map of the country. Surely, the economic viability and environmental feasibility does not welcome the industries. Yet, small and cottage industries that have great potentialities in the region have not been brought in as required. History is a spectator of the amount of neglect faced by the people of the region.

**Distribution of Villages According to the Availability of Different Amenities**  
No. (with percentage) of Villages having one or more of the following amenities

Sub-divs road	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Darjeeling	120	274850	114 (95.13)	77 (61.14)	120 (100.00)	59 (48.42)	11 (8.12)	22 (17.53)	48 (36.90)	83 (72.24)
Kalimpong	96	148337	64 (66.55)	20 (21.60)	95 (98.45)	23 (24.06)	11 (15.04)	16 (15.38)	30 (32.31)	22 (22.11)
Kurseong	68	99288	53 (86.84)	31 (52.87)	68 (100.00)	35 (67.38)	8 (18.02)	14 (45.29)	34 (59.17)	35 (67.39)
Siliguri	336	381384	225 (66.72)	46 (13.88)	328 (97.53)	30 (9.00)	35 (20.66)	88 (26.40)	86 (25.44)	73 (22.10)
Total	620	903859	456 (73.55)	174 (28.06)	611 (98.55)	147 (23.71)	65 (10.48)	140 (22.58)	198 (31.94)	213 (34.35)

Source: Computed from the Census of India (1991), DCH, West Bengal, Darjeeling District.

1 No. of Inhabited Villages, 2 Population (rural), 3 Education, 4 Medical, 5 Drinking Water, 6 Post & Telegraph, 7 Market/Hat, 8 Communications, 9 Approach by Pucca Road, 10 Power Supply

The deep-rooted poverty and ignorance have become chronic over the period of time. Besides, the people are living in a very underdeveloped infrastructure. As one may do in many parts of the country, the economic structure cannot be analyzed in the Queen of the Hills merely by observing the towns and roadside developments. A house-to-house survey in the rural villages will reveal the real picture as to how people are struggling for their livelihood. That the infrastructure is unsatisfactory is evident on seeing the poor of remote villages still trudging a daylong walk for shopping in the towns. It means many villages are without proper transport and communication facilities. The rural folks have to walk day long to sell their produce in the nearest town. The situation becomes worse during the rainy season when frequent large-scale landslides and other forms of mass wasting take place in the hills. During this period a large number of villagers lose their lives. Safe drinking water, educational institutions, primary health centre, power supply etc. face similar fate in the rural hills.

**Darjeeling District: Households (%) having different Amenities**

	Households	Electricity	Safe water	dr. Toilet	All of the three	Non of the three
<b>Total</b>	239135	32.95	37	39.21	11.06	38.4
<b>Rural</b>	<b>170655</b>	<b>17.57</b>	<b>36.1</b>	<b>27.23</b>	<b>6.25</b>	<b>48.99</b>
<b>Urban</b>	68480	71.24	39.22	69.03	23.03	12.05

## Darjeeling District: Households occupying house type

	Permanent	Semi-Permanent	Temporary		Not serviceable
				Serviceable	
<b>Total</b>	26.43	42.74	30.83	8.91	21.92
<b>Rural</b>	<b>17.21</b>	<b>45.04</b>	<b>37.75</b>	<b>11.18</b>	<b>26.57</b>
<b>Urban</b>	49.41	36.99	13.6	3.24	10.35

Source: Census of India (1991), West Bengal State, District Profile.

Moreover, rural Darjeeling in the last few decades has been witnessing a notable male selective migration for better opportunities. The migration is mainly taking place towards the urban environment of the district and to the major cities of the country like Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, and Mumbai, to name the important few. Population pressure; degradation of the Common Property Resources, forests; long neglect of the region, backwardness of the economy and society, low agricultural productivity, lack of opportunity etc. have played prominent role in this regard. Though this has been bringing home money, needed hands are diminished from home and native villages at the same time. As a result, agricultural production has seriously disrupted and has ultimately started declining. The drains of the labour force has caused damage to the subsistence economy on the one hand while on the other they are discouraging efforts to wards self reliance in the villages. Also, although, the money earned is sent to the villages to buy provisions, on account of the ecological constraints, inadequate manpower, and low technology traditional agriculture does not provide the local hill folks with adequate income to meet their basic necessities. Thus, the money is again floated back to the plains to buy provisions transported from the plains. This vicious cycle keeps the rural people of Darjeeling Himalaya with very little savings.

## POLITY

The queen of hills witnessed a long lasting agitation of more than a half-century for the separate state of "Gorkhaland" outside the state of West Bengal and within India.

The historic movement that shook the state of West Bengal in the early eighties stood for the formation of separate political administrative unit outside West Bengal and within Indian Union. The movement headed by Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), formed in July 1980, turned into a mass movement of the Nepali Speaking people in the three-hill subdivision of the district. The primary demand of the agitation were -

- A separate state of Gorkhaland outside the administrative control of West Bengal;
- Abrogation of clause VII of Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950;
- Recognition and inclusion of Nepali language in the eighth schedule of the constitution in India;
- Employment and economic development of the local people and the region respectively.

Subash Ghising, an ex -army personal, poet and a novelist led GNLf. However, the autonomy claim was the central theme of Darjeeling politics long before independence. Repeated demand was raised in 1907, 1917, 1920 and 1934 by different local political groups. Demand for a separate statehood of Darjeeling including the adjoining dooars areas of Jalpaiguri (where over 50% were Nepali inhabitants) was raised by GNLf in the true sense during 1980-85 periods. The issue was promoted in 1980 by invoking article 3 (a) of the constitution of India for the first time.

Demand for abrogation for Article 7 of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950 and the question of citizenship of the Indian Nepalis were the later developments. Since Article 7 allows the Nepalis of Nepal to cross over to India, reside and own property and also participate in trade and commerce, the GNLf alleged that the clause had jeopardize the position of Indian Nepalis, for they would be confused with the Nepalese of Nepal and face eviction. To stress the distinction between the Indian Nepalis and Nepalese Nepalis the term "Gorkha "and "Gorkha Bhasha" were increasingly being used in place of Nepali and Nepali and Nepali language, respectively.

It was also thought that people living in the district of Darjeeling were ethnically, culturally, linguistically, socially and historically distinct from West Bengal. Therefore, there was also an increasing demand for constitutional recognition of the Nepali language, more importantly since 1972 in order to maintain ethnic and linguistic identity of the hill people. Although, Morarji Desai openly discarded the demand and leveled it as a foreign language it was during Rajiv Gandhi by a gazette notification, the centre recognised the "Gorkhas" as Indian citizens. Later in the early 1990s Nepali language was included in the eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, though it was not recognised as the Gorkhali Bhasha.

Besides, growing unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, educational facilities, medical care, increasing deforestation, lack of opportunities and most importantly the step motherly treatment by the Bengal Government towards the hill people were among the major causes which added an impetus to the Gorkhaland Movement.

The period between 1986 and 1988 saw a series of violence and counter violence in the hills of Darjeeling, parts of Terai and Dooars of Jalpaiguri

district. The Centre in return reacted with the counter violence unleashed by CRPF, BSF and state Armed Police. Since GNLF was a political wing, it maintained an armed wing, namely, Gorkha Volunteer Corps (GVC). However, the GVC maintained a distinct identity within the GNLF. The GNLF cadres began to arm themselves by the end of 1986. It was only in Kalimpong unit of GVC where there was no reconciliation. There was a large scale clashes between GNLF and GVC in Kalimpong as a consequence. It was in 1988; ex-army personnel named Chhatre Subba emerged as the leader of GVC and the president of Gorkha Liberation Organisation (GLO), from Kalimpong itself. The ego clash between the GNLF and GVC followers led to clashes with frequent intra kidnapping and intra raiding of each other's strongholds by the two rival groups. A large numbers of men were killed and beheaded while hundreds were tortured in the clashes between them. There were also intra GNLF clashes mainly due to Subash Ghishing's high handedness. Mutual mistrust and enmity was also there between the nationalist and the Marxist turned nationalist Nepalis. By the end of 1987 more than 500 houses of the Marxist Nepalis were set on fire and more than 65 Marxists were killed. It is argued that these fratricidal clashes could have been avoided had the GNLF been an organization fighting for ethnic and linguistic identity.

The agitation was brought down to standstill by the mid 1988 and on the 22nd of August 1988 the GNLF supremo Mr. Ghishing signed a political document in the presence of the then Union Home Minister Mr. Buta Singh and the Chief Minister of West Bengal Mr. Jyoti Basu, promising not to proceed with the agitation for Gorkhaland henceforth. In return Darjeeling hills was granted with an autonomous Council i.e. Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) consisting of the three hill sub-divisions to look after the interest of the hill people. It was given independent financial power to use the development of these areas by the central government with the concurrence of the state government. A majority of the local folks were not happy with the decision and put forward their voices against but their voices were silenced by the iron hands. It was thought DGHC was just the replacement of the erstwhile Jilla Parishad (local body at the district level).

The decade of 90s saw radical changes on the political scenario of Darjeeling. The DGHC consisted of councilors elected by the people of Darjeeling. This body was granted autonomy to function as an independent body. However, with the passage of time, over-confidence set in among the councilors of Darjeeling. Easy win in Elections ensured the councilors' lethargy to work. Moreover, almost all the councilors were illiterate or uneducated. There was frequent funds mismanagement. Close observers assert that Ghishing was repeatedly failing to deliver the needful.

Thus, not only the movement lost fire, the functioning of DGHC became sloth. Development of the area took a back seat. The economic conditions of the local folk became worse from bad over the period of time. Funds earmarked for

development projects were diverted to pay for overheads. Over the years, the situation gained momentum. It is alleged, in spite of the formation of DGHC, Darjeeling is still a neglected region. Development work has failed to yield desired results. Earlier in 2001 Subhash Ghising's car was ambushed on the way from Siliguri to Darjeeling. The general mass of the area says it was nothing but the outburst of the long and widespread discontentment of the hill people against the monopoly of GNLG under Ghising. However, Subba's hand is suspected in the blast. This has led to a renewed spate of unrest in the region. Repeated bandhs has become a regular feature and its effects have begun to reflect on the economy. Suffice here is to say, Darjeeling Himalaya as of today is a living confusion. It is up to the local people to decide where they take the "Queen of the Hills".

## **CONCLUSION:**

Darjeeling Himalaya is one of the least economically developed regions in India. Its backwardness can be attributed to environmental/physical constraints like rugged topography, harsh climate, varying altitude with steep slopes, unfavourable valleys; ethnic clashes; and political instability which makes the life painstaking and hazardous. These parameters have a bearing on the social, economic, political and environmental health of the hill folk that are often ventilated through frustration seeking linguistic and political autonomy. Besides, unprecedented demographic threats coupled with a host of other factors have inflicted incalculable damages on the Himalaya. Various development programmes and agencies of development operating in the region lack seriousness and comprehensiveness in approach and hence do not work to the expectations. The agencies like SFDA, IRDP, CADP, Panchayat and other schemes of the government have had negligible impact on the Himalayan villages.

It, therefore, seems that there is an urgent need to work out a comprehensive regional planning strategy capable of addressing social, economic, political, demographic and environmental issues and concerns in this fragile, strategic, backward, and unstable region in order to bring in sustainable regional development, employment potential, regional income and general improvement in the quality of human life.

Besides, while formulating any sustainable development strategy the following points should not be overlooked:

- Publicity and information to educate all citizens about the environment destruction and protection.
- Checking of unplanned and illegal deforestation.
- Implementation of scientific methods for cattle rearing, stop the grazing in forests.
- Checking the population overgrowth.

- Removal of poverty - giving special attention to the people at the bottom dependent on forest for their livelihood.
- Expand the activities of local people involved in environment protection and restoration.

*\*The author acknowledges the expert comments made by Dr. Shrawan Acharya and his constant encouragement to write this paper.*

*\*\*The author is a postgraduate student of Urban and Regional Planning, School of Planning, CEPT, Ahmedabad - 9. He completed his M.A in geography from JNU, New Delhi in 2001.*

## References:

1. Banerjee, S., 2001: "Darjeeling in Doldrums Again", WWW.Bengalathenet.com
2. Bhujel, R.B., 1993: "Darjeeling Hills: Its Environmental Status", Paper Unpublished.
3. Bhutia, Y. 1991: "Natural Environment and Changing Socio-economic setup in Darjeeling Himalaya", M.Phil dissertation (unpublished) submitted to CSRD, JNU.
4. Biswas, S., 1987: "Rural Development in the Hill Areas: A study of two villages in Kalimpong", Occasional Paper-3, Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University, Darjeeling.
5. Census of India, 1991: "District Census Hand Book", West Bengal, Darjeeling District.
6. Chakraborty, P.K., 1988: "Ecology and Environmental Planning in the Darjeeling Himalaya", in Chadha, S.K. edited Himalayas: Ecology and Environment, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, Pp.137 - 149.
7. Chakraborty, P.K., 1989: "Darjeeling Himalaya: A Study in Environmental Degradation", in Chadha, S.K. edited Ecological Hazards in the Himalayas, Painter Publisher, Jaipur, Pp. 133 - 143.
8. Geography and You, 2002: "Seeking Solutions for our Barren Slopes" Vol. 2, No. 1, Pp. 4 -13.
9. Joshi, S.C., 1984: "Rural Development in the Himalaya - Problems and Prospects", Gyanodaya Prakashan, Nainital.
10. Khawas, V., 2001: "Untold Story of Gorkhaland Agitation", Paper Unpublished.
11. O'malley, L.S.S., 1907: "Darjeeling District Gazetteers, Calcutta.
12. Rao, K.S. & Saxena, K. G., 1994: "Sustainable Development and Rehabilitation of the Degraded Village Lands in Himalaya", Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal Singh, Dehra Dun.
13. Roy, B., 1968: "Darjeeling District Census Handbook 1961", Calcutta.
14. Singh, T.V. & Kaur, J. (Eds.), 1985: "Integrated Mountain Development", Himalayan Books, New Delhi.