

CHAPTER V

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS AND THEIR DISTRIBUTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic functions play important role, for eradication of rural poverty and all round development of an area. These functions not only help in checking the rural people to go to urban areas for getting and fulfilling their daily needs but also directly helps in the developmental process. Socio-economic functions are generally concentrated in large and populated villages to fulfill the demand of the people and to serve the neighbouring areas of the villages. These functions are tools for improving the economic as well as social status of the inhabitants and indirectly compete with the nearby towns. High standard and number of socio-economic functions in a village reduces the functional gap between urban and rural areas. As a result, the crowding for such facilities in the urban area can be minimized. Socio-economic functions like educational institutions, health services, communications, transports, markets, banks and co-operatives, drinking water and power supply etc. help to raise the economic and social standard of the inhabitants of the region. The size of population and the economic conditions of the inhabitants primarily control the concentration of socio-economic amenities in a village. In the study area, the socio-economic amenities are less and unevenly distributed due to various physical, climatic and economic factors.

5.1. EDUCATION

Education is universally accepted and it is a major instrument towards achieving the goal. To meet the aspiration of the people and to achieve the goal, education to the people is very important. Among the functions, primary educational institutes play most important role in spreading education in the rural areas, because they are the prime institutions to teach and to give proper training to the children for

increasing literacy rate. In the study area, many new schools have opened may be because of need and government subsidy. To bring more and more children to the schools, government is giving free textbooks and mid day meals. According to table 5.1, the percentage of villages having primary schools (> 4) has increased. The total number of primary schools in the Balason basin also increased from 113 in 1981 to 120 in 1991 to 171 in 2001. This increase includes both government and private schools. Recently there is a trend of opening private English medium schools in the tea gardens since Government schools prefer to teach through mother tongue.

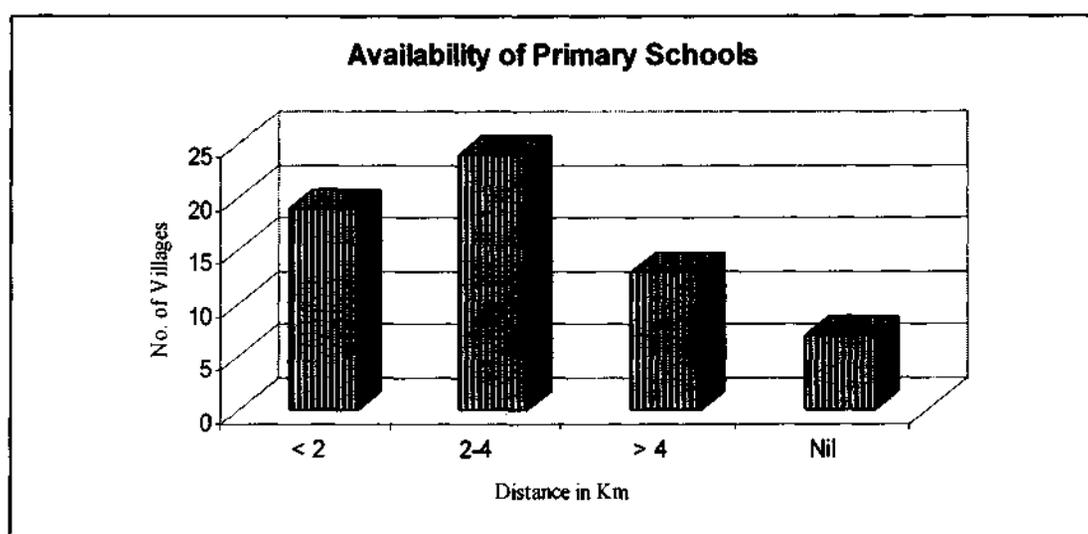


Fig.5.1

Table: 5.1 Distribution of educational institutions.

Educational institutions	Number of Edu. Inst.	Number of Villages		
		1981	1991	2001
Primary School	< 2	20	18	19
	2 - 4	24	28	24
	> 4	5	5	13
	Nil	14	12	7
Middle School	< 2	10	9	18
	> 2		1	6
Secondary	< 2	8	6	7
	> 2	0	1	4
Senior Secondary		5	2	4
College		0	0	2
Others		0	3	11

Source: Census of India, 1981, 1991, 2001.

All the khasmahals in the study area, has the highest number of primary schools where the demand for education is high for high population and the literacy rate is also high. There are DGHC run primary and senior high schools in the tea gardens and villages in the study area. Such schools provide employment to the local educated people.

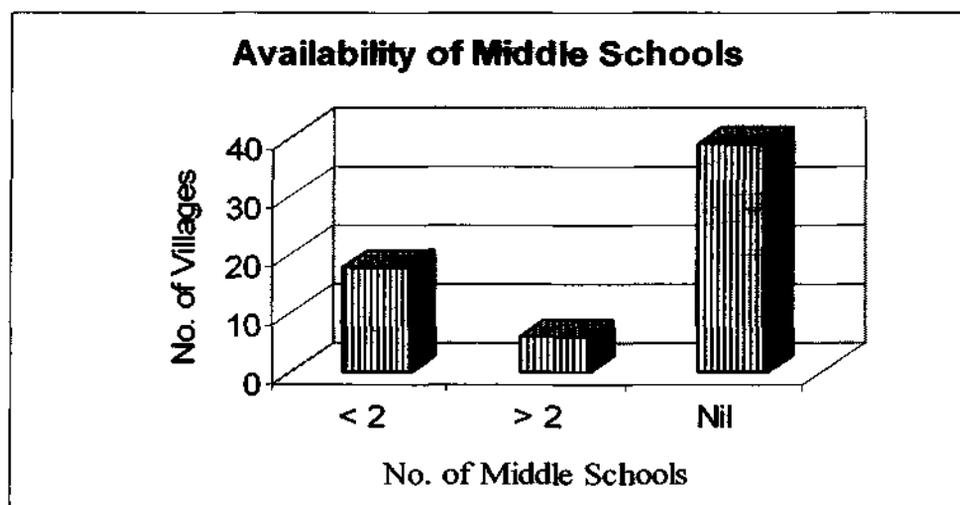


Fig. 5.2

Middle schools, secondary schools and senior secondary schools are very few in the study area and are most unevenly distributed. Compared to 171 primary schools in 2001, there are only 33 middle schools, 17 secondary schools and 4 senior secondary schools. Number of villages having other schools has increased due to consciousness among the aged people. There are two colleges in Sonada khasmahal, which are Silecean College and training college (ITI). More technical, vocational and management colleges should be opened, which in turn can help the tea industry by providing skilled manpower from the locality.

5.2. HEALTH SERVICES

Health is a vast subject having various dimensions. WHO (1971) defined health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Health

furthermore can be thought to be a dynamic equilibrium, which is determined by a wide variety of biological, socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental factors. The details of various health services available in the study area are given in table 5.2.

Table: 5.2 Distribution of different medical facilities.

Health services	Distance in km.	No. of Villages		
		1981	1991	2001
Hospital	< 5	11	1	9
	5 - 10	0	0	8
	> 10			46
Dispensary		20	29	37
M.C.W.	< 5	1	1	16
	5 - 10			5
	> 10			42
C.W.C.		1	1	10
H.C.		3	6	3
P.H.C.	< 5	1	1	13
	5 - 10			16
	> 10			34
P.H.S.		4	2	30
Others		4	2	5

Source: Census of Indis, 1981, 1991, 2001.

MCW: Maternity and child welfare center; CWC: Child welfare center; HC: Health Center; PHC: Primary health center; PHS: Primary health sub center.

Health is the positive state of well being of an individual. It involves not only the medical factors but also social and economic factors. In the study area, 2 villages have hospitals, 37 villages have dispensaries, 11 villages have MCWs, 10 villages have CWCs, 3 villages have HCs, 6 villages have PHCs, 30 villages have PHSs, and 5 villages have other medical facilities. The pattern of distribution of all these health service institutions is very uneven. Out of 63 villages in the study area, hospitals are situated within a distance of 5 kms from 7 villages, 5 - 10 km from 8 villages and more than 10 kms from 46 villages. Similarly, to avail the medical facilities provided by MCWs, 6807 people has to travel a distance of 5 kms, 8147 people travel 5 - 10 kms and 120661 people travel more than 10 kms. Tea gardens like Maharani, Edenvale, Kalej Valley and Ringtong has no medical facilities. Jamadar Bhita Khasmahal also has no medical institutions

and the nearest hospital is situated at a distance of more than 10 kms. Majority of the people depend upon dispensaries and primary health sub-centers for medical services.

Table: 5.3 Availability of different medical facilities.

Medical Institutions	No. of villages	No. of medical institutions	Ratio of population served	Ratio to total population
Hospital	2	2	1:34	1:67808
Dispensary	37	47	1:2003	1:2885
M.C.W.	9	18	1:1166	1:7534
C.W.C.	10	26	1:1050	1:5216
H.C.	13	3	1:886	1:45205
P.H.C.	6	6	1:4133	1:22603
P.H.S.	30	31	1:2360	1:4375
Others	6	7	1:3565	1:19374

Source: Census of India, 2001.

Supporting medical staff like Registered Medical Practitioners (RMP), Subsidized Medical Practitioners (SMP) and Community Health Workers (CHW) are found in a few villages. Out of 63 villages, 10 villages have 11 RMPs, 5 villages have 6 SMPs, and 12 villages have 36 CHWs. The clubs in the villages give space to the Government and NGO organizations to conduct medical awareness programmes on HIV-AIDS, Polio vaccination, TB etc. Workers of WHO and UNICEF, also visit the different villages and tea gardens if people show interest and are conscious about public health and hygiene. Tea gardens like Bukim, Singbulli etc. have their own ambulances. Others use hired taxis when needed. Thus, the total medical facilities are in a deplorable condition in the study area. Facilities are concentrated in certain villages and large part of the basin is neglected from the primary medical services which is very important not only to control birth and death rates, but to make people aware of diseases like AIDS and TB. There is a slight improvement from 1991, when there were 25 villages without any medical facilities. Now the number went down to 10 villages, where medical services are day's dream. So, though health services have improved in the last three decades but still the facilities provided are inadequate and insufficient to the demand. Many of the tea gardens are still deprived of any medical facility. A few tea gardens have their own

arrangements but that too is poorly maintained. People suffer a lot from ill health due to lack of health services. For health related problems, people has to rush to the nearest urban centers like Kurseong, Mirik, Darjeeling and even Siliguri for treatment. This is not only expensive but also impossible because of non-availability of ambulance services in the area. People are also very poor and are unable to bare the high cost of transport and medical facilities provided. Inaccessibility of the tea gardens from the major medical centers is also an important factor that hindered people to avail such facilities

5.3. COMMUNICATIONS

In this age of internet and mobile phones, amenities like post telegraph and tele phone services still play an important role in the economic development of an area. Especially a rural area can develop at a faster rate if its communication network is good. People communicate with each other to carry out any progressive work. To make any plan successful, communication gets the first and foremost importance.

Table: 5.4 Number of villages having different types of communications.

Type of Communications	No. of villages
Post Office	26
Post & Telegraph Office	3
Tele Phone	48
Not Available	14

Source: Census of India, 2001.

According to Table 5.4, Post & Telegraph office is found only in the 3 villages (Punkhabari, Sonada Khasmahal and Sukhiapokhri). All these 3 villages are not only highly populated but are also well connected by roads. The number of villages having phone connections and Post Offices has increased in the last three decades. Sonada Khasmahal, which is located on the Hill Cart Road having large population, has the largest number of phone connections (500) in 2001. Out of 37 villages, where there is no Post Office, can avail such facility within a distance of 5 kms in case of 23 villages and at a distance of more than 5 kms in case of 14 villages (Fig. 5.3). Similarly, out of 15

villages, where phone connection is not available, can enjoy the same facility within a distance of 5 kms in case of 7 villages and at a distance of more than 5 kms in case of 8 villages. Still there are 14 villages, which are cut off from the rest of the area due to the absence of any form of communication services.

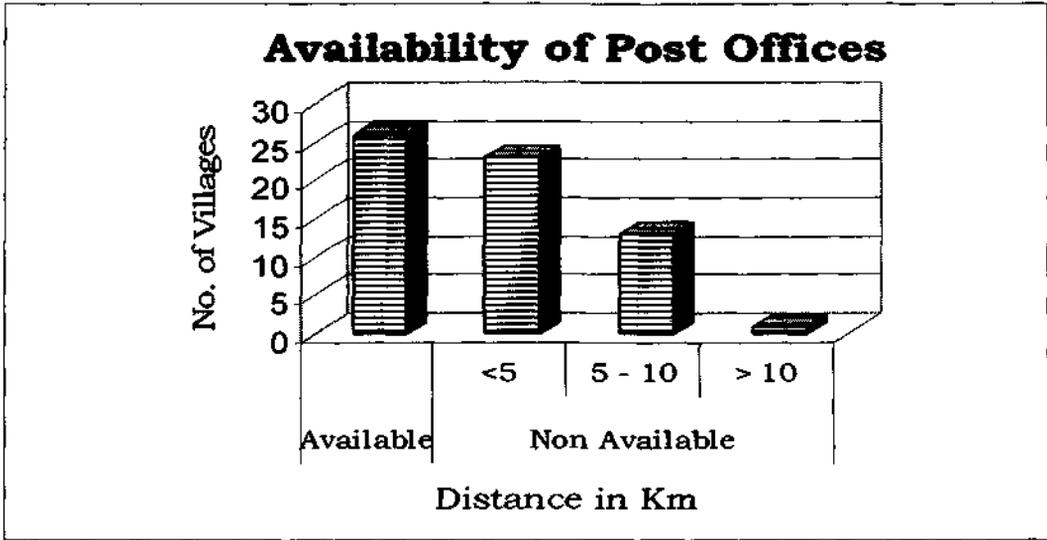


Fig. 5.3

In the tea gardens, only the managerial staffs have phone connections and that too mobile. According to 2001 Census, only landline phones are counted so many tea gardens are without any phone connection, which is not the reality. During field survey it has been found that few of the tea garden labourers also have mobile connection. Mobile phones are available everywhere in the study area.

5.4. TRANSPORT

Transport system generally serves two purposes namely accessibility and mobility. An effective transport system is indispensable for the effective utilization of resources and mobility of people and goods. It not only helps in the supply and distribution system of commodities but also collects the local production to the outside markets. Transport helps to improve the level of livelihood and economic condition of the producers. Good transport network not only develops a region but also increases connectivity with outside.

The Himalaya Railway, which is declared as a world heritage, passes through many of the tea gardens in the study area along its eastern edge parallel to the Hill Cart Road. It is a meter gauge railway and is unprofitable to the Government because of lack of passengers and high cost of maintenance. But the tourists enjoy the slow ride through the hills and forests, to enjoy the scenic beauty of the Darjeeling hills. In the study area Tung, Sonada and Ghoom Railway Stations are located.

Other than the railways, roads are very important for the vehicles to ply. Unless and until there are proper roads, neither people nor vehicle can move. In the study area, there are three types of roads, namely metalled roads (Pucca roads), Un-metalled roads (Kuccha road) and footpaths. In the mountainous and hilly areas people make their own shortcut roads by walking continuously along the same path, up and down the hill slopes. Such man made paths are called footpaths. These roads are either steep or in the form of steps but makes the journey by foot, short and time saving. People in the tea gardens also use such roads to carry their day-to day necessities.

Metalled roads surround the study area like to horseshoe. Along the western side of the basin runs the SH 12A, this runs from Siliguri to Mirik. Then it runs via Pashupati to Sukhiapokhri. Along the eastern side the NH 55 (Hill Cart Road) connects Siliguri to Kurseong, Sonada, Jorebunglow and Darjeeling. Two more metalled roads are i) The Old Military Road or Pankhabari Road and ii) newly built Rohini Road. All these roads connect Siliguri and Darjeeling via Kurseong. Unmetalled roads inside the tea gardens are constructed and maintained by Panchayat, DGHC and tea garden authorities. Metalled roads are under PWD. Roads are very poorly maintained in the tea gardens. Out of 19 un-metalled roads of 1981, 12 roads were converted to metalled. Most of the tea gardens have un-metalled roads.

The people in the tea gardens are mainly dependent on local transportation system like jeeps. Out of 63 villages, 27 villages have bus services. Rest of the villages are connected by roads but vans, trucks, jeeps, cars can only ply through such roads. All the tea gardens

have jeep services from their gardens to the nearest market centers. Such services start from 7 to 9 a.m. in the morning from the tea gardens and 1 to 3 p.m. in the afternoon from the market centers to the tea gardens. People usually avail such transport facilities on Sundays when the tea gardens are closed.

5.5. BANKING FACILITY

Financial institutions play a major role in the development and the standard of life of the people of an area. Such institutions not only sanctions loan to the cultivators and others but also encourages savings habit among the people. The study area has 6 banks which includes 2 commercial banks and 4 co-operative banks. The commercial banks are situated in Mangarjung T.G & Pokhribong khasmahal. Out of rest 61 villages, 17 villages have commercial bank within a distance of 5 km, 27 villages have within a distance of 5 to 10 km and 17 villages have at a distance of more than 10 kms. The 4 villages where co-operative banks are situated are Sukhiapokhri, Chamu T.G, Samrik T.G and Molatey T.G. Other than these, 7 villages have agricultural credit societies, 3 villages have other form of credit societies. People have to travel 5-10 kms to avail these facilities. Since Post Offices have certain banking facilities, people try to use that when in need. People in the tea gardens are mostly economically poor in income and hardly have any money left to save. For them the loan facility is the main attraction. But khasmahals are highly populated and people does lot of monetary transactions in such places. So in khasmahals such facility is a must. However, in the study area, few khasmahals enjoy banking facilities. Gramin banks are situated in Pokhribong, Sukhiapokhri, Saurini Basti, Sonada from where people are given loans for fishery, dairy farming, poultry, piggery etc. Few nationalized banks are situated in Kurseong and Mirik and for any financial need people have to go to the nearest town.

5.6. INDUSTRY

Tea industry is the only major industry in the study area. Almost all the tea gardens have factories. This industry is the major source of employment in the study area.

5.7. ELECTRICITY

Power is one of the most important infrastructural elements for economic development. The availability of power reduces pressure on forests, which provide fuel to the rural areas. The amount of electricity consumed by an area indicates the pattern and intensity of development. Electricity plays a very important role in this age of electronics and electrical gadgets.

Table: 5.5 No. of villages having different types of power supply.

Types of power supply	No. of villages
Domestic	28
Domestic & Commercial	27
Nil	8
Total	63

Source: *Census of India, 2001.*

Hydro electricity is the main source of power in the study area supplied by WBSEB. According to 2001 Census, 44.44% of villagers use electricity for domestic purposes only. Other users of electricity are tea industries. In the study area, 42.86% of the villages use electricity for industrial purposes. But electricity is not used in the agricultural sector. Due to hilly terrain, agricultural machineries cannot be used, but it can be used in irrigation and storage etc. Electric pumps are used for irrigation. Irrigation system (channelisation) mainly runs depending on gravitational force. Tanks and reservoirs are situated at higher elevations and water flows down due to gravitational force. Rural electrification is a sign of rural development. Number of villages using electricity both for domestic as well as industrial purposes has increased from 11 in 1991 to 27 in 2001. This definitely is a positive indication of rural development. But all the houses of the villages do not enjoy the facility. Still there are 8 villages in the study area, which

are not connected by electricity. Though electricity has reached in the villages, but remote part of the villages are still out of reach to avail this facility. Important facility like streetlights are not found anywhere in the study area. Only tea factories have some lighting arrangements as a safety measure. Tea gardens like Sungma, Chamu, Nagri Farm, Bukim and Dooteria have their own hydel power generating units. All tea gardens have generators of 100 to 150 KV power supply capacity to run the entire factory during power failure. The surplus power produced by the generators is transmitted to the manager's bungalow and near by labour lines.

5.8. DRINKING WATER

Supply of potable drinking water to the inhabitants, is one of the most important determinants of level of development of an area. Drinking water, in the study area, is available in all the villages mostly from taps or springs. Out of 63 villages, 53 villages have tap water connection and people of 60 villages collect water from springs but 38 villages have access to both tap and spring water. The most remarkable change, which took place, is the availability of water in the dry summer months. All the villages in the study area have supply of drinking water in summer either from taps and springs. Since water is supplied mostly through plastic pipes, it frequently gets damaged and there is every possibility of water getting contaminated. So people have to be more careful when they fetch drinking water.

Table: 5.6 Number of villages having different sources of drinking water.

Sources	No. of villages
Tap	15
Spring	9
Tap & Spring	38
River	1
Total	63

Source: Census of India, 2001.

With the development in the field of socio economic amenities, the number of residents owning private tap is increasing. Occasionally

there is a shortage of water supply, which affects the level of livelihood pattern of both, urban and rural areas, so few people arrange for their own water supply. Even from a long distance through pipelines. They are not dependent on Government supply. But the majority of people have to depend on Government for supply of safe drinking water. In tea gardens like New Fallodi, Singbulli and Phuguri there is severe crisis of water from January to April. People has to fetch water from dharas (seepage areas), which are kilometers away. DGHC plays an important role in supplying water via pipelines. Water tankers also carry water to the villages.

5.9. RECREATIONAL FACILITY

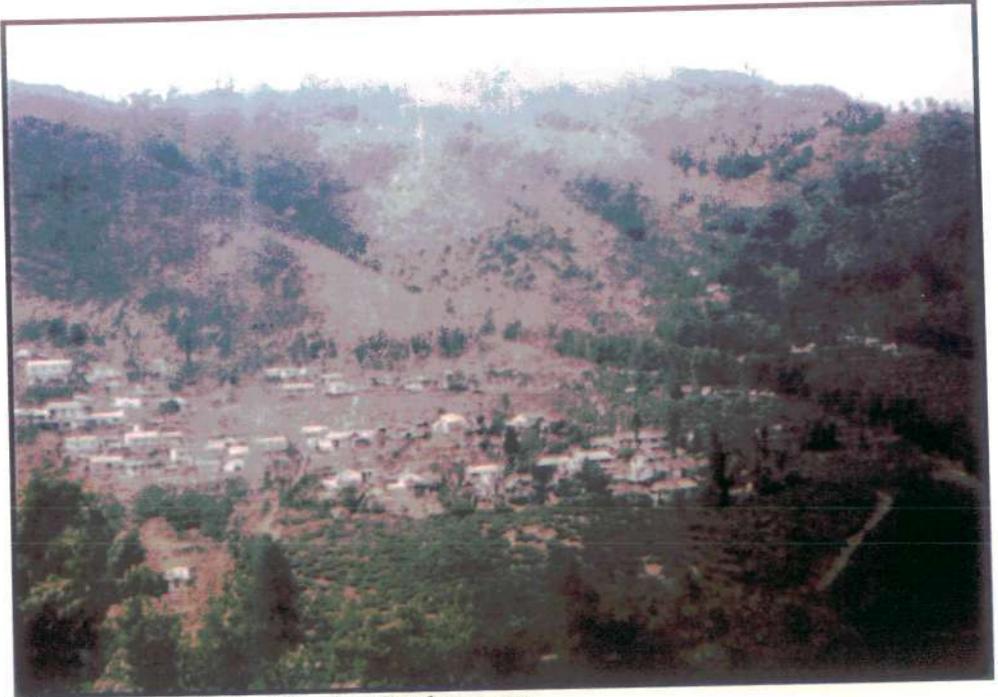
Recreation is important in every ones life. After a day long, hard working schedule everyone needs some recreation to distress their body, mind and soul. If there is no recreation, people get over-stressed and the work-capability decreases. In the study area recreational facilities are very limited. Sports play an important role as a medium of recreation among the youths. This is evident from the fact that there are 21 sports club in 18 villages in the study area. There are very limited flat lands in the hills. So in spite of people's interest in sports, numbers of playgrounds are less. Football is a very favourite game played among the people of the area. Majdura Sporting Club of Sukhiapokhri organizes cricket and football matches. Ghoom Jorebunglow Sporting Club organizes cultural programmes, blood donation camps, *safai abhiyan*, and plantation programmes. They also felicitate the best students of the different board examinations. Other famous and active clubs of the study area are Pussimbong Sporting Club and Nagri Sporting Club. There are 2 video halls and one stadium. There are no cinema halls even in Kurseong and Mirik. Cable T.V connections are there in all the khasmahals and few of the tea gardens. Tea gardens people mostly prefer personal dish connections. Drinking locally made liquor is a great pass time. Local festivals are all celebrated with great enthusiasm in the study area.

5.9.1. Tourism

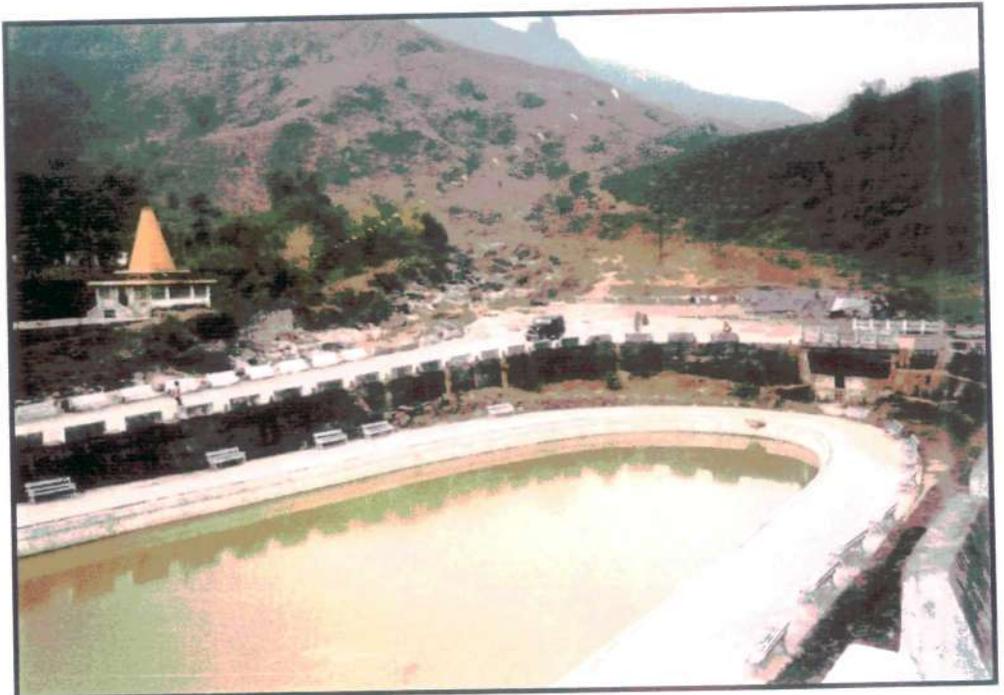
The word 'tourism' is derived from the word 'tour' meaning 'a journey in which one returns to the starting point'. Tourism may be defined as the sum of phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of tourists in a locality for a duration of at least 24 hours. Tourism is the product of leisure. Tourism is nothing but a form of recreation which involves traveling in the expectation of pleasure (Nandi et al., 1999).

Despite many natural constraints, the study area is a rich repository of tourism potentials. Mirik, in the study area, is one of the hill resorts, at an altitude of 1767m, with its own special charm. There is a 1.25 km long lake fed by perennial streams. The important places of interest in and around Mirik are the lake, Kawlay Dara, Deosi Dara, Rai-dhap, Tea Estates, orange orchards, cardamom groves and Devasthan. Dudhia, 30kms from Mirik, is a beautiful picnic spot. Trekking from Mirik to Saudkphu, Phalut has become very popular. Short trek from Mirik to Kurseong via Balason river and Namsu could be covered within one day only.

Kurseong, situated at an elevation of 1458m, is another hill station in the study area. Because of its lower elevation, Kurseong enjoys a milder and very healthy climate throughout the year. It is the peace, serenity and the healthy climate that attracts many tourists to this place. The tea gardens and forests attract tourists from all corners of the world. The places of tourist interests are Eagle's Crag, Dow Hill Deer Park, Dow Hill Forest museum, Giddapahar Mandir, Ambootia Shivmandir, Makaibari Tea Estate etc. Kurseong is also a town of schools. Many residential English medium Schools encourage the flow of guardians and students to and from Kurseong. Both Mirik and Kurseong are connected to Siliguri and Darjeeling via rail, road and airways. The nearest airport is in Bagdogra, about 2hrs from both Mirik and Kurseong. Both the centres have banks, post office, health services, police station, religious places, library, restaurants and hotels etc. needed to develop tourism. Recently tea gardens are planning to



Photograph 5.1 Tea Garden Settlements



Photograph 5.2 Tourist Spot

open up for tourism. Makaibari Tea Garden rents its guest house for tourists. Other tea gardens in Darjeeling also have arrangements for tourists' accomodation. But in the study area this concept is yet to develop.

CONCLUSION

Socio – economic conditions of the people of an area is the indicator of all round development of that area. These functions are the tools, which improve the economic as well as social status of the inhabitant, Education is one such tool which is still not used properly. Basic requirement like primary education, cannot be provided in many villages due to absence of institutions imparting such education. It is evident from the fact that middle, secondary and senior secondary schools are even less in number compared to the primary schools, in the study area. There is hardly any scope of spread of education because the people are much more interested in getting employment in the tea gardens than to get education. Women work as labourers in the tea gardens and children work in home. Similar to education, health services provided in the study area are a deplorable condition. Dispensaries are the only medical institutions which are there in many of the villages but in reality these are non functional due to either lack of doctor or medicines. MCWs are more in number than CWCs and both services are available in greater number of villages than before. Primary Health Centers also increased in number which is a positive sign, but these are also in very bad state as dispensaries. Medical practitioners are very less in number, compared to the requirement of the people. Few tea gardens have their own medical units but for the treatment of any major disease, people have to rush to the hospitals situated in the nearest towns, which is not only inconvenient but also expensive. Communication network is poorly developed, with 14 villages having no such facility. Transport network comprising of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways (a world heritage site) and NG55, passes along the eastern boundary of the study area. State Highway 12A joins

Siliguri and Jorebunglow via Mirik. The railways are running at a loss because of its low speed and high cost of coal required to run the engine. At the same time roads are also not maintained properly leading to potholes which not only reduces speed but also harms the vehicles. Roads in the tea gardens are mostly unmetalled and foot paths are quite common. Few of the tea gardens have bus services whereas rest depends on jeeps only. But all these services are inadequate. Financial institutions are very less in the study area, with few cooperative and gramin banks along with post offices serving the purpose. Hydro electricity is the main source of power in the study area with irregular supply. All tea gardens have their own generators to cope with such irregularities. Remote houses in the rural areas are still in darkness. Though drinking water has reached all the villages but there are complains regarding its insufficient supply. Taps and springs are the major sources of drinking water. Tourism spots are few in the study area with almost no development. Vast potential of tourism is not yet utilized fully. The population of the study area is mostly dependent upon tea gardens and remains very busy during the day. Their recreation involves, drinking, playing games like footfall and organizing cultural shows. Village clubs play important role in organizing blood donation camps, Pulse Polio projects and plantation programmes. So in general it can be concluded that socio-economic functions are poorly developed and proper planning is required for the development of the study area. This involves identification of the various problems prevalent in the study area, which is done in the next chapter.