

PREFACE

Environment is a complex term, which broadly refers to milieu but in geographical viewpoint environment consists of abiotic or physical elements such as land, water, air and biotic components like plants and animals. The man and his several functions, organization, institutions and various components that support the lifeform in an ecosystem are known as "Biosphere". In dynamic evolving earth system, both physical and biological processes govern natural environmental system in a particular place. Different types of physical, chemical and biological processes are involved regularly in creation, maintenance and destruction of surface materials of the earth's crust. These earth materials such as minerals, rocks, soils, water etc are constantly changing their properties, shifting from one place to another and even destroyed by geological cycle. While passing through the several alleyways, these materials remain initially uncontaminated and useful for men. Life of humans and constituents of the atmosphere, lithosphere and oceanic environment has been subject to alteration since the very beginning of emergence of life on the planet earth. Since the dawn of industrial revolution in 1860's man has emerged as the most powerful polluter in environmental process spearheaded by modern technologies capable of modifying the environment to a great extent. Man is indeed the most intelligent and powerful agent and is capable of not only affecting the environment but also able to alter the basic composition of the environment. Hence, increase in human population in the present century has put enormous pressure on earth resulting in accelerated rate of exploitation of natural resources. Therefore it is clear that environmental degradation refers to the deterioration of physical and social components brought in by the biological process headed by human activities. In the word of Singh (1991), environmental degradation simply means overall lowering of environmental qualities because of adverse changes brought about by human activities in the basic structure of the components of the environment to such an extent that these adverse changes

adversely affect all biological communities in general and human society in particular.

Human ecological relationship is a matter of study of the continuous evolutionary process of the universe, nature and earth; to evolve an ecological mind to build an ecological essence and to guide random human action. It visualizes the earth as 'sanctuary' and discovers our role as 'custodians'. It is an attempt to rethink the place of man and the place of environment knowledge in the universe. This relationship presents a comprehensive world-view based on a deep insight into the spiritual nature of our universe, which in other words is termed as ecological consciousness. This can be cultivated through education by the process of transmutation of human mode of thinking, perceiving and valuing. The ecological consciousness only can secure a healthy environment, peace on earth and spiritual bliss among the individual.

Prevailing myths about our relationship with mother earth are now obsolete and destructive. Already the four henchmen of ecological apocalypse loom in the distance namely toxic waste, the greenhouse effect, the depletion of the ozone layer and mass extinction of biological species, including indigenous tribes considered primitive and uncivilized. We are careening to a path, which leads to extinction. Carelessly and ruthlessly, human beings have assaulted the environment and pillaged earth. They have become the greatest threat to global life-support systems because of their greed, shortsightedness or simple stupidity. The views of Roma (2002) in this context is acceptable as culture is defined in a number of ways, one school of thought says, 'Culture includes all the major social components that bind men together in a society'. According to Tylor, 'Culture is a complex mixture of knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and other capabilities acquired by men as a member of society.

The former prime minister of India Mrs. Gandhi pioneered in declaring poverty as the greatest polluter and its banishment through national and international debate and discussion. She stressed that unless poverty is addressed it will be a futile exercise to discuss about protecting the planet earth from environmental disaster.

Due to overuse and abuse the life-support system of the planet earth is gradually endangered. The change in environment is attributed to supremacy and monopoly of human interference over nature. The deteriorating state of global environment and increasing human encroachment on resources have broken the sustainability of earth's life-support base. In 1972, Smith called degraded environments as "endangered environments". The degradation places the environments in endangered category by posing threat to biosphere as a whole. As mentioned by Husain, (1996) the sick ecosystem is in danger for survival of men, plants, and animals.

In 1999, the Chief Minister of Sikkim while receiving the Greenest Chief Minister of India award stated, "Even in Sikkim today we face growing problem, which do not really require any sensitive measuring instruments to see. Our Zemu glacier has depleted in size by more than 3-4 Kms. The water in Tista is flowing at an all time low. We have had the warmest winter in living memory, these all are the indications of things going wrong". The total rainfall between October 1998 and March 1999 was 93.94 percent less than the rainfall in the last 25 years. It is estimated that 60 percent of the state cardamom plantations were lost in this (Lama, 2001) unprecedented dry spell. There are examples of saying no to tourism due to supremacy of negative impact over positive impacts; worst case is underlined as a prayer for tourists. In such case, timely planning and intervention may avoid following situation.

According to the London Times the Greek Orthodox Church issued a new prayer asking the Lord to protect the Greek people from tourists. The prayer, which to be said by monk and nuns every morning goes like this:

"Lord Jesus Christ, son of god, have mercy on the cities, the islands, the villages of our orthodox fatherland, as well as the holy monasteries, which are scourged by the worldly touristic wave. "Grace us with a solution to this dramatic problem and protect our brethren who are sorely tied by the modernistic spirit of these contemporary western invaders."

If the monks and nuns are beseeching the Lord with anti tourist prayers, it is fair that the tourists are given equal chance. They may recite the following prayer in the morning and at night: "Heavenly father, look down on us, your

humble obedient tourist servants, who are doomed to travel this earth, taking photographs, mailing postcards, buying souvenir, and walking about in drip-dry underwear. "We beseech you. O, Lord, to see that our plane is not hijacked, our luggage is not lost, and our overweight baggage for unnoticed.

"Protect us from surely and unscrupulous taxi drivers, avaricious porters, and unlicensed English-speaking guides. "Give us this day divine guidance in the selection of our rooms made up, and water running from the faucets.

"We pray that the telephones work and that the operators speak our tongue and that there is no mail waiting from our children who would force us to cancel the rest of our trip.

"Leads us, dear Lord, to good, inexpensive restaurants where the food is superb, the waiters friendly, and the wine included in the price of the meal.

"Give us the wisdom to tip correctly in currencies we do not understand. Forgive us for undertipping out of ignorance and overtipping out of fear. Make the native love us for what we are and not for what we can contribute to their worldly goods.

"Grant us the strength to visit the museums, the cathedrals, the palaces, and the castles listed as 'musts' in the guidebooks. And if perchance we skip a historic monument to take a nap after lunch, have mercy on us, for our flesh is weak."

(This part of the prayer is for husbands.)

"Dear God, keep our wives from shopping sprees and protect them from 'bargains' they do not need or cannot afford. Lead them not into temptation, for they know not what they do."

Save them for making fools of themselves in cafes and nightclubs, above all, please do not forgive them their trespasses, for they know exactly what they do.

"(Together) And when our voyage is over and we return to our loved ones, grant us the favour of finding someone who will look at our homes movies and listen to our stories, so our lives as tourists will not have been in vain.

"This we ask you in the name of Conrad Hilton, Thomas Cook, and the American Express (Pranseth, 1997) Amen"

Keeping in mind the rapid growth of tourism followed by urbanization and developmental activities, serious threat to environment is being felt hence similar study area has been selected for the present study. Sikkim has ample potentials for eco-tourism development with its rich nature, culture and adventure.

In chapter first, geographical and historical background is of the study area being briefed followed by population dynamics and socioeconomic characteristics in second chapter. The third chapter details out the major tourist destinations in Sikkim. In chapter four various agents involved in environmental degradation has been discussed followed by impact analysis of tourism on society, culture, economy and environment in fifth chapter. Based on all discussion, an attempt has been made in chapter six to outline eco-tourism prospects for the state of Sikkim. Finally, recommendation and summary has been drawn on the basis of findings in chapter seventh of the thesis. The entire work is being supported by bibliography, tables, figures, and maps as per the requirement.

Over the globe, international organization and agencies initiated innumerable projects towards highlighting environment degradation and its remedies. All researchers, environmentalists, scientists, thinkers, writers and eco travelers did write and submit reports on various aspects of environment degradation but Sikkim remained untouched in these studies. It was only JD Hooker in 1849 who surveyed the area extensively and researchers have been referring the same diary till date. The world is united to fight against the negative impact of tourism on environment, culture and society. However Sikkim remains away from all such activities. Hence present study is a pioneer in highlighting major issues on environment and tourism in the mountain land of Sikkim.

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