

## Chapter - 7

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The hill areas of Darjeeling district are mostly rural in nature. Urbanisation exists here to a very limited extent. Therefore, the analysis of the problems of development of this region reduces to the discussion of the problems of development of rural areas of the hill areas of Darjeeling district. The features of the villages constituting the hill areas of Darjeeling district exhibit that agriculture, tea plantation and forestry are the mainstay of the rural economy of this region. The problem of development of the rural hill areas of Darjeeling district is, therefore, the problem of development of agriculture, tea plantation and forestry on which the subset of Indian population inhabiting in this region is basically dependent. The subsidiary occupations like animal husbandry, small-scale and cottage industry as well as sericulture have enormous importance in the economy of this region. For this, the problem of development of this region is related with the problem of development of animal husbandry, small-scale and cottage industry as well as sericulture. Besides, the problem also encompasses the development of communication, transport, power supply as well as educational and health services in the rural hill areas of Darjeeling district.

Forests in the hill areas of Darjeeling district possess great intra- as well as inter-regional economic and geophysical importance. The area under forests in the hill areas and in the district as a whole registers a decline in both the periods before and after independence. But the rate of decline in the area under forests is higher in the period after independence than that in the period before independence. The factors responsible for this rapid decline in the area under forests in the hill areas of Darjeeling district and in the district as a whole after independence are five : (i) method of exploitation of forest resources, (ii) variety of forest plantation, (iii) objective of forest management policy, (iv) regeneration as well as planting of forests and (v) administration of the forest department.

The rapid decline in the area under forest has created a number of adverse, anti-developmental impacts on the ecology and economy of the rural hill areas of Darjeeling district in the form of (i) disappearance or even extinction of unstudied plants and a large number of Himalayan fauna, (ii) frequent landslips in the rainy season causing floods in the adjacent plain areas , (iii) scarcity of drinking water, (iv) reduction of the earnings in the hands of the people engaged in forest plantation, (v) damage to agricultural crops not only in hill areas but also in adjacent plain areas along with the loss of cultivable lands in the former areas, and (vi) crisis of fodder required for livestock population the rearing of which is very much economically important

to the hill people.

Tea cultivation started on a commercial basis and in an industrial manner in the hill areas of Darjeeling district in the year 1856 entirely with the investment of European capital. Since then this industry has grown rapidly in terms of area, production and productivity on account of (i) the availability of cheap labour resulting from the large-scale immigration of Nepali workers to Darjeeling hills, and (ii) the availability of land for tea cultivation as plenty of land was declared by the Government as waste lands unsuitable for ordinary cultivation mainly in the western side of the river Tista.

In all the years after independence the area under tea cultivation and the production in the Darjeeling Tea Industry are at far lower levels as compared to those in the years before independence. It is only the yield rate which is in recent years above the levels that prevailed before independence. However, the nature of change in the objective condition of the Darjeeling Tea Industry in terms of area, yield and yield rate in the years after independence shows that the area under tea cultivation has become stagnant. Although production and productivity show a tendency to increase during the decade of the eighties after independence, their levels are remarkably lower in comparison with the all-India levels in the normal as well as peak production years. All these signify that the Darjeeling Tea Industry has entered a depressing state of affairs after independence. The fundamental reasons behind

this condition of the Darjeeling Tea Industry are as follows: (i) the inadequacy of re-investible surplus due to negative profits accruing to the Darjeeling Tea Industry, (ii) the change in the objective of the ownership and management in the post-independence period, (iii) employment of substandard managers, (iv) centralised policy of management, (v) draining of surplus and siphoning it to other industries in other industrial zones of India, (vi) aggressiveness as well as mishandling of trade unions.

In the face of a growing population after independence, the depressing state of affairs of the Darjeeling Tea Industry has created an increasing pressure of population on agriculture and the existing area of culturable land. This overcrowding in agriculture has made deteriorating land-man ratio after independence. More and more land has become fragmented and more families have come down from the status of 'middle farmers' to that of 'marginal farmers'. It has also led to an increase in the number of unemployed or disguisedly unemployed people along with an increase in the number of agricultural labourers.

Several strategies for the development of agriculture in the hill areas of Darjeeling district have been undertaken in a planned and integrated manner after independence. The period before independence shows a negligible, unplanned and disintegrated emphasis in this regard. The planned strategies for agricultural development in this region may be divided into five heads, namely, (i) irrigation, (ii) soil conservation, (iii) agricultural marketing, (iv) crop husbandry, and (v) horticulture. Among these heads

soil conservation occupies the topmost position in terms of its share in total actual expenditure on the development of agriculture. This is due to the fact that without proper measures against soil erosion developmental works relating to agriculture in the hill areas of Darjeeling district would be meaningless.

In the matter of irrigation the hill areas of Darjeeling district are extremely backward. Upto the middle of the eighties the area under irrigation as a percentage of net cultivated area is found to be of little account. This is due to the negligible emphasis on irrigating the hill areas of Darjeeling district upto that time since independence on the part of both the State Government of West Bengal and the Central Government of India. In fact, extension of these facilities began with the bringing of more land under irrigation with the sanction and establishment of numerous minor, small and a number of major irrigation schemes since the inception of the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79) when the Accelerated Hill Development Council was set up. Since this time various governmental agencies, namely, Directorate of Irrigation and Waterways Department, Block Development Office, Agriculture Department, Small Farmers Development Agencies and the like have taken effective steps in this regard. But till to-day irrigation facilities in this region have not increased at the desired pace as the performance made by the governmental agencies in creating additional irrigation potential since the inception of the Fifth Five-Year Plan is far from satisfactory.

Soil erosion through landslides causing considerable damage to arable land and other properties is an annual feature in the hill areas of Darjeeling district. Soil conservation through the implementation of remedial measures against soil erosion through landslides is of paramount importance in this region. In order to prevent landslides, i.e., soil erosion, various soil conservation measures have been undertaken in the hill areas of Darjeeling district with top priority under the Accelerated Hill Development Programmes. Execution of these measures is carried out by various governmental agencies, namely, (i) the Forest Department, (ii) the Irrigation and Waterways Department, (iii) the Agriculture Department and (iv) the Block Development Offices with Panchayat Bodies, through the implementation of numerous soil conservation schemes. In spite of various measures undertaken by different authorities through the implementation of numerous soil conservation schemes at different places, soil erosion and landslides are still the major problems in the hill areas of Darjeeling district. This is due to the fact that soil conservation measures have not yet been undertaken intensively and extensively on account of the inadequacy of funds on the part of the government, non-availability of easy credit facilities, and the time lag between cash outlay for soil conservation measures and returns on the part of individual enterprises.

Various aspects, namely, channels, location, time of sale of agricultural produce and method of price formation along with producers' share in farias' (i.e. middlemen's) price and farias' profit margin relating to the marketing of major agricultural produce in the hill areas of Darjeeling district show that the nature of the markets for major agricultural commodities are functionally inefficient in generating better and remunerative prices and thereby increasing the levels of income in the hands of the farmers. The main factors responsible for inefficient functioning of agricultural marketing are the financial weakness of the hill farmers coupled with their dependence for funds as well as for marketing agricultural produce on the farias/kayahs/mahajans, lack of various infrastructural facilities inclusive of storage and transportation. In order to increase the efficiency of agricultural marketing in the hill areas of Darjeeling district, schemes for the improvement of co-operative credit structure, setting up and development of agricultural co-operative marketing societies and development of various market infrastructures were undertaken and implemented after independence to a great extent. Nevertheless, success in this respect has not reached at its critical level.

With a view to augmenting agricultural production and productivity and farmers' income in the hill areas of Darjeeling district developmental programmes in the name of multiple cropping programme, high yielding varieties and high value but low volume

crops programme, soyabean, potato and cardamom development programme, local manurial resources, plant protection measures and quality of production improvement programme under the head of crop husbandry have been implemented after independence. The implementation of these programmes has raised the yield rates of major agricultural crops. But the same has failed to change the cropping pattern and augment intensity of cropping reflecting multiple cropping. Agriculture in the hill areas of Darjeeling district till recent years shows a more or less unchanged cropping pattern with constant relative position of the crops in the crop profile and very much low and varied intensity of cropping along with the features like extremely low land-man ratio as well as small-sized and fragmented farms reflecting overcrowding of agriculture in the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

A number of schemes have been implemented in an integrated manner for the development of horticulture in the hill areas of Darjeeling district after independence since the establishment of the Accelerated Hill Development Council. These schemes are as follows : (i) supply of fertilizers, micro-nutrients, fungicides etc. at 50 per cent subsidized rate, (ii) extension of areas under orange, (iii) establishment of sub-tropical and temperate fruit orchards, (iv) establishment of a separate horticultural wing for Darjeeling district and (v) setting up of a direct linkage between the rural farmers and the urban consumers. Owing to the implementation of these developmental schemes the areas under horticultural

crops have recently been increasing steadily at a slow rate but the yield rate has remained constant. The constancy of the yield rate along with the slow rate of growth of area under horticulture is due to the lack of use of yield rate augmenting inputs on account of the extreme poverty of the farmers and inefficiency of the horticultural crop markets.

In the period before independence that then Government gave emphasis to develop animal husbandry in the hill areas of Darjeeling district. The period after independence shows relatively more encouraging state of affairs in this regard. In this period the State Government of West Bengal and the Central Government of India took large-scale initiative to develop animal husbandry in this region on commercial basis in a co-ordinated manner through the implementation of various schemes like cattle development, piggery development, poultry development, development of sheep rearing and development of veterinary services. As a consequence, notable development in respect of various aspects of animal husbandry has taken place in the rural hill areas of Darjeeling district after independence. Yet there exist a number of problems: (i) insufficiency of qualitative cattle stock, along with inefficiency of milk marketing reflected by the problems confronted by Himalayan Milk Producers' Co-operative Union, (ii) unavailability of regular supply of balanced feed and lack of attention towards health care for poultry population and (iii) lack of emphasis on sheep rearing.

Although the small-scale and cottage industries have an immeasurable importance in the context of rural development there was a lack of emphasis before independence to develop them and inculcate the habit of industry amongst the people of the hill areas of Darjeeling district. During the period since independence much importance has been given by the Government on developing a strong base for small-scale and cottage industries through increasing the efficiency of the existing industrial units and establishing new industrial units. This has been undertaken by the Government through the implementation of various strategies, creation of enough entrepreneurial skills and provision of incentives to the entrepreneurs. As a result, a number of small-scale and cottage industries have emerged in the post-independence period. But the said industries have not flourished upto the desired level on account of the existence of some retrograding factors, namely, inadequate Governmental assistance, scarcity of raw materials and services, relatively limited size of markets and the irregular supply of power and credit.

Despite its importance and ample scope for development little stress was given for the development of sericultural practices by the Government before independence. In fact, the expansion of sericulture in the hill areas of Darjeeling district has started significantly since independence. During this period the Government has set up a number of institutions congenial to the development

of sericulture in the hill areas of Darjeeling district. But the gain has not yet reached its targetted level due to the ignorance and disinterestedness of the cultivators in this region as regards sericultural practices.

The modern means of communication started to develop in the hill areas of Darjeeling district in the period before independence. At that time the hill and plain areas of Darjeeling district were connected with the construction of roadways along with a narrow gauge railway. And also in the same era a remarkable length of metalled and unmetalled roadways as well as some ropeways were built to set up a strong communication system within the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

After independence railways have registered no development and the ropeways to a marginal extent. It is only the road transportation system which has developed noticeably in the period after independence. In spite of this, there exists inadequacy of the road transportation facilities. Above all, the transportation facilities so far developed irrespective of their categories is inadequate for the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

The supply of electricity in the hill areas of Darjeeling district started long before independence predominantly under private entrepreneurship. After independence public enterprises

have come to render services in this field. Since the earliest year of the seventies supply of electricity mainly for home consumption in the vast rural areas in the hill areas of Darjeeling district has started under state undertaking. Despite all this the progress in this field is very much slow and registers area bias.

The educational services of formal, special and non-formal types were developed and diversified in the hill areas of Darjeeling district before independence to a notable extent with the establishment of related institutions. The period after independence also exhibits significant expansion in the development and diversification regarding all these types of educational services. Nevertheless, the educational service network, developed so far in this region has lapses in some respects. Expansion of formal educational services has not yet become sufficient in relation to its need and is varied over different places in the hill areas of Darjeeling district. Non-formal educational services particularly physical educational services show similar prospect. Its development has not yet become according to the needs and there are variations over different places in the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

The provision of regular medical services of western type through the establishment of various types of medical institutions was accomplished predominantly by the Government followed by some

private enterprises before independence in the hill areas of Darjeeling district. After independence these services are provided entirely by the Government. And in order to outweigh the deficiency of medical services existing in this region especially in the rural hill region the Government in the post-independence period has expanded medical services in the rural hill areas with the establishment of a remarkable number of medical institutions like Primary Health Centres and Primary Health Sub-centres. The Government has quite reasonably claimed that the deficiency of medical services previously existing in the rural hill areas of Darjeeling district has now been removed.

In short, our study shows that the hill areas of Darjeeling district after so many years of independence have remained in a state of underdevelopment in all respects except health services. The presence of backward agriculture and horticulture with poor infrastructure, underdeveloped state of animal husbandry, small-scale and cottage industry as well as sericulture and, above all, the depressing conditions of forestry and tea plantation are the major factors for the underdevelopment of the region.