

PREFACE

Against the backdrop of the Majestic and awe inspiring Kanchenjunga and the Himalayan Mountain Range, Darjeeling, the 'Land of Thunderstorm', was conceived with a dream – a mission to create a sanatorium for the ailing and convalescent British soldiers. In the process of its creation, the search for that single 'T' that stood for Tranquility was replaced by the urge to promote the three 'T's namely Tea, Tourism and Timber. As development progressed, priority was given to Tea and Tourism, which proliferated at the cost of Timber. The exploitation of the forests resulted in what is widely acclaimed as environmental degradation.

Environmental degradation is manifested in many ways, from soil erosion, landslides, hydrological disbalance, disturbance in biodiversity, to sedimentation and floods in the plains of the Darjeeling Himalaya. Loss of soil nutrients from the upper part of soil profile has adverse effect upon crop yield and plant growth. The loss of human lives and property besides the immense difficulties caused to normal life by landslides and floods are appalling. The pressure on the environment by the ever-increasing population adds to the malaise caused by further expansion of developmental activities.

This study has attempted to identify the various problems of environmental degradation in Kurseong Sub-Division of Darjeeling Himalaya and make an in depth investigation on the factors related to these problems. An attempt has been made to study the geological set up, soil, natural vegetation including water resource and examine how the effects of hydro-geomorphological processes, climate and process of slope evolution have been greatly influenced by anthropological processes since the time developmental activity started in the area. It has therefore, attempted to provide information on a legacy of past events and relate it with the course of action that need to be followed in future.

In understanding the nature of the problems and the factors responsible for them, some preventive and remedial measures to mitigate environment degradation have been offered by the author with the hope that they may be given some consideration by policy makers,

planners, builders, administrators and politicians alike, in comprehending the basic laws of nature before any further developmental activity is taken up in the area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am highly indebted to Dr. Subir Sarkar, my Teacher and Guide for the immense help, encouragement and guidance he has provided throughout the conduct of the study. Without his perseverance and his constant supervision, it would have been an arduous task to complete the study. I am also grateful to Mrs. B. Sarkar for her support and motivation in carrying out the research work.

My gratitude goes to Mrs. Indira Lepcha and Dr. Sangeeta Lama who introduced me to my Guide and exposed me to the field of Geography and Applied Geography. I am thankful to the students of the Department of Geography and Applied Geography of North Bengal University for helping in field studies and also to the Department for giving me access to all its facilities while conducting the study.

My gratitude also goes to Mr. C.A.Rahman, ACF and the Range Officer Trainees of Eastern Forest Rangers' College, Kurseong who assisted me in conducting various studies in the field. I express my gratitude also to Dr. S. Patel IFS, Sri S.K. Sen IFS, Sri A. Banerji IFS and S.C Mukhapadhyay IFS for rendering their advice and support for the study.

I am also grateful to my wife, Regina for her unflagging support and encouragement throughout the period of research.


Pop Tshering Bhutia*

Dated May, 1st. 1999

* Divisional Forest Officer, Working Plans (North) Division, Directorate of Forests, Government of West Bengal, Darjeeling, India 743101