

## INTRODUCTION

### The Problem:

Balanced regional development is very much important for the elimination of regional disparities and promotion of national integration. But it is distressing to note that in spite of the importance of balanced regional development, regional disparity in development as well as the persistence of backward regions is a common characteristic in most of the countries, whether developed or under-developed and under different political and economic systems. Appalachia in the United States of America, the Uzbek Republic in the former USSR, Mezzugiors in Italy, the Slovak region of Czechoslovakia, the Montenegro region in Yugoslavia and the Scottish Highland may be cited as examples in this connection.

The Indian Subcontinent has become free from colonial rule with extreme regional variations in terms of the growth of the per capita income, the proportion of population living below the normative minimum, working population in agriculture, the percentage of urban population to total population, the percentage of workers in manufacturing industries and so forth. For this, in the post-independence period attention has been paid to remove this regional disparity in formulating various types of plans and policies. In spite of this fact, some states in India even to-day appear to be economically more advanced, while others are relatively backward. Besides, within each state, some regions are observed to be more developed while others are almost primitive.

In the state of West Bengal of India the hill areas of Darjeeling district, especially the rural areas of this region are acknowledged as one of the economically backward regions according to the indicators prescribed by different studies made by both government and non-government institutions to determine economic backwardness of specific regions in India. It is reported that till now about 90 per cent of the total population in this region are used to live in the rural areas, there exists a primitive rural and agrarian economy with lower productivity and, moreover, the infrastructural development in the rural areas, for example, road mileage, bank branches, electricity consumption per capita etc. is very low, inadequate or inconsequential.

These circumstances of the rural areas of the hill areas of Darjeeling district have naturally brought to the fore a number of research issues:

What are the characteristic features of the villages in terms of economic activities? What is the place of tea industry and agriculture in the economic life of the rural populace? What are the present problems of tea industry and what are their impacts on the rural economy of this region? What is the nature of agriculture and the extent of its development upto the recent years and what are the constraints in front of its development?

What is the importance of forestry in this region? What are the features of present forest policy and what are its impacts? What is the extent of development of different subsidiary activities

like animal husbandry, small-scale and cottage industries and sericulture and what are its problems? What is the magnitude of infrastructural development namely, communication, transport, power supply and so forth in the rural areas of this region? What is the nature of health and educational services to the rural people of this region?

All these along with other related questions still remain unanswered as no comprehensive study on the rural economy of the hill areas of this district has yet been made. In view of this, this study which is designed to provide answers to the aforesaid questions has been undertaken. And hence this study is expected to be very much important in the sense that it will throw light in the matter of framing appropriate strategies for removing economic backwardness not only of the rural areas of this region but also of the regions endowed with properties similar to those of the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

#### Objectives of the study:

Keeping the above issues in view, the following objectives have been framed in this study:

1. To reveal the geographical conditions of the hill areas of Darjeeling district.
2. To analyse the development of Darjeeling district in its historical perspective and the growth of population in the hill areas of this district.

3. To examine the nature of rural settlement in the hill areas of Darjeeling district and work out the major fields of development.
4. To analyse the growth of tea industry in the hill areas of Darjeeling district along with the problems confronted by this industry as well as their impact on the rural areas in the hill areas of Darjeeling district.
5. To explore the pattern of agriculture in the hill areas of this district.
6. To examine the nature of development of crop husbandry, horticulture, irrigation, soil conservation and agricultural marketing in the hill areas of Darjeeling district.
7. To make an evaluation of the forest policy in the pre-independence and post-independence period in terms of the nature of its impact on the hill areas of Darjeeling district.
8. To trace out the character of development of animal husbandry, small-scale and cottage industry along with sericulture in the rural areas of the hill areas of Darjeeling district.
9. To analyse the nature of development of communication, transport and power supply in the rural areas of the hill areas of Darjeeling district.
10. To find out the extent of development of health and educational services in the rural areas of the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

Scheme of the chapters of the Thesis:

Chapter - I deals with the discussion on geography, history of Darjeeling district and the growth as well as characteristics of population along with the nature of rural settlement in the hill areas of Darjeeling district. This chapter does also trace out the major fields of development of the rural areas in the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

Chapter - II evaluates the forest policy since independence in terms of the nature of its impacts on the hill areas of Darjeeling district and furnishes the discussion relating to the growth of tea industry along with its problems and their consequences on the rural economy in the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

Chapter-III examines the nature and efficacy of the developmental schemes and programmes undertaken so far on irrigation, soil conservation and agricultural marketing.

Chapter-IV presents the features of agriculture in the hill areas of Darjeeling district and also makes an evaluation of the nature of developmental schemes and programmes executed on crop husbandry and horticulture till the recent years for improving agriculture in the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

Chapter-V is designed to exhibit the nature of development of animal husbandry, small-scale and cottage industry along with sericulture in the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

Chapter-VI purports to examine the development of communication, transport, power supply, educational and health services in the hill areas of Darjeeling district.

Chapter-VII presents a summary of the entire work and tries to identify the problems relating to the development of the hill areas of Darjeeling district on the basis of the results and discussion.

Methodology:

For the purpose of carrying out this study, historical data relating to various issues have been collected from the secondary sources like the gazetteers, censuses, government reports etc. This study has been conducted with the application of tabular method of presenting quantitative data along with the associated statistical concepts.