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Sustainable Tourism Development in Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal, India: Issues & Challenges

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Abstract- At present tourism has been seriously considered in the national sustainable development strategies of many developing countries and placed on the agenda of many international conferences on Sustainable Development/ Tourism in a broader sense has existed for a long time in this Hill region of Darjeeling in West Bengal. The tourism activities are still in its conventional state, not put in the track of modern concept though efforts are being made to give it the real shape under eco-tourism but no avail. Sustainable tourism development provides the opportunity to take proactive approaches based on broad participation by stakeholders, which would contribute to more effective policies and plans. Based on secondary sources, literature search and discussions with key stake holders and interaction with the tourist, the existing tourists' scenario and situation were studied. The information collected from different sources has been verified with the field experience. Darjeeling receives around 3.5 lakhs domestic tourists annually, besides 50,000 foreigners.

Keywords: *sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, tourist.*

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Sustainable Tourism Development in Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal, India: Issues & Challenges

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Keywords: *sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, tourist*.

I. Introduction

Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual permanent places of residence for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes. Based on this definition, tourism industry includes all socio-economic activities that are directly involved in providing services to tourists. Tourism turns the largest industry worldwide in terms of employment and gross domestic product. The tourism industry has been growing rapidly as well as changing at a fast pace. As more people are interested in spending their holidays in nature, ecotourism as well as rural tourism has become one of the segments of the tourism industry. This creates opportunities in areas characterized by natural attractions, wildlife and wilderness habitats, agriculture, farm stay, local craft, bird watching, local cuisines etc. Local communities may benefit in economic terms as well as create an employment opportunities and commitment to conservation and sustainable development.

The principles of sustainable tourism were envisaged by the World Tourism Organisation in 1988 as "leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems". Sustainable tourism has been defined as development that meets the needs of today's tourists and host regions, while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future.

Darjeeling in West Bengal is one of the most magnificent hill resorts in the world. It conjures visions of snow peaks, serenity of vibrant green hills steeped in splendor, a land of breathtaking beauty crowned by the majestic Himalayas and attracts young, adventurous and enthusiasts across the age groups. The tourist spots and attractions in the region are serene, pristine and hub of adventure, leisure and special interest tourism. The tourism products of Darjeeling and adjoining areas are Tea Tourism, Toy Train-a World Heritage product, Trekking, Water Rafting, Bird Watching Tour, Butterflies Tours, Forest Safaris and Wellness Tourism.

II. Significance of the Study

Everyone should have the right to travel, should they choose to, and be able to explore even the farthest edge of the globe. Accessible tourism certainly makes this more possible. It gives those with accessibility needs, as well as their traveling companions, more options to choose from. It strives for equality and helps make the world a more open place. It is a focused journey to natural areas to understand the history of environment, without altering the genuineness of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to the local people.

The economic and social factors are closely interrelated, as the economy can provide the infrastructure and investment required for human development. Consequently the significance of tourism for people can be examined by how positively economic

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and social factors impact on each other. As society becomes more mobile and prosperous tourism will become increasingly significant for people.

Tourism is now one of the world's largest industries and one of its fastest growing economic sectors. The expected growth in the tourism sector and the increasing reliance of many developing countries including small regions like hill region of Darjeeling District, depends on this sector as employment generating mechanism and contributor to local, national and regional economies which highlights the need for special attention to the relationship between environmental conservation and protection and sustainable tourism development. In this regard considerable mechanisms are required of national and international financial institutions and capacity building training facilities for better implementation and management. Darjeeling being one of the oldest tourists spot in the country has been under tremendous set back due to manifold reasons. The tourism activities are still in its conventional state, not put in the track of modern concept though efforts are being made to give it the real shape under eco-tourism but no avail. There is conspicuous lacking coordination between government agencies like forest department, government run tourism department, public works department, Darjeeling Improvement Fund, the District Administration and the Municipality so far as sustainable tourism development is concern. They all seem to work in the area but all are in complete isolation and that has resulted in absence of conformity in their work.

All the hill towns are overcrowded with concrete building and people with their money and muscle power pushing aside all the existed public amenities to disappear like public toilets, park and gardens, resting places etc. to give way to mushrooming up of illegal constructions all over the hills.

III. Aims and Objectives

The literature review identified a number of gaps and weaknesses in the existing literature on tourism development in destination regions. The overall aim of this study was to build upon these resources by analyzing a sustainable tourism development in the study region not just factors associated with failure, but also factors that contribute to success.

The present paper is structured to elucidate with the following main objectives:

a) to explore the status of tourism in Darjeeling hills and its impact on economy.
b) to explore the tourism that acts to promote local economy, socio-cultural changes and life style of the people residing in and around the tourist locations in Darjeeling hills.
c) to explore the reasons for which the foreign and domestic tourists visit the destination for recreational and leisure purposes and also to gain experience from art, culture, lifestyle etc, which in turn create a tremendous impact on local economy.
d) to identify the issues and challenges for sustainable tourism development in the study area.
e) to examine the sustainable tourism development and suggestions for future prospects.

IV. Materials and Methods

The study has been based on empirical observation available from different reports, various journals, and e-journal. Collection of available literature, detection of situation in the place of importance was gathered through personal observations and, collection of related information's. Observations were made based on news reports, interaction with some of the local people associated with tourism and tourist, discussions with some of the Officials, NGOs, travel agencies etc. who are actively working on tourism. The nature of the present research work is explorative and the whole work has been done by descriptive as well as analytical methods.

V. Location of the Study Area

The area chosen for study has been delineated as cultural region where the elements in the landscape are closely interrelated. Darjeeling is the northernmost district of the frontiers state of West Bengal, extending between 26°27'10" to 27°13'05" North latitudes and 87°59'30" to 88°53'00" East longitudes, at an altitude of 2134 mts. This district consists of four sub-divisions. These are Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, Kalimpong and Siliguri. The Hill Areas of Darjeeling have first three sub-divisions, which are considered for the study area with the total area of 2477.83 Sq. kms. in 2011.

Darjeeling is actually a widespread district although the popular Darjeeling hill town is the nucleus of the place. The name *'Darjeeling'* came from the Tibetan words '*dorje*' meaning thunderbolt (originally the scepter of Indra) and *'ling'* is a place or land, hence '*the land of the thunderbolt*'. With it's temperate climate, magnificent nature all around, Darjeeling came to be called as 'Queen of the Hills.'

Darjeeling hills is formed of comparatively recent rock structure that has a direct bearing on landslides. The Himalayas serve as the source of natural resources for the population residing in the hills. A mountain terrain with its varied geologic, physiographic, climatic and other environmental conditions offers a wonderful geographical area, for the study in detail. This is more so in mountainous areas like Darjeeling Hills, inhabited by simple societies where environment articulates to a great extent to determine the socio-economic aspects.

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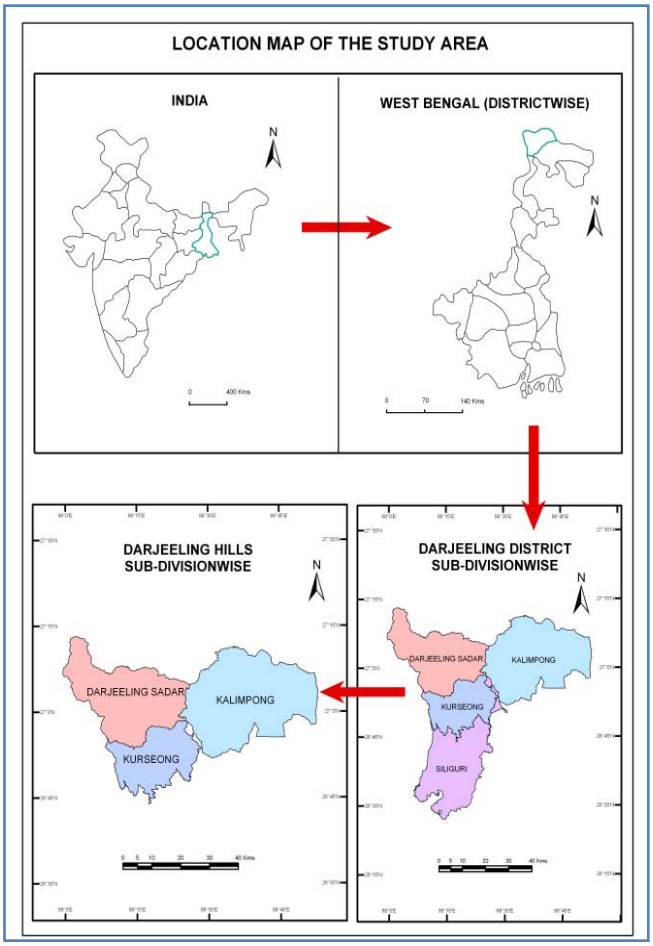

Figure 1 : Map showing location of the study area

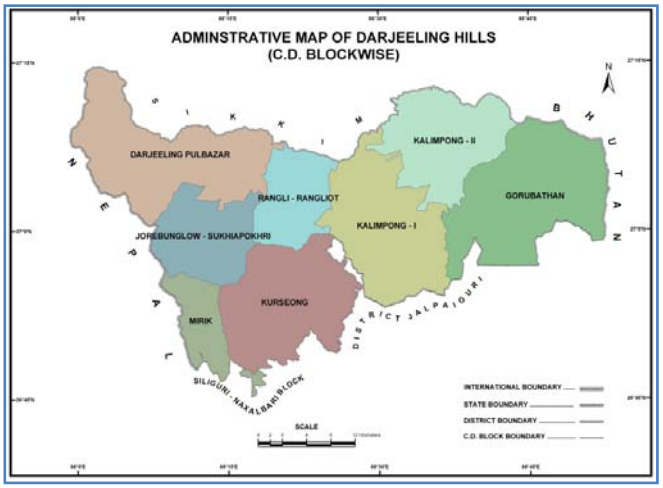

Figure 2 : Map showing administrative divisions of the study area

The Darjeeling Hills consist of eight Community Development Blocks or C.D. Blocks which include 311 inhabited villages and 31 uninhabited villages as per 2011 census. The total population of the study area during 2011 is 8,75,703 persons, of which 583639 persons are rural and 2,92,064 persons are urban. This hilly region is bordered by Sikkim in the north, Bhutan in the northeast, Nepal in the west and Siliguri Sub-Division and Jalpaiguri District in the south. Darjeeling is located in the Lesser Himalayan range and provides beautiful views of the mighty Himalayas, especially Kanchenjunga the world's third highest mountain peak.

Table 1 : Administrative Divisions of Darjeeling Hills

Name of Sub-Division	Name of C.D. Block	Area in Sq. Km.	Rural Units			Urban Units		
			Inhabited Village	Unhabited Village	Total Village	Municipal Town	Non-Municipal Town	Total Town
Darjeeling Sadar	Darjeeling-Pulbazar	426.57	47	1	46	1	1	2
	Rangli-Rangliot	272.99	29	-	29	-	-	-
	Jorebunglow-Sukhiapokhri	222.12	47	-	47	-	-	-
Kalimpong	Kalimpong-I	369.14	44	7	51	1	-	1
	Kalimpong-II	241.26	33	6	39	-	-	-
	Gorubathan	442.72	27	11	38	-	-	-
Kurseong	Mirik	125.68	21	-	21	1	-	1
	Kurseong	377.35	65	6	71	1	1	2
Darjeeling Hills		2477.83	311	31	342	4	2	6

Source: District Census Handbook, Darjeeling, 2011

VI. Importance of Darjeeling Hills

The hill areas of Darjeeling District is important both from ecological and economic point of view. As a matter of fact, ecosystems of Darjeeling hills require special considerations for their preservation, eco-conservation and development and not the same methods applicable to the development in plain areas which are entirely different. Various parameters such as agro-climatic complex and the biota are peculiar and typical in the study areas. Darjeeling region being in high altitudinal zones are of special and further interest with regard to their highly specialized conditions, and adaptations of plants, animals and human life in these remarkable eco-zones. A rich heritage of social, cultural and spiritual values in the areas is still preserved here and deserves protection. Inhabited by several ethnic and religious groups, Darjeeling Hills is characterized by

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religious harmony, racial and linguistic tolerance and regional amity.

Darjeeling is one of the most magnificent hill resorts in the world. Perched at a height of 2,134 metres with a backdrop of the mighty Himalayan peaks, Darjeeling has attracted generations of visitors to sample the joys of cool, healthy gracious and adventurous living. This heavenly retreat is bathed in hues of every shade. The flaming red rhododendrons, the sparking white magnolias, orchids, the miles of undulating hillsides covered with emerald green tea bushes, the exotic forests of silver fir – all under the blanket of a brilliant azure sky dappled with specks of clouds, compellingly comfounds Darjeeling as the "Queen of Hill Stations".

Darjeeling, nestled among rolling mountains, is a perfect destination for outdoor enthusiasts. Popular places to visit include Tiger Hill, Batasia Loop and the War Memorial, and the Himalayan Zoological Park and Snow Leopard Breeding Center, tea gardens and many more. The majestic ranges in Darjeeling hills are unforgettably beautiful, every possible variety of form and colour is theirs, waterfalls break into a thousand rainbows and relentless glaciers wind their ways down into dark precipices, while through narrow winding gorges mighty rivers carry their message into distant plains.

There is no finer place than Darjeeling to step in the grandeur and beauty of the towering snow capped Himalayas where man has added to nature's bounty. From numerous points in the town we get view of the mountains, scarcely rivalled in any part of the world. Set against the majestic backdrop of the great Himalayas, there is lovely verdure everywhere – evergreen woods, firs and pines. Even the institutions, museums, botanical and zoological gardens of Darjeeling offer delightful experience to visitors. Besides attracting ordinary tourists the place offers excellent trekking routes in the downhills to Maneybhanjan (1,969 mts), Tonglu (3,071 mts), Sandakphu (3,630 mts) and Phalut (3,596 mts). The dense forests, the verdant meadows, the savage mass of Mt. Everest, the everlasting beauty of Kanchenjunga, the rugged Lhotse or the mysterious Makalu all in one sweeping glance, present an experience that can never be equaled.

Darjeeling Tea is world renowned for its flavour. It is the best tea producing areas not only of India but also of the world. Besides the saga of toy train i.e. Darjeeling Himalayan Railways, which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site further makes the town more magnificent with highest Ghum Railway Station, which is situated at an altitude of 2,258m.

VII. Historical Background

Darjeeling continues to be a popular holiday destination in India, owing to its scenic beauty and pleasant climate. Apart from tourism, Darjeeling is also popular for its many British style public schools, which attract students from across India and even neighbouring countries. When Darjeeling was acquired by the British as a potential summer resort, it was practically uninhabited. The process of development it into a 'hill-station' commenced around 1835. Over the next 15 years, the town had grown sufficiently for the authorities to consider it reasonable to set up a municipality to look after the provision of civic amenities. Darjeeling Municipality was thus set up in 1850 when population of the town was around 10 thousand. Population in the township now exceeds more than one lakh and its pressures already exceed urban carrying-capacity.

The beginning of urbanization, therefore, had an innocuous look and it had no pretension of starting on a big scale. The present site of Darjeeling became the first choice for the establishment of a town at a time when urban development was too uncommon a feature to be found until one came down to the plains. Urbanization having its original seat at Darjeeling had its influence felt in the surrounding region and this, coupled with the introduction of the tea industry, took an active role in the colonization of the region.

The development of Darjeeling as a health resort and a frontier station as well as the progress of tea industry could not take place without the development of a transportation system. The construction of roads began, and by 1840 a road between Pankhabari on the foothills and Darjeeling was completed. Between 1849 and 1852, the old military road linking Pankhabari with Kurseong, Dow Hill, Ghoom and Darjeeling was completed. The construction of another road, i.e. Darjeeling Hill Cart Road was completed in 1865. The roads providing direct access into the hill areas made way for the encroachment of settlements and the rate of development was further accelerated by subsequent improvement in the transportation system in the following years when, in 1881, the railway line was extended upto Darjeeling providing uninterrupted traffic between the hills and the plains.

VIII. Sustainable Tourism in Darjeeling Hills

The concept of sustainability arose from the recognition that the earth's limited resources could not indefinitely support the rapid population and industrial growth as economic development moves to reduce poverty and increase standards of living among all countries. Although it is recognized that tourism can be beneficial to the natural environment by promoting environmental conservation, tourism also has a negative impact on the environment. It is increasingly a concern of the public sector to pay more attention to the

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protection of the natural environment. Most tourists wish to visit areas that are attractive, functional, clean and not polluted. Tourism can provide the incentive and means to maintain and, where needed, improve the environmental quality of areas. A high level of environmental quality is also very important for the local residents to enjoy. Tourism can help make residents more aware of the quality of their environment and support its maintenance and, where necessary, improvement. Tourism and the environment are strongly linked and interdependent. If tourism continues to grow, ways must be found to improve the relationship between the two, making it more sustainable.

The varied landscape, eternal weather, and the slopes with tea plantations make up most of tourism in Darjeeling. There is a variety in scenic attractions that tourists would come across here. It has a stronghold on the map of India for being a place having highest tea exports. Thus, tea tourism in Darjeeling calls for thousands during the plucking season when women in the fields are plucking the leaves. The aroma in the hills engulfs international visitors. It conjures visions of snow peaks, serenity of vibrant green hills steeped in splendor, a land of breathtaking beauty crowned by the majestic Himalayas and attracts young, adventurous and enthusiasts across the age groups. Urban tourism in the Darjeeling hill is shared to a certain degree by two other centres-Kalimpong and Mirik, the first of which developed with British initiative, while Mirik is avery recent development, likely to get stretch seems to have lacked the proper spirit todevelop as a tourist place in spite of its beautiful attraction for Kalimpong has visiblyincreased. Further, there are quite a few spots like Lava, Mongpu, Algara, Munsung and Pedong around Kalimpong offering the serenity of the misty mountains.

If tourism development is to be sustainable it must move away from its traditional growth-oriented model to one concerned with a sustainable set of goals and principles. All forms of tourism can either be considered sustainable or not. Sustainable tourism must be seen as a goal in tourism development. Achieving such a goal is a difficult task to accomplish; however, developing tourism in a sustainable manner must be an important objective in the developing process.

There are many stakeholders in the field of sustainable tourism. The major areas include; the host community, governmental bodies, tourism industry, tourists, pressure groups, voluntary sector, experts, and the media. It is essential that all stakeholders work together towards the common goal of developing tourism in a sustainable manner. Tourism development activities are in general related to the overall economic and social sector. So tourism concerns a great deal of inter-sectoral dependence and coordination.

IX. Tourist Inflow in Darjeeling

Darjeeling also known as the "Queen of the Hills" has some of the most attractive tourist attractions which results in inflow of large number of tourists each year to enjoy a vacation in this beautiful city in West Bengal. Darjeeling owes' its grandeur to its natural beauty, its clean fresh mountain air and above all, the smiling resilient people for whom it is a home. Known for its natural splendor, Darjeeling's best gift to its' visitors is the dawn of a new day.

Table 2 : Monthly tourist Inflow in Darjeeling during 2012-13 & 2013-14

Month	2012-13			2013-14		
	Domestic Tourist	Foreign Tourist	Total Tourist	Domestic Tourist	Foreign Tourist	Total Tourist
April	48823	2034	50857	49042	1966	51008
May	82076	1085	83161	72988	945	73933
June	66730	468	67198	65434	425	65859
July	17511	609	18120	13395	430	13825
August	14521	687	15208	488	28	516
Sept	15151	1100	16251	5988	548	6536
Oct	45824	2511	48335	30334	2178	32512
Nov	41481	2029	43510	21860	3729	25589
Dec	39293	1181	40474	31051	3018	34069
Jan	25081	930	26011	22694	711	23405
Feb	18273	1170	19443	18719	973	19692
Mar	39518	2296	41814	45729	1527	47256
Total	454282	16100	470382	377722	16478	394200

Source: Department of Tourism, Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, Darjeeling

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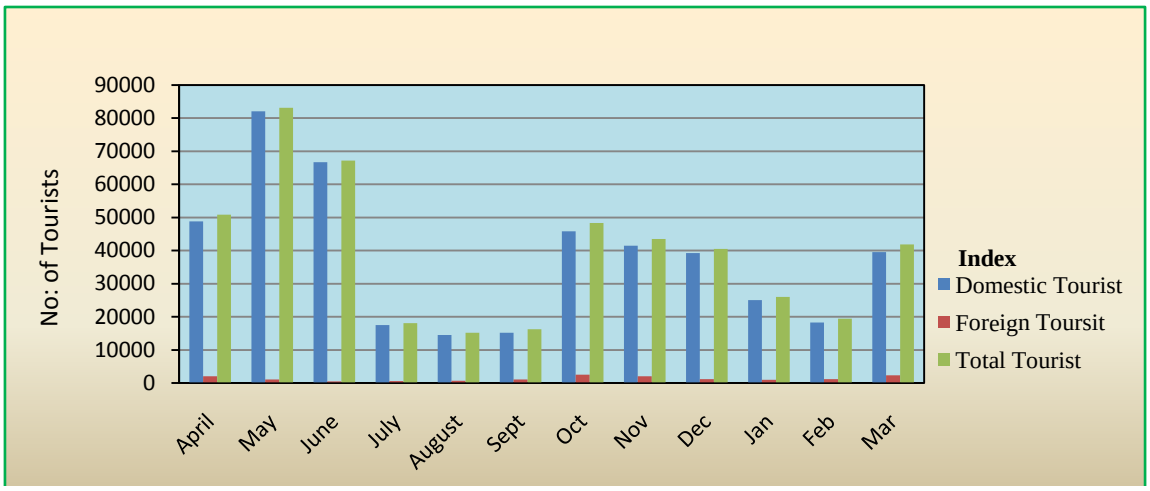

Figure 3 : Bar diagram showing tourist inflow in Darjeeling during 2012-13

The figure 3 & 4 shows the tourist arrival in Darjeeling during different months for the year 2012-13 & 2013-14. A statistics from the Tourism Department, Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, Darjeeling shows that there had been 4.7 lakhs tourists in the year 2012-13 while in 2013-14 the figure has shot up to 3.9 lakhs including both foreign and domestic tourist. Tourism is one of the largest net earners of foreign exchange in Darjeeling nest to tea. The Domestic tourist visits to Darjeeling have decrease from 4.54 lakhs in 2012-13 to 37.7 lakhs in 2013-14 (Table 2). The Foreign Tourist Arrival has increased from 16.1 thousands in 2012-13 to 16.4 thousands in 2013-14 at a compounded annual growth rate of 2.34%. The domestic tourist visits maximum in the month of May-June and the foreign tourist use to visit specially in the month of October-November. The diagram further implies that during the time of tourist season especially in summer and winter, the growth in number of both domestic and foreign tourist sharply increases.

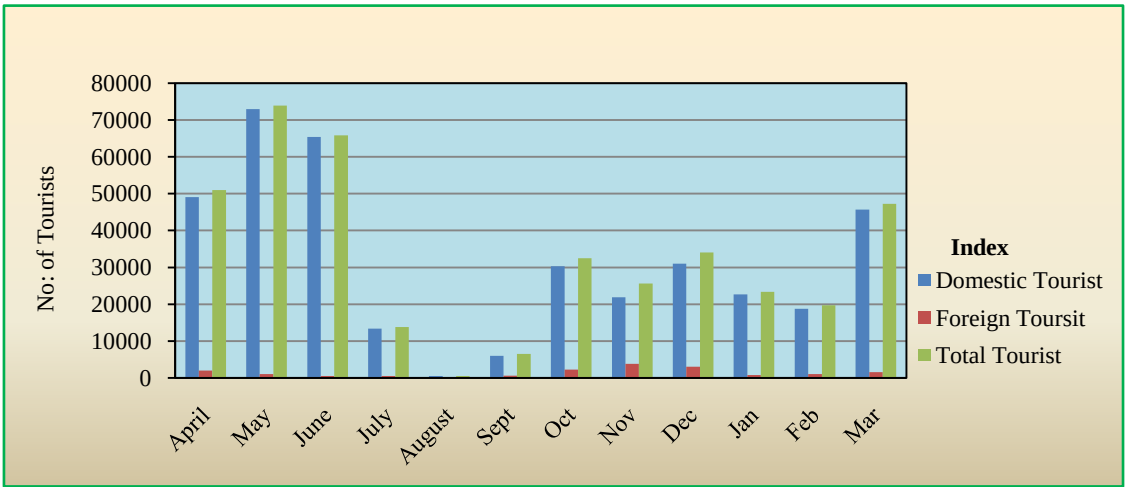

Figure 4 : Bar diagram showing tourist inflow in Darjeeling during 2013-14

During the season, the tariff and rate of hotel and vehicles also increases and the income of those who are attached to tourism also increases tremendously. Unplanned expansion of tourist accommodations, resorts and shopping areas constantly displace the local population and consequently lead to a sense curtailment of housing amenities.

X. Issues of Tourism

Tourism is an important fast growing smokeless industry of Darjeeling Hills. It plays a vital role in the economic development of a region. It brings about changes in the life style and attitudes of the local inhabitants. This is only possible if tourism is taken proper care of and is well organized and developed. Though tourism offers great scope but it still in infancy. It is the most viable but also the most neglected of all resources of the region. But tourist business is mainly confined in Darjeeling and it occupies a prominent place from the view point of scenic beauty. Darjeeling emerged as an important tourist center since British times. It also came up as a health resort.

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The vast panorama of scenic beauty and grandeur, the majestic view of the mighty snow capped ranges with jutting peaks, exhilarating climate, varied and rich flora and fauna, gushing streams all attracts the attentions of visitors. The tourist spots and attractions in the region are serene, pristine and hub of adventure, leisure and special interest tourism. Besides, scenic attraction, the rugged terrain provides ample scope for a wide variety of sports and adventure like trekking, climbing, rafting and riding etc. A land of breath taking beauty crowned by the majestic Himalayas, it is one of the most magnificent hill resorts in the world. The flaming red Rhododendrons, the sparking white Magnolias, the miles of undulating hillsides covered with emerald green tea bushes, the exotic forests of silver fir, all under the blanket of a brilliant azure sky dappled with speck of clouds, compellingly confronts Darjeeling as the "Queen of the Hills".

Tourism is an important economic activity of hill areas of Darjeeling District generating incomes and employment for the local population. Darjeeling receives around 3.5 lakhs domestic tourists and 50,000 foreign tourists per year that generates near 30% of total tourism business of the region worth around Rs 350 crore per annum. Everybody right from a chaiwala upto the hotel owner benefits from the tourism. Apart from an increase in the income and the demand for local products, tourism also results in a multiplier effect. This refers to the way in which tourist expenditures filter through the economy and generate other economic activities. The multiplier effect is based on the concept of interdependency of different sectors of the economy the result of which is that any change in the host economy's level of output, income, employment, government revenue and foreign exchange flows will be greater than the value of the initial change. The multiplier is expressed as a ratio of change in one of the above variables to the change in tourist spending that brought it about. In addition to its contribution to economic growth in the host economy, the labour intensive nature of tourism and tourism related industries results in a significant impact upon the level of employment in this sector. Income and employment generation are the most obvious positive impacts of tourism.

The facilities and services deteriorate sharply during the peak season as the amenities available cannot cope up with the huge rush. There are shortage of drinking water, electricity cut, deterioration of municipal services, congestion in public transport and lack of accommodation all these leading to a chaotic condition. Not only the visitors are inconvenienced and put to unnecessary tensions, even the local inhabitants get exasperated. Demand for more tourist accommodation and provision of service industries associated with tourist activities need more space. Mushroom growth of hotels, shops, restaurants, have defaced much of the pristine glories of the hill station for which once it was so famous. Uncontrolled urban growth, high-rise building construction, over-looking government regulation, dumping of dirt and filth has robbed the scenic beauty. Uncontrolled and widespread falling of trees for the urban expansion have not only defaced the scenic beauty and grandeur but has caused the imbalance in the ecological set up.

During the peak season, the visitors are greatly inconvenienced by soaring prices. Not only the essential commodities are in the short supply but the traders also charge undue prices. Even the hotel charges fluctuate according to the demand. The private transport owners demand higher fares and accommodate more passengers than the available capacity. Service conditions in the hotel deteriorate sharply thereby affecting the valuable customers. The porters and guides take their opportunity to charge higher rates. Thus, the tourists go with a bad impression and sometimes lead to social tensions and occasional crimes and vices. Though most people look upon tourist as a means of making a living, it is seen that the assets of tourism do not belong to the people. When it comes to running hotels it is the people from the plains who run these hotels or lease them. And in the rural areas there is very little or no people who are involved in tourism, so the question of them benefiting does not even arise. The only ones who benefit are the travel agencies.

Inspite of so many adverse effects of tourism in the Darjeeling hill areas, there is not denying the fact that the economy of Darjeeling relies on the three 'T's, Tourism, Tea and Timber, among which the Tourism plays the vital role. In order to revive the glories of the past, recouping the sagging trade and certain measures are essential so that the tourist get the maximum comforts and go back with happy memories. Preservation of the already damaged environment, creation of biospheric reserves like Sandakphu, creation of park, wildlife sanctuaries, trekkers traits and resting are important step to the development of tourism in hill areas of Darjeeling District. There should be an improvement of the existing condition and facilities, conservation of urban amenities and provision of better transport facilities and the development of infrastructural facilities, the provision of modern tourist facilities etc.

Darjeeling excels in tourism but much of its vast potential still awaits exploitation. The area is, however, ecologically fragile and under severe pressure due to the demands made on environmental resources by growing tourist traffic and rapid urbanization. Tourism, here a purely seasonal activity, shows an economic weakness because the people are out of employment during the slack season. The whole region, therefore, needs a proper policy and planning for fullest and efficient exploitation of the existing tourist industry. The development of Tourism in the hill areas of Darjeeling is necessary but it should not proceed at the cost of the ecological balance. Therefore, "Development without

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Destruction" is the only way for a sustainable solution of Global Harmony. Thus it may be safely be concluded that the role of tourism in the Darjeeling hill areas needs to be re-evaluated which should be followed up by judicious action by the locals and the authorities involved.

XI. Challenges of Tourism

Tourism has to a great part contributed to the excessive and unchecked development around shrines. Sustainable Tourism development can have both positive and negative impacts on destinations. Sustainable tourism development attempts to find a balance between these impacts to create an improved quality of life for the host community and the destination. The major attraction of the Queen of the Hill Station for the foreign tourists is the existing trekking route to Sandakphu and Phalut. But the existing facilities offered to trekkers are extremely limited and scheme had been undertaken under the Hill Development Programme in order to improve existing accommodation facilities at Tanglu, Sandakphu and Phalut.

In the past 30 years, the continual expansion of the population deeper into the hills has already left a passive trail of devastation - tourist hotels some as high as six-eight storey perch on cliffs, an expanding road network on unstable hillsides, commercial activity along new tourist routes, loss of tree cover, expansion of agriculture into forests, and a rain of garbage along hillsides.

In the past no organized effort has been taken for the promotion of tourism in Darjeeling Hills. Development of tourism in this region was taken in hand in the Fourth Five-Year Plan. The West Bengal Tourist Development Corporation and Bengal Tourism Department has undertaken various development schemes in order to provide better facilities to the tourists in the three hill towns of Darjeeling District (i.e. Darjeeling, Kalimpong & Kurseong) under the Accelerated Hill Development Programme. The problem of accommodation in Darjeeling has been solved to some extent by the construction of a 46-bed youth hostel and the extension of the Darjeeling Tourist Lodge during the Fifth Plan Period. Tiger Hill, the next attraction in the region now has a Tourist Lodge which had been undertaken during the Fourth Plan Period from where the tourists can enjoy the beauty of sunrise. In order to provide the cheap accommodation for the low budget tourists the repair and the renovation of Lowis Jubilee Sanatorium has been undertaken during the Fifth Plan Period. A Tourist-Reception Centre-cum-Tourist Office had been constructed at Darjeeling in order to provide the facilities to the tourists.

Tourist flows in Darjeeling has been increased in recent years due to the various developmental schemes which are undertaken under the Hill Development Programme. Generally the tourists are of two types: (i) Foreign Tourists and (ii) Domestic Tourists. In case of foreign tourists, Darjeeling captured only a smaller percent who visited India. After the Sinu-Indian border conflict in 1962, visit of foreign tourists has been restricted in this region. The actual figures about the foreigners are not available. But one thing is true, that their numbers are increasing every year. A large proportion of foreign tourists comes from Germany, Canada, U.K., U.S.A., Japan and Australia. Besides these foreign tourists, a large number of domestic tourists visit Darjeeling every year. Since there are no rules and regulations to record the visit of domestic tourists, it is very difficult to make any good estimate about them.

Excessive development of tourism in Darjeeling Hills especially in town areas has begun to destroy those attributes which attract the visitors. In order to alter this situation it is required to divert a portion of tourist inflow to different other areas of Darjeeling Himalaya by promoting successful tourism in those areas. Most of the tourists flock to Darjeeling during the months of April, May, June and October. During these four months Darjeeling gets 60 to 70 percent of its total tourist inflow. It is during these periods, Darjeeling has to bear enormous pressure of tourists. The transport fleet of the Tourism Department is providing valuable service to tourists during the seasons. They offer coach facilities to tourists from Bagdogra and NJP Railway station to Darjeeling and vice versa. In addition, conducted tours are also organized to Mirik and local sightseeing around Darjeeling.

Tourism in Hill Areas of Darjeeling District offers the greatest scope for development. It is roughly estimated by the Tourist Bureau of Darjeeling that approximately at present, more then four lakhs tourists from different parts of the world as well as the country visit Darjeeling every year and the Tourist Business occupies a prominent place from the view point of scenic beauty. Inspite of so many adverse effects of tourism in this tiny hill tract, there is no denying the fact that the economy still rests on its occupancy. The tourism potential, if properly planned can become a source of further income and regional development. Further expansions of tourist trade are immense if conceived on long-term perspective.

XII. Concluding Remarks

Tourism is the other important sector where Darjeeling Himalaya and its adjoining lowland have a comparative advantage. It is one of the important contributors to the regional economy. It is a growing sector and is growing relatively faster. This sector is, however, yet to be properly regulated and efficiently diversified. Of late massive mass tourism pouring across the urban spaces of the Darjeeling Hills coupled

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with weak regulatory mechanism and inadequate institutions have been the cause of serious environmental concern. In order to accommodate the influx of mass tourists many new hotels, buildings, roads and such other infrastructure facilities are constructed across the hills degrading the environmental situation therein. Diversification of the tourism into eco-tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, nature tourism etc is a welcome step. Such ventures should, however, need to be rationally planned and scientifically managed.

Tourism is widely recognized as the world's largest industry. Yet tourism is also highly dynamic and is strongly influenced by economic, political, social, environmental and technological change. The flow of money generated by tourists' expenditure finds its ways into the overall economy through the effect of multiplier. Tourism has earned considerable recognition as an activity, generating a number of social and economic benefits like promotion of national integration and international understanding, creation of employment opportunities, removal of regional imbalances, augmentation of foreign exchange earnings etc. Tourism in Darjeeling Hills is essentially encouraged for economic reasons, as it promises cash-flows into remote mountain regions having little economic opportunity, generates local employment, holds back the procedure of depopulation in the marginal areas and finally corrects regional imbalance.

Tourism aims to meet higher social and environmental goals. It has been observed that communities located near the major attraction sites such as nature parks, reserves, historical sites, etc should have the opportunity to participate in tourism related activities. Local people can be employed in hotels, restaurants, shop, transportation, guide and escort service and other tourist facilities and services. The area is, however, ecologically fragile and under severe pressure due to the demands made on environmental resources by growing tourist traffic and rapid urbanization. Environmental stress is evident from the degradation of forests and deforestation due to an increased demand for fuel-wood and timber, air pollution because of an increasing reliance on motor vehicles, and lack of basic urban infrastructure such as water supply, sanitation, and solid waste management systems.

The overzealous and unplanned growth of tourism in the Darjeeling hills of India is identified and the following questions addressed: whether tourism development should be pursued at the cost of natural environmental decay through large scale deforestation; whether a large influx of tourists during the peak season, in excess of the carrying capacity of the region, is causing immense hardships for the local population in terms of unnecessary pressure on basic amenities and community services; and whether sustainable tourism development should be adopted to arrest further environmental decay and encourage a new approach to planning in the region. The evolution of tourism in the region is described, and a methodology for applying an environmental impact assessment introduced. In a bit to improve its tourism industry in Darjeeling, planners, managers, tour operators and the public should work collectively and effectively in various directions that are related to tourism.

XIII. Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development & Suggestions

a) Tourism should support a wide range of local economic activities, taking environmental costs and benefits into account, but it should not be permitted to become an activity which dominates the economic base of an area.
b) The conservation and sustainable use of natural, social and cultural resources is crucial. Therefore, tourism should be planned and managed within environmental limits and with due regard for the long term appropriate use of natural and human resources.
c) Local communities should be encouraged and expected to participate in the planning, development and control of tourism with the support of government and the industry. Particular attention should be paid to involving indigenous people, women and minority groups to ensure the equitable distribution of the benefits of tourism.
d) All organisations and individuals should respect the culture, the economy, the way of life, the environment and political structures in the destination area.
e) All stakeholders within tourism should be educated about the need to develop more sustainable forms of tourism. This includes staff training and raising awareness, through education and marketing tourism responsibly, of sustainability issues amongst host communities and tourists themselves.
f) Research should be undertaken throughout all stages of tourism development and operation to monitor impacts, to solve problems and to allow local people and others to respond to changes and to take advantages of opportunities.
g) The industry has to organise training programmes and borrow the knowledge from experts to deal with all these issues, regular monitor and measuring the impact will indicate Quality level of achievement to protect environmental degradation. Environment protection should be the organisational culture.
h) Tourism being a highly labour intensive industry, there should be an integrated HRD system with both public and private sector participation to develop human resources to meet the requirements of the industry.

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i) There is also need for refresher training courses for the staff of the tourism industry. Proposals for running such courses by private institutions including non-governmental organizations should be encouraged and supported.

j) It is high time that the Government, after reviewing the growing tourist arrivals and the socio- economic benefits of the tourism phenomenon, accord it the status of a priority sector. The Government should also ensure more resource allocation for the overall development of this sector.

k) In view of the growing trends in the industry and the need for human resources, the Government should set up an Expert Committee comprising of human resource development (HRD) professionals, people from the tourism industry, prominent economists and intellectuals to study and assess various aspects of HRD and come out with a national policy on HRD in the tourism sector.

l) Forest cover has to be improved as per the National Forest Policy direction that hill station like Darjeeling should have 60%forest cover of its total geographic areas.

m) Wildlife depletion has to be checked and to be increased in its number by appropriate conservation programmers and improvement of other infrastructures as stated above at the earliest.

n) Seminars, conference and workshops, should be conducted to discuss the problems and prospects of tourism and development at the local, national and international level.

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