

# Tracing the concept of alternative tourism for preservation of the ethnic socio - cultural life and environment in Darjeeling Hills.

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## ABSTRACT

*The development of Darjeeling dated back to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. British first realized that the place could be turn into the health resort, subsequently, expensive tea plantation had established in this region. But due to lack of modernization of tea garden and political disturbance, today's tea industry is the faded photo of past. Day by day, tourism becomes the main economy for the region. So, the industry is facing a tremendous pressure. The rapid growth of the industry is starting to destruct itself. Today alternative tourism development is the requirement for sustention of the region. The Japanese term Tourism- "Kanko" means people making exchange across border create society, economy and culture. At present, bit off tourism initiatives has been a new sector of tourism where people enjoy culture, life style and physical environment of a region. Such type of tourism experience exclusively nature oriented experience, which provides the opportunity to share the culture and ethnical living within local landscape. Alternative tourism becomes an important economic activity in Darjeeling Hills. Especially, it involves exploring cultural root without staining the existing environment.*

**Key Word-** *Alternative Tourism, Socio-cultural Conservation, Sustainable Growth.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Darjeeling was gifted to the British by Raja of Sikkim. When Darjeeling was acquired by the British, it was practically an uninhabited place. British first realized that the place could be turn into the health resort, subsequently, expensive tea plantation were established in this region Darjeeling Municipality was thus set up in 1850 when population of town was around 10 thousand.

Darjeeling's elite residents were the British ruling class of that time, who visited Darjeeling every summer. An increasing number of well-to-do Indian residents of Kolkata, affluent Maharaja of princely states, large land owner zamindars and barristers of Calcutta High Court were also starting to visit Darjeeling. The town continued to grow as a tourist destination and became known as the 'Queen of Hills'. It is also noted for the tea industry.

The spectacular views of Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest mountain and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways, famous Darjeeling tea, scenic beauty and pleasant climate established Darjeeling as a popular holiday destination in India. Today, due to lack of modernization of tea garden and political disturbance, present tea industry is the faded photo of past. This is one of the reasons that tourism becomes the main economy for the region. So, the industry is facing a tremendous pressure. Replacing limited elite tourism unlimited mass tourism began to take place since 1970 and from this period that tourist activity flourished quickly in Darjeeling. About 45 lakhs tourists flock to Darjeeling every year. In order to provide accommodation to this enormous number of tourists, today Darjeeling is overcrowded by number of hotels of different grades. Number of non registered medium and low budget hotels are grew up at present Day. There are large numbers of shops in Darjeeling which mainly cater to the needs of the tourists. Number of street hawkers increases during tourist season. On other hand, people of the sick tea industry are searching an alternative income source in tourism industry. The rapid growth of the industry and tremendous

pressure of present situation on it has started to destruct the industry. Today alternative tourism development is required for sustention of the region.

The population of the Darjeeling is 8,50,000 (approx) including about 52,689 living in the town. The colourful people are descended from the Gorkhas of eastern Nepal; Tibetians, Lamas, Gurungs from western Nepal, fair-skinned Sikkim Bhutias and Lepchas. Most of the people of Darjeeling directly or indirectly involved with Tourism industry. Tourism industry includes all socio-cultural and economic activities that they are directly involved in providing services to tourists. Tourism turned the large industry worldwide in term of employment and gross domestic product. The bit off tourist places are growing rapidly and it is replaced on the old tourism concept to establish the sustainable growth of a region. Many new destinations, rural & tea tourism, home stay is coming up to dilute the pressure of present tourism industry in Darjeeling.

Japanese term Tourism-“Kanko” means people making exchange across border create society, economy and culture. At present, offbeat tourism has been a new sector of tourism where people enjoy culture, life style and physical environment of a region. Local ethnic culture and life style as well as fresh environment are the elements or products for such tourism. Such type of tourism experience exclusively nature oriented experience, which provides the opportunity to share the culture and ethnical living within local landscape. Offbeat tourism becomes an important economic activity for bit off areas in Darjeeling Hills. Especially, it involves exploring cultural root without staining the existing environment.

### **1.1 Objectives of the study:**

Overall aim of the present study is to analyze the resources by analyzing development of tourism in the study region and their contribution in sustainable socio-economic growth, ecological and cultural preservation.

### **1.2. Methods of data collection**

For the preparation of the paper I collected some data through two methods: that are

**a) Primary data collection method:** In the Primary data collection method information is obtained from original sources from the field.

**b) Secondary data collection method:** There are numerous sources of secondary data.  
.General library.

Published and unpublished papers.

Government publications (magazines).

Online govt. & non-govt. articles and documents.

## **2. Present alternative Tourism scenario in Darjeeling Hills**

Tourism today has become an important segment of Indian economy contributing sustainable development to the country. Tourism turned the large industry worldwide in term of employment and gross domestic product. As per the world travel and tourism council estimate, this sector now generates more than 4% of the country's GDP and more than 20 crore jobs. The success of tourism depends on the ability of destinations to engage in sustainable and conservation of vital resources. West Bengal is a state located in the eastern part of India, which shares its international border with Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. It stretches from Himalayas in the North to the Bay of Bengal in the South. Its share in international tourist receipts is about 3.36% of India. (S. Bhutia 2014)

Darjeeling is the northernmost district of West Bengal which roughly resembles an inverted wedge with its base resting on Sikkim, its sides touching Nepal, Bhutan and Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. Darjeeling's economy is dominated by tourism. At present, tourism industry has reached such a level that it began to lose its carrying capacity. So, the present tourism has required a new way to sustain the industry in future. Bit off areas of Darjeeling shows a new path to preserve the socio-culture and ecology. It offers the ethnic experience with fresh air. Such tourism of Darjeeling has achieved a great success to establish a sustainable tourism development as well as alternative sustainable economic development with preservation of ethnic socio-cultural life of Darjeeling Hills. At present two major sustainable tourism in Darjeeling Hills are –

### **2.1. Rural Tourism**

Rural tourism initiatives are just giving city seekers a taste of life on the other side of the farm hedge. They have two commitments to maintain traditional agriculture and protect the region's incredible biodiversity. The small villages have been producing high qualities and certified organic Darjeeling tea, vegetables, fruits like oranges etc. By these, they are competing successfully against large corporate tourism sales without losing their local

environment. Ethnic cottage and Home-stay in rural area is gaining popularity among tourists in Darjeeling hills day by day.

## 2.2. Tea Tourism

Expensive tea plantation was established in this region in the early 1840s' when Dr. Campbell, a Scottish surgeon, planted bushes from China. Today, Darjeeling ornamentally gabled bungalows, bandstand and the faded photos in the planters club conjure the ghost of those times. To keep the past fame as well as nostalgia of Darjeeling tea, two main economic activities of Darjeeling: tea and tourism are merged together and establish the popular tea tourism concept in the region. Tea tourism in Darjeeling is fast catching popularity with more tourists making their way to lush green tea estates of Darjeeling. Today, Darjeeling boasts of these major areas – Makaibari, Sourennee Tea Estate, Happy Valley Tea Estate, Glenburn Tea Estate, Zurrantee Tea Estate etc. that produce some of the finest tea in the world. Tea tourism is adding the fresh oxygen to the old gardens which need to do something to keep their existence. Tea tourism is a new path of sustainable development as well as a new way of economic development for tea garden and surroundings.

## 3. Challenges and scope of alternative Tourism in Darjeeling Hills

### 3.1. Challenges

Each and every industry faces some problem in its initial stage. Similarly, offbeat tourism development in tea gardens and other areas in Darjeeling are facing some problems for their social life. To quite from the bottleneck political disturbance and tremendous economic crisis in tea industry, rapid disorganized tourism development has been take place in these areas in hills. So some areas are implemented new tourism concepts without proper orientation of local community and involve unskilled man power with improper planning which are created a great tension for the regions society. It is much challenging to generalize the positive impact of tourism on a host society or people because of the complex nature of tourist phenomenon, present political situation and tremendous economic crisis in tea garden surrounded areas of the region. The reality some time creates conditions where residents may try to copy tourist behavior and spending pattern; at the same time reselecting their inability to do so and taking comparable purchasing power at many tea garden destinations social tensions emerge in the form of –

Human trapping

Prostitution

Cheating

Mugging of tourists and

Drug peddling

It is clear that while the economic impact of tourism is largely beneficial, the social impact can be undesirable and also mixing of the environment and culture. But this study does not mean that tourism is destructive for socio-cultural value in Darjeeling Hills. The solution lies with the planners, developers and decision makers. The study tries to find out the solution of such problems and also tries to show how some areas are enjoying much positive impacts from such type of tourism in study area by implementing the proper organized development.

### 3.2. Scope

A number of researchers have found different conditions for positive the impact of tourism on destination. The impact of tourism on any destination will be determined by a wide variety of factors:-

- a) The volume of tourist arrivals;
- b) The structure of the host economy;
- c) The type of the tourism activities;
- d) The difference in the socio-cultural characteristics between the host and the tourists;
- e) The fragility of the local environment.

The tourism industry in Darjeeling is a large and diverse field. It provides a challenging and exciting career opportunity for the people of this hilly region. Organization exists for people. The people make them in use. Their effectiveness depends on the behavior and performance of people constituting them. There is no doubt that the people will determine the future of tourism industry in Darjeeling. This is the only industry which generates maximum number of direct and indirect employment. Therefore, the tourism industry has achieved new dimensions with far and distant to enrich and experience the flavor of Darjeeling tea and natural beauty. In the scenario of liberalization, privatization and globalization, ongoing war among the players of tourism receiving countries is unavoidable. In such competitive situation, only efficient and effective organization can survive. Tourism education has become a subject of prime concern in the whole world as numbers of travelers continue to grow and markets become more sophisticated. Therefore, betterment of education systems, vocational qualification, higher studies and

sectored training schemes has been encouraged to improve travel and tourism service qualities. Tourism is not only an economic activity of importance to Darjeeling development, but also an important medium of cultural exchange among the various nations of the world.

The products of offbeat tourism simply help to preserve the ethnic culture with alternative income source in some areas like Bara Mangwa, Chhiabari Tea estate etc. The eco-friendly tourism is suitable to ethnic rural accommodation friendly people, scenic beauty with virgin nature, local cuisine, beverages, folk culture, folk art and crafts. Figure 1 explains such tourist product which is identified during the visit in Study areas.



**Figure1.** Tourist Products in Darjeeling Hills Source: Primary Data.

The functional elements of tourism help to improve the areas of life style. The functional elements are ethnic accommodation with hygienic toilet, local food service with maintaining a fresh hygienic way and organic food grains, communication system like road condition and transport, medical facilities, clean ecology performance of local folk culture, art and crafts. All these products help to improve the local hygiene sense, cleanness of area, transport and road condition, local health centre and also improve the urge of education. It also helps to preserve the ethnic culture which is going to rob from the mind of local people and bio-diversity which hardly one can keep in mind due to development. Figure 2 shows the elements of tourism which is also based on primary data, and collected during the visit in study area.



**Figure 2.** Tourism Elements of Darjeeling Hills. Source: Primary Data

Present initiatives in tourism helps sustainable economic growth in Darjeeling Hills. Thus alternative or bit off tourism initiative creates an atmosphere of sustainable growth which helps people to live in a beautiful earth.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The concept of holiday has now changed with existing rather than just visit on exotic location. The present socio-cultural scenario, tourism should not intervene host culture but the host community should be involved in tourism process. This is high time to exploit the tourist potential of those areas which remain untapped till now. As well as require to control on mass tourism. Darjeeling has discovered alternative tourist attractions to preserve the socio-culture as well as ecology by offering the ethnic local socio-culture experience in bit off places with fresh air and certified organic tea, vegetables, fruits like oranges, home stay in small rural forest or tea garden etc. Such type of tourism products not only help to the improvement of the economy of area but also the life style of the people. Tourism helps to improve local hygiene sense, cleanliness, and transport and road conditions, local health centre and also improve the urge of education. It helps to preserve the ethnic culture, bio-diversity. They have two commitments which are: (a) traditional life and (b) protecting the regional incredible bio-diversity. These factors exhibit the true diversity of culture to build an impressive image and add a lot of value to a particular destination. Darjeeling Hills has promoted socio-cultural tourism due to the following reasons -

- 1) Preservation of cultural heritage in the form of organized dance, music, drama and fair and festivals.
- 2) Enrichment of knowledge and experience of both the tourist and host community.
- 3) Promotion of universal peace, harmony and brotherhood.
- 4) Creation of income and employment in the destination regions.
- 5) Development of infrastructure and superstructure for socio-cultural promotion.

Tourism is no doubt a social phenomenon that aims at fostering a welfare society and nation. It is a significant way of spreading peace, harmony and universal brotherhood across people and countries. Socio-cultural relationship between people can be broadened. It represents the image of the region from all dimensions.

Environmental isolation and unstable political situation create a barrier for social promotion in Darjeeling Hills. But today they get a new path to escape the problems by introducing bit off tourism. Due to the existing problems, the concept of alternative tourism is very popular among the bit off isolated and economically backward areas. So, they adopt it without proper orientation and plane. This situation is starting disorganized rapid growth of such tourism which creates some tension in some areas. Still it is found that many areas of Darjeeling Hills enjoy the friendship and friendly peaceful atmosphere which is mainly created by such development in these areas. Here tourism promotes the exchange of knowledge and remove ignorance. It is essential for each human being to be recognized in society for status, social recognition and achievements. Here tourism has transformed the society towards the attainment of self realization and enlightenment. Here bit off tourism involves enabling people financially and psychologically. So, the concept has gained more popularity and acceptability in the different parts of Darjeeling Hills.

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