

Sustainability of Cultural Integration in Darjeeling Hills

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Abstract

Harijan makes a descriptive attempt to assess the 'sustainability of cultural integration in the Darjeeling hills' by exploring its vital constituents which encourage the sustenance of 'cultural diversity' in the hills. He also attempts to throw some new light on the prevailing discourse by focusing on the move of 'cultural diversity' to 'cultural integrity' of Darjeeling hills.

Keywords: Sustainability, Darjeeling Hills, Cultural Diversity

Introduction

The hill stations of India played a substantial role in the development of Indian culture. Culture is the pride of any nation or community. Culture acts as a cementing factor in integrating the different communities. "Integration is a process which facilitates cooperation and consensus among the members of diverse social backgrounds through the medium of communication, social values and social institutions."¹ The process of sustainable development of Darjeeling is connected with diverse demographic growth and co-existence of different culture and their integration. The British left many legacies in Darjeeling but the legacy of cultural integration brought by indigenous population. Darjeeling has in fact, been described as a 'Babel of tribes and nations' and as an 'Ethnological Museum.'² The mosaic of the cultural life in Darjeeling sparkles with a symbiosis of the Indic and Mongolian worlds.

Constituents for the 'Cultural Diversity' in Darjeeling hills

The society in the Darjeeling hills is made up of various elements drawn from diverse origins. The following are some factors that enriched the cultural diversity of Darjeeling hills.

Firslly, The climate of Darjeeling was attractive to the British as it had a mean temperature of 5 degree Centigrade in winter and 15 degree Centigrade in summer. Environmental conditions play a major role in conditioning the livelihood and economy of the people in Darjeeling Himalaya precisely because of the economic potentiality and the prospects of trade and the strategic importance of Darjeeling enhanced its identity as a 'hill station.' Urbanization of Darjeeling intensified through the establishment of

1 T.B. Subba, A.C. Sinha, G.S. Nepal & D.R. Nepal (eds.), *Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 2009, pp. 163.

2 Cfr L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling*, New Delhi, Logos Press, 1907 (Reprinted 1999).

a Sanatorium at the nucleus town led to the growth of employment opportunities and hence to population growth. By the year 1850 Dr. Campbell, the first Superintendent, was able to report that the number of inhabitants had risen to 10,000 (from 100). Sir Joseph Hooker, indeed, compared the progress of Darjeeling to that of an Australian colony, both as regards the rapid extension of buildings and the accession of native families from the surrounding countries. The British expressed hope that Darjeeling was the gateway through which commerce and culture of the West could reach Central Asia. So, the British decorated the place (Darjeeling) as a 'Hill Station' with Sanatorium, Plantation, Railways, Roadways, Public works, Tourism, Schools and Missions, etc.

Secondly, Tea Plantation Industry was a legacy of the British Government in Darjeeling. The tea industry brought about a great transformation in the economic landscape, demography and the entire socio-economic pattern of the district. Many immigrants from inside and outside of the Country participated in the development of tea plantation industry which ultimately encouraged different cultures to flourish and integrate in the area. The tea plantation industry developed Tourism which made Darjeeling the 'Queen of Hills.' Commercial tea plantation in Darjeeling dates back about 170 years under the British colony and still today forms the major socio-economic backbone of the local population. Migration of diverse ethnic groups, the revolutionizing phenomenon, in the history of Darjeeling largely encouraged by the tea plantation industry as it sought the cheap labour from outside. Tea Industry continues to be the biggest employer in this region.

Today the Tea gardens, the only organized industry in Darjeeling generates about ` 150 crores annually. "This income sustains about 50,000 permanent tea garden labourers with another 2,00,000 dependents who are completely dependent on tea-labor wages."³ With the development of Tea plantations, small hillside towns also developed into tourist resorts with minimally planned infrastructure which still sustains many towns in Darjeeling developed during that period.

Thirdly, Trade and Commerce played a vital role in sustaining cultural tranquility of Darjeeling hills. Their trading activities opened up the channels of close interaction with the natives. "Hodgson dreamt of a British business empire extending throughout the Himalayas from India, through Nepal and Tibet into China."⁴

In the interior of the district trade is carried on by means of weekly markets (haats) held in the larger villages. Kalimpong, sub-division of Darjeeling, was the entrepot for the Tibetan trade. Kalimpong is possibly the most cosmopolitan of hill stations in the Himalayas. Due to the growth of trade and commerce, it was noted as early as 1907 that one could meet "Tibetans, Mongolians, Chinese, Burmese, Nepalis, Lepchas, Bhutanese, Marwaries, Ladakis, Bengalis, Punjabis, Kabulis, and Europeans, and

3 P.J. Victor SJ, Prabhat Pradhan, Devika S. Lama and Aniruddha Das (eds), *Discursive Hills: Studies in History, Polity and Economy*, St. Joseph's Publication, Darjeeling, 2007, p. 222.

4 *Ibid.* p. 21.

every shade between," in the Kalimpong Mela started in 1891 to encourage trade and commerce.¹⁵ The following descriptions of the mela shows that Darjeeling Hills was becoming the commercial hub for the traders and merchants.

"An agricultural exhibition is held at the same time, prizes being given for grain, poultry, mules, ponies and all kinds of live stock. It is an annual festival for the whole country side, the villagers flocking in to see the athletic sports, dancing and other amusements; but it has a very practical side, as it is most useful in stimulating both the agriculture and trade of Darjeeling."¹⁶

The Newars sought to regain a leading role among the Nepalis in Darjeeling by taking on white collar jobs and entering trade and commerce. The commercial activities of the area (Darjeeling) attracted a large number of people from the plains. The Marwaris, who have been taken by Dozey as money-lenders, were in fact, the pillars of the trading activities of Darjeeling. Dr. Campbell himself established a market, also called 'Gundri Bazaar' where all kinds of people of diverse origins would come and thus gave rise to petty small scale industries such as handicraft and weaving industries which in turn encouraged the culture of the hill region.¹⁷

Fourthly, Migration was one of the important phenomena which changed the socio-economic scenario of Darjeeling hills. The British encouraged migration in Darjeeling for the supply of the huge labour in the tea plantation industry and other developmental works from the neighbouring districts, states and countries. The Britishers provided the requisite infrastructure for commercial ventures. As a result, "merchant communities such as the Bhutias, Nepalese, Tibetans, Bengalees, Marwaris, Biharis, Punjabis, Kashmiris and Hindusthanis in general began to migrate to this area and settle here in order to set up their business enterprises. British rule gave them protection and security."¹⁸

Ethnicity in Darjeeling has been formulated primarily by migration. The population of Darjeeling is exceedingly heterogeneous. The majority of the people in the hills are of Mongolian origin, belonging chiefly to various Nepalese castes, but also including a large number of Lepchas, Bhutias and Tibetans.¹⁹ Moreover, cultural assimilation was paving the way for cultural integrity in the hills. "In India the term "Gorkha" denoted the ethno-linguistic group which spoke the Nepali language in Darjeeling, a great deal of assimilation has taken place between the various ethnic groups e.g. all communities commonly speak the Nepali language and food habits are similar."²⁰ Muslims followed

5 L.S.S. O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p. 130.

6 *Ibid.* p. 131.

7 Tanka Bahadur Subba, *The Quiet Hills, A Study of the Agrarian Relations in Hill Darjeeling*, Published for the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society by the I.S.P.C.K., Delhi, 1985, p. 21.

8 Cfr L.S.S. O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

9 *Ibid.* p. 40.

10 P.J. Victor *et al*, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

as "Hakims" providing homeopathic cures and chipped in to provide their expertise in the bakery business and in the supply of meat.

The demographic feature of colonial Darjeeling Hills has been depicted as follows:

Category	Male	Female
Bhuimali and Mehter	539	540
Bhutia	292	130
Brahmin	500	130
Damai	75	33
Gharti	126	103
Gurung	981	985
Kaibarti	194	135
Kami	373	267
Khambu	1314	1459
Lepcha	592	532
Limbo	416	108
Mangar	832	514
Munda	129	126
Murmi	500	502
Newar	318	189
Oraon	2360	2272
Rajput	366	143
Sarki	109	42
Suanwar	67	34
Yakka	33	21
Bura	644	526
Shaik	4002	2299

According to the Official Government Records in 1898, the total population of the Darjeeling Terai Tract was 36,985 persons and the composition of the population enumerated also identified the specific categories of people living in the area.¹¹

Sixthly, The chief aim of education is to impart knowledge to enlighten the society, irrespective of caste, sex, creed and religion. The British left behind their own educational legacy which is still sustained by the missionary schools and colleges in Darjeeling. The Christian missionaries came with a great zeal of public service which gave a momentum to a new culture. Even other voluntary organizations also contributed to the education of the hills. A large number of Europeans (mainly British) settled in Darjeeling town since its genesis and arrangements had to be made for the education of their children. "In 1841 a school for the Lepcha children was established at Takvar in

11 Cfr Basant B. Lama, *Through the Mists of Time: The Story of Darjeeling, The Land of Indian Gorkha*, Kurseong, 2008, p.110.

Darjeeling by Rev. William Start."¹² Rev. d. William Macfarlane (1869) gave emphasis to the vernacular education. "The Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling submitted on 19 August 1873 proposals for the improvement of the Bhooteah and Anglo-vernacular schools in Darjeeling."¹³ Even the British were promoting the native education and Christian Missionaries played a vital role in fostering education in the hills. "By the end of the 19th century, there were ninety-five schools run by the missionaries in the Eastern Himalayan region- Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, the Duars and Sikkim."¹⁴ Education is always a vital element in society and here in this context, it integrated the diversity into one umbrella. Moreover, the Catholic and Protestant churches, the Buddhists Monasteries, and their support for Central Schools, the Sai Bhakta Sangh, the Bahais, the Islamic or Ramakrishna Mission Organizations all contributed to the education of the hills, which ultimately encouraged the unique fabric of Hill Culture.¹⁵

Seventhly, Tourism developed in Darjeeling in different forms and has emerged to be a revolutionizing phenomenon since the colonial times which earned Darjeeling an acclamation, "The Queen of Hills." The climate of Darjeeling attracts the tourists across the country as well as from abroad. Train welcomes all tourists who visit here- be they foreigners or our own brethren from the other parts of the country. Tourist inflow strengthens the culture. Tourism also has contributed to the broadening of the world view and self-perception of the people because of the wide variety of people from all parts of the globe which indeed somehow promotes the global culture. The grand scenic beauty and climate of the Darjeeling Himalaya have promoted tourism as an important industry.

Eighthly, Language is one of the vital factors of culture in Darjeeling hills. Darjeeling contains a polyglot population. "Nearly half of the people speak languages of the Tibeto-Burman family, of which no less than 19 different dialects were shown in the Census returns of 1901. Among the Nepalis of Darjeeling Khambu (Jimdar), Murmi and Mangar, are the commonest tribal dialects, but Newar, Gurung, Sunuwar and Yakha are also spoken. The plainsmen who have made their homes in Darjeeling speak Hindustani, while in the Tarai tea gardens Oraon, Mundari and Santali are spoken by the coolies from the Chota Nagpur Plateau."¹⁶ In the hills, Nepali, Hindi and in the Terai Bengali, are spoken by a great majority of the inhabitants, but there are also a number of other languages current in vogue.

In India, in general, and in Darjeeling, in particular, Nepali language gradually forged a bond of cultural unity and an ethnic link among various groups who had

12 Jahar Sen, *Darjeeling: A Favoured Retreat*, New Delhi, Indus Publishing Company, 1989, p.78.

13 *Ibid.* p. 85.

14 P.J. Victor et al, *op.cit.*, p.14.

15 Cfr Kishan Harijan, *History of Education and Literacy Survey of Darjeeling(1835-2001)*, Darjeeling Times, March-April, 2009, p.22.

16 L.S.S. O'Malley, *op.cit.*, p.47.

migrated from Nepal. Even the Lepchas and Bhutias, in spite of their religious and linguistic differences with the Nepalis, 'slowly but ultimately accepted Nepali as the lingua franca in the hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling.'¹⁷ Thus, Nepali language was spoken by the majority of the people enhancing integrity in the region. Lloyd issued a proclamation, 'in 1838 in four languages: Lepcha, Urdu, Hindusthani and Bengali.' Even the Christian missionaries were prominent among those who encouraged Nepali language and literature.¹⁸

In 1891 a list of the names of places, rivers and mountains in Darjeeling with their meanings was compiled by Colonel L.A. Waddell and from this it can be gathered that the oldest names in the district are of Lepcha origin. The Lepcha gave names to the mountains, rivers and sites in their neighbourhood. A few of these old names are still alive in places where the Lepchas no longer reside. "The Tibetans, after their arrival in Sikkim, gave their own names on many of the already named sites. Thus, many of the hills and rivers have two names. After the influx of Nepalese, a new toponym in Nepali language has emerged in many cases."¹⁹ Many modified names emerged in the society. For instance, "The river known to the Lepchas as Rangnyitung was named by the Tibetans as Rangnyit Chhu. In corrupt form of Nepali, it became Rangit."²⁰ In this regard, to quote Pradhan "...There are the socio-economic factors behind the rise of a feeling of identity among the Indian Nepalese, and the language serves as a bond of unity among them..."²¹

The following table provides a picture of cultural diversity through the medium of language spoken in Darjeeling hills way back in 1873.

Languages	Spoken by the number of inhabitants
Bengali	33324
Hindustani	16044
Lepcha	3952
Tibetan	6000
Nepali	25781
Murmi	6557
Mech	1766
European and others	1288
Total	94712 ²²

17 R.L. Sarkar, Mahendra P. Lama (ed), 'The Eastern Himalayas: Environment and Economy', Indian Institute of Hill Economy, Darjeeling, 1986, p.56.

18 Cfr George Thadathil, Jiwan Namdung, Terence Mukhia and Basanti Mukhia (eds.), *Cultural Identity in Nepali Language and Literature*, Sonada Salesian College Publication, 2005.

19 L.A. Waddell, 'Place and River Names in the Darjeeling District and Sikkim', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 60(1891), 53-79.

20 Jahar Sen, *op.cit.*, p.72.

21 Kumar Pradhan, *The Gorkha Conquests, Process and Consequences of the Unification of Nepal with Particular Reference to Eastern Nepal*, Calcutta, Oxford University Press, pp.236-37.

We can see the presence of different languages which subsequently means the prevalence of different cultures and sub-cultures in the society of Darjeeling hills. Different languages were spoken by different ethnic groups or inhabitants. Even the western culture was penetrating through the medium of English language, introduction of missionary and western education, which was welcomed in the hill region for the welfare of the people.

Ninthly, in Darjeeling we can find the essence of ecclesiastical interest in the form of religions and festivals. Due to the religio-cultural set up of Darjeeling, a big number of monasteries and Gumphas came into existence. The Buddhist monasteries in and around Darjeeling are "the repositories of invaluable materials relating to religion, philosophy, art, iconography and literature of Mahayana Buddhism."²² In the Darjeeling Himalayas, the Buddhist tradition is strongly established among the tribal populations. The Tamang Buddhist monastery was built in 1926. This structure is the most beautiful embodiment of Tibeto-Nepalese architecture. This religious affiliation has contributed a special dimension to the culture of this area.²³ Besides Buddhism, Christianity has also bound together communities of distinct cultural traits to the traditional cultural milieu of the area. Sanskritization processes has also penetrated leading to cultural integration with the Hindu fold. "The annexation of Darjeeling Himalaya to India (1835-1960) has brought forward certain distinct changes in this part of the Himalayas. With the administrative changes, the area became a meeting place of the Mongoloid race of the western Himalayas (i.e. Nepal), Indo - Aryans and Australoid races of Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and tribal faith."²⁴ We can find the combination of all religious institutions such as Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, Hindu temples, Masjids (Mosques), Buddhist monasteries and gumphas, Gurudwara and so on.

Festivals constitute important factor in cultural integration as all the diverse communities of Darjeeling hills celebrates own and others festivals with great enthusiasm. Music, dance, drama, folk-lore, festivals, dresses, food items and food habits constitute an integral part of the culture and a way of life of a particular people living together in one place. The New Year festivals celebrated by some communities of Darjeeling are as follows:

Pahilo-Baisakh (the first day of the month Baishakh), which falls in the middle of April, is celebrated by the Gorkhas as a common festival irrespective of caste and religion. The new-year of the Tamangs, the Gurungs and the Sherpas is known as *Lho-chhar*. The Lepchas celebrate their New-year as *Nam-boon*, which begins three days before the ending of the year and lasts for the total of seven days. Tibetans celebrate *Lho-chhar* (Tibetan New Year) in February, which is the most important festival in the Tibetan calendar. Buddha-

22 Jahar Sen, *op.cit.*, pp. 73.

23 *Ibid.* 74.

24 R.L. Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 384-85.

Jayanti, which falls on the full-moon day of Baishakh (April-May), is celebrated with much enthusiasm throughout to commemorate the birth, attainment of knowledge and the death of Lord Buddha. It is a Buddhist festival celebrated especially by the Tamangs, the Sherpas, the Gurungs and the Lepchas. A festival symbolizing the bond of love between brothers and sisters is also celebrated by Nepali Hindus as *Raksha Bandhan*.²⁵

Raksha-Bandhan is the most important festival of the Gorkhas, which they celebrate, united, is *Dashain* or Durga-puja. Tihar or Diwali, the festival of light, is the second biggest festival, which the Gorkhas (Hindus) celebrate enthusiastically with great sense of participation across communities. "The main attraction of Tihar is the system of *Deusure* and *Bhailo*. It is a kind of customary singing and dancing performed in groups, almost similar to carol of the Christmas."²⁶ Moreover, Ram-Nawami and Shiva-ratri is celebrated by the Hindus of Darjeeling. Likewise, Christmas is widely celebrated among the Christians and Muslims celebrate Id in great enthusiasm. Besides, many native festivals are celebrated by the people of Darjeeling hills. So, in all respect, there is a secular culture in the hills with a porous border of caste and religion. The above survey shows that the combination of these factors worked towards emergence of a composite culture in Darjeeling hills.

Cultural Diversity to Cultural Integrity:

As we have seen the Darjeeling Himalaya has a diversity even more pronounced than other parts of the country. Definitely, the Indian concept of 'Unity in Diversity' can be justified in terms of Darjeeling. India is a multi cultural, liberal, democratic state. Darjeeling is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual society. However, there are areas where different communities had in the course of time, intermingled deeply by establishing linkages for the smooth functioning of their respective individual societies. The Cultural Diversity paved the way for Cultural Integrity in the hills.

Darjeeling became a major social meeting place for the British. The ethnicity of Darjeeling hills brought the different socio-economic and cultural changes. "An ethnic group is a distinct category of a larger population whose culture is usually different from its own. The members of such a group are, or consider themselves to be, or are thought to be, bound together by common ties of race, nationality, religion or culture."²⁷ Earlier the Gorkha was a separate term but now it became an identity.

In fact, the term Gorkha came to be used to indicate all Nepalese irrespective of what caste or tribe they belonged. In Darjeeling the Gorkha was free from the social shackles of his native Nepal - rigid lines of religion caste, creed and culture were taken lightly, if

25 P.J. Victor et al, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

26 *Ibid.* p. 79.

27 Aditi Chatterji, *Contested Landscapes: The Story of Darjeeling*, Indian National Trust For Art And Cultural Heritage (INTACH), Calcutta Chapter, Kolkata, 2007, p. 2.

not totally disregarded a distinctly different attitude from the one in the place they left behind.²⁸

Darjeeling became somewhat of a 'mini-America' for people seeking a new life, and the district became a melting pot of sorts for Nepalese of different ethnic communities, cultures and sub-cultures now settling the area. Even the Europeans gave Darjeeling a formal urban shape to satisfy their interests by way of instituting urban institutions like Municipality, health, sanitation, educational institutions, water supply, electricity, roads, railways, markets and so on. Therefore, the European culture had a tremendous impact on the inhabitants of Darjeeling. Subsequent generations of Marwaris, Biharis, Rajasthanis have happily settled in the hills. One can find Diaspora of Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet in Darjeeling, settled happily earning their livelihood.

The social fabric went one step further when Nepalese from the hills married Bengali, Bihari and even Marwari. Religious lines were obliterated when Christians married non - Christians, Muslim married Hindu, Buddhist married Christian, and all of this happened without 'social stigma' or 'social ostracism'.²⁹ So, intermarriage among other castes and communities of diverse origins gives a unique shape to the cultural integrity of Darjeeling. We can say that migration of different linguistic, ethnic and religious groups in the hill region played a major role in developing the cultural integrity in Darjeeling hills. So, the treasured cultural practices of specific population should be preserved, which is contributing greatly for the sustainability of cultural integration in the Darjeeling hills.

The people of Darjeeling from all communities can take great pride in the fact that in the entire course of its recorded history, in the last almost 200 years, notwithstanding the terrible events of history which tore the county apart into the two still warring nations of India and Pakistan, and notwithstanding the pressures of modern day politics, the Darjeeling hills has never witnessed a communal riot - which is something that cannot be said without reservation of the most socially and politically 'enlightened' parts of India. The social structure created proud British patterns of behaviour like 'get-togethers, parties, picnics, lunches and other forms of entertainment' that set the wheels of social interaction in movement.³⁰ These too eventually became a part of the culture of Darjeeling.

Any keen observer of Indian history would subscribe to the fact that the political fragmentation notwithstanding, India existed as a civilization through centuries. "The politico-geographical boundaries did not hinder the flow of various cultural forms of art, literature, music, dance, religion and philosophy from one community and region to

28 Basant B. Lama, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

30 P.J. Victor, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

another.³¹ In fact the mingling of cultures brought the newer identification to India as a whole and to its distinctive parts - one such prominent unit being Darjeeling. Besides as Subba notes 'globalization with all its inherent contradictions' also benefitted local and indigenous cultures by 'disseminating information, creating awareness about cultural heritage and by marketing cultures through tourism and other marketing strategies.'³² Cultural economy has supported arts and crafts production, innovation and thriving cultural industry which has created comparative advantage for many ethnic groups for upward mobility and facilitate their global integration processes. There is peaceful co-existence of inhabitants of Darjeeling who are diversified by religion, culture and language. The intermingling of the various tribes and races- Lepchas, Nepalese, Bhutias and the Indians in this melting pot had an impact on Cultural Integrity of the region, which contributed to the liberal and cosmopolitan identity of the hills.

Though the politics of culture has been a brewing issue in Darjeeling right from the last leg of the colonial period, it can be said that "from the beginning of the eighties of the last century it turned to be a strong and central issue not only in the local politics of Darjeeling rather in the whole of West Bengal."³³ The problem of ethnicity and the issue of 'Identity' became visible in the politics. "...the distinction of language and culture, the Nepalese under the auspices of different organizations in the Darjeeling hills had been clamouring for separate political identity all through the long course of the twentieth century..."³⁴ The factors like high growth of population, rapid urbanization, expansion of tourism etc. put tremendous pressure on locally available resources. Further, ethno-linguistic movement became visible for protection of identity.

In this regard, "an objective assessment of the politics of Gorkha sub-nationalism reveals that in spite of their strong political will to preserve their distinctive identity they always aspired to be integrated to Indian nationalism."³⁵ The motive is not to leave India but to prove as real citizen of India. "...they (Nepalis) live in towns as well as villages, hills as well as plains, speak their language as well as those of their neighbouring communities, celebrate their festivals as well as those of their fellow Indian communities, and are found in almost every state of India."³⁶ As Amartya Sen writes, 'identities are robustly plural, and that the importance of one identity need not obliterate the importance of others.'³⁷

31 T.B. Subba, A.C. Sinha, G.S. Nepal & D.R. Nepal (Eds.), *Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 2009, p. 148.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

33 Sailen Debnath, *Essays on Cultural History of North Bengal*, Siliguri, N.L. Publishers in association with National Library, West Bengal, 2008, p. 87.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

35 T. B. Subba *et al*, *op.cit.*, p.163.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 392.

37 As quoted in *Ibid.*, p.193.

The question of Nepali identity is important but a plural and unique identity of the hill areas cannot ignore the existence of other communities in the region for peace and sustainable development. This will continue to facilitate cultural plurality and consolidate shared identity of the hill people. The concept of 'Cultural Heritage' needs to be preserved and fostered among the hill people.

Conclusion

Development is a multi-dimensional process and Culture plays a vital role in the development of the people. Preservation of environment, resources and culture is essential for sustainable development of Darjeeling hills. Darjeeling is a fascinating blend of people of various ethnic origins. In spite of the ethnic complexities of Darjeeling district, composite culture began to take shape in the three hill sub-divisions.

It is important for the state and international community to see cultural assertions as a positive social process and promote/preserve the cultural rights of local communities.³⁸ People of multiple diversities live together in perfect specimen of Communal Harmony which is a sign of sustainability of cultural integration in Darjeeling hills. The cultural heritage of Darjeeling, which is evident in its natural endowments, Colonial (Heritage) architecture and buildings and introduction of tea and tourism industry, has generated a sense of belonging and attachments to the town. Significant attention is needed to safeguard the elements of cultural heritage by sustaining cultural integrity.

38 George Thadathil, "National Aspirations and Regional Autonomy: A Socio-political Perspective on Community" in Felix Wilfred and George Thadathil (eds.), *Communities and Identity Consciousness*, Chennai, Madras University, 2004, pp. 182-190.