Wrote Mark Twain on Darjeeling:

“The one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once by even a glimpse would not give that glimpse for the shows of the rest of the world combined”.

Darjeeling Hills as a location is severely underestimated as study area. It is regarded mainly as tourist destination with spectacular landscape and as politically disturbed ‘ungovernable’ zone. The researcher has a different take on the Hills as a ‘native’ with social scientific orientation.

Tucked away in the Himalayas, Darjeeling, the queen of all hill stations, is widely known for its breathtaking beauty. A tourist’s paradise, it is the northernmost district in the state of West Bengal. The Darjeeling district shares its border with Sikkim in the north, Nepal in the west and Bhutan in the east. However, in context of the social, cultural, economic aspirations of the people of this Hill region, it still stands neglected. Even after more than six decades of independence of the country, this beautiful Hill station is still without proper infrastructure, medical facilities, joblessness, basic amenities like drinking water, and the list is long. Above all, lack of economic development in the region has hard hit, particularly the rural areas of the Darjeeling Hills. To take an instance, there are hundreds like Desh Bir Rai, a villager who shares his opinion on development: “We have not been provided with the basic of road, water and electricity, what to talk of development”.

The ordinary people had great hope and expectation when Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was constituted in 1988 after a long agitation for Gorkhaland. But the development scenario in the Hills, continued to stagnate, with the rural areas worst hit. One of the grounds for such negligence can be pointed to the political instability that does not seem to stop.

The need of the hour, therefore, is to address the basic needs of the people and design strategies and policies to provide solutions to social, economic, environmental and political problems. Considering these conditions, the researcher wanted to comprehend the scenario and there was an urge to particularly explore the rural belt of
Darjeeling Hills. Development seems to have fragmented, where in some areas it is yet to start and in some places it stagnates. Darjeeling, therefore, yearns for 'change'.

The rural villages depict the reality, through the struggle for survival. In fact it is a daily battle with lack of electricity, good roads, safe drinking water, primary health centers, schools and so forth. The study attempts to explore, putting Participatory Rural Development Communication (PRDC) at the centrestage, the limits and potential of development in the life of the rural poor who have always been at the receiving end of the top-down development process. The researcher has made a modest effort to explore and identify the channels of communication that can facilitate the rural people to take part in the process that is meant to alleviate their life. The participatory process also involves people's active involvement in identification, interaction, sharing and decision-making. The focus needs to be on the 'voice' of the rural people that unfortunately lies largely unheard in the rural areas.