

CHAPTER 3

ECONOMY AND COMMUNICATION OF SILIGURI

Scholars have treated the economy as well as material life as one of the central themes in studying urban history of a region. In the Marxian viewpoint the trajectories of growth of the modern world are reflected through the great economic transformations that shaped world history. Scholars¹⁵⁹ tend to understand that the industrial revolution was a crucial turning point which simultaneously led to the growth of consumer culture in the world. The evolution of economic theories saw its protagonists in the works of Adam Smith (1723-90), through David Ricardo (1772-1828), Alfred Marshall (1842-1924) and John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) in conjunction with Industrial capitalism and served as an ideological justification to the economic system that evolved in different corners of the world. Economic theorists hailed Marx as one of the most influential thinkers on how economy shaped the modern world. Marx believed that human society passes through five different stages and these transitions are natural concomitant to the changes brought within. The five stages were Proto Communism- feudalism- capitalism- Communism -socialism. Marxist theory had a profound impact on the historical research regarding economic growth, industrialization and periodisation, class formations etc. Historians like Eric Habsbawn drew on Karl Marx to narrate England's path towards industrialisation and its basis in “enclosure movement, perennial capitalism and early rapid mechanisation.”¹⁶⁰

While Marxist models was guiding framework for Scholars like George Lefebvre and Albert Soboul, it was Robert Malthus a political economist who came forward with his ‘pessimistic perspective’ that population had a natural tendency to grow if not controlled , which would have an adverse impact on the availability of food supply. Thus, a corollary of demographic and economic stagnation was explained by Malthus.

¹⁵⁹Roche, Daniel. *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France (1600-1800)*, Cambridge, 2000, Neil Mckendric, John Brewer and J.H.Plumb (ed.), *The Birth Of Consumer Society: The Commercialisation of Eighteenth Century England*, Bloomington, 1982. Brewer and Roy Porter (ed.) *Consumption and the World of Goods*, London, 1933.

¹⁶⁰ Walker Garhine(ed), *Writing Early Modern History*, OUP, 2005, p.161.

The works of Malthus guided historians like March Bloch, Fernand Brudel and Le Roy Ladurie, who identified a long period of ‘traditional and immobile Society’ that emerged after the 14th century Black Death. The Malthusian framework of the Annals School was criticised by economic historians who questioned “the immobility of traditional society and the assumptions that technological limitations and cultural backwardness were the factors inhibiting growth.”¹⁶¹ Historians began to look towards Social Sciences primarily anthropology and sociology to develop insights beyond Marxism and Malthusian meta-narratives.

A new insight that comes into consideration is the study of ‘space’. Henry Lefebvre’s seminal work, “The Production of Space” argued that space is produced by historical societies in three but distinct interconnected bases: ‘The Perceive Space, The Conceived Space, and The Lived Space’.¹⁶²

The Perceive Space as Lefebvre suggested refers to the element that can only be sensed by body manipulation and moves through the physical body. The Conceived Space is the idea that is derived from thinking about space and this could arise from physics, urban planning, and geography and includes the ways of drawing borders, mapping cities and imagining the area with notions based on structures prevalent in the society. The Lived Space differs from perceive and conceive basis as it could amplifier or undermine each of the two aspects and it may also contain the characteristic feature of the book perceive and concept space.¹⁶³ E Soja comments that “Spatiality is not only product but also producer and a reproducer of the relations of production as well as domination.”¹⁶⁴

The economic space as well as the transit spaces passed through colossal changes in context to Siliguri. The urge for creation of personal ‘social spaces’ by renovating Darjeeling

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 164.

¹⁶² Lefebvre, Henry. *The Production of Space*, Eng. trans, OUP, 1991, pp. 66-71, also see Walker Garhine(ed). *Op. cit.*, p. 161.

¹⁶³ Lefebvre, Henry. *Op. cit.*, p. 40, Walker Garhine(ed). *Op. cit.*, p.161.

¹⁶⁴ Soja, E. “The Spatiality of Social Life: Towards a Transformative Re-theorization” in D. Gregory and J. Urry. *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*. Macmillan, 1985, p. 110

Hills into Sanatorium by the Europeans and growth of transport and communication changed the fate of Siliguri. Cities are shaped and reshaped by many historical and geographical features but at any stage in the city's history economic boom can occur and patterns of land use can change the transporting priorities. Thus, Economy and communication can be the 'maker and breaker' of cities.

Siliguri's particular location on the narrowest part of Indian land naturally limits the scope of the city's boundary. There are strips of land on both sides of Sevoke Road (north east of Siliguri) up to Mampong forest and of NH-31 (Siliguri to Bagdogra road on West of Siliguri) up to Nepal and Bihar. Hence, the city is growing as a ribbon-development along those lines. On two sides of NH-31 there exist many tea plantations, limiting the growth. On south Siliguri's expansion is thwarted at the Bangladesh border and on the east, by Baikunthapur reserve forest. Siliguri is the commercial hub for the entire North Bengal, North-Eastern States and some parts of Bihar. The market of Siliguri satisfies the demand of the large hinterland of Dooars, the entire state of Sikkim and Darjeeling, also parts of the Kingdom of Bhutan and North-East India. Siliguri is the nodal point of location where the cargo is shifted from one carrier to another for dispatch to other destinations in the North East part of India. Naturally trading has become one of the traditional mainstays of business in Siliguri. Apart from trading, the three T's Tea, Tourism and Timber have accounted for major economic produce. Siliguri has a large number of trade centres and readymade markets for consumer goods and is thus home to myriad retailers, wholesalers, dealers, distributors and small-scale entrepreneurs. It is the commercial nerve centre of North Bengal.

The city's strategic location makes it a base for indispensable supplies to the North-East region. Thus, Siliguri has gradually developed as a profitable region for a variety of businesses. As a central hub, many national and multinational companies and organisations have set up their offices. Agriculture production is not significant in the Siliguri Municipal Corporation area. However, the surrounding areas, especially the north and north-western parts of the city, host a

few tea estates. The city mainly depends on its surrounding villages for vegetables and dairy activities

The development of the Tea industry was a big boon for Siliguri and the adjoining areas. The focus which was earlier towards the Hills now began shifting towards the terai regions. Siliguri being the foothills of the Himalayas began to develop as the 'Junction point' of trade for dispatching the teas commercially to other parts of India and especially Calcutta port from where it was further sent to different foreign countries. The development of Railways juxtaposed with the commercial development of Tea gardens at large scale in the District.

Table 3.1: Growth of Tea Industry in Darjeeling District (1951-1990).

Dist/ Region		1951	1961	1971	1981	1990	%increase over 1951
Darjeeling	Number of Tea Gardens	-	99	97	103	102	-
	Areas in Hectares	16569	18605	18245	19239	20065	21.00
Siliguri /terai	Number of Tea Gardens	-	47	48	53	82	-
	Areas in Hectares	8402	9344	10769	11314	13345	58.00

Source: Tea Statistics 1990-91, Tea Board of India, Calcutta, pp.4-10

Siliguri emerged as the third-most important centre of tea trade in the country. Post-independence two important changes took place in the Tea sector. Firstly, the establishment of the Central Tea Board in 1950 and the Tea Board of India in 1953 and the setting up of the Siliguri Tea Auction Centre in 1976 for better marketing of local tea products, gave a major fillip to the tea industry. Both domestic and foreign sales from tea gardens situated in the North-Bengal districts and Assam were now routed through Siliguri. The tea auction centre has greatly reduced the travel time of tea growers of North Bengal to market the end product. The second most important change was that the ownership of the Tea Estates changed. The Bengali owners

were replaced by the Marwari owners.¹⁶⁵The main reason for this change was that the Bengali Tea owners solely depended on the Tea Gardens for their income and were extravagant and led a lavish life. This deteriorated the financial condition of the owners and slowly the ownership passed in the hands of Marwaris.

Siliguri was turning into one of the most economically vibrant towns in West Bengal. The process of urbanisation led to the expansion of the town which had some adverse impact on the tea gardens. The tea gardens were now converted to Satellite towns owing to demand for urban expansion, for example the Uttorayan Township was erected on the burial ground of Chandmoni Tea Estate. As reported in the Telegraph (dated 21/12.2009) “the West Bengal Estate Acquisition (Amendment) Bill, 2009 was necessitated by the fact that the land at these units was being used to build commercial and residential complexes and not to serve the purpose for which it had been given on lease”¹⁶⁶. Such issues of allowing the state to take over land depended on whether Lessee or the companies wanted to invest in tea or other crops as permissible under the Tea Act 1953. Tea companies were eager to give up khet land to evade payment of rent. According to the state government, such resumed land would mean to be utilised for industrial growth. However, in some cases it resulted in severe discontentment as in the case of the Chandmoni Tea Estate. This particular tea garden deserves mention here as it was the only tea garden in West Bengal that faced such alteration from tea cultivation to land being utilised for developing and promoting real estate with state patronage.

Chandmoni Tea Estate was located at NH-31 in Siliguri. This tea estate initially had a total grant area of 775.18 acres of which 351.99 acres was under tea cultivation, 274.0 acres under forest and 234 acres under khet land. This tea estate had a capacity of producing 800 lakh tonnes of tea per year. It was believed that since the owner Luxmi Tea Company had huge liabilities its management decided to convert the land into real estate. However it was

¹⁶⁵ Ghosh, A.G. *Parbatya Uttar Banga Prasanga: Darjeeling Nama*. N.L. Publishers, Siliguri, 2013, pp.99-100

¹⁶⁶ *The Telegraph*, 22 December 2009, Viewed on

(http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091222/jsp/bengal/story_11895350.jsp).

mentioned that 150 acres of land would continue tea cultivation. According to MOU (dated 18.10.1998), out of 664.395 acres of land, “it was decided that 406.64 acres of land which is now held by Chandmoni Tea Company Limited on lease for cultivation of tea, be resumed by the state government out of total land holding of the company. for development of a satellite township. The remaining land of the tea estate would continue to be detained by Chandmoni on an existing term of lease”.¹⁶⁷

Eventually, the state withdrew the lease of this Tea estate and a ‘new company’ by the name of Harshavardhan Neotia’s Bengal Ambuja Housing Development was formed that undertook the project of housing development “Uttarayan”. Biswas Saswati¹⁶⁸ reveals that 64 % of the formerly employed permanent tea garden women workers of Chandmoni T.E. are unemployed; 12 % engaged in irregular construction work as helpers, 12% as garden workers in Uttarayan (Work only for two weeks in a month), 4 % as domestic workers and 4% engaged in selling liquor. Also, the Chandmoni Tea Estate Anti-Eviction Joint Action Committee demanded a judicial inquiry into the land deal by arguing that the state government had handed over 406.64 acres of land against a sum of Rs 13.92 lakhs in 2002 (while the actual valuation was Rs 100 crore) and affected the livelihood of 500 odd workers¹⁶⁹.

The Growth of Economic Sectors and Markets in Siliguri:

Locational advantage of Siliguri led to the growth of the wholesale trade market in Siliguri as the most important distributive as well as ‘feeder Centre’ since independence. Route connectivity of Siliguri to other parts of North Bengal, Sikkim, Bhutan and northeast India led to tremendous growth in the wholesale business activities. Rapid growth of trade and commerce in Siliguri is evident from the income of some commercial taxes and increase in the number of Limited companies.

¹⁶⁷ Biswas Saswati. “Development Project and Project Affected Women: A Study of the Former Women Workers of Chandmoni Tea Estate”. *UGC SAP Project Report*, September 2008

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ (http://www.telegraphindia.com/1111118/jsp/siliguri/story_14766115.jsp, *Telegraph*, Nov 18, 2011; accessed on 15.06.19).

During the period from 1955 -56 to 1964-65, there was an increase in the number of limited companies from 37 to 63. This growth amounted to 70 percent of the total growth and the number of wholesale establishments increased from 448 to 881 which corresponded to 81 percent of the total. The growth in commercial tax collection reflects the increasing trends in the wholesale as well as retail trades in siliguri.

In the period 1958-59, the total sales tax was only 8,5400 Rs only. Ten years later during the period 1968-69 the whole collection increased to 55.16,000 Rs. Only. Post Bangladesh War of Liberation and increase in the migrants in the city also led to an increase in the tax collection. The period 1976-77, witnessed the collection in crores i.e. 1,64,33,477. It was the highest figure till then. Decade after India opted the policy of liberalisation the collection of sales tax in Siliguri alone in the year 2007-8 was 120.47 crores and the total amount collected from Darjeeling District was 125.34 crores. In the year 2010-11 Siliguri contributed 205.40 crores and the total collection of the District was 207.48. Thus we see that Siliguri contribution to the commercial tax collection was more than 95% of the total tax collected throughout the District.¹⁷⁰ This was possible only due to immense growth in the whole sale trading activities in the town.

In 1991, 85.3% of the total workforce was engaged in the tertiary sector. Out of 158,058 workers in the SMC area, only 1.9% comprise cultivators and agricultural labourers. In 2001, the secondary sector accounted for 0.3% and tertiary as much as 97.9% of the total workforce. This indicates the dominance of the tertiary sector in the economy and low industrial economy analysis of the sectoral share of workers shows that about 1% of the total workers in the city were engaged in primary sector activities, 3% in the secondary sector and about 96% – a phenomenal share – in the tertiary sector. Tea processing, timber and other manufacturing units formed as a source of secondary sector employment. It is also observed that these industries employ regional workforce from nearby rural areas. The workforce within the city is

¹⁷⁰ Computed by the author from various Administrative Reports, Directorate of Commercial taxes, Government of West Bengal

predominantly occupied in tertiary sector activities which include trade, transport, hotels, real estate, etc.

Economy of Siliguri Municipal Corporation is predominantly based on trade and commerce. A major portion of Siliguri is covered by Cottage & Small Scale Industries. Major commercial and institutional uses are distributed mostly along the major transportation corridors of the Municipal Corporation. Economic activities of Siliguri Municipal Corporation have been categorised broadly in two sectors – formal and informal. Formal sector includes trade & commerce industries. Informal sector covers the service and other related activities.

Trade & Commerce play a major role in the generation of the local economy in Siliguri Municipal Corporation. Considerable numbers of small-scale & cottage industries were spread over the Municipal Corporation predominantly in the wards of Sevoke Road added area (Formerly in Panchayat Area) and Burdwan Road like Grill Factory, Atta Mill, and Steel Furniture. Except for the above-mentioned areas, other trade activities were considered to be the major revenue generating sectors in the Municipal Corporation. These industries are served by local and regional populations and migrating from different parts of adjacent districts and states.

Formal service sector also contributes significantly to the local economy within the Municipal Corporation. It constitutes academic institutes (schools, colleges and other academic institutions. Automobile repair centres, banks and post offices, health institutions, IT offices, retail outlets and trading centres located along the transportation corridors like Burdwan Road, Sevoke Road, and other major local roads. These outlets of service sector are served by local people as well as considerable proportions of outsiders come from various parts of the districts of Jalpaiguri, Malda, and Uttar Dinajpur. The city is the regional education hub; it has become a pioneer in imparting higher education and graduate programmes for the local as well as migrant students.

Due to the inherent geostrategic importance of Siliguri as it is centrally located and the largest town in the region including Sikkim- Darjeeling region, a big number of students flock

to Siliguri for higher education. The city has two pioneer engineering colleges popular among the science students, viz., Surendra Institute of Engineering & Management and Siliguri Institute of Technology. Among the undergraduate colleges the Siliguri College, established in 1950, is the oldest in the city. Other undergraduate colleges include Siliguri College of Commerce, Surya Sen Mahavidyalaya, Siliguri Mahila Mahavidyalaya, St. Xaviers College KGTM Bagdogra College, Naxalbari College, Salesian College and Gyan Jyoti College. There are also many B.Ed. colleges imparting technical education in the city. Among the health sector, the North Bengal Medical College, situated in Sushrutanagar, is the only medical college in the region. The medical college is connected to the main city through the third Mahananda Bridge. 10 km away from the main Siliguri city, in Raja Rammohanpur we have the prestigious University of North Bengal, which was established in 1962. There are approximately 123 schools in Siliguri run by the state government or other private organisations. Siliguri Boys High School is the oldest school of the city founded in 1918. Don Bosco School, St. Josephs' High School, Hindi Balika Vidyapith School are the other old and famous schools of Siliguri.

The Informal Sector is one of the most important revenue-generating sectors, not only in connection with local economic development, but also as a strong medium for poverty alleviation programmes. These units are found in almost all the wards of the Corporation. There are several units engaged in producing soft toys, envelopes, and manufacturing of shawl ornaments, bidi and other various handicraft products by the local Self Help Groups.

List of various skills found in different zones of the Municipal is furnished in Table below. All these indicate the importance of the various sectors contributing to the local economic scenario. At present several industries like the tea garden are closed or sick and resulting in large-scale unemployment and economic hardship for the tea garden workers. However, a detailed investigation is necessary for taking the decisions on closed industries in terms of their revival or suitable re-use of their lands.

Table 3.2: Showing details of Formal Service Sector

Sector	Nos. of Industries	Status	Person Employed
Formal			
Large Scale Industry	Not Available	N/A	N/A
Medium Scale Industry	Not Available	N/A	N/A
Small Scale Industry	750	Operational	24921
Construction Companies	1200	Operational	45000
Bank and Insurance	35	Operational	875
Service-Sector,(Including Nursing Home)	20000	Operational	25000-30000

Source: Siliguri Municipal Corporation, 2010.

The informal sector, especially the manufacturing activities require special attention in terms of organisation development, market oriented training, provision of suitable infrastructure i.e. common work shed for several units to share the infrastructure, electricity supply for units like Jari work, handicraft, adequate storage facilities clustered in suitable areas. Informal service sector people like shop owners, rickshaw pullers, washer men, construction workers; hawkers need financial support in the form of credit facilities and insurance coverage. Also, most of them require basic services like storage units, parking spaces, etc.

Table 3.3: Showing Detail of In-Formal Service Sector:

Sl. No.	Sector	Persons employed	Average Daily Income (Rs.)
1.	Rickshaw Puller	10000	150-200
2.	Van Pullers	2000	200-300
3.	Auto (Rickshaw) Driver	651	200-300
4.	Taxi / Car Driver	5325	300-400
5.	Mason	15000	150-200
6.	Construction labour	30000	100-150
7.	Hawkers	4000	150-200
8.	Plumber	1500	150-200

Source: Siliguri Municipal Corporation, 2010.

Approximately 10000 rickshaw pullers reside within Siliguri Municipal Corporation. Their average income of each is Rs. 150-200 approx. per day. Approximately 2000 cycle rickshaw van pullers reside within Siliguri Municipal Corporation. The average income of each is Rs. 250-300 approx. per day. 25000 people work in shops including suppliers and about 12% children are involved in this work. This involves shops like grocery, sweet, saloon, hotels and restaurants etc. Adults generally receive a remuneration of Rs. 1000-2000 per month but the children get Rs. 300-900 per month. Street vending is an indispensable economic activity in urban India. Street vendors account for about two percent of India's population and provide affordable as well as convenient services to a majority of the urban population. Approximately 4000 vendors reside within Siliguri Municipal Corporation. Their average income is around Rs. 5000 per month. Approximately 25000 masons and construction labourers stay within Siliguri Municipal Corporation, though many of them are originally from outskirts like Jalpaiguri, Malda, and U.Dinajpur etc. Masons earn more than Rs. 4500, whereas the labourers earn max. of Rs. 2500/month. Approximately 1500 plumbers stay within the Corporation. They earn more or less Rs. 5000/ month.¹⁷¹

Table 3.4: Showing Commercial establishments (trade) in Siliguri

S.No.	Category type	Approximate no.of Establishments
1	Fish, meat Poultry	384
2	Fruits and vegetables	5,341
3	Groceries and provisions	356
4	Eating Places	4,314
5	Pan and Cigarettes	3,500
6	Textile and Clothing	2,500
7	Medical	2,000
8	Computer and Electronics	136
9	Electrical	2,135
10	Gifts, books, stationery	754
11	Hardware, building materials	1,211
12	Household merchandise	331
13	Furniture and Interior	157
14	Jewellery	953

¹⁷¹ Datas collected from Siliguri Municipal Organisation.

15	Optics and watches	478
16	Footwear	1,231
17	Recreation	17
18	Transport	500
19	Service Outlets	5,000
20	Miscellaneous	150
21	Hotels	533
Total		31,981

Source: *Socio-economic study, SJDA, 2008.*

Commercial establishments in the SMC area number 45,230; of these, 33% are registered and 67% unregistered and informal in nature. About 8% of the commercial establishments are wholesale shops. The important commercial centres in SMC are Bidhan Market, Nivedita market, Khalpara and Mahabirsthan market.¹⁷² Most of the economic activities in Siliguri are found in the two streets of Sevoke Road and Hill Cart Road. Many traditional stores and hotels dot the former street while Sevoke Road flaunts sophisticated stores and most of the city's banks. The most preferred item in Siliguri is Darjeeling tea; the city is also well-known for its woollen garments that are sold a-plenty on Hill Cart Road and Sevoke Road. There is also another famous market for electronic goods, which goes by the name of Hong Kong Market. Most of the gadgets available are quite cheap and thus allure tourists. We also find well-known automobile companies in Siliguri with various showrooms. Some of the showrooms belong to Mahindra & Mahindra, General Motors, Hyundai, Ford, JCB, Tata, Toyota Kirloskar, Honda Siel, and Maruti Suzuki. Two-wheeler brands such as Honda Scooters, Bajaj, TVS Suzuki, Yamaha, Kinetic, Hero Honda, and LML have also clinched their positions in Siliguri's economy.

Bidhan Market is in the heart of Siliguri city, bounded by Bidhan Road, Sevoke Road and Hill Cart Road. New Market and the Hong Kong Market are located within the Bidhan Market area. The Hong Kong Market is popular with locals as well as tourists who visit the city for cheap imported goods, usually from the Chinese market as well as from places like Nepal and Thailand. There are 550 shops in Hong Kong Market; these sell foreign goods like electronic

¹⁷² Siliguri Municipal Organisation and Socio-economic study, *SJDA, 2008*

items, cosmetics and clothes and employ as many as 1,500 persons. One peculiarity of the shops is that they have an average area of 20 sq.m.

Table 3.5: Showing some prominent Markets in Siliguri and Workflow

S.No.	Market Name	Major Goods/articles	Category of Vendors	Number of Vendors (Approx.)
1	Hong Kong Market	watches, cosmetics, electronic goods, eateries, food courts, materials for women, bags,etc.	Stationary	550
2	The Seth Srilal market,	Dress material for women, artwork, handcrafted products and bags, eateries, food courts	Stationary	400

Source: *Source: Discussion with SMC officials*

Hong Kong Market deals especially in imported goods which are brought usually from the Chinese market as well as from places like Nepal, Thailand, etc. Seth Srilal Market is another busy shopping area in the centre of the city, which gives tourists good deals and has also gained a name for selling momos and other snack items.

Other than important commercial establishments, the city region shows vibrant trading. Informal trade contributes greatly to the city's economy. Hence, one cannot overlook the importance of the informal economy in the city. The migrant population living in slums is mainly engaged in the informal sector and comprise rickshaw-pullers, vendors, and daily wage labourers. There are also small-scale shops in the markets of the city which sell some timber and bamboo handicrafts.

Wholesale Trade and Business Firms in Siliguri

The Marwaris and some Biharis control the wholesale trade in Siliguri. The Darjeeling district, in which Siliguri is located today, can be said to have achieved its present shape and size relatively recently in 1866 following the Treaty of Sinchula (November 11, 1865) between

British India and the Kingdom of Bhutan.¹⁷³ Unsurprisingly, therefore, it is in the 1870s that the Marwaris first came to Siliguri,¹⁷⁴ lying at the heart of the then dreaded malarial Terai, although some settlements had already started in Kurseong in the 1850s-60s, Kalimpong in 1865 and in Darjeeling apparently with the establishment of the business firm by Jetmull Bhojraj in 1845.¹⁷⁵ From the late nineteenth century the number of Marwaris in Siliguri continued to swell, though they preferred to live within the city and not settle beyond the town area at least till the 1940s.¹⁷⁶ By the early 1970s, it was claimed that about 1,200 Marwaris of the Mahesree group and 1,800 Marwaris of the Agarwal group lived in Siliguri.¹⁷⁷ However, in an undated interview conducted by Narayan Chandra Saha with Ram Kumar Agarwal, an old Marwari living in Siliguri, we get an estimate that about 30,000 Marwaris, of whom 5,000 were Jains, lived in Siliguri at the start of the new millennium.¹⁷⁸ Migration of the Marwaris to Siliguri did not happen following a fixed pattern historically. In fact, it happened in four phases: pre-independence, post-independence, during trouble in Assam in the 1970s, and during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Even so, as we have noticed they never approached anything in size even in terms of becoming a considerable percentage of the population. For the longest period of time they have been directly or indirectly connected to all kinds of enterprises, such as money-lending, *jotedar* (holding of *jotes*), *araddari* (big wholesale dealing), commission agency, wholesale and retail business, export and import business, ownership of hotels, restaurant, go-downs, and lately tea

¹⁷³ The long military engagement of the Kingdom with British India is covered by Karma Phuntsho. *The History of Bhutan*. Vintage Books/Random House India, 2013

¹⁷⁴ Saha, Narayan Chandra, Darjeeling Terai Anchal Marwari Samaj: Ekti Samikshal [The Marwari Community in the Darjeeling-Terai Region: A Survey], *Itihas Anusandhan*, Vol. VIII, Calcutta, 1993, p. 345

¹⁷⁵ Dash. A.J. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*. Calcutta Secretariat Book Depot: Calcutta, 1947, p. 174. However, Timberg could not identify the firm of Jetmull Bhojraj as a Marwari concern. See, Thomas A. Timberg. *The Marwaris: From Traders to Industrialists*, Stosius Inc./Advent Books Division, 1979, p. 206

¹⁷⁶ *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, p. 71

¹⁷⁷ Yogi Nath Mukhopadhyaya. "Ai Amar Deshl [This is My Country]." *Desh*, BS Magh 23, 1379 [1973]

¹⁷⁸ Saha, Narayan Chandra. *The Marwari Community in Eastern India: A Historical Survey Focusing on North Bengal*, Decent Books, New Delhi, 2003, p. 157

plantations and tea factories as well as realty. Arthur J. Dash had earlier noted: —Marwari and Bihari control of the commodity trade of the district [Darjeeling] is practically complete and ... Marwari and Bihari control over retail supply of consumption goods is dominating.¹⁷⁹ This control has not weakened over the years. In fact, it has grown in strength and scope to encompass today nearly the entire gamut of MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises), be it those involving building materials, wrought-iron, confectionaries etc. A quick look at the Souvenir of the Siliguri Merchants Association brought out in 1992 establishes this. According to the information provided here, the number of business firms registered under this association and engaged in Terai's trade and commerce was 418 in 1992. Of these, the number of Marwari concerns was 177. It accounts for roughly 50 per cent of the total business firms of Siliguri.¹⁸⁰ In the list of Presidents and General Secretaries of the Association between 1952 and 1992, we find 26 Marwari names which further confirm their dominance.

The organisation which plays a vital role in controlling not only trade and commerce but also industry in North Bengal in general, and of which the Siliguri Merchants Association is the biggest component, is the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FOCIN) with its headquarters at Siliguri. It has 36 member associations and the number of its council members was 66 for the term 1990-92. At least 29 of the 66 council members, or roughly 50 percent, were from the Marwari community. Similarly, FOCIN had 157 subscribing members in 1990, a majority of whom were Marwaris. A quick look at some of these members would reveal the extent of Marwari hold over business: Gajanand Goyal & Co. (hardware and electrical merchants), the Mittal Brothers (bankers and financier), the Bajla Bastralaya (textile retailer), Radheyshyam Agarwal (industrialist and transporter), the Jain Enterprise (government order supplier), the Singhal Agencies (welding material and foam dealer), the Singhania Bastralaya (cloth merchant), Jiwanram Chetandass (petroleum products dealer), Harish Chandra Singhal (Income Tax pleader), Muniram Achiram (wholesale dealers of foodgrains), Lalchand

¹⁷⁹ Dash. A.J. *Op. cit.* p. 175

¹⁸⁰ Souvenir (A Special Issue), Siliguri Merchants' Association, 51st General Meeting, 1992

Ramabatar (tea traders), Lalchand Madamlall (wholesale tea merchants), Debidatta/Phoolchand (foodgrains dealers), Lalchand Amarchand (agency business), Lalchand Kundalia (agency business), Moolchand Periwai (broker), Pokarmall Mahabir Prasad (sawmill owner), Sohanlal Shewduttarai (edible oil, pulses, rice merchant) and so on.¹⁸¹

Given Siliguri's historical role as the coordinator of trans-border trade with Sikkim, Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh as well as with Calcutta, it is not surprising that the nature of business in Siliguri is heavily biased in favour of wholesale and retail trade. It is basically a service town, which from the 1960s has become an important centre of wholesale trade. Much of this wholesale trade, as we have noted, is controlled by Marwaris, and strong kinship bonds among them make it practically impossible for others to freshly enter into the business. It is likely that these wholesalers possess a high amount of liquid cash, much of it derived as profit from their trade, which changes hands rapidly without getting anchored in investment to any great extent. The city also has a very high concentration of retail trade with an incredible number of shops in operation. There are 3 shops per 100 people, whereas in Delhi the number is 0.21. Many of these shops operate at subsistence level generating disguised unemployment in the informal service sector. The informal sector can expand by absorbing unskilled labour—migrant labour from slums, as we have seen— without any major capital expenditure. On the other hand, not uncommonly for India, at the owner's level, the retailer and the wholesaler are often the same person operating from the same shop-front. Put another way, a bit of monetary inducement promptly turns the wholesaler into a retailer in Siliguri's bustling marketplaces.

Communication System of Siliguri

C. A. Bayly has remarked “the study of information, knowledge and communication is an interesting project which might help close the deplorable gap between studies of economic structures on one hand and of orientalism on another hand.”¹⁸² Before 1835 A.D. means of

¹⁸¹ Souvenir— FOCIN, North Bengal, published at its 10th Annual General Conference on June 3, 1990

¹⁸² Bayly, C. A. *“Empire and Information: Information Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870”*. Cambridge University Press, 1996

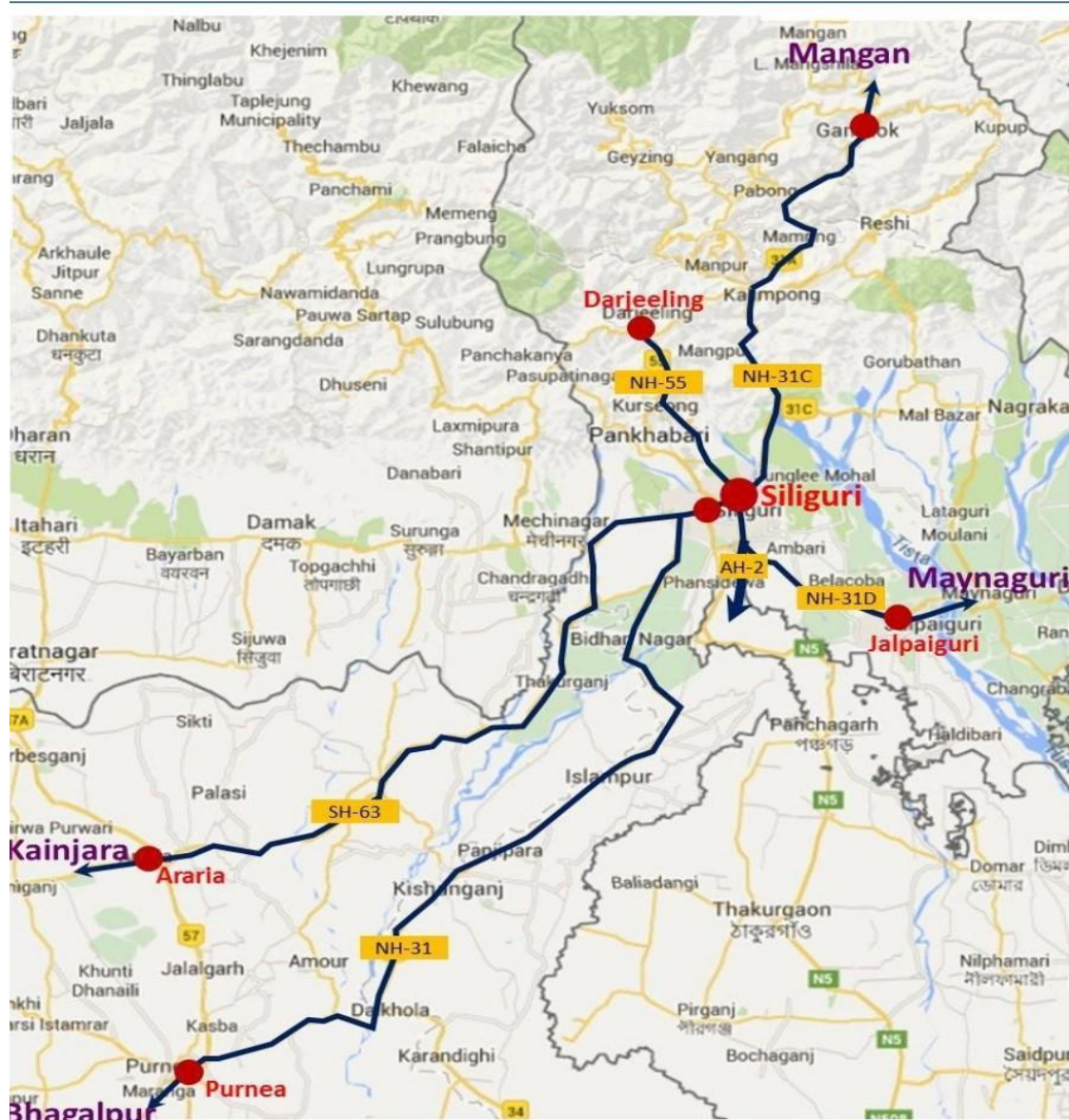
communication was in a very rudimentary stage and the pioneers who visited Darjeeling after an arduous journey from Calcutta, had to pass a stretch of rich woody and marshy land infested with wild animals and deadly insects like the most fearful female anopheles mosquitoes, formed the present heart-land of Siliguri. This sub section of the chapter looks not only at the growth and development of communication but how the economy was linked to the communication in the development of Siliguri. Siliguri is an organically growing and unplanned city. The absence of road hierarchy is pronounced which leads to many complexities. Carlo Gershenson(2008), points out that ‘a complex system is one in which elements interact and affect each other so that it is difficult to separate the behaviour of individual elements, for example a cell composed of interacting molecules, a brain composed of interacting neurons and a market composed of interacting merchants. More complex examples are an ant colony, the internet, a city, an ecosystem, traffic, weather and crowds. In each of these systems the state of elements depends partly on the states of another element and affects them in turn. This makes it difficult to study complex systems with traditional linear and reductionist approaches.’

The urban structure of Siliguri reflects a ‘linear form’, which has been formed by its road network. The road network of the city is unorganised with more intercity and local roads. Moreover, there is no definite hierarchy of the road system with most of the city roads also serving the intercity traffic. Roads are a product of human necessity to link different places. The necessity rose out of commercial demands and military obligations. It forms the basis for the urban transportation system. However, in Ancient period, usually, waterways were preferred as the best method of transportation but with the passage of time roadways became more important and demanding for transportation purposes. After the partition of the province the most important need of the West Bengal Government was an arterial road to link the northern region comprising the district of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar.

Thus, the construction of National Highway number 31 from Barhi, Bihar border to Siliguri was taken up. The NH31 assumes strategic significance as the Calcutta-Siliguri direct rail link was intercepted by East Pakistan territories. A short term package was also included in

the construction of Jalpaiguri Siliguri Provincial Highway and also improvement of Darjeeling-Pedong and Rishi Roads. Immediately after the partition the State Government of Bengal prepared a separate emergency program for border roads and approached the central government for financial assistance. A technical Committee under the Central Board of transport reviewed the plan and submitted the report in June 1949. Owing to the paucity of funds the whole proposal was overlooked until 1951 when the Planning Commission brought new road building specifications.

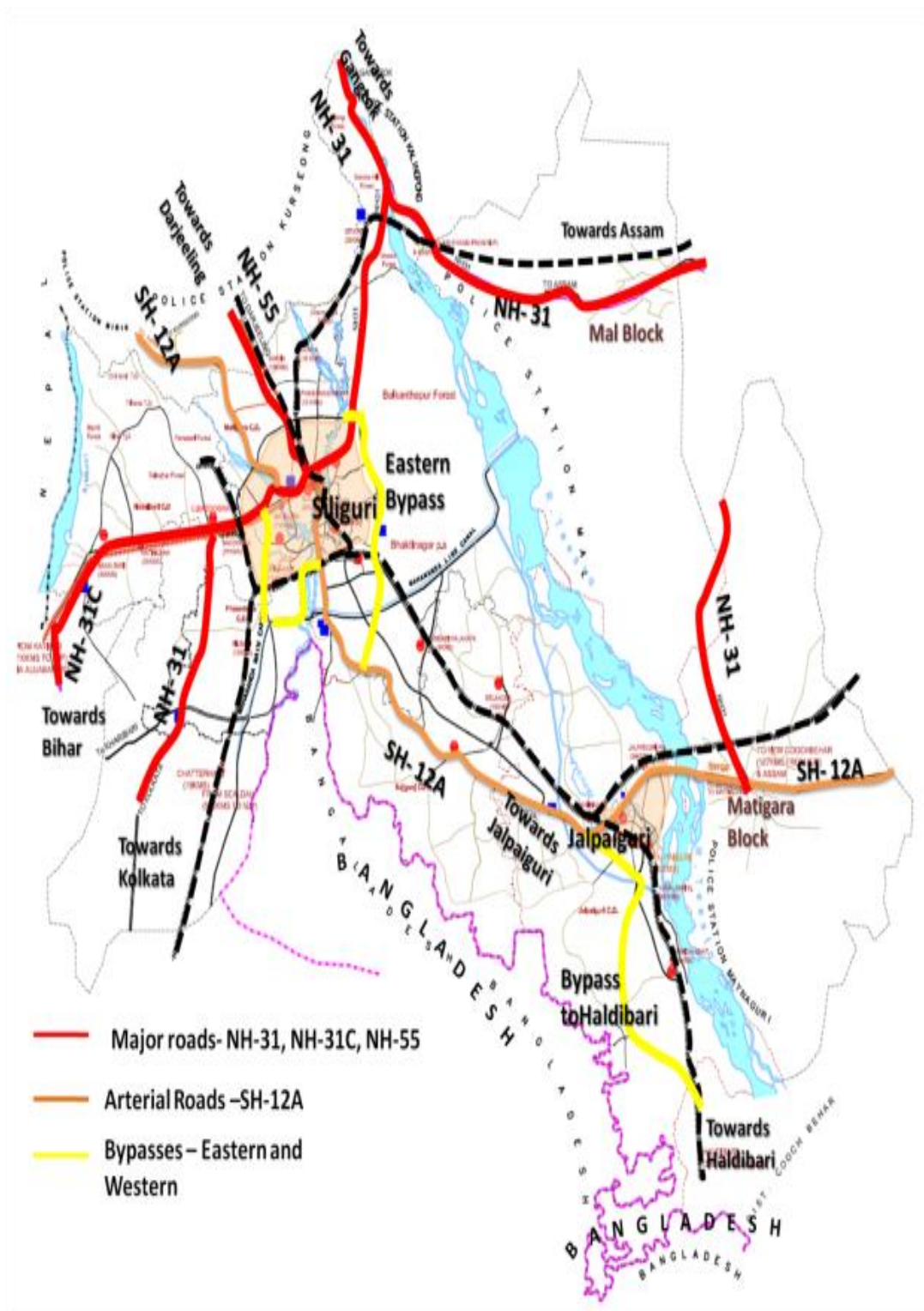
Map3: Road connectivity of Siliguri.



Source: Google (Image) and CRIS analysis

The road network of Siliguri is mostly North-South oriented, Hill Cart road being the most important corridor along this direction followed by Burdwan road. The other important roads are Sevoke Road and Bidhan Road in the city. NH 31 also passes through the city.

Map 4: Regional Connectivity Map of SJPA, 2011.



Source: SGI, 2011

As per Siliguri CMP (Siliguri Comprehensive Mobility Plans), about 4.4% of the road network consists of arterial roads, 3.2% sub-arterial roads and 8.1% inter-city and additional highway corridors. Other roads comprise 84.3 % of the total road network. The carriageway classifications of road network shows that the maximum percentage (64%) of road network is 1-2 lanes undivided and the road surface condition of most of the network (51.3%) has been observed to be poor. The National and State Highways also pass through all the six blocks within SJPA providing a high level of intra-regional connectivity. Adding more lanes and improving the quality of these roads would increase potential for development of these blocks, thereby reducing urban population pressure on Siliguri and Jalpaiguri in future. Also, there has been no major increase in road lengths within these six blocks in the last five years. The roads developed under PMGSY (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna) have experienced only 10 -20% increase in length. 67% of the Village roads in SJPA are unpaved, all weather roads. However, there are missing cross-links in the road network at block level and therefore, many trips pass through major urban areas Siliguri/Jalpaiguri which increases the congestion on the urban roads.¹⁸³

Major junctions in Siliguri are Panitanki More, Air-view More, Sevoke More, Venus More, Thana More, Check-post and Jalpai More. The traffic at certain junctions along Vivekananda Road, Hill Cart road and Station Feeder Road shows a high percentage of slow moving traffic. Traffic volume as per CMP report reflects that Hill Cart road, carries relatively maximum volume, i.e., the average daily traffic (ADT) between 47,639 PCUs and 83,828 PCUs and followed by Sevoke Road which carries volume between 42,937 and 54,150 PCUs. The intensity of traffic volume varies from 83,828 PCUs (ADT) on Hill Cart Road to 16,900 PCUs at Deshbandhupara road. The variation in traffic volume of various locations clearly establishes the primary role of Hill Cart Road, Sevoke Road and Bidhan Road as most of inter and intra city traffic tends to converge on these roads from all other collector /local roads. The traffic intensity

¹⁸³ *Perspective Plan 2025*, Siliguri Jalpaiguri Planning Area, Prepared by Department of Architecture and regional Planning, IIT, Kharagpur, 2004.

on various locations indicates that the arterial road network of Siliguri comprises the above three roads along with Burdwan road, Station Feeder road and DBC road. The peak hour traffic intensity pattern has also been observed to be similar to the traffic intensity pattern for the day. The peak hour traffic ranges from nearly 9000 PCUs on hill cart road to 2700 PCUs at Burdwan road. However, the proportion of peak hour traffic is observed to vary from 6.5% to 17.9%. The peak hour on most of the locations was observed to be during morning hours. This can be attributed to the external traffic which moves into Siliguri from neighbouring areas during the morning hours in order to reach around office hours and then moves out of the city as and when their work is finished.¹⁸⁴

The composition of traffic shows that slow moving vehicles formed the maximum proportion of traffic on almost all the locations. The composition of slow modes varied from as high as 85% on Station feeder roads to 31.5 % on NH-31C. The percentage of slow moving traffic is observed to be high on local and collector roads indicating that they are the major modes of transport from the home end. The highest volume of slow moving traffic was registered on Hill Cart road – 54,000 PCUs, which is 60% of its total volume whereas the NH-31C carries a very high volume of goods vehicles. The percentage of fast and goods traffic increases on the arterial network comprising Hill Cart road, Sevoke road and Bidhan road. The total vehicles in Siliguri has doubled from 42,482 in 1996 to 86,526 in 2004 showing a high growth of 194% per annum, while from 2004 to 2014 it was found to be 169% . However, the highest growth is seen in LMV and 2 wheelers which is 107% and 97.2% respectively.¹⁸⁵

Non- motorised vehicles also contribute to congestion and urban complexities. A total of 6,283 cycle rickshaws (non-motorized three wheel IPTs) were registered in the SMC area till 2006. Also, there are around 2,000 cycle rickshaws which are registered in the neighbouring panchayat areas (2010). Additionally 1,728 pedal rickshaws for movements of goods are also

¹⁸⁴ *Siliguri Municipal Corporation: Unnayan, Udyog O Sambhabana (1999-2003)*, Siliguri Municipal Corporation, 2004

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

registered within SMC. A comparison of population and vehicular growth rates clearly brings out the disparity in their growth. In other words vehicles in Siliguri are growing at a faster rate than the growth of population.

Increasing vehicular population is one of the most important contributors of the pollution in the urban areas of the country. The chief cause for the air pollution in Siliguri is the dense vehicular traffic movement, especially along the major roads in Siliguri. Bardhaman Road, Hill Cart Road, Sevoke Road, Bidhan Road are the corridors with more air pollution. The air monitoring data given shows a high value of SPM near TN Bus stand and SNT Bus Stand because the average speed of the vehicles is very low due to recurrent congestion and also due to vehicles producing high quantities of hydrocarbons. Air pollution is also high near the truck terminal along the Vivekananda road, the Bagdogra market due to heavy vehicular traffic. Noise pollution due to urban traffic is also damaging the environment at an alarming rate. In fact motorised vehicles are accountable for about 90% of all unwanted noise worldwide. The adverse impact on health because of increasing air and noise pollution is also evidenced by the occurrence of lung cancer, asthma, allergies, various breathing ailments and mental stress issues in the urban population.

Bagdogra International Airport, Siliguri, is situated about 15 km from the heart of the city. The airport is well connected to Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Mumbai, Chennai, Guwahati, Bangkok (Thailand) and Paro (Bhutan). The Bagdogra air force station was established on 29 November 1962 in the backdrop of the Sino-Indian border conflict. The main purpose of the Air Force Station was to exercise command and control over Fighter Squadrons, Helicopters and also for Transport Units. The starring role of the Station transformed in April 1970 when it started exercising organisational control on two Fighter Squadrons, one Helicopter Unit and also two Air Observation Posts. The Survival security support Flight was relocated to this Air Base in the month of December 1982. Subsequently in February 1989, a Signal Units was established to provide multi-channel communication facilities for Air Defense and Administrative Communication to the designated Units. A Mobile Observation Flight was

established at this Base in February 1982 to provide initial warning of airborne objects in order to alert air defence measures.¹⁸⁶ This airport is also functioned as a civil enclave at Air Force Station Bagdogra¹⁸⁷ of the Indian Air Force. It became the gateway to the hill stations of Gangtok, Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Kurseong, and to other parts of the North Bengal region and witness thousands of tourists year after year. The airport also acts as an important transport hub in the region. The Government of India conferred an international status to the airport in the year 2014.

Christopher Alexander¹⁸⁸ in his classic essay "A city is not a Tree", argues persuasively that the problem with town planning and urban development could be linked to a structure: they were dysfunctional due to their simplistic tree-like hierarchy of systems and subsystems. He further says that a naturally grown city had a more complex structure that he identifies with semi-lattice which allowed for overlapping elements. It would be worth mentioning the words of Merlin: "The ideal transport mode would be instantaneously free, have an unlimited capacity and always be viable. It would render space obsolete, this is not the case, space is constrained for the construction of transport networks, and transport appears to be economic activities different from others. It trades space with time and thus money."¹⁸⁹

Thus we see that Siliguri city acts as a convergence point to all major and minor routes connecting North-Eastern States, Sikkim, Darjeeling Hills and to the neighbouring countries of Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh. The National Highways NH-31, NH-31A, NH-31C and NH-55, and the State Highways SH-12 and SH-12A are the regional road connectors that pass through the area. The National Highway 31 passes through the city and connects it to Delhi in the West and Guwahati in the East. District headquarters like Darjeeling in the North, Jalpaiguri in the

¹⁸⁶"20 Wing, Indian Air Force - Database". *Bharat Rakshak*. <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/Database/Units/20%20Wing>

¹⁸⁷ The airbase is home to the IAF No. 20 Wing, as also to the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-21 (Mig-21) FL fighter aircraft of the No. 8 Squadron and a Helicopter Unit.

¹⁸⁸ Alexander, C. *A city is not a tree*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996. pp. 118-131.

¹⁸⁹ Rodrigue, Jean-Paul, et al. *The Geography of Transport Systems*. 4th ed., Routledge, 2016.

East and other district headquarters and State capital Calcutta in the South are connected to Siliguri through State Highways. NH 31C connects Gangtok in the North to the main highway and SH-12 connects Siliguri to Cooch-Bihar. Siliguri is a natural growing town with lots of urban complexities, lack of cohesive transportation network, absence of land use and transportation integration, limited public transport options, and no intermodal connectivity. Road network lacks a functional hierarchy and there is absence of appropriate road geometry along the corridor length and at intersections. We find many unorganised on-street parking, especially in the core urban area. Encroachment of roadside activities on roads and sidewalks, Exhausted capacity of all the arterial, sub-arterial and collector roads , poor quality of roads, lack of enforcement of traffic. Though there are four railway stations (Siliguri Town station, Siliguri Junction, New Jalpaiguri Station and Bagdogra station) in and around Siliguri, these railway stations still struggle to cater to the ever increasing population of Siliguri.