

## CHAPTER VII

### AN ANALYSIS OF URBAN GROWTH: SILIGURI AND BALURGHAT - CASE STUDIES

Siliguri and Balurghat are the two cities of North Bengal. Both have a very brief history and have suddenly emerged as class I cities in 1981 Census. The political and communicational changes in the region have snowballed large-scale migration in these two cities, and that is about where the similarity between the two cities ends. Siliguri is swiftly waking up whereas Balurghat seems to linger at the threshold of preindustrial sleepiness.

In this chapter the cases of Siliguri and Balurghat will be presented from the perspectives of demographic, socio-economic, political and communicational changes. A comparative study of some of the tangible and intangible aspects of the social and economic life in these two cities shall, also, be discussed in the conclusion.

#### Siliguri : Past and Present

Siliguri was a small sleepy town in the first half of this century and today it is humming with activity. Situated at the foot-hills of the Himalayas in eastern India, it was a village for change-over to a suitable mode of journey from the plains to the hills. In the Gazetteer of 1907 it was described

as a swampy malarious village with a population of 784<sup>1</sup>. It was declared as a town for the first time in the Census of 1931. And in 1981 Census the population of Siliguri has been recorded as 1,54,378.

The transition of Siliguri from a rural settlement to a Class I city, within a span of mere fifty years, is quite spectacular. It is more so, in the context of the indifferent urban growth as experienced by the other towns of North Bengal. The following table brings out in relief the rapid growth of Siliguri against the slowly changing sizes of some other North Bengal towns.

Table 5B

Change in Size of Selected Urban Places of North Bengal:  
1901-1981

Cities/ Towns	Size-classes of Cities and Towns in the years									
	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	
Darjeeling	IV	IV	III	III	III	III	III	III	II	
Koch Bihar	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV	III	III	II	II	
English Bazar	IV	IV	IV	IV	III	III	III	II	II	
Jalpaiguri	V	IV	IV	IV	III	III	III	II	II	
Kurseong	VI	V	V	V	V	IV	IV	IV	IV	
Old Maldah	VI	VI	VI	VI	VI	VI	VI	V	V	
Siliguri				V	IV	III	II	II	I	
Balurghat						IV	III	II	I	
Raiganj						IV	III	III	II	

1 A.J. Dash, Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, Calcutta, 1947, p. 55.

It may also be noted that the towns of Balurghat and Raiganj show a relatively quick growth.

Looking back to the past, we get an amazing picture of urban growth of Siliguri. In the District Gazetteer of Darjeeling (1947), Dash wrote that Siliguri "can be described as a town by reason of its importance as a centre of communication and transshipment. When the North Bengal State Railway was extended to Siliguri in 1878, the village was transferred from the Jalpaiguri district to Darjeeling and the administrative headquarters of the Terai was moved to it from Hanskhawa ... Its (Siliguri's) growth has been rapid, haphazard and without proper direction. The result is an unhealthy urban area with deplorable drainage and inadequate water supply". The last two sentences still hold true, yet Siliguri became a municipal town in 1950 and a Class I town, with a population of 1,54,378 in 1981, and now in 1988, it provided a venue for an international football competition.

The sudden spurt of population increase in Siliguri could be associated with several factors of growth, the fountainhead of all being the location of Siliguri at the important juncture of topographical change (plains to hills) and international boundaries. In addition to this strategic geographical location, nodality in transportation system, consequences of various political changes in the region and its increasing distributing and trading activities are the other factors taken into account. The population of Siliguri

is overwhelmingly made up of migrants. These migrants preferred to come to Siliguri for various reasons, of which political turmoils at the time of the partition of India in 1947 and at the time of the Bangladesh war of 1971, and the political changes within the neighbouring country of Nepal are quite important. All these and some other factors brought about economic changes in the character of the town. The demographic and economic changes are associated with social changes.

Economic change is the major resultant of other factors of growth. It is, in its turn, a factor of growth itself. It is a universal feature associated with urban growth. While analysing the historical, political and socio-economic changes, in and around Siliguri, a pattern seems to emerge. This is a frequently occurring pattern in colonial set up.

The development of Siliguri town is clearly linked with the development of the sanatorium town of Darjeeling, tea-industry in the region and the political changes in the country and in the neighbouring countries. Prior to that, Siliguri was a small market centre on the trade route of wool from Tibet<sup>2</sup>. The hill resort of Darjeeling was chosen as a sanatorium by the British and the importance of Siliguri lay in its being the transit station for onward journey from the plains to the hills. Siliguri, then a hamlet, gradually

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2 Ibid.

acquired a few shops to cater to the needs of the transit passengers. The roads and railways connecting Siliguri with Darjeeling were developed next. Labourers were required for construction work. Tea-industry developed by the British in the hills and the plains of Darjeeling district, also required labour. This locality was sparsely populated and that, too, by the cultivators. So, in response to the new demand, migrant labourers came forward.

The original inhabitants of the area which is now Siliguri town, were a handful of agriculturist families, who lived in scattered homesteads on a subsistence economy. They were mostly the Rajbansis, the Meches and other tribes. The opening of tea-industries and railways were the starting point of economic expansion. Then, the Bengalis from eastern and southern parts of Bengal came as clerks, and the Marwaris came as small shopkeepers in the latter half of the 19th century./ The Marwaris also acted as the money-lenders to the tea-garden labourers and the agricultural families. The exorbitant rate of interest rapidly snowballed the original amount of debt making repayment of the total amount next to impossible. As debts remained mostly unpaid, the Marwaris started acquiring land near Siliguri railway station in lieu of the sum lent. The land-holdings near the Town Station now, almost totally, belong to the Marwaris who have adopted a policy to sell the

land to Marwaris only. The land-value has increased tremendously. In Khalpara, the Marwari dominated area, the land-value per katha (720 square feet) was less than Rs. 10/- in 1920 and it was nearly Rs. one lakh in 1990<sup>3</sup>. In the Bengali dominated area the land-value has also risen, but, moderately. However, the fact remains that the indigenous families have been alienated from land.

With the above-mentioned changes in the economic sphere of Siliguri, the town continued growing. The Bengalis with formal education were attracted to the new job opportunities in the British administrative set-up. Some went for legal profession. The traders, mostly uneducated Marwaris, used this small town as (a) the collecting and distributing centre of the local products of the hills and the plains to Calcutta and other parts of Bengal, and (b) the distribution centre of commodities for the local people and the hills. The other group of migrants in the town were the labourers. These people were mostly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The situation was more or less the same till the partition of India.

With the partition of India in 1947 the situation changed overnight. The newly created country of Pakistan partially cut off the eastern part of India from the mainland.

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3 Ranajit Roy, Economic Change in Siliguri and Problems of its Urban Development, Ph.D. Thesis, N.B.U., 1985, pp. 46-47.

The new route to eastern India by the rail and roads passed through Siliguri, thus enhancing the importance of Siliguri as a communicational node. At the same time, the displaced persons from Pakistan started pouring into the region. The population influx was enhanced by the incoming Nepalis as well. The construction of roads, bridge, railway station, army cantonments gathered momentum. And the population of Siliguri increased very rapidly. The commercial and transporting activities multiplied. But development of an industrial base at Siliguri had never been seriously contemplated. Only recently several medium and small scale industries have cropped up in and around Siliguri. This retarded industrial development has been explained by Roy as the doing of the Marwaris, who send away the capital generated at Siliguri to other regions<sup>4</sup>. This is also true for certain other groups of migrants in Siliguri as substantiated by the observations in Gurung Basti, a neighbourhood of the city with a sizeable chunk of Hindi-speaking population from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh<sup>5</sup>. Although, the population of Siliguri is almost entirely composed of the migrants, some of whom have permanently settled down in this city, still there are some migrant groups who maintain their ties with the place of their origin. A demographic profile of Siliguri is being given here to describe these migrants as well as to emphasize its population growth.

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4 Ibid., p. 90.

5 N. Choudhury, "Growth of Siliguri : A Study in Urban Migration" in Jr. of Indian Anthropological Society,

Some Demographic Aspects

Siliguri is an in-migrating town in comparison to some of the predominantly out-migrating towns. Thus, in Siliguri, the population increase and variation in sex ratio indicates initial male-dominant thrusts followed by the immigration of the whole families, conforming to the views of Bogue<sup>6</sup>.

Table 59

Decadal Variation in Population of Siliguri, 1901-'81

Year	Persons	Males	Females	Decadal % Variation	Sex Ratio
1901	784	N.A.	N.A.	-	-
1931	6,067	4,182	1,885	-	451
1941	10,487	7,121	3,366	+72.85	473
1951	32,480	20,903	11,577	+209.71	554
1961	65,471	39,651	25,820	+101.57	651
1971	97,484	56,139	41,345	+ 48.90	736
1981	1,54,378	86,074	68,304	+ 58.36	794

Source : 1. Bengal District Gazetteers : Darjeeling, 1947  
 2. Census of India 1971, Ser. 22 - West Bengal, Pt. IIA  
 3. Census of India 1981, Ser. 23, Paper 1 of 1982.

6 D.J. Bogue, "Techniques and Hypothesis for the study of Differential Migration", International Population Conference 1961, paper 114.

The variation in sex ratio assumes a new trend from 1951, when suddenly about 8% increase in favour of the females is noted. This trend continues unabated upto 1971, and in 1981 census a somewhat slowing down of female immigration is observed. The coming in of refugee families from the East Pakistan or Bangladesh in large numbers, had set the more rapid trend.

The first three decades in the history of the town are those characterised by very high growth rate. Afterwards, the rate have slowed down a bit, but it is still high in comparison to the growth rates of many other Indian cities, or towns, in the recent decades.

Table 60

Population Growth of Selected Urban Places in West Bengal  
1941 - 1981

Urban Places	Population (in 00)					Index of Growth (Base 1941 = 100)			
	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1951	1961	1971	1981
✓ Siliguri	105	325	655	975	1544	310	624	930	1473
Darjeeling	272	336	407	429	546	123	149	151	201
✓ Jalpaiguri	278	413	487	555	617	149	176	199	222
✓ Koch Bihar	160	332	419	627	621	208	262	392	388
✓ English Bazar	233	307	459	613	790	131	197	263	339
Asansol	558	763	1035	1560	1970	137	185	280	335
Bardhaman	416	556	623	726	1674	134	150	175	403
Medinipur	432	455	595	713	861	105	138	165	199
Dalurghat	-	181	270	671	1046	-	-	-	-
Raiganj	-	155	323	432	603	-	-	-	-

Source : 1. Census, 1971, General Population Tables  
2. Census 1981, West Bengal : Final Population Tables.

The rapid and enormous population growth of Siliguri is unparalleled in this region as may be seen in the Table 60. The older towns of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar and English Bazar have registered double to four times growth, whereas Siliguri has experienced nearly 15 times increase, taking the 1941 population as the base. The towns of Asan ol, Bardhaman and Medinipur, all important ones from industrial, communicational and administrative point of view, have also shown about 2 to 4 times increase only. Bardhaman is as important, if not more, as Siliguri as a communicational node. Yet its growth is much slower than that of Siliguri. The trend of population growth of Raiganj town is somewhat comparable to that of Siliguri. An attempt at comparison with Balurghat town has been done here though it may be considered as a rural town. It also has shown spectacular population growth over the last few decades, but its rural nature is evident from the fact that the percentage of workers to total population in 1981 was less than 25 in the town, out of which, again, more than 13% workers accounted for agricultural pursuits as their occupation in 1981<sup>7</sup>. The workers belonging to manufacture class comprised a small percentage in the previous census years also. Sen and

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7 Census 1981, Ser. 23, West Bengal Provisional Population Tables.

Banerjee have suggested that the high rates of urban growth in the West Bengal districts, other than Calcutta Metropolitan District, since 1951, were influenced by the very low urban components of their population in the initial years<sup>8</sup>. This observation may be applied to the town of Siliguri as well. But this is not a sufficient enough explanation of the concentration of such a large number of migrants in this particular town only. There are many other factors, which probably have contributed towards the tremendous growth experienced by Siliguri. These factors would include the strategic geographical location of Siliguri, its nodality in transportation system and economic and political variables as well.

The migrants came from diverse places of origin as is seen from the composition of population of Siliguri. The population is multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious. Even in 1947, Dash noted that, out of 10,504 persons of Siliguri town 1,961 were Muslims, 839 were scheduled castes and tribes, 6,758 were plains Hindus, 656 were Nepalis, 12 were other hillmen, 42 Indian Christians, 4 British, 15 Anglo-Indians, 2 Europeans and 15 Asiatics<sup>9</sup>. Today the population composition of the town is no less varied.

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<sup>8</sup> Asok Sen and Alak Banerjee, Calcutta Metropolitan District in the Urban Context of West Bengal (1951-1981), Occasional Paper No. 60, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1983, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit.

An analysis of the population composition by mother tongue and sex in 1971 shows that about 64% are Bengali-speaking and 28% are Hindi-speaking. The latter group includes the Marwaris also. However, the sex ratio (859) among the Bengalees shows a higher proportion of females, which again, may be attributed to the immigration of the refugee families from Bangladesh. It is suggested that the immigrants from south Bengal have lower proportion of females than those from Bangladesh. The Nepalis have the next higher sex ratio.

Table 61

Population Composition of Siliguri Town by Mother Tongue and Sex, 1971

Mother Tongue	Persons	%	Sex Ratio
Bengali	62,350	63.96	859
Hindi+	27,942	28.66	521
Gorkhali/Nepali	4,953	5.09	765
Urdu	959	0.98	513
Punjabi	720	0.74	710
Others <sup>++</sup>	560	0.57	509
<b>+ All</b>	<b>97,484</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>736</b>

+ Mother tongue grouped under Hindi: Bhojpuri, Garhwali, Hindustani, Kangri, Khotta/Khotta, Kumani, Kurmali, Thar, Madhesi, Magadhi/Magahi, Maithili, Marwari, Nagpuria, Rajasthani, Sadan/Sadri.

++ Mother tongues grouped under others: Assamese, Gujrati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Chinese, Dogri, Bhotia, English, Konkani, Kurukh/Oraon, Manipuri/Meithei, Mundari, Santali, Sikkim Bhotia, etc.

Source : Census of India 1971, Ser. 22 - W.B., Part II-C(ii).

The Hindi-speaking population, although quite large-sized, have a very low sex ratio (521). From a sample survey of a neighbourhood of Siliguri among the migrants from Bihar, about 34% of the households were found to be all-male ones<sup>10</sup>. These migrants came primarily as labourers. The presence of migrant labourers from Bihar was also noted by O'Malley<sup>11</sup> at the beginning of this century. On the basis of a sample survey undertaken by Siliguri Planning Organization in the late sixties, Roy observes that, the refugees from East Bengal (East Pakistan now Bangladesh) are 61%, the migrants from Bihar are 17% and the Marwaris are 8%. Though less in number, the contributions of the Marwaris towards the population growth of Siliguri had not been any less than others.

The recent political changes in Assam has again initiated a new course in the migration flow. The emigrants from Assam are settling down in the border areas of North Bengal. A sizeable population of Nepali-speaking persons have been evicted from Assam. The more recent movement of the hill people, demanding Gorkhaland, has made the hill areas no more desirable for the settlers from the plains. Even the people from the hills, in the ensuing commotion, have fled from their

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10 N. Choudhury, Op. cit., p. 24.

11 L.S.S. O'Malley, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Sikkim, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 183-184.

homes in the hills. Siliguri, being the developing town nearby, is acting as the host of many of these people.

The migrants who came to Siliguri in search of economic opportunities, arrived in waves with each new job-generating conditions, which increasingly came into being with Siliguri assuming more and more importance as a communication node. Now the tertiary sector has a vital position in the economy of the town. Beginning with the administrative and associated occupations the economy of the town has gradually shifted through activities related to development of roads and communication system and then to trading and transporting.

From Table 62 it is seen that the trade and transport workers comprised 46.53% and 51.93% of the total workers in Siliguri in 1961 and 1971 respectively. The variation from 1961 to 1971 is way above the variation in the number of the total workers during this period. The shift towards these two occupations is further supported by the declining or slightly increasing percentage of workers employed in the other occupations. On the basis of 1961 census data Siliguri has been functionally classified as Trade and Transport Town with accentuation of trading in 1971<sup>12</sup>.

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12 Asok Mitra, et al, Shifts in the Functions of Cities and Towns of India, 1961-71, I.C.S.S.R. and J.N.U. Study, New Delhi, 1981, p. 225.

Table 62

Shift in Occupational Pattern of Siliguri Town,  
1961 - 1971

Occupation	Working Force		
	1961	1971	% variation during 1961-1971
1. Primary			
-Number	357	916	+156.58
-% to total workers	1.52	3.04	
2. Industry			
-Number	4814	4625	- 3.92
-%	20.89	15.34	
Manufacturing			
-Number	4328	3522	- 18.62
-%	18.24	11.68	
3. Construction			
-Number	930	943	+ 1.39
-%	3.91	3.13	
4. Trade & Commerce			
-Number	6210	8477	+ 36.50
-%	26.17	28.11	
5. Transport			
-Number	4831	7134	+ 48.70
-%	20.36	23.82	
6. Other Services			
-Number	6584	8009	+ 21.64
-%	27.25	26.56	
Total No. of workers	23,726	30,154	+ 27.09
Total population	65,471	97,484	+ 48.90
% of workers to total population	36.24	30.93	

Source : Census, N.D. 1961 & 1971, General Population Tables.

With the diversification of the economy of the town, the growth of the town has become almost inevitable. Manufacturing has never been the strong point of Siliguri, but wholesale trade flourished in the town. This assumed such a great importance in the otherwise low generative economy of the area that Siliguri developed more and more as a communicational node, centre for storage and wholesale trade, and drew people to its new-found affluence. The products of the tea plantations in North Bengal, which previously was marketed primarily through Calcutta, has now found a newer market at Siliguri. The development of the town and its economy, both are, thus, unplanned, and are products of spontaneous and haphazard growth.

O'Malley wrote about the village Siliguri in 1907 that, it was the northern terminus of Eastern Bengal Railway, where it was joined by the Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway. It also was the terminus of the Cart road from Kalimpong and Sikkim and, thus, a focus of the local trades. Several jute farms were established there. A few permanent shops and biweekly Government market were also there. It was the headquarters of a Deputy Magistrate (criminal work of the Terai and managing of the Govt. estates). He was formerly stationed at Hanskhawa near Phansidewa, but his headquarters were removed to Siliguri in 1881 on the extension of the railway to that place. The place could only boast of a small sub-jail, a post-office, a dak-bungalow, an inspection house, police

station and a dispensary with twenty beds. All these were situated near the railway station<sup>13</sup>. Siliguri town began to grow from the railway station area with the construction of godowns for wholesale trade and residence-cum-commercial establishments by traders. Retail shops and some consumer goods industry followed, to make this area the core of the town, although, a large portion of the area has poor accessibility by road and inefficient drainage system.

After the partition of India, Siliguri became the centre of traffic of contraband commodities, ranging from imported fabrics to second-hand intelligence, because of its peculiar location. After the 1962 Sino-Indian war, Siliguri assumed strategic importance with rapid growth of army cantonments and improved roads. This, in its turn, further developed the commercial character of the town and within the space of a few years the population of the town rose by thousands.

"In 1962-63, the Burmah Oil Company (now known as Oil India) came to Siliguri to construct the pipeline that brings oil from Assam. In its wake came a demand for better housing and the company paid local landlords to build brick and cement houses with modern sanitary fittings. Till then Siliguri did not know of septic tank and the flushable W.C. Today, Siliguri

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13 L.S.S.O'Malley, Darjeeling District Gazetteer, 1907, p. 209.

has a big oil complex where oil from the Assam refinery is stored before distribution to other parts of the country"<sup>14</sup>.

Owing to this heavy thrust of commercial use of land, there has been an extreme paucity of land and open spaces for recreation purposes. Industrial, commercial and residential areas are interspersed all over the town. The neighbourhoods of the town, thus, show a mixed type of land-use. Yet, some pattern of residential and occupational clustering of the constituent ethnic groups of the population of Siliguri is discernible against this jumbled background. The migrants to Siliguri have arrived at this particular destination because of the economic opportunities offered here.

But, one does not live by bread alone! However, money-minded these people might be, they evince, nonetheless, a feeling for community and neighbourhood. In the urban setting therefore, they search for and associate with individuals of the similar background. Thus, the migrants of like background (excluding social, educational and economic aspects) tend to live in common residential areas, get absorbed in similar occupations and gradually adapt to the urban environment. The extent of adaptation may vary from one group to

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<sup>14</sup> The Statesman, Towns Old & New - XI, "Siliguri : The Rags-To-Riches Story", 1975.

another. This has earlier been referred to while discussing  
changing aspects of occupations and urban associations <sup>15</sup> .

### The Social Profile

From the foregoing discussions the social profile of the migrants is not that clear and structured. In this section an attempt has been made to present the profile in a better organized manner. The dominance of some of the migrant groups over others in terms of (a) sheer number, (b) economic superiority, (c) power or (d) cultural attainments are now being considered one by one.

#### (a) Numerically dominant groups:

Bengali is the major language spoken in Siliguri and the people whose mother tongue is Bengali are the numerically dominant group here as is evident from the Table 61. However, all of these Bengali-speaking people are not from the same place of origin. There are some local people, immigrated from the surrounding areas, some immigrants from other parts of West Bengal and a large-sized body of Bengalee refugees from Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan). They have arrived at

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<sup>15</sup> See pp. 174-75, 194-95, 200-204.

Siliguri at different points of time.

Some of these Bengalees constitute the old families in the town and are economically well off. However, other Bengalees are trying to chalk out new avenues of financial success. This, possibly, accounts for their penchant for small business and other commercial activities.

The Nepalis, a considerably large-sized group in Siliguri, are found to be more in services.

(b) Economically dominant groups:

Although not numerically dominant, the Marwari traders are quite numerous in Siliguri and what they lack in number they have made up in their near monopolization of the whole-sale trade. The Marwaris, as mentioned earlier are the first traders to arrive at Siliguri. They had the vision and tenacity coupled with business acumen. This, in turn made it possible for them to grow into a powerful business community with deep roots in the economy of the town and its surroundings.

At a later phase of development of the town the Punjabis came. They have clustered around the occupations of transporting, selling and repairing of automobile parts. Some of them have taken to the catering business also.

The Bengalee businessmen come third in the rank of the hierarchy of the economic dominance. They are mostly in retail trading.

(c) The Power Elites:

The power elites in Siliguri are the administrators in various capacities and the political leaders. The administrative positions, both judicial and non-judicial, are held predominantly by the Bengalees.

As in every other place, the base of the political power is constituted by the youth. In Siliguri, they can be categorised into several groups, such as the Bengalee students and immigrants from Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan), the Nepalis and the better placed labourers who dabble in trade-union activities. They support the political party that advances their separate interests. The local political leaders, therefore, are quite powerful. There are Bengalees as well as Nepali leaders. It is interesting to note, that the Marwari traders, although economically dominant, are not directly involved in the political activities of the town. However, it may be presumed that they do have underground linkages with the political leaders of the area, so that they may continue their business activities without much interference. The rumour has it that, at the time of elections, they finance various political parties according to the need of the situation, but concrete data on this point is extremely hard to come by.

(d) The Cultural Elites:

The parameters considered for determining cultural elites are religion, education, literature, music and art.

The heterogeneity of Siliguri is reflected in its having diverse religious centres. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism have their own religious centres in the city in addition to having numerous way-side shrines. Besides, there are associations which hold religious discourses regularly. The religious experts are venerated in their own spheres. The secularization of life in Siliguri, in consequence, appears to be very superficial and skin-deep.

The academics are respected. There are a number of schools, three colleges and a University nearby. Literature, art and music have not flourished in Siliguri. This is not a cultural centre like Calcutta, Benaras or Lucknow. Moreover, the heterogeneous linguistic groups and regional groups have their own forms of literature, art and music. Bengalees, the numerically dominant group, who are also closer to their cultural centre, Calcutta, manifest some cultural expressions through music, drama and other such media. There are a few schools and clubs for these activities, but none have really stood out. The Bengali News Daily—Uttar Banga Sambad—has brought together a number of writers and poets. A sincere effort on part of these writers is somewhat pushing forward the literary and artistic movements. Still, the cultural elites at Siliguri are of a very medium order.

These Bengalees thus, make up the broad base of the urban social structure by virtue of sheer number. Because of

the numerous migrants from different origins, the social structure is segmentary with some amount of interaction between the segments. The social relations within the segments are determined by social and economic ranking, place of origin, kinship and various cultural attainments. The inter-segmental relations on the other hand is of economic and political nature. There the more powerful groups enjoy greater advantages.

### The Social Change

(The urban social and economic structure with its heterogeneity has brought about social change — the dynamic aspect of urban life. Social change is a very broad concept and cannot be dealt in its entirety in the narrow scope of this dissertation. However, the migrant has been seen from two perspectives and the extent of his need to adapt has been suggested thereby.)

(Firstly, the migrant belongs to his original society, often rural. In this society he has been socialized and from this society it is difficult for him to sever all bonds. This is true for first generation migrants, which is often the case in Siliguri. Thus we find that the migrant in the urban setting on the one hand, sustains his rural ties, and on the other hand, deviates from the traditional forms.)

Sustenance of rural ties is observed through — (a) repeated visits by the migrants to the place of origin; (b) visits of the friends and relatives of the migrants to his

urban residence; (c) having property at the place of origin; (d) sending money to the rural home either at regular intervals or during social occasions and (e) the residential and occupational clustering of the migrants from the same or adjacent places of origin and migrants of the same ethnic group. A microstudy of a neighbourhood of Siliguri supports this observation<sup>16</sup>.

(The deviation from the traditional forms in the urban setting, on the other hand, indicates an attempt on the part of the migrants to adapt to the changed milieu. Of the traditional social structure, the family and kinship ties, the two strong bastions, are said to be losing grounds in the urban centres of India<sup>17</sup>. This, when examined in Siliguri, is found to be partially true. (Family continues to be the most important agency of socialization and is still the unit that keeps its members close together, but the influence of the peer groups and educational and political pedagogs is gradually eroding its importance in the life of an individual. The bond of kinship ties comes to surface, whenever we find the immigration of kins to the town and their 'cradling' by the earlier

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16 N. Choudhury, Op. cit.

17. A. Ross, Hindu Family in its Urban Setting, Delhi, 1973;  
S. Vatuk, Kinship and Urbanization, Berkeley, 1972;  
M.S. Gore, Urbanisation and Family Change, Bombay, 1968;  
G.N. Ramu, Family and Caste in Urban India, New Delhi, 1977 and others.

immigrant kins.) One aspect of monopolization of land-holdings by the Marwaris in a particular neighbourhood of Siliguri can be seen as a manifestation of kinship and ethnic ties.)

Another traditional form that persists in some of its aspects is the Hindu caste system. In the urban setting, although a wide range of deviations regarding commensality and caste-occupations is found, the caste dictates regarding the marriage norms are usually observed.

(Deviations are also observed through some aspects of social disorganization (see pp. 207-213). Siliguri is passing through a phase of accentuation of vices and crimes irrespective of sex.) The proximity to the international borders of Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan provides a wonderful opportunity of smuggling of a variety of consumer goods.) In Siliguri, Hong Kong Market, a veritable paradise for the smugglers, has become the main distribution centre for the smuggled goods. The market system has shopkeepers, suppliers known as carriers, financiers and credit facilities. The price is regulated through seasonal variation in demand and supply, which is closely associated with the tourist season of the hills. This does not mean that at other times there is no market of the smuggled goods, but on the contrary, all throughout the year, there is considerable demand of the goods. The nearby presence of the military cantonments, tea estates and the urban population, including both the permanent immigrants and the floating population, explains this demand to a great extent.

(On the other hand, the proximity of the army-men and the tea planters is probably affecting the life of the rural migrants to the city in several ways, such as the changes in economic life, dress and the values regarding inter-personal relationship. The new economic opportunities, at the same time, appear to be creating some anomalies in the traditional outlook of the immigrants. This suggests the other aspect of social change, when the immigrant is looking around for his niche in the urban milieu.)

(From the observations in Siliguri, it is suggested that the migrants from various origin are facing the problem of identity in the multi-ethnic set-up. The unskilled and semi-skilled labourers and petty traders from U.P. and Bihar appear to be simulating the Bengalees<sup>18</sup> and the Bengalees in their turn are trying to establish their bonafide in different manners.)

(The Bengalees although numerically dominant, are passing through a phase of disequilibrium.) The economic supremacy of the trading class on the one hand, and the dominance of the power elites on the other, have put them in a precarious condition. (It is suggested that, to cope with the situation they have adopted two distinctly different courses.

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18 S. Roy, Social Disadvantages and Education, unpublished dissertation, N.B.U., 1931, p. 85.

The migrants have congregated at Siliguri primarily for economic reasons. Some of the Bengalees had the option to remain at their places of origin and some did not have that option, as they were forced to migrate because of political holocausts. These migrants were attracted to Siliguri because of its economic potentialities. But the lack of industrial growth has limited the scope of economic growth of the town. The commercial and transporting activities, supported by catering activities, comprise of the most of the economic endeavours at Siliguri. Although still growing, without further diversification it is nearing a saturation point. (The migrants, in this economic crisis, find very little new opportunities. Probably that is why petty trades and smuggling flourish in the city. Crime is on the increase. The authorities have noted a negative correlation between smuggling and crime against property and person<sup>19</sup>). In this unstable set up, a new way of life is gradually emerging.) The easy life of the established traders is becoming the norm. Those who can afford, show off their economic achievement through conspicuous consumption. Flashy dress, habits of drinking, expensive hobbies like video cassette watching are examples of this. All these are coming in a rush. (It may be said that the migrants, in search of their

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19 Ranajit Roy, Op. cit., pp. 315-316.

identity, try to imitate the ways of life of their economic superiors. This can be observed in their occupation, dress and habits of spending, as if possession of materials raise the status. Political affiliation, with the ruling parties mostly, is another aspect of it. All these are, however, peripheral changes. The changes in the core are not that apparent and, probably, are present only incipiently.)

The other course adopted by the migrants, is to adhere to their cultural identities by following the cultural elites. The cultural elites of Siliguri, in their turn, are siphoning their values and ideas from the hub of the Bengali cultural life, Calcutta. Thus a double or triple filtered cultural expression is reaching these people. As a result a superficial affiliation to the Bengalee culture is manifested. Literary and musical appreciations are part of this and an example of which is the annual book fair that is held at Siliguri for the past few years.

However, this adherence to the traditional Bengalee culture appeal to a limited circle only. It involves a more sober and more serious outlook towards life than the mass culture that is now invading all the cultural boundaries. The mass media is transmitting the pop music, art and values. This is more easily accessible and the Bengalees of Siliguri are drifting towards the tributary of the Indian popular culture.

The trend of secularization is also observable. Examples of which are — star-studded programmes like Bombay 'nites' and cricket festival, etc., which are, more or less, money-spinning activities. From the newspaper advertisements it appears that for a small city, the occurrences of these festivals are rather frequent in Siliguri. In this cultural context, one's status is raised if one can show one's expertise of or understanding in any of the manifestations of the Bengalee culture. This situation is aptly expressed by the concept pseudo-urban or semi-urban or suburban culture. The recent international football match held at Siliguri is another such example. The people of Siliguri had a proprietary and proud feeling about this tournament.

(The migrants from the rural areas outside the state of West Bengal, in general, are found to exist in an extension of their home-place. They are always trying to reach out and keep their rural ties viable.) Inward and outward flow of people (migrants) and outward flow of cash and goods from the town are commonly observed. The urban growth of Siliguri, thus, cannot be associated with 'urbanism' in its truest sense.

#### Balurghat

( Balurghat is the other Class I urban centre of North Bengal. If Siliguri cannot be associated with 'urbanism' in its truest sense, the same can be said about the town of Balurghat

with a greater assertion. The rural nature of Balurghat has already been mentioned, which shall be further elaborated in this section. The population of the town has grown very rapidly (See Tables 58 and 59), but its density or heterogeneity are much less than that of Siliguri. Economically it is not a generative town. Social and political relations are more of a pre-industrial nature there.

The town of Balurghat is situated on the east bank of the river Atrai, flowing north-south, navigable throughout the year. It has no railway link, which is, currently, the most important demand of the people there. The only mode of communication is the road connection with Raiganj town and nearby towns and villages.

Balurghat is the headquarters of the district of West Dinajpur. In the pre-Independence period it was just a sub-divisional town with profuse village characteristics. Prior to 1904 Balurghat was a part of the Sadar Sub-division of Dinajpur district. Strong mentions that, in 1912 its population was 3,220. The 'village' was connected with Dinajpur town 32 miles away by a main road. Balurghat is basically an important market centre in the vast rural hinterland. In the pre-independence period also, it was an important grain market on the bank of the river Atrai. The trade of agricultural products were conducted mainly through the water-way of river Atrai and there was very little communication network by road

excepting the most important 16 miles long Balurghat-Hili bus route as the means of communication with the railway at Hili, just inside the Bojra district<sup>20</sup>. With the incorporation of the railway station Hili into Pakistan (now Bangladesh) Balurghat town slid back into greater isolation in relation to the other parts of West Bengal. The international border, on the other hand, did not deter the population movement across the border. Instability in socio-political situation of East Pakistan (then Bangladesh) acted as a lever in the migration of thousands from that country. During the Bangladesh war shelling into India across the border near Balurghat threatened the security of the town too. Exodus from Balurghat, though short-lived, was the consequence.

Migration from Pakistan started around 1947 and increased in 1950. In the first part of the 70's a large mass of refugees came and settled in and around Balurghat. A continuous flow of rural migrants since the 60's has also added to the urban population<sup>21</sup>. The migrants came in waves from different places of origin in different times. Sree Sarker, a respondent from Balurghat, informed that the upper caste people—gentry class— from eastern Bengal — mostly from the districts of

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20 Strong, Bengal District Gazetteers, Dinajpur, Allahabad, 1912.

21 Balurghat Municipality, Smaranika, Balurghat, 1985, p. 3

Dhaka, Mymensing and Rajshahi — arrived long before the partition. The probable cause of their migration was push at origin due to fragmentation of lands. Near about the time of the Partition the migrants were no more the upper caste and class people only. They poured in en masse, and their places of origin were Pabna, Khulna and Jessore districts, to be precise. At the time of Bangladesh war an unending flow of lower caste poor rushed into Balurghat from the nearby districts of Bagura and Dinajpur. All this added to the population growth and this has <sup>been</sup> shown in the table 59.

No wonder, that Balurghat town has an uneven unplanned development as it grew from a village. All the neighbourhoods of the town have a very compact nature, as seen in the villages of East Bengal. It is possible to reach most of the neighbourhoods from one's own by alleys and side ways. In other words, the neighbourhoods are clustered together and not spread out along some important thoroughfare as is seen in the cases of Siliguri, Raiganj and other towns of this region. The urban area is criss-crossed by numerous lanes and by-lanes. As it is not spread out along some road, the neighbourhood units are never too far off. This, along with the lack of speedy urban transport facilities, has been able to maintain primary social relationships intact. The only mode of transport within the town are cycles and cycle-rickshaws.

The location of Balurghat near the international border is a factor that accounts for its speedy urban growth on the one hand, and its inhibited economic growth, on the other. The effects of the proximity of the international border are manifold. (a) After the Partition and later on, during the Bangladesh war, refugees came in and settled down in the town area and in the surrounding rural areas; (b) After 1967, when the United Front ministry came into power, landlords in the surrounding rural area felt the impact of the changed land policies; (c) After 1971, the international border could be freely crossed over either way. This created the problem of dacoity in the rural area. Often cattle and other assets were poached and taken across the border, making it impossible to retrieve the property. The landed people started moving into the town — with a house in the town and another in the village — their occupation remaining agriculture as before. Agricultural produce were often forcibly taken away from the field or from the store of the agriculturists. Agriculture, thus, became a non-lucrative occupation. Next came a gradual shift to other occupations — the available avenues being (i) trade and Commerce, (ii) teaching in schools and (iii) job at the government establishments. The rural people from surrounding countryside poured into the security of the city-limit, with its retinue of protective police forces.

Thus, we find the political changes, in both the international and the national level, have spinned off certain changes in social control and economic conditions which, in turn, made people move into urban areas and into non-traditional occupations.

The inhibited economy of the town is due, not only to its proximity to the international border, but also to its peculiar land-locked situation. This in the truest sense in the 'interior' place. A look at the map of the district of West Dinajpur would reveal the reality.)

#### Economy of Balurghat

The economy of Balurghat is based on agriculture till now. Previously, almost everybody in Balurghat town had his own landed properties. Following the planning policy of the Government of India, some even took to capitalist farming. In 1967, the United Front ministry came into power and changes started taking place. The new ministry's avowed policy was to ameliorate the distress of the have-nots<sup>22</sup>. The rural people became aware of their rights and expectations. They rose against the exploitation by the jotedars, a new phenomenon

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22 After coming of the United Front ministry in power in 1967, peasant movements took place in many regions of West Bengal. In 1969 West Bengal Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1969 and W.B. Land Reforms (2nd Amendment) Act, 1969 were enforced. Operation Barga was officially taken up in 1978. These are only a few examples of the changed governmental policies.

indeed. The age-old unquestioned allegiance of the rural poor to their superiors - social as well as economic - started diminishing. This coupled with the increasing misery was followed by a large number of incidents of dacoity, theft of cattle, disturbances during harvesting and even forcible harvesting. The bargadars began establishing their own rights. All these made the landed gentry cautious and a tendency, since then, has been observed to reduce agricultural investments and channelise the capital to some other activities. Sometimes they were forced to sell the land to bargadars at a distress price. Selling off agricultural land and investing the money in shops, transporting or husking machine operation have become common occurrences. Only the low-income group people of the town continue to depend upon agriculture and daily-wage-earning for their livelihood. Most of these people have arrived from the surrounding hamlets <sup>23</sup>.

The agricultural enterprises of the people of Balurghat have decreased but other opportunities have not increased considerably. As already mentioned, occupational opportunities in Balurghat are mainly of three types — service, trade and commerce and transport. Industries have not developed here. The reasons are — (a) non-availability of raw materials

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23 K. Sanyal, "Du - ek Katha" in Smaranika (in Bengali), Balurghat Municipality, 1985, pp. 18-19.

except agricultural products, (b) the high cost involved in transporting raw materials or finished products by roads — the only means of communication in the area, (c) reluctance of the entrepreneurs to invest in a place so close to the border, with the memory of shelling across the border still very fresh in mind.

Service :- Balurghat became the sub-divisional headquarters in 1904. In 1912 it contained a sub-divisional office, a high school and a charitable dispensary. (Strong, 1912 : 127). This initial picture is still there, only great diversification of each of these elements has taken place, especially after the village became district headquarters. The services comprise of jobs at the district collectorate and a large number of educational institutions. In addition to these there are many governmental offices and autonomous bodies and banks in the town, but it is rarely, that a local person gets employment there as the recruitment is not done locally. Since 1951 this is a municipal town and many persons are employed in the Municipal office. As there are no industry worth mentioning, no private sector offices could be found.

A list of public sector offices has been prepared and placed in the Appendix . A summary of this list is given below.

Table 53

Public Sector Offices in Balurghat Town, 1987

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Offices	Number
Municipality	1
Zilla Parishad	2
Sub-division level Government Offices	4
District level Government Offices	18
State Government Offices	23
Central Government Offices	5
District Library	1
Judicial Offices	3
District Jail	1
L.I.C.	1
Banks	9
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Total	68

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There are 15 Higher Secondary schools and 5 High schools in the town. Moreover, there are several high schools in nearby market centres and quite a few persons commute by bus to these schools from the town. Besides these, there are a large number of primary schools in and around Balurghat. These schools provide white-collar jobs to the towns people. In the absence of new job-generating conditions, the employment market in Balurghat is almost saturated.

Industry :- There are no industry in Balurghat other than some small scale industries.

Table 64

Number of Small Scale Industrial Units Granted Permanent/Final Registration Certificates in Balurghat, 1976-1982.

Year	Number of Units	Persons Employed
1976 - 77	9	54
1977 - 78	10	61
1978 - 79	8	30
1979 - 80	5	20
1980 - 81	1	3
1981 - 82	1	3

Source : District Industries Centre, West Dinajpur.

From the above table decrease in the number of new S.S.I. units and the persons employed in these units in Balurghat can be seen. Of course it is a possibility that there are some other units, not registered with the District Industries Centre. The types of industry are also a handful and very few industries employ more than 20 persons. The most common type of industry is wheat-grinding. Handloom weaving, tailoring, candle factory, oil mills, etc. come next. It is obvious that

the enterprises are centred around the basic needs of the people and industrialization in real sense is totally absent in Balurghat.

Trade and Commerce :- Commercial enterprises on the other hand, are on the increase. Most of the commercial activities, again, centre around food products or raw materials. Of the 1956 shops 1509 are of food materials or food products. Other than these there are large number of cloth shops, jewellery shops, medicine shops and coal depot and oil depot. Transporting business flourishes in the absence of railway communication in Balurghat. The more stable condition of the population is reflected in the existence of only a few hotels in Balurghat town.

In addition to the above information it was also learnt from the Municipal sources that there are about 400 contractors in the town, of whom 160 are enlisted in Balurghat Municipality and regularly undertake various developmental activities of the town. These developmental activities include mostly constructing buildings and roads. There is no sewerage in the town but two big drains are under construction. Two deep tubewells and about 500 shallow tubewells have been sunk to ensure improved water supply in the town.

Table 65

Distribution of the Enlisted Contractors in Different Grades, Balurghat : 1987

Grade	Number of Contractors	Credential	Deposit Money
A	16	Rs. 2.5 Lakhs +	Rs. 5000/-
B	13	Rs. 1-2.5 "	Rs. 3000/-
C	33	Rs. 50,000/- - 1,00,000/-	Rs. 2,500/-
D	30	Rs. 20,000/- - 50,000/-	Rs. 1200/-
E	68	Rs. 20,000/- or less	Rs. 500/-

The table 65 gives a clear picture about the investing capacities of the contractors. There is no really big contractor. Twenty-nine persons have credential of more than a lakh of rupees. The others are mostly small contractors. This is also an indication of the middle-class nature of the town.

Transport :- Balurghat town is well-linked by roads to the important places in the districts of West Dinajpur and Malda. In the absence of railway connection, transportation by roads have developed and this provides livelihood to a large number of people. During the 80's the number of vehicles have increased by far and that may be due to Self Employment Programme. And

this has brought about distinct dynamism. There are 9 transport enterprises in Balurghat that undertake carrying of goods.

Passenger-carrying buses and mini-buses regularly ply between Balurghat and other towns — situated both far and near.

There are 12 regular bus routes and numerous mini-bus routes.

The busiest routes are Balurghat-Hili, Balurghat-Kaliaganj and Balurghat-Raiganj.

Table 66

Category-wise Distribution of Vehicles Registered at Balurghat

Category	No	%	
State carriage (bus)	82	9.2	39.7%
Contract carriage (including mini-bus)	127	14.4	
Truck	231	26.1	
Tractor	13	1.5	
Trailer	9	1.0	
Motor cycle	359	40.6	
Jeep	26	2.9	
Private car	38	4.3	
Total	885	100.0	

Source : 1987 data from R.T.O., Balurghat.

From the above table the importance of the flow of public goods and passengers to and from Balurghat can be visualised as the buses, mini-buses and trucks constitute 39.7% of the total vehicles registered at Balurghat. The large number of motor-cycles is also an indicator of regular commuting

by individuals. Besides these, there are numerous cycles and cycle-rickshaws in the town. Municipality records showed that there are 1500 rickshaws and 1600 rickshaw-pullers, 125 thelas (two-wheeled push carts) and 150 thela-drivers, 200 bullock-carts and 10 vans. (1987 information).

The ancilliary occupations that are generated by this flourishing transport business are the selling and repairing of vehicular parts and selling of fuel. There are 20 shops that sell motor and cycle parts. Repairing is undertaken by 20 motor garrages and 30 cycle repair shops. There are 8 petrol depots or pumps.

Smuggling :- The above discussions on economic aspects when seen against the rapid population growth experienced by Balurghat town reveal a slow and unregulated economic dynamism. Under the circumstances the economy of the town could be expected to have bogged down, but the locational factor, and lack of employment opportunities and a more than willing group of persons together have created prospering smuggling activities in the region, which is jokingly referred to as 'border industry' by the towns people. In Khidirpur, a neighbourhood of Balurghat, the boats of the fishermen are used for smuggling in open daylight. Sree Birendralal De Sarkar informed that smuggling of rice to Bangladesh creates scarcity in Balurghat after the month of Chaitra (March-April). According to him the

clothings smuggled in from Bangladesh is affecting the local cloth business on the one hand and the smuggling out of low-priced handloom sarees and lungis on the other is boosting the weaving industry of Gangarampur, a nearby small town. The smuggling activities have also been discussed in the previous chapter (pp. 127-133). Here I only want to point out that the growth of Balurghat town in this disadvantageous location, without having any industrial-urban economic base and improved communicational facilities of rail and airways, has been possible largely due to this viable 'border industry'.

The economic dynamism of the town is characterized by unregulated economic relations with exploitation in personal relations. In this context, the small commercial activities have increased. No specialized education or skill is required to assist in a shop, and the youngmen of the town have largely taken up the job of shop assistants at a pittance. Moreover, the organized smuggling activities have provided another avenue of income for these unskilled persons.

The growth of Balurghat is, thus, not related to the urbanization of the mainstream. It has simply grown in size, but not in quality. The urban amenities, as well as social relations in the town, indicate its pre-industrial nature.

Some Aspects of Social Life in Balurghat

The close personal relations and frequent face to face interaction of the people in Balurghat strike any outsider. During my field-work and afterwards, in discussion with others, this observation has been corroborated. The people of the town are known to each other, at least by appearance, and whenever two acquaintances come face to face, which they often do as the mode of communication is walking or cycling, they stop and exchange a few words. Even the road-side meeting is followed by prolonged leave-taking. Gentle words and sincere gestures between equals — as well as un-equals — have been observed. As a result, injudicious spending of time occurs, but to them it is the time well-spent. To an industrial-urban person the manner of working and management of time of these people would appear inefficient. Thus the attitude and values of these people differ considerably from that of the urban men of the main-stream, who are anonymous in their urban settings and are used mostly to transitory, superficial relations.

To understand the social structure in Balurghat town it is necessary to review (a) the migrational history, (b) the history of development of the town and (c) the present state of life and work of the people.

The Migrational History:- In pre-Partition days the Muslims were predominant in the local population. Regular movement of Muslims from Chittagong, Dinajpur, Charkai, Phulbari to visit

relatives at Balurghat was quite common. A businessman of Balurghat opined that this movement of Muslims was good for business. A place without the Muslim community is bad for business. ("Musalman je deshe nai she deshe byabshar ashubidha achhe. Musalmanra hate bate khae.") They buy edibles and eat wherever and whenever they feel like. Previously Hindus did not eat outside their homes and even today, dining out is less frequent.

During the pre-Partition days some upper caste Bengali Hindus from East Bengal were gradually accumulating capital and investing that in land. Many Biharis and some Oriyas and indigenous Bengalis worked as labourers. Biharis used to work in brick-fields mostly, and have now been replaced by tribals. As mentioned earlier, migration from East Bengal/ East Pakistan/Bangladesh had several distinct waves.

(1) A gradual movement of upper caste people, mainly from Dhaka, Mymensing and Rajshahi districts of eastern Bengal in search of fortune, created a better-off landed class in the area. These elite families took interest in the development of the town and a few of them dominated the scene for quite some time. The school libraries and clubs were started by them. 'A large and well-found hospital dispensary' was maintained by private subscriptions, the local zamindar, Babu Rajendra Nath Sanyal, being a liberal subscriber. Strong writes in 1912, "this gentleman, who lives in the immediate

vicinity, was not long since a ward under the Court of Wards and still maintains the former European Manager's bungalow as a guest-house, at which Government officials on tour are made welcome"<sup>24</sup>. This neighbourhood now bears the name Shaeb-Kachhari Para. To fulfil the recreational needs and to consolidate the youth, Balurghat Theatrical Association was founded in 1909. The name was changed to Edward Memorial Dramatic Club (1911) and then to Balurghat Natyamandir. The Natyamandir used to bear the educational expenses of some students and this practice is continuing till today. There are now several dramatic clubs and innumerable sports and literary clubs. In the early days political associations like 'Yugantar', 'Anushilan', Congress and social reform and welfare oriented organizations like Hitasadhani Sabha and Mahila Samiti also operated from Balurghat. 75 years old Ashoka Sarkar informed that in 1929 she came to Balurghat from Dacca as a new bride. There was no rickshaws at that time. The town was very backward but the people were very sincere and helpful. She, along with a few ladies, took initiatives in forming the underground Congress Mahila Samiti. Later on the name was changed to Balurghat Mahila Samiti to pave the way of receiving aids from British Government. One novel feature of this Mahila Samiti has been to organize a weekly women's market to deal

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24 Op. cit., p. 127.

with the products made by the poor women around. A poor lady was given the responsibility of collecting toia (tax), a share of which was earmarked for her own use.

The college in Balurghat was started by the refunded amount of the punitive tax imposed by the British Government in 1942. In 1947, when it was learnt that the fine was going to be refunded, the people of the town decided not to receive it individually but to use the total amount (Rs. 75,000/-) for establishing a college. The college was started in 1948 but the refund-amount was received even much later.

These are a few instances of the care and attention shown towards the development of the town by these early immigrants.

(2) The next wave of migrants started coming just before the Partition and continued a few years afterwards. They came from the districts of Pabna, Khulna and Jessore and all of them were Hindus of mixed social status. They were obliged to migrate as their existence came to be threatened in the area which soon afterwards became East Pakistan. This flow of migration was gradually slowing down when in 1950 the riot in Santahar, E. Pakistan, suddenly created a new spurt. These migrants of different places of origin and different economic classes came without much preparation and formed various residential clusters and tried to survive somehow in the new setting. Their need for security and their

common rural background probably had created very close personal ties which can be observed in Balurghat town even today.

(30) The coming of the United Front Ministry in West Bengal brought in many changes which had far-fetching effects (see pp. 252-53). During the Bangladesh War (1971) this area was flooded by poor lower caste people from the contiguous districts of Bogura and Dinajpur. Without any resources they had no option but to take up any sundry job. Their squatter-settlements have the appearance of industrial slums.

These different migrational waves have left their mark on social structure of Balurghat. And the process has led to the development of some sort of a social stratification. At the apex are the old established families who, virtually, rule the roost. Next in order, come those who arrived as recent migrants. The base is made of the indigenous people and the tribal group.

Development of the town : Past and present :- The development of the town is closely linked with the migrational and political history as pointed out in the previous pages. The formation of Balurghat sub-division in 1904 created some importance for Balurghat, which at that time was smaller than nearby Patiram ganja (market centre). By virtue of becoming the sub-divisional headquarters some jobs also were created. It became the district headquarters in 1947 and employment opportunities increased.

Even today job at the Collectorate is one of the main avenues of livelihood in Balurghat. The creation of Balurghat Municipality in 1951 ushered in the possibilities of developing urban conditions. Improvement of roads, markets and bus-stand etc. have been undertaken by the municipality. The municipality has 15 Wards now. 205 posts have been created under the Municipality, of which most are now filled up.

The administration of the Municipality has passed through several phases — (a) 1951-1969, with the Congress dominated municipal body, (b) 1969-1973, with R.S.P. majority, (c) 1973-1981, when the municipality came under a Government appointed administrator and (d) the current phase (1981 onwards) with R.S.P. dominated municipal body. The developmental activities of the municipality have naturally been affected with each changeover.

In recent years, the combination of Leftist State Government and Municipal body has received further incentives from the new urban development policy of the government. The town has, now, come under the Integrated Development of Small & Medium Towns of the Government of India. Under this scheme drainage, water supply and electricity are improved. The financial burden is shared by the centre and state governments along with the local body. 40:40:20 are the break-up of 86 lakhs, earmarked for development of Balurghat town. The various developmental works include — drinking water supply, roads, drainage, street-lighting, traffic control, education,

improvement of the conditions of scavengers, slum-dwellers, scheduled castes, working women, mother and children (through I.C.D.S. ), etc.

There are 11 slum areas recognized by the Municipality. These are inhabited by the Santals, Turis, scheduled castes and other low-income-group refugees from E. Pakistan/Bangladesh. These slums are scattered all over the town. The huts are mostly kutchha. From 1981 population figures, the total population of slums in Balurghat are found to be 24140, i.e. 23.06% of the town's population. One of these slums is inhabited solely by the Santals. The distribution of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the slum population is 34.63% and 4.76% respectively. For a town of the size of Balurghat the problem of slums appear to be quite big. Most of this is a reflection of the third wave of migration from E. Pakistan or Bangladesh.

The development of the town continues to depend upon the people of Balurghat as recorded in a publication of the Municipality — clubs, businessmen's associations and schools have helped by providing land and services<sup>25</sup>.

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25 Balurghat Municipality, Op. cit., p. 76.

Life in Balurghat :- The people of Balurghat have seen various political upheavals and experienced the migration and their adaptation. But this adaptation has been confined to agriculture and related activities initially, and then, switched on to commerce and service. The ongoing changes in the economic and technical spheres all over the country have, however, a very tangential impact on this district town because of its positional problems. Hence, the scene of Balurghat remains, more or less, stagnant.

The people are embedded in the social relations that developed at their places of origin and due to the migration and resulting economic and psychological insecurity. The niceties of earlier days are still normal. The pace of life is slow in all the country towns in comparison to the metropolises, but it is more so in Balurghat. Raiganj, a town not so far away, situated at important cross-roads, is a much more busy town.

The leisure time of the literates is spent in the pursuit of dramatic and literary activities. A feeling of belongingness to the town itself often comes to surface. As a result they are keen on contributing their mite towards its development. The contributions of the early immigrants may also be explained in terms of their feudal background in East Bengal and their noblesse oblige outlook. Some of these early doyens have been labelled by one of my respondents as the "Feudal lords".

The fact that Balurghat developed as the theatre centre of North Bengal is probably, again, a heritage from the feudal days of East Bengal. That the theatrical activities serve the recreational as well as social cohesive functions was an accepted knowledge to the early immigrants.

The efforts to shift the district headquarters to Raiganj has been strongly resisted to in the early seventies. The people there realized the handicaps they faced. They have been demanding for better communication. Rail communication has been promised, but it is yet to materialise. A vayudut service with Calcutta had begun, which few could afford. Resultantly, it had been discontinued and has been resumed only very recently.

The political life in Balurghat has gradually changed, as is obvious from the changes observed in the Municipal Body. Most of the first immigrants followed the path taken by the leaders in Indian National Congress. In spite of idealism and the spirit of social work an elitist bias was to be found in Balurghat in conformity with the then Indian political trend. With the later migrants, elitism in politics gradually waned. Further changes were discernible as the refugees came to stay permanently in Balurghat. This was also the period of the coming of the Left Front in power. In the Municipal Body, too, the R.S.P. came in position. The landlords felt insecure due to incidences of forcible harvesting, land demands of the bargadars

and dacoity across the border. Many landlords, then, had to move to the town area and to a more cramped life style.

However, the town of Balurghat is relatively more homogeneous than Raiganj or Siliguri. Besides some indogenous scheduled castes and earlier immigrant scheduled tribes, almost all are immigrants from East Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh. There are only about 50 families of Marwari business men. Although they have retained their vegetarian diet and rituals, they speak Bengali and have Bengali friends. On this point, Durgadutt Agarwala (56 yrs.) informed the researcher that the Marwari families maintain a most formal and business like relations while doing business in their community. In business, they never relent. Therefore, extra-business communication and informal relations could be had only with people outside their community. They are mostly engaged in cloth business, rice mills, transporting and petrol pumps. In addition to these people, there are some Biharis who carry on petty business activities and are outsiders in the urban <sup>Balurghat</sup> society in Balurghat. <sup>Balurghat</sup> is, thus, primarily a town of Bengali middle-class. From what the present researcher has seen of these people, she feels like drawing a very succinct conclusion that, among the Bengali middle class of Balurghat there is a perceptible hangover of their feudal past in East Bengal.

Siliguri and Balurghat : A Comparison

Siliguri and Balurghat, the two cities of North Bengal, have grown rapidly in the post-Independence period. The political changes associated with the Partition of India have brought about changes in the communicational network in the region. The impact of the political changes was first felt in the pre-Partition days during the communal riots, when a large number of refugees crossed into the security of the area which was to become West Bengal later. Since then, a stream of migrants have continued to enter the Indian territory in varying volumes. Population of Siliguri and Balurghat have grown due to the migration from East Pakistan/Bangladesh. The population of Siliguri has, also, grown due to migration from the neighbouring states and hill areas.

Owing to the changes in the communication network both Siliguri and Balurghat were affected, but not identically. Siliguri, due to change in the international boundaries, suddenly found itself at important intersecting point of western and north-eastern India, the south and North Bengal, the hills and the plains. Its importance from the military, strategic perspective also increased. And Siliguri grew.

Balurghat, on the other hand, found itself cut off from the railway link at Hili railway station which fell within the Pakistan territory. The closing in of the international boundary from the three sides placed Balurghat in a relatively

inaccessible corner. Although, in later years, road link between Balurghat and other parts of West Bengal and Bihar have been greatly improved, Balurghat did not grow due to communicational changes significantly. Growth of Balurghat town, however, has clearly been associated with the internal political changes and related changes in the law and order and socio-economic aspects (see pp. 251-252).

With the growing population, both the towns experienced some differentiation in economic activities. Industries have not developed in any of the two places, but Siliguri received the economic support generated by the adjoining tea-plantations. Commercial activities is the mainstay of urban occupations in both the towns, but it is diversified to a great extent in Siliguri. With Siliguri becoming an important communicational node, it has been possible to develop wholesale trading, storing and transporting of food as well as other consumer goods there. In contrast, the businessmen at Balurghat, have to confine their trading to food, clothing and such other consumer items. The hinterland of Siliguri is wide-spread in the hills, Duars, north-east India and other adjoining districts, whereas Balurghat has a localized market within the subdivision only. Balurghat, it has been observed, has a keenly competitive market with price-regulating mechanism. The reason may be adduced to several facts : (i) Hill enjoys an edge over Balurghat; (ii) the buying potential of the local people is limited; (iii) there are more shops than what is needed in the area. That is, supply is

more than the demand for commodities. All these tend to keep the local price low. In Siliguri, on the other hand, the businessmen have a wider market to operate, drawing in more entrepreneurs in the town. As an end result, Siliguri has developed into a centre of perceptible commercial-capitalistic entrepreneurship.

Both Balurghat and Siliguri have service opportunities in the Administrative set-up of the respective areas. Balurghat, being the district headquarters has got it more, but some offices have been shifted to Raiganj, which is a more easily accessible place. Siliguri, on the other hand, is merely a sub-divisional headquarters, but it hosts a number of district offices, which should normally have been located in the district headquarters. This, again, is due to the greater accessibility of Siliguri than Darjeeling, the headquarters town of the district. In Balurghat, the service sector is confined to these public sector offices and school-teaching. Siliguri has service opportunities in some private sector offices as well. There are many higher educational institutions in and around Siliguri, and only two in Balurghat.

Road transporting absorbs a large number of unskilled workers in Siliguri, and to a smaller extent in Balurghat. The three railway stations, situated within and near Siliguri town, again, provide livelihood to a large number of labourers and some white collar workers. Since the Chinese aggression in

1962, the northern part of the state has become strategically important. Many roads, bridges and cantonments have since then developed. The developmental work in and around Siliguri is in no way comparable to that in Balurghat. This, again, has created job opportunities.

Yet, smuggling is an important feature in the economy, while the extent of unemployment remaining quite high<sup>in</sup> both the towns. In Siliguri, smuggling is only an alternative and temporary avenue of income. Whereas, in Balurghat the economy depends quite to an extent on smuggling (see pp.179-80, 260-61).

It is by now apparent that both the 'push' and 'pull' factors have been in operation in the growth of the two towns. As these two blanket terms need elucidation, a brief review of the situation in these towns seems quite in order. 'Push' from East Pakistan and then Bangladesh had taken place due to obvious reasons. Dearth of sizeable agricultural land in the densely populated East Bengal districts had also brought, in earlier days, migrants to Balurghat. Siliguri was an undesirable place in the pre-Independence period and the above condition in East Bengal had brought in migrants to other towns of the area, e.g. Jalpaiguri. But with the exodus during the mid- and late-forties Siliguri also received its share of refugee population. Balurghat and its surroundings were deluged by the refugees. This situation is still continuing. Both the towns have received these immigrants, but Balurghat has<sup>it</sup> to a greater

extent. 'Push' factor in Nepal and Bihar has also brought immigrants to Siliguri. In case of Bihar, it is mainly the <sup>arising out of skewed man-land ratio,</sup> push, whereas, in Nepal it is conditioned by political and ~~arising out of skewed man-land ratio~~ economic reasons. The internal socio-political relations of Nepal had further been complicated due to the closure of Nepal-Tibet border on the Tibetan side. The direction of economic pursuit, then, had to be shifted southward and migration to nearby towns in India resulted. Siliguri, again, received a fresh influx of refugees.

Pulling capacity of Siliguri has gone on increasing with the growth of the town and its economic diversification. Although industry, in real sense, has not developed here, commercial capitalism combined with the still low land-price had been able to pull entrepreneurs, unskilled labourers and white-collar workers from far flung areas. Urban growth of Siliguri has continued in an unplanned manner with slums, squatter settlements and shanty towns. The 'pull' of Siliguri is mainly due to its nodal position and economic generation through commercial and urban and communication developmental activities. In contrast, Balurghat has been unable to pull by economic generation. The 'pull' of Balurghat has been in its ability to provide shelter to the insecure population in its rural surroundings. The urban-economic activities have not really pulled the population, rather the population congregated in the town to shut out the rural insecurity and the essential

economic activities in the town then continued in the rural tradition, albeit with some changed character due to ecological changes. This, in turn, has later on pulled the rural poor to the town. This is, then, a secondary 'pull'.

Thus, it may be said that Siliguri has grown due to both 'push' and 'pull' factors. But the same statement about Balurghat has to be made with some reservations. It is more a case of 'push'. And 'pull' has come only as a by-product. Those who were 'pushed-out' of their rural setting were obliged to be 'pushed-into' Balurghat town and the deciding 'pull' factor has been, merely, the promise of security in the town.

Under these circumstances the urban dynamism in the two towns differ. Occupational changes are more pronounced in Siliguri. Many Balurghat people still depend on agricultural produce from their lands, although a shift towards occupations like service or commerce is taking place. In Siliguri majority of the people have moved away from agricultural activities. Trading is the main pursuit there. Pace of life is much faster in Siliguri in comparison to that of Balurghat. The social relations in such a set up, is more numerous and transitory. The basis of the relations is often self-interest, although the familial bonds and cultural expressions also underline many interpersonal relations. In Balurghat, the social relations are of more a permanent nature and often oriented towards

others' interests. Of course, this statement is rather drastic, as the basis is not a prolonged and painstaking analysis of social networks, but observations and interviews.

Both the towns have their various associations. Balurghat is famous in North Bengal for its theatrical associations. Literary associations are also well-developed there. Siliguri has followed Balurghat, Jalpaiguri and Raiganj in these activities, but probably the relatively rapid pace of life, greater heterogeneity and pursuit of commercial capitalism in Siliguri have created an inhibiting effect. Other types of associations are also there, such as religious associations, work associations, clubs, social welfare organizations, etc. Organized social welfare works were undertaken more by individuals in the early period. This trend has not died down altogether, but is greatly supplemented by organized efforts now. The feudal background of the old established families in Balurghat is remembered in this context (see pp.263-65, 269-270).

It may not be very wrong to state, that a continuation of feudal social relations can be observed in Balurghat. In Siliguri we find a break in the feudal tradition and a change over to capitalistic relations. The development of Siliguri has been attributed to several factors (see pp.221-22,229-32), which together with the direct exposure to the British administration

probably has caused this break. The neighbourhoods of Siliguri bear such names as Babupara and Hakimpara, which is not found in Balurghat. There the clustering of rural occupations and ethnic groups are manifested in the names of some neighbourhoods, such as, Jejepara, Maldampara, Basakpara, Biswaspara, Ghoshpara, Nepalipara, Turipara, Kundu Colony, Bogura Colony, etc.

Some of the neighbourhoods are slum-like in both the towns. But in the preindustrial tradition, the slums of Balurghat are more socially controlled, whereas the slums in Siliguri can be controlled only formally. This is due to greater social disorganization and increasing gap between rich and poor in Siliguri. Balurghat is a middle-class town and the poor in that town is not so poor in contrast. Moreover, the continuing stream of unskilled migrant labourers are inflating the slum population at Siliguri. The extent of social disorganization in slums has been pointed out by the police authorities in Siliguri. This may be considered as a manifestation of 'lupenization'<sup>m</sup> associated with commercial capital formation.

The detailed discussion about the two towns has been confined mainly to their history and present state of life there. Both the towns have grown from small villages to Class I towns, but the urban features are more pronounced in Siliguri. The differentiation would continue and grow as the planning

and fiscal machineries of Government is concerned more about the future of Siliguri than that of Balurghat. Siliguri Planning Organization has been studying the problems and prospects of this town since 1965. At present, some of the interim plan proposals are being implemented by Siliguri-Jalpaiguri Development Authority. Balurghat has, only recently, come under the purview of the Integrated Development of Small & Medium Towns. The attention of urban development had been directed only towards provision of minimum urban amenities, but other urban needs like recreation, academic seminar, music and art, etc. are only recently being considered for Siliguri. Opening of the Tathya-Kendra in Siliguri with its auditorium, exhibition hall, library, etc is one such example. A full-fledged stadium in Siliguri has been inaugurated this year (1988) where an international football-match was held. It must be mentioned, however, that, the development of Siliguri is receiving financial support also from its capitalist traders. The Siliguri-Jalpaiguri Development Authority, Public Works Department and Siliguri Municipality have to put in concerted effort to shape up this unplanned town to a city on its own right. The industrial entrepreneurship and governmental help for industrial growth have started taking root in and around Siliguri. The trend is hopeful for the future of Siliguri. But the same cannot be said about Balurghat, which is not looking forward to any major change in near future.

Steps to rejuvenate the economy of Balurghat is its dire need.

The two Class I towns of North Bengal, thus, have some common and a few different factors of development and a similar history of growth. But that history also has many points of differences, which have shaped up the two towns differently. Balurghat, with its large population size, is leisurely carrying on its preindustrial urban life, where vestiges of feudal social relations linger on, inspite of the interplay of politics and economy of the mainstream. Siliguri, on the other hand, is growing haphazardly with its increasing heterogeneity. The race for capitalism and a self-assertion among the urban elites are pushing it forward. The better-off people of Siliguri are mustering all their resources to compete with the primate city-Calcutta. How far they will succeed is yet to be seen. But it can be safely stated at this juncture that, Siliguri has emerged as THE focal point of urbanization in North Bengal.