

CHAPTER-V

Conclusion.

New technology, new education and new administrative structure coming in the wake of British rule were so pervasive that they affected nearly all aspects of urban life. There were significant changes in the morphology of towns, their demographic profile and social structure, new means of communication altered the pattern of trade and facilitated migration to urban areas, the new educational system opened avenues for new professions and new ideas. Modern education also promoted rationalist thinking and instilled humanistic values which aroused concern for social reform and initiated simultaneously the process of secularization and communalization among the educated lot. Even in a semi colonial situation as in Sikkim such changes were visible.

Urban development in Gangtok during the colonial period was largely the expression of British power and their need to fulfill various functions.¹ The initial function was administrative followed by economic importance. Therefore, starting off as a suitable seat for Sikkim administration in 1889, and a possible mart for Indo-Tibetan trade, Gangtok steadily acquired urban elements as it entered the 20th century. But, military and strategic functions were extremely important as it was located in the frontier zone adjacent to Tibet. There was a constant fear of intrusion and the strategic importance of the place was deeply felt even prior to the Lingtu incident. Infact, at the earliest phase, the township had emerged as a cantonment. Gangtok's strategic importance had remained in the minds of British administrators for initiating road construction. In this connection the *Nathu-la* road stands as a good example which was built to facilitate easy movement of the Younghusband Mission to the Tibetan frontier.² Gangtok as a potential mart for Indo-Tibetan trade was also fully explored by the *Nathu-la* road. The road also made life much easier for the pioneers to carry on with their work of improvement of the Gangtok station. (The road was meant for mule and pony and not for cart

traffic). Subsequently, when the cart road joined the capital of Sikkim with Geilkhola railway terminus, the story of her isolation became a thing of the past. This road became the life-line of the emerging township as it linked Gangtok with the plains of India.

Probably it would have been difficult for the capital of Sikkim to step on the road of urbanisation without J.C White as the first British Political Officer. It was White's knowledge in road building that proved to be immensely useful in a hilly place like Gangtok who put his best efforts for surveying and cutting lines for communication and link it up by roads and bridges with different parts of the country. Within twenty years of his stay in Sikkim the country was opened up by a system of roads, and torrents were bridged.³

A constructive programme for road building within the capital was also initiated by the first Political Officer. Till 1920 construction of roads and development in communication system within Gangtok showed a steady improvement. The Ridge road was joined with the palace, the market, the hospital and with the cart road leading to Rangpo. As the capital was opened out more roads were required for development of internal communication and something was accomplished each year. By 1930 Gangtok could boast of a labyrinth of roads within the town.⁴

Gangtok did not have any administration worth the name prior to the establishment of the Political Agency. With the creation of different departments of administration and the growth of administrative machinery J.C White was able to streamline the administration of the capital and the entire country. Special care was taken to look after the internal management of Gangtok, the development of its civic amenities, hospital, market etc. The public works department since its very inception took up such responsibilities of providing civic amenities to the people and discharged the responsibility efficiently. As early as 1907,⁵ it provided drinking water and constructed urinal in the market area. For maintenance of sanitary condition at the bazaar sweepers were appointed and civic amenities slowly expanded to other parts of

Gangtok. By 1927 the hospital, market and the Government quarters were provided with water taps, proper drains and urinals. In 1927⁶ electric light substituted kerosene lamp in the Gangtok hospital. In 1930⁷ Public buildings and roads in the capital were provided with electric lights. Therefore, by 1930s the capital of Sikkim had all possible civic amenities and people could lead a smooth life. In the first decade of the 20th century the police force had developed into a well organised defence institution⁸ and life of insecurity had become a story of the past. Security and justice was further guaranteed with the establishment of the Chief Court of Sikkim at Gangtok. The court functioned on English model under an independent and legally qualified judge.⁹

Economically speaking, Gangtok proved to be an important centre of activity for Indo-Tibetan trade. The opening up of a trade registration office at Gangtok in 1896¹⁰ the construction of a wool godown at Deorali¹¹ (a store house for wool coming from Tibet), a building for accommodating bull and stallion¹² etc., all go to show the importance of the place as a mart for Indo-Tibetan trade and after the construction of the *Nathu-la* road trade increased steadily. Indo-Sikkimese trade also received a tremendous boost because of the cart road especially in the first quarter of the 20th century. Besides, the flourishing new industries of carpet making, cloth weaving introduced new field for employment of labour. A well organized local market led to greater demand for local supplies. The increased facilities of transport brought markets within reach for the local produce¹³ and also items of Indo-Tibetan trade. Such developments introduced new sources of revenue further helping to build up the economy of Gangtok. A systematic collection of revenue from the bazaar was also introduced.¹⁴ All these led to greater circulation of money. The revenue of the state was kept partly in the Imperial Bank of India, Calcutta, and partly in the Bank of Messers. Jetmull and Bhojraj in Darjeeling and Gangtok. The former was treated as a depot for collecting all the surplus revenue of the State while the latter was appointed to recover and disburse all the revenue and expenditure of the State and thus exercise the functions of a Treasury

Office.¹⁵ The utilization of latent water-power further added good revenue to Gangtok's developing economy.

Colonial need to fulfill their various functions also found expression in the growth of modern education. For creating a group of English knowing people with English attitude who would be loyal supporters of British administration in Sikkim they followed a policy of initiating modern education in tune with the policy followed in British India. This policy found expression in the establishment of the Bhutia Boarding and the Nepali boarding school at Gangtok.¹⁶ Female education also found its beginning in 1913 with the starting of Kazis' daughters' school.¹⁷ In 1923, the Scandinavian Mission started a full fledged girls' school at Gangtok.¹⁸ The amalgamation of the Bhutia and Nepali boarding schools into the Tashi Namgyal High School further gave importance to Gangtok as an important centre of learning in Sikkim.¹⁹ Growth of modern education and also reforms in administration and economy introduced changes in the urban social structure. This change was visible in the emergence of a middle class. This middle class was not a homogenous unit but a conglomerate of educated professionals, the merchants and even the commoners who had climbed up the social ladder because of their economic prosperity. The birth of middle class led to the stratification of the society from two-tier division consisting of the upper and the lower class into a three-tier division, viz., the upper class, the middle class and the lower class. Besides, a hierarchical division of settlement within the township set apart a portion of the town exclusively for the British. The native officials were pushed below the earmarked portion of White settlement. The business community settled in the bazaar area. The relationship between the different rungs of official hierarchy and the official and non-official communities was dominated by a feeling of disdain. The English settlement enjoyed facility of market and domestics. The Ridge Park market was infact exclusively established by the British for catering to their exclusive wants. This policy had manifested even in the growth of civic amenities first in the area of their settlement which suggests discrimination against the natives. Their air of superiority also resulting out of the fact that

they were the rulers, limited their social interaction with the ruled except with the royal family and few elites.²⁰

British preoccupation with health issues resulted into yet another aspect of urban development and that was the establishment of a centre for health. Beginning as a dispensary catering to the health needs of the British at the station, the Gangtok dispensary within no time turned out to be a public health centre.²¹ The establishment of a civil hospital at Gangtok²² with modern amenities in the second decade of the 20th century brought relief to the general health of the people of Sikkim. With constant care shown by the Government for its maintenance and expansion, the hospital had by 1930 different wards to cater to the health of the people, such as, a maternity ward, a tuberculosis ward and a general ward.²³

Thus, Gangtok did not end up by being a mere administrative headquarter of the British or functioning as a place catering to economic and strategic needs of the colonial Government. Although it started off with such functions yet within a short span of time Gangtok gained importance of its own by performing many other functions. However, one must not forget that whatever functions Gangtok had for the British, they would not have been realised if there were no roads. Things had definitely improved for Gangtok after the construction of the cart road. From 1925²⁴ this road was slowly opened for vehicular traffic. In 1940s when the cart road was fully opened for mechanical traffic²⁵ Gangtok's urbanity was justified in the modern sense of the term.

The study has led me to come to a decision about the final shape which Gangtok has taken in terms of the colonial model of urban growth. True, Gangtok cannot be fitted in its entirety into the straight-jacket hill-station framework, as a neighbouring Darjeeling would be done. It seemed to have survived more in its ethnicity than in the metropolitan ambience that was imposed on it. Nevertheless, it has taken to some of the features of a colonial city, and in the process it assumed some cultural and organisational approximation to the satellite hill-stations that grew due to the British penetration in the lower ridges

of the Darjeeling hills. So, Kalimpong and Kurseong turn out to be unavoidable analogies for Gangtok to understand the intricate network of its inner cultural dynamics and the fabric of the physical existence inspite of the strong presence of the British Raj.

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