

CHAPTER - V

LOCAL URBAN GOVERNMENTS AND URBAN AMENITIES IN THE TOWNS OF NORTH BENGAL

Dating back to its origin, the role of urban Government becomes more crucial with the rapid expansion of urbanization which resulted in a deep crisis in the urban environment. The term urban Government means a Local Self Government which is a responsible institution committed to ensure well being of the urbanities within the jurisdiction of urban area.

Characteristically, the urban government is an administrative institution of a particular locality (i.e. of an urban centre), having a limited known area of Jurisdiction, representing the inhabitants of that area and elected by them, enjoying considerable autonomy provided by the Acts and regulation, having the power of imposing tax on the services it renders, and spending the income on local services, thus separating it from the State or Central Government's services⁽¹⁾.

Condition in North Bengal

The picture of urban Government in this northern part of West Bengal is a bit different in respect of that of the southern part of the River Ganges. The region remained backward for a prolonged period because of its remote location from other parts

of the state as well as less urban character. The lack of well documented reports and old records made it quite a hardship to shed light on the nature and activities of the local government of this region prior to British rule. A few administrative centres were created in this region to run the administration and with the establishment of these administrative centres, some sort of local bodies like union Board and District Boards were created to supervise some local services and to decentralize the administration. But how far the services of these local bodies was able to do well for the inhabitants of those localities is a matter of research. ^{What} ~~What~~ we can assume is that the services ^e performed by these local bodies were no more better than that of the present day.

The affect of the partition brought change in the demographic picture of this region. Population in the urban area increased abruptly with the refugee influx and the role of the urban governments gained more importance followed by the increasing liabilities. While a few towns existed in North Bengal in the pre-partition period, the post-partition period witnessed a mashroom growth of towns and according to census of 1971 there were 28 urban centres in North Bengal. Out of these twenty eight urban centres, only twelve towns have municipality, eleven are under Anchal Panchayat and four are under town committee and one is a railway town.

Table -13

Showing the towns with their local Governments.

SL NO	1 Name of the District	2 Name of the towns	3 Nature of urban government
1.	Cooch Behar	Cooch Behar	Municipality
2.	Do	Dinhata	"
3.	Do	Tufanganj	Town Committee
4.	Do	Mathabhanga	"
5.	Do	Haldibari	"
6.	Do	Mekhliganj	"
7.	Do	Guriahati	Anchal Panchayat
8.	Jalpaiguri	Jalpaiguri	Municipality
9.	Do	Alipurduar	"
10.	Do	Maynaguri	Anchal Panchayat
11.	Do	Dhupguri	"
12.	Do	Falakata	"
13.	Do	Malbazar	"
14.	Do	Domahini	"
15.	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	Municipality
16.	Do	Kurseong	"
17.	Do	Kalimpong	"
18.	Do	Siliguri	"

Table - 13 Contd.

Sl No	1	2	3
19.	West Dinajpur	Salurghat	Municipality
20.	Do	Raiganj	"
21.	Do	Kaliaganj	Anchal Panchayat
22.	Do	Gangaraapur	"
23.	Do	Hili	"
24.	Do	Islampur	"
25.	Do	Dalkhola	"
26.	Malda	Englishbazar	Municipality
27.	Do	Old Malda	"

The foregoing table shows that many a good number of towns (eleven in total) which have been declared urban according to the Census of 1971, have such local Governments which are basically rural in character.

The general outline of functions and responsibilities of these local Governments of urban centres is same. It exists to provide and promote the civic amenities for offering a better urban-livelihood. But the service or functions varies markedly based on their nature and size. In fact, the function of an

Anchal Panchayat differs greatly from the function of a Municipality.

Before going to describe the functions of those local bodies, a brief account of their nature of formation, perhaps, will help us to understand their functional capacity.

The municipality usually consists of several commissioners whose number varies according to the strength of the population (based on the criteria given by the ministry of Local Self Govt. of West Bengal vide Govt. order no-9586/M-1M-65/58 (3) dated 30.10.1958) to give a proper democratic representation. The commissioners represent their wards from which they are elected. A Chairman and a Vice-Chairman are elected by the commissioners from among themselves for a period of four years. The Chairman usually supervises the entire function of the municipality and thus holds the most responsible position in the municipal administration.

The town committee, according to its constitution, is a nominated body whose number of members varies from three to nine⁽²⁾, headed by a Chairman and Vice-Chairman who are also nominated⁽³⁾ members. Usually the Executive Administrative Officer of the town becomes the Chairman of the town committee by virtue of his post. An Anchal Panchayat is constituted for a group of contiguous gramsavas, consisting of several members (varies according to

the number of gramsaves) directly elected for a term of four years. Anchal Pradhan and Up-Pradhan are elected by the members of Anchal Panchayat.

The function of a municipality comprises various fields from street scavenging to impart education. A brief description of the functions of a municipality is given below.

The municipality contains a number of sections like sanitary, health, engineering, education and general, each headed by an executive personnel under the direct supervision of the Chairman. Each section mentioned above has the following responsibilities :

Health : To supervise and regulate offensive and dangerous trades to prevent the food adulteration; inoculation and vaccination for the prevention and control of contagious and infectious diseases; to supply drinking water⁽⁴⁾.

Sanitary : To clean municipal roads and public places, disposal of garbage, night soil; preparation of compost manures; cleaning of drains, service latrines etc. and to keep the town clean⁽⁵⁾.

Engineering or Public Utilities : Construction, maintenance and improvements of roads, culverts and drains; cremation and fire services; sanction of building plans; lighting the public streets, etc⁽⁶⁾.

Education : To establish, maintain, pre-primary or primary ~~XXXXXXXX~~ schools with all amenities like water, latrine, urinal, electricity, etc⁽⁷⁾.

Development : Construction, and maintenance of markets, shopping centres, slaughter houses, washing places, wells, parks, etc. and preparation of comprehensive plans for proper development and growth of the town⁽⁸⁾.

General : To look after the administrative machinery for proper discharge of duties⁽⁹⁾.

The function of Town Committee is not so wide like a municipal organization even though it has some sort of resemblance with the municipal services. The main functions⁽¹⁰⁾ of a town committee are given below :

- (1) To provide chowkidari service.
- (2) To construct tanks, roads, bridges, ghats, wells, drains and privy.
- (3) To maintain and repair the above things being the property of the town committee; to keep the town clean.
- (4) To supply water and to arrange for lighting the street and watering the roads.
- (5) Erection and maintenance of offices and other buildings required for the purpose of the town committee.
- (6) Other works of public utilities calculated to promote the health comfort or conveniences of the inhabitants.
- (7) To maintain a fire brigade.

Main functions of the Anchal Panchayat are sanitation and conservancy; construction^{and}/maintenance of public streets; supply of

water; primary education; lighting of public streets in built-up areas; construction of drain and drainage works and provision of public latrines, etc. But throughout India the Panchayats have no work schedule. The works vary from State to State based on their nature of Panchayats apart from those mentioned above which are almost common in all the Panchayats of India.

An analytical approach towards the urban administration in North Bengal will reveal that, actually the urban administration in this region presents a different picture regarding its functions or services which list a volume of work only in black and white. Though the municipalities of the towns of North Bengal generally pledge to render all sorts of urban amenities or civic utilities to their tax-payers, in fact, the idea of creating a full-fledged urban society is still a far cry in this region. Practically, still now many a good number of municipalities have no piped water supply system for supplying drinking water to its residents. Towns like Raiganj, Balurghat, Siliguri fall in this group. The service function of town committee is strictly limited to certain fields like Chowkidary, conservancy etc. and practically no Mihal Panchayat in North Bengal has conservancy service, pipe water, general health section, even some has no street light facility.

Of course, the establishment costs of almost all urban

Governments absorb a considerable amount of money in the fields of expenditure. In Cooch Behar municipality it was 22% of the total expenditure in 1973-74, in Darjeeling municipality it was 66% in 1972-73 and in Alipurduar municipality the cost of establishment in the year 1973 increased by Rs. 650/- roughly than the year 1971-72. In Town Committees and Anchal Panchayats the establishment cost takes a lion's share in the fields of expenditure. So, most of the urban Local Governments depend mainly on the Government Grants to meet the expenditure on development works. The political infiltration is also another reason for the sluggish administration of the Local Governments. In fact, the organizations being elected bodies have become political platforms and are concerned much less with keeping their pledges made at the time of election.

The financial condition of the urban Governments and their actual functions, in practice, can be revealed by detail analysis of their income and expenditure statements. The dearth of available data and information makes it almost impossible to give a full financial picture of all the local bodies of the urban centres of North Bengal. A selective study, taking a local body from each of the representative groups of local Government viz Municipality, Town Committee, and Anchal Panchayat would, however, serve the purpose.

Case Studies : The case studies of the following urban centres are mainly based on their statements of income and expenditure. We shall try to derive from their income and expenditure statements, what kind of services they are rendering to their rate payers, and what percentage of the total expenditure they devote to development works; how much is absorbed by the general administration; how much they obtain as grants from the Governments and the nature of grants; the existing drawbacks catering to the public demands and possible means of improving the situation.

Data : The data presented in this paper mainly constitute the statement of income and expenditure of the local bodies, collected by the author himself through personal visits to those institutions. The statement of income and expenditure has been taken for three years from 1971-72 to 1973-74, except in the case of the panchayat where the figures for continuous three years were not available.

Jalpaiguri Municipality : The municipality of Jalpaiguri was established in the year 1885. The total area at present is 10.075 sq.km. The total population of the town, according to the Census of India 1971, is 55,345 persons which indicates an increase of 14% during the last decade. Total number of rate-payers is 5247 persons (up to 1973); total number of wards - 19; total number of commissioners - 19 (as per single member constituency). The town is the

second most important town of North Bengal, but being the divisional Headquarters of North Bengal, ^{it} enjoys the highest administrative status.

Source of Revenue :

- (a) Rates on holdings, (b) Conservancy rates, (c) Water rates
- (d) Lighting rates, (e) Tax on profession and trade; (f) Food license; (g) Rickshaw license; (h) Cart Registration; (i) Rent of land and houses; (j) Pound rent; (k) Sale of composed manure; (l) Fees from market and slaughter-house; (m) Fees from building plan; (n) Grant-in-aid from government.

Mode of Taxation :

- (a) Rates on holding - 10%
- (b) Conservancy rate - 7% (based on the total annual valuation of holding)
- (c) Water rates - 2½% (based on the total annual valuation of holding)
- (d) Lighting rates - 2% (based on the total annual valuation of holding)

Table - 2

Showing the income of the Jalpaiguri Municipality from 1971 - 74 March.

(Amount in Rs.)

Source of Revenue	1971-72	Percentage	1972-73	Percentage	1973-74	Percentage
A. Consolidated rate	544637.0	48.3%	602012.0	38.7%	649481.0	51.3%
B. License fee and other taxes	66175.0	5.9	54060.0	3.5	56333.0	4.5
C. Govt. contribution & other grants	427606.0	37.8	799711.0	51.4	490385.0	38.7
D. Miscellaneous	90986.0	8.0	99622.0	6.4	69165.0	5.5
Total :	1130405.0	100.0	1555405.0	100.0	1265914.0	100.0

(Source : figure compiled from the detail statement of sources of revenue. Annual reports of Jalpaiguri Municipality).

The table - 2 shows that throughout ^{the} three financial years, from April 1971 to March 1974, the consolidated rates comprising rates on holding, conservancy rate, water and lighting rate; ^{and} Government's contribution and other grants are ^{the} two main sources of income for this Municipality, contributing over 80% of the total income.

The license fees and other taxes, consisting of those on profession and trade; House connection fees; warrent fee, and fees on market and slaughter houses, make a very small part of the total income in the respective years. From the table-2, it is found that the highest percentage covered by this section was only 5.9% in 1971-72.

The miscellaneous items comprising interest, pound, rent on land and houses, sale proceeds of compost manure, advance, deposit etc (and miscellaneous itself) contributed something more than license fees and other taxes. But in never came to more than 8 percent of the total income of this municipality in those respective years.

The Table-2 indicates that the earning from different sources did not increase uniformly while in 1972-73 all except Government contribution decreased from 1971-72; in 1973-74 the consolidated rate and license fees and other taxes improved their position, but the Govt. contribution and the miscellaneous items suffered a setback.

The reason behind the increase of consolidated rate in 1973-74 is that nearly Rs. 60,000 was collected more as current collection in that year (Table ¹⁵-3).

Table-3/15

(Amount in Rupees)			
Source of Revenue	1972 - 73	1973 - 74	Amount increased
Rate on holding	201317.0	224213.0	22501.0
Conservancy rate	129021.0	150052.0	21031.0
Water rate	47783.0	56260.0	8477.0
Lighting rate	38556 .0	45190.0	6634.0

(The arear figures have not been added within the current figure)

Table-4 16

Showing the expenditure of Jalpaiguri Municipality for the following financial years 1971-72, 1972-73 and 1973-74.

(Amount in Rs.)

Sl No.	Heads of Expenditure	1971-72	Perce- tage (%)	1972-73	Perten- tage (%)	1973-74	Perten- tage (%)
1.	Conservancy	410900.0	35.1	410148.0	26.3	404164.0	31.7
2.	Water Supply	39641.0	3.4	44143.0	2.8	61765.0	4.8
3.	Drainage	96036.0	8.2	101103.0	6.5	101380.0	7.9
4.	Roads	173091.0	14.8	527599.0	33.8	227251.0	17.8
5.	Lighting	26006.0	2.2	33114.0	2.1	75934.0	5.9
6.	Health measures	10817.0	0.9	8663.0	0.6	10173.0	0.8
7.	Primary education & grants to other institutions	79693.0	6.8	81313.0	5.2	70959.0	5.6
8.	Market and Slaughter House	8597.0	0.7	8841.0	0.6	10434.0	0.8
9.	Miscellaneous	129145.0	11.0	133834.0	8.5	117122.0	0.2
10.	General Administration.	197673.0	16.9	210974.0	13.6	197620.0	15.5
Total :		1171599.0	100.0	1553782.0	100.0	1276302.0	100.0

Looking at the expenditure account (table-4)¹⁶, it is interesting to observe that the Conservancy and Roads jointly absorb not less than 50% of the total expenditure throughout the three financial years and the general administration took not less than 13.6% of the total expenditure in the three respective years. So, we can say that conservancy roads and general administration jointly absorb, roughly, $\frac{2}{3}$ of the total expenditure which reveals the plight of other services like, water, lighting, education, health, etc. which are considered no less important than the foregoing services. Practically the breakdown in the table-4¹⁶ shows that none of these services absorbs 10% of the total expenditure and specially in health service, it is less than 10% throughout the three financial years. Although the situation improved to a small extent during 1973-74 financial year, yet the services require more attention upto now.

While on ^{the} one hand the income statement of Jalpaiguri Municipality shows that the organization depends too much on the Government grant, on the other hand, the expenditure statement reveals that some fundamentally requisite services are far from the expected standard, and the authority should seek some rational approach to overcome these shortcomings.

(B) Town Committee Tufanganj : The Town Committee of Tufanganj town was established in April, 1939, under the section of Act no.IV

of Cooch Behar Town Committee Act of 1903⁽¹¹⁾. The area of the town committee remained the same (i.e., 34 sq.m) from the date of establishment and in spite of further expansion of the township with the increase of population, the area remained static. As per Census 1971, the town contains 4209 persons. By virtue of post, the Sub-Divisional Officer of the town is the Chairman of the town committee. The body is a nominated one. The total number of members varies from three to nine. The town, being one of the sub-divisional headquarters of Cooch Behar district, is mainly an administrative centre. The industrial and commercial pulse of the town is weak.

Funds or Source of revenue : According to the Act No. XV of the Town Committee Act of Cooch Behar State of 1903, money, taxes, rents and profits received by the Town Committee of any place, all fines, fees, and penalties paid or levied under this Act, in addition to such sums as the His Highness the Maharaja* may assign from state funds to any town committee constituted under this Act, shall constitute a fund which will be called the town committee fund⁽¹²⁾. The maximum limit of assessment on holding remained within Rs.84.0 only per annum from its establishment, as per the rule of the Act of 1903⁽¹³⁾

* After the merger of Cooch Behar State with the Indian Union, the Government of West Bengal is giving financial assistance to the Town Committee.

Table-517

The following is the statement of income of Tufanganj Town Committee for the last three financial years viz 1971-72, 1972-73, 1973-74.

(Amount in Rs.)							
S1 No.	Source of Revenue	1971-72	Percentage	1972-73	Percentage	1973-74	Percentage
1.	Consolidated rate	9133.0	14.29	9645.0	13.7	12739.0	12.5
2.	License and other taxes	20865.0	32.63	22390.0	31.7	19180.0	18.1
3.	Govt. Contribution	26624.0	41.64	28118.0	39.8	60613.0	57.3
4.	Miscellaneous	7320.0	11.44	10554.0	14.8	12929.0	12.1
Total :		63942.0	100.0	70707.0	100.0	105461.0	100.0

(Source : Annual Administrative Report, Tufanganj Town Committee)

It will be seen from the table-¹⁷5 that the Government grants constitute more than 40 percent of the town committee's income with a slight fall in 1972-73, while the consolidated rate comprising Chowkidari Tax, latrine tax and lighting tax failed to earn much, the highest percentage in this field is only 14.29 percent in 1971-72. On the other hand, the license fee and other taxes contributed more, such as 32% in 1971-72, than consolidated rate throughout the three financial year. The income from

miscellaneous items, however, shows an increase from 1971-72 onwards.

The Table - V shows that this organization (like the Jalpaiguri municipality) depends too much on Govt. grants and the local sources of income play a rather insignificant role for the augmentation of its funds.

Table - 18

Showing the expenditure statement of Tufanganj Town Committee.

Sl	Heads of expenditure	1971-72	Percentage	1972-73	Percentage	1973-74	Percentage
1.	Establishment cost (general).	15251.74	26.9	16972.53	18.6	17532.04	17.8
2.	Chowkidar Establishment.	7126.04	12.6	7903.03	8.6	8418.57	8.6
3.	Conservancy Establishment.	23725.83	41.7	26775.62	29.2	22547.31	29.4
*4.	Original works.	8972.21	15.9	38330.94	41.8	42111.94	43.0
5.	Miscellaneous	1625.77	2.9	1640.84	1.8	1318.75	1.3
Total :		56700.59	100.0	91622.96	100.0	97978.61	100.0

The most remarkable feature of this breakdown is that, while the expenditure on general establishment decreased gradually,

* Original works comprise construction of roads, buildings, sinking of tubewells; Drainage; light charge; Watercharge, establishment, etc.

(26% 18% and 17% in the respective years) from 1971-72, the town committee devoted more funds to original works which increased by 26% in 1972-73. The expenditure on conservancy however, declined by 13% during that period.

It can be noted that inspite of the absence of development fund from the government, the town committee tried its utmost to utilise its major portion of income on the development works.

(C) Falakata Anchal Panchayat : The Anchal Panchayat of Falakata, the latter being a police station headquarters of Jalpaiguri district, has no such administrative importance like two other towns viz Jalpaiguri and Tufanganj. The Panchayat was established in June, 1961 according to the Panchayati Act of 1958. The town, with a population of 7194 persons and an area covering 16.36 sq. miles of which 0.189 sq miles comprise the proper town area, plays an important role for the surrounding country-side from the commercial point of view. The total number of rate-payers is 2506. The anchal Panchayat is an elected body headed by a Pradhan who is usually elected by the other members from among themselves for a period of four years. The activity of Anchal Panchayat as a local Self Government is very limited specially in an urban area. The Panchayat provides no conservancy service or street lights in this town. The street light service, once initiated, has been withdrawn since 1970 due to very poor response from the rate-payers in

Paying light taxes. The following table will show the sources of revenue of Falakata Anchal Panchayat for the year 1974-75 March.

Table-7¹⁹

Showing the income statement of Falakata Anchal Panchayat.

(Amount in Rs.)			
Sl No.	Source of revenue	1974-75	Percentage
1.	Tax on housing and holdings : (combining current & arear).	651.88	36.87
2.	Tax on business and license fees: (combining current & arear).	1764.25	18.61
3.	Cattle certificate.	305.00	3.21
4.	Government grants.	6756.00	71.3
	(A) Chowkidari & dafadari		
	(b) Secretary's pay.		
Total :		19477.13	100.0

The interesting feature which the table-7¹⁹ shows is that Government contribution constitutes 50 percent of the total income of this Anchal Panchayat, and the tax on housing and holding secures second place, obtaining 34.5 percent of the total income. Others are insignificant as the sources of revenue.

Table-8²⁰

Showing the expenditure of Falakata Anchal Panchayat for 1974 - 75.

(Amount in Rs.)

Sl No	Heads of expenditure	1974 - 75	Percentage
1.	General establishment (Combining pay to chowkidar and dafader, secretary and stationery and allowances)	10717.65	83.8
2.	Tax collection commission (to staffs)	976.00	7.6
3.	Development works	1100.00	8.6
Total :		12793.65	100.0

²⁰
The table -8 shows that the general administration absorbs more than 80 percent of the total expenditure of this Anchal Panchayat which reveals the plight of the other services, specially of development work which constitutes only 8.6 percent of the total expenditure. Ofcourse, the Government's grants for development work towards this organisation is too tiny, so the shortage of own fund coupled with inadequate Government development grant made this organization unable to spend more for development work.

This Anchal Panchayat gets from the State Government only Rs. 1297.0 as development grant, and practically no organization would venture to step forward for any kind of development work with that picayunish grant.

The financial picture given above of three different types of urban Local Governments gives a general idea about the condition prevailing in North Bengal. Barring a few, almost all the local urban bodies of this region are suffering from a inverse pyramidal set-up where costs for staff maintenance is much higher than the actual expenses on civic services. Simultaneously, these organizations, like Town Committees and Anchal Panchayats are facing an acute financial stringency due to the lack of local sources for earning more revenue as well as limited Government grants. This has a direct impact on the servicing capacity of the civic bodies. The urban residents get little from their hands what is called urban amenity, and as such living conditions become unbearable. Lack of sanitation, and absence of underground sewerage, scarcity of purified drinking water, good roads, hospital and shopping facilities along with unplanned growth giving rise to slum conditions everywhere, add to the misery of the dwellers. The appalling condition can be improved only when the civic authorities take a serious view of the situation. But here also the principal handicap is an inadequate fund.

As the existing sources of revenues ~~along~~ cannot provide the required fund, the local bodies usually seek Government help in the form of grant-in-aid. It is imperative, therefore, that the pattern of this assistance should be made more liberal in regard to the schemes like water supply, sewerage and drainage, primary schools and primary health etc.

The report of the committee of Ministers constituted by the central council of local self government (November 1963) recommended ⁽¹⁴⁾ that :

- (1) There should be a basic "general purposes" grant for each local body other than the bigger municipalities and corporation;
- (2) The local bodies eligible for such grant within each category (municipality, local board, panchayats, etc) would be classified into few simple divisions based on population, area, resources etc, and the grant itself related to these factors as well as to the size of the normal budget of the local bodies.
- (3) The basic grant should be such that, after taking into account its own resources, the local body will have fairly adequate finance for discharging its obligatory and executive functions.

But, ^{it} is known to us that the Government, itself going through economic crisis, has no such capacity to provide enough money for all these services. Hence, the local bodies have to tap every new avenue to increase its fund. This can be achieved in

two ways :

(1) either by cutting the expenditure on establishment or by creating new taxes or organizing the existing tax collection department in such a manner as to yield more income.

Regarding the expenditure on general administration, it has already been said that, the expense in this field is more than the actual and many authors writing on local Governments have harped on the same string. The local body should not forget the economic capability of the tax-payers while imposing the new tax. A larger burden of tax levied on the tax payers may create difficulties for the local bodies to collect it. Besides, now-a-days the different political bodies will put political pressure on the local body to lift such new taxes if imposed. An example may be cited here. Recently the Siliguri Municipality tried to introduce a toll tax upon the vehicles crossing the Mahananda river, but the local body had to lift it in the face of a strong opposition from the interested sections.

The realisation of property tax through proper assessment, often absent due to undervaluation of the property or the inefficiency of the elected body "to cope with the complicated problem of valuation of property"¹⁵, may help the local body in improving

its financial condition. For this ~~the report of~~ the Committee of Ministers under the Chairmanship ^{of} Dr. R. Zakaria⁽¹⁶⁾ recommended to setup an independent valuation machinery to look ^{into} ~~after~~ the assessment work at regular intervals.

The reports of the collection department's of many local bodies reveal that the collection (of rate) often fall below 50 percent of the total assessment. Every year a large sum is left due. For example, in Jalpaiguri Municipality the percentage of collection of total demand were 64 (percent) and 51 (percent) in 1969-70 and 1970-71 respectively and in recent years it has fallen below 50 percent of the total demand. A well-developed collecting ^{system} can shorten this gap to a considerable extent and better its financial condition. Report of the committee on "Augmentation of Financial Resources of Urban Local Bodies" recommended that a "separate cadre of municipal executives"⁽¹⁷⁾ should be created. According to the report of that committee it is expected that this independent cadre of Municipal executives would be the fittest to realize the municipal dues than the existing bodies. This system has been proved successful to increase the percentage of collection in Kerala and Madras. The committee constituted by the central council of Local, Self Government, (1963) on "Augmentation of Financial Resources of Urban Local Bodies", also recommended other steps which can be taken to

Some of them applicable to the towns of North Bengal are given below in brief : (i) Constitution of an Urban Development Board⁽¹⁸⁾ as the consultant organization for the local Bodies. If this board is established it can help the local body in the matter of finance, implementation of schemes, borrowing loan from abroad, etc.

(ii) The local bodies can seek loan from Life Insurance Corporation of India for implementation of their schemes, particularly which are related with health measures, resulting in "better health longevity of the policyholders"⁽¹⁹⁾. (iii) Imposition of Entertainment tax⁽²⁰⁾: "the State Government should earmark 25% of the proceeds of this tax for the urban local bodies".

The directive principles of State policy pleads for a "full enjoyment of liesure, social and cultural opportunities (Article - 43, part IV)", and the standard of living of its people (Article-4, part IV of indian constitution)", and the Government of India being a welfare Government it is expected that there should be a co-ordination between the Local Self Government and the respective State Government agencies to fulfil those desires of the constitution. Simultaneously, as Freeman has expressed "Local Government exists to preserve and protect the rights of the individuals and to contribute to the nation as a whole"⁽²¹⁾, the local urban bodies have a specific role to perform fair, sincere and faithful discharge of their duties by

keeping the institution out of mal-administration, corruption, internal political conflict and above all indifference to their responsibilities. If this becomes the motto of the local bodies then, I hope, the condition of the local bodies of North Bengal as well as the rate payers, will improve, though slowly but with confidence.

Urban Amenities in the Towns of North Bengal

Man even at the most modest scale of living requires some sort of social facilities and the scope for cultural activities, which turn out to be the part and parcel of his daily life, especially when he is an urbanite. Almost all the communities usually recognize the demand for urban amenities in some fashion. The civic amenities are generally an expression of a common style of living. Although the municipalities of the towns of North Bengal generally pledge to render all sorts of urban amenities or civic utility services to its tax-payers, in fact, the idea of creating a quite and full-fledged urban society is still a far cry in this region. As still the minimum urban amenities, which are essential for a urbanite, like, electricity, piped water supply, streetlight, Government housing estates, sanitary and conservancy services, are restricted to the limited circle of the society, the people or tax-payers who are not financially

well-to-do generally have no scope to enjoy these facilities, especially those which are directly related to the purchasing power of the buyer. Of course, the whole underdeveloped region of the world is facing the same problem, except where the Government has taken a greater responsibility of social welfare. People rush to the big cities and towns only because of the lure of amenities available there much more than smaller towns or the semi-urban areas. So, also to check the human congestion in the big cities, the planning bodies and the Local Self-Government agencies should recognize the importance of amenities in decentralizing the population.

As the towns of North Bengal are mostly administrative in origin, so the degree of amenities vary from town to town according to their administrative status. These towns, which are district administrative headquarters, are enjoying more urban amenities or civic utility services than the other towns which are sub-divisional or only police station. According to administrative status, Siliguri is the only exception in this regard. Out of 28 urban centres in North Bengal, only twelve (12) towns have municipalities, and others have Anchal Panchayats mentioned in the table-6, by '(M)' and '(A.P.)' respectively. Dearth of available data and information is a great handicap in bringing out the clear picture of the existing civic utility services.

Most of the organizations, providing the utility services, are quite reluctant to give correct information about their activities. In fact, the organizations being elected bodies have become political platforms and are concerned much less with keeping their pledges made at the time of their elections. The following table will show the distribution of urban population in the districts of North Bengal.

Table -21

Sl No.	Name of the District	Total Population (According to census 1971)	Urban Population (According to census 1971)
1.	Darjeeling	731,777	180,212
2.	Jalpaiguri	1,750,159	168,030
3.	Cooch Behar	1,414,133	96,652
4.	West Dinajpur	1,859,887	173,690
5.	Malda	1,612,657	68,626
Total :		7,418,663	686,660

(1) Sanitary and Conservancy Service :

The following table shows that though the municipal towns of North Bengal are over crowded the number of tax-payers are extremely limited. As a consequence, a vast number of people have been left out of municipal facilities, though lured by urban amenities they are compelled to reside in the towns. Besides, it is to be noted that still now, a large number of privy or service latrines exist in more towns.

Table-22

Showing the Municipal towns with their total population, total number of tax-payers, total number of sanitary and Privy latrines.

Municipalities	Total Number of population	Total number of tax-payers. (and the year in bracket)	Total number of sanitary latrines	Total number of privy/service latrines
Darjeeling	42,373	2672 (72-73) ad - report	124 (+) Total seat 788	109 (+)
Kalimpong	23,436	1631 (Sept. 1974)	21 (+)	1 (+)
Kurseong	16,425	1383 (Nov-1974)	703	429
Siliguri	97,484	8313 (1971)		
Jalpaiguri	55,159	5247 (Dec-73)	2000	2374
Alipurduar	36,667	5534 (1972-73) Ad - report	450	5050
Cooch Behar	53,684	7500 (1974)	3000	4000

Table-22Contd.

Municipa- lities	Total number of population	Total number of tax-payers. (and the year in bracket)	Total number of sanitary latrines	Total number of privy/service latrines
Dinhata	11,737	N.A.	N.A.	200
Balurghat	57,088	4768 (Ad.report 1972-73)	703	1981
Raiganj	43,191	6300 (Aug-1974)	N.A.	N.A.
English Bazar	61,335	N.A.	2775	7974
Old Malda	6,691	N.A.	75	1000

(1) (+) Only public latrines maintained by the municipality.

(2) N.A. Not available.

(3) Tax-payers according to administrative report/current number available in the office.

This is solely an unhealthy symptom specially where houses stand proximal to each other. Though further extension of privy latrines have been banned in a few municipalities, even then some of the municipalities of North Bengal have no such prohibition. Sanitary and privy or service latrines both exist in the Anchal Panchayats,

but as the organisation maintains no record, it is quite a hardship to find out the exact number of sanitary and privy latrines. However, according to the versions of the several Anchal Pradhans, it can be said that most of the latrines are privy in nature and excluding of Government quarters, merely one percentage of the total population has sanitary latrines.

Almost all the municipalities of North Bengal maintain a sanitary department which supervises the conservancy services; conservancy service encompasses a number of services like street scavenging, night soil dumping, drainage repair and cutting (where only kachha drains prevail), daily sweeper service, toilet cleaning (specially in the hill towns), market cleaning, garbage dumping, burning ghat cleaning, etc. The Anchal Panchayat makes no conservancy service and the residents of a specific panchayat has to hire a private sweeper on contract basis to remove the night-soil or garbage or to keep his home clean. Only in rare cases like removing dead and rotten animal; panchayat engages a sweeper. The existing strength of the sweepers (Table-23) of a few municipalities proves that the conservancy service is not up to the mark against the total population rate payers of the town. Especially the towns with their littered streets and markets and lack of responsibility of the authority in removing garbage from the road-side and keeping the drains clean, reveal the plight of

This service as well as of the rate-payers of those towns.

The absence of conservancy services has made the towns under-panchayat, quite unhygienic.

Table-23

Table showing the municipalities with their tax payers and total number of sweepers.

Sl No.	Municipalities	Number of sweepers	Rate payers
1.	Jalpaiguri	263	5247
2.	Balurghat	73	4763
3.	Raiganj	73	6300
4.	Kalimpong	66	1631
5.	Siliguri	250	8313
6.	Alipurduar	14	5524
7.	Cooch Behar	209	7500

Further, it can be noted that except Darjeeling, no town of North Bengal has permanent cemeteries within the municipal area, and the towns of plain have only burning ghats, open on river side. The drainage condition of the municipal as well as of the panchayat towns is very poor. Nevertheless a large number of towns have no

adequate drains to drain out the rain water. Because of the absence of provision for adequate drainage within the towns, the dirty water flows directly to the street from the houses and shops resulting in most undesirable condition for the roads and the residents. Due to the absence of drainage the roads become muddy or water logged in rainy season and full of dust during the winter and summer causing untold sufferings to the pedestrians.

Excepting Cooch Behar and Darjeeling, which have drains, most of which are open in nature on both sides of all the roads, most of the municipal or non-municipal towns rarely have drains on both sides of all of their roads. Especially big towns like Malda (English Bazar) and Raiganj are almost devoid of good drainage net-work. As the conservancy services can be treated as essential services to make town-life healthier, it is questionable how far the actual progress has been made by the municipalities of North Bengal in tune with the increase of population in those towns. Though the financial bondage is one of the main bottlenecks in mechanizing the conservancy services, the author believes that expenditure should not be questioned in rendering this minimum civic amenity to the rate-payers.

Water Supply :

Water supply is an essential service for the growth of a town. Though townhalls or waterworks, now-a-days, are not considered

of the pride in a community of a developed country, most of the towns of North Bengal, are still now lacking in this facility. Out of 28 urban centres, only 6 towns have pipewater supply system. Tube-wells and ringwells are the main source of the supply of drinking water for the rest of the towns. The sources can be divided into three types, first, the pipe-water supply usually looked after by the Public Health Engineering department, secondly, the tube wells or ring-wells usually supervised by the Municipality or Anchal Panchayats or Rural Water Supply, and thirdly, lakes from which water is carried down by pipe line to the reservoir and therefrom to the town. Of course, only the hill towns like Darjeeling and Kalimpong have to bring water from the lakes. The Monsoon plays an important role in this respect. The permeability of the springs, which are the main sources of water supply, depends largely on the rains of the monsoons. Almost none of the panchayats have provision of pipewater supply, excluding private arrangements especially in the Government quarters or hospitals. The main sources of supply of drinking water in those towns are ring-wells and tube wells.

Table - 24

Showing average daily supply, per capita consumption, and direct house connection.

Sl. No. Municipal towns.	Total population of the town.	Average daily supply of water	Average percapita consumption.	Direct house connection.
1. Cooch Behar	52,684	5,22,000 gallons	9.83 gallons	950
2. Jalpaiguri	55,159	1,68,000 gallons	3,04 gallons	376
3. Darjeeling	42,873	9,60,000 gallons including public toilet	22,20 gallons	2112
4. Kurseong	16,425	1,30,000 gallons	7,97 gallons	N.A.
5. Kalimpong	23,436	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
6. English Bazar	61,335	8,00,000 "	13,04 gallons	751
(average of winter and summer supply 9,00,000 + 7,00,000)				

N.A. Not available.

The above table (4) shows that the percapita consumption or per head supply of water is far from adequate while in some are too poor in respect of the requirement of the people of those towns.

The source of this water is different from town to town. The Jalpaiguri municipality supplies the water through three deep tubewells only. The highest per head supply of water is at Darjeeling, 22.20 gallons, and the lowest perhead supply of water is at Jalpaiguri, i.e. 3.04 gallons. So the people maintain personal tubewell or ringwell to meet the minimum requirement. Further, it can be noted from the above table No. that in comparison to the total population, Kurseong (16,425) has a better volume of perhead supply (7.97) gallons) than Cooch Behar (53,634) with its perhead supply of 9.83 gallons perday. The volume of per day supply of water also varies in winter and in summer especially in the towns located in the south of this region. The waterworks of English Bazar shows a fluctuation of supply of water between winter and summer seasons. While in summer the total volume of parday supply is 9,00,000 gallons, in winter it is 7,00,000 gallons. The difference is 2,00,000 gallons. But this variation is absent in the hill towns where the inadequate supply is the main problem, particularly during the tourist season (April-May and October-November) and if any variation in the volume of supply exists, it is simply due to the less or heavy rainfall in that area. The number of direct house connections shown in the above table- reveals what a little fraction of the total population of those towns are enjoying this facility. In English Bazar out

of 7311 holding only 10.27% are enjoying this service, while in Darjeeling 63.53% are getting this facility against the total holding of 3342 of that town. Of course, it has already been said that the amenities, like, direct house connection of water supply electricity, sanitary latrines are too costly in this region. So, the availability of such facilities is directly related to one's economic status. As a result, most of the people have no such provision to bear the cost involved. Further, out of 28 urban centres a good number of important towns have no pipe water supply system, like Siliguri, Balurghat, Raiganj, Maynaguri, Dhupguri, Alipurduar and Old Malda. Only Balurghat, Alipurduar and Old Malda have got sanction regarding the installation of pipe water supply system. The rest other towns have tubewell as their source of supplying drinking water. But the tubewell water is detrimental to health, as the purification process is absent in this system. A hygienic water supply system is the burning question in the towns of North Bengal.

Electricity for public and private consumption (Public safety or street lighting)

At present West Bengal State Electricity Board is supplying electricity to the towns of North Bengal except Darjeeling where the municipality itself supplies power to the people. Of course,

Bihar State Electricity Board also contributes especially to the towns of southern part of this region, like Balurghat etc. Almost all the Municipalities, Anchal Panchayats and Town Committees provide street lighting except Falakata Anchal Panchayat, and Dalkhola. The former one has no such service for the last three years (1971-74) and the latter town panchayat has sanctioned a proposal for rendering this service. The following table will show the present position of street lights in the towns of North Bengal.

Table -

Showing the distribution of total population, and number of streelight in the towns of North Bengal.

Civic Status	Name of the town	Total population (1971)	Total no. of street light
M	Cooch Behar	53,684	839
M	Dinhata	11,737	242
T.C.	Tufanganj	4,209	89
T.C.	Mathabhanga	9,167	105
T.C.	Mekhliganj	3,777	105
T.C.	Haldibari	5,098	30
M	Jalpaiguri	55,159	652
M	Alipurduar	36,667	330
A.P.	Maynaguri	15,808	102

Table-6 Contd.

Civic Status	Name of the town	Total population (1971)	Total no. of street light.
A.P.	Dhupguri	16,808	29
A.P.	Falakata	7,194	Nil (June 1971)
A.P.	Malbazar	10,951	N.A.
A.P.	Domahani	7,706	30
M	Darjeeling	42,873	1560
M	Kalimpong	23,430	N.A.
M	Kurseong	16,425	391
M	Siliguri	97,484	1938
M	Balurghat	67,088	437
M	Raiganj	43,191	650
A.P.	Kaliaganj	21,169	162
A.P.	Islampur	15,715	52
A.P.	Hili	6,096	50
A.P.	Gangarampur	14,809	16
A.P.	Dalkhola	5,622	(Proposed-40)
M	English Bazar	61,335	740
M	Old Malda	6,691	80

Note : N.A. Not available. M. Municipality. T.C. Town Committee.
A.P. Anchal Panchayat.

The table-6 shows that the number of street lights is still inadequate in a number of towns and some of them have a very small number, such as, Hili with its sixteen street lights only and Dhupguri with 29 street lights. As a matter of fact, a vast area of those towns remain in darkness which is detrimental to public safety. Besides, some of the towns have no street lights at all, such as Falakata and Dalkhola. At Falakata the service has been stopped since 1971 due to pecuniary crisis of the Panchayat, and at Dalkhola, a scheme to provide street lighting to the people has been proposed. The number of street lights according to proposed scheme is 40. Furthermore, it can be noted, that the number of street lights in the district Headquarters towns are not satisfactory, especially the total number of street lights at Balurghat, Malda, Jalpaiguri is far from adequate. The highest number of street lights is at Siliguri (1938) and lowest at Gangarampur (16). More street lights are required to meet the demand of public safety. Maintenance of street lights is extremely poor. In many towns the light posts are without lamps for a considerable period and the civic administration remains callous about their duties in this respect. In fact, the existence or presence of a street light helps to a great degree to check the undesirable activities or accidents, but as the authority feels not so much concerned about this, the anti-social activities or crimes at night are increasing

day by day in the towns of North Bengal. The suffering, due to the absence of a street light, increases greatly during the rainy season. The roads, being devoid of good drainage system, become muddy and quite unsuitable for either pedestrian or for vehicular traffic and in general they become death-traps for both.

Health Service.

Although, many a good number of service essential to the community are administered by the local self government bodies, some important services are controlled by national government, such as, electricity, communication, unemployment, hospital and general health and fire service etc. Even then, some sort of preventive and curative measures are usually taken by the municipalities. For this service a separate wing exists in all the municipalities of North Bengal. This section looks after the health schemes of the municipalities, like spraying mosquito-killer or gamaxin powder, disinfection of wells, vaccination and inoculation services, for which every municipality employs some people specially to adopt precautionary measures against the epidemics like, Cholera, Typhoid, Diptheria, infectious diseases like small-pox, besides, every municipality further takes preventive measures against food adulteration etc. ofcourse, in most of the urban centres of North Bengal, the Public Health Department, an independent organization

of Government of India, mainly supervises the services related to the general health of the people of the towns. In the towns where Panchayat is the Local Self Government body, a sanitary inspector of the Public Health Department, looks after the general health service of that town. It is also the same in case of the towns which have town committees. Anyway, the following table - will, in brief, give an idea about the present condition of the hospital services available in North Bengal. The Number of Nursing Homes are very few. Specially well-equipped nursing home is a rare institution in this part of West Bengal. To this date only Cooch Behar (2) Jalpaiguri (1) Alipurduar (2) Kalimpong (1) and Siliguri (9) have nursing homes, run by the local medical practitioners.

Table-7

Civic Status	Name of the Town	Total population (1971)	Total no. of hospital	Total no of bed and year of collection	Average number of people per bed	Bed per 1000 population
M	Cooch Behar	53,684	2	420 (1973)	127.81 persons	7.85
M	Dinhata	11,737	1	25 "	469.48 "	2.13
T.C.	Tufanganj	4,209	1	10 "	420.90 "	2.37
T.C.	Mathabhanga	9,167	1	25 "	366.68 "	2.72
T.C.	Meknliganj	3,777	1	25 "	151.08 "	6.51
T.C.	Haldibari	5,098	1	24 "	212.41 "	4.70
M	Jalpaiguri	55,159	1	401 "	137.55 "	7.27
M	Alipurduar	36,667	1	125 (1974)	293.33 "	3.40
A.P.	Maynaguri	15,808	1	60 "	263.46 "	3.79
A.P.	Dhupguri	16,808	1	20 "	846.40 "	1.18
A.P.	Falakata	7,194	1	20 "	359.70 "	2.78
A.P.	Malbazar	10,951	1	20 "	547.85 "	1.82
A.P.	Domahani	7,194	1	4 "	179.85 "	0.55
M	* Darjeeling	42,873	3	238+ "	180.138 "	5.55
M	Kaliapong	23,430	1	270 "	86.77 "	11.52

Table-7 Contd

Civic Status	Name of the Town	Total population (1971)	Total no. of hospital	Total no of bed and year of collection	Average number of people per bed	Bed per 1000 population
M	Kurseong*	16,425	2	46+ (1974)	357.06	2.97
M	✓ Siliguri	97,484	1	136 "	716.79	1.39
M	Balurghat	67,088	1	250 "	268.35	3.72
A.P.	Raiganj	43,191	1	100 "	431.91	2.315
A.P.	Kaliaganj	21,169	1	50 "	423.38	2.358
A.P.	Islampur	15,715	1	20 "	785.75	1.358
A.P.	Hili	6,096	1	20 "	304.80	3.281
A.P.	Gangareampur	14,809	1	20 "	740.45	1.350
A.P.	Dalkhola (+)	5,622	1	—	—	—
M	English Bazar	61,335	2	258 "	237.73	4.202
M	Old Malda	6,691	1	10 "	669.10	1.495

* Only the bed strength of the Government hospitals has been mentioned in the table. But both the towns have one more hospital (privately run), of which the bed strength has not been added, as the data were not available.

(+) The town has one health centre which gives only out door treatment, the P.H. Centre is at Karandighi, the administrative centre of this region.

M - Municipality, T.C - Town Committee, A.P. Anchal Panchayat.

The figure regarding the availability of hospital beds for people varies from town to town. It is highest in Kalimpong with one bed for 86.77 persons and the lowest in Domohani with one bed for 1798.5 persons. And the number of beds per 1000 persons is also the highest in Kalimpong, 11.52, and the lowest in Domohani, 0.55. It can be noted that the available medical facilities are usually more in the towns which are administrative headquarters and less in other towns, excepting Kalimpong.

The Health service in the small towns is generally very poor. The number of beds per 1000 persons or the average number of persons per-bed will be able to prove the statement. As the health service is a vital one in the growth of a town, the towns of North Bengal require more medical facilities to make a healthy environment. Of course, a scheme for further extension has been proposed by many a good number of hospitals, like increase of existing bed strength, construction of staff quarters, water supply to the hospital, etc. and if the schemes are implemented timely, then it will certainly better the existing conditions of health service in the towns of North Bengal.

In fact, in a country like India, where most of the people are below the capacity to provide money for expensive medical treatment, the Government hospitals are the main source of medical service, while in developed countries, the case is to some extent different. The people rush to the hospital for getting free

facilities, as a result the hospitals, with their minimum strength, are facing such a vast number of patients as to create almost squalor or unhealthy atmosphere in the hospitals. In most of the hospitals many patients lie on the floor due to lack of bed. It is sufficient to say that a free and full medical service is essential to make the citizen as well as the town prosperous. The service of the hospitals is not confined to the municipal bounds of the towns alone. Patients come from distant areas and Health Service Centres always forward the critical cases to the nearby subdivisional or district hospitals.

Like the health service, education is also considered compulsory in the urban-life. How far education retains reputation, can be proved by giving example of hill towns of North Bengal, where many a good number of students come from all over India to have a good academic carrier. Of course, this is limited to the convents or missionary schools which are mainly patronized by the rich people of the country. In case of higher education, the towns of North Bengal have nothing noteworthy, excepting a University barely 14 years old, an Engineering College, a newly made Medical College and a number of colleges unevenly distributed among the towns of North Bengal, as a result a considerable number of students have to travel a considerable distance roughly every day to attend the college. The schools are crowded with students

and almost an unhealthy academic environment prevails in almost all the institutions.

The Primary School exists in all the urban centres of North Bengal, and almost all the municipalities of North Bengal maintain primary schools at their own cost. The primary schools provide free + education. The schools can be classified as co-educational, ^{for} girls and boys, but the number of schools are not satisfactory. In some towns a primary school for the wards of the conservancy workers also exists. Besides, the District School Board also manages a number of primary schools in the towns of North Bengal.

Every town of North Bengal has Higher Secondary and High Schools . The number varies from seven (7) to one (1). All the towns, barring a few have Boys' and Girls' schools separately. Mainly in the small towns the co-education system exists and that is mainly due to the lack of the number of high schools. Colleges are mainly concentrated in the larger urban centres. But because of the limited capacity both in space and teaching staff, the colleges in many cases also have to take 2 to 3 shifts in a day.

The Technical and Medical institutions are very small in number. The only Engineering college is situated at Jalpaiguri and the only Medical College is located a few miles apart from Siliguri, nearer to the University Campus of this region.

The most important feature of the educational institutions of this region is the English medium schools run by different missionary organizations. Most of them are situated in the three hill towns of North Bengal and some of them are pretty old maintaining a high academic standard. Established during ^{the} British regime for educating the children of the English or European residents in India, these schools do not properly serve the region under study. Besides the high level of expenditure is another barring factor for making this service available to the middle class people of the region. These schools mainly cater to the students coming from all over the country and mainly to those belonging to better off community of the society. Ofcourse, lately merit is being considered as an essential factor for admission.

Table-8

Showing the distribution of academic institutions in North Bengal

Name of the towns	Total no. of schools (H.S.S; H.S. Jr. H.S. primary)	Total no. of colleges	Total no. of Technical institution	Total no. of medical institution	University
Cooch Behar	33	3	2	X	X
Dinhat	14	1	X	X	X
Tufanganj	15	1	X	X	X
Mathabhanga	11	1	X	X	X

Table- Contd.

Name of the towns	Total no. of schools (H.S.S;H.S. Jr.H.S. primary	Total no.of colleges	Total no.of Technical institution	Total no.of Medical insti-tution	University
Mekhliganj	4	1	X	X	X
Haldibari	9	Proposed	X	X	X
Jalpaiguri	62	4	2	1	X
Alipurduar	43	1	X	X	X
Maynaguri	10	Proposed	X	X	X
Dhupguri	15	X	X	X	X
Falakata	9	X	X	X	X
Malbazar	12.	X	X	X	X
Domahani	37	X	X	X	X
Darjeeling	63	4	X	X	X
Kalimpong	24	1	2	X	X
Kurseong	24	1	X	X	X
Siliguri	69	2	1	1	1
			(Near to the town 40 minites Journey)		(Near to the town 30 minutes journey)
Balurghat	33	3	X	X	X
Raiganj	58	2	1	X	X
Kaliaganj	11	1	1	X	X

Table- Contd.

Name of the towns	Total no. of schools (H.S.S;H.S. Jr. H.S. primary)	Total no. of colleges	Total no. of Technical institution	Total no. of Medical institution	University
Islampur	17	1	X	X	X
Hili	14	X	X	X	X
Gangarampur	15	X	X	X	X
Dalkhola	6	X	X	X	X
English Bazar	87	3	2	X	X
Old Malda	12	X	X	X	X

Note : H.S.S - Eleven Class School

H.S. - Ten class School

Jr.H.S- Eight Class School

Primary-Four Class School

Recreation and Cultural Activities :

Recreation acts as a remedial feature in the life of the urbanites to overcome the day to day drudgery. An urbanite needs more recreation than a farmer who at least can enjoy nature.

Recreation varies according to cultural pursuits and financial condition. It is generally accepted that some sort of entertainment and relaxation is necessary from both the psychological and physiological point of view. Hence, sociological impact of the role of recreation in urban life is unavoidable. The inability of most of the people of the towns of North Bengal to enjoy their leisure in a proper way gives an impression of cultural backwardness. It is, however, true that most of the urbanites residing in the towns of North Bengal have rather limited financial capacity. A large number of people comprising mainly low income group are naturally debarred from enjoying such type of recreation as periodical excursions, site-seeing, going on special types of tour etc., In the the developed countries public parks provide the minimum sort of recreation where one can relax for a few hours at least. In North Bengal, park is a very rare thing as most of the towns, with a few exceptions, have no such public parks or gardens.

Other direct sources of recreation one may consider Cinema House, Theatre Hall, Public Halls, Public Libraries, Museums, Zoo etc. Picture showing house or in other words the cinema is the only available source of recreation. Almost every town has atleast a cinema house, however, small it may be. But the number of cinema houses is insufficient in respect of the

populace. Besides, excepting a few cinema houses, most of them are ill equipped; seeing a picture becomes rather a strain than enjoyment. The lack of air cooler and the excessive heat in the summer make them uncomfortable places. In spite of that people go there, as they have no other way for using their leisure time. The libraries are few in number. Only the District Headquarters towns, including a few other important town, possess libraries. But only a small fraction of the total people uses them. Apart from the high rate of illiteracy they are not made popular for serving the common interest of the people.

The permanent theatre or stage is absent in the towns of North Bengal. Only occasionally, a club or a drama-team presents theatrical show on a commercial basis. A small number of towns, however, have permanent theatre halls. In some towns the existing cinema houses are used for theatrical purpose, whenever required by the interested parties. The economic serfdom of the people, the indifference of the municipalities and the Government, and the economic backwardness of this region have combined effect on the recreational dullness in the towns of North Bengal.

All other recreational organs, like Public Hall (except Kalimpong) do not exist in the towns of North Bengal.

The cultural activity of a town cannot be traced through a statistical method as usually. a fraction of the total population

of a town carries out this function. In the towns of North Bengal many a good number of organizations carry out the cultural activities by organizing conference on literature, by publishing little magazines and journals, by performing social works, etc.

The culture δ retains its highest form with the development of urbanization. It is not the size of the town alone, but also the long tradition in certain spheres of activities that ultimately builds up the cultural side of the urban centre. North Bengal towns are generally small in size; many of them are at the same time quite new. Even the earliest of them are not more than a hundred years old. As such the cultural tradition cannot be deeprooted and has little to offer. Nevertheless, typical cultural behaviours are witnessed in everytown, having both religious and non-religious origins.

First of all, the towns have a good number of clubs providing cultural programmes, Most of these clubs organize only games and a few specilize in drama etc. These clubs are the main centres which preserve the cultural aspects of a town. But often political infiltration rains the ideals of these institutes and inspite of doing good for the society, they become the society's probelem. The increasing unemployment resulting from a staguent economy made a larger number of youth victims of juvenile delinquency. Hence, juvenile offences are now-a-days superseding all other social

problems of the towns of North Bengal. Apart from these, the clubs in many cases organize religious festivals on different occasions on a competitive basis. Large sums are spent on such items and the towns take on a grand festive look with colourful decorations. The following table-9 will help to explain the existing recreational and cultural facilities available in the towns of North Bengal.

Table-

Showing the distribution of Cinema, Theatre, important Library in the towns of North Bengal.

Name of the towns	Total no. of population	Total no. of Cinema house	Total no. of Theatre halls	Total no. of Public Library and others
Cooch Behar	53,684	4	3	2
Dinhata	11,737	1	1	1
Tufanganj	4,209	1 (+)	-	1
Mathabhanga	9,167	2	1	1
Mekhliganj	3,777	-	1	1
Haldibari	5,098	-	-	-
Jalpaiguri	55,159	3	1	1
Alipurduar	36,667	2	1	1
Maynaguri	15,808	1	1	1
Dhupguri	16,808	1	-	-

Table- Contd.

Name of the towns	Total no. of population	Total no. of Cinema house	Total no. of Theatre halls	Total no. of Public Library and others
Falakata	7,194	1 (+)	-	1
Malbazar	10,961	1	-	1
Domohani	7,706	-	1	-
Darjeeling	42,873	2	1	1
Kalimpong	23,430	1	1	1
Kurseong	16,425	1	-	1
Siliguri	97,484	4	1	1
Balurghat	67,088	2	2	1
Raiganj	43,191	3	-	1
Kaliaganj	21,169	2	1	-
Islampur	15,715	2	-	-
Hill	6,096	1 (+)	-	2
Gangarampur	14,809	2 (Temporary)	-	1
Dalkhola	5,622	1	-	-
English Bazar	61,335	3	1	1
Old Malda	6,691	X	1	1

(+) Where cinema house is used both for picture and drama performance.

N.A. Not Available.

N.B. Besides the figure given in the column 5, there are many libraries which serve only a small fraction of each locality, and the educational institutions have their own libraries.

The communication service in the towns of North Bengal is not satisfactory. The number of post offices will prove this statement. Almost all the towns, especially the small ones, have one to two post offices against a large number of population. The telephone is considered a costly amenity and the use is mainly limited within the commercial and official services. Very few people can keep telephone for personal use due to its high cost of maintenance. The number of telephone lines in each town of North Bengal will show how limited is its service within the town. Telephone is mainly used in this region for making trunk-calls on business matters. Ofcourse, the small size of the towns provide ample scope to the residents to contact the person wanted without much trouble. Even then, valuable time can be saved by using telephone at least by private medical practitioners, etc. But the lack of sufficient number of public call booths and lack of telephone-mindedness have direct impact on the restricted telephone service in the towns of North Bengal.

Table-10

Showing the distribution of post office and telephones lines in the towns of North Bengal.

Name of the urban centre	Total number of population	Total number of post offices (including Head post office and sub post offices)	Total number of Telephone lines in the specific year
Cooch Behar	53,684	7	470 (1973)
Dinhata	11,737	2	130 (1973)
Tufanganj	4,209	1	27 (1973)
Mathabhanga	9,167	1	49 (1973)
Mekhliganj	3,777	2	18 (1973)
Haldibari	5,098	1	25 (1973)
Jalpaiguri	55,159	9	366 (1973)
Alipurduar	36,667	3	233 (1974)
Maynaguri	15,808	2	91 (1974)
Dhupguri	16,808	2	39 (1974)
Falakata	7,194	1	38 (1974)
Domohani	7,706	1	N11
Malbazar	10,961	1	133 (1974)
Darjeeling	42,873	6	767 (1974)
Kalimpong	23,430	1	235 (1974)
Kurseong	16,425	2	233 (1974)
Siliguri	97,484	9	2200 (1974)

Table- Contd.

Name of the urban centre	Total number of population	Total number of post offices (including Head post office and sub post offices)	Total number of Telephone lines in the specific year
Balurghat	67,088	4	206 (1974)
Raiganj	43,191	1	185 (1974)
Kaliaganj	21,169	1	110 (1974)
Islampur	15,715	1	76 (1974)
Hill	6,096	2	22 (1974)
Gangarampur	14,809	1	39 (1974)
Dalkhola	5,622	1	46 (1974)
English Bazar	61,335	7	458 (1974)
Old Malda	6,691	1	25 (1974)

Source : Post & Telegraph Department, Government of India and the Telephone Exchange located in the urban centres of North Bengal.

The table-10 reveals that out of 28 urban centres, more than 15 have one to two post offices for a population, ranging between roughly 23000 and 3000. The total number of telephone lines is ~~the~~ highest at Siliguri town, 2200, for a population of 97,484 and the lowest is at Mekhliganj (13 only) for 3,777 persons. The communication service is entirely a Central Government service. So Government's liberal policy towards this end is the only way to remove this present state of shortcoming.

Internal Transport System :

The role of transport in the urban-life can be compared with the arteries in a human body. The internal transport system performs that duty within the town by providing link among the different parts of a town. The streets play the major role in this respect. As far as the street pattern of a town will be scientific, the dynamism of that town will increase. Excluding the Hill Cart Road of Siliguri, all other roads of the towns of North Bengal are quite unsuitable for the present state of traffic-flow.

In general, the road pattern in the towns of North Bengal shows a great diversity. In the absence of any street planning, except in Cooch Behar Town, the roads have developed in the most confused and haphazard manner in almost all the towns. This is mainly due to their unplanned growth. Only the road pattern of Cooch Behar town is a planned one and it is grid-patterned, i.e. the roads are rectangular to each other at every crossing point.

In most of the towns like Malbazar, Dhupguri, Maynaguri, Islampur, Dalkhola, Gangsarampur, etc. only one or two roads are metalled in nature and in most cases that road is either a part of National Highway or a State Highway which passes through the town. The municipal towns contain a considerable length of metalled roads.

But in Raiganj and Balurghat the percentage is very poor. Within Raiganj Municipal area it is only 6.20 km., within Balurghat Municipal area it is 24.59 km. only, and in English Bazar Municipality it is only 22.08 km.

Table-31

The table showing the distribution of length of metalled and unmetalled roads in the municipalities of Jalpaiguri, Balurghat, Raiganj, Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, and English Bazar.

Name of the town	Total length of roads in km/als	Total length of metalled roads in km.	Total length of unmetalled roads in km.
Jalpaiguri	48.502 km	31.50 km	17.002 km
Raiganj	71.24 km	6.20 km	64.59 km
	(up to date - Aug-1974)		
Balurghat	44.42 km	24.59 km	19.33 km
Darjeeling	63.494 km	22.09 ⁴ km	41.4 km
Cooch Behar	68.09 km	51.98 km	16.11 km
English Bazar	56.75	22.08 km	34.67 km
Siliguri	102.28 km	44.09 km	58.19 km

Regarding the means of internal transport the Rickshaw is playing the major role. Next is the Bicycle. Only recently auto-rickshaw has been introduced in the big towns of North Bengal, though their service inside the town is very limited. They mainly ply between the parent towns and its commuting zones. Though the number of rickshaw has not been collected, it can be said that, the numbers are not insufficient because of the fact that most of the people are pedestrians. Few people use rickshaw to go to a place except when he is in a hurry.

No towns of North Bengal have city bus service. Only a partial city Bus service exists at Jalpaiguri town. But neither the municipality nor the Government has any contribution in this respect. The Duars buses, while passing through the town, give such sort of service at a cost of 15 paise per head. But the service exists only on a particular road, surrounding the town. In case of ^{the} other towns, the rickshaws are ^{the} main source of internal transport. In the hill towns of North Bengal people are mainly pedestrians, as the hill towns by their nature permit no internal transport service; only the people of the commuter's zone use taxi to come into the town.

In fact, the economic condition of the people and the size of the individual urban centres of North Bengal cannot support a costly service like internal transport. In spite of that, as the

internal transport contributes to the further expansion of an urban centre, the Local Governments can take the venture to introduce the city bus-service or something like that to decentralize the existing population congestion in the hub of the town.

Shopping Facilities :

Except Malda, Darjeeling and Siliguri, no other towns of North Bengal have planned market. The English Bazar municipality has its own market named Chittranjan Municipal Market. This is a retail market, selling or specializing in articles like groceries to clothings. Besides this, that town has two other municipal market, one is a wholesale market and other is on the way of completion. In Siliguri, the New Market, located in the heart of the town near Hill Cart Road, is the only planned market. There are two other markets, a whole sale market located in the old part of the town and another is Seth Srilal Market, an extension of the New Market.

In Cooch Behar, Bhabani Bazar or Market is the only big permanent market comprising both the retail and whole sale goods. various kinds of shops, most of which mainly are stationeries, exist, surrounding this market like a ribbon.

Almost all towns of North Bengal have one central or big market. Besides this, many a good number of isolated shops are

scattered throughout the towns for catering to the immediate but minor needs of the nearest localities. Usually they develop on the street-crossing of the residential areas normally within a walking distance. This is the most common feature witnessed throughout North Bengal. These stores are mainly composed of groceries, coal-depot, stationeries, betel shops, tea-stalls, restaurants, etc. They maintain no chain and occasionally a residential house fills up the gap between two stores.

Because of their unplanned growth, the shops are not evenly distributed. All sorts of goods are not always available in these shops; people must have to depend on the central market for their larger requirements. The central markets in the towns of North Bengal are always within a reasonable distance and people can use them frequently. Unlike the big towns or cities, the week-end marketing tendency is absent in these towns. Most of the people visit the central market to purchase all necessary commodities for a whole month, and the isolated shops located in all the residences or near to the residential areas meet their casual needs. In fact, the economy of the people does not permit frequent marketing. Besides, all sorts of goods, mainly the luxury and modern materials or goods for entertainments like, pressure-cooker, electrical goods, record player, choice books, high-quality cosmetics are not always available in all the towns of North Bengal. In fact, it

solely depends on the culture and interest of the individuals of each town. What is available in Siliguri, is not available in Gangarampur or Islampur or in any other town of that standard. As a matter of fact, the non-basic function of a town mainly depends on the economic condition of the people of the respective town. Majority of the people belong to almost the same economic condition, so the choice of purchasing high quality commodities differs from those who are belonging to the higher echelons in the locality. These persons whenever they need to use the sophisticated goods are to procure the same from distant places.

Housing :

The housing is very poor in the towns of North Bengal. Most of the people have to construct their house at their own cost. The Government's contribution is very negligible. The existing housing-estates, in a few towns, cover less than a fraction of 1 percentage of the total population. Most of the towns have no housing estates. Even all Government employees do not get Government quarters.

A house is the replica of one's economic condition and as majority of the people belong to middle-income group, they

cannot provide enough money to make a fulfilled house. So, often it has been noticed, that a family consisting of 8 to 10 persons, live in a house which is quite unsuitable for them, but people have to live in such a condition as they have no other alternatives.

Many a good number of families live in the rented houses. The rent varies according to the amenities, like electricity, tap water, locational facilities available, and rent is usually high when the houses offer all these facilities. Besides, the location factor is very important. The rent of a house usually increases with the minimization of distance in respect of location of Bus Stand, Market place, Shopping Centres or Education Institutions etc. But as the earning of majority of people are only enough to maintain their daily-life, they cannot afford a high rent. As a result, a large number of families live in sub-standard houses which lack electricity, pipe-water supply, well furnished and adequate rooms, specially bedroom well furnished toilets, etc. Unlike the Local Self Government of many other towns of India, municipalities or Local Self Government bodies of this region have no scheme on housing. Even, the State or Central Government's role in this respect is not noteworthy. No private housing estate organizations or housing co-operatives exist in the towns of North Bengal.

So, a well furnished small house is a far cry as well as the most crying need in the urban environment of North Bengal. Of course, it has already been noted that a house is the right expression of one's economic condition, because almost every individual likes to make his house according to his best liking.

But as long as the present economic backwardness prevails in the economic atmosphere of this region, this sorry plight of housing will remain.

Table -II

Showing the distribution of Housing Estates in the towns of North Bengal

<u>Name of the Town</u>		<u>Number of flats</u>
Darjeeling	-	48 (Flats)
Siliguri	-	126 (Flats)
Jalpaiguri	-	160 (+ 35 for fire servi
Cooch Behar	-	48 (+ 35 for fire servi

Source : Assistant Engineer's Office of Housing Estate
Siliguri.

Conclusion :

So long the attempt has remained confined in dealing with the available urban amenities in the towns of North Bengal. Unlike the

European Countries, where the difference between rural and urban has almost lost meaning, because of the fact that some basic civic amenities like pipe-water, electricity, etc. have been sent everywhere¹, North Bengal's urban centres themselves have not yet gained the full urban status, particularly in respect of civic amenities available in the towns. But a proper analysis is a requisite to find out the real causes responsible for this condition.

The role of a Local Body is to look after the interests of its rate-payers. But, often it has been noticed that the Local Self-Government body's (like municipality or town committee or panchayat) function is not satisfactory. Their main problem is the shortage of fund or financial crisis or lack of Government's grants⁽²²⁾. In fact, annual administrative reports of a few municipalities of North Bengal, have given the same complaint⁽²³⁾. A few lines may be reproduced from the annual administrative report of Darjeeling Municipality (1972-73). It is not at all possible for this Municipality to keep and maintain the roads in good condition unless adequate fund is made available to this municipality by the Government in the shape of compensation or grant. This municipality has, in fact, persistently been requesting the State Government as well as the Union Government for a recurring grant since several years⁽²⁴⁾. The picture will be more clear with the statement of the Chairman of Alipurduar Municipality : "The financial position of the Municipality which has to depend on direct taxation has

seldom been satisfactory..... The minimum amenities expected by the rate-payers cannot be extended to them, financial position being not encouraging..... It has been sufficiently clear that Municipalities cannot maintain the service at the minimum standard leaving out the question of any development, for maintenance alone, at any level of efficiency, there is no scope for further enhancement of taxes and such as, adequate amounts should be made available to the Municipality in the shape of grant-in-aid. The development scheme should be undertaken at Government cost, exempting municipalities from payment of any share of contribution towards the same as against $\frac{1}{3}$ rd share of cost now being borne by municipalities (25).

But, according to P.W.Freeman, Local Self Government has to meet the challenge of rising standards of social amenity, education provision and general living condition (26). So the Local Self Government organizations of urban centres of North Bengal should exploit all main available resources to increase the standard of amenities. Though it is admitted that some sort of Government help in the form of grants is essential for development work, but a benefit of the doubt arises in the case of disbursement of money collected through taxes imposed on the rate payers particularly when an imbalance in revenue income and revenue expenditure is noticed in the municipal budgets (27).

However, it can be said, that a small rate charged for electricity per unit, more beds and cheap medical facilities in the hospitals, sufficient number of schools and colleges to reduce the rush of students in one institution, the improvement as well as expansion of existing recreational facilities and cultural activities, creation of new parks in the towns, introduction of new means of internal transport in big towns, expansion of roads for smooth traffic-operation, even distribution of shops throughout the area, betterment of house conditions by setting up private or Government housing co-operative are a few among the lots of development works which will be conducive to the increase of standard of amenities in the towns of North Bengal. To better sanitary system by demolishing the service latrines and introducing conservancy service in all urban centres and protected pipe water supply must be treated as compulsory schemes for the betterment of health of the urban population of North Bengal and all these can be made available if the financial position of the Local Self Governments permit to shoulder the responsibilities. Hence, National Government should take steps to ensure that adequate allocation of funds is made for the above purposes in the National Five Years Plans (28).

CHAPTER-V

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