

A B S T R A C T

North Bengal is a very popular term to-day describing the five northern districts of West Bengal e.g. Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda covering a total area of over 21,611 Sq.Km. The region has a glorious historical background and characterised by her peculiar physical set-up, it presents a picture of urbanization which closely reflects its physical, socio-economic, cultural and even political aspects. The work has been systematically treated in the following chapters.

Physically the five districts of North Bengal differ from each other. While the southern most district i.e. Malda, is completely a riverine plain, the northern most district, Darjeeling, is a mountainous region, situated on the Himalayan Chains, and Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri are distinctive with their mixed plain landscape. Besides, the slopes and height are two determining factors in the distribution of residential and commercial areas in the hill towns of Darjeeling district, while flood is a great handicap in the districts of Jalpaiguri, Malda and Cooch Behar.

Speaking about the historical background, it has been shown that some of the towns of North Bengal have a prolonged historical record as proved by their existence for centuries. They are

Gour, Old Malda, Cooch Behar, English Bazar, etc., particularly Cooch Behar and English Bazar are two scintillating imprints of the history of this region.

From the point of view of demography, we can divide North Bengal, broadly, into two phases. One is the pre-partition period and the other is the post-partition period. On an analysis of the census reports of the pre-partition period, it is found that a few towns were present in this zone while most of the others have originated during the post partition period. Further analysis reveals that the urban growth in this region is not so much the product of economic development and a pull from rural to urban areas, but rather a push of population from the areas of social unrest and dispute. In this context one may refer to the case of partition which has given rise to the immigration of a large refugee population to this region from the erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. North Bengal contains a little urban population 9.26 percent of the total population.

The classification of the towns, specially, on the basis of their functional character, is now an important practice for geographers. The importance as well as the evolution of a town can be determined in terms of its functional organisations. The different types and sizes of the towns have direct relation with their different combination of socio-economic features. In North

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Bengal the administrative function generally determines the size of her towns. Almost all the towns in North Bengal, except a few came into being as administrative head-quarters. In course of time increase in administrative functions increased the importance of the towns which gradually added to them commercial and other activities. All such activities provided economic support to the growth of the towns of this region.

The landuse survey is an essential tool as determining the spatial character or the physiognomy of a town, ultimately bringing out its morphological character. Thus morphology may be considered as the structural and visible skeleton of a town, while the landuse pattern reveals the manmade fabric in which the urbanites carry on their activities. The landuse pattern of the towns of North Bengal shows haphazard distribution of the residences and commercial activities. The landuse map of Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Siliguri, Dinhata, Balurghat and English Bazar give an insight into the pitiable plight of the unplanned growth of these towns.

When the forces conducive to urban growth are not equally assembled in all the places, urban centres in a region do not flourish at the same rate, thus giving rise to the existing hierarchy. Considering the towns in general, the central func-

tions of the principal towns do not extend far beyond their municipal limits. In North Bengal, the administrative set up has actually been instrumental in elevating the economic and cultural aspects of the urban centres.

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. Though the municipalities of the towns of North Bengal generally pledge to render all sorts of urban amenities to its tax-payers, the idea of creating a quite and full fledged urban society is still a far cry in the region under study. The Local Self Government Bodies should take more initiative at least for the sake of creating a healthy urban environment.

Finally the existing nature of the problems arising out of the interaction of various forces need to be assessed for visualizing the future of urbanization in North Bengal. The regional economy of this region presents greater scope for further development of urbanization in the region under study.