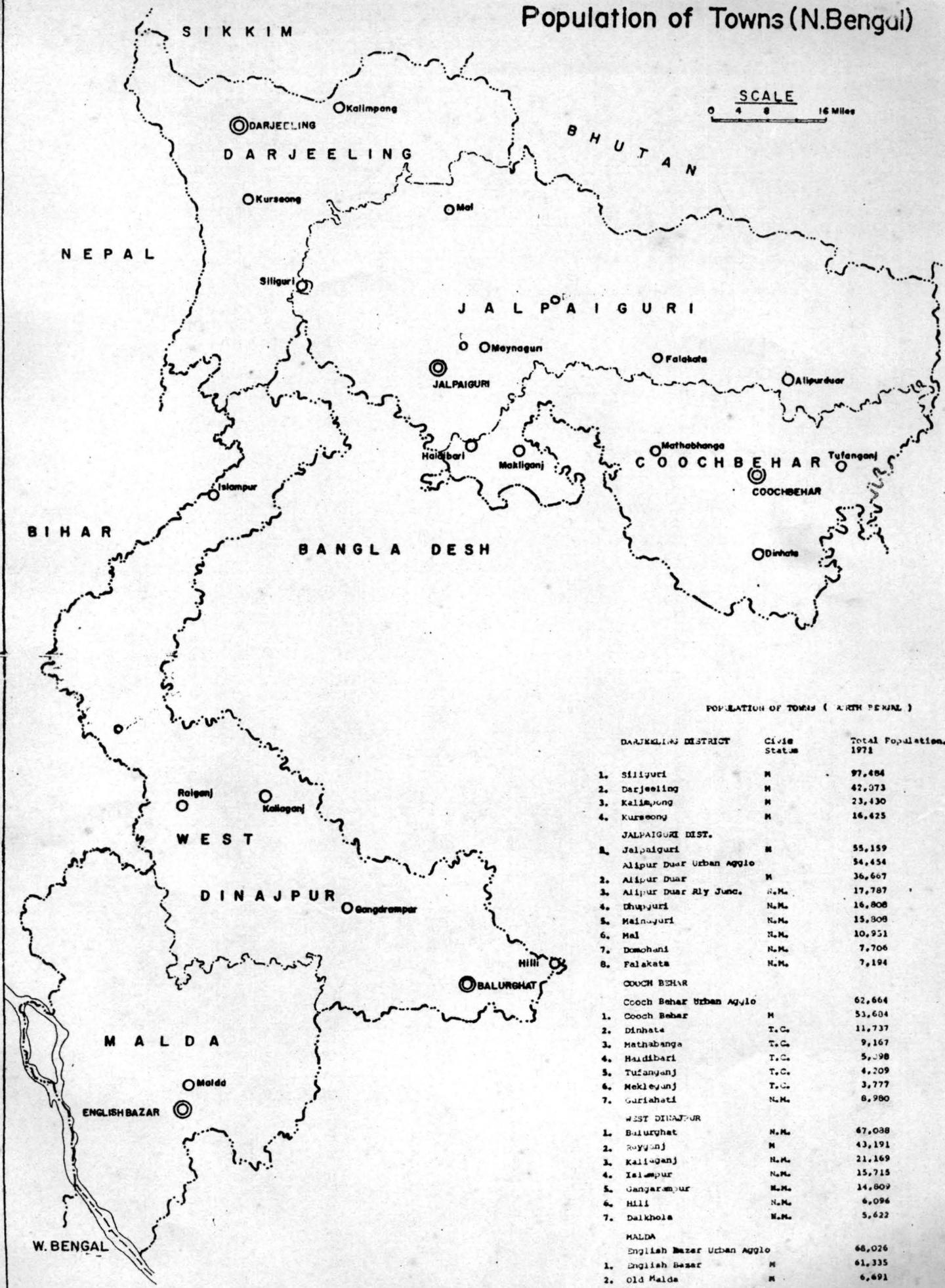


### CHAPTER III

#### CENTRAL FUNCTIONS & THE HIERARCHY OF THE TOWNS OF NORTH BENGAL

Broadly speaking, urban functions can be defined as those functions which are absent in the rural areas. Every urban place is characterised by some urban functions, ranging from grocers shops to large industrial/commercial establishments along with the seats of various public organizations like Government offices, University, College<sup>s</sup>, etc. The urban place thus acts as a container of the physical structures and the seat where the functions, processes and purpose gradually take shape and are carried on through time. But an urban place is not merely a container; it acts as a magnet, for pulling and attracting people as well as different institutions from outside. As a matter of fact, it is the central functions which build up the magnetic character of an urban centre. Since all urban functions are not central functions, though all central functions are urban functions, it is necessary to find out how the central functions are formed. The type and variety of central functions vary from place to place according to the resourcefulness of that urban centre or the region in which they are found. The central functions of a developed region may not be the same as the central functions of an undeveloped region. As for instance, in a developed region the central function largely consists of number of advanced urban functions; like, circulation of a number of daily newspapers,

# NORTH BENGAL Population of Towns (N.Bengal)



POPULATION OF TOWNS ( 1971 )

DARJEELING DISTRICT	Civic Status	Total Population, 1971
1. Siliguri	M	97,484
2. Darjeeling	M	42,073
3. Kalimpong	M	23,430
4. Kurseong	M	16,425
JALPAIGURI DIST.		
1. Jalpaiguri	M	55,159
Alipur Duar Urban Agglo		54,454
2. Alipur Duar	M	36,667
3. Alipur Duar Rly Jung.	N.M.	17,787
4. Dhapjuri	N.M.	16,808
5. Mainjuri	N.M.	15,808
6. Mal	N.M.	10,951
7. Domohani	N.M.	7,706
8. Falakata	N.M.	7,194
COOCH BEHAR		
Cooch Behar Urban Agglo		62,664
1. Cooch Behar	M	51,604
2. Dinhat	T.C.	11,737
3. Mathabhanga	T.C.	9,167
4. Haidibari	T.C.	5,398
5. Tufanganj	T.C.	4,209
6. Mekleyanj	T.C.	3,777
7. Gariahati	N.M.	6,980
WEST DINAJPUR		
1. Balurghat	N.M.	47,038
2. Royganj	M	43,191
3. Kaliganj	N.M.	21,169
4. Islampur	N.M.	15,715
5. Gangarampur	N.M.	14,809
6. Hilli	N.M.	6,096
7. Dakkhola	N.M.	5,622
MALDA		
English Bazar Urban Agglo		68,026
1. English Bazar	M	61,335
2. Old Malda	M	6,691

(morning and evening), better audio-visual mediums (like television) and communications (like good telephone network), research institutions, specialist physicians, large, well-equipped modern hospitals, stage production, radio station, social clubs with auditoriums, etc., which often remain absent in the urban places of an undeveloped or underdeveloped region. One is not required to go far to find out the reasons for this type of dissimilarities which actually reflect the socio-political conditions prevailing in a region or country.

Central place, as defined by Walter Christaller, is the place which has got some importance in respect to its surrounding region and by its capability can render some external services to its supplementary region and the place may be from a tiny settlement to a big metropolis. Gradmann has called this as the "chief profession"<sup>(1)</sup> of a town, and according to Christaller "which are decidedly important to the meaning of the town".<sup>(2)</sup> Christaller has indicated the centrality of a place as "the surplus of importance"<sup>(3)</sup> in respect to the total importance of the total area where "the importance is no sum at all, but is rather the combined economic efforts of the inhabitants".<sup>(4)</sup>

Christaller's work advocates a theoretical conception regarding the spacing of the urban centres in a rigid geometrical form based upon performing central services and exchanging central goods. According to Christaller, the centrality "must be expressed in

quantity"<sup>(5)</sup> and "the value thus obtained must be combined in order ~~to~~ somehow if one is to express the entire importance of the place."<sup>(6)</sup> He took telephone as the single important factor for determining the central importance, as in his opinion "nothing to-day is as necessary or as characteristics of importance as the telephone."<sup>(7)</sup> But his geometrical set-up (Hexagonal) of the central places ranging from lower to higher order and his telephone index received much criticism from the later scholars who worked on central places in different countries. According to them Spate (1967), Brush (1953), Kar (1960), Folke (1968), Singh (1971), the locational pattern of the central places and the indicators of centrality vary from one region to another depending on their different socio-political back-grounds and economic conditions. In a country like India where administration so long has exerted maximum influence upon the growth of the towns, the spacing of the towns or central places do not follow any established law of geometrical pattern (Kar, 1960) found in Southern Germany. The works of Kar, H.R. (1960), Singh, O.P. (1971), Folke, S. (1968), G.H.K. Spate (1967) are important contributions to the development of centrality in India. Kar (1960) worked on the central places of lower West Bengal, India;<sup>(8)</sup> Singh has defined the centrality based on a new method i.e. the "Absolute centrality Index" or H.C.I devised by him<sup>(9)</sup>, while Folke's work is based on "the process

of spatial integration in two south Indian districts, is investigated by means of the central place systems and the pattern of spatial interaction. (10)

In North Bengal, the typical geographical setting as characterised by the steep mountains and turbulent rivers on the one hand and the flat riverine plain on the other hand, with a long strip of deep forest in between, accompanied by poor transportation and ill-developed economic condition and political negligence have pushed the urbanization to a back route. Of course, the Partition of India (1947) has changed the size of the individual towns of this region due to refugee-influx from the erstwhile East Pakistan, (now Bangladesh), but the economic progress lagged far behind the rate of population growth. Besides, over-dependence on Calcutta, the primate city of Eastern India, has retarded the normal growth of the towns of this region. The investigation made by Kar (1960) (11) has revealed force-fully the influence of Calcutta on the whole Eastern India. Prior to the Independence, the towns of North Bengal, excepting the administrative headquarters remained entirely confined within their own boundaries and their function rarely extended beyond that. Only the administrative headquarters particularly for judicial and administrative purposes exerted some influence on their surrounding areas. The situation gradually changed, after the independence. But the towns never



developed into economic cultural or political centres as such, till some time after the Independence. The overwhelming influence of Calcutta has already been mentioned. The raw materials had their natural flow towards the Mother City. Even tea, the only product processed in the region, and that too in the tea gardens which never could give rise to any urban centre, had its principal market in Calcutta. Thus the transportation lines developed prior to the independence to facilitate the movement of those goods and oriented from north to south and the main route went through the present Bangladesh connecting the collecting points in the region with Calcutta at the minimum distance. The role of the urban centres located along this principal and the only commercial artery was primarily as midpoints of collection and transmission; they were economically too weak to hold back the collected goods for giving rise to secondary activities. The Partition of Bengal in 1947, however, changed the situation. The northern district of West Bengal lost direct connection with Calcutta and it was not until 1953 that direct rail connection was established. By that time roads were also constructed. The railway and roads being oriented from west to east in the three northern districts for the first time made movement easier and quicker. The urban centres were more accessible than even before and having been connected by the major roads and the railway line

recorded a high rate of growth. Hitherto most of the urban centres maintained their precarious existence primarily as administrative centres. Their linkage whether economic, cultural or political with the countryside was too weak to be mentioned. But once the communication routes were established, the existing towns woke up from their age-long slumber, and readily forged ahead in building up their career anew. Besides administrative functions, they started activities in newer fields and within space of decades some of the urban centres emerged as high order central places. This is more true about the existing large towns which offered a greater degree of infra-structural facilities than the smaller ones. It is also true that a number of new towns taking the same advantage emerged during this period.

Urban growth during the post-independence period cannot be fully realised without referring to the growth of political importance of the region. The international boundary line on the east and north making it a neighbour of at least three foreign countries has added to the strategic significance of the region. As a result, administration had to be tuned up accordingly. New district headquarters had to be created, new roads and railway lines were constructed and different measures had to be taken to guard against any eventuality.

In general the life of an urban centre is formed of two broad types of economic activities. One is internal and the other is external in nature. While the former one caters to the demand of the resident urbanities, the later one renders the service to the complementary region (ERGANSONGE BIET; Christaller, 1966)<sup>(12)</sup> of that urban centre. The higher judicial and administrative institution, the higher educational institution, like University, Engineering or Medical College, the larger hospitals with more specialised services, the zonal offices of the Commercial Bank and insurance can be classified as the external services. Often it is found that "these external services are essentially the internal services on a large scale and take origin as an internal services in response to the need of the urban residents (Bhattacharya, 1972)<sup>(13)</sup>". For example, the functions of financial institutions, like bank, insurance houses, etc. can be cited, as a bank may open a branch in a town for its residents at initium and later on can extend its service to meet the need of the complementary region of that town.

In otherwords, one can define the central services of a town as the services or functions, characteristically external in nature which the respective town renders to the people of its supplementary region or those functions for which the residents of the complementary region of an urban centre depends upon that

urban centre. Thus the place is a central place and functions are central functions. The functions or services which can be included in this group are the seats of higher administration, like, District Magistrates' or Deputy Commissioners' or Sub-divisional Officers' Office, District Court/Sub-Divisional Courts; the seats of higher learning, like, scientific institutions, University, Medical College, hospitals with specialised services, communication, shopping, recreation of higher form, News papers and divisional or zonal offices of financial organizations like Bank, Insurance house, wholesale trade etc.. On the other hand, the services which can be classified as internal, are primary and junior schools, retail shops, hospital with only outdoor facilities, and the Local Self Government services, like, municipal or panchayat etc..

As the size of each town differs from one<sup>e</sup> another based on their site and situation, the degree of central function also may vary from town to town. Of/course, the concentration depends largely on the accessibility of that place in respect to its surrounding region and hence communications and transportations network play an important role in increasing the scope and variety of the central functions of a central place, besides determining spatial extent of a central service. Certain services like shopping, recreation or entertainment, school education etc. belong to the category of external services, no doubt, but their spatial extent

is absolutely dependent upon the nature of transportation. As a general rule, the larger the size of the place, greater is the variety of central services. In North Bengal where administrative function is the *raison d'être* of most of the urban centres, the higher central functions will be found in the higher administrative centres.

In an industrially backward region the administration exerts maximum impact on building up the economic and cultural status of an urban centre. They normally get priority over other centres in respect of transportation development and in consequence the various types of central functions are naturally attracted to these centres more than the others, not so fortunate in that way. The utilization of the resources of the supplementary region of an urban centre often largely depends on the administrative status of that centre. The higher order central functions like, bank, insurance with their zonal offices, transportation headquarters, higher education centres, etc, usually tend to concentrate in the higher administrative centres either for keeping a direct or indirect link with the various administrative establishments or for enjoying better transportation facilities to extend their services to the bigger supplementary region. It is observed that with the increase of administrative status, the supplementary region of the respective urban centre would increase in size.

Of/course, if there is a well-developed industrial centre in such a region the dictum may not apply. Under this process the administrative hierarchy ultimately defines the functional hierarchy of the urban centres, such as the centres with district headquarters or the district town will, as a rule, have a greater complementary region than a sub-divisional town which is administratively less important. There are exceptions, no doubt, but that is also mainly due to the better site and situation factors.

The urban hierarchy of this nature are to be found in North Bengal where most of the towns have irregular spacing and display no rigid geometrical location like the hexagonal arrangement of Christaller (1966). Though Stewart (1958)<sup>(14)</sup> says that "roughly similar local transport facilities seem to be dictate similar spacing of lowest order towns performing equivalent functions in both areas" and "the administrative hierarchy, for example, is largely unrelated to the economic and has its own value," yet this theory does not apply to the region under study where the functional hierarchy, as said above, is largely governed or as if somewhat predetermined by administrative status of the towns.

Every town is in a way distinctive in its attributes, and hence the assessment of central functions must include the economic and social condition of the respective urban centres. Besides, the region being economically backward, the towns do not possess all the

central functions stated by Christaller, but only some of them. Of them also some are very rare. Sophisticated mass-communication media like radio station, developed transportation like air ways high grade technical and general educational institutions, like, Medical College, Engineering College, University etc., regional head quarters of commercial organizations, like, the zonal office of the Commercial Banks, etc., are found only in a few of the towns. The most important media for mass communication the daily newspaper, is entirely absent and only the weeklies and fortnightly are published from some selected towns, like, Siliguri, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Kalimpong, Alipurduar, Balurghat, etc.. Some other functional units like, high schools, post office, health centres, and entertainment centres like cinema houses are very common among the central services which have been accepted here, as the primary indicator of central services or external services.

Central Services as Offered by the towns :

The following are the functions or services taken as the indicator of central functions obtaining in the towns of the region under study :

- (A) Institution of administration
- (a) District Headquarters.
  - (b) Sub-Divisional Headquarters.
  - (c) Police Station Headquarters.

(B) Institution of Communication

- (a) Post Office with telephone & Telegraph facilities.
- (b) Radio Station/Microwave station, etc.
- (c) Departmental Telegraph office.
- (d) Internal communication by Telephone lines.

(C) Institution of Finance

- (a) Bank.
- (b) Insurance, etc.

(D) Institution of Education

- (a) University.
- (b) Medical/Engineering College.
- (c) College.
- (d) Training centres.
- (e) Schools, etc.

(E) Institution of Health

- (a) Hospital with bed strength.
- (b) Nursing home.
- (c) Veterinary hospital.
- (d) Other hospitals, etc.

(F) Recreational Institution

- (a) Cinema house.
- (b) Theatre Hall, etc.

(G) Transport

- (a) Airways.
- (b) Railways.
- (c) Roadways, etc.

(H) Cultural Activity

- (a) Public library.
- (b) Local Newspaper.
- (c) Cultural clubs with auditoriums.

(I) Baza and co-operatives

- (a) Baza shop of different types based on annual sale-range.
- (b) Co-operative stores.

(J) Hotels with lodging facilities.

The type of establishment stated above have again been sub-divided into a number of sub-headings in order to bring out the hierarchical order of the towns. Among the services mentioned, a few requires some explanatory notes. First, hotels with lodging facilities have only been chosen as this particular indicator reveals the commercial importance of an urban centre or its importance as a place of tourism (like, Siliguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, etc). It is true that a hotel always provides housing accommodation to the travellers. But in this area under study there are hotels which do not provide such facilities, although registered as an hotel. Hence, the distinction has to be made between those offering

bed and those not, the latter falling under the category of Eating Houses. Almost all such hotels with bed have concentrated mostly in the district headquarters, and particularly in those which are either tourist centres, or both tourist and commercial centre at the same time. This particular fact further strengthens our view that the concentration of higher order external services is closely related with the administrative hierarchy. Second, the "Bata Shop" has been taken as an indicator after Bhattacharya (1972)<sup>(14)</sup> as it is the only commercial concern in India maintaining its branches all over the country. A Bata shop thus carries some special importance as an urban phenomenon as its grades and number differ with importance of the town. Besides, this is brought forward in the classification of the shops into types based on the annual sale-range, which alone defines the commercial importance of the towns they are located in. Third, the hospitals have been classified according to their bed strength as the availability of hospital services can not be gauged properly by any other factor.

As Christaller has expressed the "Centrality must be expressed in quantity"<sup>(15)</sup> and as mere size does not reveal the importance of centrality of a place distinctly, a score point/value (Föpke 1968)<sup>(16)</sup>, (Bhattacharya 1972)<sup>(17)</sup>, has been prescribed for each of the central functions considering their importance and number of occurrences in a particular central place. The addition of

the score values establish the <sup>actual</sup> importance of the place ~~actual~~ and its capacity in discharging the external services.

Table - 1

Central Functions of the towns of North Bengal  
(1973 to 1975)

(A)	(B)	(C)
Name of the Central Function	Sub-heading of the central functions classified in column(A)	Score points for the central functions mentioned in column (B)
(A) Institution of Administration	District Headquarters (D.M.)	5
	District Head quarters(D.C.)	4
	Sub-divisional Headquarters	2
	Police Station Headquarters	1
(B) Institution of communication	<u>POST OFFICE</u>	
	Head post office with telegraph and Telephone (2nd class/H.S.G)	4
	Sub-post office with Telegraph and Telephone (L.S.G.)	3
	Sub-Post Office with Telegraphy and Telephone	2
	Sub-Post Office with either Telegraph or Telephone	1

Table - 1 Contd.

Radio Station	6
Microwave Station	5
Departmental Telegraph and Telephone Office	4
<u>Internal communication by Telephone lines :</u>	

Number of telephone lines :

below 50 lines	1
51 - 100	2
101 - 250	3
251 - 500	4
501 - 1000	5
1001 - 2000	6
2001 - 3000	7

(C) Institution of Finance :

<u>Bank :</u>	
State Bank of India (Branch Office)	5
Commercial Bank (Zonal Office)	4
Commercial Bank (Br. Office)	3

Insurance :

Life Insurance Corporation of India	
L.I.C. Division Office	5
L.I.C. (Head Office)	4
L.I.C. (B.O)	3

Table - 1 Contd.

	L.I.C. (E.O)	2
	L.I.C. (D.C)	1
	National Insurance (General)	
	Division Office	4
	Branch Office	2
	Other General Insurance	1
(D)Institution of Education :	University	7
	Medical College/Engineering College	5
	College	4
	Polytechnic	3
	Training Centre	2
	High School	1
(E)Institution of Health :	Government Hospital with beds.	
	<u>Number of beds :</u>	
	0 - 50 beds	1
	61 - 100	2
	101 - 250	3
	251 - 350	4
	351 - 450	5
	Nursing home	4
	Veterinary Hospital	2
	Other Hospital	3
	Nurse Training Centre	1

Table- 1 Contd.

(F) Institution of Recreation :	Cinema House	4
	Theatre Hall	2
(G) Transport :	Airport with daily flight	7
	Airport with three flight a week	6
	Railway (Terminal)	5
	Railway (Station)	4
	Roadways(Terminal)	3
	Roadways(Station)	2
	(Bus-Station)	
(H) Cultural Activities :	Public Library	4
	News paper (weekly)	2
	Newspaper (fortnightly)	1
	Cultural club (with auditorium hall)	2
(I) Bata and Co-operatives:	Bata shootype (according to sale range)	
	K (Rs. 4,50,000 - 6,00,000)	5
	J (Rs. 3,50,000 - 4,50,000)	4
	I (Rs. 2,00,000 - 3,50,000)	3
	H (Rs. 2,00,000)	2
	G (Rs. 1,74,000)	1
	<u>Co-operative Store :</u>	
	Sasabayika (Departmental Retail Store)	4
	Wholesale Consumers' (Head quarters)	3

Table - 1 Contd.

	Wholesale consumers (Br.)	2
	Primary Consumers Store	1
(J)Hotel with lodging facilities.	Three Star Hotel	6
	Two Star Hotel	4
	Tourist Lodge	3
	Other Hotel	2

Note : (A) D.M : District Magistrate's Office

D.C : Deputy Commissioners Office

(B) H.S.G : Higher Selection Grade

L.S.G : Lower Selection Grade

(C) H.O. Headquarters

B.O. Branch Office

D.C. Development Circle.

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It is necessary to point out here that in selecting the 'indicators' of central functions, care has been taken not to include those which do not exist in the towns of this region. Thus, many of the higher order functions existing in larger towns or cities elsewhere do not find any place in the present list.

A careful analysis of the services offered by these towns will reveal that in general the services under each category belong to middle to low or lower order in the scale of importance. For

instance, in the administrative sphere the function is confined to the jurisdiction of the district at the most; in the sphere of communication not a single class I post office has been found; the number of telephone lines do not cross the mark 3000 in any of the towns; the index of commerce is also not at all higher in view of the fact that no branch of Reserve Bank has yet been established in the region, while the State Bank has remained to the grade of a "Branch Office" and that too is highly restrictive in its appearance; the poverty of the educational services is pronounced by the absence of any research institution in the entire region and the limitation is further magnified by the lone presence of one University, one Medical College and one Engineering College in the region as a whole (Table 1). The same picture emerges when services of other types are considered. Even the large hospitals are moderate in size; cinema halls are of mediocre size without modern amenities like air conditions etc. while the theatre halls are very poorly equipped. In the sphere of transportation, air service plays an insignificant role, while the road and railway terminals have not yet developed into the originating points for long distance passenger traffic. The absence of any daily newspaper or any reference public library portrays the cultural backwardness of the region. Even the "Bata Shops are of medium to small in size; the samabayika, if present at all, is too poor to be called a departmental store and the highest status of the Hotels is confined to three-star.

Table - 2

Showing the population, Administrative status, Total score and Hierarchical order of the towns of North Bengal

1	2	3	4	5
Name of the Towns	Population	Administrative Status (1971)	Total score value	Hierarchical order of the towns.
Siliguri	97,424	S.D.	273	5
Darjeeling	42,873	D.T.	197	4
Kalimpong	23,430	S.D.	76	2
Kurseong	16,425	S.D.	61	2
Cooch Behar	53,634	D.T.	172	4
Dinhata	11,737	S.D.	48	1
Tufanganj	4,209	S.D.	27	1
Mathabhanga	3,167	S.D.	40	1
Mekliganj	3,777	S.D.	16	1
Haldibari	5,098	P.S.	17	1
Guriahati	8,920	-	06	1
Jalpaiguri	55,159	D.T.	175	4
Alipurduar	36,667	S.D.	91	2
Maynaguri	15,808	P.S.	32	1
Dhupguri	16,803	P.S.	31	1
Falakata	7,194	P.S.	28	1
Malbazar	10,951	P.S.	29	1
Domahani	7,706	-	15	1

Table - 2 Contd.

1	2	3	4	5
Balurghat	67,038	D.T.	87	2
Raiganj	43,191	S.D.	94	2
Kaliaganj	21,169	P.S.	54	1
Islampur	15,715	P.S.	53	1
Gengarampur	14,809	P.S.	29	1
Hili	6,096	P.S.	22	1
Dalkhoia	5,622	P.S.	25	1
English Bazar	61,335	D.T.	145	3
Old Malda	6,691	P.S.	19	1

<u>Score range</u>	<u>Order</u>	
0 - 55	1st	D.T. - District Town
56 - 111	2nd	S.D. - Sub-divisional Town
111 - 165	3rd	P.S. - Police Station
166 - 220	4th	
221 - 275	5th	

In order to find out the importance of a town and its graded order in terms of the totality of the services it offers, a schematic procedure has been followed where each of the function or service has been evaluated on the basis of points. Thus, the total score made by town on the basis of the points it earns for particular services it offers, determines its place in the hierarchy of the urban centres. For this purpose a frame has been suggested (Table-2) establishing different order of towns in the hierarchy. In the present case urban places belonging to five different orders emerged.

(Table - 3)

Name of the central places grouped in individual order

SL No.	1st Order Central places	2nd Order Central places	3rd Order Central places	4th Order Central places	5th Order Central places.
1.	Guriahati	Alipurduar	English Bazar	Darjeeling	Siliguri
2.	Dinhata	Balughat		Jalpaiguri	
3.	Tufanganj	Raiganj		Cooch Behar	
4.	Mathabhanga	Kurseong			
5.	Mekhliganj	Kalimpong			
6.	Haldibari				
7.	Falukata				

Table-3 Contd.

8. Dhupguri
9. Maynaguri
10. Malbazar
11. Domahani
12. Kaliaganj
13. Islampur
14. Gangarapur
15. Dalkhola
16. Hili
17. Old Malda.

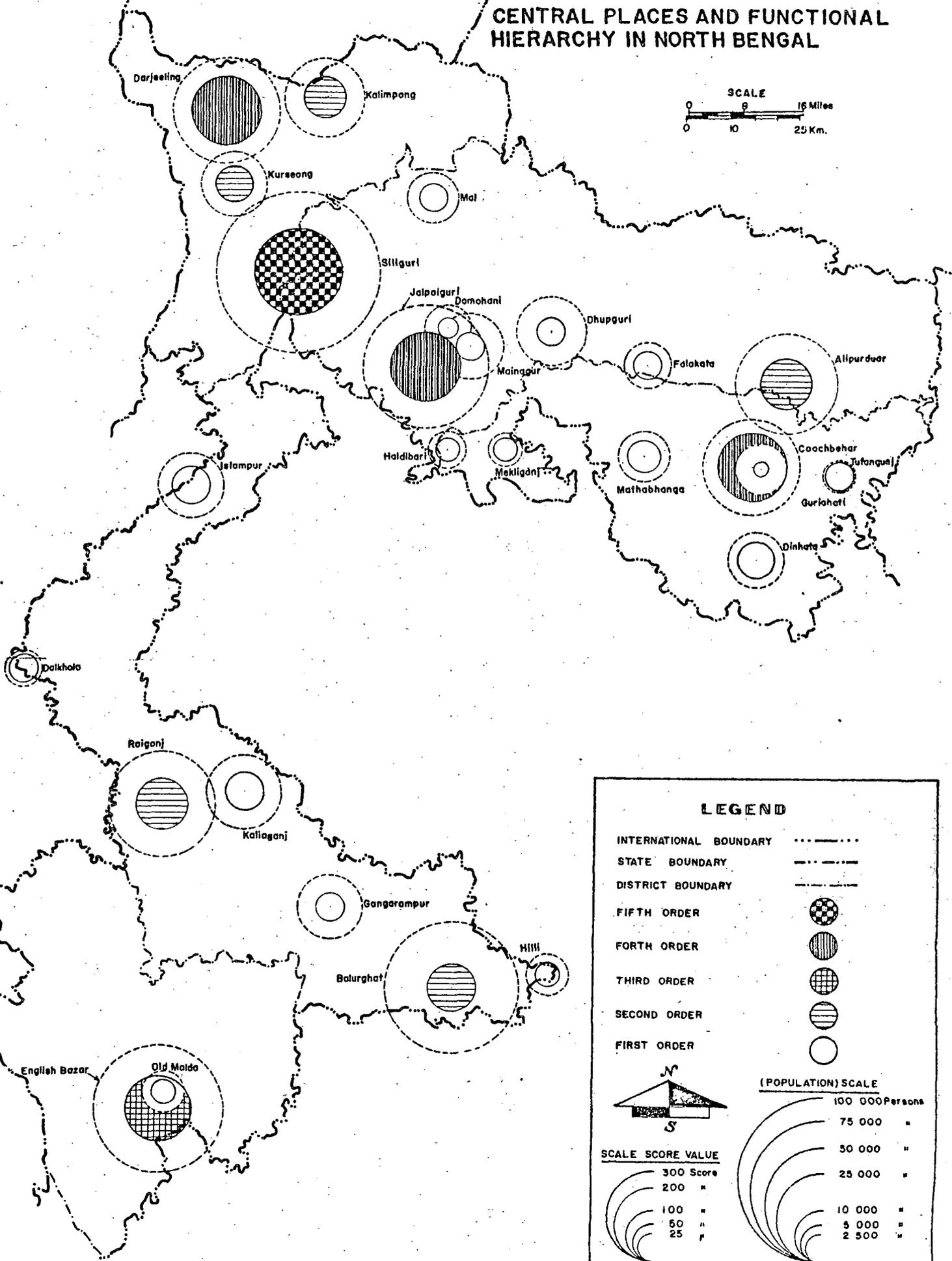
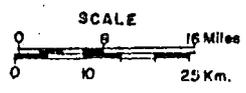
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Table - 3 shows that only one central place is in the 5th order, three central places are in the 4th order, one central place is in the 3rd order, five central places are in the 2nd order, and the remaining seventeen central places are in the 1st order. The schematic analysis clearly brings to light the extreme irregularity in the hierarchical distribution of the central places in North Bengal. (Map No. P-161)

The order of the central places based on the score of their external services, shows (Table-2) that, at the top of the ladder is siliguri, scoring 273 points, offering all the central services described in Table -1. This is, by far, the unique case as no other centre offers all the services taken for consideration

88° 00'      88° 30'      89° 00'      89° 30'

# CENTRAL PLACES AND FUNCTIONAL HIERARCHY IN NORTH BENGAL



### LEGEND

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY    - - - - -

STATE BOUNDARY                - - - - -

DISTRICT BOUNDARY            - - - - -

FIFTH ORDER                   

FORTH ORDER                  

THIRD ORDER                  

SECOND ORDER                 

FIRST ORDER                   

(POPULATION) SCALE

	100 000 Persons
	75 000 "
	50 000 "
	25 000 "
	10 000 "
	5 000 "
	2 500 "

SCALE SCORE VALUE

	300 Score
	200 "
	100 "
	50 "
	25 "

here. In order of position Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar the three district headquarters of the respective districts come next and are classed as 4th order central places. English Bazar, another district town of the district of Malda, alone represents the 3rd order central places. Next to English Bazar are 2nd order central places represented by Belurghat, Raiganj, Kalimpong, Kurseong and Alipurduar. Among them the first one is a district headquarters and the others are sub-divisional headquarters. Mostly, there are seventeen towns falling to the bottom of the scale. These are 1st order central places, consisting of sub-divisional headquarters and police stations. The great variation between the highest and <sup>the</sup> lowest score values is indicative of the wide variation in the number and types of services available from different towns of North Bengal. The central places in North Bengal do not present any constellation pattern in respect of their hierarchical distribution or set up, and it has often been noticed that some central places, having sub-divisional administrative status, have surpassed their district headquarters. The average score value of the central places, ground according to their administrative ranks, viz, District towns, sub-divisional towns and police station towns presents two interesting points: (1) functional hierarchy increasing with the increase of administrative status (Fig 1) and 2) central places - having sub-divisional

status, score nearly half the average score of the district towns and the average score of the police station central places is less than half of the average score made by the sub-divisional towns. The average score mentioned above has been calculated on the basis of the formula given below :

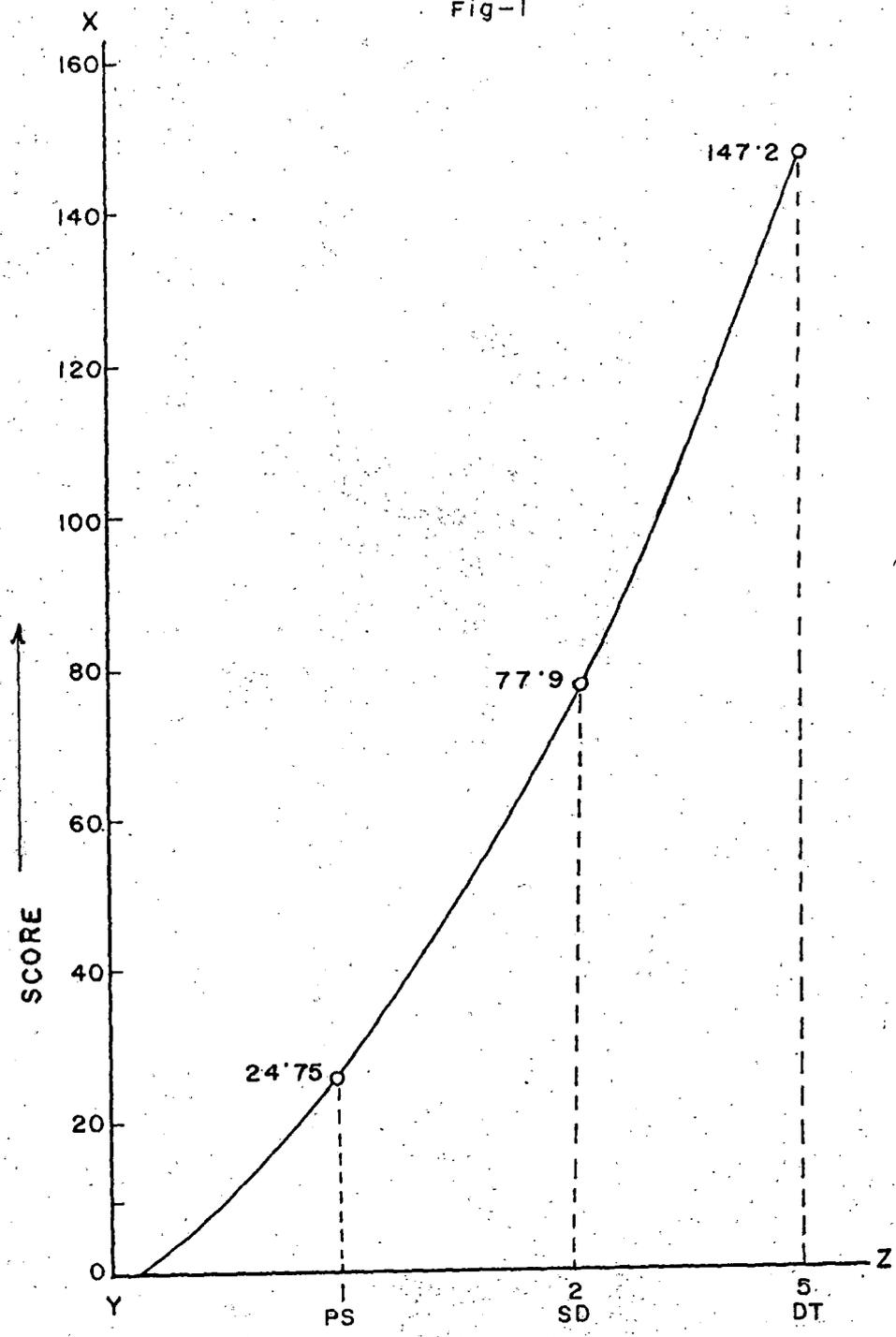
$$\frac{\sum \text{Of score of central places belonging to same administrative hierarchical unit}}{\sum \text{of total number of same administrative hierarchical towns.}}$$

It differs from the curve which has been drawn based on the weighted mean score of the central places of same administrative hierarchy based on the following simple formula.

$$\frac{\sum \text{of score X population of the respective central place}}{\sum \text{of population of the central places of same administrative hierarchy}}$$

According to this formula the mean score value between the district towns and the sub-divisional towns differ to a little degree (Fig-2). When District towns score 149.3, the sub-divisional towns score 147.9, but the Police Station central places remain almost in the same position, scoring only 29.8.

Fig-1



Showing relationship between administrative hierarchy and functional hierarchy.

PS - Police Station, SD-Sub-Division, DT- District Town

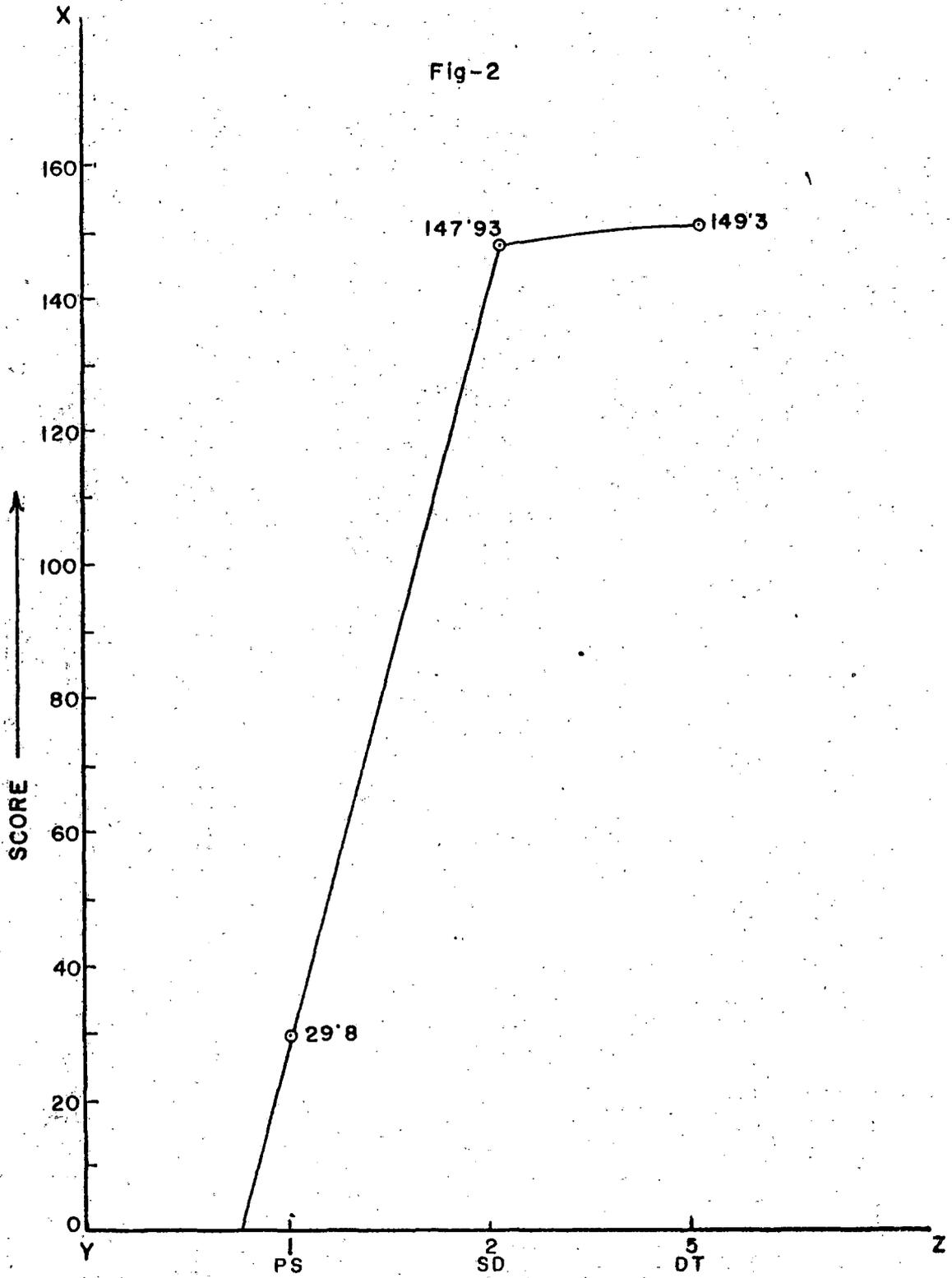


Fig-2

Showing the average (weighted mean) score of the Central Places of same administrative hierarchy in respect of their population.

PS - Police Station, SD - Sub-Division, DT - District Town.

These two figures show two important points : (1) The average score, whether it is general average or weighted mean, supports the hypothesis established in the foregoing paragraphs that in North Bengal, the functional hierarchy or external service capacity increases with increase of administrative importance and (2) the size of the towns (i.e, the population) plays an important part in rendering the external services. It, therefore, may be concluded that the weighted mean of the sub-divisional towns is almost nearer to the district town when the population is taken into consideration.

The hiatus between the weighted mean of the central places of sub-divisional status and those of the police station status is due to the small size of the population, as well as the concomitant poor score values of the latter. As for instance, among the central places of police station status, Kaliaganj scoring the highest points (54), has the largest population (21,169).

Table-4

Showing the resemblance between size and the central external services of the urban centres.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Name of the urban centres	Population (1971)	Order according to size	Hierar- chical score	Order according to hierar- chical score	Serial number according to total points scored
Siliguri	97,484	1	273	5	1

Table-4 Contd.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Balurghat	67,088	2	87	2	8
English Bazar	61,335	3	145	3	5
Jalpaiguri	55,159	4	175	4	3
Cooch Behar	53,684	5	172	4	4
Raiganj	43,191	6	94	2	6
Darjeeling	42,873	7	197	4	2
Alipurduar	36,667	8	91	2	7
Kalimpong	23,420	9	76	2	9
Kaliaganj	21,169	10	54	1	11
Dhupguri	16,308	11	31	1	16
Kurseong	16,425	12	61	2	10
Mayneguri	15,808	13	32	1	15
Islampur	15,715	14	53	1	12
Gangrampur	14,809	15	29	1	17
Dinhata	11,737	16	48	1	13
Malbazar	10,951	17	29	1	17
Mathabhanga	9,167	18	40	1	14
Guriahati	8,980	19	06	1	26
Domohani	7,706	20	15	1	25
Falakata	7,194	21	28	1	18
Old Malda	6,691	22	19	1	22

Table-4 Contd.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Hili	6,096	23	22	1	21
Dalkhola	5,622	24	25	1	20
Haldibari	5,098	25	17	1	23
Tufanganj	4,209	26	27	1	19
Mekhliganj	3,777	27	16	1	24

Table -4 reveals further, that with the fall in size, the central service capacity of the urban centre diminishes appreciably. This trend particularly is most distinct among the lower order central places. The two central places such as Balurghat and Gurihati, however, record marked differences between their respective size and central service capacity and as such become exceptions to the rule. But, the reasons are not far to seek. Balurghat, though a district headquarters, lies almost out of the way, in a corner of the district, and with a poor transportation system and without any railway link, it remained away from the mainstream <sup>of</sup> development in contrast to the others. This has equally been reflected in its central functional activities offering a lesser amount of services as compared with the centres of similar administrative status.

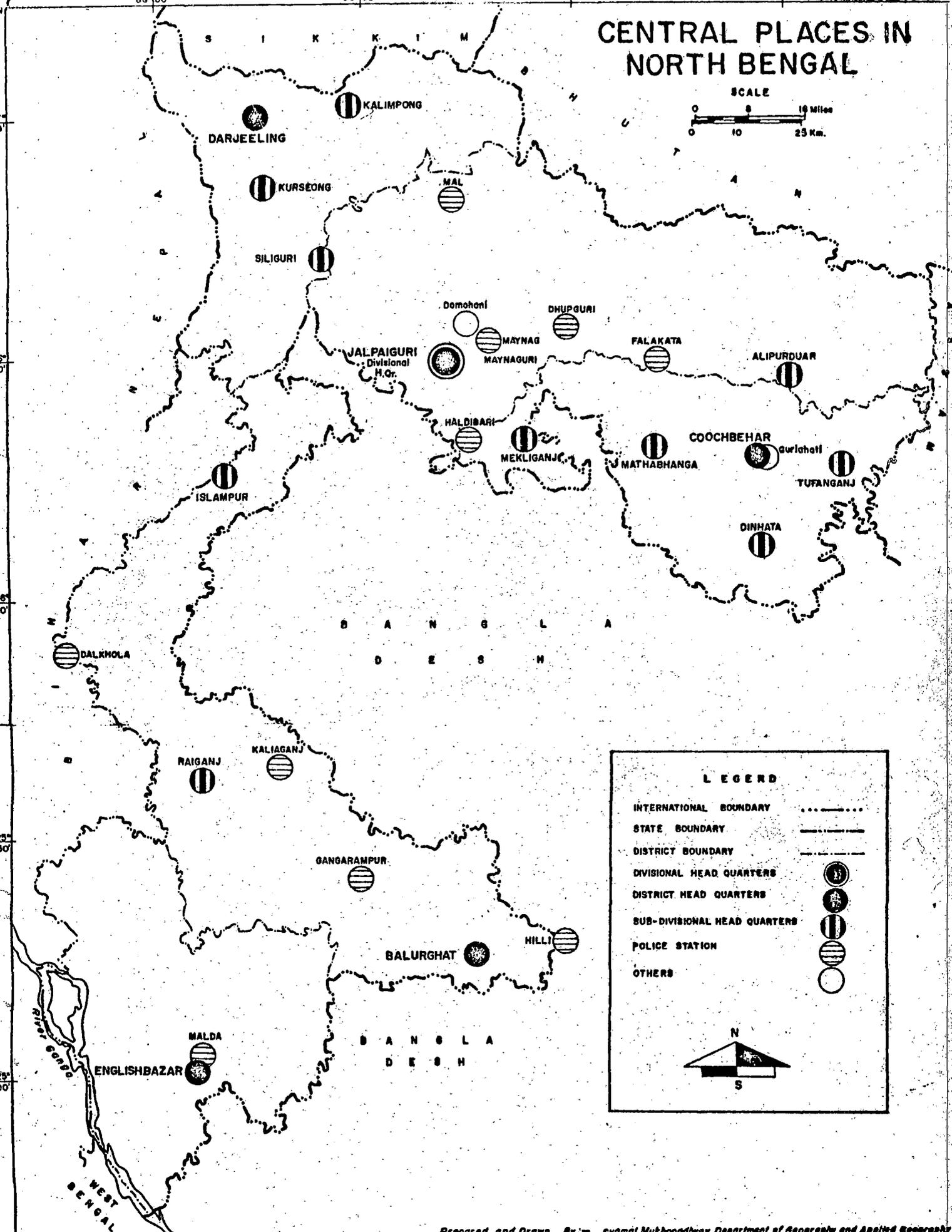
88° 00' 88° 30' 89° 00' 89° 30'

# CENTRAL PLACES IN NORTH BENGAL

SCALE



27° 00'  
26° 30'  
26° 00'  
25° 30'  
25° 00'



**LEGEND**

- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY .....-.....
- STATE BOUNDARY -----
- DISTRICT BOUNDARY - - - - -
- DIVISIONAL HEAD QUARTERS (Symbol: Circle with vertical lines)
- DISTRICT HEAD QUARTERS (Symbol: Circle with horizontal lines)
- SUB-DIVISIONAL HEAD QUARTERS (Symbol: Circle with diagonal lines)
- POLICE STATION (Symbol: Circle with horizontal lines)
- OTHERS (Symbol: Circle with a dot)

On the other hand, Gariahati, declared as a separate urban centre of the district of Cooch Behar, in fact, lies within the distance of a few minutes walk from the district headquarters of Cooch Behar (i.e. Cooch Behar district town). As a result it completely depends upon the town of Cooch Behar for most of the central services, like, hospital, education, entertainment, library, transport and so on. The central services of this town are, therefore poorly developed, giving it a score-value of only 6 points.

#### Dynamic aspect of hierarchy

The number and variety of central services, defining the hierarchy of the urban centres, expressed in the total score value of each central places as given in the table-2. lends strong support to the hypothesis that, with a few exceptions, the degree of external services increase with the increase of administrative status. Excluding Siliguri, for the time being, one can find that only one district town with a total score of 87 points has been surpassed by two sub-divisional towns such as raiganj and Alipurduar and there are two other sub-divisional towns such as Tufanganj Mekhliganj, with scores of 27 and 16 points which fall below the rank of six and ten police station towns respectively. Apart from these diviations, the remaining towns have almost followed the trend defened above.

According to the score value earned by each town it has already become clear that Siliguri, though a sub-divisional town, has attained the highest hierarchical position, i.e. 5th order, and has surpassed all other towns including all the district headquarters of this region. The reason behind this spectacular growth of Siliguri is its locational advantage which contributed to the expansion and multiplication of its central services through concentration of seats of a large variety of higher offices or establishment of public institutions, among which the headquarters of a number of financial organizations like banks insurance; higher learning institutions like a University and a Medical College; an airport, terminals of railways and roadways, are noteworthy. Siliguri has witnessed this rapid growth only during the recent years, particularly since 1962. Prior to that it was like any other sub-divisional town of the region, coming next in functional importance to that of the district headquarters.

The strategic location of Siliguri has proved to be an important factor, adding special weight to the development of this place as the principal market centre for the use of the defence personnel. The towns of Darjeeling, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri are all grouped in the 4th order central places and are characteristically superior to their sub-divisional towns because of their administrative status, and most of the important seats of finance,

health, education and transportation <sup>are</sup> have concentrated in these towns. The highest score of Darjeeling among all the district towns of the region is primarily due to her fame as one international/tourist+centre, resulting in the presence of <sup>a</sup> large number of good hotels with lodging facilities among which three-and two-star hotels are also included. Besides, being the only large town in the hills, Darjeeling exerts more influence<sup>s</sup> on its surrounding or complementary regions than the urban centres of the plains.

Raiganj, a sub-divisional town with good transport links, has scored higher than the district town of Balurghat. The sub-divisional towns, like, Dinhat, Tufanganj, Mathabanga, Mekliganj<sup>h</sup> cut a very sorry figure in terms of total score and have been grouped in the 1st order central places. All of them are small-size towns with a large degree of dependence upon Cooch Behar district town.

Old Malda, Kalimpong and Haldibari represent Christaller's "displaced central places of historical times"<sup>(19)</sup>. Old Malda, once a flourishing town in Bengal, being located too near to English Bazar, has lost its economic independence in course of time. On the other hand, Kalimpong and Haldibari have lost their importance as principal markets since when the political boundary of the country changed. Haldibari, prior to the Partition of Bengal, was an important jute-collecting centre in the North Bengal. The existing empty

large jute godowns of the town, and the existence of a railway line for transportation of the collected jute at one time, make its present poverty amply clear. Losing its prior economic position, Haldibari gradually changed and degraded from an important collecting centre to a small residential settlement. Lastly, the border conflict since Partition has almost sealed its future prospects. On the other hand, Kalimpong, for a long time, was the terminus of the mule trade route from Tibet into India via the Jalap La pass. At that time Kalimpong flourished as a trade centre. But with the closure of that trade-route, after the seizure of Tibet by China (1957), the importance of Kalimpong declined as a commercial centre.

The central places of North Bengal hardly fit in with Christaller's pattern. In fact, "It has been doubted whether these many steps (the seven or more ranks of central places (M-, A-, K-, G-, P-, L-, etc) of a full central place hierarchy devised by Christaller may be recognized in a highly developed countries. Geographers have in a number of developing countries in the past years increasingly observed that (a) the number of hierarchical steps of central places is far from the full range of theoretical requirements of W. Christaller and that (b) the standard of economic and social developments in various regions is of imminent influence on the formation of central place hierarchies" (19).

### Spacing of the towns of North Bengal

So far the spacing is concerned, the region under study presents no constellation pattern, as urban development has not taken place in response to the economic functions of the region. In otherwards, the poor economic growth did not have any real impact on the urban expansion; on the contrary urbanization has been rather imposed upon the administration's framework. It becomes more clear when one tries to study the districts separately. From Cooch Behar to Malda - out of these five districts none has the central places of all the five orders. While in the district of Cooch Behar we find only the 4th order and 1st order central places, Darjeeling district has no 1st order and 3rd order central places. Besides, the spacing between the 1st order central places are not same even in any of the districts except the district of Cooch Behar which shows an exception, though partially. The 1st order central places like, Dinhata, Tufanganj and Mathabhanga of the district of Cooch Behar are located with almost equally spaces between them. The region having homogeneous physical and economic background exhibits this sort of relationship. But the 1st order central places of the other districts differ greatly in respect of their spacings. While the distance between Mal - bazar - Maynaguri, and Mal bazar - Dhupguri are almost same (20 mls), spacing between Domohani - Maynaguri (8 mls) and Domohani-Dhupguri

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(14 mls) is widely different. The district of Darjeeling, being a hilly region, presents irregular spacing which is so natural according to her physical setup. But in West Dinajpur the picture is again the same. Here also the distances between the 1st order central places are not regular. The spacing between Dalkhola - Kaliaganj (23 mls) and Dalkhola - Islampur (36 mls.) may be cited as typical examples. The two central places of the district of Malda belong to two different orders, 3rd and 1st order. So the question of spacing does not arise here.

Among the 2nd order central places, two are in Darjeeling (such as Kalimpong and Kurseong); one is in Jalpaiguri (Alipurduar), and two are in West Dinajpur (such as Belurghat and Raiganj). So one can hardly measure the spacing here. The three 4th order central places, are located in the three districts of Cooch Behar, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, represent their headquarters and the lone 5th order central place, Siliguri, is located in the district of Darjeeling. Here, too, the spacing can not be measured. It reveals that the central places did not form in an orderly fashion, i.e. there is no order-wise succession.

Cooch Behar itself is a 4th order central place but the rest of the centres within the district are 1st order central places, while 2nd and 3rd order places are absent. This schematic analysis leads to the conclusion that the administration played a major role

in the growth of the towns. So, when the district headquarters have reached upto 4th hierarchical order the other central places remained mostly in the lowest order in the hierarchical scale, revealing their weak economic background. The general absence of any medium or large industrial establishments, making the region virtually dependent on agriculture, which itself is not developed either, has left little scope for urbanization. It is the administrative function which has given rise to the present system of urban centres in the region and the development of the communication system having so far been oriented to the existing pattern of urban development, has failed to generate sufficient force for creating new urban centres. As a result, the growth of the urban centres remains haphazard, lacking systematic spacing or orderwise succession.

(xxii)

CHAPTER - III

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