

CHAPTER-VI

INDUSTRIAL CANVAS IN THE OPENING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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Transport and Communication is the backbone of Industrial development of any country of any age. The Colonial Government had a pre-conceived notion to convert India into an agricultural farm. To serve this purpose, the interior of India was needed to be linked by a network of good transport system. North Bengal during the Colonial rule was not free from such type of general principles of transport and communication development. The introduction of modern transport system such as Railway, Road and Riverine had the most lasting impact in the economic sphere of North Bengal. It is to be noted that Railway was the most important effective communication system of the 19th century which stands for speediness and economic development. So, the Railway had greatly changed the Industrial canvas of the 20th century North Bengal. In addition to Railway, one can not ignore the road communication system and riverine transportation which also played an important part for the opening of industrial canvas of North Bengal. It is to be noted in this context that before the introduction of railways, roads and rivers were the prime ways and chief means of transport and communication. I have discussed the inauguration of railways and its commercial importance in North Bengal in Chapter-III. In that chapter it is already discussed how with the introduction of railway the economy of North Bengal flourished and improved the trade and industries like, tea plantation industry and also made cheaper the prices of agricultural produces, commercialized different food grains and non food grain agricultural produces, broadened the business sphere, encouraged to settle different trading communities and as a whole brightened the economic prospects of North Bengal during the period under study. In this chapter I am concentrating my attention upon the road and riverine communication system.

ROAD TRANSPORT SYSTEM:

It can not be denied that one of the greatest handicaps of Indian agriculture was the lack of adequate roads. Agricultural produces and perishable products can not as a rule be taken to market in good condition from villages in the immediate neighborhood of a town without a good metalled road. It is to be mentioned that in the 19th century road communication in North Bengal was very poor and there were very few miles of metalled roads in the southern portion of North Bengal. It was the Colonial need and requirements for commercialization of agricultural produces, trade and industries particularly tea industry and for transfrontier trade that impetus was given from the mid 19th century for the construction of metalled road in different parts of North Bengal. From the beginning of the 20th century this road development scheme got a vigorous form. From this time attention was not only paid for the construction of roads in different parts of North Bengal, but also new bridges were constructed and attention given to the proper repair of the roads. Due to the construction and development of roads North Bengal during the Colonial rule under study gradually developed as agricultural flourishing zone. In this context it is to be noted that metalled road greatly helped to flourish an area. It is mentioned that good metalled road was one of the factors behind the agricultural flourish of Punjab. Punjab during the Colonial rule was far in advance in regards to better system of metalled roads than any other province in India. Here one finds villages from which perishable farm produce is conveyed regularly by lorry to towns 50-60 miles distant.¹ But owing to the physical features of the land, heavy rainfall, numerous streams and rivers, road building was not only a difficult task in North Bengal, but also extremely expensive. On the other hand the devastating floods also created hindrances to road construction in North Bengal, particularly in the northern parts of North Bengal. In spite of these hindrances during the Colonial rule under study the Colonial Government paid much attention to the construction and development of roads in North Bengal.

It is already mentioned that when Darjeeling was gifted by the Raja of Sikkim to the East India Company in 1835 the means of communication was not so well in Darjeeling. It is recorded that upto 1835 there were only two routes viz. one was by the "Nagree" pass and the other by "Sabook Golah". Besides these two routes, there was also a third route by the Mahananda.² But this route was not used and was deserted since overgrown with jungle. Thus lack of well road communication system to reach Darjeeling was one of the many hurdles. After Darjeeling was gifted, with in a few years the Colonial masters started here tea plantation industry and saw great prospects of transfrontier trade with the adjacent states of Darjeeling. At first to the Colonial Government it was very urgent to connect the hill with the plains. Consequently from Siliguri to Darjeeling road construction was completed between 1839 to 1842. In 1864 from Kurseong to Darjeeling a cart road was completed. Thus within the hill and from plains to hill road communication was started. After that the Colonial Government took a broader scheme and a road of 126 miles long from Karagola Ghat on the Ganges opposite Sahebganj to Siliguri had been improved by construction known as Ganges Darjeeling road. Further from Siliguri a road had been constructed connected with hill cart road. Another road was constructed to link with the North East. This was the Sivok Bagrakot Road (9½ miles long) connecting Ganges Darjeeling road with North Assam. It is to be mentioned that in Darjeeling district road construction was very expensive and not easy due to several streams and rivers which was one of the factors for hurdles of road construction in Darjeeling district. However the Colonial Government took initiative to construct bridges over the important rivers to connect plains with the hill. In 1892-93 a bridge was constructed over the Panchanai river on the 4th mile of Darjeeling Hill Cart Road and was opened for both cart and railway traffic.³ Further bridges over Balasan river and Mahandnda river rendered great facility for well communication system of plains with hills.⁴

The importance of road communications in Darjeeling district had always been recognized locally and by the provincial government. It is

recorded that there were three agencies responsible for the supervision and construction of roads in Darjeeling. In this context mention should be made (i) Public Works Department, (ii) Through local fund under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioner and (iii) under the supervision of the Municipality. These three agencies constructed different roads, both metalled and un-metalled, bridges were constructed and maintained. W.W. Hunter in his Statistical Account mentioned that in 1871 the total length of the roads under public works department jurisdiction was 93 miles of which 65 miles were unmetalled, the roads maintained from the local fund was about 234 miles and the roads which were under the Municipality was more or less 100 miles long totally unmetalled.⁵ Thus, it is found that in the late nineteenth century there were 427 miles roads maintained under these three agencies. Due to the gradual development of tea plantation industry and transfrontier trade from the eighties of the nineteenth century Colonial Government paid much attention to road development and construction projects in Darjeeling and Terai. From the beginning of the twentieth century as exports and imports were largely enhanced several new roads were constructed for transfrontier trade and military traffic between plains and hills.⁶ In the beginning of the twentieth century there were 642 miles of roads in Darjeeling.⁷

The Hill Cart Road which was 48 miles from Siliguri to Darjeeling was the most important road as because it connected plains with hills. The Colonial Government was conscious of keeping this road properly maintained and without any shortcomings. Needless to say that besides the Hill Cart Road the Colonial Government also paid attention of the development, construction, repairs both in hills and plains for several other roads in Darjeeling district. Among these roads the 15th miles Tista Bridge to Rangpo metalled road was an important road. In 1903-04 an amount of Rs.1,16,470 was sanctioned for the construction of a Cart road from Rangpo Junction to Gangtok and in that year Rs.75,377 was expended.⁸ From Kurseong to Darjeeling 19½ miles, long road was constructed which contained 300 bridges also an important road. But the most important road

was the Tista valley Road 18½ miles which connected Sivok to Tista Bridge. This road was continued therefrom to Sikkim and Tibet via Rangpo and to Kalimpong and Tibet. For the improvement of the first section of the Lachen Road from Tista Suspension Bridge to the Rungpo Junction was undertaken at an estimated cost of Rs.60,312 in 1905-06.⁹

From the beginning of the twentieth century the Colonial Government took further initiative and paid much more attention for trading with the transfrontier states like Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet. In 1903-04 an amount of Rs.27,682 was sanctioned for Tista Valley trade route in connection with certain bridges and bungalows in Sikkim and Rs.21,695 was allotted for expenditure on the work during the year.¹⁰ In the same year upto 21st mile Tista valley road to Kalimpong and beyond was called Rishi Road which was 26 miles up past the Tibet frontier at the Jelep La Pass to Phari Dzong and Lhasa. In 1929-30 this route was improved considerably, to make it usable by heavy motor traffic.¹¹ In 1911 the 17 miles Pashok Road connected Tista with the Cart Road at Jorebunglow. To open out a route into Sikkim, the line from Labha via Richila to Lingtu was ordered to be laid out and surveyed.¹² Further, the Colonial Government for the development of trade with Tibet also paid attention. In this context it is to be mentioned that from plains or Siliguri to Jelep La there were two alternative routes, (i) one from Siliguri to Jelep La via Tista bridge, Rangpo, Pakyong and Rongli and (ii) from Siliguri to Jelep La via Tista bridge, Kalimpong, Argarha Labha, Pangola and Lingto. The Colonial Government took initiative for the repair of the first route and was opened at an expenditure of Rs.10,000. However, this route was deferred and finally the second route was sanctioned and ordered to open for the trade with Tibet.¹³ Besides these development works, in the same several other important works were done in connection with road. The following table illustrates the most important work completed in 1903-04 and the amount spent for the work.

Road Development works in Darjeeling in 1903-04

1.	Survey of a new alignment of the Tista Valley road, 13 th to 24 mile	Rs.29,000
2.	Permanent repairs to the upper section, Tista Valley Road	Rs.88,750
3.	Temporary Repairs to the Tista valley road from Sevoke to Riang	Rs.30,000
4.	Special repairs, Darjeeling Hill Cart Road, 1902-1903	Rs.71,000
5.	Special repairs, Darjeeling Hill Cart Road, 1903-04, 23 rd to 30 th Mile	Rs.26,000
.	High level Tista Valley Road (Estimate not prepared)	

Source: Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1903-04, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1905, p.88

In the Terai, the Siliguri Naxalbari Road connected with the three roads North Ward viz. (i) Matigara Kurseong Road 22¼ miles long, (2) The Tirhana Naxalbari Road 8½ miles long and (3) the Tirhana Bagdogra road 5¾ miles long. Owing to increase of traffic it became necessary to improve and metal Tirhana – Bagdogra Road in the Darjeeling Terai and on 31st March of 1905-06 an allotment of Rs.8,000 was expended.¹⁴ The Ghum Simana Road which was known as Nepal Frontier road was an important road connected with Nepal. In 1921-22 a Cart road from Ghum to Sukiapokri was completed and in the same year in connection with the development of Kalimpong as a hill station, the construction of the lower bridle road was completed at a cost of Rs.91,085.¹⁵

In this context it is to be mentioned that Kalimpong had a great strategical importance. Through Kalimpong much of the trade of the hill was conducted with the transfrontier states. Majority of the trade was conducted with Tibet through Kalimpong. The trading importance of Kalimpong earned for it the epithet of the king of the hills. Thus after its annexation to the British territory the Colonial Government kept in mind its prompt development with regards to road development for trade and commerce. At

the beginning of the twentieth century some six new roads were opened connecting Kalimpong.¹⁶

Besides, the construction of Panchanai, Balasan and Mahananda bridges, several other important bridges were also constructed and reconstructed during the concerned time period under study. In 1933-34, the Anderson Bridge over the Tista river was constructed which greatly helped opening of Industrial canvas in the Darjeeling district as well as North Bengal.¹⁷ In 1929-30, a bridge was reconstructed over the Mellikhola in Darjeeling, which was washed away in July 1927.¹⁸ Further, in 1930-31, a bridge was also reconstructed over the Bhalukhola in Darjeeling.¹⁹ For the development of communication in the Darjeeling district weighbridges were also constructed at several places in Darjeeling district. Besides proper metalled surface of different roads were widened. The construction of weighbridges by the Colonial Government, by which was necessary for the maintenance of the roads. Further, widening of metalled roads helped smooth and easy transportation. At Sukna in Darjeeling district a weighbridge was constructed to check, whether or not a vehicle was properly loaded in accordance with the concerned Acts before entering the hill.²⁰ In this context it is to be mentioned that road communication in Darjeeling district received a further impetus with the introduction of the petrol driven vehicles after 1918.²¹ From that time, the carrying capacity was tremendously developed and largely extended in Darjeeling district. Besides transportation of goods through petrol driven vehicles, light motor cars also started plying in the hill. It is mentioned that 'Austin-7', a very light motor car with low gear box began to ply on the streets of Darjeeling which ensured comfort and convenience to the passengers.²²

With the growing needs of the time, there developed in the district of Darjeeling, an all round and gradual progress of road communication. This is to be borne in mind that the well-knit communication system was the extension of the Darjeeling based tea industry but it also opened ample opportunity for transfrontier trade. As the district was the gateway of Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet, the development of roads in Darjeeling

district greatly helped in developing the trade relations with the frontier states. As a result both export and import of goods gradually increased between the frontier states and North Bengal through different routes of Darjeeling. The tables below illustrate the value of external trade with frontier states.

Total value of external trade of Bengal with Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

From	Imports into Bengal		Export from Bengal	
	1876-77 Rs.	1877-78 Rs.	1876-77 Rs.	1877-78 Rs.
Nepal	55,07,816	70,29,566	46,75,009	45,54,661
Sikkim	8,02,657	18,222	1,41,647	16,589
Bhutan	12,708	18,666	7,590	33,997
Total	63,23,181	70,66,454	48,24,246	46,05,247

Source: Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1877-78, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1878, p.149

The total value of external trade of Bengal with Nepal, Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan

From	Imports into Bengal		Export from Bengal	
	1886-87 Rs.	1887-88 Rs.	1886-87 Rs.	1887-88 Rs.
Nepal	102,77,226	112,34,228	52,90,285	73,51,720
Tibet and Sikkim	3,23,102	3,65,262	3,92,295	2,50,834
Bhutan	77,072	1,28,913	1,54,725	1,80,677
Total	106,77,400	117,28,403	58,37,305	77,83,231

Source: Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1887-89, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1889, p.176

The total value of external trade of Bengal with Nepal, Tibet, Sikkim and
Bhutan

	Imports		Exports	
	1902-03 Rs.	1903-04 Rs.	1902-03 Rs.	1903-04 Rs.
Nepal	141.79	146.94	91.33	88.98
Tibet	9.63	3.57	8.11	3.92
Sikkim	3.43	3.10	2.74	3.11
Bhutan	4.16	7.01	1.16	1.19
Total	159.01	160.62	103.34	107.20

Source: Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1903-04, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1905, p.88

Trade with Transfrontier countries in 1921-22

From	Article	Rs.	To	Export from Bengal
Sikkim	Fruit	50 lakhs	Sikkim	17 lakhs
Nepal		27 lakhs	Nepal	11 lakhs
Nepal	Animal (living)	32 lakhs	Tibet	3 lakhs
Sikkim		06 lakhs		
Tibet	Wool (raw)	18 lakhs	Others	4 lakhs
Sikkim	Spice	6 lakhs		
Others	Not mentioned	24 lakhs		
Total		163 lakhs		35 lakhs

Source: Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1921-22, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, p.231.

Thus it is found that the development of road communication helped to boost the transfrontier traders developing trading contacts with the plains. In this connection, it is quite pertinent to mention that Kalimpong was an important hill station and also an important trade centre. Even before Darjeeling got its importance, Kalimpong flourished as an important trading centre from where much of the frontier trade was conducted. Mules were imported from Tibet to Kalimpong, where Government bought them for transportation. It is recorded that more than 100 Tibetan mules were annually purchased in Kalimpong by Government for transportation purposes at an average price of Rs.150 each. Kalimpong was the entrepot of the trade between Bengal and Tibet.²³ From Kalimpong the wool and other goods from Tibet were unloaded from the mules and sent down to Siliguri by carts.²⁴ It is mentioned that wool was the chief import from Tibet to

Kalimpong which formed 83 percent of the total imports in 1903-04.²⁵ Besides wool, the other important imports through Kalimpong were cattle, hides, skins, fruits, spices, oil seeds. The chief staples of export to Tibet were cotton goods, brass, copper, petroleum, salt and sugar. The following tables illustrate export and import for some particular years from Kalimpong to Siliguri and from Siliguri to Kalimpong.

Amounts of goods carried during the five years 1898 to 1902 by the carrying Companies from Kalimpong to Siliguri.

Year	Wool	Yak's tails	Cardamom	Dyed wool	Miscellaneous	Total
	Mds.	Mds.	Mds.	Mds.	Mds.	Mds.
1898	46,620	1,440	2,465	613	162	51,300
1899	43,900	2,500	2,560	365	334	49,659
1900	40,005	1,160	1,760	335	289	43,549
1901	41,310	1,112	1,692	217	312	44,643
1902	34,200	815	640	215	143	36,013
Total	2,06,035	7,027	9,117	1,745	1,240	2,25,164
Yearly average	41,207	1,405	1,824	349	248	45,033

Amounts of goods carried during the five years 1898 to 1902 by the Carrying Companies from Siliguri to Kalimpong.

Year	Piece goods and twist	Bhutia stores (piece-goods, iron oilman stores, glass, rice, sugar etc.	Rice	Tobacco	Salt	Miscellaneous	Total
	Mds.	Mds.	Mds.	Mds.	Mds.	Mds.	Mds.
1898	19,183	4,429	11,428	4,293	5,735	10,076	55,144
1899	25,452	9,857	10,177	7,422	8,028	15,549	76,485
1900	24,150	9,751	9,124	7,945	5,379	18,936	75,285
1901	11,615	7,255	7,651	5,993	5,437	13,767	51,718
1902	17,840	3,958	2,610	4,877	1,918	11,825	43,028
Total	98,240	35,250	40,990	30,530	26,497	70,153	3,01,660
Yearly average	19,648	7,050	8,198	6,106	5,299	14,031	60,332

Source: C.A. Bell, Final Report on the Survey and Settlement of the Kalimpong Government Estate in the District of Darjeeling, 1901-1903, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1905, P.XXIX and XXVIII respectively.

The above figures show that the trade for the five years (1898 to 1902) from Siliguri to Kalimpong and from Kalimpong to Siliguri, respectively as carted by the carrying companies. From the Tables, it is evident that the average imports by these companies to Kalimpong from Siliguri amounted to 60,000 maunds, and the corresponding export to 45000 maunds. It is to be mentioned that besides the carrying companies, the traders too individually carried goods on their own. C.A. Bell further mentioned that the addition to the figures mentioned above 40000 maunds of goods needs to be added for traders who did their own carrying. Thus the total amount of trade passing through Kalimpong may therefore be taken at $(60,000 + 45000 + 40000) = 145000$ maunds. Of this amount, about 60000 maunds were exported to Siliguri and 85000 maunds were imported from Siliguri to Kalimpong and out of the 145000 maunds probably about 60000 maunds belonged to the Tibetan trade and the remainder represented the trade of Kalimpong with the plains probably, trading was carried in carts.²⁶ In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that the entire trade along the Tista Valley with Sikkim and Tibet and also with Kalimpong passed through Siliguri by road – transportation.

Regarding Tibetan trade Kalimpong was the transit station. Goods were carried on mule from Tibet to Kalimpong and there upon, they were transported to Siliguri on cart and vice versa. It was so because the cart road from Siliguri did not extend much beyond Kalimpong. The Tibetan traders and their servants made Kalimpong business headquarters between October and May. In this context, it is to be mentioned that Yatung was an important trade centre between Tibet and Kalimpong. The whole value of the Tibetan trade at Yatung, practically all of which passed through Kalimpong, averages about $15 \frac{3}{4}$ lakhs of rupees.²⁷ The table shows the value of trade passed through Yatung from 1898 to 1902.

Trade Passed through Yatung from 1898 to 1902

Years	Imports into Tibet Rs.	Exports from Tibet Rs.	Total imports and exports Rs.
1898	7,18,475	8,17,851	15,86,326
1899	9,62,637	8,22,760	17,85,397
1900	7,30,502	7,10,012	14,40,514
1901	7,34,075	7,83,480	15,17,555
1902	7,61,837	8,15,338	15,77,175
Total	39,07,526	39,49,441	78,56,967

Source : C.A. Bell, Final Report on the Survey and Settlement of the Kalimpong Government Estate in the District of Darjeeling, 1901-1903, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1905, P.XXIX

Besides Tibet, a considerable amount of trade was carried on between Darjeeling and Nepal, both through hills and plains routes. From Nepal food grains, cotton pieces goods, manufactured wool and hides, sheep, goats, cattle and poultry were imported. In the hills, the Ghum Simana Road carried much trading from Nepal and in the plains the Siliguri – Naxalbari road was primarily used for trading with Nepal. The trade with Sikkim was as usual on a very small scale. Fruits, nuts, vegetables and cereals were the principal articles of import and cotton goods and salt of export. The trade with Bhutan was always insignificant. However, in 1902-03 the total amount of trading increased by 54 percent owing almost entirely to the increase in the imports of timber, the value of which amounted to Rs.4,45,609 against Rs.1,181,000 in the preceding year.²⁸

Though most of the traffic of the district was carried on by the Darjeeling – Himalayan Railway, but in the eastern part of the district transportation was primarily carried on bullock carts and pack ponies along the Tista valley Road to Siliguri. The Tista Valley Cart Road was used for the import of rice in the hills. Besides, the Tista valley Cart Road, the Rikyisum – Patharjhora Cart Road provided direct communication with the rice fields of Jalpaiguri district.²⁹ Due to developed road communication net work, several places of the district were interlinked. Consequently, Darjeeling town, Kalimpong, Kurseong, Siliguri, Naxalbari, Matigara became the chief

trade centres. On the other hand some places of the district became important for transfrontier trade centre like, Rhenok, Pedong, Sombari, Simana, Garidhura. In the Terai, Matigara, Bagdogra, Naxalbari, Kharibari got connected with each other and this route reached upto the border of Nepal. In the hills, Pedong and Lava emerged as important commercial centres. A large bazaar was established at Pedong where traders and vendors came from Tibet. Thus through developed communication system, a link was established between the plains and the hills as well as with the transfrontier states adjacent to Darjeeling district. At the beginning of the twentieth century the opening of the bridges over the Rilli at Pedong and over the Git at Longshor gave uninterrupted communication for ponies between Kalimpong and the Duars.³⁰ In this way road communication facilitated selling of the plains and Duars. From Kalimpong through road transport a good number of oranges were exported to the Duars and Terai.³¹

Besides Siliguri, the northern terminus of the Eastern Bengal State Railway, also became the terminus of the Cart Road from Kalimpong and Sikkim. Thus, it focused the whole trade of Darjeeling, Sikkim and Tibet. As Siliguri was interlinked through different routes with the hills the Colonial Government opened a bi-weekly government market at Siliguri. Several jute firms were established in Siliguri. Thus, it is found that developed road communication led to the flourishing market towns, specially planned to receive the vast surplus produce of the newly developed areas as well as opened a new horizon in trade and industry in the twentieth century in this region.

Before the formation of the Jalpaiguri district, there existed some important roads. However the roads in the district particularly in the western duars, were in a bad condition. It is already mentioned that during the tenure of D.H.E. Sunder as settlement officer, there was no metalled roads in the district and he urged upon the Government for opening up a road from Ghargharia to Jaigaon. He also, strongly recommended the extension of Jalpaiguri Gairkata road. The roads found in the Jalpaiguri district before 1869 were as follows:

From Darjeeling to Tetulia via Pankhabari and Phansidewa.

Siliguri to Jalpaiguri through Phoolbari and Baikunthapur.

Debgram to Sikkim via Sevoke and Kalimpong.

Rangpur to Jalpaiguri via Kargirhat.

Phuntsholing to Mainaguri through Buxa.

From Mongpong through Ambari Falakata to Rangpore across Tista.

From Kalimpong to Dam Dim and Mougaong through Algara and Gorubathan route.

Eastern Nepal to Panchanai through Rajarjhar and Nijamattara.

It is to be mentioned that like Darjeeling district, Western Duars region also was split by numerous rivers and the erratic changing courses of the rivers made the maintenance of the roads quite difficult. However, a good number of roads were constructed in the Western Duars region of the Tista river due to absence of heavy rainfall and resultant flood. W.W. Hunter has mentioned in his "Statistical Accounts of Bengal" that like Darjeeling, there were three agencies for the maintenance and construction of roads in the western Duars. The Public Works Department, the Local administration under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioner and the Jalpaiguri District Board were entrusted with the construction and development of roads in Jalpaiguri district. The following three roads were under the management of Public Works Department.

1) The 27 miles of the imperial Cart road from Purnia to Darjeeling passed through Jalpaiguri. 2) the 29 miles long road from Jalpaiguri town to Titalya on the Purnia and Darjeeling road. 3) the 21 miles in length from Cooch Behar town to the military station of Buxa, in the Bhutan range in the east of the Duars subdivision.

There were nine roads maintained through the local fund under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioner. (1) the 27 miles long from the station of Jalpaiguri through Western Duars to Eastern Duars. (2) the 26 miles long from Jalpaiguri town or rather village of Mainaguri via Ambari to

Bhutia Stockade at Chamurchi. (3) Mainaguri to Cooch Behar town of which 11 miles passed through Jalpaiguri district. (4) A short road from Jalpaiguri town to Dunga Hat and from thence to Domohani Hat. (5) Roads from Mainaguri to Dmohani Hat and Dunga Hat. (6) the 27 miles long from Jalpaiguri to Siliguri via Ambari Falakata, (7) the 31 miles long Jalpaiguri to Boda road. (8) the 29 miles long road from Jalpaiguri to Dalingkot Road from Jalpaiguri town to Cooch Behar was 26 miles in length.³²

Besides the public works Department and the office of the Deputy Commissioner, some roads were maintained by the Jalpaiguri District Board which are as follows:

- 1) Lataguri – Metali Road, 2) Ramshai – Sulkapara, 3) Sulkapara – Thaljhora Road, 4) Nagrakata feeder road, 5) Banerhat – Chamurchi Road, 6) Ramshai – Gairkata Road, 7) Gairkata – Birpara Road, 8) Gairkata – Dhupguri Road and 9) Gairkata – Binnaguri Road.³³

It should be mentioned that most of the roads in Jalpaiguri district particularly in the western Duars region were linked with tea gardens. Previously these roads were in a poor condition. As the British Government, was aware of poor condition of the roads in the district, it took initiative for the gradual development of roads in Jalpaiguri district. Besides tea planters, it also greatly helped in transportation of commercial agricultural produces to different places. After the opening up of railways in Jalpaiguri district, road construction and development projects got great impetus. J.F. Gruning remarked that after the inauguration of railways all the traffic were conducted through railway.³⁴ Consequently, the Colonial Government paid attention to the construction of feeder roads along with the general road construction. In this context, it is to be mentioned that several roads were constructed in Jalpaiguri district to serve as feeder to the Duars Railway.³⁵ It is to be mentioned that the road from Dam Dim Station to Fagu tea garden was constructed. This road, not only benefited several tea gardens, but also served as an important feeder to Bengal Duars Railway. Further, to the west of the Tista, the Boda – Domar railway station road was an

important feeder road which was used mostly during the jute growing season.

The Jalpaiguri District Board also maintained a total length of 802 miles road of which 24 miles were metalled roads. On the eastern bank of the Tista river opposite to Jalpaiguri town, was the principal road maintained by the district Board. This road stretched as far as the Eastern Duars region upto Alipurduar and was known as the Jalpaiguri – Alipur road and thence it was called as Alipur – Haldibari Road.³⁶ West of the Torsa river a road was constructed to Rajabhatkhawa Station within the Cooch Behar state Railway. This road was mostly used by the tea planters. In 1929-30, the Buxa Forest Road from Alipurduar to Rajabhatkhawa was re-aligned.³⁷

From the beginning of the twentieth century, as volume of trade of different agricultural produces increased, the Colonial Government took great initiative for construction, development and repair of the roads in Jalpaiguri district. In the year 1900 Rs.2,430 was sanctioned for the construction of the Ramshaihat – Gaikata Road.³⁸ In 1904-05 in the Duars, roads from Gaikata to Birpara from Banerhat to Chamurchi, from Ramshaihat to Gaikata, Jainti – Rydak road and Rajabhatkhawa – Jaigaon road were completed and Rs.253,949 was spent for the total works.³⁹ In the year 1905-06, road development projects were also under taken for the Duars in Jalpaiguri district. In this year, projects for two roads from Ramshaihat Station to Nagrakata and from Ramshaihat to Gaikata were sanctioned for Rs.68,945 and Rs.19500 respectively.⁴⁰ Thus, it is found that from the beginning of the twentieth century, road development programme was continuously going on. From 1899-1900, a grand project had been taken by the public works department for the construction of roads in Jalpaiguri district. The following table illustrates construction of works under taken by Public Works Department in Jalpaiguri district from 1899-1900 to 1918-19.

**Construction of roads in Jalpaiguri District from, 1899-1900 to
1918-19**

Name of the Estate	Amount of road and public works realized during last 20 years (1899-1900 to 1918-19)	Amount spent on the construction and repair of roads during last 20 years (1899-1900 to 1918-19)
Government khas mahal (western Duars)	551700*	1396253
Chaklajat Estates	1021093	508350
Baikunthapur Estate	604062	383092

*These figures are only for 12 years, viz. 1907-08 to 1918-19; those for the period 1899-1900 to 1906-07 are not available.

Source: Proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Council, Index to Vol.LII, January to December, 1920, Published by Authority of the Council, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1921, P.747.

Further, for the development of roads in Duars allotment of Rs.444000 was made for expenditure in 1921-22.⁴¹ In that year, work was done in the following road projects:

Construction of Dalgaon Lankapara Road Section II (7.16 miles)

Improving and metalling Barnes Mainaguri Road (5.28 miles)

Improving and metalling Lataguri Mainaguri Road (11.45 miles)

Improving and metalling Mainaguri Dhupguri Road and Construction of a major bridge over Jaldhaka river (12.19 miles).

The roads of the district were linked with different railway stations of the district and also several other places of the district. Further, the road routes of the district were linked with the Darjeeling district in the west and Cooch Behar in the east. The district, through road routes also got linked with the frontiers of British India in the South. The connection among various places of the district as well as with other districts of North Bengal and British frontier, promoted not only internal trade but also inter-regional trade with Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, Assam and Trans-Himalayan trade with Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Tibet, China and even with Central Asia. Due to developed

road communication system, different agricultural produces now were easily transported from this district and this mostly benefited the tea industry of this district. On the other hand, various articles of trade, such as, cotton cloth, corrugated iron and various consumer goods now easily reached to the different remote areas of the Duars region. The roads of the Duars were also used to drive the cattle and sheep from one place to other places in the Duars and even from Duars to other regions. In this context, it is to be mentioned that cattle and sheep were driven from western Duars to Assam in great number through Central Emigration Road.⁴²

The road communication received a further impetus after 1864 with the British initiative in Cooch Behar State. The bifurcated Emigration Road made a link between the east and west of Cooch Behar with different parts of North Bengal. Besides the Emigration Road, Several other roads also connected Cooch Behar with other parts of North Bengal. Of these roads, (i) the Buxa road connected Cooch Behar with Buxa in the Western Duars via Alipurduar, (ii) the Lowkuty road connected the town of Cooch Behar with important *bundars* of Baxiganj and Haldibari, (iii) Rangpur road was going down through Dinhata to Mogalhat, (iv) the Goshanimari and Shitai road joined the town Cooch Behar with Goshanimari and Shitai. Besides these roads, there were a large number of cross roads for communication between different places within Cooch Behar State. Besides these roads, there were several others Cross roads for communication between different places of Cooch Behar state and Bhutan Duar like, (a) a road from Dinhata to Mekhliganj, (b) from Mathabhanga to Sitalkuchi, (c) from Cooch Behar to Goshanimari and (d) from Patgram to Bhutan Duar. After the opening of Railways in Cooch Behar State, a good number of Feeder roads were also constructed to get the railway facilities. Among the Feeder roads, mention may be made of road from Changrabanda to Mekhliganj, from Manikganj to Haldibari, from Balarampur to Dinhata and from Dewanganj hat to Emigration road.⁴³ Further, some feeder roads were also constructed which terminated at the railway stations of Chawra Hat, Cooch Behar and Baneswar.⁴⁴

It should be mentioned that with the growing needs of the time, road construction and development in Cooch Behar state gradually progressed. Upto 1874-75, there were 115 miles of unmetalled roads in Cooch Behar State.⁴⁵ However, within fifteen years, the roads in Cooch Behar state became three times as much in miles. It is recorded that in 1888-89, there were 355 miles roads existing in Cooch Behar State. During this period a 48 miles long road from, Dhubri to Jalpaiguri, passed through Cooch Behar state it was the principal road. Public works Department, Local Authority and the Cooch Behar State itself were responsible for the development, construction and repair of the roads in the state. The Public Works Department for the year 1887-88 had spent Rs.15,737, 7 Ans and 7 p as total expenditure for construction and repair of roads in Cooch Behar State.⁴⁶ The table illustrates different roads of Cooch Behar and bridges on running feet during 1888-89 in the Cooch Behar State.

Roads and bridges in Cooch Behar State in 1888-89

Sl. No.	Name of the Roads	Roads in mile	Bridge in running feet
1.	Emigration road west of Cooch Behar	46	3244
2.	Emigration road East of Cooch Behar	19	135
3.	Rungpore road	23	927
4.	Buxa Road	12	725
5.	Lowkutty road	26	978
6.	Kalighat road	2	48
7.	Purbabhag road	12	148
8.	Sitai road	06	134
9.	Sagardighi road	03	71
10.	Falakata road	06	121
11.	Cross road from Dinhat to Mekhliganj	40	386
12.	Cross road from Mathabhanga to Sitalkuchi	12	608
13.	Cross road from Cooch Behar to Goshanimari	14	366
14.	Cross road from Patgram to Bhootan Duar	15 ¼	696
15.	Feeder roads Changrabanda to Mekhliganj	5 ½	152
16.	Feeder roads Dewanganj hat to Emigration road	5 ½	91

17.	Feeder roads Manikganj hat to Haldibari	3 ½	214
18.	Feeder roads Kasiabari hat to Haldibari	2 ½	112
19.	Feeder roads Balarampur to Dinhata	12 ½	487
20.	Feeder road Toofanganj to Lowkuty road	4 ½	201
21.	Feeder road Chowdhurihat to Dhubri and Teesta roads	02	22
22.	Sitai to Durgapur	07	171
23.	Village roads Buxa road to Baressurhat	02	
24.	Village road town to Shuktahat	02	
25.	Village road Per Mekhliganj to Dewanganj hat	03	
26.	Fair Weather track from Bhoishkuchi to Garodhat	06	
27.	Portion of road from Emigration road west of Cooch Behar to Pondibarihat	02	
28.	From Chilakhana on the Lowkuty road to Bhatibari	07	
29.	From Fulbari on the low kuty road to Chilkiguri	10	
30.	Pundibari road`	12	
31.	Garodhat road	06	
32.	Majherdabri road	05	
33.	Kalighat railway line	02	
34.	Bhalka road	04	
35.	Haldibari road	10	
36.	Toofanganj road	02	
37.	Bengchatra road	01	
38.	Godadhar road	02	
	Total	355 miles	

Source : Annual Administrative Report of the Cooch Behar State, for the year 1888-89, Cooch Behar State Press, 1889, P.31

The process of road development project gradually developed and upto 1900, the State of Cooch Behar had 382 miles of road in addition to 187 miles of village roads.⁴⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century it reached within 400 miles with high embankments.⁴⁸

In 1900 the following main roads were in existence and maintained by the Cooch Behar State.⁴⁹

- 1) A road from Gitaldaha through Dewahat, Koch Bihar, Banerwar to Alipurduar.
- 2) A road from Cooch Behar to Tufanganj and Passing on to Kharibari.
- 3) A road from Cooch Behar east-wards through Ghora-mara and Fulbari to Lawkutya and the turning North and passing through Mahishkuchi to Garad hat (Guard hat).
- 4) A road going north from Ghoramara to Natabari. A road from Banerwar east wards connected at Natabari.
- 5) A road from Cooch Behar through Rajarhat west wards to Pundibari thence a branch went north wards to Patlakhawa forest while the main road went west wards through Chokhekata and Gitaldanga to Moranga.
- 6) A road from Koch Bihar West Wards through Rajarhat, Khattimari, Mathabhanga to Balarhat.
- 7) A road from Cooch Behar south wards through Ranidanga to Gossanimari and thence to Sitai. A branch went west wards to Lalbazar and then to Sitalkuchi.
- 8) A road from Coch Behar through Nishiganj hat and Sibpur to join the Mathabhanga - Sitalkuchi road.
- 9) A road from Giladanga going south through Matabhanga to Sitalkuchi.
- 10) A road from Mathabhanga to Nishiganj.
- 11) A road from Mathabhanga to Falakata through Chokhekata.

The network of Cooch Behar Roads were joined with the network of roads in the district of Rangpur (now in Bangladesh) and through them with Calcutta. This road scheme had also opened up the interior of the state.

The gradual progress of road development in Cooch Behar State generated a tremendous impact on the society and economy. The exports and imports in the state were largely enhanced. The chief exports from the state were tobacco, jute, mustard seeds, rice, etc. and the principal imports were piece goods, salt, brass, copper, utensils, sugar, molasses, spices, dried fish etc. Due to better road communication, the crops of the district, after meeting the local demands, were exported abroad. There was a large export of jute, tobacco, rice, mustard seeds and sugar cane.⁵⁰ Due to the developed communication system, every nook and corner of the state came in closer contact with each other. The progress of road communication now converted the remote corners into little rural towns and that into big towns. Cooch Behar, Dinhata, Mathabhanga, Haldibari, Mekhliganj turned into important trading centres due to better road facility. Cooch Behar itself became the principal centre of commercial activities in the state. It had commercial links with the *bandars* and the other market places of the state. Dinhata had its trade mostly along the Sahebganj, Gosanimari and Rangpur roads.⁵¹ Most of the trade in Changrabandha was carried out through road linked up with Patgram, Jalpaiguri, Mekhliganj and Ranirhat.⁵² Thus, with the development of road system in Cooch Behar, the export and import of the state gradually expended.⁵³

Though previously several roads existed in Dinajpur district were linked with the headquarters of other districts, but these roads were not used for commercial activities. Mostly the commercial activities of the district carried on by boats in the monsoon. W.W. Hunter mentioned the following roads were existed in the nineteenth century in undivided Dinajpur district.⁵⁵

- i) An imperial road from Baharampur via town of Dinajpur on to Darjeeling. The length of this road within undivided Dinajpur district was about 130 miles.
- ii) A 24 miles road from Dinajpur to Rangpur.
- iii) From Dinajpur to Bogra 36 miles long branch road.

- iv) A road from Dinajpur to Malda 40 miles long.
- v) From Dinajpur to Gangarampur 18 miles branch road.
- vi) From Dinajpur to Purnia a 48 miles long road.
- vii) From Dinajpur to Nekmard Fair road a 36 miles long.

With the growing needs of the time, the district was provided with many other roads. From the beginning of the twentieth century, roads were constructed in undivided Dinajpur district to connect various important centres of the district as well as with various railway lines. In 1909-10, in undivided Dinajpur district, there were 993 miles of roads, except village roads.⁵⁶ In addition to Rangpur road, Malda road, Bogra road and Purnia road, the Dinajpur – Kishanganj road was an important road. This road passed through Bochaganj (now in Bangladesh) and Nekmand and after crossing Purnia it entered Kishanganj.

Different places of the district were interlinked with one another by several roads. The Balurghat road which was one of the most important road in undivided Dinajpur district connected Balurghat with Dinajpur. A short road of 16 miles long from Balurghat to Hili was constructed as the nearest means of communication with the railways at Hili. In 1921-22, of this 16 miles road, the metalling of the first 8½ miles was completed.⁵⁷ This road was the only road of undivided Dinajpur district supervised and maintenance directly under the provincial government. This road was the most used road in the district and there was heavy cart traffic through this road to Hili railway station. As this road was most used road, the Colonial Government was aware of the constant development of this road. It is to be mentioned that this route was further strengthened and certain bridges were reconstructed on this route in 1930-31.⁵⁸ It is recorded that over a week, the daily average of bullock carts passing a point near Hili was 1,411 loaded and 1,247 unloaded carts.⁵⁹ The 18 miles Gangarampur road connected the village of Gangarampur with Malda. This road carried considerable trade in rice and other produces. Two miles away from

Gangarampur, there was a large village named Naya Bazar where many merchants resided and conducted a great volume of rice and paddy trade.⁶⁰

In the third decade of the twentieth century there were 39 miles of metalled roads and 1,081 miles of unmetalled roads in addition to 477 miles of village roads maintained by the Local Boards in Dinajpur district.⁶¹ In this context it is to be mentioned that some inter district roads were also important for commerce and trade. The road from Banshihari to Itahar, from Churaman via Bindole to Raiganj and Durgapur and from Kaliyaganj to Churaman via Durgapur carried heavy cart traffic, principally rice and jute. There was a considerable traffic by cart from Banshihari to Malda through Itahar. The Malda road also served as a feeder to the railway at Birol (now in Bangladesh) and from that place paddy was exported to Calcutta which was collected from Banshihari and transported to Malda.⁶² A small quantity of jute was exported through road transport, but major proportion of mustard seeds were exported by road. But with the inauguration of the railways, the old inter district roads got superseded by the railways. It is to be noted that the road from Dinajpur to Rangpur which was formerly the chief line of communication between Rangpur and Calcutta became less important after the opening of railways in undivided Dinajpur. The same to be found with regards to Purnia and Kishanganj roads.⁶³ On the otherhand through different rivers marts of the district in addition to rice and paddy, tobacco, jute, hides etc. were brought to the railway stations which were situated near by the river trading marts. After the inauguration of railways, a considerable amount of different goods like salt, kerosene oil, refined sugar, molasses, piece-goods, iron and steel, betel nut, jute etc. were imported by railways. Thus it is found that with the opening of railways, road communication slowly lost its importance in Dinajpur District.

From the earliest times, rivers were one of the chief means of communication in the Malda district. In the monsoon most of the rivers were used as the most important means of communication on which the road had converged. As means of commerce, thus, the roads in the district had no great significance. However, during the Muhamadan rule, some roads in the

district became important. In Muhamadan times, Pandua was the administrative headquarter. During the Muhamadan rule, there were two principal roads (i) one from Pandua via Old Malda and Gaur to the Ganges (ii) and another was from Pandua across the river Tangon to Dinajpur district. After the formation of the district in 1813, no major changes in road construction projects had been taken and till the second decade of the twentieth century the roads existed in the district were the same as shown in the Majour Rennell's map of roads for the district.⁶⁴

W.W. Hunter mentioned that there were 14 numbers of roads of 177 miles length under the supervision of local management. The roads existed within the district were (i) in the civil station of English Bazar 3 miles of metalled road, (ii) road from Amriti to Nimasarai 7 miles in length, (iii) the 25 miles Dinajpur road from Malda Ghat to Sankrol, (iv) from English Bazar to Nimasari 4 miles long, (v) a road from Tartipur to Baragharia, (vi) the 11 miles long Sastanitala to Kaliachak road, and (vii) the 2 miles long Sibganj road.⁶⁵

However, the principal road of the district was a road starting from Baragharia on the western bank of the river Mahananda opposite Nawabganj through Sibganj, Gour, English Bazar and after crossing river Mahananda at Old Malda it ran through Gajole to Dinajpur.⁶⁶ This route was the old main route. This road connected with Diara from Kaliachak and Panchananpur and with Gomastapur from Kansat.

Till the opening of the railway in 1909, the most important road in the district was from English Bazar to Manikchak. This road was familiar by the name of Rajmahal Road. This Rajmahal Road connected the important centres of the district such as Amriti, Mathurapur, Ratua and Samsi.⁶⁷ To the east this road connected Dinajpur district and on the west this road also connected Purnia border of Bihar district. Besides the Rajmahal Road, another important road was Murshidabad to Darjeeling via Dinajpur which entered the district near Jhelum. This road connected the west of the district with the marts of Nawabganj, Gomastapur and Rahanpur on the banks of river Mahananda. All these roads were maintained and supervised

by the District Board. G.E. Lambourn mentioned that there were 20 miles of metalled road and 512 unmetalled road in the district under the supervision of the District Board till 1918.⁶⁸ It is to be mentioned that Nawabganj was a great market for winter rice. A considerable amount of rice from Barind areas of undivided Dinajpur district and from Rajshahi District came to Nawabganj by cart. Besides rice, a certain quantity of jute from Sibganj, Kaliachak was also marketed at Nawabganj.⁶⁹ Rohanpur was one of the biggest rice trading centre and there was a rice mill at Rohanpur. Thus, from different parts of the district, paddy and rice came to Rohanpur by cart particularly in the '*hat*' day. It is to be noted that from Rohanpur, a great amount of rice was exported but not through the road route.

From the third decade of the twentieth century, motor services were introduced through the routes of English Bazar to Baragharia, English Bazar to Kaliachak, English Bazar to Ratua and English Bazar to Mathurapur.⁷⁰ However, it is found that the main trade of the district was carried by rivers and railways. Thus road transport with the inauguration of railways in the district, particularly the opening of the Katihar – Godagari line, lessened the importance of the English Bazar Rajmahal route which was the main road route for export and import trade.⁷¹ However, regarding road transportation, no statistical figure during the concern time period of the area under study in Malda district is available. Thus road transportation in Malda district during the concerned time period was insignificant. Rather, roads in Malda district were used as a feed to railways or river-borne trade and commerce.

Thus, it is found that the Colonial Government was aware of the poor condition of the roads in North Bengal under study which adversely effected the development of trade, commerce and industry. As such it made great efforts to improve upon the condition of road communication system in order to boost commercial activities in the region. At the same time the state of Cooch Behar also took the same initiative on its own as well as with the British assistance. It may be mentioned that under the earlier mentioned three agencies the road development projects got a grand success. The table

illustrates the road maintenance works done by public works department and Local Authorities in North Bengal, except Cooch Behar for 1892-93.

Road Communication of North Bengal maintained by Public Authorities in Bengal during 1892-93.

Name of the District	Length of metalled road maintained by Public Works Department	Length of unmetalled road maintained by Public Works Department	Length ;of metalled road maintained by Local authority	Length of unmetalled road maintained by local authority	Total of metalled road	Total of unmetalled road
	Miles	Miles	Miles	Miles	Miles	Miles
Dinajpur			20 ³ / ₈	1094 ³ / ₈	20 ³ / ₈	1094 ³ / ₈
Jalpaiguri	8 ¹ / ₂		27 ¹ / ₄	531 ³ / ₄	35 ³ / ₄	531 ³ / ₄
Darjeeling	127 ¹ / ₃	231 ¹ / ₂		337	127 ¹ / ₃	568 ¹ / ₂
Malda			3 ³ / ₈	538 ¹ / ₈	3 ³ / ₈	538 ¹ / ₈

Source: Report on the Administration of Bengal 1892-93, Calcutta, printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1894, P.425.

RIVER TRANSPORT SYSTEM

Although Darjeeling district was split by several rivers like Tista, Mahananda, Balasan, Jaldhaka, Mechi etc., but all of the rivers were not suitable for navigation by trading boats. The beds of all the rivers in Darjeeling district were sandy in the plains and stoney in the hills. Due to these geographical features of the rivers in the Darjeeling district there was no scope for riverine trade and therefore trade through river in Darjeeling district was completely absent. However, on reaching the plains some of the rivers became navigable. Though navigation was very difficult and precarious, it is to be mentioned that during the concerned time period in the Terai, Mahananda was navigable and on reaching plains river Tista was also navigable for boats of 50 maunds or two tons burden. Besides, Mahananda and Tista in the plains river Balasan was also navigable that could be assumed from the name of two ghats on Balasan river i.e. Panighata and Patharghata and on the banks of Balasan river there emerged three hats (village market). It is recorded that there were a number of *ferries* in the Terai on the Mahananda river. Sasi Bhusan Dutta in the Darjeeling Terai settlement Report of 1898 mentioned that there were five *ferries* in the Terai viz. Old Duramari, Phansidewa Ghat, Domukha Ghat, Champasari

Ghat and Debiganj Ghat and the Colonial Government gained a revenue of Rs.632 in 1897-98 from the *ferries* of Terai.⁷²

Like Darjeeling district Jalpaiguri district was also split by several rivers and streams, but few of the rivers were fit for navigation. River Tista was navigable by large boats as far as Jalpaiguri, the Duduya upto the Jalpaiguri – Alipur road, the Mujnai as far as Falakata and the Kaljani upto Alipurduar, and the Torsa was navigable by Cargo boats during the rains.⁷³ The Baurahat, situated on a small tributary of the Tista, in the patgram police station, business transactions took place through the river Tista. From Baurahat there were a number of merchants who carried on an extensive trade in tobacco, rice and jute which they collected from all parts of the district and exported through Tista river to Dacca and other eastern markets.⁷⁴ Through Tista river, the nearest Sal timber of Darjeeling district, western Duars and Baikunthapur floated down to the Brahmaputra river and the greater part of the timber was passed to Dacca, Serajganj and other eastern markets. From Falakata tea was despatched in boats down the Mujnai river to Dhubri. But with the establishment of railways this river borne communication slowly decreased.

There were a number of *ferries* in the Jalpaiguri district. Town Jalpaiguri itself was connected with the Duars region through Barnes Ghat on the eastern side of the Tista river by ferry. J.F. Gruning mentioned that there were 125 *ferries* in the district of which 99 *ferries* were within the purview of the District Board and the rest of the *ferries* were within the provincial jurisdiction.⁷⁵ However, another report highlighted that there were 97 *ferries* in Jalpaiguri district of which 76 were under the management of the District Board and the rest 21 under the Government management.⁷⁶ The principal *ferries* were on the Tista and Jaldhaka rivers. Abden Ferry which was situated on the opposite side of the town Jalpaiguri was one of the most important *ferry* of Jalpaiguri district. This *ferry* was maintained and managed by the Bengal Duars Railway Company. Besides this *ferry*, on the Tista and Jaldhaka rivers there were some important *ferries* too. There were also other important *ferries* at Paharpur, Premganj,

Rangdhamali, Baikunthapur, Karchibari, Fulbari, Helapakri, Kantimari and Boalmari. But the most important *ferries* were at the “points where the Jalpaiguri – Alipur, Ramshai – Gairkata and Ramshai – Suklapara roads cross the river.”⁷⁷ The extent to which the *ferries* were important in the economy of Jalpaiguri could be assumed as it is recorded that the District Board earned revenue Rs.18,740 while the provincial *ferries* gained Rs.7.516 for a particular year in 1907-08.⁷⁸ Though the Colonial Government collected and gained revenue from the *ferries* of the district it also awarded for the maintenance of the *ferries* and the roads on the both sides of the *ferries*. It is recorded that of the 21 government *ferries*, two of the government *ferries* had government roads on both sides, 4 had district board roads on both sides, and 3 had district board or local board roads on one side; the remaining 12 had Cooch Behar state roads, tea garden roads or roads otherwise maintained on both sides.⁷⁹ It is to be mentioned that depending upon the river borne trade there emerged several trading centres in Jalpaiguri district. The chief trading centres of the district both in Duars and Regulation part were Jorpakri, Mainaguri, Falakata, Madarihat, Buxa, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri town, Tetulia, Rajnagar, Saldanga and Debiganj.

The state of Cooch Behar was divided into parts by numerous rivers, but seldom used for internal communication. W.W. Hunder mentioned that there was a very little trade on the rivers of Cooch Behar except during the rains.⁸⁰ There were at least six principal rivers flowing through Cooch Behar state such as Tista, Singimari, Torsa also called Dharala, Kaljani, Raidhak, Godadhar. These six rivers were navigable by trading boats of 100 maunds, through out the year. Besides these six rivers, there were twenty minor streams which were used for boat traffic of the lesser sort during the rainy season only. Town Cooch Behar lay between two channels of the Torsa. Tufanganj, an important trade mart was situated on the bank of the river Kaljani. In this context it is to be mentioned that Kaljani, a deep stream was carried a considerable river traffic Boat of 7 to 11 tons coming up all the year round. River Kaljani was used extensively to float down timber from the forests at the foot of the hills. At Alipurduar in Taluk Kholla the Government

Forest Conservancy Department had opened a timber depot. From this government timber depot the timber of the western Duars was floated in considerable quantities down Kaljani river to the Brahmaputra river. The rivers of the Cooch Behar state were directly connected with Rangpur (now in Bangladesh). So, some portion of the total volume of trade of Cooch Behar was carried on with the district of Eastern Bengal. From Balarampur, jute, paddy, mustard seed and oil were carried across by boat to Sirajganj.⁸¹ Further, tobacco trade at Mathabhanga was mostly conducted through the ports of Brahmaputra to Manikganj and Narayanganj.⁸²

Mekhliganj was an important standing place on the river Tista. From Mekhliganj a large tobacco trade was carried on by the Burmese merchants. The Burmese merchants purchased tobacco from Mekhliganj and sent it down by boats to Kaliganj in Rangpur and from there reshipped for the marts of Burma.⁸³ From Cooch Behar a good quantity of jute and tobacco was also exported to Serajganj by river Tista.⁸⁴ Jaldhaka was an important river and there was an extensive trade of jute and tobacco down the river Jaldhaka. Besides these rivers, in the rainy season Sankos and Dharla rivers could be traversed by boats of 1000 maunds. Through river the chief exports from the Cooch Behar state were tobacco, jute, mustard seed, rice, mustard oil and the principal imports were piece goods, salt, brass and copper utensils, sugar, molasses, pulses, dried fish etc.

From the earliest time in Malda district the rivers had been the most important means of communication and before the construction of the railway in 1909 the rivers were one of the chief means of communication in Malda district. Like the other districts of North Bengal, Malda district was also split by several rivers. The principal rivers of Malda were Mahananda, Kalindri, Tangan and Purnabhaha. The basic characteristic of these rivers was that all these rivers were navigable throughout the year for boats upto 100 maunds.⁸⁵ River Kalindri had a connection with the Ganges.

The rivers of Malda served as water ways for the export of a variety of commodities to market within the district, to other districts or to railway stations and steamer *ghats*. River Mahananda which came down from the

hill and through Terai entered Malda district. This river formed a most important channel of communication between Lower Bengal and the sub-Himalayan districts. River Tangan and Purnabhaha were the important tributaries of Mahananda. Both the rivers flow from Dinajpur into the North-Eastern Corner of the Malda district. A considerable amount of paddy with boats laden came down from the North Eastern corner of the district and from parts of Dinajpur district through these rivers.⁸⁶ On the banks of river Mahananda important trading centres emerged such as English Bazar, Malda and Rohanpur. These trading centres conducted a considerable trade in grain and other products which chiefly passed in boats up and down the Mahananda. Down the Mahananda to Calcutta a vast quantity of traffic was consigned consisting chiefly of rice, tobacco, gunny-bags and oil seeds and up traffic was mostly salt and cotton from Calcutta. Besides these up and down traffics, through Mahananda and its tributaries timber-rafts in great numbers used to be floated from the mountains of Nepal. Due to the change of courses of river Kalindri Haitpur became the principal river mart on the Ganges and also became the most important seat of river trade in the district. Through river a good quantity of mango was exported during the mango season to Dacca and other parts of Eastern Bengal.⁸⁷

There were a good number of *ferries* in Malda district also. The district Board maintained these *ferries*. Besides the Government maintenance there were also a number of *ferries* in the district maintained by some of the Zamindars of Malda. Besides, the *ferry* services some of the Zamindars of Malda also the owner of Steamer services. In this context mention should be made of the name of Rai Bahadur Chandra Ketu Narain Singh.⁸⁸ The Steamer owned by him run on alternate days from English Bazar to old Malda, and thence via Kalindri to Rajmahal. The *ferries* which were at Nawabganj, old Malda and Rajmahal were the property of the British Government. G.E. Lambourn mentioned that except Monday there were steam boats and *ferry* services from Lalgola to Nimasari up the Mahananda in connection with the Ganges.⁸⁹ There was also *ferry* steam from Manikchak across the Ganges to Rajmahal. Due to the river borne trade

some places of Malda district became important markets. Of the river borne trade centres Mehaghat on the Kalindri river, Balia – Nawabganj on the Mahananda, Rohanpur on the Mahananda and Chapai – Nawabganj on Mahananda were the principal markets. In this context it is to be mentioned that from Mehaghat a good quantity of Paddy, Pulses and jute were exported entirely by boats and much of the produce exported to Dhulian in Murshidabad district.⁹⁰ Besides Mehaghat, bulk of the trade particularly, export of rice and paddy is carried by river from Rohanpur, Balia-Nawabganj and Chapai – Nawabganj. In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that though railway was inaugurated in Malda in the first decade of the twentieth century however the main export trade in rice and paddy by steamer up the Ganges to Bihar had been largely unaffected. The following table will show different produce exported through river route carried by steamer from Malda for the year 1930-31.

**Goods carried by Steamer from Malda District during the year 1930-31
(in maunds)**

Paddy	Rice	Seeds	Jute	Mangoes	Tobacco	Silk
2249	41364	22338	11790	94	4885	Nil

Source : Final Report on the Survey and Settlement operations in the District of Malda, 1928-1935, by M.O. Carter, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, Bengal, 1938, p.18

From the table it is evident that of the various agricultural produces exported through river rice run highest. It is also to be noted that the figures for rice i.e. 41,364 maunds carried by steamer from Malda were higher than those of all the railway stations of Malda district together. It is recorded that in the same year from 15 railway stations the total number of rice exported was 37,644 maund which was lesser than that of the rice carried through river route and the most remarkable fact is to be mentioned that though there was a railway station at Rohanpur transportation towards export through railway from Rohanpur was only 3,414 maunds of rice. However through river route the greater portion exported from Rohanpur.⁹¹

Like the other districts of North Bengal undivided Dinajpur possessed many rivers, but none of the Dinajpur rivers was of great importance for navigable by large boats through out the year. Mahananda, Nagar, Kulik, Tangan, Chhiramati, Purnabhaha, Atrai, Jamuna and Karatoya were the principal rivers of undivided Dinajpur district. Though most of the rivers of Dinajpur district were not suitable for navigation by large boats but during the rainy season there was a considerable river traffic to and from every part of the district. It is reported that there were atleast thirteen important rivers navigable by large boats of hundred maunds and only two rivers navigable by boats of two hundred or three hundred maunds burden.⁹² During the rainy season the want of roads in the interior tracts and the heavy cost of land transport compeled the holders of grain and other staples to depend upon the river transport to send their produce to market. During the rainy season river Nagar was navigable by large Cargo boats and by small boats and canoes throughout the year. River Tangan was navigable by large boats throughout its entire course in undivided Dinajpur district. River Purnabhaha was also navigable throughout its course for large boats during the rainy season. It is to be mentioned that in the area under study boats of two hundred or three hundred maunds burden, came up the Tangan to Radhikapur⁹³ (an important trade mart of present North Dinajpur). Before the inauguration of railways in undivided Dinajpur district all the paddy exported from the district was carried off down the rivers Kulik, Nagar, Punarbhaba and Atrai. W.W. Hunters' statistical account recorded details of Water borne traffic at certain control points in the 70's of the nineteenth century of undivided Dinajpur district. The statistical records mentioned that in the area under study i.e. from Raiganj through river Kulik 80,460 maunds or 2945 tons, rice was exported in 1873 and 1990 maunds or 72 tons jute was exported in 1874, through river Atrai from Patiram 115,491 maunds or 4227 tons in 1872 and in 1873 the figure was 112,021 maunds or 4100 tons, from Kumarganj 94,875 maunds or 3473 tons and 114,818 maunds or 4230 tons in 1873, from Balurghat 34,383 maunds or 1258 tons in 1873 and from Hili in 1872, 234598 maunds or 8587 tons and in 1873, 38283 maunds or 1401 tons of rice, were exported.⁹⁴ Thus, it is clear that

through river a good quantity of rice was exported from different parts of Dinajpur district particularly the area under study during the concerned time period. The following table shows navigability of the river in the area under study of Dinajpur.

Name of the River	Length (miles)	Open (no. of months)	Maundage of Boats	
			Dry season	Rainy season
Nagar	68	12	40	1000
Kulik	50	4	500	1000

Source: Government of Bengal, Statement of Navigable Rivers, Canals and Khals in Bengal, Calcutta, 1866.

Though the above figures presents a partial picture of the navigability of the rivers in the area of our study with regards to Dinajpur district, it could be assumed that during the rainy season the rivers in the area under study of Dinajpur played an important role in connection with riverborne trade. In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that even after the establishment of railways in different areas of Dinajpur district export of paddy was also continued down the different rivers of Dinajpur district. It is recorded that even after the establishment of railways roughly 10 lakhs of maunds of paddy was exported from different parts of Dinajpur district in a year.⁹⁵

The chief articles of trade of Dinajpur district were rice, tobacco, jute, gunny cloth, salt and molasses and there were numerous large produce depots scattered throughout the district along the different river banks. Churaman, Kaliyaganj, Raiganj, Hemtabad, Dhankail were the principal riverside trading villages and produce depots in the area under study of Dinajpur district during the concerned time period. These trading villages were important for considerable trade of rice, gunny cloth, sugar and jute.⁹⁶ Through Sahibganj a great portion of the grain produced in the rice fields of Dinajpur was shipped from large river side produce depots in Malda. Besides, through the Ganges rice of Dinajpur was exported to the North western provinces by way of the principal rivers of Dinajpur district.⁹⁷ A big

trade in gur (molasses), by country boat within the district was carried on down the river Purnabhaha from Kaharul for sale at Gangarampur (present south Dinajpur district) and neighbourhood. Further, from Nazipur which was a great gurbandar (molasses trading centre) was shipped down river to East Bengal to the tune of some 75,000 maunds a year.⁹⁸

It is found that in the area under study during the concerned time period besides railway and road transport, one can not ignore the importance of river transport. Except Darjeeling district, all the rivers of North Bengal during the concerned time period had played a vital role in river-borne trade. The Colonial Government was also aware of the riverine communication net work and maintained most of the *ferries* and steamer services. Consequently, a considerable amount of different commercial agricultural crops both foodgrains and non-foodgrains were exported from different parts of North Bengal through different rivers of North Bengal. Besides the export trade through different rivers of North Bengal, particularly the rivers of Jalpaiguri timbers were floated to Eastern Bengal. Further, a considerable amount of agricultural produces also exported from North Bengal to Calcutta through river transport. The following table illustrates the quantities of goods and its value exported from North Bengal through river transport.

Goods exported by river routes from North Bengal

Year	Quantity (mds)	Value (Rs)
1886-87	2948	25206
1887-88	3660	35614

Source: Report on the Administration of Bengal 1887-89, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1889, P.155.

ROPEWAY TRANSPORT SYSTEM

In addition to Road and River transportation the construction of Ropeways in the hills also caused some amount of economic progress in North Bengal under study. Before the construction of Ropeways the hill areas of Darjeeling district had to rely on carts and Coolies. In the year 1928 the Kalimpong Ropeway Company Limited was formed for the purpose of transporting commodities between the town of Kalimpong and the Darjeeling – Himalayan Railway in the Tista Valley.⁹⁹ The opening of the Ropeways in the hills not only reduced the carrying carts of the goods but also enhanced the facility of goods for transportation at a time. In the year 1930, the Kalimpong Ropeway was opened from Kalimpong to Riyang to the public carriage of goods.¹⁰⁰ Due to this Rope way transportation carriage of goods from Kalimpong to Tista Valley extension of the Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway had been greatly facilitated.¹⁰¹ The traded goods primarily transited were baled wool, oranges and timber outward and foodgrains, brick tea, cloth and building materials inward. The quantity of goods transported increased gradually and this means of transport proved to be an efficient and commercial form of transport, because the carrying capacity of the rope way was 10 tons per hour.¹⁰² In the latter years the Kalimpong Ropeway had been replaced by a new ropeway owned by the Samthar Co-operative Multipurpose Society Limited. As the Ropeway proved a success in transportation, the Colonial Government tried to open several ropeways in the hills. In 1939 the Darjeeling – Bijanbari ropeway was opened and following this efficient and economical form of transportation a number of private ropeways on the tea gardens also opened in the hills of Darjeeling district.¹⁰³

Apart from tea plantation industry, during the concerned time period the British found this region a big source of different cash crops and timber trade. Consequently, the Colonial ruler due to free entry of trade and commerce was aware of a well-developed communication and transportation system. Besides railways, much impetus was paid in road construction. At the same time, river-borne transportation which was the traditional mode of

communication was not ignored. North Bengal having many large rivers, with tremendous water course for the major portion of the year, had a good case for development of water transport. During the period under study the river-borne communication was further developed with the passage of time by the introduction of steamer services in this region. Thus, in the twentieth century with the better road-communication and river transportation domestic trade as well as inland and external trade grew fast. In the domestic trade weekly market or bi-weekly market and annual and bi-annual fairs became important due to better fabric of road and riverine system. Excellent road communication and river borne transportation helped reducing regional economic differences. On the contrary, it also helped the rise of prices of agricultural produces considerably and made the markets more and more competitive. Consequently, both the cultivators and the region under study benefited. Producers and consumers came into direct contact. To invest in different fields of economy of North Bengal, traders and investors, both indigenious and foreigners as well as different intermediate trading communities, thronged in different parts of North Bengal. The trade of jute, rice, tea, timber and tobacco got a new stature in this region. Thus, on the whole road construction and riverine communication also brought about a change in the socio-economic structure of North Bengal and this region turned towards urbanization.

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