

# **CHAPTER-I**

## **GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND HISTORICAL PROFILE OF NORTH BENGAL**

## CHAPTER - I

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Before we enter into the detailed study of our problem, we have to determine the area or field over which our investigation is concerned. This chapter will attempt to give a description of the geographical area of North Bengal which had been changed its area and shape in course of time. The area represented by North Bengal is of recent creation, but it did not bear any separate administrative division or administrative zone. At present un-officially the six districts viz., Malda, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar of the Jalpaiguri Division of West Bengal State is called North Bengal. But the term i.e. Northern part of Bengal and 'North Bengal' has been used from the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is found that numerous government and non government offices and institutions have used the term 'North Bengal' and of its separate identity. From the sources it is to be mentioned that the term North Bengal was used in 1878 by the Famine Commission.<sup>1</sup> In the Brahma Public opinion the word North Bengal was also used in 1880.<sup>2</sup> In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century following the regular and gradual use of the Bengali word "Uttar Banga", British Officials started to use the term "North Bengal" in their different official documents.<sup>3</sup> C.E. Buckland in his famous book, "Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors" used severally the term North Bengal in 1901 and in the Census Report of India 1901 G.A. Gait also mentioned the word North Bengal.<sup>4</sup> J.A. Vass in his Gazetteer of Rangpur has mentioned the word North Bengal.<sup>5</sup> The word North Bengal was also used by the Government. The Administrative Report of 1903-04 stated that there was a heavy rainfall on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> July in the northern districts and Lower Himalayan slopes, and generally along the hills, but most marked in North Bengal and West Bihar.<sup>6</sup> F.W. Strong in his Gazetteer of Dinajpur though did not use the word North Bengal, but he used the term Northern Bengal. He wrote, "In 1873-74 the whole of

Northern Bengal from Champaran to Rangpur was visited by a severe famine.”<sup>7</sup> In 1916 L.S.S. O'Malley in his “Rajshahi District Gazetteer” frequently used the word North Bengal and from the time the trend of frequent use of the word got started. In 1923, the British Government formed North Bengal Flood Committee. It is quite pertinent to mention that in the historical context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the term North Bengal denoted a wider connotation and covered a wide geographical area of the districts of Rajshahi Division i.e. Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna, Malda. In this context it is to be mentioned that Hemchandra Roychowdhury in his History of Bengal mentioned, “North of the main branch of the Ganges, now known as Padma and west of the Brahmaputra lies the extensive region of North Bengal which embraces the modern Rajshahi Division and the State of Cooch Behar.”<sup>8</sup> Thus it is found that this Northern tract lay between the Ganges and the Brahmaputra rivers, broadly speaking, this portion of the delta may be said to have extended from the 24<sup>th</sup> degree of the North latitude and from the 88<sup>th</sup> to 90<sup>th</sup> of longitude.<sup>9</sup> Its eastern limit was the river Brahmaputra, on the west it followed more or less closely the line of the Mahananda, Ganges and Bhagirathi rivers, but the artificial limits of districts did not always conform to this natural boundary. The whole tract was in fact one great rice-producing plain, studded with large morasses or patches of uncultivable brushwood. In short this was the geographical boundary of greater North Bengal.

The history of North Bengal has a direct bearing on the development of its settlements, but it is difficult to construct a systematic picture where passage of time has left few evidence to built upon. As a matter of fact, the area known as present North Bengal, only Dinajpur (undivided) and Malda have a place in history, while the root of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling is not so deep. The existence of these three places was first recognised in a few survey and settlement reports written in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among the six districts comprising the present region, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar were not a part of British India for a long time. It was from the third

decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century following several treaties with the rulers of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, these areas gradually merged with the British territory and the history of these areas are closely linked up with each other.

Malda has a rich historical background. The country originally formed a part of the kingdom of Pundra of Pundravardhana, the country of the pods and subsequently of Barendra region of Bengal. Pundravardhana was generally known as a region which lay from the north of the main branch of the Ganges or Padma to the west of Brahmaputra. In ancient period Malda got prominence by the name of Gauda. In the work of Panini, written in about the fifth century B.C., the existence of the Gaudapura is mentioned.<sup>10</sup> The name of the city was also mentioned in the Arthasastra of Kautilya and in the work of other Sanskrit writers.<sup>11</sup> The Mahasthanagarh inscription which was written in Brahmi Character proved that the Maurya ruled over the province of Pundravardhana. Thus Pundravardhana and Gauda was a part of the Maurya Empire. Major Rennell mentioned that Gauda was the capital of Bengal 730 years before Christ was born.<sup>12</sup> The hold of the imperial Guptas being somewhat stronger over Gauda. In this context it is to be mentioned that in the Allahabad pillar inscription it is described that the eastern boundary of Gupta Empire during the time of Samudragupta covered an area of whole North Bengal as far east as Kamrupa. The region perhaps formed a part of the Gupta Empire since its inception. Gupta rule continued over North Bengal till at least the middle of the sixth century A.D. On the ruins of the Gupta Empire in Bengal, two independent Kingdoms rose into prominence viz., Vanga and Gauda. Sasanka who started his life as a Mahasamanta under a Gupta emperor (possibly identified with Mahasenagupta), became eminent as a ruler of Gauda in the history of Bengal. Bana in his Harsha Charita mentioned him as Gauda-adhipa.<sup>13</sup> During Sasanka's reign the limits of Gauda were not confined within the district of Malda but extended in the South to the border of Orissa. Between 725 A.D. and 735 A.D. Gauda was ruled by Yasovarman of Kanauj. After Yasovarman Gauda came under the Sway of

Muktapida Lalitaditya of Kashmir and his grandson defeated the five Gauda chiefs. According to Taranath the Chandras also extended their Sway to the Gauda region.<sup>14</sup> During the Pala and Sena region Gauda flourished as a city. In the history of Bengal the Pala kings were known as Lords of Gauda. It is well known that after Sasanka's death in Gouda, roughly in Bengal vassal kings became locally independent. As a result lamentable state of anarchy was started, bitterly known as *matsyanyaya*, which paralysed the life of the people. This situation was ultimately removed when Gopala, the founder of the pala dynasty, was raised to the throne of Gauda by the local chieftains. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Pala dynasty was supplanted in North Bengal by Vijayasena of the Senadynasty. Vijayasena raised the status of the senas from the local chiefs of Radh to that of the king of Gauda. The sena ruler Ballal Sena made Gauda his capital and his son Lakshman sena made it the principal seat of his dynasty which took its name Lakshmanawati after his name.<sup>15</sup>

At the end of the twelfth century Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji invaded Bengal and expelled Lakshmanasena and moved the capital from Nadia to Gour. In the early Muhammedan rule of Bengal Gour and Pandua were the two important capitals. Pandua is situated about twenty miles from Gaur, and six miles from Malda. In the year 1353 A.D. Ilias Khwajah Sultan, the first independent king of Bengal, transferred his capital from Gaur to Pandua,<sup>16</sup> where it remained about seventy years. But Jalaluddin transferred it again to Gaur. With this exception Gaur continued inspite of many vicissitudes to be the capital of Viceroys and kings of Bengal till 1564 when Sulaiman Karanani removed the seat of Government to Tanda, a few miles to the South west of Gour. It is to be mentioned that Gaur also came under the Sway of Sher Shah. After the desertion of Sher Shah, Humayun, the Mughal ruler, occupied Gaur and named it Jinnatabad (the heavenly city). In 1575 A.D. Munim Khan, one of Akbar's Generals, after defeating Daud Khan, the last Afghan ruler, occupied Gour. Abdul Fazal mentioned that Gour was an ancient city of Bengal and there was a Sarkar in Bengal Subah having the name Gaur during Akbar's reign. It is found that during the Mughal regime frequent

disturbances and revolts occurred in Gaur and the Mughal authority strongly suppressed the revolts. During the reign of Akbar Mansingha's grandson Mahasingh fought against a rebel of Jalal Khan who had been looting Malda. The district of Malda came into prominence once during Islam Khan's viceroyalty, approximately in 1611 A.D. when Ali Akbar, a petty Mansabdar of Malda suddenly rose in revolt. During Islamkhan's viceroyalty, the seat of Government was transferred to Dacca about 1612. This shifting of Capital to Dacca naturally left Malda in comparative obscurity. It is found that during the reign of Aurangzeb Gaur formed a part of the Jaagir of Saista Khan. But in 1660 Mirjumla, the first Governor appointed by Aurangzeb again transferred the capital to Dacca. With this shifting of capital Gaur lost its position as a centre of political glory of Bengal which she had enjoyed for several centuries. The geographical factor, the change of the course of the Ganges, also sealed the fate of Gaur.

Thus, it is found that under the Hindus and Muslim rule from ancient to medieval period Gaur, which is a part of present Malda district, enjoyed a prominent position and even rose to the status of a metropolitan city. At one time this place was known as Gauda, there after it came into prominence with the name of Lakshnauti, apparently after Lakshmanasena of the sena dynasty. During the time of Muhammedan rule it was the usual practice that Gauda was spelt as Gaur. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Gaur covered an area of approximately 20 square miles and was fortified with a rampart and a moat 150 feet wide. During the Mughal rule Gaur formed an important political and administrative unit. From a reference of the Ain-i-Akbari it revealed that one Quazi Yakub was appointed as the district Quazi at Gour.<sup>17</sup> But Gour did not merely enjoy an eminent political and administrative position, it was also an important centre of trade and commerce, and used to be visited by Arabs, Abyssinians, Afghans, Portuguese and Chinese.<sup>18</sup>

The ruins of the city of Gaudapura is now situated partly in Rajshahi district and partly in present old Malda of Malda district of West

Bengal. The earliest reference to a place named Malda is found in nine inscriptions of Husaini epoch bearing the names of kings of this dynasty and ranging in date from 899 to 938 A.H. (1493 A.D. to 1531 A.D.).<sup>19</sup> Malda is situated at the confluence of the river Kalindri. With the river Mahananda and the city is also mentioned in *Ain-i-Akbari*.<sup>20</sup> But the origin of the name Malda has been the subject of considerable speculation among the scholars. According to one tradition the name of Malda came into existence after the Muslim Conquest of Bengal. The word Mal in Arabic means Wealth and the name Malda probably signifies that during the Muhammedan period it was an important centre of trade, through which great wealth changed hands.<sup>21</sup> According to another tradition, Malda signified a place of wealth, but it is a Persian word. The name of the town probably drew its origin from being the port of Peruya when it was the capital of Bengal, and became afterwards celebrated for its manufactures.<sup>22</sup> There is also a third tradition which mentioned that an old woman brought up the entire stock of mercury of a merchant who had come to the place to trade and who had been unable to dispose of his goods (Mal). Her wealth was such that she was able to spend all her purchase in clearing on tank called "Parapukur" (mercury tank) to that day and thus gave the place the name Malda or place of wealth.<sup>23</sup> Thus from these traditions it is clear that the place Malda got eminence from its existence as a place of trade. It is found that one Richard Edwards was sent by the English East India Company in October, 1676 to Malda for ascertaining the prospects of trade at that place. In December, 1676 A.D. Edward sent a report in detail of the market prices of different commodities and transportation facilities of Malda and the report was well accepted by the authorities of the East Indian Company. Consequently the British connection with Malda began with the establishment of a factory in 1680 A.D. It is to be mentioned that when East India Company by establishing a factory in 1680 A.D. entered the economic venture of Malda, it was a part of the personal jagir of Shaista Khan. In 1696 A.D., Rahim Khan, the leader of the Orissa Afghans, occupied Malda. But

nothing of importance seems to have occurred in Malda during the time of Rahim Khan's occupation of the town.

After the battle of Plassey the Supreme power in Bengal passed into the hands of the British. In 1765 A.D., the East India Company obtained the Grant of Diwani i.e. the right to collect the revenues of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and Malda now came under the direct administration of the East India Company. The Commercial Resident of the Malda Factory was entrusted with the duty of collecting revenue from the surrounding areas. In 1771 the East India Company established a fortified Commercial Residency at English Bazar. Before the formation of the district, Malda was a part of Dinajpur district (undivided Dinajpur). Thus the revenue administration was carried on under the superintendence of the provincial council of Dinajpur. In 1780 the system of administration of civil justice was revised. According to the revised civil justice Moffassil Diwani Adalats were established in different places of Bengal and Bihar. Malda was included in the jurisdiction of the Sadar Diwani Adalat of Tajpur of Dinajpur district (undivided Dinajpur). In 1813 the district of Malda came into existence. The district was formed consisting of the eight thanas or police stations carved out from different districts namely Seebgunge (Shibganj), Kullea Chuk (Kaliachak), Bholahat and Gurgureebath from Purnea district, Malda, Bamongola from Dinajpur district (undivided) and Rahanpur, Chappue from Rajshahi district.

Thus, the district formed then, was infact, carved out of the districts of Rajshahi, Murshidabad, Purnea and Dinajpur. This newly formed district was included in Bhagalpur Division and was placed under the charge of a joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector. Mr. Braddon was entrusted with the task to perform as a joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector of the said Division. In 1859, the charge of the district was given to a Magistrate for the first time. It was in 1875 for the first time the district boundary was notified. In 1879, a total of 65 villages from Murshidabad and 237 villages from Dinajpur were transferred for annexation to this new district. In 1905 Malda district was transferred

from the Bhagalpur Division to the Rajshahi Division. In 1912, when the partition of Bengal was annulled, the district was included in the Rajshahi Division and remained within that Division till Partition of India (15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947). But the jurisdiction of the district was not clear and on the 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, Cyril Radcliffe declared that the district will be partitioned and the thanas of Sibganj, Nawabganj, Bholahat, Nachol and Gomastapur would be transferred to Pakistan (Bangladesh); again in 1950, the boundaries of the district were slightly modified.<sup>24</sup>

Besides the great political admirable position, Malda had an important location significance also. The district of Malda situated between 20°30' and 25°32'30" north latitude and 87°48' and 88°33'30" east longitude. There are no mountains or even hills in the District. The whole area of Malda is flat in character and the lands are very fertile, according to the level of the land.<sup>25</sup> The district is classed as partly riverine and from the earliest times the rivers have been the most important means of communication. There are four important rivers, the Ganges, the Mahananda, the Kalindri and Punarbhaba which are navigable throughout the year. Buchanan Hamilton stated that the district is everywhere intersected by rivers. The Ganges and Mahananda river system determined the morphology and growth of the town. Geographically, the chief determining factor of the town's morphology was the river Mahananda and this river was the main artery of the town. Besides Mahananda the other rivers of Malda also determined the development of the district. Fergusson ascribed that, the Koshi which fell into the Ganges near Bhagalpur used to flow through North Bengal. The Kosi, therefore, might have contributed to the building up of the southern portion of North Bengal.<sup>26</sup> Again Fergusson hints at the possibility of the Brahmaputra flowing through North Bengal once before i.e. before it travelled eastward through Mymensingh district to meet the Meghna. The hypothesis of Fergusson is probably correct and the Brahmaputra must have contributed to the building up of North Bengal even in the olden days and not only since its last diversion through the Jamuna which occurred only comparatively recently. Before the diversion the Tista also

used to discharge her waters through the Purnabhava (a tributary of river Mahananda), the Atreyi and the Karotoya which used to fall into the Ganges. The Ganges and Mahananda enriched the country each year by deposits of mud that were left by the inundations of the Mahananda and the Ganges. Besides the deposition of mud, the large number of spill and drainage channels which intersect Malda were, in consequence, allowed to continue their beneficial activities and the area was healthy and prosperous. Thus it is found that the unique geographical location in the fork of the Ganga-Mahananda was determined to the development of Malda and its economy.

The early history of Dinajpur (undivided) rests on a number of vague traditions and legends. But from the discovery of several seals reveals that Dinajpur (undivided) was a part of the kingdom of Pundravardhana or Pundranagar. In ancient time the area of our study i.e. Indian portion of Dinajpur was also a part of the Pundravardhan which was ruled by the Pundras. The Sabhaparvan of Mahabharata, the Ramayana and even Patanjali in his Mahabhashya mentioned the Pundras.<sup>27</sup> The Maurya seal proves that this tract formed a part of the Maurya Empire. In this context it is to be mentioned that from the seal which was discovered in 1931 within the ruins of Mahasthangarh established the fact that Pundravardhana or Mahasthangarh was a centre of Buddhism in the Maurya period. Further, in 1937-41 a few clay seals found during excavations at Bangarh (now in South Dinajpur), may be assigned to the Maurya period. In addition to these it is to be noted that some terra-cotta figurines of the Sunga period and gold coin of the Kashana period have also been discovered at Bangarh; which proved that there was a good relation during the reigns of the Sungas and Kushanas with Pundravardhana. The discovery of a number of inscriptions of the Gupta and later Gupta periods bears ample testimony that Dinajpur (Indian Portion of Dinajpur) was a part of the province of "Pundravardhana Bhukti" of Gupta Empire. One of the copper plates was found in the village Baigram near Hili (now in South Dinajpur district). The name of 'Devkote' is inscribed on this copper plate, which



situated in the Gangarampur police station of present South Dinajpur District. Besides these, several inscriptions also discovered in different parts of Dinajpur (undivided) and other parts of North Bengal that North Bengal formed a part of the Gupta Empire during the reign of Kumaragupta-I, Buddhagupta and their successors. The reign of Pala and Sena kings occupies a glorious chapter in this region also. During Pala and Sena rule Dinajpur (undivided) formed principal part of the kingdom. The inscription of the Tapandighi Copper plate proves that Dinajpur (Indian portion of Dinajpur) was also under the kingdom of Senakings.<sup>28</sup> In this context it is to be noted that Mahipala-I was a great king among the Palas in the sense that he restored the fallen fortunes of his house and re-established the Pala power. The tank Mahipaldighi in Bangshihari (now in South Dinajpur) Police Station and the Pargana of Mahinagar were probably named after his name. Ramapala was another important ruler of Paladynasty who is said to have established the city of Ramavati. During the reign of Ramapala all the rulers of Pala dynasty maintained their administration from this city. It is believed that the location of this city was in the present Itahar thana of North Dinajpur of West Bengal.<sup>29</sup> Vijayasena, Vallasena and Lakshmanasena were the sena kings who ruled over the Indian portion of the Northern part of Bengal between the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It is to be mentioned that Pundravardhana-bhukti formed a part of the Sena kingdom in Bengal, but the area of the Pundravardhana-bhukti was bigger than that of the pala dynasty. It is found that at the time of Lakshmanasena, Pundravardhana bhukti included almost the whole of Northern parts of Bengal and Eastern Bengal upto Chittagong and the districts of the presidency Division situated to the south of the Padma. However, the rule of the Senas over this tract was rather short lived as the Sena Kingdom was replaced by the Muslim kingdom founded by Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji in approximately 1201 A.D.

From 13<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. to the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Dinajpur (undivided) was under the Afghan and Mughal authority. Bakhtyar Khalji was murdered by one of his general named Ali Mardan Khalji, who

occupied 'Devkot' (Bangarh) very soon and became the viceroy of Lakhnawati. But Ali Mardan's reign was, however short lived as he was assassinated in 1213 A.D. It was Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din after taking the power transferred the seat of Government from 'Devkot' (Bangarh) to Gour. With the transfer of Capital to Gour, Dinajpur (undivided) became a part of the kingdom of Gour. But it is to be mentioned that though the seat of Government was transferred, Hemtabad (present North Dinajpur) and its surrounding areas did not form a part of the kingdom of Gour. It belonged to another kingdom, beginning from the immediate west of Hemtabad under a Hindu king named Mahesh Raja.<sup>30</sup> It is also to be noted that at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Ganesh, a Hindu Hakim or Raja of Dinwaj became powerful and seized the power from the Afghans for few years. Raja Ganesh took the title of Danujamardana-deva on his accession to the throne. Thus again Dinajpur (undivided) came under the Sway of Hindu dynasty. However, his son Jadu was converted to Islam and ruled as Jalal-ud-din. But no inscription of Ganesh and his successors have not been discovered as yet. According to Jadunath Sarkar till 1431 A.D. Dinajpur (undivided) was under Ganesh and his successors and this area was again reinstated to the Ilyas Shahi dynasty again. During the reign of Akbar, the great Mughal ruler, Dinajpur (Indian portion) was probably contained within the Sarkars of Tajpur (now in North Dinajpur) and Havelee Pinjara (Portion of Dinajpur now in Bangladesh). But no incident worthy of note appease to have taken place in Dinajpur (Indian portion) during the long period of about two hundred years, during which Bengal remained under the Sway of the Mughals. One thing is to be mentioned that during the reign of Akbar the first authentic traces of the great Zamindari system was found in Dinajpur (undivided) and during the next two centuries under the Mughal the history of the undivided Dinajpur was closely intermingled with this Zamindari system.

In 1765 the British East India Company obtained the Diwani of Bengal, consequently Dinajpur (undivided) came under the British administration. But the acquisition of the Diwani by the East India

Company did not bring about any major change in the administrative machinery. The Zamindari system was continued and a committee of revenue was formed by the East India Company. In 1773, the court of Directors ordered to withdraw the English collectors and it was decided that each district was to be superintended by a Diwan, or Aumil except such as had been let entire to the Zamindars or responsible formers. According to the decision the provincial councils were to correspond with the Governor and Council in the Revenue Department, and the Diwan with Roy Rayan. Thus a provincial council was established at Dinajpur (undivided) which have the charges of the Dinajpur, Silberries, Purnea, Rangpur, Edrackpur, Baharbund, Cooch Behar and Rangamati. In 1786 Dinajpur (undivided) district was formed.<sup>31</sup>

After the formation of the District, Dinajpur (undivided) has undergone several changes in its boundary. It is mentioned in the Major Rennells map that Dinajpur was a large estate under the control of the Raja of Dinajpur, with an area of three to four thousand sq. miles or eight to ten thousand sq. km. By the end of 1800 A.D. almost the whole estate of Dinajpur had been alienated and the East India Company took over its management. The representatives in India of the East India Company thought that with the weakening of the power and prestige of the Maharaja of Dinajpur it would become easier for them to strengthen their hold over the region. The boundary of the district was readjusted in accordance with the plan of the Governor General in Council. The district of Dinajpur was included in the Murshidabad Division which consisted of the districts of Bhagalpur and Purnea, Dinajpur, Rangpur and Rajshahi, Birbhum and the city of Murshidabad. In 1905 Dinajpur was included in the new district of Assam according to the India's new scheme of partition of Bengal into two parts. In 1912 it became again a district of Bengal. During the time of Maharaja Jagadishnath, the district of Dinajpur was divided into two in accordance with the Radcliffe Award (15<sup>th</sup> August 1947). By the Racliffe Award major portion of the district, representing the Western portion of Dinajpur and having been sliced off the original district of Dinajpur, came to be known as "West Dinajpur", became a part

of Independent India of West Bengal. Within a decade according to the transfer of Territory Act in 1956, some areas from Purnea district of Bihar were annexed to West Dinajpur. The territory thus acquired formed a new sub-division in the name of Islampur. On 20<sup>th</sup> march 1959 the tract lying north of the river Mahananda was transferred to the district of Darjeeling. But the newly formed West Dinajpur district was rather peculiar in shape. From North to South it is a long tract covering approximately two hundred fifty km. and its width is between sixteen km. and fifty six km. Thus, due to administrative convenience the district of west Dinajpur was further divided into two halves i.e. North Dinajpur district and South Dinajpur district since April 1992.

The district of Dinajpur lies between 24<sup>o</sup>55' and 26<sup>o</sup>23' North latitude, 88<sup>o</sup>2' and 89<sup>o</sup>19' East longitude. On the north-east the district is bounded by Jalpaiguri and by Purnea on the north-west and west; on the east by Rangpur and by Bogra on the South east; on the south by Rajshahi and by Malda on the south-west. The country is flat which is situated in the Gangetic plain between Himalayas and the Ganges, consisting of very fertile soil. Several rivers flowing through this tract had linked with the Ganges and several river marts emerged basing on different rivers. River Nagar formed its natural boundary on the Purnea and river Karotoya separated the district from Rangpur. Bulk of the commerce of the tract was carried by several rivers flowing through this tract and considerable cultivation of different crops, especially rice cultivation was the general features of the economy of Dinajpur (undivided).

The area which is known as Darjeeling, previously was a part of the dominions of the Raja of Sikkim. The area which is under the Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling district, formerly being a part of Sikkim also, was occupied by Bhutan in 1706. At that time the relation the Raja of Sikkim and Nepal was also strained. In 1780 the Gurkhas of Nepal occupied the power of Nepal and invaded Sikkim. Within thirty years the Gurkhas overran Sikkim and annexed Terai. In the meantime war broke-

out between British India and Nepal concluded by the treaty of Titaliya (1817). According to this treaty Nepal handed over the occupied area of Sikkim to the British India. But the British Government handed over the whole tract of land between the rivers Mechi and Tista to the Raja of Sikkim and accepted his sovereignty over the tract. As the British Government reinstated the lost area of Sikkim to the ruler of Sikkim, a friendly relation was made between the British India and the Raja of Sikkim.

Ten years after the signing of the treaty of Titaliya frontier disputes again started between Nepal and Sikkim and the disputes were referred to the British Governor General. Consequently, in 1829 Captain Lloyd and Mr. Grant went to Sikkim to deal with the disputes. Lloyd, during his visit to the area was attracted by the advantages of Darjeeling as a site for a sanatorium. He reported it to the Governor General Lord William Bentinck. As a result Lloyd was directed to make friendship with the Raja of Sikkim. Thus, on the 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1835, a grant was obtained from the Raja of Sikkim, presenting the whole tract lying south to the Great Rangit river, to the British. The grant was worded as follows:- "The Governor General, having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of his government, suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, I, the Sikkim puttee Rajah, out of friendship for the said Governor General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, that is all the land south of the Great Rangit river, East of the Balason, Kahail and Little Rangit rivers and west of Rungno and Mahanadi rivers."<sup>32</sup>

In spite of that the friendly relation between British India and Sikkim gradually deteriorated. The increasing development of Darjeeling was the main cause for it. The increasing importance of Darjeeling under free institutions was a source of loss and frustration to the Lamas and leading men of Sikkim who had a great share in the monopoly of all trade in Sikkim.<sup>33</sup> Within ten years progress of development was rapid in

Darjeeling. A road was constructed from Pankhabari (old Military road). Besides the construction of road, hotels, bungalows and houses were erected. However, the rest of the ceded areas were still under forests and practically uninhabited. But the British Government in 1841 granted the Raja an allowance of Rs.3,000 per annum as compensation which was raised in 1846 to Rs.6,000 per annum. However, disturbance was going on due to internal rebellion led by Lamas and other leading men of Sikkim and Kidnapping was going on frequently. In November 1849, on their way to Sikkim Sir Joseph Hooker and Dr. Campbell were kidnapped, though were unconditionally released after about a month (on the 24<sup>th</sup> December 1849). Following this incident an expedition was made to Sikkim in 1850, resulting in the accession of some portion of the hill tracts of Sikkim and the Terai (Morang). With the annexation of the Terai and the portion of the Sikkim Hills bounded by the Ramman and the Great Rangit rivers on the north, by the Tista on the east and by the Nepal frontier on the West. Now the area of 640 sq. miles or 1657.60 sq. km. was attached to Darjeeling. The whole area of Terai and hill territory was now handed over to the Deputy Commissioner.

The annexation of Terai brought about significant change in the relations between Sikkim and the British India. Before this annexation, Darjeeling was within the territory of Sikkim and to enter Darjeeling the British had to take permission from the Raja of Sikkim. But after this annexation the British territory in Darjeeling was connected with the British districts of Purnea and Rangpur in the plains and the Sikkim Raja was cut off from access to the plains except through British territory. However, the relations with Sikkim was not deteriorated, but raids on British territory was carried on by the Sikkimese. In 1860 when Dr. Campbell tried to cross the Ramman was attacked and forced to fall back on Darjeeling. Thus Sir Ashley Eden was sent with a force of 2,600 men. Eden with his force entered Tumlong, the capital of Sikkim and finally it put on end to frontier troubles with Sikkim (28<sup>th</sup> March, 1861). Eden secured full freedom for commerce throughout the Sikkim border. It is to be mentioned in this context that though the frontier disputes came to an

end with Sikkim, but the trouble was not over with Bhutan. Along their long frontier with India, the Bhutanese were responsible for a series of incursions in which property was plundered, lives taken and many innocent persons carried off into captivity. In 1862 it was informed that Bhutanese were preparing to make an attack on Darjeeling. Thus very quickly troops were sent from Dinajpur to restore confidence. This was followed in 1863 by the despatch of a special Mission under Sir Ashley Eden to Bhutan to settle differences and obtain the restoration of plundered property. But the Mission failed as Eden was treated with indignity. After that event negotiations continued fruitlessly and the Government of India decided to annex the Bengal Duars and such hill territory to prevent Bhutanese incursions into Darjeeling. In 1864 expeditions were sent into Bhutan and in November 1865, a treaty was signed by which Bhutanese incursions into Darjeeling was stopped and the Bhutanese hills were ceded to the British for an annual subsidy of Rs.50000.<sup>34</sup> What is now the Kalimpong sub-division was acquired from Bhutan as a result of the Anglo-Bhutanese War (1864-65) and included with Darjeeling. The inclusion of Kalimpong to Darjeeling gave birth to the Darjeeling district in 1866.

During the time of the formation of Darjeeling district the headquarters of the Deputy Magistrate of the Terai was at Hanskhawa near present Phansidewa. In 1880 it was transferred to Siliguri, a piece of land measuring 62.72 acres acquired from the Pargana Baikunthapur of Jalpaiguri district. In the meantime Kurseong had begun to develop and in 1891 it was made the headquarters of a new sub-division. Both the Terai and the lower hills west of the river Tista were included in this new subdivision. In 1907 Siliguri was made a subdivision and thus re-establishing the Terai Subdivision. In 1917 the Kalimpong sub division was created. The newly formed Darjeeling district was included in the Rajshahi division and remained within this division till the partition of India, except a little break for few years from 1905 to 1911.<sup>35</sup>

After the formation of the District, Darjeeling was declared a non-Regulation district i.e. general rules and laws were not to be applicable in this district. Thus Darjeeling had no representative in the Legislative Council constituted under the Government of India Act 1919. This district was also declared a backward tract. Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the district was made a partially excluded area. On 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947 the district with the rest of India, attained independence as a part of India and got recognition of a district within Jalpaiguri Division of West Bengal State.

The district of Darjeeling is the northern most district of North Bengal lying between 26°31' and 27°13' north latitude and between 87°59' and 88°53' east longitude. The district is hemmed in international frontiers. On the west the district is bounded by Nepal and to the north the district is bounded by Sikkim. On the south the district is bounded by Jalpaiguri district and Bhutan and on the east to the village of Phansidewa on the Mahanadi River (Mahananda) and westward of Phansidewa by the Purnea district of Bihar. Of all the frontier districts of India, the boundary of Darjeeling is most complicated and the area of the district is not marked by any natural features as a region complete in itself. The district consists of a portion of the outlying hills of the lower Himalayas and stretch of territory lying along the base of the hills known as the Terai or plains. The upper portion of Terai i.e. nearest the hills was mostly covered with forests and jungle. It consists of alternating beds of sand, gravel and boulders brought down by numerous rivers and streams flowing out of the hills. J.D. Hooker in his "Himalayan Journal" defined the Terai as the region of forests trees and the soil is preferred for sal tree, the most valuable of Indian timber.<sup>36</sup> The soil of this area was very fertile and the Meches and Dhimals the two tribes chiefly inhabited in this portion connected with shifting cultivation. In comparison to upper terai, the lower terai was more open and cleared which had also a very fertile soil. In this portion Koch tribe, Rajbansi and Bengalee settled down permanently in connection with agriculture. But the hill portion of the district is a confused labyrinth of ridges and narrow valleys. Hills and

valleys were covered in many places with dense forests. These were the geographical features of Darjeeling.

Jalpaiguri had no existence as an administrative unit till 1869. By the amalgamation of the Western Duars with the Jalpaiguri sub-division of Rangpur district, Jalpaiguri district was formed in 1869. But before the formation of the district, the area was neither a unified politico-administrative unit nor a well-defined economic zone. As most parts of the area were outside the centralizing influence of the Mughal state and its successors in Bengal, there is a singular absence of written official documents relating to the area. The lack of interest of the earlier powers was because a greater part of the area was covered with dense forests and was inhabited by indigenous peoples like Mech, Garo, Rava etc. But it would not be correct to say that the entire area was unaffected by the impact of the British power since the battle of Pallesy. After the Grant of Diwani (1765) many parts of Jalpaiguri were well under the direct rule of the agents of the East India Company, while in the other parts interventionist and restrictive nature of Company's rule was evident.

At one stage Jalpaiguri formed a part of the kingdom of Pragjotishpur of Kamarup, extended as far as the Karotoya river in the west. This dynasty fell before an invasion by Husain Shah, the Afghan Governor of Bengal who ruled from 1497-1521 A.D. In the early part of 16<sup>th</sup> century Jalpaiguri was known as Baikunthpur or Battirishhazari, situated between the Teesta and Mahananda rivers and was direct paramountcy of Koch king founded by Visha Sinha. But the big Koch kingdom soon fell into decay and the Mughals acquired the whole of the territory of Koch kingdom in 1603. At that time a fierce struggle then took place for possession of the two parganas of Patgram and Boda which were ultimately ceded to the Mughals, though they were framed out to a cousin of the Raja of Cooch Behar who held them on his behalf. Under the Mughal rule, these conquests were included in the frontier of Zamindari of Fakirdundi or Rangpur and were transferred to the East

India Company with the Grant of Diwani to it in 1765.<sup>37</sup> Thus Jalpaiguri came under the direct administration of the British.

Jalpaiguri was a part of British Rangpur since the East India Company was granted the Diwani of Bengal. To the north-east of this region lay the area that later came to be known as the western or the Bengal Duars. This Western Duars or Bengal Duars was bounded by Darjeeling and Bhutan in the North, Sankos river and Goalpara district of the province of Assam in the East, native kingdom of Cooch Behar and Pargana Baikunthpur in the South and river Tista in the West.<sup>38</sup> Traditionally the Duars was supposed to have belonged to the kingdom of Cooch Behar, but by the beginning of 1765 it came to be run by the writ of Bhutan, lying to the north. This portion of the Duars is known as Eastern Duars. It extended from Sankos river in the west to Manas river in the East. The western and eastern Duars are jointly known as Bhutan Duars.<sup>39</sup> Besides the Duars, a Chunk of the region lay to the west of the Duars between the river Tista and Mahananda with Bhutan and Sikkim in the north and the district of Rangpur in the south. This was the Baikunthpur Raj of the Raikats, a collateral branch of the rulers of Cooch Behar, reduced to a Zamindari estate after 1793. In the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the fate of Jalpaiguri was destined by the British. For several times the area of Jalpaiguri was to be cut up and distributed again and again among various British districts or territories. This behavioural process started with the commencement of hostility towards Bhutan in 1772 when the Bhutias invaded Cooch Behar which was a dependency of British Bengal. From this time; little intercourse took place until the occupation of Assam by the British in 1826. During that time it was found that the Bhutias had illegally kept several tracts of this region under their control which came to known as Duars or passes.<sup>40</sup> There were such 18 passes or Duars covering a narrow strip of country extending over twenty miles in breadth known as the Athara Duars or eighteen doors. The Bhutanese had access to the plains of Bengal and Assam through these doors. There were eleven such recognised Duars which were situated between Tista and the Manas, bordering on Bengal

frontier and were known as Bengal Duars. Of these eleven Duars five fell in the western Duars.<sup>41</sup> The remaining seven passes were on the frontier of Goalpara and Kamarup district of Assam and were generally called the Assam Duars.<sup>42</sup> The Bhutanese managed to overrun the Bengal Duars dispossessing the Muhammedan rulers but failed to obtain absolute possession of the Assam Duars.

The British in Bengal understood the Bhutanese by their activities were dangerously near the British district of Rangpur. At this juncture the British conceived two things (i) to annex the Bengal Duars from Bhutan and (ii) opening of commercial relation with Tibet and Bhutan. In 1774 a treaty was already concluded between the East India Company and the Bhutan Government. Thus, the company decided not to lay emphasis on total rupture with Bhutan and in this question three missions were sent respectively under Captain Tuner in 1783, Captain Pemberton in 1837 and finally Ashley Eden in 1863. But all these missions proved unsuccessful due to the highhanded behaviour and indignity shown towards the British envoys by the Bhutan Government. Thus when all the efforts to bring peace were failed the British took decision to use force against the Bhutan Government. In June 1864, the British Government addressed letters to the Bhutan Government, permanently annexing Ambari Falakata (Bengal Duars) and declaring the annual payments had ceased for ever (£200 as rent for Ambari Falakata and £1000 as revenue from the Assam Duars) previously made by the British Government to Bhutan. The Deb Raja, in whose name all official communications from Bhutan Government were usually made, paid no respect to these demands made by the British Government. However, a letter was received from Dharmaraja, offering no apologies for the gross insults offered to the British envoy, but proposing to receive a fresh intercession by the British. This action of the Bhutan authorities left no option to the company. Thus on 12 November, 1864 by a proclamation the British Government permanently annexed the Bengal Duars.<sup>43</sup> This annexation of Bengal Duars laid the foundation stone for the formation of modern Jalpaiguri district.

After the annexation of Bengal Duars, the British divided this tract into two parts – Eastern and Western – for administrative reasons. The Eastern Duars were merged with Goalpara district of Assam. The western Duars was divided into three tahsils viz., the Sadar comprising the tract between Tista and Torsa rivers with its headquarters at Mainaguri; the Buxa tahsil extending from river Torsa to the Sankos river with its headquarters at Alipur; and Dalingkot tahsil which includes the mountainous part of the annexed territory.<sup>44</sup> But in 1867, the Dalinkot region (present Kalimpong) was merged into the district of Darjeeling. At the same time they also separated Fakirganj (now Jalpaiguri), Boda, Sanyasikata (now Rajganj) and Patgram from Rangpur and amalgamated them to form the modern District of Jalpaiguri. On 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1869, the Titalya Subdivision was separated from Rangpur and incorporated with the Western Duars to form the district of Jalpaiguri. According to the Act XVI of 1869, the portion of the District which is composed of Thanas Jalpaiguri, Boda, Patgram and Rajganj and a portion of Mainaguri, being regulation, and the other part viz. the Duars, non-regulation the former administrated by the general revenue laws, and the later under a special revenue law of its own.<sup>45</sup> The Deputy Commissioner removed his headquarters from Mainaguri to Jalpaiguri town and the district was subdivided into two subdivisions- (i) the Sadar, which included the former Titalya subdivision and the part of Western Duars, lies between the Tista and Jaldhaka rivers and (ii) the Falakata subdivision comprising the rest of the Buxa subdivision. In 1874-75 Patgram was attached to the Sadar subdivision and since this change the Jalpaiguri district remained unaltered till the “Radcliffe Award”. Due to the partition of India the southern police station of Titalya, Pachagarh, Boda, Debiganj and Patgram, comprising a total area of 672 sq. miles, became part of Pakistan (now in Bangladesh). The present day district of Jalpaiguri thus consist of the old Baikunthpur Estate and the Western Duars. According to the Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1954, the Zamindari of the Baikunthpur Estate was abolished and Jalpaiguri became a district of West Bengal within Jalpaiguri Division.<sup>46</sup>

The district of Jalpaiguri lies between 26°0' and 27°0' north latitude, and between 88°20' and 89°53' east longitude. The greater part of the district is covered by fertile soil. The district is bounded on the north by the district of Darjeeling and the independent state of Bhutan, on the south by Rangpur and the state of Cooch Behar, on the west by Darjeeling, Purnea and Dinajpur and on the east by the Eastern Duars. Topographically, this district has two distinct parts the upper portion was sub-mountain tract of some ten to fifteen miles in width from the Bhutan Hills downward. The lower part was plain lands and was comparably habitable. In the uplands to the north of the Duars the soil is practically well suited to the growth of the tea plant. Near the northern boundary line of the western Duars there is only mountainous tract known as Buxa. Nearer to the Buxa hills there are dense and extensive tracts of sal and other tree forests. In addition to this there is also a valuable and extensive sal forest, comprising an area of about fifty or sixty square miles which is situated about twelve miles north of Jalpaiguri town, came to be known as Baikunthpur jungle. Thus it is found that the Regulation Area was predominantly rural where a great deal of cultivation carried on, but in the western Duars most of the part is covered with jungle and wastelands.

The name of Cooch Behar means 'the abode of the Koches', the latter meaning a tribe. The king of Cooch Behar probably belonged to the non-Aryan tribe of Koch, presumed to be of Tibetan or Dravidian Origin. In the early times the territory of Cooch Behar was a part of Pragjyotishpur or, as it was afterwards called Kamarup. The name of Pragjyotishpur is mentioned in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Vishnupurana and the Harivamsa, however, there is no mention of Kamarup in any of these works. The earliest recorded king of Kamarup was named Mahiranga Denava who is regarded to have been the first king of the country and was succeeded by three kings. After them, Pragjyotishpura seems to have been occupied by a race of Kiratas. The expulsion of the Kiratas marks an epoch which by the settlement of a colony of Brahmans and other high caste Hindus in Pragjyotishpura. Bhaskar Barman was an important ruler of Kamarup who occupied the

throne of Kamarup in 639 A.D. After the Gupta and the Pala rule the country was overrun by the Koch, Mech, Garo and Bhot tribes. At this juncture the condition was favourable for the rise of upstarts and a person of humble birth somehow acquired power and proclaimed himself king and assumed the name Niladhvaja who founded Kamtapur as his capital. Nilambara, the last king of Niladhvaja house was a mighty ruler. But during his rule Kamtapur was conquered by the Muslim in 1498 A.D. However, the Muslim could not keep the Kamta Kingdom for long.

After the expulsion of the Muslim the Kamta Kingdom was engulfed in anarchy. The Koch chiefs were in the meantime gradually rising into power. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Koches under Vishva Sinha founded an empire which was extended from Darrang in the Upper valley of the Brahmaputra to the boundary of the Purnea district. Under Vishva Sinha the government began to be systematically administered. As a powerful ruler Vishva Sinha demanded tribute from the Deva and Dharma Rajas of Bhutan and in this question a war followed by which Vishva Sinha conquered the country upto the foot of the hills. Thus Deva Raja of Bhutan made a treaty with him, acknowledging his supremacy and agreeing to annual tribute as well as to help Vishva Sinha with troops in time of war and to administer the affairs of Bhutan under his orders. On the retirement of Maharaja Vishva Sinha Naranarayan became king who defeated the Governor of Gour and the country as far as the Ganges was conquered. During the time of Maharaja Naranarayan, Cooch Behar was an extensive kingdom. It comprised, in addition to the little state of Cooch Behar of the present day, almost the whole of Northern Bengal, Bhutan and Assam, as well as the modern states of Kachar, Jaintia, Manipur and Tipperah and extended upto the coast of the Bay of Bengal. Naranarayan was decidedly the most powerful of the kings of the large extent of the country which once formed the ancient Hindu Kingdom of Kamarupa. In this context it is to be mentioned that though Cooch Behar was a part of the ancient kingdom of Kamarup, there was no separate existence of Cooch Behar prior to the division of the Kingdom between the two

brothers, king Naranarayan and Sukladhvaja, the latter known as Chila Roy, in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>47</sup>

Naranarayan was the last Koch king of Kamrup. After Naranarayan his son Lakshminarayan succeeded to the throne who professed himself a vassal of the Mughal Empire. During his reign Ali Kooli Khan (Shere Afghan), one of the generals of Akbar, the great Mughal emperor, conquered Gour and other countries in the West of the Cooch Behar Kingdom. At that time the extent of the country was bounded on the east by the river Brahmaputra; on the south by Ghoraghat; on the west by Tirhoot; and on the north by the mountains of Thibet and Assam. Though there were frequent attack by the Muslim the independent Koch Kingdom of the western Kamarup remained upto 1714 A.D.

Maharaja Upendra Narayan was the first independent king of Cooch Behar who ascended the throne in 1714 A.D. He was not a powerful ruler and during his reign Bhutias gradually extended their conquest to the plains. From his time Bhutan's domination over Cooch Behar continued even till the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

As the Bhutias gradually became very powerful, they extended their authority over the state. Once getting unrivalled access into Cooch Behar, Bhutan did not lose any time in establishing her supremacy over the state, and by 1765 her representative assumed power of authority over the whole territory. During this time the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was conferred on the East India Company by Shah Alam, Emperor of Delhi. Thus the intercourse between British India and Bhutan started on the issue of the state of Cooch Behar State. The Bhutias began to extend their authority and came down in force after the death of Rajendranarayan in 1772. The whole country came under the occupation of the Bhutia. The Bhutia general Jimpe, had a fortification thrown around the palace in the town of Cooch Behar, and occupied it with a strong Bhutia force. In that critical situation Khagendranarayan, Nazir of Cooch Behar state approached British help against the Bhutanese raids. The East India Company was watching with concern the growing power of

the Bhutias close to their borders. The East India Company took this opportunity, and an expedition was sent under Captain Jones who persuaded the Bhutanese through the Duars into the hills. On 5<sup>th</sup> April 1773 a treaty was signed between the East India Company and Dharendranarayan, the ruler of Cooch Behar. This treaty ensured the ruler of Cooch Behar to assist him against his enemies if necessary as against Rs.50000/- as the ruler would acknowledge subjection to the Will of the Company to be annexed to the province of Bengal.<sup>48</sup> Thus by virtue of this treaty Cooch Behar became a feudatory state of the British and at the time of crisis British Commissioners were sent to help the ruler of Cooch Behar in 1802 and in 1805, 1813 and in 1817.<sup>49</sup>

After this teaty, war broke out between the British and Bhutan which continued for more than a year. In this war Bhutan was defeated and at this an appeal came from Dalai Lama of Tibet to the British Government and a treaty was signed between the British, the king of Bhutan and Darpa Deo Raikot, the Zamindar of Batrishjhari or Baikunthapur on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1774. Darpa Deo was involved in this treaty because he joined with the king of Bhutan during the war. After this, Darpa Deo was compelled to pay Rs.10,000/- to the British as annual revenue.

According to the above contract the king of Bhutan was compelled to release king Dhairjendra Narayan and his brother and other captives along with various presents. Bhutan, however, was not satisfied with the terms and conditions of the treaty and it continued raids on Baikunthapur, forming a part of the Cooch Behar State. To this the British kept their eyes closed while, at the same time, for obtaining a direct access to Tibet via Bhutan, they ceded Baikunthapur as well as another tract of land of Cooch Behar to Bhutan in 1779 which remained in their possession for the following 86 years. In 1789 Henry Douglas was appointed British Commissioner for Cooch Behar and he introduced administrative procedures to be followed properly and regularly in the

state. By this way the state of Cooch Behar came into direct contract with the British administration.

Though smooth administrative system was introduced in Cooch Behar by the British, however, the Bhutanese disturbance over Cooch Behar was not stopped. In this context it is to be mentioned that after the conclusion of the first Anglo-Bhutan War (1774), the British Government had to make over all these Taluks to Bhutan with a view to secure peace with the government. But when Nazir Deo without understanding the obligation of the said treaty, sought to recover possession of the lands so lost to the state, this led to a dispute with Bhutan. However, this dispute was over come with British mediation and down to 1788 Bhutan had no complaint against Cooch Behar. But Cooch Behar had never willingly parted with the land which were ceded by the British in favour of Bhutan in 1799. Thus the old boundary dispute now again arose in 1801 and finally the Maharaja succeeded in recovering the greater portion of the lands which had previously been alienated from Cooch Behar. In December a brawl took place between Cooch Behar and Bhutan which was settled by the transferred of land as far as Bhagamalli, an old road passing through Tengnamari from east to west, from Bhutan to Cooch Behar. But the Bhutias, however, did not give up possession of the land, and furthermore committed encroachment upon Cooch Behar. The Bhutias made encroachment upon Cooch Behar in 1811, 1817, and in 1832. These frequent attacks upon Cooch Behar by the Bhutias was dangerous to the British. Further, the British observed that the Bhutias had illegally occupied several tracts of land at the foot of the hills and for this Bhutan agreed to pay tribute to the British Government. But the Bhutias did not pay the tribute regularly. On the other hand, they entered into the Indian territory and committed depredations. Thus in 1863, Mr. Ashley Eden was sent to Bhutan to make a contract against these outrages. But he failed to make a favourable contract. It is also to be note that at that time Tongsa Panto came into power in Bhutan who made Cooch Behar kings into mere puppets. On Mr. Eden's return Ambari Falakata taluk (the Bengal Duars) was annexed to British territory in

India. In the following year Bhutan made an abortive attempt at recovering the area, but finally was forced into a treaty (Sinchula Treaty, 1865). According to the terms of the treaty the rectangular area situated in the middle of the tri-junction of Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet in the north, the Rangpur district with Ambari Falakata taluk and the area between Cooch Behar and the Kamrup district of Assam were annexed to British territory.

The direct contract of British administration made the ruler of Cooch Behar as feudatory chiefs of East India Company. In 1800 the East India Company stopped the coining of Narayani rupee, which was a symbol of supremacy of the ruler of Cooch Behar.<sup>50</sup> In this context it is to be mentioned that the Narayani rupee was one of the oldest coins of India which formed the coinage of ancient Kamarup, the kingdom of the Koch family. These coins were current in Assam, Bhutan and the neighbouring countries. In 1803, the British Government wanted to introduce in Cooch Behar the system of law and justice, but it was abandoned owing to the strong opposition by the then Maharaja of Cooch Behar. The British Commissioners, however, did something to improve the condition of the police in the country. In 1805 there were two Thanas in the state, one at Atharabenki, south of Dinhata, and the other at Mekhliganj. In the following year a third was also established near Balarampur. It was with the accession of Nipendranarayan to the throne (1863-1911) created the administrative machinery of the state on the model of a British district.<sup>51</sup> During the reign of Nipendranarayan in 1893 the Cooch Behar state Railway was opened for traffic. Nipendranarayan was succeeded by Rajarajendranarayan who ruled only for two years. After the death of Rajarajendranarayan in 1913 Jitendranarayan became the ruler of Cooch Behar who was succeeded by Jagaddipendranarayan. Jagaddipendranarayan was the last Maharaja of Cooch Behar. After India got independence, on September 12, 1949, he signed the Instrument of Accession by which the state of Cooch Behar was transferred to India. By this transformation Cooch Behar State became a district of West Bengal under Jalpaiguri division.

The state of Cooch Behar lies between 25°57'40" and 26°32'20", north latitude, and between 88°47'40" and 89°54'35", east longitude. Geographically, the state of Cooch Behar was formed a part of the lower Provinces of Bengal, situated in the north east corner. The tract of the country lying between the foot of the hills, and its northern frontier being the western Duars or the eastern part of the district of Jalpaiguri; on the east by the Guma Duars, and Pargana Ghurla of the Assam District of Goalpara, and Parganas Gaibari and Bhitambar of Rangpur; on the south by Chakla Purvabhag, and Parganas Kakina and Kazirhat in the district of Rangpur, and Pargana Patgram in the district of Jalpaiguri; Pargana Kazirhat of Rangpur, and Chakla Boda in Jalpaiguri on the west. Several rivers Tista, Torsa, Gadadhar, Sankos, Jaldhaka, Kaljani, Dahrla flows through the state. The country is level and open, undiversified by hills or any large sheet of water. Generally the soil of Cooch Behar is very fertile and especially the eastern portion of the state richest and greatest fertile tract is situated. During the greater part of the year the climate of Cooch Behar is full of moisture. The land i.e. the soil and the climate is suitable for tobacco cultivation.

Thus, it is found that every district of North Bengal coming into its present shape has a history behind its creation. The historical evolution of the districts has given rise to the region of 'North Bengal'. This 'North Bengal' region has also a contrasting geographical picture in its land, climate, soil and rivers. In the southern portion of North Bengal, it is found that this part is flat, very fertile soil and rivers were suitable for navigation, while in the northern parts of North Bengal contained hills, down slopes, foothills and major parts of the tract covered with dense forests. These geographical variations determined the differences in economy and diversified settlement character of North Bengal.

Hence, as a whole it is found that for our present study North Bengal got a unique geo-historical profile. This geo-historical profile is simply to have an idea about the area of our study. But our major objectives are something different. Administratively this region was under

Rajshahi Division. When the East India Company obtained the Grant of Diwani, the district of Rangpur passed into the hands of the company and this region came under the British administration. Though politically East India Company got the authority over this region but its administration was not deeply imposed in this region till the second Anglo Bhutan War (1864-65). After this event several tracts of Bhutan came under the Control of British Bengal and finally the district of Jalpaiguri was formed in the year 1869. It is the opinion of the local historians that the area called here as North Bengal got its shape after the formation of Jalpaiguri district. The area mentioned here as North Bengal had a separate identity due to its geographical location and features. It is already mentioned that within this region Malda and Dinajpur (undivided) had different land formation in comparison to Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar State. Malda and Dinajpur, due to richest fertile soil, produced abundant agricultural crops like paddy, sugarcane, mustard, mango etc. Undivided Dinajpur was renowned for paddy cultivation and was familiar as the granary of North Bengal.<sup>52</sup> Besides agriculture, a considerable quantity of indigo, cotton and silk produced in the Southern part of North Bengal i.e. in Dinajpur and Malda, especially Malda was famous for silk production and mulberry cultivation. Different references mentioned that cotton and silk industries were the chief industry of Malda which ran from ancient period.<sup>53</sup> With the passage of times silk industry flourished under the tutelage of European traders especially, the Dutch, French and English. Besides the cotton and silk manufacturing, indigo was also a staple product of Malda and Dinajpur which was developed both by European and Native capital. It is to be mentioned that several rivers which flowed over the Southern part of North Bengal determined the economic development of this tract. Nagar, Kulik, Mahananda, Punarbhava, Atrai rivers were not only suitable for navigation to carry goods but also originated different important trading marts. Malda became a flourished trade centre due to its geographical location on the banks of the Ganges and Mahananda. Thus the geographical features and location made this area of North Bengal an important economic zone.

Till the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri were not a British Bengal. Cooch Behar was a princely State, Darjeeling was a part of Sikkim while the Duars or Jalpaiguri was under the Control of Bhutan. It was in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the state of Cooch Behar came into contact with the British Raj, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Darjeeling came under the British authority and in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jalpaiguri also came under the direct British administration. Before the British tutelage the basic feature of economy of these areas was subsistence economy and this zone was in sharp contrast to the other parts of rural Bengal in British India. But this zone had a great commercial prospects due to its geographical features. The state of Cooch Behar had a source of economic vitality. Captain Lewan Writes in his, "Account of Kuch Behar State", that Kuch Behar forms a large, well cultivated plain. The greater portion of the state is fertile.<sup>54</sup> There were abundance of natural resources in Cooch Behar and several rivers have been flowing over the state. W.W. Hunter mentioned that at least six principle rivers of Cooch Behar had always been navigable throughout the year by trading boats with carrying capacity of 100 maund.<sup>55</sup> Cooch Behar was also an area of lucrative trade and commerce for tobacco. Since the formation of the district everything began to develop in Jalpaiguri. For revenue purpose the district was divided into two tracts. In the permanently settled Parganas, all farming lands were brought under cultivation. The land tenure of this area was based on *jotedari* system. Jalpaiguri district had large areas of arable waste lands where different agricultural copious crops could be produced. It is found that the vast areas of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, covered with dense forest containing sal and other valuable trees, had great prospects for timber production and timber trade. Ashley Eden, British Envoy to Bhutan admitted that although a portion of the forest - infested region was uninhabitable during the rains, at other times of the year, especially when the forest is cleared to enable free current of air, the region would be not only healthy, but healthier too, on account of the excellent natural drainage, and soil laden with rich black vegetable mould suitable for timber production.<sup>56</sup> From

stray references it is found that basing upon the forest resources this area was rich in timber trade. From the sources it is to be mentioned that there was a timber market at Jalpaiguri even before the arrival of the British in this area.<sup>57</sup> However the most striking economic significance was the growth of tea plantation industry in this region. The agro-climatic condition was favourable for the growth of tea plantation in the northern part of North Bengal. This new industry transformed the whole socio-economic complexion of North Bengal. Further, the communication system was geared up with the establishment of Railways in North Bengal. This modern and swift communication system greatly helped the growth of trade and commerce and changed the entire pattern of the economy of North Bengal.

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