

CHAPTER-III

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In this chapter an attempt has been made to know about the forces and factors that laid to the growth of tea plantation in a vast area covering Hill, Terai and Duars region. At the same time, attempt has also been made about the development of Railways in the area under study. While narrating the different phases of plantation and progress of Railway organisation, a critical consideration has also been taken up for the importance of the two items in socio-economic milieu of the area mentioned. This chapter has been divided into two sections - firstly, progress and development of the plantation and in the second section, different factors of Railways have been discussed to know in details of the communication development and commercial activities.

TEA

British political and economic expansion in India, which had began in 1757, completed its formative phase by the Charter Act of 1833. It is found that during the seventy five years Britain not only won the paramount political power in India but more than half of Bengal's external commerce. Due to the advantages of the Industrial Revolution, the Britishers reinforced by free trade, seemed to invest them with absolute control of India's economic destiny. It is to be mentioned that the Charter Act, 1833 ended the remittance trade, but it opened India to the full impact of the Industrial Revolution. Besides the introduction of free trade the Charter Act, 1833 also recognised the Europeans' right to own land. This recognition of the Europeans' right to own land led to the introduction of the plantation system, when the tea plant was discovered in Assam and the Himalayan foothills by Lieutenant Charlton and Captain Jenkins in 1833.¹

Tea was the most valuable cash crop and the Colonial Government was interested for the inauguration of tea gardens because earning from

tea export played a vital role in Britain's international trade and capital flow relations and in the maintenance of the British imperial structure.²

In 1837, the inauguration of some experimental tea gardens in Assam brought so much dividends that such kind of venture immediately attracted the attention of some capitalists both in India and Britain.³ Thus in India, development of the tea plantation industry started on a large scale with large capital, big landholdings and in an organised manner. The Assam Company was the first tea company in India which took over part of the Government's experimental areas in 1839. In 1858, this tea company was incorporated in Britain and by 1865, there were 62 registered companies and 30 sterling companies in India. After the experimental tea cultivation in Assam with the favourable background, tea was first planted in Darjeeling areas in 1839, in the Terai in 1862 and in the Duars in 1874.

Thus it is found that the first thought of the possibility of producing tea in India came from the Britishers themselves. But the question arises as to why did the British take initiative to inaugurate tea garden industries in India? In this context, it is to be mentioned that the British very systematically took the plan to inaugurate tea garden industries. Tea had a great demand in European market and the East India Company started shipping tea from China to England as early as 1689.⁴ From about 1715, the East India Company or John Company as it was often called, took complete control of the tea export trade from China and in 1721 it obtained monopoly rights in that trade which lasted till 1833. During the period of monopoly, tea developed into a very popular drink not only in United Kingdom but also in American colonies. It is to be noted that one of the causes of American War of independence was the imposition of taxation upon tea. But regarding tea trade, it is quite pertinent to mention that during that time the East India Company was simply a buyer from China. The East India Company knew very little about the collection of the tea by the Chinese merchants from distance villages. Upto the end of the 18th century China was the only supplier of tea to Europe. Thus upto

the 18th century tea trade was controlled by the Chinese merchants and the Britishers had to depend upon the Chinese for tea trade. In this context it is to be mentioned that the trade agreement between the East India Company and the Chinese government was valid for till 1833 and the East India Company was apprehended if the Chinese Government would not agree to extend the trade agreement. As tea was a very profitable article the Britishers in India were in search for tea production which would free them from their dependence upon the Chinese. Thus, in 1833 with the loss of monopoly rights in the trade, serious attempts were made to find an alternative source for the supply of tea.⁵ In this regard, a real progress started in 1834 by Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor General. To investigate the possibilities of cultivating tea in India he appointed a committee called, "Tea Committee". The committee issued a circular to the local officials calling for information and on 24th December 1834, the tea committee reported to the government about the indigenous tea plant of Assam and about the possibility of its commercial success.⁶ Following this report tea was successfully planted in Assam and within a very short time with the pioneering zeal of Dr. Campbell, the superintendent of Darjeeling, tea industry took firm root in North Bengal.⁷ It is to be mentioned that the development of the tea industry was closely associated with the growth of Western market for tea and the Colonial Government encouraged and supported the tea plantations with foreign capital and enterprise. Thus, it is clear that though tea was associated with great advancement of commerce but it also was a typical foreign investment of the nineteenth century capitalist exploitation. It is quite pertinent to mention in this connection that though with a favourable background, tea was introduced in India in the nineteenth century but from the late eighteenth century, earnest efforts were taken by the Britishers in India for the cultivation of tea. In 1780 a few bushes from Canton were planted in Calcutta and serious thoughts were given in 1788 for the culture of tea as a commercial proposition in India, to replace the expatriated British monopoly tea trade in China.⁸ Percival Griffiths did a lot of research in tea and he showed that after the phase of short sighted

exploitation of Bengal by the East India Company's Servants had ended, the practical mind of Warren Hastings clearly realised that if the company were to prosper it must promote industrial development. Warren Hastings had taken initiative for the introduction of tea cultivation in India. Though no practical result seems to have followed but the general impetus to trade and industry given by Warren Hastings had resulted in many directions. It was in 1778 that Sir Joseph Banks was asked to prepare a series of notes for the East India Company on the cultivation of new crops and in them he advocated the cultivation of tea in India.⁹ Thus, it is found that serious attempts were taken by the Britishers for the cultivation of tea as a commercial crop in India in the late eighteenth century and with a favourable background, it was inaugurated in the nineteenth century in India.

We have seen that by 1837, experimental tea plantations were started by the Government in Assam. It is also to be noted that during that year experimental tea plantations were also started in Punjab. In the area of our study, tea was first planted in 1839 and the experimental growth of tea was started in 1840 at Darjeeling. But before going into the history of the development of the tea in the Darjeeling district, it will be rewarding to have a bird's eye view of the early history of the district. The whole of the district of Darjeeling was part of the Dominions of the Raja of Sikkim. In 1706 Kalimpong was forcibly occupied by Bhutan. In the year 1780, the Gurkhas of Nepal seized the power of Darjeeling, invaded Sikkim and occupied the remaining area of the district including Terai. The process of annexation continued for over 30 years. In the beginning of the nineteenth century (in 1816), war broke out between the East India Company and the Nepalese and by the treaty of Titaliya (now in Bangladesh), the entire area, wrested by the Nepalese from the Raja of Sikkim, was ceded to the East India Company. The Company restored the entire area to Sikkim and guaranteed its sovereignty. At the time of Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General of India, it was reported to him that the small village of Darjeeling could be developed as a sanatorium besides being utilized as a key Military station. A proposal to that effect

was initiated which was duly approved by the court of Directors of the East India Company. The Raja of Sikkim was approached and by a deed of grant dated 1 February 1835, he made an unconditional cession of Darjeeling area to the East India Company. At the time of the unconditional cession in 1835, the Darjeeling hill tract of approximately 138 sq. miles contained a population of not more than 100. Darjeeling soon became a favourite summer retreat for the officials of Bengal and their families, and it was established as a Sanatorium for invalidated European soldiers. In the year 1841, the company granted the Raja of Sikkim an allowance of Rs.3,000 per annum as compensation and this was raised in 1846 to Rs.6,000 per annum. In 1850, the grant of Rs.6,000 was withdrawn and the remaining hill area and the Terai were annexed. But there was recrudescence of troubles and as a result of a military expedition by the British in 1861, a treaty was concluded on 28th March 1861, between the British Government and the Raja of Sikkim. By this treaty, it put to an end to all frontier troubles between the British Darjeeling and Sikkim and secured for the British commerce across the Sikkim frontier. The existing district of Darjeeling was created in 1866.

It is to be noted that tea did not, however wait for the formation of the Darjeeling district. It must also be admitted that the rapid development of tea plantations in this district owed to a great extent to the consolidation of the British Empire in this region and the very active interest taken by the East India Company in the development of the Darjeeling district. The colonial Government encouraged and, infact supported the tea plantations with foreign capital and enterprise. Encouraged by the success of Government plantations, private foreign capital (invariably British) hastened the course of development of the tea plantations in Darjeeling district. In this context, O'Malley ascribed that due to the enterprise of Dr. Campbell, the superintendent of Darjeeling, in 1840, the possibility of starting and developing the cultivation and manufacture of tea in the Darjeeling under East India Company was given much attention. It was soon found that the plant thrived readily at this attitude others began to follow Dr. Campbell's example and seed being

distributed by Government to those who desired to cultivate the plant.¹⁰ Though experimental planting of tea started from 1840 in the Darjeeling region, but much headway was not made till 1853. It is found from the report dated 28th April 1853 of Dr. Campbell that he was pleading with the Government all along either for the establishment of experimental plantations directly by Government or for extension of trials by the native residents, in the Darjeeling region. In his report dated 30th March, 1853, No.123 Campbell expressed his hope that the tea cultivation in the Hills around Darjeeling would receive favourable consideration of the Government.¹¹

When W.B. Jackson, Esq. C.S. Judge of the Sudder Dewanny and Nizamut Adawlut, Calcutta, came to Darjeeling in 1854 he noticed only one tea plantation. Jackson did not think that there was very good prospect for tea in the upper regions of Darjeeling.¹² W.W. Hunter stated that in 1853, two or three gardens existed in Darjeeling region, but neither their names nor their location have been furnished by him. Hunter ascribed that the real date of the commencement of the industry may be taken at 1856-57. According to Hunter, of the existing gardens in the Darjeeling district, only two date as far back as 1856, viz., that of the Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company, and one owned by the Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank.¹³ Thus it is found that after 1853 within three years, tea cultivation and tea industry began commercially in Darjeeling and since 1856 more and more tea companies registered for tea gardens and tea industries in Darjeeling region.

The largest tea concern in Darjeeling district was that of Darjeeling Company Ltd., which owned four gardens, established between 1860 and 1864. These gardens were called Ambutia, Ging, Takda, Phubserang. In the Terai, in 1862, the first garden was started at Champta near Khaprail by James White. The Lebong Tea Company opened Takvar and Badamtam before 1864 and Makaibari also opened during that period. During the four years following 1870, the tea industry in Darjeeling continued to develop at an even greater pace than before, and by 1874, the number of

plantations had increased from 56 to 113. The following table shows the growth of tea gardens in Darjeeling district from 1866 to 1935.

Growth of Tea Gardens in Darjeeling District (1866-1935)

Year	No. of Gardens	Area under Tea (in acres)	Production (in lb)
1866	39	10392	433715
1867	40	9214	582640
1868	44	10067	851549
1869	55	10769	1278869
1870	56	11046	1689186
1871	-	-	-
1872	74	14503	2938626
1873	87	15695	2956710
1874	113	18888	3927911
1885	175	38499	9090500
1895	186	48692	11714500
1905	148	50618	12447500
1910	148	51281	14137500
1915	148	54024	20303500
1920	148	59356	15850000
1925	148	59356	18732500
1930	148	59356	20870500
1935	148	59356	20798000

- Source :
- 1) D.H. Buchanan - The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India, New York, 1934, p.56
 - ii) A.J. Dash - Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling, Superintendent, Government Printing, 1947, p.114
 - iii) Tushar Kanti Ghosh, Tea Gardens of West Bengal (A Critical Study of Land Management) B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1987, p.26
 - iv) W.W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.X, Turbner and Company, London, 1876, p.165.

From the table it is found that between 1873 and 1874, there was rapid development of the tea industry in Darjeeling. The comparative statistics for these two years are quoted from the Bengal Statistical Reporter for November 1875:

Among the results of the operations of 1874 in Darjeeling district, the most remarkable are the number of newly opened gardens, and the immense increase on the out-turn of those yielding tea. The returns of 1873 showed 87 gardens at the end of that year, which the number returned for 1874 is 113. There were 26 new gardens opened that year. The total area shown under cultivation at the end of 1874 was 18,888 acres, this being 3193 acres more than the area returned for 1874 and 4385 acres more than the area returned as cultivated in 1872. The out turn of 1874 was 3,927,911 lbs as against 2,956,710 lbs. produced in 1873. The increase was 971,201 lbs. There can be no doubt that the average yields per acre throughout the district was much greater in 1874 than in former years. A comparison of the statistics of the last five years shows that in 1874 there were about 12,000 acres of plant yielding leaf. The average yield of an acre of the tea producing plant was therefore, about 325 lbs. It is to be feared, however, that improvement in the quality of the tea manufactured has not kept pace with the increase in quantity. The average quality of the tea produced in Darjeeling in 1874 was inferior to that produced in some other districts. It is believed that this evil has been recognised by many of the leading planters, and that we may look forward to successful attempts being made for the improvement of Darjeeling tea.¹⁴

It is found that within the short span of nine years between 1866 and 1874, the number of gardens under tea had almost exactly trebled, and the area under tea cultivation had increased by 82 percent; while the production of tea had multiplied itself nearly ten times. It is, however, to be noted that tea plantation industry did not start on a large scale in the Kalimpong portion of the district. In this context it is quite pertinent to quote O'Malley, "the latter portion (Kalimpong portion) of the district is

however, almost entirely closed to tea, both because the greater part of the tract is a forest reserve and most of the remainder has been reserved for native cultivation and unsuitable for the growth of tea plant".¹⁵ According to the Settlement Report of C.A. Bell, I.C.S. (1901-1903), there were only four tea estates in the Kalimpong sub-Division.¹⁶ (1) Sama Beong, (2) Ambiak, (3) Phagu and (4) Kumai. It is interesting to note that in the later years the position of tea gardens in this area had not substantially changed and at present there are six tea gardens in this area.

The table shows that in 1895, there were 186 tea estates but the number decreased thereafter. The reason is that from this time onwards, tea estates were more and more organised under big limited concerns so that although the total area increased, the number of separate gardens decreased. It also shows the total number of tea gardens has been more or less constant since 1905 and the total area under tea has been more or less constant since 1920. In this context, O'Malley ascribed that the number of gardens has been reduced in consequences of the amalgamation of several estates.¹⁷ It is found that in the year 1910 the total area under tea was 51,281 acres and in 1920 the area under tea had increased to 59,356 acres and was constant upto 1935. During the concerned time period under study, it is found that the area under tea rose to maximum in 1920 when it was 59,356 acres and the production of tea was maximum in 1930 when it was 20,870,500 lb.

With the successful venture in the hills and Terai belt, the introduction of tea gardens in Duars started in 1874 by Mr. Richard Haughton at Gazaldoba.¹⁸ In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that the Jalpaiguri District can broadly be divided into two distinct parts (i) the area to the west of the river Tista, and (ii) the area to the east of the river Tista. The area to the east of the river Tista was called the western Duars. The word "Duars" connotes gates or doors. There were certain gates or doors of Bhutan by which the Bhutanese had access to the plains of Bengal and Assam. There were eleven such recognised Duars and of

the eleven, five of them fell in the Western Duars. The Gazaldoba region was situated on the Western part of the Western Duars and the said garden was owned by Dr. Brougham. Richard Haughton, pioneer of the tea industry in the Darjeeling district, was appointed as manager of the garden.¹⁹ It is to be noted that after the annexation of the Duars in November 1864, the district of Jalpaiguri was formed in 1869. A few years after the formation of Jalpaiguri District, the Western Duars was included in the list of Scheduled District under the Scheduled District Act (Act XIX of 1874). In accordance with this Act the Administrative Head of the District was designed as the Deputy Commissioner. British understood the potentialities of this area and separated the area from the rest of Bengal and the land laws and regulation which were relevant in other parts of Bengal were declared inapplicable in this area. The British declared a large tract of land of this area as 'waste' and utilized the wasteland for cultivation and plantation of tea.²⁰ The Duars region was not attractive to all, except the boldest pioneers. It is stated that in the middle of the nineteenth century it was covered with dense jungle, giving shelter to all kinds of wild beasts and inhabited only by primitive tribes....²¹ Besides, this region was also one of the most unhealthy districts, in which malaria and black water fever were rife in the nineteenth century. The Britishers in India at that time were not unduly worried about the unsuitable condition of the Duars and Jalpaiguri, because climatically this region was much to recommend as a tea growing area. In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that the considerable potential of Duars as a tea growing area was noticed as early as 1859.²²

Thus, it is found that after the opening of tea gardens in 1874, tea cultivation rapidly extended in Duars and the greater part of the primeval forest disappeared and miles after miles of it got replaced by the great expanses of tea gardens. In 1875, L.W. Barantee took the settlement for the tea cultivation and in the same year, two other gardens, Fulbari and Bagrakote were established. The Bagrakote tea garden, opened out by Mr. North and owned by Mr. S. Cresswell. Mr. Cresswell also started many more gardens in the Duars and subsequently started the renowned

Broking Firm of M/s Cresswell and Company. In 1878, more tea estates came up like Good Hope, Rancherra, Manabarrie, Balabarrie, Altadanga, Money Hope (Fulbari) and Patabari of Lish River. During that time the activities of Duncan Brothers in Tea started and they established Meenglass in 1884, Hope in 1885 and Jiti and Chalauni in 1886. Apart from Jiti and Chalauni, a number of Tea Estates were started by the European Planters like Nagrakata, Spring Field, Sukanbari, Bhagatpur, Looksan, Gatia and Tondoo in that year. In 1887 Patharjhora Tea Estate and Glencoe Tea Estate were started. In 1889 the Duncan Group established Carron, Nagaisuree and Lankapara Tea Estate. In 1890 Gairkata, Telipara and Hantupara Tea Estates were opened. In 1896, Duncan Group also established Kumargaon, Sankos and Phaskhawa in the eastern sector and Haldibari, Jayanti, Baradighi were developed as well as Hasimara Tea Co. Ltd. started its activities. In 1897, Garganda Tea Estate was opened by Duncan Group and Rydak Tea Company Ltd. started its gardens in Eastern sector. In 1899, Meheod and Company started their activities on a very large scale and Bhatkhawa was got established in 1900.

But the development of the tea industry in Jalpaiguri district presents a novel feature in that one finds the conscious and bold attempts made by Indians (mainly Bengalees) to establish tea gardens in the teeth of the unfair competition from the Europeans. It should be noted in this connection that the first attempt to compete with the Britishers was made by Maniram Diwan as the First Indian discoverer of indigenous tea plant in Assam.²³ Darjeeling and Western Duars was known as the non-regulated territory, in which the laws of land were not generally applicable, and when applied necessary modifications to suit the local conditions were made.

In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that from time to tome, the Government framed rules for the grant of wastelands for tea cultivation in the Districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling. J.F. Gruning wrote in 1896 wasteland rules were issued by the government of Bengal.

Under these rules the applicant must satisfy the Deputy Commissioner and Superior Revenue authorities that he has sufficient capital at his command to enable him to open out the grant; he must deposit the cost of surveying the land calculated at the rate of one rupee an acre of the estimated area and is also required to execute an agreement to pay at a similar rate for any land in excess of what was originally estimated. When this has been done the Deputy Commissioner directs a detailed enquiry to be made in order to ascertain whether the land can be leased; if he decides to lease it, he directs a survey to be made and at the same time, a valuation of the timber is made by the Forest Department. The applicant is called on to pay any sum due on account of the cost of survey and also the value of the timber. When he has done so, he receives a preliminary lease for a term of five years, the land being rent free for the first year and after that paying a rental of 3 annas an acre for the second year and an additional 3 annas for each successive year upto 12 annas an acre. Each grant must be compact and capable of being enclosed in a ring-fence; it must ordinarily not contain more than 1,500 acres, but larger grants may be made for special reasons.²⁴ It is also said that on the expiration of five years, the lease was again renewed for thirty years after fulfilling certain conditions and so on and the rate would remain static for the next thirty years. Thus, if the areas were found suitable for the cultivation of tea, one could easily get the required lands. A large number of Indian enterprises sprang from the lawyer class in Jalpaiguri district. Since the native planters were law abiding people and had no ill motive, the British government could not but treat them at par with the British tea garden owners.²⁵ In spite of this hindrance in 1877, for the first time, Munshi Rahim Baksh, a Peshkar (clerk) of the Deputy Commissioner, probably taking advantage of his official position, was able to take a settlement of Jaldhaka Grant for 728 acres. In 1878, Kali Mohan Roy and Smt. Durgabati Sen got the Altadanga Grant for 310 acres, which was later on passed to Munshi Rahim Baksh. But actually, the first Indian tea garden started in 1879, the Mugalkata Tea Garden, the owners being the Jalpaiguri Tea Company Ltd., a registered joint Stock Company.²⁶ It was a

landmark in the history of "tea venture" by the Indians with the formation of joint stock company in Jalpaiguri. Bhagwan Chandra Bose, the father of the illustrious scientist Sir J.C. Bose, who was posted as Deputy Magistrate in Jalpaiguri district, took a good deal of initiative in the formation of tea gardens by the Indians. The settlements of lands in Duars to the Europeans for the purpose of establishing tea estates and successful opening of tea plantations by them made Bhagwan Chandra think as to whether or not the Indians could venture in this field. To get a tea lease he had proved that he had capital at his disposal by depositing the required cost and got a preliminary lease for five years and there after a thirty-year lease was granted. Thus by this a purely Indian concern, established in 1879, came to be known as Mogalkata tea estate, Jalpaiguri Tea company Ltd. and was the first Indian Tea Garden.

After this remarkable event of 1879 ten other tea grants were actually issued and some of the grants to the Estates already established. Thus the movement which started on the bank of Tista River, had covered Dam Dim and Mal area and reached Nagrakata area. Being emboldened with earlier success, the promoters of Jalpaiguri Tea Co. Ltd. established Northern Bengal Tea Corporation in Jalpaiguri. The Needeem Tea Estate started under this Tea Corporation. In 1884, there was a lot of activities and efforts by the Indians for the opening of tea gardens. During this time, an effort was made by Babu Chandra Kanta Das and Babu Prasanna Kumar Das to start two Tea gardens. However, being unable to start the Tea Estates they were transferred to the Chalsa Tea Co. Ltd. and Chalauni Tea Co. Ltd. respectively. In 1886, a number of Tea Estates were opened of which one was by Bibi Rahimannessa, wife of Munshi Rahim Baksh. The Estate was known as Mal Nuddy with 329 acres of land. Another Indian garden that started in the same year was Gurjunghora Tea Co. Ltd. This year also saw the Northern Bengal Tea Corporation, succeeding in getting a permanent lease in lieu of the preliminary five-year lease. Sri Gopal Chandra Ghosh with the help of Srinath Chakraborty, the then serastadar of Jalpaiguri court, along with few friends established the Jalpaiguri Tea Company with Mogalkata Tea

Estate. At that time people did not know what was tea business, or what was the benefit of starting business by joint Stock Companies. Therefore they had to experience serious difficulties in raising Capital.²⁷

In 1889 Gopal Chandra Ghosh established Anjuman Tea Company with two gardens under it viz., Mujnai and Makrapara. In 1891 Munshi Rahim Baksh extended his Jaldhaka Grant by further addition of 115 acres and the Hantupara Tea Estate was established. The Saha family of Amla Sadarpur (Nadia district) established Totapara Tea Estate in 1892. In 1896 Munshi Rahim Buksh started Rahimabad Tea Garden. In this year Gurjungjora Tea Company Ltd. was established at Jalpaiguri town. In 1895, the Kathalguri Tea Company Ltd. was established by Srimath Roy. In the year 1900 the Atiabari Tea Company Ltd. was registered at Jalpaiguri. From 1901 to 1910 the tempo of starting of tea estates in Duars went down. However, some Tea Co. Ltd. came into existence during that period. Though there was no activity in 1905 but in 1904 Atiabari was opened. In 1907, the Ramjhora Tea Co. Ltd. was registered and it started a tea estate with some lands which were earlier refused by the English Planters. Gopal Chandra Ghosh and his son-in-law Tarini Prasad Roy and Sashi Kumar Neogi, Waliur Rahaman and Mussaraff Hossain established this Company. Having successfully established the Totapara Tea Estate in 1892, the Saha family of Amla Sadarpur started Ambari Tea Estate in 1908. In 1909 the Dalmore Tea Estate was started by Needeem Tea Company and in 1910 the Dima Tea Company was registered by the Nawab group in Jalpaiguri. During that time the Bengalees of Alipurduar did not also lag behind and started Turturi Tea Estate. From the District Gazetteer of J.F. Gruning the development of the industry upto this period show how the acreage in tea increased.²⁸ It may strike someone as if some gardens were closed between 1901 to 1907 as the number of tea estates as plantation units went down. But actually, the number of gardens, namely, the grants issued were amalgamated with other plantation units and there was no reduction in the total acreage of lands under tea during that period.

How far the Jalpaiguri Bengalees advanced during the period between 1879 to 1910 will be apparent from the following table.

Indian Tea Companies

Original Capital	Present Capital	Name of the Company	Year of Origin	Gross Acreage Area under Tea
50000	700000	Jalpaiguri Tea Co. Ltd.	1879	1495/560
100000	400000	Northern Bengal Tea Co. Ltd.	1882	898/520
85400	841600	Gurjanghora Tea Co. Ltd.	1882	800/612
225000	775000	Anjuman Tea Co. Ltd.	1889	4026/1112
50000	500000	Chamurchi Tea Co. Ltd.	1891	2190/877
75000	787500	Katalguri Tea Co. Ltd.	1895	2325/778
75000	500000	Chuniajhora Tea Co. Ltd.	1963	1834/512
75000	525000	Atiabari Tea Co. Ltd.	1900	1823/1034
130000	897000	Ramjhora Tea Co. Ltd.	1907	1522/858
135200	1081000	Devpara Tea Co. Ltd.	1909	1500/900
124200	496800	Diana Tea Co. Ltd.	1910	1250/690
1124800	7503900			19663/8453

Source : B.C. Ghosh, The Development of Tea Industry in Jalpaiguri District, 1869-1968, Calcutta-1970, p.30

During the thirty one years (between 1879 to 1910) there were eleven purely Indian ownership Tea Companies with Indian Capital. But as all the available virgin lands were by now settled and the entrepreneurs, mostly Indians (Bengalees) now had to search lands which were settled after the Sunders settlement as Jote land and were clubbed together. After 1914, the Government by order prohibited clubbing of Jote lands in a ring fence for the purpose of plantation of tea.

In Duars in the year 1911 the Debpara Tea Estate, Dam Dim Tea Estate and the Diana Tea Estate started. The Dheklapara Tea Company was established in this year. In 1912 Lakhipara Tea Estate started. In this year a number of Jalpaiguri Tea Companies were registered viz., the Bengal Duars National Tea Company Ltd., the Eastern Tea Co. Ltd., the Friends Tea Co. Ltd. the Gopalpur Tea Co. Ltd., the Khayerbari Tea Co.

Ltd. and the Kohinoor Tea Co. Ltd. The promoters of Bengal Duars National Tea Co. were originally the Duars people.²⁹ The Registered office of the company was at Malbazar and most of the promoters were tea garden employees. In 1912-13 Gour Nitai, Monmohinpur, Halmari Tea Gardens and New Assam Tea Garden in Assam and Sukna Tea Garden were opened by the Jalpaiguri business people. In this respect, the initiative taken by the Raikats of Baikunthapur estate in opening the tea gardens in the Jalpaiguri District should be mentioned. Samarendra Dev Raikat (Taru) stated that Prasanna Deb Raikat inaugurated two tea gardens at Shikarpur and Bhandarpur.³⁰ In 1913 Hossainabad Tea Estate was started by Nawab Saheb, Jalpaiguri, Dheklapara by Karmakar family, Palashbari by Sashi Banerjee, Rheabari by Waliuar Rahaman and Radharani by Pal Choudhury of Nadia. By amalgamating *joteland* before the prohibition order came, the Alipurduar Lawyers started Patkapara Tea Estate Jalpaiguri enthusiasts, started the Dhowlajhora Tea Estate in 1915 and Kohinoor in 1916. The First World War gave a gap, but activities again started from 1917. In 1917, Saraswatipur Tea Estate was started and in 1918 Jaypur (sunny Valley) and Karala Valley Tea Estate were started and in the next year Bhandiguri Tea Estate was also started. It should also be noted that in 1917 Tarini Prasad Roy established the Saroda Tea Company. At the later date this company became the owners of the biggest garden opened by Indians in the Jalpaiguri district. In 1922, Alipurduar entrepreneurs started Turturi Tea Estate. In 1924 the Anandapur Tea Estate was started by Ananda Chandra Rahut. At the time of its opening keen difficulty was experienced in the matter of securing adequate finance from the Bank.³¹ In 1925, the Batabari Tea Company was started by Khan Bahadur Mokleshwar Rahaman and in that year Makhanlal Chakraborty opened out the Jadavpur Tea Company. In 1926 the Malhati Tea Estate was started by Jogesh Chandra Ghosh. From 1926 to 1929 a good number of Tea Company Ltd. and Tea Estates were started by the Bengalee planters of Jalpaiguri.³²

The above incidents clearly indicate that as the consequence of the Act of 1833 which allowed free entry in trade and industry, tea gardens in

the Duars increased by leaps and bounds during the concerned time period of the study. It is found that the inauguration of the tea plantation enterprise in the Duars was purely a European exercise; although some sorts of native capital began to pour in slowly. The following table illustrates the development of tea gardens in the Duars or in Jalpaiguri district.

Tea Gardens in Jalpaiguri District.

Year	No. of gardens	Total area under cultivation	Approximate Production (in lbs)
1874	1	NA	NA
1875	3	NA	5600
1876	13	818	29520
1877	21	4754	33129
1881	55	6230	1027116
1891	67	32325	NA
1892	182	38583	18278628
1901	235	76403	31087537
1907	180	81338	45196894
1911	191	90859	48820637
1921	131	112688	43287870
1931	151	132074	66447715
1941	189	131770	96604450

Source : For the year 1875, 1877, 1891 Subhajit Roy, Transformation on the Bengal Frontier, Jalpaiguri - 1765-1948, Routledge Curzon, London, EC4P4EE, 2002, p.-77, for the year 1874, 1876, 1881, 1892 and 1907, J.F. Gruning Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri, Allahabad, 1911, p.103 and the remaining years census 1951, West Bengal District Handbooks, Jalpaiguri by A. Mitra, Calcutta, 1954, p.iii.

It is found that tea industry in Jalpaiguri district started commercially from 1874 and by 1876 there were thirteen gardens with an area of 818 acres and a yield of 29,520 lb. of tea. By 1881, the number of gardens increased to 55, and the acreage under tea to 6,230 acres. In other words, the number of gardens quadrupled and the area under tea

increased more than seven times within a span of five years. As we find from Gruning's Gazetteer, at the time of settlement in 1892, 182 gardens were established giving a turnover of 18 million pounds. The cultivation rapidly extended during the nineties and in 1901, the number of tea gardens had increased to 235. From 1881 to 1901, within two decades, the total area under tea in Jalpaiguri district was more than twelve times and during the period 1901 to 1931 the area under tea was nearly doubled. It is found that after 1901 the extension of cultivation became comparatively low. After 1901 the apparent decrease in the number of gardens was due to the fact that several gardens had been amalgamated and upto 1908, there were no applications for new gardens.³³ In 1931, the number of tea estates in the whole Jalpaiguri district touched the figure 151. Of these, 143 gardens were situated in the Duars and the remaining 8 were located on the western side of the Tista river near Jalpaiguri town.³⁴

It is to be noted that though the Britishers opened tea garden industries in North Bengal the headquarters of the tea companies were in London. The tea produced in India was brought to the auction market of London where primarily the prices of Indian tea was settled. The bulk of India's tea crop was to be auctioned in London, due principally to the fact that the U.K. was by far the largest consumer of Indian teas, and London offered a Central market for buyers in neighbouring countries of Europe. In the year 1838, the first auction was held in London and auctions have also been held in Calcutta ever since 1841.³⁵ By the colonial method the prices of tea was calculated and it was stated that through the auction of tea, it could bring free trade and free competition in the tea market. Thus, the prices of tea was not dependent upon the cost of production as the Auctioneers settled the prices of tea on the basis of the quality of the production of tea.³⁶ By this method, the Britishers totally controlled the prices of tea in India as well as the tea of North Bengal. In this context it is quite pertinent to mention that in 1879 the Calcutta Tea Brokers Association was formed and in 1888 Calcutta Tea Traders Association was established which virtually framed the rules for auction of tea in

Calcutta. The word 'broker' in case of tea is actually a misnomer. They do a number of things. They are auctioneers and valuers and also consultants on tea manufacture and market prospects. During the concerned time period under study, there were four brokers viz. (i) J. Thomas and Co. Private Ltd., (ii) Carritt Moran and Company Private Ltd., (iii) W.S. Cresswell and Company Private Ltd. And (iv) A.W. Figgis and Company Private Ltd. who controlled the tea auction in Calcutta.³⁷ It is to be noted that it was only, after independence from 1947 onwards that Indian brokers entered this field. The table shows the trend rate of the average selling price of tea of North Bengal in Calcutta Auctions.

Average Selling Price (per lb) of Tea in Calcutta Auctions

Year	Darjeeling Ans Ps	Dooars Ans Ps	Terai Ans Ps
1	2	3	4
1910-11	9 6	6 11	6 7
1911-12	9 7	7 4	7 1
1912-13	9 7	7 0	6 0
1913-14	10 3	7 7	7 3
1914-15	9 7	7 3	7 0
1915-16	10 9	8 7	8 7
1916-17	10 9	8 4	8 0
1917-18	7 11	6 5	6 1
1918-19	9 7	7 0	6 10
1919-20	9 7	8 0	7 3
1920-21	7 5	5 0	3 10
1921-22	11 7	9 11	8 3
1922-23	0 1	12 9	11 10
1923-24	2 2	14 7	14 2
1924-25	4 3	15 4	14 8
1925-26	0 0	13 1	12 0
1926-27	0 8	11 9	10 9
1927-28	3 0	14 8	13 5
1928-29	14 8	10 11	9 11
1929-30	14 11	9 6	8 6
1930-31	14 9	9 1	8 0
1931-32	11 5	5 11	5 2
1932-33	9 8	4 8	4 4

Source : Annual Report for season 1932-33, published by M/s J. Thomas and Company, Calcutta, cited in Tushar Kanti Ghosh, Tea Gardens of West Bengal, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1987, p.178.

From the trend of the rates of price movement, it is seen that during this twenty-year period, the price of Darjeeling tea almost doubled by 1927-8, though they fell substantially in the period of the Depression. The average price of Duars and Terai tea also showed great rise. The peak

period appears to be the 1924-5 season when all varieties of tea reached the highest figure. It is further to be seen that while the selling prices of Terai tea and Duars tea remained almost the same, the average price of Darjeeling tea remained almost one-and-a-half times higher than that of the Duars and Terai tea.

Tea plantation industry is essentially a labour intensive enterprise. The industry needed a sufficient number of workers to plant, pluck and finally process the tea leaves. For the tea plantations industries of Darjeeling, employment was offered to the people across the border of Nepal. It is to be noted that as the Gorkha ruler captured Eastern Nepal in 1780, a great number of Nepali people connected with cultivation like Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Damai, Kami etc. were uprooted from their lands and were living in a worse condition. Thus, when tea plantations industries were gradually opened in Darjeeling region, these landless Nepali people of the Eastern Nepal found the alternative way of living to connect themselves gradually as labour forces to this industry. So, by this way within a short span, the number of Nepali people increased in Darjeeling region. Thus, due to this easy way the Nepali population gradually increased in Darjeeling and the tea plantations industry gradually developed in Darjeeling.³⁸ In the Duars or Jalpaiguri the indigenous inhabitants of the area like the Koches, Rajbansis and Meches did not work in the tea gardens. The bulk of the garden labour force consisted of coolies recruited from Hazaribag, Chotonagpur and Santhal Parganas. Moreover, the castes of coolies employed in the tea gardens in the Duars were paharies who came from Nepal and Bhutan. The tea garden labours recruited in the Jalpaiguri district from outside, is not an isolated case. This pattern of recruitment from outside was more or less a rule.³⁹ It is found that in Assam, from the starting of the tea company, the main problem was how to recruit a large number of labour force on a low wage. As the local people of Assam had lack of interest to join in the tea plantations industry, the Britishers forced them to join in the tea plantations industry by adopting different policies. In this context, it is to be mentioned that in Assam the land revenue was not so high.

Consequently there was no scope for the creation of landless labour in Assam. Facing an acute labour shortage, the planters of Assam urged upon the Government to further enhance the land revenue rates, so, that the poor peasants could be flushed out of their village to work for wages on plantations.⁴⁰ It is found that due to indiscriminate land distribution for the extension of tea plantations industry the Kachari tribes were uprooted from their lands and were bound to join in the tea gardens of Assam.⁴¹ But the British planters and the tea companies of Assam faced very acute problem due to the frequent revolt of the Kachari labours.⁴² From these incidents, the Britishers took the decision that they should not be dependent on the Kachari coolies or local labours of Assam.⁴³ So, realising the situation of Assam the British planters did not take any risk to recruit the local people of North Bengal in the tea plantations industry. Sarit Kumar Bhowmik mentioned an interesting fact regarding easy recruitment of labours from outsiders to the tea gardens of Duars. He mentioned that initially the Nepali labours, settled in Darjeeling, were recruited in the Tea gardens of Duars. As the industry was developing rapidly, the Nepali labours proved insufficient. At this juncture, the planters turned to Chotanagpur for their labour supply in plantations as they were already serving a large numbers in Assam. The tribal society in Bihar during that time (in the 19th Century) was in a state of turmoil. In this context it is quite relevant to mention that in the 17th Century, the tribal Raja granted villages to the non tribals, like *dikus* (aliens) traders who became the powerful Zamindars in due course of time due to the British administrative policy. This practice dealt a severe blow to the tribal agrarian structure. It increasingly alienated the tribals from their lands. The Britishers took the opportunity of their poverty and recruited them in the tea plantations in Duars.⁴⁴ It is also to be noted that like Assam the local people of North Bengal were less interested to join as labours in the tea gardens and did not see this profession as a honourable profession. It is found that majority of the local people of North Bengal were cultivator and cultivation was a favourable profession to them and they kept themselves aloof from the tea garden industries of

North Bengal.⁴⁵ Further, there were some economic factors that made the local people disinterested to join as labour forces in the tea plantations industries. It is to be mentioned that in the tea plantations industries, labour probably got very low wage and the labour was less free than in another profession. Hence, it was necessary for the Britishers to use elaborate methods for recruiting labour from the poor parts of India. Since local labour in Bengal and Assam gradually earned higher wages than were paid by the planters.⁴⁶ However, Percival Griffiths mentioned that the labours in the Duars was always free because the labours in the Duars were not placed under any kind of contract and could live whatever they please.⁴⁷

The above discussion showed the growth and development of tea plantation industries in North Bengal. Particularly in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district, it is found that the tea plantation industry was purely an European exercise and the Colonial Government gave active support and sponsorship for the rapid growth and development of this industry. It is to be noted that the tea garden industries in the hills upto 1905 was almost entirely in the hands of the European.⁴⁸ It should also be mentioned that besides being the European tea plantations, some sorts of native capital began to pour in the tea plantations of Duars and Terai. It is found that during the concerned time period under study the enterprising Bengalees of Jalpaiguri were responsible for advancing and the development of the tea industries in the Duars and Terai and they had to sacrifice a lot to make the tea industries in the Duars a success.

From the above discussion, it should be acknowledged that the tea plantation industry had played a valuable role in the economy of North Bengal. It is said that Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts grew and developed due to Tea garden industries and these two districts were well known to the world for the tea garden industries. The unprecedented development likes railways, road and transport, shops, hat and bazaar, tourism, hotel and overall, the urbanisation, was primarily due to the impact of tea garden industries in North Bengal. The growth and

development of tea industries in North Bengal also made a great change of its population. D.H.E. Sunder in his survey and settlement reports ascribed that “the opening out and improvement of the Western Duars and the increase in population here is chiefly due to the tea industry.”⁴⁹ Due to the settlement of different communities, a new culture developed in North Bengal. In this regard, it is pertinent to mention O’Malley’s observation. He wrote – “The Nepalese on the tea gardens soon learn the mysteries of the engine room and the different processes of tea manufacture. This respectively is evident on a large scale at the railway workshops at Tindharia, where after a few months training hill lads are found to pick up very quickly different methods of work; and at the electric light works at Darjeeling they show a similar quickness to grasp the practical details of electrical engineering.”⁵⁰ A great number of European Tea Planters settled in North Bengal particularly in Darjeeling. The Bengalees also settled in Darjeeling as Babu or Clerk and also as shopkeeper. Marwaris and Beharis also settled as traders in Darjeeling. Following the tea garden industries, there emerged a New North Bengal and it was the beginning of a new epoch in North Bengal’s economy. Different tea gardens of the Duars were connected by railway from 1892 to 1914. Siliguri became an important town and business centre due to the growing tea garden industries. Different tea companies opened their head office at Jalpaiguri. Darjeeling and Kurseong became the centre place of the European economic activities. The tea industries of Jalpaiguri required not only the green leaf for making tea, but a lot of other materials. A number of industries grew for the supply of these ancillary materials. A large number of people were engaged in the trade for the supply of fuel wood and other timbers to the estates. Cane baskets were required for carrying green leaf and a number of businessmen were engaged in making these baskets. Plywood industry gradually came up and developed. It should be mentioned in this connection that in 1918, the first plywood factory “The Assam Saw Mill and Timber Company” was floated in India. Since then more factories were started in Assam and Bengal.⁵¹ A good number of plywood factories sprung up in North Bengal,

too.⁵² The development of tea garden industries also assisted the agriculture of the hill areas. The Lepchas left their nomadic life. Besides this, the inclusion of Kalimpong in Darjeeling district in 1865, also helped the agricultural development. In this regard O'Malley pointed out that the tea had great contribution for the agricultural development.⁵³ Thus the tea garden industry not only helped in the development of tea gardens, but led to an overall economic development of the region. In short, it means the economic development of whole North Bengal and Bengal and in turn, the economic development of the Colonial rule in India. With the export of Indian tea to the foreign countries, North Bengal's economy was connected with the world's economy. But it is pertinent to mention that the English tea planters traded for a century and earned heavy profit from the tea garden industries of North Bengal, but they had lack of interest for the development of North Bengal and the people of North Bengal. Rather, the tea era during the colonial rule was an era of exploitation and to earn extreme profit was the main motto of the British tea planters. According to Sarit Kumar Bhowmik the British tea planters exploited and tortured the labour classes indiscriminately due to their poverty.⁵⁴ But we have no detailed records regarding this due to the lack of evidences and documents during the period under study.

RAILWAY

Railway is an integral part of the life and landscape of India. To think of life without railways conjures up the picture of a very primitive state of existence. Railways did not exist in any part of the world before 1825. But it is found that Railed ways had existed centuries before the first railway train ran. The ancient Greeks had discovered that a man or a horse pulls a load eight times greater along railed ways than along a rough road.⁵⁵ The earliest reference to 'rail' appears in England in 1597.⁵⁶ This was also in England the first railways ran between Stockton and Darlington on September 27, 1825. In India the first railways ran over a stretch of 21 miles from Bombay to Thana on 16th April 1853. This event made history.

From its beginning in 1853, India's Railway System expanded rapidly. After 1870, Railway development was rapid.⁵⁷ Some £150 million of British Capital was invested in India's nineteenth century railways, the single largest investment within the nineteenth century British Empire.⁵⁸ Apart from the main trunk lines, between the year 1872 and 1890, a large number of branch and feeder lines were developed for protective, commercial and strategic purposes. By 1910, Indian Railway became the fourth largest in the world.⁵⁹ The introduction of railway in India had a revolutionary impact on the life, culture and the economy of India and her people, though strategic railway lines were planned to facilitate internal communication for the defence of India by the British. But it was not only for defence, but also for economic and commercial purpose that the Britishers were eager to open railways system in India. In this regard, the opinion of Lord Harding may be mentioned. He reported that the plains of Hindustan offered remarkable facilities for building railways and it would be of immense value to the commerce, government and military control of the country. However, the broad outline of the scheme laid down by Lord Dalhousie in his famous Railway Minute of 1853 which formed the basis for the future railway extension in India. He wrote that India could be a market for British Manufacturers and a supplier of agricultural raw materials, once its means of communication were scientifically developed, to the potentialities of India as a field of invest for British Capital, and to the great use of railways in enabling more rapid mobilization and movement of troops.⁶⁰

The introduction of Railways opened a new chapter in Indian history. Sir Edwin Arnold remarked as early as 1865 that Railways might do for India what dynasties had never done and railways might make India a nation.⁶¹ It should be acknowledged that India became a nation with its local centres linked by rail to each other and to the world by the introduction of railways. Railways, by establishing these links, had an impact throughout the Indian economy. It was so because prior to the introduction of railways, transportation was costly. In many regions commodities in bulk could be moved only by pack-bullocks. Railways, it

was believed, would assist the economic development of India and would provide a market for British goods and a source of raw materials.

Due to Railway transportation markets were not only widening but were becoming national markets. The agricultural sector of the economy was deeply affected by the widening of markets and the prices in India were susceptible to any significant shift in world prices. Agriculture began to commercialize. Railways unquestionably played a major role in increasing agricultural output, the growth of modern industry and new jobs. Thus, the British authorities in India took the decision to support the railways. That support was absolutely crucial on the economic side for the supply of raw materials to England and helped the marketing of British manufactures in India. It is to be mentioned that till the last decade of the eighteenth century, India had been a source of luxury trade goods for Britain. But by the nineteenth century, the situation was completely reversed. From the source of highly priced trade goods India became a source of raw materials for the British Industries and a profitable market for the British factory manufactured goods. This led to the age of railway construction in India financed almost entirely by the British Capital and India witnessed British Economic Imperialism in its full form. Thus, no longer after railway construction began in western countries, the government of India together with the British government decided to encourage the building of an extensive railway system in India.

British annexation of North East India was a gradual process and was very slow because the British economic and strategic interest in that region suggested mobilization for political integration of the area with the mainland of British India. The annexation of the entire North East India has been virtually completed in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The development of the means of communication in the North East helped to discover the natural resources of the remotest corner of the region and ensured supply of commercial crops to important business centres. This free movement of agricultural produce was a great filling to trade and commerce in the region and regional trade was connected with

international trade by dint of easy communication. The state of Cooch Behar came into contact with the British Raj in the 18th Century and Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling in the 19th Century. The timber wealth of North Bengal and Assam drew some officials of the East India Company as early as the seventies of the eighteenth century that initiated the process to explore the commercial potentials of North Bengal and North East India. The North East region was very appropriate for tea cultivation and the first tea garden in Assam came into existence in 1839. In the Northern parts of Bengal, the first tea garden started in Darjeeling in 1840. After the annexation of Western Duars in 1865, the first tea garden was opened in Jalpaiguri in 1874. The planters of Assam urged upon the Government for quick transportation. Thus, the company started a number of steam service between Calcutta and Assam which expanded the navigational network in that region. It was almost simultaneous or little later of the introduction of steam service that Railways was introduced in India. The Greater India Peninsular Railways undertook the construction work in the Bombay region. Meanwhile, Eastern Bengal Railway came into existence in 1850 to construct a route from Calcutta to Kushtia (now in Bangladesh). During the same year, the importance of railways in North Bengal was realized in Jalpaiguri district by the British India Government.⁶² It is to be mentioned that agricultural crops in North Bengal were abundant. Darjeeling was famous for tea and cardamom etc., Jalpaiguri was considered as a flourishing centre of tea, timber, tobacco and jute, Cooch Behar was famous for tobacco and rice cultivation, Dinajpur was famous for its production of food-stuff, rice, tobacco, jute, molasses and Malda was famous for its raw silk. Besides these, the natural resources of North Bengal, particularly Tea, Timber and Tobacco became a special attraction to the Britishers.⁶³

Different letters of the proceedings of the Governor General mentioned the establishment of railway in North Bengal and of its perspective mentioned the trading probability in different regions of North Bengal. Chief Engineer of North Bengal Railway, Colonel H. Drummond wrote, 'The general feature of the country are favourable to the

construction of a railway, and the land is well cultivated and very fertile, I noticed good crops to tobacco and sugarcane. Besides these, rice and jute are largely produced; also ginger and betel nut, for a railway from Rungpore via Kishorgunge. Tenganmaree, Punga, Katkibaree, Kaseabaree and Mundalghat to a first... in the 3rd mile from Jalpaiguri on the Titalia Road. At Tenganmaree this goods from Ghoramara – an extensive mart on the Tista would reach the railway'.⁶⁴

Bengal entered the railway era in 1854 with the East India Railway (EIR) connecting Howrah and Hoogly.⁶⁵ The next phase was ushered in by the opening up of the North Bengal State Railway (NBSR) in 1878. In 1860, the East India Railway had been extended upto Sahebganj in Bihar. In this way the gate of Rail in North Bengal was opened. After crossing the Ganges at Sahebganj one had to travel by road which extended upto Siliguri from Karagolaghat and passed through Purnia, Kishanganj and Titalia of undivided Jalpaiguri district.⁶⁶ The excellent cart road was connected with a great road that had been built across the plains of Bengal for over a hundred and fifty miles from the Station of Sahebganj on the East India Railway; for in those days no rail road existed from Calcutta to the Northern confines of Bengal.⁶⁷ So, the travelers had to undertake a long journey by road from Karagolaghat to Siliguri. On 15th November, 1862, Sialdaha - Ranaghat line was extended upto Poradaha (a junction near Kushtia, now in Bangladesh). This was the Goalanda Rail line of Eastern Bengal Railway. The Poradaha junction that was situated south of river Padda was the gateway of North Bengal. So, it is clear that by 1862, the second door for railway was opened for North Bengal. In 1870 construction of railway in North Bengal was planned and for this reason measurement of land started.⁶⁸ The plan for constructing railway started particularly as a relief measure to the labour for road making as during that time there was food scarcity in the region.⁶⁹ The next story is the development and expansion of this railway. The Northern Bengal Railway constructed railway line from Poradaha to Siliguri. It was a meter gauge line and later this railway line was changed, from meter gauge to broad gauge. In 1878, the North Bengal State Railway was opened for

traffic upto Jalpaiguri and by the end of that year, it had been extended to Siliguri.⁷⁰ The route of North Bengal State Railway was stretched between Poradaha and Jalpaiguri via Parbatipur in Dinajpur district. From Parbatipur two branches then fanned out eastwards towards Rangpur, and westwards towards Dinajpur. After that, the Eastern Bengal Railway constructed the railway line between Siliguri and Darjeeling in 1878. In 1881, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Company had opened its steam tram way for traffic upto Darjeeling. Prior to this construction of railway, the means of communication of Darjeeling were very rudimentary.

Darjeeling came into British possession in 1835. During that time the area of Darjeeling was almost entirely covered by forest and it was reported in 1830 to be totally uninhabited.⁷¹ The only road and bridges that existed were a few narrow rough tracts through forest and a few cane bridges over the torrents. A guide to Darjeeling published in 1838 mentioned 98 hours as the time the journey from Calcutta to Darjeeling. The whole journey to Darjeeling lasted five or six days from Karagola ghat on the Ganges to the foothills at Siliguri. The discomfort and expensive journey was graphically described by Sir Joseph Hooker in 1848.⁷² Improvement of communication with Darjeeling was first taken up by Lieutenant Napier and it culminated by the construction of old Military Road from Pankhabari to Kurseong in 1842.⁷³ Another road route was opened in 1869 that came to be known as Hill Cut Road. This route was very expensive and to open this route government had to spend rupees 1.5 lakhs per year. Thus, the Government was in search of a less expensive communication system i.e. the Railway system. This situation became favourable after Siliguri was included in the Meter Gauge Rail. The first railway line in Siliguri was opened on 10th June, 1878.⁷⁴ Siliguri became the terminus of the Eastern Bengal Railway and became the starting point of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (here after DHR). The cultivation of tea had by this time developed remarkably and the industry had become firmly established. The needs of this industry and the inconvenience suffered by the general public in the tedious ascent soon led to dissatisfaction. Thus, it was decided to construct a steam tram

along the road from Siliguri to Darjeeling. The construction of this tram way commenced in 1879 and in a couple of years was completed.⁷⁵ It developed into the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. The illustrated guide for tourists to Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and Darjeeling published in 1896 says : 'A magnificent Hill Cart Road (Now NH31A from Siliguri to Darjeeling) seems to invite the laying of a steam tramway. According to the 1896 guide, the DHR was perhaps the first attempt at private enterprise in the field of Railways. By this way communication by rail between Calcutta and Darjeeling was established within fifty years after the forest clad Darjeeling spur of the Sikkim Himalaya came to be embodied in the British Indian Empire. After that narrow gauge line was started under construction and within 1880 it was extended upto Tindharia and Kurseong and on 4th July, 1881 this line was extended upto Darjeeling.⁷⁶ But there was a great hurdle to continuous journey from Calcutta to Darjeeling as there was no bridge over the Ganges. Due to frequent claim to the Government, at last, the hurdle was won over by the construction of Hardinge Bridge on Ganges in 1915 and the broad gauge system was extended in 1920 through this bridge.⁷⁷ Thus, it became easier and shorten to communicate between Calcutta and Darjeeling. There was another branch of DHR that was opened between Siliguri and Kishanganj in the Purnia District shortly before the war of 1914-1918. The third branch of DHR was extended from Siliguri to Giellakhola (towards Kalimpong) through Sivok or Tistavalley Road in 1913.⁷⁸ The DHR also opened light railways in the hill. It is recorded that within 1921-22, 2'0 gauge of 51.00 miles in length light railways were constructed by the DHR.⁷⁹ The Tistavalley Road to Kalimpong ended upto Sikkim and Tibet Frontier at the Jelep La Pass, the East Indian border post. Jelep La Pass was an important trade route. It should be noted that after the annexation of Darjeeling, the Britishers soon discovered its boundless economic potentiality and the trans-Himalayan trade route between British India and Tibet.⁸⁰ Later on Matigara Kurseong Road, the Tirhana Naxalbari Road, Tirhana-Bagdogra Road were constructed by the DHR.⁸¹

Jalpaiguri was well in advance in the sphere of communications. This advancement was mainly due to two reasons – first, the Britishers did put their early foot prints in this region as it was once a part of British Rangpur. Secondly, Jalpaiguri's geographical location as an entrepot to reach both the North Eastern and trans-Himalayan countries with which the Britishers wanted to establish trade relations. Obviously, the promotion of communications here first caught the attention of the Britishers even before its formation as a district in 1869. After the formation of the district, the most potent factor which gave a big boost to the development of communications was the growth of tea plantations and tea industries.

The early rail roads traversed the district for journey to Darjeeling and for catering to the needs of the growing tea industry. It has already been mentioned that with the active support of the Government, tea plantation enterprises started but the poor mode of communication, nullified all their efforts. So, the Government as protector of tea planters' interest could no longer turn a deaf ear to the demand of the planters. Thus, it was an outcome of the pressure created by the tea planters for the construction of railways in Jalpaiguri district. The early Duars planters were fortunate in that they started their enterprises at the time when the Government was very much railway minded and the Jalpaiguri district was benefited by this 'progressive mood'.⁸² There was another factor that helped in the inauguration of railway in Jalpaiguri district. This was the existence of low agricultural prices of the region and the dismal performance of trade in the region. Commissioner E.E. Lewis described in detail how the lack of communication system affected the agricultural prices in Jalpaiguri and its adjacent areas.⁸³

Jalpaiguri district was well served by railways, mainly the Eastern Bengal State Railway or it was called the Northern Bengal State Railway, the Bengal Duars Railway and the Cooch Behar state Railway. The Northern Bengal State Railway was opened upto Jalpaiguri in 1878. The southern section of the Eastern Bengal state Railway, which was called

the North Bengal State Railway, opened its metre gauge line on 28th August, 1887 from Atrai to Jalpaiguri.⁸⁴ It was extended from Poradaha to Bheramara Ghat and from Sara Ghat to Atrai and further extended from Jalpaiguri to Siliguri on 19th January 1878. It was part of the through passage from Calcutta to Darjeeling. This rail also entered Cooch Behar district near Haldibari and in a northerly direction to the North West. This railway served the whole of the track to the west of the Tista river. At that time, there were the following railway stations on the line falling within the district, namely, Mandalghat, Jalpaiguri and Belakoba. At the time of Partition in 1947, a big slice of this railway fell within East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

The Bengal Duars Railways was opened for the explicit purpose of opening the whole of Western Duars to the outside world and to serve the growing tea industry. In 1891, the Government of India entered into an agreement with Octavious Steel for opening this railway. It was agreed upon that the railway would run from Barnes, in the eastern bank of Tista and to the opposite side of Jalpaiguri, to Dam Dim and that there would also be a branch from Lataguri to Ramshaihat on the Western bank of the Jaldhaka. It was also agreed upon that in future the line would run over a bridge on the Jaldhaka to the East from Ramshai hat. The Company was supplied with cost free land, slippers for the track and free use of the *ferry* service between Jalpaiguri and Barnesghat Junction. The season 1892-93 has been most unfavourable for the construction of railway in the Duars, because of unusual rainfall and extreme cold. However, Chalsa and Lataguri stations were opened for goods traffic on the 15th January, Domohani station on the 6th March 1893, and Ramshai station on the 15th of the same month. In the middle of 1893 branch line from Lataguri to Ramshai was opened.⁸⁵ In 1898-99 three extentions of the Duars Railways were started on that from Domohani to Lalmanirhat and the others – Malbazar to Tantapara and Damdim to Bagrakot.⁸⁶ In 1903-04, 38.60 miles metre gauge rail lines were constructed by the Bengal Duars Railways.⁸⁷ Further a new Branch line on the Bengal-Duars

Railway from Domohani to Barnes Ghat was opened to passenger traffic during 1933-34.⁸⁸

The following table shows the dates on which the different sections of Bengal Duars Railways were opened.

From	To	Distance (miles)	Year of opening
Barnes	Damdim	31	1893
Lataguri	Ramshaihat	5 ½	1893
Barnes	Lalmanirhat (now in Bangladesh)	66	1900
Barnes	Barnesghat	1	1900
Dam Dim	Bagrakot	7	1902
Mal	Madarihat	44	1903
Chalsa	Matiali	5	1915

Source : Barun De, et al., West Bengal District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri, Calcutta 1981, p.167

However, eastward expansion of the railway could not be conceived in Jalpaiguri district owing to the huge cost involved in the construction of the bridge over the Jaldhaka. During the concerned period, the metre gauge (main line) from Katihar junction proceeded to Kamakhyaguri touching on its way several stations within the district, namely, Bagrakot, Oodiabari, Dam Dim, New Mal Jn., Chalsa Jn., Chapramary, Nagrakata, Caron, Changmari, Banarhat, Binnaguri, Dalgaon, Mujnai, Madarihat, Hasimara, Hamiltanganj, Kalchini, Garopara, Rajabhatkhawa Jn., Damanpur, Alipurduar Jn., Salsalabari, Samuktala Road and Chepani Hat.

The broad gauge (branch line) from New Jalpaiguri to Jalpaiguri passing through Ambari Falakata, Belakoba, Raninagar, Mohitnagar and Jalpaiguri extended to Haldibari in Cooch Behar district. It is to be noted that though railway came much later in Cooch Behar state, some branches of the Cooch Behar state Railway touched some areas of Jalpaiguri district.

Before 1876, there was no Railway within Cooch Behar state. Though Cooch Behar state came into contact with the British rule in

1773, it was not until 1863 that real efforts to develop a communication system was initiated. It is already mentioned that during the time of Maharaja Nipendra Narayan, the ruler of Cooch Behar, Colonel Houghton, the British Commissioner of the State had given much attention to progress the communication system of Cooch Behar State. From the Bengal Administration Report of 1874-75 the communication system of Cooch Behar prior to the introduction of Railways in the State highlighted very poor communication system. There were 115 miles of unmetalled road, with numerous good wooden bridges and thousands of carts. There were many steams and some boats, but water carriage did not seem likely to play an important part in the traffic of Cooch Behar. The state of Cooch Behar lies intermediate between two navigable rivers, the Brahmaputra and the Tista but there was very little trade through river traffic except during the rains. Thus, the introduction of Railway in Cooch Behar State brought about a change in the communication system. In 1876 the North Bengal Railways opened a station at Haldibari. This line later became the mainline of the Eastern Bengal Railway connecting Calcutta with Siliguri and Darjeeling. But as Haldibari lay at the extreme western end of the state, and the Tista river intervened, connection of Haldibari with other places in the state was not easy. Thus, in 1883 a plan was taken to connect Cooch Behar with Mogalhat of Rangpur through Kaunia and Dhubri line. But as the Government did not accept that programme, the plan was cancelled in 1884. Thus within a considerable progress was made in the construction of Cooch Behar state Railway line, which was opened for goods traffic on 15th September, 1893.⁸⁹ In the very next year, the Cooch Behar state itself constructed a railway of its own from Mogalhat to Cooch Behar in 1894.⁹⁰ The Cooch Behar State Railway now came into existence. In this connection it is to be mentioned that prior to the construction of railway from Mogalhat to Cooch Behar in 1891 a small feder line was built on a gauge of 2.6" ran from Gitaldah junction on the Dhubri branch of the Eastern Bengal State Railway to Jaintia station. From Gitaldah junction it ran to Buxa Road station and from that point the railway line advanced towards Jaintia. The Cooch Behar State Railway

has been extended northward to the boundary of the state, and the line is continued thence through the Jalpaiguri district to Jainti near Buxa. This extension gives railway communication to numerous tea-gardens in the Jalpaiguri Duars, and will contribute materially to the income of the state railway. In 1898-99 special gauge (railway) 3.22 miles Torsa – Cooch Behar and 11.50 miles Cooch Behar – Alipurduar were completed.⁹¹ Between February and April 1910, the line from Mogalhat to Cooch Behar converted into a meter gauge. This linked up Cooch Behar with the railway system of the district of Rangpur (now in Bangladesh). At first, the railway stopped near Cooch Behar town to the south of the river Torsa. After the construction of a bridge over the Kaljani river in 1900, the line was extended upto Alipurduar and in 1901 the line was extended to Rajabhatkhawa and Jaintia in the Bhutan foothills. The meter gauge from Rajabhatkhawa to Hasimara was extended in 1914.⁹² Historically the Haldibari railway station was the first railway station of the present North Eastern India. Radharaman Mitra in his Calcutta Darpan stated that between 1875-76, a severe famine occurred in North Bengal and the Government for relieving the famine opened the railway in Cooch Behar.⁹³ But it is to be noted that though the famine was an immediate reason for the opening of railway in Cooch Behar, in general it was the Colonial interest that the expansion of railway started. Besides the Colonial needs, the Britishers were specially attracted to the jute and tea of North Bengal and Assam but the road and riverine transportation of these agricultural crops were both costly and hazardous.⁹⁴ Thus, with the introduction of the railways overall transport system was effected and the entire trade and commerce of the district, both export and import, got a tremendous boost. The Eastern Bengal State Railway, better known as the North Bengal State Railway, the Bengal Duars Railway and the Cooch Behar State Railway all traversed the whole district.

In 1872, there was no railway in the district of Dinajpur. Within a decade in 1881, however, only a few miles of the line passed through the district.⁹⁵ Between 1884 and 1891 Eastern Bengal State Railway and Northern Bengal State Railway opened railway line in Dinajpur district.⁹⁶

The mainline of the Eastern Bengal State Railway traversed the eastern angle of the district from north to the south for a distance of 31 miles. The Bihar section of the Eastern Bengal railway left the mainline at Parbatipur junction and runs from east to west across the centre of the district. The stations on the mainline from north to south were Parbatipur, Bhowanipur, Phulbari and Chonkai and those on the Bihar section from east to west were Parbatipur, Chirarbandar, Kallgaon, Dinajpur, Birol (all are now in Bangladesh) Radhikapur, Kaliyaganj, Bangalbari and Raiganj.

Dinajpur was purely an agricultural district and was one of the principal rice producing districts in the Bengal province.⁹⁷ The trade of Dinajpur with the North – Western Provinces consisted almost entirely of the exports of rice. Besides rice, tobacco, jute, salt, gunny cloth and molasses were the chief articles of trade of the district. A great portion of the grain produced in the rice field of Dinajpur was shipped to large river side produce depots in Malda. Large quantities of rice passed Sahibganj from Dinajpur through Malda. Most of the exports to Calcutta came by way of river route. Jute also was largely exported from Dinajpur by way of the river route. So, the trade of Dinajpur district prior to the introduction of railway was either river based or road based. However, Dinajpur was not a boat or sea faring district.⁹⁸

In comparison to other districts of North Bengal, railway communication was very poor in Malda district during the period under study. Malda District was classed as partly riverine. Besides the riverine route, road transportation was other important means of communication.

Thus, before the introduction of railways in Malda all the trade of the district carried through either riverine transport or by road transport. In the first decade of the twentieth century Malda was connected with some branches of railway line by East India Railway. In this context it is to be noted that Railway came much later in 1909 in Malda district among the districts of North Bengal. The introduction of railway in Malda district gradually lessened the importance of road transport. The opening of Katihar – Godagari line lessened the importance of English Bazar –

Rajmahal route.⁹⁹ This line which opened in 1909 gave railway communication to the district. A line was also opened from Rajmahal to English Bazar via Kalindri by the East India Railway. Besides this line, the Eastern Bengal Railway opened a line from Amnura to Kumedpur via Nachole, Rohanpur, Singhabad, Muchia, Nimasarai, Adina, Eklakhi, Kumarganj, Samsi, Bhaluka Road and Harischandrapur. The Godagari – Kathihar metre gauge line connected the north-west of the district with Purnea district of Bihar. In 1929, the construction of the Chapai-Nawabganj-Abdulpur broad gauge line was completed.¹⁰⁰ Thus with the introduction of railway in Malda, the traders preferred to use the rail communication and the principal articles were now exported through railway. Through rail, the bulk of rice and jute was exported to Calcutta.¹⁰¹ Fish were exported through railway from Rajmahal and Lalgola to neighbouring districts. Malda had long been famous for its mangoes. Mango was also exported by rail to Calcutta and other places.

The following table shows goods carried by the Eastern Bengal Railway from different stations of Malda (in maunds) during the year 1930-31.

Station	Paddy	Rice	Pulse and gram.	Jute	Oil seeds	Sugar	All goods
Amnura	780	881	42	-	-	-	8999
Nachole	3545	301	-	-	8	-	6072
Rohanpur	3349	3414	152	225	274	-	13362
Singabad	336	113	14	-	-	-	2316
Muchia	1172	145	25	-	16	-	2757
Malda	22	527	84	-	302	-	5038
Malda Out Agency	13	41	410	-	188	-	5920
Nimarasai	1038	2313	14518	43316	9268	3219	103216
Adina	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Eklashi	222	77	16	-	-	-	2654
Kumarganj	214	-	13	-	192	-	5316
Samsi	7671	21580	51404	80745	20518	49	199730
Baluka Road	455	2654	6467	33312	2361	-	55496
Harishchandrapur	1106	5498	32346	39690	3615	164	88062
Kumedpur	-	-	-	406	-	-	712
Total	19793	37644	105489	197694	36742	3432	499644

Source : M.O. Carter, Final Report on the Survey and settlement operations in the district of Malda (1928-35), Bengal Secretariat Press, 1938 Calcutta, p.18

North Bengal's economy, during the second half of the nineteenth century was primarily agricultural. So, an analytical survey of the opening of Railway system in this region may give a picture of the socio-economic impact of the construction of railways in North Bengal.

The following table shows the total amount of traffic conveyed by the North Bengal State Railway

Year	Down traffic (in mds)	Up traffic	Total traffic	Rs.
1886-87	4545846	1978767	6524613	55126765
1887-88	5229111	2443142	7672253	61018123
1888-89	6164795	2852942	9017737	65472446

Source : Report on the Administration of Bengal for the year 1887-88 and 1888-89, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, p.168 and p.181 respectively.

The mainline of the DHR carried the greater part of the produce of the Sadar and Kurseong Sub-division, the supplies needed for the towns of Darjeeling and Kurseong and for the tea gardens and industries of these sub-divisions as well as the traffic from Nepal crossing the frontier at Simana Basti and Northward. The principal commodities moved by the DHR on the mainline were rice and other food grains, cement, iron, salt and building materials, coal, provisions and miscellaneous merchandise in the upward direction and potatoes, tea cardamoms, orange and timber in the downward direction. The table shows the important part the Railway played in the economy of the district as well as areas beyond the district to the north.

Year	Mainline goods. Tons (000's)	S.K. Extension goods. Tons (000's)	T.V. Extention goods. Tons (000's)
1909-10	47	-	-
1919-20	62	46	29
1929-30	80	44	28
1934-35	76	45	30

Source: A.J. Dash, Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, 1947, p.196

Rice was an important commercial items transported by the railways. The Siliguri-Kishanganj line handled timber, rice and jute. The cultivation of jute increased largely since the advent of the railway system of transport which ensured cheaper costs of export of jute.¹⁰² The Siliguri Kishanganj extention leaves the mainline at Panchanai junction, three miles from Siliguri, where it turned westwards and passed through Matigara, one of the biggest hat in the district between Mahananda and Balason river.¹⁰³ In the 1880's, the emergence of Matigara as a centre of trade and distribution was spectacular. It was stated in the annual General Administration Report of the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling for the year 1885 that the bazaar of Matigara became a centre of trade and distribution second only to Darjeeling not only for the Terai but also for the Hills.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, Matigara was an important Railstation under Katihar section of Northern Bengal Railways. The line from Matigara ran to Naxalbari, 14 miles from Siliguri. The importance of Naxalbari was that it was near the border of Nepal and was an outlet for rice and timber from the state. From Naxalbari, the line ran south west to Galgalia, 29 miles from Siliguri. Galgalia was a depot for paddy from Nepal. It is to be mentioned that most of the fertile tracts in and near the Terai tapped by the railway facilitated to receive in increasing quantities of foodgrains, of which more than half of the imports were from Nepal.¹⁰⁵ Besides rice, the other agricultural crops like raw jute was also exported from Galgalia. From Galgalia the line passed through Thakurganj, an important rice centre, upto Aluabari, a large centre for jute and rice. From Aluabari the line turned south west and joined the Bengal Assam meter gauge section at Kishanganj in Bihar, 70 miles from Siliguri. The Kishanganj branch of the DHR served the Terai tea garden via Siliguri and there was a certain amount of traffic with Nepal through Naxalbari station, some of which passed through Siliguri. The Kishanganj branch carried principally jute and paddy.¹⁰⁶ The whole import and export trade of the plains passed through the Bengal and Assam Railway at Siliguri. Further, timber logs were brought to the timber sawing industry at Siliguri by the Forest Department through DHR.¹⁰⁷ The Tista Valley

branch carried orange, cardamom, potato, timber and wool. Large bales of wool from Tibet and fresh oranges and cardamoms supplied through Gielle Khola near Kalimpong.¹⁰⁸ Kalimpong which was incorporated in British India in 1865 was an important trade centre on the trade routes from Sikkim and Tibet to Bengal. Pack Ponies arrived with wool from Tibet to Kalimpong and traders of many creeds and races jostled with each other in Kalimpong for trading purpose.¹⁰⁹ Dried chilli was a profitable trade and the Tibetan traders engaged in that trade. From Vunter, a place of Kulu valley of Himalayan province where from the dried chillies were purchased and brought by road and then by rail to Kalimpong via Calcutta and Siliguri. From Kalimpong, it was exported by pack ponies to Tibet. It is known that in 1930 the value of a price of dried chilly was to a silver coin.¹¹⁰ Thus, it is clear that the increased facilities of railway communication, gave an impetus to trade. But what is more important is that the tea gardens and tea industries grew rapidly with the rapid development of railway system in Darjeeling. Within fourteen years of the first commercial plantation in 1866, there were 39 gardens in existence and nearly 3000 acres of tea under cultivation where as in 1921 there were 150 gardens covering nearly 54,000 acres and the annual output of tea exceeded 17 million pounds in Darjeeling.¹¹¹ This was the outcome of the rapid development of railways in Darjeeling district due to very active interest taken by the British Government.

The increased facilities of railway communication had great impact in Jalpaiguri district also. The district which was well supplied with railways monopolised most of the trade. J.F. Gruning writes, "The development of the tea industry and the influx of a large cooli population into western Duars, combined with increased facilities of railway communication, have given an impetus to trade generally, and the large markets which have sprung up in the neighbourhood of the tea gardens, provides the cultivator with a ready market for his rice, vegetables and other products".¹¹² The Eastern Bengal State Railway served the permanently settled paragon west of the Tista, the Bengal Duars Railway and its branches ran through the tract between Tista and Torsa rivers

and the rest of the Alipurduar Sub-division was served by the Cooch Behar State Railway. The trade of the district was mainly with Calcutta. Jalpaiguri was an extensive plain yielding copious crops of rice, jute, tobacco, sugarcane, mustard etc. And there was no uncultivated or waste land in the regulation portion of the district except the tract known as the Baikunthapur Sal Forest.¹¹³ The principle exports were tea, jute, tobacco, rice, cotton, piece-goods. Tea and jute were railed to Calcutta.¹¹⁴ From 1883 to 1900 same percent of raw jute was supplied to Calcutta from Jalpaiguri due to the opening of railways in Jalpaiguri district.

The following table shows supply of jute from different parts of North Bengal to Calcutta.

Imports of Jute into Calcutta from supplying districts of North Bengal

Districts	Imports by all routes			Imports by rail		
	1886-87 Mds.	1887-88 Mds.	1888-89 Mds.	1886-87 Mds.	1887-88 Mds.	1888-89 Mds.
Jalpaiguri	326596	242829	459916	326596	242929	459916
Dinajpur	186660	169674	210099	59806	44806	99290
Malda	47848	56109	121141	-	-	-
Darjeeling	-	-	61261	24643	20304	61261

Source : Report on the Administration of Bengal 1887-89 & 1888-89, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1889 & 1890, p.135 & p.143 respectively.

The merchants of Baura hat, situated on a small tributary of the Tista, preferred to sent their goods by rail.¹¹⁵ It is recorded that through Bengal Duars Railway in 1907, 91,800 maunds of tobacco were dispatched from Baura Station out of 111,977 maunds and following six months 49,499 maunds out of 61,195 maunds were despatched from Baura Station.¹¹⁶ Thus, the river trade was gradually decreasing. But some particular items like timber trade did not loose its importance through riverine way. During that time timber was exported to Dacca and Sirajganj through the Brahmaputra river. Thus it is found that a great change took place by the opening of the Bengal Duars Railways. Before the construction of railways in Jalpaiguri district, the tea gardens of the area depended upon road transportation. The tea gardens of the Dam Dim and Phulbari Ghat used roads to send their tea to or get supplies from

Jalpaiguri and Siliguri.¹¹⁷ But with the opening of railways, nearly all the traffic was conducted through the railway. The introduction of Railway also led to the improvement of the roads. So as to ensure easy traffic from different stations. Jute cultivation and jute trade had increased by gigantic step with the opening of railways in Jalpaiguri district. During 1907, the railway carried 144000 tons of goods of which exports of jute was 17,106 tons.¹¹⁸ Long before, during the time of Warren Hastings, 'timber' was mentioned as one of the items of trading possibilities in North Bengal. Thus with the introduction of railways, timber logs were easily carried by railway transportation to different parts of North Bengal. Lataguri of Jalpaiguri district was an important timber depot and railway junction. There emerged great number of saw mills adjacent to Lataguri. Prior to partition of India, there were references of timber trade by railway from Rangpur, Parbatipur to Lataguri via Changrabanda, Bhotepatti, Mayanaguri, Domohani. From Lataguri there were branch lines to Neora and Ramshai which principally carried only timber logs.

The introduction of Railway in Cooch Behar State had great impact in its economy and in the economy of North Bengal as well. It changed the pattern of the economy of the district as well as the economy of North Bengal as it opened to trade and commerce. It transmitted commercial crops like jute, tobacco, foodgrains etc. from village to town. With the blessing of Railway, Haldibari became an important town and it greatly helped the economy of the state. Within 7 to 8 years after the introduction of railways the export trade of the Cooch Behar became double.¹¹⁹ With the establishment of jute company at Haldibari, it became a special trade centre. A very large quantity of jute were exported from the neighbouring station of Haldibari, which was one of the biggest centre of the jute trade in Bengal.¹²⁰ Jute from Boda, Pachagadr (now in Bangladesh) and Islampur came to Haldibari by bullock cart. The annual administrative report of Cooch Behar revealed as to how jute trade increased due to railway facility. The quantity of jute imported into Haldibari was 519010 maunds in 1911-12 as against 355620 maunds in 1910-1911 from different parts of North Bengal.¹²¹ Haldibari became a jute depot of North Bengal and

from Haldibari all the raw jute were exported to Scotland through Calcutta Port. During 1930s, everyday 60 wagon raw jute were exported from Haldibari by a special 'Mal' train called Jute special.¹²² However, in 1933, the opening of new railway line from Dinajpur to Ruhea had led to a diversion of jute traffic in that direction thereby affecting adversely the state Bundar of Haldibari.¹²³ The European Jute Companies Ralli Brothers, Barkmayer, Landen and Clark opened their firms at Haldibari and exported raw jute from there. Adjacent to the Haldibari and Chawrahat railway line, some European business firms grew up. Besides the Europeans, the merchants from other states particularly the Marawaris migrated to Haldibari for trading purpose. Within 1926, there were 7/10 European firm and 14/15 Marawari and indigenous firms connected with jute and tobacco trade at Haldibari.¹²⁴ It should be noted that Cooch Behar and its adjacent region Dhubri and Goalpara of Assam were the biggest jute growing districts of India and raw jute also came to Haldibari from these regions.¹²⁵ It is known that for the paper mill of Titagarh, bamboos were exported through Haldibari by Rail wagon and from Haldibari light wooden logs were exported to WIMCO.¹²⁶

With the introduction of railways in Dinajpur, the high costs of road transport, the risks and uncertainties typically associated with river transport came to an end. Now the trade lasted all the year on account of the opening of North Bengal State Railway in Dinajpur. The North Bengal State Railway improved the merchandise trade of Dinajpur in a large way.¹²⁷ Dinajpur district was noted for its rice exports and before the introduction of railway in this district, grain used to be carried on during rainy season only by boats. With the introduction of railway rice trade got much importance as the traders preferred to use rail route. In 1909-10, nearly four lakhs of maunds of unhusked and 178000 maunds of husked rice were exported by rail.¹²⁸ Traders preferred to export rice by the rail to the nearest railway station also. Thus, as a result of the gradual improvement in communication the prices of agricultural produce rose steadily. With regard to Dinajpur district, rice became the most marked commodity with the opening of the railway between 1884 and 1891.¹²⁹

Besides rice, the other important articles exported through rail from Dinajpur were rags and mustard seed, raw hides, jute etc. Raiganj was itself a railway station and was a principal mart from where jute was exported.¹³⁰ The exports of jute in 1909-10 were 3,72,000 maunds, nearly the whole of which was carried by rail to Calcutta.¹³¹ There was also a considerable export of chillies from Kaliyaganj railway station to the eastern district.

Thus, it is found that a great change was witnessed with the opening of Railways in North Bengal during the concerned period. It should be mentioned that before the introduction of Railways in North Bengal, the communication system of North Bengal was of primitive type depending mainly on bullock-Carts and river ports. But whatever development the British made in this field in India was not for meeting India's need for economic progress, but to serve the Colonial interests of their homeland. They found in India a good source of raw materials, a big field of investment and a growing market for their manufactured goods as well. In order to fulfill these objectives better, they paid necessary attention to open up a good and cheap communication system i.e. the Railways system. The Britishers had a pre-conceived notion that the communication of India needed to be developed to effectively convert India into agricultural firm. According to Rajani Palme Dutta by this way India thus turned to be an agricultural colony of the British.¹³² The districts of North Bengal were no exception to it. The gradual progress of railways in North Bengal obviously stimulated different agricultural crops and cash crops in this region and this sign of stimulation could easily be seen in jute, tobacco, rice, cardamom, orange cultivation and other agricultural crops. But the greatest achievement of the introduction of railway was the rapid expansion of the tea industries in Darjeeling and Duars areas. Due to the rapid growth of tea gardens in North Bengal, the wage earning population increased rapidly. Thus a great demand for agricultural produce was created, but without the opening of railway line that demand could not be met. With the opening of Railways in North Bengal, the transportation of agricultural goods became easier. The railway opened

this region to a great extent to trade and commerce and both exports and imports trade in this region were largely enhanced and transmitted commercial crops of this region like jute, tobacco, foodgrains etc. from the village marts to the towns and Bandars (Ports). Thus the markets were widened throughout this region as well as the other parts of India and the world also. The different Railways like Eastern Bengal State Railway, North Bengal State Railway, Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, the Bengal Duars Railway, Cooch Bihar State Railway etc. really created an excitement to exploit the whole region of both plains and hills economically. The hilly areas like Darjeeling and Kalimpong especially became important for trans-frontier trade. Siliguri became an international trade centre. The entire trade alongwith Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet and also the vast North Eastern region passed through Siliguri and practically the whole of the import and export trade from the plains passed through the Bengal and Assam Railway via Siliguri. Like other parts of India and Bengal, the introduction of railways attracted the different entrepreneurial communities to migrate in this region for undertaking economic ventures. As E.E. Lewis, the then Commissioner remarked that a great change has been wrought by the opening of Northern Bengal State Railway for traffic. He also mentioned that before 1878, the Marwari businessmen used to establish their main business centres at main town of Jalpaiguri and set up business in their own account in the Duars¹³³ but with the opening of Railways, the Marwaris tookup courage to spread their activities across the district. So, the non regional Indian traders and merchants such as Marwaris, Beharis, Punjabees, traders from present U.P. and traders from other parts of Bengal began to rush to North Bengal for economic ventures. It also attracted foreign merchants and traders such as British, Scottish, American, Tibetan and others to take part in new economic ventures in this region. So, the opening of the Railway all over North Bengal brightened the economic prospects of this region.

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