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Preface

Foundation of railway in India in 1853, between Bombay and Thane is a remarkable incident in Indian history. That was undoubtedly a new dimension in the history of communication in India. In 1854, the East India Railway (EIR) connected Howrah and Hooghly, thus the railway entered in Bengal. The Eastern Bengal railways came into existence in 1850, to construct the 110-mile route from Calcutta to Kushtia. In 1871, Eastern Bengal railway reached the western bank of the Padma and established railheads at Kushtia (Nadia) and Goalando (Faridpur). In 1870, the primary construction work of the meter gauge line started from Siliguri to Poradahar and thus the Northern Bengal State Railway opened to traffic up to Jalpaiguri in 1878.

My selected research title is 'Growth and Development of Railways in North Bengal and its Impact on Society and Economy (1870-1950)'. The title denotes the introduction and development of railways in the northern region of Bengal between the periods of 1870 to 1950; the term as well as signifies the factors and nature of the development of the railway in the same region. At present, the term 'North Bengal' only indicates the northern part of West Bengal in India, including the districts of Malda, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Darjeeling Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar. In our study area, the term 'North Bengal' designates the northern part of colonial Bengal, including the districts of Pabna, Rajshahi, Bogra, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Malda, Darjeeling and Coochbehar state also, which basically indicates the our fields within the study area.

The study indicates the nature of the colonial commercial and political interest behind the foundation and development of railways in North Bengal. Therefore, the transport policy of the colonial authority was an indispensable part of our study. Here we have calculated all the significant factors those are highly responsible for the development of railways in North Bengal.

The acceptance of the railways as a superior carrier for the internal and external trade is practically examined by the comparative analysis of the export-import trade. We have examined all factors behind the rise of railway as an excellent carrier from any traditional mode. We have studied the comparative transport cost, capability and reliability of railways and other conventional modes. The study also examined how far the communication systems revolutionized by the introduction of modern technology like a railway. In national context, railways took a dominant role in the export-import merchandise traffic where the role of conventional mode gradually became secondary. We have practically examined the acceptance of the railways as a superior carrier for the internal and external trade in respect of our research area. North Bengal is highly facilitated by the wonderful river

communication system. Therefore, we specially examined the competition between railways and river traffic in North Bengal.

It is argued that the foundation of railways helped to expand the agricultural market. Agriculture production of India linked with the national and international market which helped to commercialize the agricultural products of the country. We have studied the role of railway to accelerate the process of commercialization of agriculture in North Bengal. Therefore, this analysis not only calculates the argument of the widening of agricultural market but also indicates the trend and nature of the expansion of agricultural market by the railways in North Bengal. The study significantly indicates the role of railway to link the agriculture products of North Bengal with the global market.

Railway's impact on industrialization and de-industrialization in North Bengal is also a significant part of our discussion. The process of industrialization does not only depend on the factor of communication, but it is a unique feature to develop the industry in any particular region. The study also indicates role of the commercialization of agriculture, to develop the small-scale agriculture-base modern industry in North Bengal. We have significantly traced on the study of major capitalist investment on the plantation industry of North Bengal. We as well critically examined the role of railways to accelerate the process of de-industrialization in North Bengal.

We have examined the role of railways to reduce the price divergence and price gap of the essential products of North Bengal. We have selected two necessary products for common people; the rice, one of the main export products of North Bengal and salt, most needed import product of North Bengal. The study mainly calculates the trend of pre and post-railway price convergence and price gap in North Bengal.

We have also selected the study on wage structure and purchase power of the common labourer to identify the economic condition of the marginal people. We have examined the wage structure and purchase power of the common labourer to analyze the economic impact of railways on the society of North Bengal. We have simply calculated the pre and post railway wage development of the northern districts of Bengal. To calculate the real economic development, we decided the study of the purchase power which indicates the real economic condition of common people.

In our social area, we have selected the socio-cultural impact of the economic changes due to railways on the natives of North Bengal. We have calculated the impact of the development of railway communication on the native society and culture. The study has tried to calculate the role of railways to accelerate the process of westernization and *sanskritization* in North Bengal. Study on demography, environment, socio-cultural assimilation, impact on gender status and the racial challenge are as well incorporated with the same. We have specially examined the role of railways for the deforestation in North Bengal. In the demographic analysis, we have studied the role of railways to reduce the population density gap between the police stations and administrative blocks of the districts of North Bengal or the role to converge the population distribution in North Bengal. In our social area, we have also studied the impact of railways on the native society and culture.