

INTRODUCTION

Scope of the Study

This research work is perhaps the first ever attempt to make a comprehensive study of the Marwaris who have settled in the three northern districts of Darjeling, cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal. Some studies have no doubt been undertaken on the Marwari Community in general and some of its sub-caste groups in particular. But no detailed or district-wise or even region-wise study has so far been made of this business community. Two fundamental works on the community, which are available, are (1) Thomas A. Timberg's "The Marwaris-from traders to Industrialists" and (2) Dr. D.K. Taknet's "Industrial Entrepreneurship of Shekhwati Marwaris". But these are macro-level research studies on the Marwaris living in the important cities and towns of some Indian Provinces or states. The two works do not go into the details of commercial pursuits, industrial activities and achievements of the Marwari community at the district level. Even the article and papers on the migrant Marwari community, published so far in academic journals and magazines, focus on specified aspects of the business activities of the Marwaris and are by no means micro level studies undertaken region or district-wise. Moreover, the Districts of Darjeeling, cooch Behar, and Jalpaiguri are virtually virgin soil in this respect from the researcher's point of view. Herein lies the relevance and

importance of the present study.

The process of migration of the Marwaris to the region under study has to be understood in the context of the socio-economic as well as socio political conditions prevailing in the area before and also at the time of their migration; The marwari business community was attracted to the area because of some factors that were in operation in the three Districts under study during a certain period of time. The historical method of research has been found useful to analyse these factors. The approach is of the micro level type which is consistent with the present move towards historical empirical research. The remote village has at times been used as the lowest socio economic unit, thereby going down to the grass root level. Further, as various groups and communities have come within the orbit of the study, the group approach to social science research has also been of use.

However, micro level research often suffers from lack of data or primary source material and the present study is no exception. To obviate this difficulty, a pilot survey was conducted by handing out questionnaires to the old resident Marwari families of the districts of Darjeeling, CoochBehar and Jalpaiguri. The information furnished by those who responded constitutes the primary source material for this study. The district gazetteers, government records, and administrative reports have also been used

extensively in this research study. And local journals, magazines, little magazines, souvenirs, news papers and above all, secondary source materials collected from the books published on the subject, have provided valuable supplementary information for the study.

The first chapter of this dissertation deals with the early history and socio-economic background of the three districts of Darjeeling, CoochBehar and Jalpaiguri, prior to the arrival of Marwari businessmen in the area. How things changed after the establishment of British rule has also been covered in this chapter. After the British came, the subsistence^e agriculture of the area was gradually commercialized, which opened up opportunities for business ventures and induced various merchant groups to migrate here.

The second chapter briefly covers the early history of the Marwari community and its social, economic, religious, caste, and cultural identities. The role of religion as a factor in the choice of a business career by the Marwaris has also been touched upon.

In the third chapter are given some definitions and general theories of human migration, both internal and external or transcontinental. The factors and forces behind migration and the causes of the Marwari migration to the region under study have also been dwelt upon.

The fourth chapter deals elaborately with the emergence of the Marwaris as a distinct business community in the three districts of North Bengal and their settlement at the important centres of trade and commerce in the area.

In the fifth chapter, the switch over by the Marwaris from the money - lending to the money - investing business has been discussed in some detail. Initially, the principal occupation of the Marwaris was to lend money and earn interest. However, as new avenues of commercial enterprise opened up, they began to deviate from their traditional occupation and started investing money in land and various businesses. Ownership of land was a status symbol and it also diluted, to some extent, the 'outsider' identity of migrants. Besides, ownership of land was a necessity for commercializing a backward agriculture. So many Marwaris who earned interest at exorbitant rates by lending money and thus amassed vast sums of money had actually started purchasing 'jotes' to become 'jotedars'.

Chapter sixth highlights the development of transport and communication that provided a fillip to business and industrial activity in the area. The gradual development of a communications network and a transport system increased labour mobility and the viability of business units. The development of transport and communications was also conducive to the commercialization of agriculture. So as the profitability of investment increased, migrant

merchant groups were attracted to the area and the Marwaris with their business acumen were quick to seize the new opportunities.

The seventh chapter throws light on all aspects of the commercial ventures of Marwari businessmen in the three districts under study. The transition of a subsistence agrarian economy to a market oriented and surplus generating economy, the commodities and cash crops like paddy, sugarcane, tobacco, cinchona, coffee and tea which began to be marketed on an increasing scale and the important role of Marwari marchants and entrepreneurs in the trade and commerce of the region, have also been discussed at considerable length. The predominance of the Marwaris in the export and import trade of the area has also come under close study.

The next chapter notes the cultural activities of the Marwaris in the region and also their participation in political activity. Some Marwari had actually joined the freedom movement of our country. In the ninth chapter is given a detailed account of how their philanthropic nature, power of adaptability to local conditions and amiable temperament helped the Marwaris set up their business in areas far away from their homes in Rajasthan. Indeed, their remarkable ability to mingle with local people and their broad outlook went a long way towards achieving success in their pioneering efforts in the world of trade

and commerce in the area under study.

The concluding chapter sums up the research findings and analysis. And it includes some candid observations of this researcher on the success of the Marwari Community in the business domain in the area.
