

CHAPTER - I

THE BACKDROP

This research study seeks to explore the emergence of the Marwaris as a distinct business community in the three northern districts of Cooch Behar, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal. In order to understand the factors which attracted Marwari businessmen to these areas, a brief account of the transition of this region from a static feudal or semi-feudal state to a somewhat modern phase may be useful. Historically, the three districts were, however, by no means of homogeneous character; they rather exhibited diverse characters and the diversity persisted until the establishment of British colonial rule in India.

The district of Cooch Behar was at one time a princely state and its economy was of a static semi-feudal nature, heavily dependent upon traditional agriculture. The minimum daily needs of the people could be met with the meagre resource available to them within the state. (1) But there was merely subsistence living and no economic prosperity and social mobility in the state. There was a lack of transport and communication and no foreign contact. Hence no trade and commerce could develop either within the state or with the outside world. Even the general administration of the state was lamentable; in the words of the first Deputy Commissioner, Beveridge " Before

the appointment of a British Commissioner, the government of CoochBehar was in a deplorable condition. It was infact a mongrel government, being a cross as it were between the Bhutia or the Koch - idea of government and those which the Bengali Amla supposed to be ours. There was no cohesion or real subordination in any part of the administration from the top to the bottom." (2) This ineffectual administrative set-up, tagged on to a most backward economy, was bound to be a deterrent to any kind of modernization.

In this context, mention may be made of Nilambara, the last Khen King of Kamtapur. He was a mighty king and his suzerainty extended over the greater part of Goalpara and Kamrupa, the whole of Rangpur and coochBehar and parts of Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur. During his reign, the communications net work was improved and magnificent roads with good tanks alongside, every few mile, were constructed. Portions of these roads still form part of the main road between coochbehar, Rangpur and Bogra. (3) The present Dinhata Mekhliganj Road closely follows this alignment and the embankment of this road. Another big road was built so as to connect Kamtapur with Ghoraghat. (4)

The reign of Nilambara was also important from the socio-economic point of view, for it was for for the first time that a small communications network of some sort of

inter-regional nature had been developed. This advancement had at least three bearings on this region :

(1) Social mobility in the region was promoted
(2) Agricultural produce could be transported from the village marts to towns and ports

(3) Foreign merchants were attracted to the region to take part in trade and commerce.

This is amply corroborated by Radhakrishna Das Bairagi, a contemporary chronicler of the Kamta dynasty, in his book " The Gosanimangal " wherein he mentions the "Kainyas" by which the Marwari merchants used to be called at that time. (5)

Nevertheless, this reign of Nilambara was nothing more than a momentary flash which failed to alter the basic character of the traditional economy of the princely state. This, however, does not mean that the state was devoid of economic vitality. Captain Lewin, in his 'Account of Kuch-Bihar State', writes, " Kuch - Bihar forms a large, well-cultivated plain. The greater portion of the state is fertile". (6) Its natural resources, flora and fauna, had always been numerous. At least six principal rivers such as (i) the Tista, (ii) the Singimari, (iii) the Torsha (Dharla), (iv) the Kaljani, (v) the Raidhak and (vi) the Godadhar have been flowing over the state. These rivers had always been navigable by trading boats with a carrying capacity of 100 maunds or say 4 tons through out the year. (7) The rivers were like arteries supplying water sources to the state. So the state had economic resources

and hence some development potential. What was lacking was an efficient administration capable of ensuring a proper utilization of the available resources. But then the native administration could do nothing to develop the economic potential of the state. Maharaja Biswa Sinha, the founder of the princely state of Cooch Behar (1510 A.D.) inherited this traditional and stagnant economy of the state. The Mughal overlordship in the 16th and 17th centuries too could not do anything to bring about an improvement in the economic situation.

Such a gloomy state of things continued till 5th April 1773 when a treaty was signed between the East India Company and Dharendra Narayan, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar. The whole plan was engineered by Nazir Deo Khagendra Narayan. The treaty stipulated that the Rajah of Cooch Behar would immediately pay Rs. 50,000/- to the collector of Rangpur to meet the expenses of the force sent to assist him, that the amount would be expended, if necessary, and that the Rajah would acknowledge subjection to the will of the company upon his state being cleared of his enemies and would also allow the Cooch Behar state to be annexed to the province of Bengal. (8)

Meanwhile, the East India Company was granted the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa by the Mughal Badshah Shah Alam II in 1765. The company thus became the legal agency to renovate the land tenure settlements in the provinces

and at the same time to collect land revenue at its will. So it became necessary to make various land tenure experiments which tended to take a stable shape during the Governor Generalship of Warren Hastings. Ultimately, in 1793, Cornwallis introduced a new land tenure system under the name of permanent settlement. Under this new system a new class of intermediaries, called Zamindars, came into existence. With effect from the same year (1793) land revenue settlements were made permanent with Zamindars under an obligation to pay a fixed amount of revenue to the East India Company within a definite period of time. The Zamindari of the defaulters was to be confiscated and auctioned to the highest bidder. As a matter of policy, Cornwallis did not want to impose directly any financial burden on land-holders and cultivators. He wanted merchants and inhabitants of towns and cities to share the burden of revenue payment with zamindars. So he thought of introducing internal dues on commerce. He was of the view that since land revenues were fixed permanently, the company's servants would be free to devote themselves to the enforcement of the laws of internal trade which might be enacted for protecting the rights and property of land holders and cultivators. (9) In reality, however, after the new system of permanent settlement was introduced, the East India company, which was essentially a commercial organisation, started extracting as much revenue as possible. In a way, the permanent fixing of revenue in absolute

terms served the company's purpose to the fullest possible extent. The authorities also took a lesson from the contemporary European physiocratic way of thinking the cardinal principle underlying which was laissez - faire. It was with such a socio economic perspective that the East India Company concluded a treaty, in its own favour, with the cooch Behar state in 1773. Naturally, this intercourse began to generate its impact on the traditional economic set-up of this region and the consequent change followed the logic of history.

The reign of Harendra Narayan (1783 - 1839) had set the stage for change. During his reign, Henry Douglas was appointed British Commissioner for Cooch Behar in 1789. He not only restored law and order in the state but also introduced administrative procedures to be followed properly and regularly. He himself used to supervise all offices, whether judicial or revenue. He also superintended the proceedings of the courts and influenced their decisions. He used to pay quarterly visit to the Sadar Diwani Adalat and the Revenue Board of Calcutta, and also to the different departments under his charge.(10) Thus the State of cooch Behar came into direct contact with the British administration. From then onwards the land tenure system and land revenue settlements began to be geared into motion and the traditional agricultural economy of the state started shaking off its age - old slumber. The reign of Shivendra Narayan witnessed further improvements in the

administration of the state.

But the real breakthrough in the whole system came with the accession of Nripendra Narayan to the throne (1863-1911). He was truly a modern king. He had a great passion for English education and culture. He was a liberal minded monarch who broke the dynastic tradition by marrying Sunity Devi, daughter of Keshab Chandra Sen, the celebrated Brahmo reformer of the 'Naba Bidhan Brahmo Samaj'. Under him the administration of Cooch Behar entered into the modern phase. (11) The administrative machinery of the State was created on the model of a British district. (12) The land revenue system became scientific after rearrangement and resettlement. The state was thoroughly surveyed and all tenures and rights were recorded. By these operations land revenue could be raised from Rs. 307454 (£30,745.8s Od.) in 1863-64 to a prospective figure of about Rs. 900000/- (£90,000) in 1778-79. The English law codes were introduced. The courts, both civil and criminal, were conducted by the best executive servants. The police of the state had also been re-organised. The education of the people was given proper attention. Good carriage roads were built to connect the state with adjacent commercial centres. The rivers were bridged, plantations of valuable timber trees were preserved and an efficient system of the postal and telegraphic communication was established. (13) Every encouragement was given for the extension of cultivation. Production of commercial crops like jute and tobacco

was given priority. Nripendra Narayan went to the extent of hiring the services of two tobacco experts - Mr. Paterson of America and Mr. Montford of Manila. A scientific agricultural farm was established to train cultivators so that they could produce good quality tobacco on a large scale, Kumar Gagendra Narayan was sent to the Royal Agricultural College at Syren Sesta in England. Kumar Nityendra Narayan too was sent to learn agriculture in the U.S. After completion of their education they returned home and devoted themselves to extension of tobacco cultivation. Two experimental tobacco farms one at Neelkuthi and another at Dinahata, were established. For the first time in this country virginia tobacco cultivation was experimented with and the result was highly encouraging. (14) A major break through was also achieved in the field of communications.

Before Colonel Houghton's arrival there were only three roads covering a total distance of 41 miles in the whole of the state, but under British administration, the distance covered by roads increased to 284 1/2 miles by 1882 - 83. (15) The communication system was also geared up with the opening of the Cooch Behar State Railway for traffic in 1893. The rail transport greatly facilitated augmented supplies of commercial and agricultural goods, helped the growth of trade and commerce, created a variety of new avenues of employment and thus played a pivotal role in socio cultural development in the State and the neigh-

bouring British provinces. The rail link changed the entire pattern of the State's economy. (16) The development of transport and communications facilitated the movement of agricultural goods from the rural areas to the towns, bazars and bundars (ports) in increasing quantities. With the opening up of the country by roads and railways it was but natural to expect that the export import trade of the state would gradually expand. (17)

Thus Coochbehar became an area of lucrative trade and commerce and hence an area that held out good business prospects to any enterprising business community in India. What needs to be noted further is that since most of the people of the area earned their subsistence livelihood from land, there never existed a native or indigenous business community as such in this region. There had always been a 'commercial vacuum' in the area. This economic void was a great incentive to alien trading communities. So as years rolled on, various merchant communities such as the Marwaris, Gujaratis, Bengalees (Gandhabaniks, Subarnabaniks in particular), Khattris and so on, got attracted to the vast business prospects of the State and began to migrate and settle here to exploit the existing situation. The pioneers in this field were the Marwaris.

The picture was somewhat different in the district of Jalpaiguri as this district had never been a separate political entity before its modern formation in 1869. Its

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destiny was like that of a pendulum swinging to and fro; it belonged to different states at different periods. At times its destiny was merged with that of CoochBehar. In the ancient period both Jalpaiguri and CoochBehar had been parts of ancient Kamrupa (Pragjyotishpur)(18). During the early part of the 15th century, these two districts came under the sway of Khen imperialism and the three Kings of this dynasty were Niladhvaj, Chakradhwaj and Nilambara (19).

In the early part of the 16th Century, Jalpaiguri was known as Baikanthupur estate or Battrishazari, situated between the Teesta and Mahananda rivers and it was under the direct paramountcy of the Koch Kingdom, founded by Maharaj Biswa singha. It yielded an income of Rs. 32000/- per year (20). This estate or paragana was divided by Biswa singha and a part given to his brother Sisu (later Sishyasinha), the founder of the Raikat Family of Jalpaiguri. So the Raikats of Baikunthapur were a collateral branch of the Koch dynasty and as Sisu was the elder brother of Biswa sinha, they claimed themselves to be the senior branch of the Koch line.(21)

From the 17th Century onward, the fate of Jalpaiguri began to be separated from the destiny of CoochBehar by the Mughals who were rapidly extending their sway towards the east and they virtually conquered and annexed CoochBehar

in 1603. A fierce struggle then took place for possession of the two parganas of patgram and Boda which were ultimately ceded to the Mohammedans, though they were farmed out to a cousin of the Raja of Cooch Behar who held them on his behalf. These parganas were included within the Mughal Zamindari of Fakirkundi or Rangpur and were transferred to the East India Company with the grant of Diwani to it in 1765 (22). Thus Jalpaiguri came under direct administration by the British.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the fate of Jalpaiguri was destined otherwise by the British. It was practically converted into a chinese melon to be cut up and distributed again and again among various British districts or territories. This behavioural process started with the commencement of hostility towards Bhutan in 1772 when the Bhutias invaded Cooch Behar which was a dependency of British Bengal(23). After the British occupied Assam in 1826, it was discovered that the Bhutias had usurped several tracts of low lying land at the foot of the mountains, called the Duars and passes (24). There were 18 passes or Duars covering a narrow strip of country extending over twenty miles in breadth. The whole locality came to be known as the Athara Duars or 18 passes. Of these, eleven were situated between the Teesta and the Monass, bordering on the Bengal frontier and hence were called the Bengal Duars. The remaining seven passes were on the frontier of Goalpara and Kamrup districts of Assam and

were generally called the Assam Duars (25). The Bhutanese managed to overrun the Bengal Duars dispossessing the Mohammedan rulers but failed to obtain absolute possession of the Assam Duars. However, the Assam princes were forced to purchase their security, as it were, by making over their Duars to the Bhutanese in lieu of an annual payment of Yak tails, ponies, musk, gold-dust, blankets and knives of the estimated value of Narrainee Rs. 4785.4 (26)

At this revelation, the British conceived two things : (i) annexation of Bengal Duars from Bhutan at the expense of a fixed revenue ; and (ii) opening of commercial intercourse with Bhutan and Tibet. So initially the company decided not to lay emphasis on total rupture with Bhutan. Upon intercession of the Regent of Tibet, a treaty of peace between the company and the Bhutan Government had already been concluded in 1774. Thereafter three emissaries were sent to Bhutan one after another - Captain Turner in 1783, Captain Pemberton in 1837, and Mr. Ashley Eden in 1863. But the missions could not bring peace with honour, owing wholly to the high handed behaviour and indignity shown towards the British envoys by the Bhutan Government. When peace effort fails, use of force may succeed. The company declared permanent annexation of the district of Ambari - Falakata (Bengal Duars) and stopped the annual payments (£200 as rent for Ambari - Falakata and £ 1000 as revenue from the Assam Duars) previously made by the British Government to Bhutan. To the demands

for these payments the Debraja sent no reply. The Dharma Raja, however, solicited fresh intercession by the British. But the action of the Bhutan authorities left no option to the company. So by a proclamation made on 12 November, 1864 the British Government permanently annexed the Bengal Duars (27). With this annexation the foundation stone for the formation of modern Jalpaiguri district was laid.

At the same time, however, the British divided the Bengal Duars into two parts - Eastern and Western - for administrative reasons. Then they separated Western Duars along with Dalinkot from the East; and Fakirganj, Boda, Sanyasikata or Siliguri and Patgram from Rangpur and amalgamated them to form the modern District of Jalpaiguri in 1865. The Eastern Duars were merged with the Goalpara district of Assam. On 1st January, 1869 the Titalya sub-division was separated from Rangpur and incorporated with the Western Duars. But in 1867, the Dalinkot region (present day Kalimpong) was merged into the district of Darjeeling. Then came the 'Radcliffe Award' according to which the southern police stations of Titalya, Pachagarh, Boda, Debiganj and Patgram, comprising a total area of 672 sq. miles, became part of Pakistan. The Present day district of Jalpaiguri thus consist of the old Baikunthapur Estate and the Western Duars. Under the Bengal Estate Acquisition Act. of 1954, the Zamindari of the Baikunthapur Eatate was abolished and Jalpaiguri became a district of West Bengal (28).

Till the end of 16th century Jalpaiguri was only an agricultural tract and its agrarian economy was static in character. The picture was the same in the Cooch Behar state during this period. The working people were mostly shifting cultivators, hunters and food gathereres. As such their economy was a subsistence economy. A change towards a settled agriculture was attempted only after a section of the Koches were Hinduized under the influence of Bengalee Hindus and the Koch Kingdom under Biswa simha was established (29). In the 17th century Jalpaiguri became a partner in Mohammedan land revenue practice based on the Zamindari system, promulgated by Raja Todarmal. During the Dewanship of Murshid Quli Khan in the 18th century, some sort of change in the form of an Ijaradari system was administered here. Even when the East India company was granted the Diwani in 1765 the company was still a trading organisation which lacked both the willingness and the ability to set up an elaborate land revenue administration. So the Mohammedan practice of farming out land to contractors was continued untill 1783 (30). However, the period starting from 1783 and ending in 1869, i.e. till the formation of the modern Jalpaiguri district, did not witness any spurt in revenue administration. In this connection Dr. Buchanan Hamilton's account of Patgram, Boda, and Baikunthapur is worth mentioning. About Patgram, Dr. Hamilton states that the average rent paid

by the jotedars to the Raja was Rs 3/- for 10 dons, equal to 4 1/4 annas a calcutta bigha. The people were very poor shy and indolent. In Boda there was no economy in the management of revenue. In fact, the Raja's interests in this estate seem to have been greatly neglected. Baikunthapur was not included in any Sarkar or Mohammedan division of the country. It was only after the British assumed the government of the country that Baikunthapur was incorporated into the Bengal land revenue administration. The only rent actually realised from the tenants was about 4 3/4 annas per don of land, good and bad, equal to about 0.86 of a calcutta bigha (31). Hamilton's account undoubtedly indicates the miserable state of revenue administration in the district during the period preceding 1869.

But everything began to settle and improve since the formation of the district in 1869. The district was divided into two distinct tracts for revenue purposes. The permanently settled portion comprised Baikunthapur pargana and the chaklas of Boda, Patgram and purbabhag forming Jalpaiguri Sadar Sub division and Alipur Duar, Sub division comprised 180 temporarily settled estates and 5 government estates. The highlight of land settlements which were soon taken up, was that all settlements were made after detailed measurements and classification of the cultivable land (32). In the permanently settled parganas, all the farming lands were brought under cultivation. The zaminda-

ris were well managed with the manager supervising all the estates. The registers and accounts were kept up regularly. Everything became systematic (33). The first settlement was made in 1871 and the revenue of the parganas rose from Rs. 42,706/- to Rs. 65,133/-. The second settlement of 1880 resulted in an increase of revenue from Rs. 88,618 to Rs. 1,51,862 (34).

The increase in land revenue was due to a massive extension of cultivation and the transport of agricultural produce was largely supported by an improved communications network. It has already been mentioned that the khenking Nilambar of Kamtapur constructed several roads which ran from his capital in different directions in his territory. To these were added several other roads constructed under the supervision of the Public Works Department. The rail links provided another milestone in the communication system of the district. The Northern Bengal State Railway was opened to traffic as far as Jalpaiguri in 1878 and was then extended to Siliguri. The Bengal Duars Railway on the metre gauge was opened to serve the growing tea industry. The Cooch Behar State Railway linked Cooch Behar with Gitaldaha in 1891 and the section between Koch Behar and Alipur Duar, Jaintia was opened in 1900. (35)

But historically, the most significant development after the formation of the district had been the growth of tea plantation and the tea industry in the district. The tea

industry brought about a great transformation in the economic landscape, demography and the entire socio-economic pattern of the district. The thinly populated forest area of Western Duars gradually filled in with inhabited villages, tea gardens and small factories (36). The District began to prosper steadily and rapidly. The cultivators were well to do and probably in no other district in India, cultivation extended faster, while the reserved forests paid an increasing annual revenue to Government (37). As years rolled on, the district became a place of attraction and the population began to grow faster and faster. Educated Hindu gentry from East Bengal districts, clerks, lawyers, doctors, and teachers, from the neighbouring areas and even from the distant provinces of India flocked to and around the district and settled here. Thus a process of urbanization set in and the tea plantations and the tea industry further accelerated this process (38).

According to the first census taken in 1858 - 59 at the time of the revenue survey of Rangpur (to which district it then belonged) the population of the regulation part of the district was returned at 1,89,067 (39). A survey of the Western Duars was made in 1865 - 67, according to which the population of Western Duars was 49,620 (40). However the first elaborate attempt to enumerate the population of the District as a whole was made in 1872, according to which the population was 417,855. This figure

increased to 5,80,570 in 1881 and to 680,736 in 1891. The upward trend continued, the population figure reaching up to 787,380 in 1901. The largest increase in population, however occurred in Western Duars Gruning writes that migration of people from the neighbouring districts to the fertile waste lands of the Western Duars began as soon as British rule ensured the safety of life and property. With increasing migration more and more waste lands were brought under cultivation. The Mainaguri Tahsil was soon left with very little land for new settlers. Cultivation in the Falakata Tahsil was extended to an enormous extent.

Even in the eastern Tahsils of Alipur and Bhalka population increased rapidly and cultivation was extended in every direction. This increase was due to two factors:- (i) growth of the tea industry and (ii) influx of settlers from other districts and the Cooch Behar State. According to the statistical information made available by Gruning, the population of Western Duars increased from 49,620 in 1865 - 67 to 100,111 in 1870 to 182,687 in 1881 to 296,348 in 1891 and to 410,606 in 1901 (41).

So the British administration, new land settlements, tea plantations, growth of the tea industry, utilisation of reserve forests, major improvements in transport and communications, the extension of Cooch Behar State Railway up to Buxa Duars and of Northern Bengal state Railway up to Siliguri and the construction of Bengal Duars Railway to

serve the growing tea industry - all these factors completely changed the socio economic life of the people of the district. Every aspect of daily life was geared up. And social mobility among the native and alien inhabitants of the district increased considerably.

Extension of cultivation led to increased agricultural produce. Tea plantation and the tea industry undoubtedly provided a new momentum to economic activity. But then cash crop such as jute, tobacco, mustard, rice, cotton and wheat also began to be cultivated extensively. The forest resources of the district were numerous and valuable and were available over an area even larger than that of the adjoining district of Darjeeling. Baikunthapur was famous for its Jungle Mahal which was abundant in valuable Sal trees. So the scientific reservation of forests made the district rich in the timber resource. Improved communications made it possible to transport agricultural produce from remote village to towns, bazars and bundars. The geographical location of the district was such that it automatically got connected with trade in Calcutta in the south, with East Bengal and Burma in the East, with Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim in the west and with Bhutan and Tibet in the North. In the 19th century, or rather in the second half of the 19th century, to be more precise, a trans-Himalayan trade system grew up in North East India. Assam, Manipur, Rangpur, Dacca, Narayanganj, Chittagong and Calcutta on one side and Nepal, Darjeeling, Sikkim, Bhutan,

Tibet and even Central Asia on the other, came within the orbit of this international trade system (42). Thus tea and timber were added to trade and social mobility led to trade mobility. Various merchant communities such as Marwaris (Agarwals, Oswals etc) Biharis, Bengalees (Gandhabaniks, Subarnabaniks) , Khattris and so on came and settled here in search of commercial pursuits. But it was the Marwari community that played a dominant and pioneering role in the business domain. Gruhing writes "Marwari merchants exploit the western Duars as they do many parts of India ; always ready to lend money at exorbitant interest, they manage to get the simple cultivators into their debt and then extract from them the uttermost farthing or seize their land under a decree of the civil court. Cultivators are, however, generally so prosperous and crops are so certain in the Western Duars that the Marwari has never succeeded in getting the hold which he has in other parts of India "(43). The native inhabitants were essentially an agricultural community and had no knack to take to trade and commerce as their occupation. According to the 1901 census, 89.4 per cent of the total population (700,000 persons) lived by agriculture, a larger proportion than in any other district of Bengal. Of the 700,000 persons, 133,207 or over a sixth, were dependent on the tea industry for their livelihood. (44) So it is evident that there had always been a 'commercial vacuum' in the district. The Marwaris filled up this gap.

The formation of the District of Darjeeling was a late chapter of British colonial rule in India. The nucleus of the District of Darjeeling, before it got its present dimension in 1866, was part of the dominions of the Raja of Sikkim. It was created as a result of almost accidental involvement of the British Indian Government in the affairs of neighbouring Himalayan states such as Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. In 1817, The British Government fought on behalf of the Raja of Sikkim against Nepal and restored to the former the whole of the tract between the Mechi and Tista rivers (45). In 1835, the Sikkim Raja, "Out of friendship presented Darjeeling to the East India Company that is, all the land south of the Great Ranjeet river, east of the Balasur, Kahail and little Ranjeet rivers and west of the Rungno and Mahanuddi rivers ". This was an unconditional cession of the worthless uninhabited mountain at the expense of Rs. 3000/- as compensation granted to the Raja. The figure, however, was raised to Rs. 6000/- in 1846 (46). Thus the foundation of the modern district of Darjeeling was laid. The next addition to the district was Sikkim Morang or tarai at the foot of the hills bounded by the Ramman river on the north, by the Great Ranjeet and the Teesta on the east and by the Nepal frontier on the West. This addition was the result of a British expedition which became necessary. The Raja's Dewan Namguay, the Lamas and leading men of sikkim had become frustrated and grew jealous at the increasing

importance of Darjeeling under free institutions and at the loss of a monopoly of all trade in Sikkim and loss of control over those slaves who now settled as free citizens and British subjects in Darjeeling. They seized and imprisoned Dr. Campbell and Dr. Hooker while they were travelling in Sikkim with permission from the government and the Raja of Sikkim (47). The last addition to the District was a slip of Bhutia hill territory, ceded to the British in return for an annual subsidy in 1865. In 1866 it was transferred to Darjeeling and it became the Kalimpong Sub Division of the District (48).

This is how the present district of Darjeeling was physically formed. But how it became a centre of economic importance and thereby attracted various merchant communities to migrate and settle here for commercial ventures is, however, another story. At the outset, it is necessary to keep in mind that none but the British, the nation of shop-keepers, opened various avenues of successful trade and commerce in the district. The Britishers were the precursors who effected all round development in the district and thus set the stage ready for commercial enterprise. At that time, the Governor - General was William Bentinck who⁶⁶ was an advanced whig in politics and a disciple of Bentham. But the real significance of Bentinck was that he was a man of the left who carried within himself the ideas of the new age just coming into power ... he was able to give Indian policy a twist to-

wards welfare and Western innovation..... The phrase "We have a great moral duty to perform in India" was coined by the brilliant Ellenborough, but it was the man he sought to recall who gave it content and meaning (49)". Bentinck's sincere notion to do good to the greatest number was corroborated by the promulgation of the charter Act of 1833 which abolished the monopoly trade of the East India Company and opened Indian markets to the international sphere. And after Mr. J.W. Grant penetrated the hills in 1829, convinced Bentinck about the importance of securing possession of Darjeeling and, in particular, pointed out its advantages as a centre of trade and its strategic importance owing to its geographical location, commanding the entrance into Nepal and Bhutan, Bentinck readily approved of the proposal of its cession along with the court of Directors. Even after its cession in 1835, he sent General Lloyd and Dr. Chapman to Darjeeling which was still a terra incognita to the British, to explore and ascertain the nature of its climate, and to investigate the potentialities of the place ; and after getting their report, he finally decided to adopt Darjeeling as a sanatorium (50). So the development process started in the district without delay and under his patronage, Mr. Grant, Captain Herbert, General Lloyd, Dr. Chapman, Joseph Hooke and above all Dr. Campbell, with their sincere efforts and diligence, developed the district into a modern one.

However, the economic potentiality and the prospects of

trade as well as the strategic importance of this place did not escape the eyes of the British administrators: -

(i) The geographical Location of the district itself was of advantage as regards its socio economic viability and mobility. It is hemmed in by international frontiers. There is Nepal to the West, Sikkim, now a state of India, to the north and Bhutan and Bangladesh to the east. Only three Indian districts, one of which is in Bihar, offer accessibility to Darjeeling and that again, only from the south (51). With its international frontiers, the district from time immemorial had been a partner in trans-Himalayan trade. In the ancient period, there was a trade link with China via Assam. A road from Singfu in China connected Langchu, Singfu, Kokana via south eastern Lasha and Chumbi valley in Tibet and reached the Ganges Valley. One more road pass reached Assam from Lasha. One trade pass, starting from the Darang District, merged with Bhutan and Tibet through the river Dhansiri. Merchants from Central Asia, China and Tibet would come to Assam through these passes for purposes of trade and would sell their wares, chiefly silk goods. That was why they were called 'ceres', 'ceredoi' and at last 'Kiratas'. They were the first to start silk cultivation in Assam. 'The Periplus of the Erythrian Sea' has mentioned a trade route that ran through the Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts of North Bengal, Sikkim and Chumbi Valley and reached Tibet and China where the silk goods would come from and enter India. These Silk goods would also reach Demrisia (Tamil Kingdom) via

Tamralipta port. Buddhist monks used to enter India through these passes (52).

(ii) During the Turko-Afghan period massive trade activity went on between India and Central Asia via Bhutan, Tibet, Persia and Afghanistan. According to B.M. Morison, in the 12th and 13th centuries North Bengal had had trade links through land routes with Tibet and Burma. In the Mughal age, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar were within the purview of trade relations, through the Northern passes, with the Tatars of Central Asia and Tibet. Hoven has mentioned an American Merchant who stayed for five years at Lasha in Tibet where he used to buy and sell cotton goods, indigo, variously fashioned clothes, musk etc. (53)

At that time the Mughal trade system was directly linked with Bhutan and Tibet. The list of imports included rock-salts, silk, wool, gold-dust, horse, yak tails, musk, etc. and the items that were exported to those countries were wax, dried fish, cotton and silk goods, perhaps also rice, iron, etc. This caravan trade was mostly conducted between Assam and Lasha and transactions or barter were made somewhere at the foot-hills or Terai. In 1809 the total value of the goods trade was Rs. 2 lakhs (54).

Long before their occupation of Darjeeling the Britishers had been in search of this classic trans-frontier and

trans-Himalayan trade link. This is evidenced from the remark of W.W. Hunter. He remarks : " The establishment of trading relations between British India and Tibet and Central Asia is a subject that has long received close attention from Government", (55) So with the cession of this hilly tract, they now had the golden prospect of trans-Himalayan trade. The annexation of Terai in 1850 and Kalimpong in 1866 further brightened this prospect. Previously Darjeeling had been an enclave in Sikkim territory and, to reach it, the British had to pass through a country acknowledging the rule of a foreign country. But after the seizure of Terai, the British Territory in Darjeeling was continuous with British districts of Purnea and Rangpur in the plains and the Sikkim Raja was cut off from access to the plains except through British Territory (56). The unification of Darjeeling had, however, a greater significance. The trade and commerce of the plains now got linked up with frontier trade. It guaranteed the opening up of the country to foreign trade and the removal of all restrictions on travellers and merchants; it also fixed the maximum rate of transit duties to be levied on goods between British India and Tibet. Full freedom of commerce was thus secured. All this was possible owing to a fresh treaty concluded between the British and Sikkim government in 1861.(57)

(iii) After the seizure of Terai, the three districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar in North Bengal

came under a similar kind of British administration and were thus joined with the mainstream of British administration in Bengal. This promoted all-round development of communications, land tenure and land settlements, agriculture and above all trade and commerce. So merchants of various communities who had already migrated to and settled in other districts of Bengal in search of commercial careers, now began to think of further migration to these three districts in search of better fortunes. The Marwaris who had already settled in Murshidabad, Malda, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Dacca, Assam and even Calcutta, now began to flock in and around this region to grab at the new economic opportunities. Indeed the unification of the Darjeeling district heralded a new horizon of trading prospects which generated an extra momentum to the trans-frontier trade system.

(iv) The Britishers acquired Darjeeling for establishing a good sanatorium on account of its cool and excellent climate, with the purpose of enabling sick British troops and civil servants to recuperate their health. But they soon discovered that the climate of Darjeeling was quite suitable for plantation of tea, coffee, oranges, cinchona, various European fruits, grapes, etc. But by far the most important factor to reckon with in the district was its potentiality to produce tea. Tea had a very big foreign market. The East India company exported tea from China to Britain in exchange for Indian opium. So

when it was discovered that Darjeeling had a great potential for tea production, the Britishers began to take keen interest in how tea plants could be grown. In 1834, the then Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck, appointed a committee⁶⁶ for the purpose of submitting a plan for the introduction of tea culture in India." In 1840 Dr. Campbell started growing tea on experimental basis (58). Tea plantations and the tea industry had completely changed the demographic picture and the economic scenario of the district. Tea became an item of commercial enterprise of the district.

(v) The formation of the district had a political significance too. Political relations always precede commercial relations. The district was the product of peaceful negotiations among the British Raj, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and to some extent, Tibet. The British mediated when there was a hostile relation between Nepal and Sikkim and restored the whole tract between the Mechi and Teesta rivers to the Sikkim Raja who, as a mark of friendship, presented the tract to the British. Without this mediation the foundation of the present day Darjeeling district could never have been laid. Again, it was the British who maintained Sikkim as a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan. Thus it was British intervention that prevented the Gurkhas from making the whole of Sikkim and the hills west and south of the Teesta an outlying province of Nepal (59). Secondly, the British thought that a hostile neighbouring country

like Sikkim would jeopardize the smooth flow of trade with Bhutan and Tibet. So after the seizure of Terai, the British settled the frontier relation with sikkim by concluding a peace treaty on 28 March 1861. Thirdly, the British, for the same reason, was in favour of establishing peaceful relations with Bhutan, a country that had to be crossed to reach Tibet. That was why the British Government made a fresh treaty with Bhutan in 1865 in order to remove all differences between the two. Fourthly, the location of Darjeeling was also important from the strategic point of view. The district could be an area that engross all the trade of the region, commanding the entrance into Nepal and Bhutan. Also, as Darjeeling held the key of a pass into Nepal territory, its importance for military purposes could hardly be minimized(60).

Immediately after getting proprietorship over Darjeeling, the British started development work which was slow in the beginning but gradually became faster. In 1835, this tract was almost entirely under forest, and an area of 138 square miles contained only 100 souls. The density of the forests and poor communications were hindrances to human migration here and only those people who could make a precarious living from rough cultivation of forest land and collection of forest fruits, would dare to come here. Soon a primitive system of government was introduced in the area. Though it countenanced slavery, it did nothing to encourage development and a rise of population.

Only huts were found in the area in 1836.

But soon after the British decided to develop Darjeeling as a hill resort, things began to change. A sanatorium was set up. Allocation of funds to the petitioners was made quickly. By 1840, a road (Pakhabari road) had been constructed ; a hotel was started at Kurseong and another at Darjeeling. Thirty Private houses were also erected at Darjeeling. These were the achievements of Lloyd as a local agent.

But the man who completely changed the entire complexion of the district by his magic stick was Dr. Campbell, a member of the Indian Medical service and the British resident in Nepal. He was transferred to Darjeeling in 1839. He was actually in charge of political relations with Sikkim and was entrusted with civil, criminal and fiscal administration in the district, besides being Postmaster, marriage registrar and administrator of the station funds (income from the leased lands for building purposes in and around the station). All these responsibilities were shouldered by Campbell single-handed. He encouraged the immigrants to cultivate the mountain slopes, stimulated trade and commerce, and attracted the settlers to receive grants of forest land. His success could be measured from the fact that the population which was only 100 in 1839 rose to 10,000 in 1849. " whatever has been done here ", wrote Mr W.B. Jackson, an

inspecting officer in 1852, " has been done by Dr. Campbell alone. He found Darjeeling an inaccessible tract of forest, with a very scanty population; by his exertions an excellent sanatorium has been established for troops and others ; a hill crops has been established for the maintenance of order and improvement of communications; no less than 70 European houses have been built, with a bazar, jail, and buildings for the accommodation of the sick in the Depot ; a revenue of Rupees 50,000/- has been raised, and it is collected punctually and without balance ; a simple system of administration of justice has been introduced, well adapted to the character of the tribes with whom he had to deal, the system of forced labour formerly in use has been abolished, and labour with all other valuables has been left to find its own price in an open market, roads have been made, experimental cultivation of tea and coffee has been introduced, and various European fruits and grapes, and this has been affected at the same time that the various tribes of inhabitants have been conciliated, and their habits and prejudices treated with a caution and forbearance which will render further progress in the same direction an easy task. I may, in short, say of him that to him is the government indebted for the formation of the district of Darjeeling ." (61)

The year 1866 marks an epoch in the district. Henceforth development proceeded with more certainty and greater momentum. Noteworthy development was achieved in the

agricultural sector. Large areas of forest land were brought under cultivation. The primitive method of shifting or 'jhuming' was replaced by the more efficient method of terracing, ploughing and irrigating lands. New crops such as tea, cinchona, potatoes cardamom, oranges, etc. were introduced. Side by side, systematic conservation and utilisation of forests had been effected. The rapid extension of agriculture, followed by a rapid increase of population, resulted in the clearance of large areas of forests at favourable altitudes. In 1864, the first large cinchona plantation was started at Rangbi. Now this plantation is a centre of manufacture of cheap quinine which is within the reach of the poorest peasant. The industry was now firmly established as a commercial enterprise. Dr. Campbell's example was followed by others, resulting in the establishment of large plantations and in the formation of companies, until in 1866 there were no less than 39 gardens with over 10,000 acres under tea and an outturn of the value of nearly half a million pounds (62). The industry was still almost entirely in the hands of Europeans, chiefly for two reasons : (i) the hill people were not acquainted with the mechanism of its manufacture and (ii) they did not have sufficient capital to invest in the industry. That was why the Marwaris who had plenty of capital began to enter the industry as money-lender. People of other communities, mostly Bengalees, obtained loans from the Marwaris to enter the

The cultivation of coffee was started at the same time. Experiments in the growth of tobacco, rubber, camphor, fine Indian corn, etc. were made. Several planters laid out good orchards. Orange groves, Peach trees and Pine apples did set a target of good prospects.

The most remarkable breakthrough without which progress in other directions would have been impossible had been made in the communication system. The Royal engineer, Lord Napier of Magdala had been engaged in laying out the station of Darjeeling and in making a Road through the virgin forest to the Terai. But this road was too narrow and too steep for wheeled traffic. So the wonderful Darjeeling Hill Cart Road was constructed and extended up to the plains. The opening of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway in 1881 was an important addition to the communications network. The process of urbanisation was furthered with the establishment of a hydro - electric power plant in the district. This was the earliest of its kind in India. Experiments with manufacture of paper and copper smelting were tried during this period. The manufacture of local handicrafts was also given encouragement

Major attempts were made in the sphere of spreading education in the district. The first attempt to make the hills the home of European education in India, was made in 1860. Bishop Cotton's proposal for the establishment of hill

schools for the Europeans was supported by Lord Canning. So several hill schools were established at Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. Many of these were boarding school. The St. Paul's schools was shifted from Calcutta to Darjeeling in 1864. The spread of education was a pre-condition for the original purpose for which Darjeeling was acquired, that is, use as a sanatorium (63).

However, the picture in the Terai was different. Here the development process started late. The reason for this late start was obviously the late occupation of this tract in 1850, that is, 15 years after the cession of Darjeeling in 1835. That was why Siliguri, the heart of the entire Terai, was a remote village and a quarry of malaria and Kalazar. It then contained only 784 souls (64). But with the incorporation of the Terai within the jurisdiction of Darjeeling hills in 1850, its importance as a partner in trans - Himalayan trade had largely increased. Now the Britishers turned their attention towards the Terai. They started land-surveying and distribution of Jotes which were completed in 1891-92, (65) The Darjeeling Improvement Fund was created for the all round development of the Terai. Various 'hats' and 'bazars' controlled by the government, were established at Siliguri, Matigada, Bagdogra, Naksalbari, Kharibari, Phansidewa and so on. (66) But the simple factor that transformed the whole socio-economic complexion of the Terai with full mobility was the opening of the railway by the British. In 1878,

Eastern Bengal State Railway company extended its metre-gauge line up to Siliguri. In the same year, a wooden bridge was constructed over the river Mahananda.(67) In 1881 the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway opened a narrow gauge line connecting Darjeeling with Siliguri. (68) Siliguri was also connected with Darjeeling Sadar by the Hill Cart Road which again linked Cart Road with Kalimpong and Sikkim and it thus promoted the local trade. Several jute firms were established here and in addition to the permanent shops, a bi-weekly government market was also brought into existence (69). Side by side, the post and Telegraphic system was introduced.

The other place of importance was Kalimpong which had a population over 1000 inhabitants in 1907. It was charmingly situated at an altitude of nearly 4000 ft. with a delightful winter climate and a rainfall far smaller than that of either Darjeeling and Kurseong. Here a part of the land had been set aside for European settlers (70). After its inclusion within the jurisdiction of Sadar Darjeeling, its importance as a trade centre increased to a large extent. Locally too, it became an important place. It was the chief market for the agricultural produce of the neighbourhood, to which villagers would bring the produce of their fields on market days. The trade of the place was also stimulated by the establishment of an annual 'mela' or fair at the end of November. Merchants from neighbouring countries like Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and

even Tibet would come here with various kinds of merchandise and a number of mules which were brought up by government for transport (71). There were large bazars at Pedong on the Tibetan trade route and at Sombari at the end of the chief valley, where the produce of the hill cultivators was sold to the cultivators of the Duars (72). But the real significance of the British occupation of Kalimpong lies elsewhere. Kalimpong had been the terminus of the pack mule routes from Tibet to India via the Jalapla pass about 65 miles away. It was also the terminus of the Darjeeling Himalaya Railway in the Teesta Valley (73). The trade and commerce of Kalimpong was enriched by the extension of cultivation, land - revenue survey and settlements, development of communications, a rapid increase in population and so on, after its transfer to Darjeeling Sadar in 1866.

So the year 1866 was a landmark in the history of Darjeeling. The Britishers provided all kinds of incentives to make the district a hill resort and at the same time provided the requisite infrastructure for commercial ventures. Naturally, merchant communities such as the Bhutias, Nepalese, Tibetans, Bengalees, Marwaris, Biharis, Punjabis, Kashmiris and Hindusthanis in general began to migrate to this area and settle here in order to set up their business enterprises. British rule gave them protection and security. Of all these communities, the Marwaris were and are still the most enterprising.

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