

## Chapter IV

### COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK AND BUSINESS VENTURES :

#### A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW.

Communications and transportation have always been key factors in economic advancement. It is worthwhile to mention that a communications network and transportation have a significant effect on the growth of the economy. They induce migration of people, be it, rural to rural, rural to urban, inter-district, inter-state, inter national or even inter-continental, and thus promote industrialisation and commercialisation. As an after effect, urbanisation is speeded up. There are various facets of economic development which are inter-related to each other : (1) communications and transportation act as the potent agencies of economic development. They greatly widen the range of human migration. (1) (II) Industrial development requiring labourers from rural areas causes international migration. This also helps to spread urbanisation. So industrialisation and urbanisation are two integrated factors of internal migration. (2) (III) New trade routes promote mercantile or overseas colonial migration. (3) (IV) In order to supply raw materials and facilitate marketing whether internal or external, for finished goods, a well spread-out communications and transport network is necessary. (4) (V) A sufficiently planned and developed communication system or communica-

tion and transportation satisfy the twin needs of industrial revolution, i.e., manpower as well as raw materials and a very accommodative market, national or international. So exporting of surplus goods abroad and importing of scarce goods from abroad are facilitated and it is thus possible both to widen the range of goods and services coming to the home market and to increase the value of domestic output and thereby to improve the national standard of living both qualitatively and quantitatively. (5) And lastly, low degree of geographical integration is a feature of pre-industrial economy which arises partly from its dependence on agriculture and partly from its low level of specialisation. This is due to lack of integration among its regions and in this case, economic decisions are taken in accordance with varying conditions in regional markets, thus causing variations in the value of commodity goods in different regions. This is the result of a poor communication system. (6) So promotion of communication and transportation is helpful for reducing such regional economic differences.

One can easily understand the close link of communication and transport with economic development in a country from the following facts : (I) Communication serves final consumers by carrying products to them. It also helps traders to export goods. Smooth communication ensures availability of a variety of goods everywhere and thus

generates newer and greater demands.

(II) It facilitates larger production by channelising raw materials and necessary equipment to places of production. Again, smooth and quick transport reduces costs and hence the prices of produced goods. It also helps in finding the best locations for industries.

(III) Planned economic development largely depends upon the progress of transport and communications. They help in linking different parts of the economy and thus keep the economy in a sort of integrated balance. Every part of it can grow smoothly. Easy access to remote areas within a country helps discover new and unexplored resources. Some times the range of markets can be extended and remove obstacles to industrial development easily.

(IV) The provision of transport service itself requires a lot of things including engines, wagon, coaches, ships, aeroplanes, railway stations, airports, ports, offices, etc. Again, supply of all these depends on things like steel, coal, electricity, wood, rubber, cement, bricks, etc. So in a broad sense, communication provides a vital infrastructure facilitating the procurement of all such requirements.

These are the economic benefits of communications and transport. But there are some non-economic benefits too. The coming together of people from different places and

regions fosters in them social integration. There is also the cultural impact of interactions among the people. Their emotional make-up undergoes change for the better ; they became broad minded and humane. (7) So the relationship between communications and the economy is so direct that without the former, the rich natural resources of the latter may remain inaccessible and so untapped.

Provision of transport facility as well as means of communication may be through a personal enterprise, a social service or an industry. Its evolution falls into two well-defined phases. The first covers the period upto the industrial revolution, before which the power of human porters, draught animals, water currents, and the winds were to be employed. But the industrial revolution begins the 2nd phase during which steam, electricity and internal combustion have been developed as source of energy.

The new sources of energy bring about a transformation in the basic conditions of the old transport system and both the techniques, employed in it, and the forms of organisation as well as ownership, associated with it, are greatly influenced. Motor-propelled vehicles, whether wheeled or floating, take the place of animal-pulled vehicles. Machine defeats man or animal power. So these vehicles could run faster than animal-pulled traffic. However, the new devices require a specialised track, whether a road, a railway or a waterway. A road is a much less specialised track than a railway and naturally, the

options for using this track are many. Various kinds of traffic are using the road tracks. Generally, the organisation, acting under Central or Local government, provides the roads and the construction of railways is made by private enterprises except in cases where industrialisation does not reach its 'take off' stage. In that case, initiatives is frequently taken by the state. Again use of road transport by a vehicle does not require any co-ordination between the track and the vehicle. But the rail transport, it was early recognised, needs signalling for safe and speedy journey. Here the provision of track and signalling should be under the same control as the provision and operation of the trains. Regarding the sea and air transport, nature provides the tracks and the vehicles are ships and air craft. The task of conducting transport is confined to the provision and operation of the vehicles and terminal facilities. Ships are generally owned by private entrepreneurs, but docks and harbours, either by local bodies or public corporations or private companies. (8)

The analysis so far made regarding the relationship between communication and economy was almost applicable in England and continental Europe before the industrial revolution. But in colonial India it had a different meaning. While in Europe everything was done with a view to upgrading national benefits, in India it was done for the benefits of the mother country, i.e., England. After

India became a British colony, means of communications and transportation were developed mainly for the purpose of draining and plundering of Indian wealth to feed the industrial revolution there.

The British found India as a big source of raw materials, a vast market for their finished goods and a field of investment. For these, they had to destroy the Indian handicrafts, introduce commercialisation of agriculture by compelling peasants to shift to cash crops like jute, tea, coffee, indigo, etc. and setting up of a communications and transport network. These led to entry of British capital to give rise to big managerial houses. However, as a result of such de-industrialisation policy, the Indian economy was ruralised with increasing poverty among its people. India thus turned to be an agricultural colony of the British. (9)

But this naked economic exploitation in India could not be possible without an efficient communication network. The Britishers had a pre-conceived notion that "the communications of India needed to be developed to effectively convert India into an agricultural firm. To serve this purpose, the interior of India was needed to be linked by a network of good transport system with the coastal towns and the coastal towns of India were needed to be linked with the ports of England." (10)

So attention was given to "the development of a communica-

tions network length and breadth. Road making, opening up of telegraph lines, uniform postage service, irrigation projects, public works departments, and above all railways were enlisted in the programme of development of a communications system. It was Dalhousie who was the pioneer of civilian works in India. " He came to India as a convinced westerniser ..... He believed that the promotion of civilisation meant the promotion of western reforms, that western administration and western institutions were as superior to India as western arms had proved more potent ". (11) He set up the first telegraphic wire and established a cheap and uniform postal service. The public works Department, created by him, became the agent for carrying out his noble programme of public works, such as extension of irrigation projects, opening up of new roads etc. But the most striking achievement of Dalhousie was the Grand Trunk road which runs from Calcutta to Peshwar. (12)

But by far the greatest success of Dalhousie was the construction of railways. Although the plan was mooted by Hardinge, the rail initiatives came from Dalhousie and that's why he is called the father of the Indian Railway. Dalhousie's minute of 1853 convinced the home authorities of the need and feasibility of railways and laid down the main items of their development strategy. He envisaged a network connecting the important internal centres with the

ports to meet the strategic need as well as serve the purpose of commercial development. In 1849, the historic agreements for constructing railways were signed by the Secretary of the State for India with the East India Railway Company and the great Indian Peninsula Railway company. These early agreements became the proto-types of all the later ones signed in the last two decades of the 19th Century. Two types of agencies-private and state were used for this purpose. The North - Western Railways were state enterprises while the Bombay, Baroda, and Central Indian Railway remained in private hands. At the same time, railways built in the states, were sometimes operated by the state itself, as was the case of Hyderabad, sometimes by private companies or the Government of India. (13) By the end of 1869, construction of 4255 miles of railways was completed by the guaranteed companies. Upto 1880 nearly 2,493 miles of railways were built through the agency of the government, the total milage being 8498. After 1884, railway expansion was pushed on at 'break - neck speed'. By 30th June 1905 nearly 28,054 miles of railways, built at a cost of 359 crores of rupees (or 240,000,000) were open to traffic. (14)

The construction of railways in India provided numerous benefits. (1) It revolutionised the prospect of trade and commerce by making possible production for a market and by opening up of the interior and remote places to large-

scale economic operations. (II) Plantation and factory industries were facilitated by the easy supply of coal to the production centres. (III) The prospect of the distribution of finished goods to the markets, was brightened and the entire country was brought within the orbit of world economy. (IV) The supply of cash crops like jute, tobacco, indigo, opium, groundnuts, tea, coffee, cinchona etc. to the world market was assured in greater proportions. (V) Similarly, a number of industries including iron and steel, chemical, jute, etc. flourished.

However, the construction of railways had also its evil effects. Behind this grandiose arrangement, the British imperialistic attitude was absolutely clear from the famous and exhaustive minute, written by Dalhousie in 1853. 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 investment for British capital, and to the great use of railways in enabling more rapid mobilisation and movement of troops. (15)

So Indian handicrafts collapsed, the general price - level rose high and the internal economic balance was upset through excessive export. Dr. Chandra writes, " the transport revolution had merely ruined the existing carrying trade and enabled the cheap machine-products of England to undersell and thus destroy the indigenous handicraft

industries.” (16) But the worst consequence of opening up of railways was the increase in the volume of drain of wealth from India. The railways were built with foreign capital and management. So the obligations and casualties were many. India had to remit a vast amount of money in the form of interest and profits, payments for the imported materials and expenditure on the establishment in England. So the drain of wealth was continuous and all other benefits of railways were very much diminished if not altogether negated. (17)

Road making was given importance and here also Lord Dalhousie was the pioneer. He dissolved the old Military Board and set up the Public Works Department as the agent for carrying out his ambitious programme of public works. This Department extended irrigation project and took in hand a vast programme of road construction. In 1839, the Grand Trunk Road from Calcutta to Delhi was opened and this was followed by links between the major cities of British India. Ports of India were thrown open to the commerce of the world. Nearly 400 miles of electric telegraph lines were constructed, connecting Calcutta with Peshwar, Bombay, Madras and other parts of the country. Such an all-round advancement in the means of communication and transportation under the British Raj created a tremendous impact in North-Eastern India, particularly in the region under study.

The impact was two fold. (1) 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 fillip to trade and commerce in the region and regional trade was joined with international trade by dint of easy communication. After the state of Cooch Behar came into contact with the British Raj in the 18th century and Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling in the 19th, British trade in Calcutta was made to continue with the Sub-Himalayan countries like Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and even Tibet on the one hand, and in Assam and North-East Hill Council states such as Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh on the other. The direct contact with Bhutan and Tibet further helped to promote British Trade with China and even with Central Asia. (ii) Brisk trade naturally attracted trading communities of neighbouring parts of the sub-continent. The Marwaris, the Beharis, the Punjabis, the Kashmiris, the Sindhis, etc. from India and the Tibbatis, the Bhutias, the Sikkimese, the Nepalese, the Assamese, etc. from the hill countries came in and were engaged in trade among themselves which induced further migration of people which gradually reached its momentum with the pace of improvement in the communications network.

Though the Cooch Behar state came into contact with

British rule in 1773, it was until 1863 that real efforts to develop a communication system was initiated. At that time, the King of Cooch Behar was Maharaja Nripendra Narayan who was said to be the modern king of Cooch Behar. During his royalship, Colonel Haughton, the commissioner of the state, brought a revolution in the overall administration of the state and under his commissionership, much attention was given to the progress of communications. Making of roads was the responsibility of the Public Works Department and in 1867, Babu Govinda Chandra Roy was appointed a road overseer.

The early stage of communications has been evaluated in the Bengal Administration Report for 1874 - 75. It contains the following paragraph. 'There is a small but effective Public Works Department, with a good native officer with practical training at the head. The state has now 115 miles of unmetalled roads, with numerous good wooden bridges; and thousands of carts are now found where only tens and scores used to be seen. There are many streams and some boats, but water carriage does not seem likely to play an important part in the traffic of Cooch Behar. The territory lies intermediate between two great navigable rivers, the Brahmaputra and the Tista, and the cross roads are directed to meet the main starting places for such navigation'. (18) In another source, it is mentioned that there were only 3 roads with a total length of 41 miles in the state. All of them had originated from the

Cooch Behar Town. The first had advanced to the Banerwar Temple and was 7 miles long ; the second to Balarampur with a length of 10 miles ; and the third, the largest, to Mughalhat covering a distance of 24 miles.

In this diplorable state of road construction, the transport system was nothing worthy of mention. Most of the roads were unmetalled. So their condition in the monsoon was beyond description. Moreover, the existence of at least 6 rivers such as, the Teesta, the Jaldhaka, the Torsha, the Kaljani, the Raidak and the Gadadhar along with 200 streams used to make the state completely water-logged. As there were no embankments, the floods were frequent and devastating. The state had suffered from heavy floods in 1787, 1822, 1842, 1870, 1878, 1886, 1892, 1895, 1934, 1950, and so on. Such natural calamities obviously used to put a great bar to the development of a satisfactory communication system. Even in 1950, almost all the roads outside the Cooch Behar town were unsuitable for vehicular traffic.

So the traditional way of transport continued. The cultivators brought their produce in the markets either carrying it on their heads or by engaging porters. Then came the ox as a means of transport and the men who controlled the oxen, laden with goods to take to the markets, were called 'Baladia'. A mighty ox could bear on its back one maund of goods, i.e., one ox was counted as a unit of transport, meant for one maund of goods. Sometimes goods

were arranged in two parts, hanging from the 'Tat', fixed tightly on the back of oxen. (19)

Next came the bullock - carts in Cooch Behar in or around 1860. Later buffaloes, instead of oxen, began to be used to pull the carts as the carrying power of a buffalo is greater than an ox. Buffaloes were also used to pull ploughs. (20) Like the bullock carts, palanquins were also employed as transport for the civil population in both villages and towns. (21) Elephants were also used as means of transport. In the later period, when long and wide roads were constructed, elephant began to lose importance as means of transport. Still there were many tracks ravaged by rains. So elephants were the only means of transport that could penetrate into those impassable tracks. (22) Elephants were used by Govt. Officers too. Each sub-divisional officer had to undertake official tours on elephants. There were only a few two wheeled carts drawn by small ponies. Some wealthy villagers also kept horses to ride on. The state had a few jeeps for government use and a few buses only for distant trips to Bagdogra, Siliguri, Purnea, etc. (23)

In the monsoon, most of the roads in the state, particularly the village paths became so muddy that bullock carts could hardly move along them. So the people were compelled to depend on ferry traffic both for carrying goods to the 'hats' and markets, and for ferrying passengers. From Cooch Behar, Jute and Tobacco used to be

exported in very large quantities, but there was very little trade through river traffic except during the rains. (24)

In short, this was the traditional way of communication prevalent in the state and so the economy could hardly flourish, depending upon this primitive and obsolete communication. So the state had to look for other means of communication and attention was given to new road making and to repair the old roads so that they could be used for motor propelled wheeled cars, the hall-marks of modern transport. At the same time, priority was given to the opening of rail lines, the far more advanced road technology of the 18th century, in the state.

Haughton's over - all administration of the state synchronized with the beginning of a glorious chapter of road making. During 1865 - 1876 a major road, 97 miles long, was constructed on the embankments. Some feeder and cross roads linked up the main roads with the North Bengal and Western Bengal State Railways and their Stations, like Haldibari, Mughalhat, Dhubri, etc. So the Principal marts as well as the remote villages and backward areas came under a systematic road system which improved inland communication. Thus the milage of roads which was 41 in 1864, came upto 151 in 1876 and sprang up to 284 1/2 in 1882 - 1883. The major roads were constructed before 1876 and the increased milage of 1882 - 83, however was meant for the feeder and cross roads. (25)

Major Rennel showed the existence of ten roads in his map of 1779. They were (i) Cooch Behar - Chichakata road, via Alipurduar ; (ii) Sahebganj - Cooch Behar Road via Dinhata ; (iii) Mowamari - Dhubri Road, via Balarampur ; (iv) Mowamari - Parodanga road, via Sahebganj ; (v) Cooch Behar - Rangpur, via Bogribari ; (vi) Barthar (Sitai) - Mekhliganj, via Pargram ; (vii) Cooch Behar Jalpes, Via Maynaguri ; (viii) Chichakata - Balarhat, via Raychang ; (ix) Chichakata- epra, via Taankumary ; and (x) Kanthalbari-Dewanganj, via Changrabandha. (26) However, some of these roads subsequently changed their directions with changes in the course of the rivers. Sometimes, change in the course of a river and opening up of a new town caused disappearance of a road. Such was the case of the Cooch Behar - Mowamari - Balarampur - Khoribari road and the Cooch Behar Lalbazar road via Bogribari, Patharganj and Kaligani. (27)

Although in the two decades prior to the accession of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, a progressive policy in the matter of communications was launched, the state was still far from well equipped in respect of means of communication. During the reign of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, programmes were under taken for the development of communication with the objective of building up a regular transport system through outside the state. With this end in view, the Maharaja sanctioned an annual grant

of Rs. 50,000 from the state exchequer with effect from 1893 - 94. This helped creation and continuance of a fund for the improvement of communications within the state. The fund came to be known as the communication Improvement Fund.

In 1900, the following roads were seen existing : Besides Nos 1 and 2 as shown in Rennel's map, there were (i) Cooch - Behar - Kharibari, via Tufanganj, Road ; (ii) Cooch Behar - Goradhat (Guard-hat) , via Fulbari ; (iii) Ghoramara - Baneswar via Natabari ; (iv) Cooch Behar - Moranga, via Rajarhat ; (v) Pundibari - Patlakhawa via Chokhekata and Giladanga ; (vi) Cooch Behar Mathabhanga, via Rajarhat ; (vii) Cooch Behar Sitalkuchi via Sitai ; (viii) Cooch - Behar Mathabhanga, via Nishiganj ; (ix) Giladanga - Sitalkuchi via Mathabhanga (x) Mathabhanga - Sitalkuchi, via Nishiganj ; and (xi) Cooch - Behar - Falakata, via Chokhekata. (29) The network of Cooch Behar roads was joined with that of Rangpur (Now in Bangladesh) and through them approach to Calcutta became possible. In the 1950s a major breakthrough was achieved in respect of improvement of roads in the state.

There was neither any District Board nor any Local Board in the state to supervise the roads and it was not until merger with West Bengal that the Public Works Department of the latter took over the charge of construction and maintenance of roads in this region.

After some improvement in the condition of the roads,

passenger bus service was initiated Between Cooch Behar and Mathabhanga with a terminus on the left bank of the Mansai, opposite of Mathabhanga. Two other buses started running between Fulbari and Cooch - Behar and Dinhata and Cooch Behar. In April, 1945, the Cooch Behar Raj launched a motor transport service with a fleet of 3 buses and 3 trucks. After the merger of the state with West Bengal on 1.1.1950, the Government of West Bengal took over control of this service and converted it into the North Bengal State Transport Corporation. However, other private vehicles gradually began to ply in the state. In 1961, there were 85 private cars along with 84 Jeeps, 191 motor cycles, 163 public vehicles, 316 goods vehicles and 49 other vehicles. (30) In 1971, while the state buses had numbered 116 plying over 26 routes in the district, there were 14 private buses, 125 taxis, 186 private trucks and 40 State Transport trucks. (31) In 1990, the North Bengal State Transport Corporation possessed 640 buses and 30 trucks. There was also a proposal for purchasing 150 more buses in the near future. (32) Nevertheless, bullock - carts and bicycles are still the primary means of transport of agricultural produce from the villages to the primary markets. (33)

The ferry transport has also a key role in the communication network. In the rainy season, the roads, particularly the village paths became so sticky and deeply muddy, that they could hardly afford any wheeled vehicles to move. So

the country boats or ferry transport used to become the primary means of communication. Throughout this season, nearly the whole of both of the inward and outward of traffic needed to be carried on by country boats. (34) I have mentioned earlier that six principal rivers flowed through the State of Cooch Behar. They are (I) the Tista, (II) the Jaldhaka (Maushai, Singimari and Dharala with different parts of its course), (III) the Torsa, (IV) the Kaljani, (V) the Raidak and (VI) the Gadadhar. They have their origin in the Himalayas, entering the state from the Western Duars and falling into the Brahmaputra after passing through the state and the Rangpur District and often joining each other in their down ward course. (35) These big rivers as well as the numerous streams flowing through the State helped the formation of its soil, facilitated external communications and provided a good source of revenue to the State. (36) They were all nevigable with trading boats capable of carrying 100 maunds or 4 tons of burden throughout the year. There were also 20 minor streams which were used for boat traffic of mean order during the rainy season only. (37)

The river traffic had some limitations. It was usable in the rainy season only. The state had no river side town or large village inhabited by a particular community who could live on river traffic or could improve the ferry system. During other seasons the smaller streams became dry and the river mouths at Bagwa and Dudhkumar through

which the Dharala and Sankos fell into the Brahmaputra, had such a small depth of water, that boats with more than 100 to 200 maunds of burden required to be lightened for transshipment into smaller boats. (38)

The introduction of railways in the state brought about a major breakthrough in the whole communication system in 1876. In 1876, the North Bengal Railway opened a line at Haldibari. This line later turned to be the mainline of the Eastern Bengal Railway connecting Calcutta with Siliguri and Darjeeling. But as Haldibari was situated at the extreme Western end of the State and the Tista intervened, it could not serve the purpose of the State, connecting Haldibari with other places. So the State itself thought of constructing a railway of its own from Mogalhat to Cooch Behar. (39) Calica Doss Dutt, Dewan of the State, was asked by the Maharaja to take up the land required for the purpose and to properly compensate the people evicted in the process. Babu Hem Chandra Bhattacharyya, sudder Canoongoe, was first assigned to make an estimate of the compensation. The task was ultimately handed over to Kumar Gajendra Narayan, Superintendent of agriculture and forests. The total amount of the compensation paid up to the end of the year 1892 was Rs. 809399. (40)

The Cooch Behar State Railway came into existence in 1892. The line was originally opened on 2 ft. 6 inches gauge.

Between February and April 1910, the line was converted into a metre gauge (3ft. 3 3\8 inches). This linked up Cooch Behar with the railway system of the district of Rangpur. At first, the Railway was ended near Cooch Behar town to the south of Torsa. But later it was extended upto Alipurduar and to Jaintia in the Bhutan foot - hills. The partition, however, caused a setback to the railway communication, as partitions of it went to East Pakistan. The dismal condition remained untill the Assam link railway was constructed. Presently the railway has been working from Gitaldaha to Alipurduar, establishing a link with Assam through the North East Frontier Railway, while the Bamanhat - Gitaldaha section has been operating as a branch line. The recent opening of the Broad gauge line from New Jalpaiguri to Jorai through the Northern part of the District has atleast provided a satisfactory railway communication in the district. (41)

During the Maharaja's administration, there were small airstrips at Cooch Behar, Tufangunj, Dinhata, Mathabhanga and Mekhliganj, designed to use his small personal planes. Since 1950, the Cooch Behar airstrips has been enlarged and improved to a good landing ground. Although the scheduled passenger service was not yet opened, Cooch Behar became a busy Airport handling almost the entire expensive inward trade of the district and large quantities of Tobacco, Jute and Tea from Cooch Behar itself and the Western Duars of Jalpaiguri. (42) After the

partition of India and till the Assam link portion of the railway was constructed, the only means of exit from Cooch Behar was the air transport. Later a few private operators started air services for passenger and cargo combined. At a later period, the Indian Air Lines had started the Bayudut service daily from Calcutta to Cooch Behar. But it had been in operation for a few years only. (43)

Among the three districts under study, 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, and secondly, its 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 British 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 the tea industry. In fact the tea industry completely changed the landscape, demographic complexion and socio-economic pattern of the district. The Western Duars, which was once a very thinly populated or a desolate place, soon became dotted with inhabited villages, tea gardens and small factories. The district began to attract educated Hindu gentry from East Bengal.

The new administrative set up needed clerks and lawyers and once they settled there, doctors and teachers were required. They settled down in the town and built up domestic houses and schools. Thus a process of urbanisation set in. With the opening of tea gardens, the process of urbanisation got further momentum. (44)

In the 16th century, Nilambara the last Khen king of Kamtapur was said to have constructed a few magnificent roads with good tanks every few miles. During the British period, portions of them formed part of the main road between Cooch Behar, Rangpur and Bogra. (45) One of them stretched towards the north-western direction and reached Jalpesvar temple of Jalpaiguri. A part of the said road could still be seen by the Name of Dinhata - Mekhligang road. (46)

In the 18th Century as well as in the first half of the 19th century, road building in the region was concentrated over the area, west of the Tista. So this portion of the District was fairly well connected through the roads. Although geographical condition in this part of the district were favourable to road building, frequent flood as well as heavy downpour caused extensive damage to roads. In the western Duars, road construction was very difficult and communications were often interrupted as this tract was cut off into sections by large rivers which again frequently changed their courses. In 1905, the Raidhak swept away five miles of the main road to

Alipurduar and the floods of 1906 dissected the roads to pieces. So there had been a great want of roads in the Western Duars to the North East of Alipurduar. There were Alipur - Haldibari - Jainti - Raidhak and Newlands - Chakchaka roads. But they were all rude cart tracks and became quagmires in the rains which impeded rather than aided traffic. So metalled and at the same time, new roads were badly required, specially after the introduction of the tea plantation and the industry in the Western-Duars. The industry was initially established as a commercial enterprise in 1856. The problem of communication was further intensified by opening of more gardens throughout the north of the District between the Tista and Sankos rivers. Before the construction of the Bengal Duars Railway, the tea gardens of the Dam Dim Sub district had to depend on the Jalpaiguri - Dam Dim and Fulbari Ghat roads to send away their produce to or get in supplies from Jalpaiguri and Siliguri. It was only after the opening of the said railway, that all the traffic began to use the railway. The introduction of the railway also provided a fillip to the improvements of the roads, to ensure that the traffic could easily avail of it from different stations. So use of these roads obviously increased with the opening of the railways. (47)

Necessity was followed by efforts. Road construction in the district came under the purview of the Public Works Department. In 1870, the following roads came under the

supervision of the Public works Department : (1) Twenty seven miles of the imperial cart road from Purniah to Darjeeling passing through Jalpaiguri. (2) A road, twenty nine miles in length from Jalpaiguri town to Titalya, was joined with the Purniah and Darjeeling Road. The mails to and from Calcutta were carried along this road. (3) A fine road was extended from Cooch Behar town to the military station of Buxa. The part of the road, twenty one miles long, fell within Jalpaiguri District.

A number of roads were under local management. Hunter has outlined twelve of such roads. They were (I) Jalpaiguri - Haldibari, via Alipurduar, 77 miles long; (II) Mainaguri - Chamurchi, via Ambari ; (III) Mainaguri - Cooch Behar, via Jalpaiguri; (IV) Jalpaiguri - Siliguri, via Ambari - Falakata, 27 miles long ; (V) Jalpaiguri - Boda, 30 miles long; (VI) Jalpaiguri - Dalimkot, 29 miles long ; (VII) Jalpaiguri - Cooch Behar, 26 miles long ; (VIII) Tista - Domahanihat ; (IX) Mainaguri - Domahanihat ; and (X) Jalpaiguri Dunga - Hat road. Apart from these main roads, there were many tiny village roads. (48)

The roads constructed by the P.W.D. were mostly intended to serve the interests of the tea industry. Those were : (1) the 19 - mile Latiguri - Matiali Road, via chalsa ; (2) the Ramshai - Sulkapara road was ten miles in length; (3) eight and half miles long, the Sulkapara - Thaljhora Road; (4) the Banerhat - Chamurchi road; (5) the 13 -

miles long Ramshai - Gaikata road ; (6) the Gaikata-Birpara Road which was Seven and half miles long ; (7) the eight and quarter miles long Gaikata - Dhupguri Road ;

(8) the Gaikata - Binnaguri Road, four and half miles long. The Jalpaiguri District Board constructed a few roads, the total length of these being 802 miles ( 26 metalled + 778 unmetalled ). These roads as identified by Hunter have already been mentioned. The District Board also constructed a few roads over the west of the Tista. Among those, the notable were the Boda Road (31 miles long), the Siliguri Road (23 miles long), the Titalya Road (26 miles long), the Boda - Domar railway road (19 miles long), part of the Central Emigration road (28 miles long), the Imperial road and so on.

In the Western Duars the important roads, constructed and maintained by the Board, were (1) a road from Dam Dim to Fagu tea garden in Darjeeling ; (2) the road between the Hantapara tea Garden and Falakata; (3) The road running to the Rajabhatkhawa station ; and (4) Cooch Behar-Buxa road. Apart from these, there were two other roads, east of Alipurduar, the Jainti - Raidhak Road, and the Newlands - Chakchaka Road. All of these roads were constructed to serve the interest of the tea industry. Bullock-carts, Buffaloes, human carriers, Pack ponies, Bhutia men and women, elephants, etc. were used for transports. (49) Bullock carts carried mainly goods, but occasionally,

they carried passengers. Then came cycles and cycle - rickshaws, particularly in the urban areas.

Presently, the state highway - connects the district headquarters of Jalpaiguri with Alipurduar, Cooch Behar etc. and all the 13 block headquarters are connected either by state highways or good metalled roads. Distant places like Delhi, Lakhnau, Patna, Calcutta, Gauhati, etc. are connected by National Highways. The Public Works Department (Roads) constructed the following roads between 1954 and 1968 : (1) Mainaguri-Changrabandha road, (2) Jaldhaka - Ranirhat feeder road, (3) Dhupguri - Falakata Road, (4) Mondalghat link road, (5) Jalpaiguri-Paharpur Road, (6) Bonarpara Road, (7) Mainaguri station Road to Mainaguri-Changrabandha road, (8) link road to Berubari, (9) link road to Jalpes temple, (10) Heeramati Gurudevpur Hat road, and (11) Kholaignam - Khetiphulbari road. The total length of these road has been 99.25 Km.

Such a great advancement in road construction has its effects on road transport. With the improvement of road conditions, motor propelled vehicles began to move on the roads. Government Offices began to use jeeps, instead of horses or elephants. Human carrier gave way to motor wagons, taxis, trucks, hat buses, etc. The North Bengal State Transport Corporation was set up. The latest addition to the transport system are four wheeled little trucks, little buses and three wheeled auto rickshaws. At least 33 routes in the district were covered by North

Bengal State Transport Corporation. 86 buses were run by private owners. 74 hat - buses also plied in the district. 260 Taxis including 7 station wagons were used to run in the district along with fifty two-seated autorickshaws. At a glance, 86 state carriages, 534 contract carriages, 1908 private carriers, 1,627 public carriers and 3,582 private cars and jeeps ran in the district in 80s of the 20th century. (50)

The district is well fed by the rivers. Those are the Mahananda, Karotoya, Tista, Jaldhaka, Duduya, Mujnai, Torsa, Kaljani, Raidhak and Sankos. Those all had originated from Sikkim, Bhutan and Darjeeling Hills and could be classified into two systems, namely the Brahmaputra system and the Ganga system. (51)

Almost all of these rivers, since the ancient past, were navigable by boats carrying hundred maunds, or between 3 and 4 tons of burden throughout the year. (52) So there had always been a prospect of river traffic in the district. The Tista was navigable by large boats to approach Jalpaiguri. But the Torsa was navigable by cargo boats and that was again during the rains. (53) Eight ferries were used to ply over the Tista throughout the year. A ferry plied over the Mahananda at Siliguri. The Duduya, Mujnai, Torsa, Kaljani, Chek, Raidhak, and sankos rivers also had facilities of ferry transport. In the monsoon, few temporary ferry services were opened, one

each to traverse the Jaldhaka, the Gadadhar and the Karatoya rivers. Ferries were leased out for one year to the highest bidders through auction. (54)

There were 125 ferries in the district, of which 99 belonged to the District Board, and the rest were provincial. The District Board secured a revenue of Rs. 18740, in 1907 - 08 from its ferry service where as the provincial ferries got Rs. 7,516. The principal ferries were allowed to continue on the Tista and Jaldhaka Rivers. Hunter states that only eight ferries were used to serve the Tista river. But J.F. Gruning mentioned about three more ferries, one at Premganj, one at Kharchibari and one at Fulbari. A wirerope ferry was used to help cross the new road through the Tondu forest. On the Karatoya a ferry was introduced at the point where the road from Jalpaiguri to Titalya crossed it. Other ferries were launched at Pochagarh on the Jalpaiguri- Boda road and at Debiganj on the Boda Domar Road. (55) However, most of the river traffic lost their importance after the district was opened to the railways, as the merchants preferred to carry goods more by train than by boat.

The real breakthrough in the overall transport system was effected in the district with the introduction of the railways. The entire trade and commerce of the district, both export and import, got a tremendous boost by this transport revolution. The Eastern Bengal State Railway, better known as the Northern Bengal State Railway, the

Bengal Duars Railway and the Cooch Behar State Railway- all traversed the whole district.

The Northern Bengal State Railway was opened to traffic up to Jalpaiguri in 1878 and was extended to Siliguri, the present terminus of that railway. Calcutta and Darjeeling were linked up by this line. Previously, the passengers of Darjeeling had to halt for transshipment at Sahebganj and, after crossing the river Ganges, had to undertake a long and tedious journey by road from Karagola Ghat to Siliguri. But this line entered Cooch Behar near Haldibari station and was directed North-wards to Jalpaiguri where it again curved to the North West. Thus, vexatious transshipment and tedious journey by road had been obliterated. (56)

The Bengal Duars Railway was constructed for two purposes, (i) to assist in opening up the Western Duars and (ii) in developing the tea industry. The line between Barves Junction and Dam Dim, 31 miles long, and the line between Lataguri and Ramshaihat, 5 1/2 miles long were opened for traffic in 1893. The line between Barnes Junction and Lalmanirhat (now in Bangladesh), 65 3/4 miles long and that between Barnes and Barneshghat, covering one mile were completed in 1900. The western expansion from Dam Dim to Bagrakot, 6 3/4 miles long, was completed in 1903. The eastern extension from Mal to Madarihat, covering 44 miles was opened for traffic in 1903. The railway, therefore,

consisted of a mainline from Lalmanirhat, the Junction with the Dhuburi branch of Eastern Bengal State Railway, to Madarihat on the Torsa river and two short branches, from Latiguri to Ramshai Hat and from Mal to Bagrakot. (56) In 1915, a line of the same railway was added to the existing lines from Chalsa to Matiali, 5 miles long. (58)

The Cooch Behar State Railway opened a narrow guage line in 1891 from the Western side of the Torsa to Gitaldoha. The line was first extended to Rajabhatkhawa and thence to Jainti in 1901. The latter portion was converted into metre guage in 1910 and was merged with the Eastern Bengal Railway. The meter guage from Rajabhatkhawa to Hasimara was enlarged in 1914. (59)

The Assam link Railway project further laid a mile stone in the district's Railway linkage after Independence and the last vestige <sup>of</sup> the medieval railway system was removed after the Farakka Barrage was constructed over the river Ganges and thereby Calcutta was directly linked up with New Jalpaiguri by a broad guage line. Then the line passed through Belakoba, Raninagar, Jalpaiguri town, Mainaguri, Dhupguri, Falakata, New Cooch Behar, Alipurduar, New Bangaingaon and reached Gauhati in Assam. Now all the rail lines came under the jurisdiction of the North Eastern Frontier Railways. (60)

Before any part of the present Darjeeling came into British possession in 1835, the means of communication

were nothing but mere patch work. The only roads and bridges that existed here were a few narrow rough tracks through forests and a few cane-bridges over the torrents. Except this rudimentary communication, the whole tract was almost covered by deep forests. Grants' memorandum of 1830 reported that there were only two routes there - (i) the 'Nagree' pass and (ii) the 'Sabbook Golah'. A third route by the side of the Mahananda was also mentioned. According to the Darjeeling Guide of 1838, the journey from Calcutta to the foot hills of Darjeeling took 98 hours. The whole journey to Darjeeling lasted five or six days and the expense needed for a journey from Karagola Ghat on the Ganges to the foot hills was Rs. 240 in 1848. (61)

This hopeless and uninhabited condition of Darjeeling, specially after its present formation as a district, congregating the Terai in 1850 and the Kalimpong subdivision in 1865, proved to be a Pandora's box to the British. They annexed Darjeeling to build a sanatorium for the sick servants of its Government, to engross all the trade of the country and to use it as a key-pass to Nepal and Bhutan. But after annexation, they soon discovered its boundless economic potentiality and the trans-Himalayan trade route between British India and Tibet and even Central Asia. They soon realised that the natural environment of the district was wholly conducive to plantations like tea, coffee, Cinchona and cultivations of European fruits like orange, grapes, etc. and vegetables

like potatoes, cardamom, and other commercial crops like tobacco, rubber, etc. besides its priceless forest resources. But the most important development without which all these economic prospects would have been foiled was the improvement of communications. So the British gave first priority to road-construction in the district. By 1840 a road was built from Pankhabari and another at Mahaldiram. But the whole complexion of the tract underwent a great change with the transfer of Dr. Campbell from Nepal to Darjeeling as superintendent. Of him, it is said that, " whatever has been done here, has been done by Dr. Campbell alone ". His effort resulted in establishing a good sanatorium, building up a hill crops, improving the means of communications, constructing of European houses and roads, and introducing the cultivation of tea and coffee. Above all, the Government was indebted to him for the formation of the district of Darjeeling. (62)

The first step to introduce modern communication could be traced back to January, 1839. Calcutta road, to the east of the hill on which Jalapahar cantonment stands now, was completed by Lloyd. A road from Siliguri to Darjeeling was completed in 1842. This road, now known as the old military road, could be seen from Pankhabari to Kurseong and then on to Dowhill, Sinehal and Ghum. However this road was not fit for wheeled traffic. So the construction of a cart road began in 1860. The portion from Kurseong to Darjeeling was opened to traffic in 1864 and the whole

portion was completed in 1869.

On the basis of Tumlong treaty of 1861, the British were authorised to construct a road through Sikkim. The old military road was not sufficient to meet the expanding demand of the district. So the Siliguri - Darjeeling cart road had to be constructed. It was along this highway that the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway route was subsequently projected. (63) Meanwhile, communication in the plains had been improved by the construction of a road 126 miles long from Karagola ghat on the Ganges opposite Sahebganj to Siliguri. The hill cart road was connected to this road at Siliguri. The road from Karagola to Siliguri is presently known as the Ganges - Darjeeling road. (64) The next important road, constructed in the district, was the Tista valley road which was the highway for travellers and merchants going to Sikkim and Tibet. At the extreme south of this road, an extension road leading from Sivok to Siliguri was constructed and at the Tista Bridge, there was an important junction where the roads to Darjeeling and Kalimpong met it. The other two roads leading to the Tista valley, had emerged from Darjeeling. Another important road, leading from Ghum to Simanabasti on the north west was also constructed. This was good cart road, 10 miles long and passed through Sukiapokhri. Other important roads were : (I) Kurseong Matighara, via Pankhabari (11 1/2 miles), (II) Tiribana Bagdogra (6 miles), (III) Naksalbari- Garidhura (11 miles), and (IV) Rikyisum -

Jangi guard, via Mimglas and Gorubathan (26 miles). (65)

The maintenance and construction of the roads were carried out by the Public Works Department, the District Road Committee, the terai road fund committee, the District Road Cess committee and the Darjeeling improvement fund and so on. In the tea garden areas, some roads were used by the tea estates and in the reserved forests, some by the Forest Department. The means of transport were strong bullock - carts, Pack - ponies, human carriers 'Dandi', hardy porters, Sure - footed mules, coolies, elephants, Palki (Palanquin), tonga and luxurious rickshaws.

In 1860, the East India Railway was extended up to Sahebganj. From this point to Karogola Ghat was a journey of five hours for crossing the river before proceeding by bullock cart to Dingra Ghat and from there by Palki, Pony, Carriage or cart to the foot of the Hills past-purnea, Kishanganj, and Titalya and thereafter a 56 miles tedious journey along the Pankhabari - Darjeeling Road. The Cart Road from Siliguri to Darjeeling was completed in 1869. In 1877, the Northern Bengal State Railway was opened for traffic between Atrai and Jalpaiguri. In 1881, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway started carrying passengers to Darjeeling. But the greatest hurdle to continuous journey from Calcutta to Darjeeling was the Ganges. At last this hurdle was won over and the Ganges was bridged in 1915. The broad guage system was first extended

north ward so that a passenger could reach Darjeeling after a continuous train journey of 22 to 24 hours from Calcutta, instead of 98 hours as needed in 1838. (66)

The road communication received a further impetus after 1918 with the introduction of the petrol driven vehicles. Since then, the carrying capacity of the communication system in the district was largely enhanced and at the same time, the comfort and convenience of passengers were also ensured. Austin 7, a very light motor car with a specially low gear box for use in the hills began to ply on the street. (67)

In 1871, the following imperial roads were under the management of the Public Works Department, viz, (1) the 48 miles Darjeeling Hill cart road from Siliguri to Darjeeling, the first 8 miles being metalled ; (2) New cart road from the saddle to Jalapahar which was 2 1/2 miles long and unmetalled ; (3) Pankhabari - Siliguri road which was 16 miles long and unmetalled ; and (4) Cinchona Plantation road from the saddle of Rangbi, which was 7 miles long and also unmetalled. The total length of the roads under P.W.D. jurisdiction was 93 miles.

In the same year, the following roads, all unmetalled, were maintained through the Local Fund under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioner : (1) the 6-mile road from the little Ranjit river to Gok and Kalbang ; (2) the 4-mile Balasan-Nagri road ; (3) the 20-mile Little Ranjit-

Nepal frontier road ; (4) the 6-mile Tista river - Kalimpong road ; (5) the 14-miles Kalimpong Damsang road ; (6) the 12-mile Damsang Llabaroad; (7) the 38-mile Llabaroad - Daling Kot and Kiranti road ; (8) the 12-mile Garidhara - Nuksarbari road ; (9) the 16-mile Garidhara - Phansideva road ; (10) the 10-mile Matigarh - Phansideva road ; (11) the 6-mile Nuksarbari - Karaibari Hat road ; (12) the 12-mile Karaibari - Phansideva road ; (13) the 12-mile Nuksarbari Matigarh road ; (14) the 6-mile Karaibari - Adhikari Hat road ; (15) the 12-miles Matigarh - Campasiri road ; and (16) the 12-mile Gurumara-Tistaroad. So the total length of the roads, maintained from the Local Fund, was about 234 miles.

The following unmetalled roads were under the supervision of the Municipality. (1) 8-mile long Dhutiria road from cart road to the Dhutiria Factory ; (2) the 10-mile long Gok road from Darjeeling town to the little Ranjit ; (3) the 16-mile Hopetown road from cart road to Hope town and Balasan ; (4) the 2-mile long Darjeeling station - Jallapahar road ; (5) the 8-mile long Darjeeling station Rangnu road ; (6) the 6-mile long Kurseong -Pankhabari road ; (7) the 12-mile long Ranjit road no.1 from Darjeeling to Great Rangit; (8) the 8-mile Rangit road no. 2, from Takvar to Great Ranjit ; (9) the-10 mile long Singtam Road from Darjeeling to Little Ranjit and (10) the partly metalled and 20-mile Darjeeling Station road. So the total length of the roads under the municipality was, more or

less, 100 miles. The grand total of the length of roads, covered by the 3 agencies as noted above, was 427 miles.

(68)

The comprehensive road building programmes undertaken by the British in the District from 1835 to 1871 had been a grand success in view of the fact that the uneven soil, because of the mountainous nature of the country combined with heavy rainfall and the landslides in the Terai made road construction almost impossible. The devastating and frequent floods also created hindrances to road construction. In the hills, the soil, because of its content of micaceous substance was prone to erosion and landslides, especially where the forest covering was destroyed and the rain swept away the exposed surface. So owing to the physical features of the land, road building was not only a difficult task but also extremely expensive.

O'Malley wrote in 1907, " The roads have to be driven up hill and down dale, often along the edge of steep precipices, where the hill side must be dug away, the rocks blasted, and the hill streams controlled. Expensive stone walls are consequently necessary, breast walls being built above the road to prevent the hill side falling upon it, and revetments being built below to prevent it sinking. The rock strewn streams which drain the mountain slopes are another source of danger. Trickling runlets in the hot weather, they become swollen torrents in the rains

; and training walls have to be built far up the mountain to prevent them washing away the road. The effects of excessive reainfall have also to be guarded against, in order to prevent the roads being scoured out. For this reason, they are generally built with an inward slope and with a drain against the hill-side, as otherwise the steep inclines would make them mere water- courses ; and at intervals there are small ridges of stone to divert the water into the drains. In some cases, the roads have been built with an outward slope, but in the opinion of my engineers this is a mistake, as the water rushing over it is apt to scour and undermine the hill-side below the road ."

" There are few roads with a gradient easy enough to allow of cart traffic, and the majority are built with a gradient which only admits of the passage of ponies and pedestrians : in some places, in fact, the gradient is so steep that ordinary metalling will not rest, and the roads have to be paved with rough stoneslabs. These, though troublesome enough to walk upon, are the only means of keeping the road passable during the monsoon months, and of preventing them being scoured out by heavy rain. The roads have more often than not to be laid out in sharp zig zags or curve round the spurs of the mountains and into the deep ravines and gorges ; and the result is that their length is out of all proportion to the actual distance as the crow files, being often twice and sometimes thrice as

great ". (70)

Inspite of the difficulties and the resultant heavy costs, the construction, maintenance and bridging, road construction in Darjeeling was given most priority both by the government and the army, for, this was the prime factor without which modernisation of Darjeeling could never be achieved. The Public Works Department, the Zilla Parishad, the Municipality and the local Boards assigned for road making were all very much aware of this. So as they gave importance to new road making, they also emphasized repairing of the old roads and metalling the existing 'Kutchra' roads as much as they could. With the introduction of automobiles on the roads of the district after 1918, a fresh impetus was given to the building of modern throughfares in this area. (71)

In 1928, the Road Development Committee under the chairmanship of M. R. Jayakar necessitated a great change in the whole road policy of the government. In 1929, a central road fund was set up with the proceeds of a surcharge on petrol in order to enable them to make annual Block grants. This fund was used to subsidize the provincial work on roads. But as Bengal had no development plan worth the name at that time, A.J. King was appointed social officer for development in 1934. Mr. King prepared a plan for 309 miles of improved roads in the district consisting of 182 miles of the existing metalled, 83 miles

of existing unmetalled and 44 miles of the new roads. (72)

But the king's plan was modified at the Nagpur conference of the provincial chief Engineers. Here the roads were classified into five categories, viz, (i) National Highways (ii) Provincial Highways, (iii) Major District Roads, (iv) Other District Roads, and (v) Village Roads. It was decided that 41 miles of the roads were to be constructed in Darjeeling under the head of National Highways, 106 miles under the head of Provincial Highways, and 201 miles under the head of major district roads. (73)

The Shillong plan, which was better than the Nagpur plan, proposed that 'through' express ways and ring roads around important towns like Siliguri were to be constructed. During the first and second plan periods, a number of roads was transferred from the Cooch Behar construction Division to the Darjeeling construction Division which included Raiganj, Siliguri and Darjeeling construction Subdivisions. Investment in road development during the third plan was directed primarily to improving the quality of roads, bridges, and culverts. In the fourth plan, emphasis was laid on the construction of roads to serve the industrial centres, potential centres of economic growth and underdeveloped areas. (74)

The most important throughfare in the district was the Ganges-Darjeeling Road, now known as National Highway no. 31, which formed part of the Great Asian Highway. It links

National Highway No. 37 in Assam with N.H.W no. 31A from Sikkim, N.H.W. nos. 30,33 and 2 in Bihar and N.H.W. no. 34 from the southern West Bengal. This results in Siliguri being developed as the most important commercial centre of the North Bengal.

Although road construction in the district made tremendous progress, rail - roads did not lag behind. The properties of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Company and the extension company were purchased by the Government of India in 1948 in order to convert a part of the system into metre gauge for establishing a direct rail link with Assam running exclusively over Indian territory. (76)

After the partition, in order to make good the loss of the portion of the old Bengal Railway to the Eastern Bengal Railway (East Pakistan), the old Assam Railway was made to link Assam with the rest of India and was converted to metre gauge. The metre gauge portion of Siliguri - Jalpaiguri and Jalpaiguri - Haldibari railways were opened to traffic on the 23rd and the 26th January, 1950, respectively. (77)

The policy of the Indian Government to re-group, the Indian Railways gave birth to the North East Frontier Railway which included the Railway system of the Darjeeling District. It included important stations like Siliguri town, Siliguri Junction, New Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling,

Sukna, Tindharia, Kurseong, Sonada, Ghum, Baghdogra, Matigara and Naksalbari. However, considering the fact that road transport is comparatively cheaper and quicker, the growing competition between rail and road communication has put this section of the railways in a deplorable condition. (78)

The erection of the rope ways was another landmark in the history of communication network in the Darjeeling Himalayas. The Kalimpong Rope way co. Ltd. was formed in 1928 for transportation of commodities from the Kalimpong town to the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway over the Tista Valley. The Ropeway opened in 1930. On Arrival at the station, the carriers were automatically lifted off the rope and ran on overhead rails in the station. The Ropeway from Darjeeling to Bijanbari, 5 miles long, was owned by the Darjeeling Ropeway Co. Ltd., and was opened for traffic in January, 1939. There were also a number of Private Ropeways on different tea gardens, such as Liza Hill, Thrubo, Gopaldhara, Namring, Pashok, Gyabari, Phuguri and Singball etc. estates. (79)

The Kalimpong Ropeway Co. Ltd has been inoperative now and in 1966, it was handed over to a new company owned by the Samthar Co-operative Multipurpose Society Ltd. (SAMCO) The Darjeeling Bijanbari Ropeway of the Goeankas now serves the intermediate station of Jail Angle in addition to Singtam and Chongtang. One noticeable feature of this ropeway is that it is owned by the Marwaris. The only

other ropeway, opened after Independence, connects Darjeeling with Singla Bazar with a carrying capacity of 4,000 tonnes of goods and 10,000 passengers per year. It is divided into four sections from Lebong Road station to Takvar Tea Estate (Station II), from Takvar to Barnesbeg Tea Estate (Section III), from Barnesbeg to Singla Tea Estate (Station IV), and from Singla Tea Estate to Singla Bazar (Station V). The goods car can carry 1,500 Lbs (or 75 Cft) while the passenger cars are four-seated with two standing travellers at a time. (80)

The district has very little prospect of water communication. Only small country boats or dug-outs could be used in short portions of the rivers, flowing over the plains. So no regular means of water communication has grown in the district. There were only five recognised public ferries in the 1930s. They were Sivok, Dumukha, Duramari, Champasary and Phansidewa Ferry systems. At present, the old ferries have been replaced by bridges. (81)

#### Communication Network and business ventures

In the district of Cooch Behar, the all-round and gradual progress of the means of communication, coping with the growing needs of the time, generated a tremendous impact on the society and economy. The impact was many sided : (i) it increased social mobility among the inhabitants of the district ; (ii) it opened the country, to a great extent, to trade and commerce. ; (iii) it transmitted commercial

crops like jute, tobacco, foodgrains etc. from the village marts to the towns and bunders (Ports) ; (iv) it helped the rise of prices of agricultural produce considerably as markets become more and more competitive; (v) it made exports and imports easier than before; and (vi) it attracted foreign merchants from abroad to take part in new economic ventures. With the rise of prices of the agricultural produce, both the cultivators and the state were benefited. (82) Previously, as there was no competitive market owing to the absence of adequate communication the peasants were compelled to undersell their produce at the local markets and become economically losers. (83) The state also did not get sufficient revenue. But the gradual improvements in the means of communication made trade and commerce free and viable leading to rise of a real and competitive market. The opening of the railways and the construction of roads all over the state opened the country for trade. (84) So the alien merchants such as the Marwaris, Gujaratis, Beharis, Kashmiris, Maghs, and so others, began to rush to the state for economic ventures. The exports and imports in the state were largely enhanced. The chief exports from the state were tobacco, jute, mustard - seed, mustard - oil, rice etc. and the principal imports were piece - goods, salt, metals, copper, utensils, sugar, molasses, pulses, silks, cocoanuts, betel - nuts, beads, dried fish, etc. The crops of the district, after meeting the local demands, were

exported abroad. There was a large export of jute, tobacco, rice, mustard - seed and suger cane. The native merchants estimate the value of exports at about £150,000 per annum, and that of imports at £ 90,000 per annum. The value wise break up of the export and import items were as follows; (1) Exports : Tobacco £ 70,000 ; Jute £40,000; Mustard - seed and oil £ 20,000 ; rice £10,000 and micellaneous £10,000 : (2) Imports : Cloth £50,000 ; Salt £15,000 ; and other articles £25,000. So it is revealed that the balance of trade was in favour of the state as the value of exports exceeded that of imports over time. This was a good source of capital accumulation in the state leading to economic prosperity of the people. (85)

The centres of commercial activity were the various bunders (Ports) and 'Hats' (markets) apart from the Cooch Behar town itself. The communication network knitted these centres in a single chain and thereby every nook and corner of the state came into closer contact with each other. It is the progress of communication network which converted a remote corner of a place into a little rural town and that into a big town, as explained by Harendra Narayan Chaudhury in his book " The Cooch Behar and its Land Revenue Settlements " in the following manner : " The nucleus of a bunder is a Hat. As the latter grows in importance it begins to draw larger traffic, and if the site be favourable with good means of communicatin by land

or by water an experimental shop is opened by the side of the Hat by some enterprising man. If the venture succeeds, more shops come into existence, and, following the example of the pioneers, are raised near the Hat ground. The place soon grows into a little rural town ".(86) As soon as the town grew in importance from the commercial point of view, big merchants began to reside permanently in the markets and bunders and open firms to conduct business.

The principal centre of commercial activity in the district was the headquarters itself. It had commercial link with the bunders and the other market places of the district. This became possible with the growth of a satisfactory communication network in the second half of the 19th century. Moreover, the trade grew in volume over the years. This is evident from the fact that the volume of trade in the state in 1884 far exceeded the same of both of 1864 and 1872. A general review of trade was made in 1872, according to which the total value of exports in that year was Rs. 13,20,000 while that of imports was Rs. 90,000. According to the said review, the trade in jute was doubled due to the opening of the North Bengal Railways.(87) It is obvious that the bulk of the trade as stated above centred round the Cooch Behar Town market which was divided into two sub-markets the Kalikaganj market for the morning shift and the Toha market (presently Bhabaniganj market) for the evening shift. Here

articles of both local and foreign produce of every description and variety were exchanged for trade.

Among the 25 bunders in the state, Haldibari was famous for its jute trade. Its connection with the Kasiabari, Emigration and Manikganj road ; and with the Eastern Bengal State Railway, made the jute trade a brisk one and owing to this, the number of carts carrying jute in the bunder rose from 35,562 in 1910 - 11 to 51,901 in 1911 - 12 ; the quantity of jute imported into the bunder was 5,19,010 maunds in 1911 - 12 as against 3,55,620 maunds of the previous year. (88) Mathabhanga was famous for Tobacco trade. The total quantity of tobacco imported into the Calikaganj bunder was 38,555 maunds in 1911 - 12 against 34,560 maunds of the previous year. There was also an increase from 4,076 to 5,822 maunds in the quantity of jute to the bunder. Similar trends were also noticeable in other bunders such as Chanrabandha, Chowrahat, Dewanhat, Balarampur, and Buxirhat. From Balarampur, jute, paddy, mustard - seed and oil were carried across by boat to Sirajganj. (89) During the year 1891 - 92, owing to the failure of the rice crop, the prices of foodgrains rose high. But this crisis was easily overcome by the easy transport and communication network. Large quantities of rice were imported into Haldibari, Mogulhat, Kalirghat near Cooch Behar, Chowrahat, Mekhliganj, Jamaldah, Laukuti, Cooch Behar and other places either largely by boat and also by road transport or by the railways. It was imports in large quantity from Brit-

ish India that kept up the supply and saved the state. Imported rice found its way to the most distant corners of the state where no home - grown rice could be available. (90)

That the spread of communication served as a great stimulus to the increase of trade and commerce in the district, may also be inferred from the following facts. The number of jute - carts which came to the Haldi-bari bunder was 67,542 in 1901 -02. The number of such carts was 65,5830 in the previous year. So there was an increase of 1,959 carts over a single year. The amount of tolls collected from those was Rs.8442.12 in the former year as against Rs. 8197.14 in the latter. The volume of jute trade in Dewanganj also increased. From Calikaganj bunder at Mathabhanga, the respective quantities of tobacco and jute exported abroad were 57876 and 11285 maunds in 1901 - 02. These were 48,120 and 8030 maunds respectively in the previous year. The total value of different trade items such as tobacco, jute, rice, mustard - seed, salt and sugar etc. was estimated as Rs.4,54,000 in 1901 - 02 which was a marked improvement over the corresponding figure of the previous year. (91)

The Mekhligunj bunder was important for its tobacco trade. A large number of Burmese merchants used to come here to purchase tobacco leaves to send those first to Kaligunj in Rangpur, by crossing the Tista by boat and then to

Chittaganj for final transshipment for Rangoon and other Burmese ports. (92) Tobacco trade at Mathabhanga was mostly conducted through the ports of Brahmaputra, Manikgunj and Narayangunj. (93) Dinhat had its trade mostly along the Sahebganj, Gosanimari and Rangpur roads. (94) Most of the trade in Changrabandha bunder was carried out through both of the road and river transport. It was directly linked up with Patgram, Jalpaiguri, Mekhligunj, and Ranirhat. (95)

The co-existence of both road and river traffic caused different means of communication to grow over time. From Cooch Behar, the export of jute and tobacco was abundant. The Sairat mahals were under the district control of the state and were leased out to farmers on convenient terms and usually for 3 years. The ferries belonged to the state and provided a sizable annual revenue over time. The chars, grown up in a river were liable to fresh assessment. (96) The rivers of this district were to directly connect Rangpur in East Pakistan (Presently Bangladesh). So some portion of the total volume of trade of the district was to be carried on through the southern district of Eastern Bengal. (97) During the monsoon all the rivers flowing through this district had to be traversed in boat of a carrying capacity of 1000 maunds each. None of the marts on the Dharala was of any importance but the aggregate volume of trade was immense. On the Sankos, on the extreme north eastern limit of Rangpur district,

there was a mart at Bharngmari through which a significant amount of trade in oil, oil-seeds and cotton was conducted with Assam. (98)

W.W.Hunter, in his statistical account has provided a chart of river traffic in terms of both exports and imports for the six months since september 1875. The account reveals that the district during the six months undertook the following volume of trade comprising various goods - 260 maunds of wheat ; 502 maunds of rice ; 4,382 of maunds paddy ; 72,934 maunds of jute ; 3,199 maunds of oil ; 1,972 maunds of mustard - seed and 33,940 maunds of tobacco Volumes of import of different goods from abroad were also revealed such as 11,150 maunds of coal ; 104 maunds of cotton ; 1,854 maunds of pulses and gram ; 19,679 maunds of salt and 17,186 maunds of European piece goods.

This is a partial assessment of the total volume of goods traded through the district. The total volume of exports during the six months of reference was 118,540 maunds or 4339 tonnes while that of the imports was only 41,812 maunds, or 1530 tonnes, being a little more than one-third of the exports.

Jute was the most important article of export, aggregating 72,934 maunds to account for 61% of the total volume of exports during the 6 months period of reference. Almost the entire volume transshipped of it was sent to Sirajganj

in Pabna district for being transshipped into larger boats. A very small quantity i.e. 850 maunds was exported directly to Goalanda. The jute-exporting bunders of Cooch Behar had the following volumes of trade during the five-month period from Nov., 1875 to March, 1876, : Balarampur, 28,812 maunds ; Chaorahat 17,149 ; Demakuri 5,437 ; Bak-sarhat, 4,200 ; Cooch Behar town 3,135 ; Durgapur 2,754 ; Bella 2,135 ; Gobrachhara, 1,949 ; Mekhligunj 1,476 ; Silkuri 979 ; Tobacco, exported abroad was 33,940 maunds, or 28% of the total volume of export. The exporting centres had the following volumes of trade during the same period of time : Sibpur, 1747 maunds, Chilka, 750 maunds ; Mathabhanga, 691 maunds ; Cooch Behar towns, 530 maunds ; Silkuri, 425 maunds. The entire English piece goods were imported from Sirajganj and the marts like Chaorahat had received, £ 660 and Cooch Behar Town had received, £ 473. (99) However, after partition the importance of river traffic diminished to a great extent partly due to the loss of many branches of the rivers to East Pakistan and partly due to the opening of the railways, namely the Northern Bengal State Railway. It considerably diverted the traffic from the rivers and almost tended to monopolise the export of jute, tobacco, mustardseed, mustardoil - cake, etc. (100)

The opening of the railways in the state was the first tangible step towards a well spread communication network, and its subsequent modernisation. In fact, it brought

about a transport revolution in the district. The Cooch Behar state appeared in the railway map in the year 1893. It not only changed the pattern of the economy of the district, but also played a key role in promoting cultural development through social mobility. The State Railway was instrumental in augmenting its commercial and agricultural resources by facilitating the growth of trade and commerce. It created a variety of new avenues of employment by inducing mobility of labourers within the state and between states as well. The following table shows the net earnings of the state from the investment on the railways.

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Year	Gross workings	Workings	Net Earnings
1900	Rs. 94,792	Rs. 43,190	Rs. 52,602
1901	Rs.1,27,596	Rs. 52,929	Rs. 74,667
1910-11	Rs.2,17,388	Rs.1,09,532	Rs. 1,07,856
1921-22	Rs.3,06,142	Rs.1,40,825	Rs. 1,65,317
1928-29	Rs.5,63,677	Rs.2,58,594	Rs. 3,05,083

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Source : The Annual Administrative Reports of Cooch Behar.

(101)

It is evident from the above table that the State Railway became a regular source of sizeable earnings which enriched the state exchequer.

Another contemporary administrative report also highlighted the business orientation of the State Railway in the following manner : " The original estimated gross earning for the year 1901-02 was Rs. 94,000 and this figure in the revised estimated was raised to Rs. 1,19,000. The actual gross earnings for the year were Rs. 1,30,559 or Rs. 11,559 more than the revised, and Rs. 36,559 more than the original estimates. During the year ; it had been decided that in the new working agreement the percentage of gross earnings to be charged by the Eastern Bengal State Railway should be lowered from 45 to 40%. On all traffice when the stones carried in trucks were exclusively the property of the Eastern Bengal State Railway. The new agreement took effect from the 1st January, 1901. The actual expenditure for the year under the aboe terms was Rs. 53,707. The net earnings for the year were, therefore, Rs. 76.852, or approximately , 5 1/3% on the total capital outlay, which up to the 31st March, 1902, amounted to Rs. 14,41,578 of which only Rs. 14,08,310 had been accounted for, leaving a credit balance of Rs. 33,268 in 'Your highness'favour' in the hands of the Eastern Bengal State Railway. The capital expenditure on the line for the year, as reported, was Rs. 57,580 against an estimate of Rs. 20,000 in 1902-03. The estimated gross earnings of the railway for 1902-03 were placed at Rs. 1,17,853, and though this figure was considerably below the actual earnings for the year under report, still it was on the safeside in as much as the earnings for 1901-02 included certain earnings

for previous years on account of the stone traffic, which, it was discovered, had not been correctly credited to the Cooch Behar State Railway in the past. (103)

The following table will show the revenue, results and traffic working of the line during the year 1901 - 1902.

For the year		1900	1901
Mean mileage worked	Miles	33.71	33.78
Train milage	Miles	64.397	56.112
Gross Earnings	Rs.	94,792	1,27,596
Working Expenses	Rs.	43,190	52,929
Net Earnings	Rs.	51,602	74,667
P.C. of working expenses On gross Earnings	Rs.	45,6	41,40
P.C of net Earnings	Rs.	4.02	5.25
on capital outlay, including suspense (14,20,370)			

Source : Ibid, P.13 (104)

The above table postulates the following : (1) The extension of the railways wholly consistent with the increase of state earnings ; (ii) the state earnings stimulated further investment in rail transports.

The above table contains signs of future progress. The

following table will substantiate it.

Number and value of wagons loaded in selected Railway stations of Cooch Behar District, 1969 - 1972

Table

1969 - 1970			
Name of Station	Principal Commodities	No of Wagons	Approximate Value
		Rs.	Rs.
Cooch Bihar	Jute	400	37,32,350
New Cooch Bihar	Jute	1298	4,15,36,000
	Tobacco	122	1,23,42,000
	Hides	21	6,03,000
	Timber	37	1,11,000
	Miscellaneous	224	60,00,000
Dinhata	Jute	1,678	2,51,70,000
Nataguri	Jute	193	23,16,000
Bamanhat	Jute	523	7,84,500
Choksha Danga	Jute	25	3,75,000
Jorai	Jute	19	18,227
	Timber	131	77,597

Table

1970 - 1971			
Name of Station	Principal Commodities	No of Wagons	Approximate Value
		Rs.	Rs.

Cooch Bihar	Jute	566	50,76,500
New Cooch Bihar	Jute	683	2,18,56,000
	Tobacco	77	41,69,400
	Hides	10	3,01,500
	Timber	29	87,000
	Miscellaneous	81	40,00,500
Dinhata	Jute	879	1,18,35,000
Nataguri	Jute	138	16,56,000
Bamanhat	Jute	310	4,65,000
Choksha Danga	Jute	16	84,520
Jorai	Jute	21	15,269
	Timber	379	2,35,956

Table

1971 - 1972			
Name of Station	Principal Commodities	No of Wagons	Approximate Value
		Rs.	Rs.
Cooch Bihar	Jute	594	57,59,375
New Cooch Bihar	Jute	1,222	4,05,23,000
	Tobacco	52	57,20,000
	Hides	16	4,06,300
	Timber	31	93,000
	Miscellaneous	255	67,00,000
Dinhata	Jute	1,085	1,62,75,000
Nataguri	Jute	95	1,14,000
Bamanhat	Jute	246	3,63,000

Choksha Danga	Jute	12	72,320
Jorai	Jute	108	94,358
	Timber	273	2,12,749

Including Broad-gauge and Metre-gauge wagons.  
The rest are on Broad-gauge wagons.

105) Source : Durgadas Majumder, op. cit. P. 97

The two tables presented above demonstrate ideal examples of the communication economy relationship which obviously attracted the entrepreneurial communities of India to migrate here for undertaking economic ventures and it is needless to say the the Marwari Community, the pioneer of private entepreneureship in trade and commerce in India, must have come on the scene early enough to exploit new opportunities.

Jalpaiguri, before it got its present dimension in 1869 was the only outlet through which British Political as well as commercial intercourse either with Tibet through Sikkim and Bhutan or with Cooch Behar and Assam Came off. Even when Darjeeling was an enclave in Sikkim Territory and Ambari Falakata was forcefully occupied by Bhutan, Jalpaiguri was the only connector, which served as a footing platform to Captain Lloyd, Mr. Grant, Captain Herbert, Dr. Chapman, Dr. Hooker, Ashley Eden, and above all Dr. Campbell who were deputed from time to time to explore and investigate the climate and capabilities of Darjeeling. So when this was the state of things, Jalpai-

guri, Owing to its inadequate communications, had no easy access to the territories lying on its western, northern and eastern boundaries, except only with British Rangpur and Purnea in the south. These geo-physical features were the real hindrances to any kind of economic development and only proper growth of means of communications could remove these barriers. It should be kept in mind in this context that the communicational development in Darjeeling and the North East as a whole was largely conditioned by the improvement in the means of communication in the district of Jalpaiguri and herein lay the reality of the communication-economy relationship. The Britishers were well aware of it and so they did the needed things when Jalpaiguri became a district in 1869. Jalpaiguri was really a bottleneck between Darjeeling in the West and Cooch Behar in the East, besides its frontier link with

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British India in the south and thereby promoted not only internal trade within itself but also inter regional trade with Darjeeling, Assam, and Cooch Behar and trans-Himalayan trade with Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet, China and even with central Asia, a trade route, which the British desired for long. All these were the far reaching consequences of the gradual introduction of a the modern transport and communication system in Jalpaiguri either by the Government or by private initiatives, particularly by the tea garden owners.

The crops of the District were more than sufficient to

meet the local demand. So there had always been a surplus which was largely exported abroad. Jute, Sal-Timber and tobacco, largely, and rice and paddy, partly were exported. The gradual progress in the means of communication, obviously, stimulated this trade, to a great extent and this sign of stimulation could easily be seen in tobacco cultivation. A letter, published in 'The Statistical Reporter of March 1876' reported that the cultivation of tobacco in the district largely increased as the market of it became buoyant. Some year ago, the 'bispat' or the lower leaves were considered almost of no value. But in 1875, the prices rose rapidly up to Rs. 4 per maund. The tobacco packed up into bundles under gunny covers were sent to Goalanda by boat and then to Calcutta by rail. (106) The jute cultivation was also growing as its market too responded very positively.

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Available statistics on river trade for a period of 6 months prior to february, 1876 reveal that as against the total volume of exports of 50,540 maunds or 1850 conns, the total volume of imports was only 17,750 maunds or 650 tons. Among the exportable items, jute contributed the maximum of 47% of *the export* followed by tobacco with 43% of the same. So there were three times more exports than imports during that period of time. In contrast, salt among the importing items alone contributed 50% of the total volume of imports. The Statistical Reporter furnishes detailed information on the three staple articles

or trade, namely, jute, tobacco and apiece-goods for the period of 4 months: from Nov, 1875, to Feb, 1876. Out of a total of 23,806 maunds of jute exported from Jalpaiguri, 16,433 maunds or 69% was sent to Sirajganj and 7373 maunds or 31% was to Goalanda. During the last 2 months of 1875 Baura exported 7484 maunds of tobacco. But Baura during the said four months, received European cotton manufactures of the value of Rs. 17,605, which was the total import into Jalpaiguri. The whole of this import, as is known, came from Sirajganj of Pabna District. (107)

However, the greatest achievement of a well-knit communication system was the extension of the Darjeeling based tea industry to this district in general and to the western Duars in particular. J.F. Gruning writes, " The development of tea industry and the influx of a large coolie population into the 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, provide the cultivator with a ready market for his rice, vegetables and other produce ". (108) In fact the railways monopolised in respect of carriage most of the trade of the district. The rail transport was used to carry tea and jute to Calcutta and Tobacco to Burma. Most of the Sal Timber was sent down by river to Eastern Bengal. Rice was imported in large quantities from Dinajpur. Coke for tea gardens came from Raniganj and at a later

period from Assam. In addition to sal timber, tobacco, mustard seed, jute, cotton and hides were also exported by river routes to Sirajganj, Dacca and other markets. The up-stream traffic was mainly engaged to carry the imports of earthen cooking utensils, cocoanuts, molasses, dal etc. from Dacca and Faridpur. Most of the trade with Bhutan was carried out through Buxa. (109).

The principal trade centre was Baura Hat. Here extensive trade was undertaken in respect of goods like tobacco, rice and jute which were collected from all parts of the district for being exported by river to Dacca and other Eastern Markets. Sal timber followed down the Brahmaputra river to be transported to Dacca and Sirajganj. Some amount of tea was sent to Falakata to be despatched to the Mujnai by boat. That again was to be loaded in the steamers at Dhubri.

The railway statistics for the year 1907 show that the railway carried 606,000 passengers and 144,000 tons of goods. The principal items of import carried by the railway were 14,910 tons of coal, 19,507 tons of food grains, 4,58 tons of salt, 3,397 tons of manufactured metals, and 952 tons of cotton - goods. The principal items of export were 17,106 tons of jute, 16,229 tons of tea and 6,342 tons of tobacco. The export of item like jute, tea and tobacco vividly explains the growing trends of cultivation of those crops in the district.

Presently, the district imports rice from West Dinajpur, Darjeeling and Nepal ; and pulses from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. And it exports jute and oranges to Calcutta and tobacco to Assam, Orissa and Calcutta. (112) Obviously, the means of communication meant to brighten the prospects of import and export trade have been the road and the rail traffic.

The British occupation of Darjeeling in three phases and its subsequent conversion into a district in 1865 had some important objectives. Those were (I) to make Darjeeling a sanatorium, (II) to introduce plantation of tea, coffee, and cinchona, (III) to establish trade relations with Tibet and Central Asia. and (IV) to open out the district for trade and commerce. They conceived those keeping in mind the great strategical importance of Darjeeling as the gateway to Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. The British desired to bring this added advantage in their favour. The establishment and growth of adequate means of communication in the district helped them to make it a reality. It was communication which made it possible for Darjeeling to approach the British Districts in Purnea and Rangpur on the south, Nepal on the west, Bhutan on the east and Jalpaiguri on the South. The long - cherished British desire of opening up a commercial route with Tibet either through Sikkim or through Bhutan also now became a reality. So socio economic mobility began to grow faster and faster among the inhabitants of these regions. Modern

communication helped to boost the transfrontier trades as well as the trade with the plains over time. Improved and greater facilities accrued through the smooth communication network which largely stimulated the cultivation of cash crops like jute, tobacco, cardamom, orange, and above all, tea.

The cultivation of jute increased largely since the advent of the railway system of transport which ensured cheaper costs of export of jute. (113) With the rapid growth of tea plantation, the industry was commercialised and boosted by easy and cheap traffic. In 1874, the number of tea gardens in the district was 113 which increased up to 148 in 1905. (114) Production of orange and cardamom - growing also became more profitable since the improved communication facilities smoothed their exports to foreign countries. 90% of the total output of oranges was being exported from Darjeeling. (115)

The construction of a trade route in Sikkim and its linkage with the Northern Bengal Railway fulfilled the British desire of establishing a trade relation with Tibet and Central Asia. This became possible by signing a friendly treaty with Sikkim in March 1861, and another with Bhutan in Nov. 1865. The opening of Darjeeling to free trade and commerce through a well planned communications network also accomplished with greater ease. The made the establishment of a sanatorium in an once uninha-

bited area surrounded by hill forests, feasible and consequently it became a reality.

The road and the railway system of the district, the latter in the form of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, really created an excitement to exploit the regions of both Terai and the hills economically. Siliguri became an international trade centre. The entire trade along the Tista valley with Sikkim and Tibet and also with Kalimpong 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. The Hill cart road and the main line of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway transported the greater portion of the produce of the Sadar besides that of Kurseong. Again, the commodities, needed for Darjeeling, Kurseong, and the tea gardens, were supplied through these routes. The Kisanganj Branch of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and the terai road system served the Terai tea gardens via Siliguri and a certain amount of Nepal bound traffic via Naxalbari Station also moved through Siliguri. The amount of goods booked to and from the Siliguri Station on the Bengal and Assam Railway to enter or leave the district for the year 1941-42 was 81,505 tons and 37,946 tons respectively. Similarly the amount of goods booked on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, entering into and leaving from the district at Siliguri was 34,567 tons and 26,419 tons respectively for the same period. So also, the amount of goods booked internally on

the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway coming to and leaving from Siliguri and Siliguri Road Stations in the year ending March, 1942 was 19,703 tons and 3,015 tons respectively. The principal commodities, imported to and exported from Siliguri included paddy, rice, gram, and pulses, wheat flour, wheat, oil seeds, salt, gur, sugar, wood, cotton, fruit, vegetables, oranges, jute, iron and steel, oil cakes, Kerocene, tobacco, tea, cardamom, wool, etc. (116)

A latest gazetteer of the district has explained the communication - economy relationship with a new focus on it. The inflow of goods largely reflects the strength of the local and sub-regional economy. The highly ginning market of perishable commodities, foodgrains, building materials, and timber is due to the rapid rate of urbanisation at Siliguri and flourishing forest based industries. The tea gardens of the Duars, Siliguri, Mainaguri, Patlakhawa and those on the Dalkhola - Siliguri road sections together account for nearly three-fourths of the total supply of tea coming into Siliguri. More than 85% of the building materials are supplied by the business centre of Siliguri, Dalkhola and those lying on the Siliguri Mainaguri Road sections. *The miscellaneous* commodity group occupying the largest share in the total import, consists primarily of a variety of consumer goods. Considering that Siliguri remains the main warehousing and distributing centre of consumer goods for the North Bengal Region as well as for parts of North Bihar and the Brahmaputra

valley, such a large inflow of miscellaneous commodities would only be natural.

Large scale import and ware-housing and heavy reliance on railways characterise the movement of foodgrains. Primarily due to the 'break of gauge' factor, export of food grains by road is double that of import. Moreover, Kalimpong and other widely scattered tea garden areas of the district of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri which are not served by railways have to depend exclusively on road transport for this as well as for other commodities. As a matter of fact, Jalpaiguri town is one of the largest receivers of foodgrains from Siliguri and in this regard how vital is the role of road transport in carrying the foodgrains by trucks is borne out by the fact that Siliguri imports 1,313 tonnes of grain every week.

By virtue of its location, Siliguri has also become the main collecting as well as distributing centre of fruits and vegetables. Wholesale vegetable markets are held at Siliguri twice a week and the town imports 812 tonnes and exports 583 tonnes of this commodity per week, local consumption accounting for the difference, since there is hardly any rail transport for this perishable commodity. In the absence of any incoming traffic by road, the carriage of commodities like mineral oil, coal and cement from Siliguri is made almost by rail and pipeline for this region. The main corridors of transshipment of these commodities are the Siliguri - Mainaguri, Siliguri -

Dalkhola, Siliguri - Kalimpong and Siliguri - Gangtak road sections.

The goods in transit through Siliguri is only, 1,934 tonnes per week or 13% of the total flow. This relatively low proportion of the goods in transit indicates that Siliguri is more important as a ware housing and distribution centre. A large proportion of the goods in transit flows between Assam Valley, particularly Gauhati, and the Calcutta industrial belt. This is partly due to the complete stoppage of inland water transport through East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh). It is estimated that on an average Calcutta sends 487 tonnes of goods, mostly consumer products and iron and steel to Assam Valley while Gauhati in exchange sends to Calcutta 332 tonnes of goods, mostly tea and jute every week". (117) The latest statistics in respect of passenger and goods traffic by the North Frontier Railway during the period 1965 - 66 and 1966 - 67 has been furnished by the said Gazetteer. The said railway carried 1,05,310 and 1,20,470 passengers during the year mentioned and its earnings on this account were Rs. 3,41,390 and Rs.3,04,222. It also earned a total of Rs.90,320 in 1965 - 66 and Rs. 1,45,374 in 1966 - 67 under other miscellaneous heads. Its earnings on goods traffic were Rs. 12,16,000 and Rs. 10,24,000 as against 58,546 and 51,145 tonnes of goods carried respectively during the same years. (118)

The construction of ropeways also caused some amount of economic progress in the district. Previously Kalimpong had to rely on bullock carts and coolies for the transport of all goods and the rates varied from annas 8 to Rs.1 - 4 per maund from Gielle Khola railway station depending on the seasons of the year. But the opening up of the Kalimpong ropeway in 1930 not only reduced the carrying costs of the goods but also enhanced the quality of goods for transportation at a time. The traded goods included mainly baled wool, oranges and timber outward and foodgrains, brick-tea, cloth and building materials inward. The quantity of goods transported increased fast over to 475,000 maund in 1939 - 40. Thus the ropeway proved to be an efficient and commercial form of transport.

The Darjeeling Bijanbari ropeway opened in 1939, carried on an average annual maundage of 150,000. It connected Bijanbari, an important trade centre from the Eastern Nepal and Western Sikkim with Darjeeling. Bijanbari has also an important tea garden, forest and Khas Mahal area. This ropeway transported potatoes, vegetables, poultry, cardamoms and forest produce up to Darjeeling and carried down cloth, year, sugar, salt, keroscene, and metals. (119)

The Kalimpong ropeway had been replaced by a new ropeway owned by the Samthar Co-operative Multipurpose Society Ltd (SAMCO). It carried various agricultural and forest produce from Suruk, Samthar, Sinji and Yangmakun Khas Mahal

forest blocks. The Darjeeling Bijanbari ropeway began to serve an intermediate station of Jail Angle in addition to Sangtam and Chongtang. So transport in this area became easier and for that reason, agriculture, horticulture, dairy farming and bee keeping began to develop in Bijanbari - Pulbazar area. Import of hides and medicinal plants from across the Nepal and Sikkim frontiers also largely increased. The only other ropeway, i.e., Darjeeling - Singla Bazar ropeway operating since Independence added further momentum in the general transport system in the district. (120)

Transport and communications are considered to be important pre-requisites for modern economic development. These provide a vital impetus for growth by inducing factor mobility and widening the market for the goods throughout the country as well as the world.

These two are also necessary means of industrialisation. Rapid industrialisation promotes commercial activities which bring forth urbanisation.

So for the spread of urbanisation in the country, massive industrialisation as well as commercialisation are essential. Obviously, all of these are stimulated by a smooth transport and communications network.

Before the advent of the British, the transport and communication system in India was of primitive type,

depending mainly on bullock-carts. 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 mother land. 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 fulfil these objectives better, they paid necessary attention to built up a transport and communications network throughout the country. Roads were developed, Railways were set up and internal navigation was organised. As a result, economic activity was extended to the districts.

The districts of North Bengal were no exception to it, although in Cooch Behar, the progress of development of the present day system of transportation was initiated by Nripendra Narayan, a King with a modern outlook. The Duars of Jalpaiguri attracted the British rulers for being suitable for tea plantation as were the hilly areas of Darjeeling, which had significant commercial prospects and this prompted them to built up modern transport system. The strategical importance of Siliguri being the gateway to Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan and the only passage to vast north eastern region of the country was also a dominant factor to reckon with. The districts of North Bengal, having many large rivers, with tremendous water course for the major portion of the year, had a good case for development of water transport. With the advent of modern

means of transport in the district of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling the trading activity became brisk in and around the region over time, with the exportables being the principal local produce like jute, tobacco, orange and rare variety of wood apart from tea.

With improved transport and communications, new economic entrepreneurships sprang up in these three districts of North Bengal. It was natural that the Marwaris, the leading commercial class of the country, entered the region to undertake economic ventures.

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