

INTRODUCTION

Local history has attracted the attention of scholars, historians and professional students of history. The validity of local history can hardly be of any doubt and its importance lies mainly in its contribution to our understanding of the history of the wider region of which the particular locality forms a part. Local or micro level history deals with in-depth study of a locality; a village, a region, a small town, a district or any culturally autonomous region. It provides a manageable geographical framework, approximated by processes of wider socio-economic change of the people and reaction of the masses to the socio-economic and political structure. This study is an attempt at analyzing the social, economic and political transformation of the plain portion of Darjeeling district, popularly known Darjeeling Terai between 1864 and 1994. The starting point is 1864, the year when Terai sub-divisional headquarter was established in Hansqua near Phansidewa, and the terminal point is the year when a portion of Terai popularly known Siliguri police station got a status of Siliguri Municipal Corporation in 1994.

One may ask why a small portion of a district or better to say a sub-division called Siliguri has been chosen. In this regard several explanations may be offered. Firstly, Darjeeling Terai covers an area of about two hundred and seventy four square kilometres of territory within the present Siliguri sub-division of West Bengal, which is strategically very important in the Indian geography with borders of countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Tibet (China). Secondly, after the five decades of the establishment of University of North Bengal no historical research works yet to be done by any research scholar in this regard. But it is a real fact that Siliguri or in wider aspect Darjeeling Terai emerged as one of the fastest growing region in India in regard of economic and population growth on the one hand and witnessed the great popular movements like Naxal uprising on the other hand. An overall study on different aspects of social, economic and political history of present Darjeeling Terai in the Colonial and Post-Colonial period has not yet received scholarly attention. For this reason the area of present Darjeeling Terai find a little place in the main stream social, economic and political study of historians.

There are no research work have so far been completed touching the thematic margin of the proposed dissertation or any completed research work have not yet been

published on the proposed topic. Though some studies have no doubt been undertaken on few issues of this region but no detail study has so far been made on social, economic and political transition of this region. The few published works available are-

1. 'The Eastern Morung: A Disputed Territory In Anglo-Nepalese Relations (1770-1816)' by Tapas Kumar Roy Choudhury (in *The Indian Historical Review*, Biannual Journal Of The Indian Council Of Historical Research), Vol-XVII, No.1-2, Vivekananda Jha(ed), Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1993.)
2. *History and Culture of the Kirat People* by I.S.Chemjong, (Puspa Ratna Sagar, Nepal, 1967.)
3. *Economic History of North Bengal* by Manas Dasgupta (University of North Bengal, Raja Rammohanpur, 2010.)
4. *Migration between India and Nepal* by Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya (Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1996.)

Tapas Kumar Roy Choudhury and I.S. Chemjong partially touched the history of Darjeeling Terai region. Though, Tapas Kumar Roy Choudhury in his outstanding article first time dealt with the pretext of the colonial annexation of Terai. I.S. Chemjong in his work takes some initiative to draw historical background of this region in pre-colonial period. Manas Dasgupta in his book discussed many topic related to the economic history of North Bengal about tea, trade, land revenue etc but he lightly touch a portion of Terai i.e growth of Siliguri and spend six or seven pages to discussed the opening of Terai on commercial point of view. Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya in his books explores only the Nepali migration in India and early political connection of Nepal with India. It also deals some effects of social and cultural migration and briefly discussed agitation for separate state by the Nepalis in India. In these books the Terai region of Darjeeling district has been discussed in scattered ways and beyond historical sense. Apart from these *Siliguri: Purnango Itihas* (Bengali) by Sibaprasad Chatterjee (Himalaya Publisher's, Siliguri, 2000), *Ekti Janapader Kahinee* (Bengali) by Sree Praudyot Kumar Basu (Shayma Press, Hooghly, 1990) *Siliguri Sahorer Itibritoo* (Bengali) by Bijay Chandra Ghatak (Jaghreetee Press, Jalpaiguri, 1389 B.S)- all of these book have been written by local writers and non-academicians. These works are mostly written about Siliguri and its urbanization. They are basically memoirs in character and are far away

from any historical sense. It is better to regard these works as narration of information rather than history. Moreover they are biased, exaggerate and narrative in nature. But there are some outstanding unpublished Ph.D works on Terai region mainly dealing with tea industry and commercial activities in Siliguri after Independence of India in 1947. These are

1. *The Darjeeling Terai Tea Plantation (1862-1976): A Case Study Of The Condition Of the Workers* by Ashok Kumar Ganguli (Jadavpur University, 1994)
2. *Economic Changes in Siliguri and Problems of Its Urban Development* by Ranjit Roy (N.B.U. 1986)
3. *Industries, Trade And Trading Communities of North Bengal (West Bengal) 1833-1933: A Study Of Economic History* by Sujit Ghosh (N.B.U. 2010)
4. *Siliguri : An Urban Study in Socio-Economic Considerations* by Sudipta Majumdar (N.B.U. 2001)

Though, these works are more comprehensive and evident but no one had tried to explore the continuous changes of history of Darjeeling Terai region between 1864 and 1994. Ashok Kumar Ganguli's work is based on the tea garden labourer's condition in Terai and he analysed in detail as the involving of Communist Party to mobilising tea workers. Ranjit Roy in his work investigated the economic activities of Siliguri and showed the rise, growth and development of Siliguri as a most prominent commercial town of North Bengal after the termination of colonial rule. Sujit Ghosh in his work beautifully analysed the economic activities of North Bengal from the introduction of Charter Act of 1833 to an end of the great worldwide Economic Depression in 1933. In his work he only focused some tea and transport activities in and around Siliguri and it is to be note that when Siliguri just emerged as a town in 1931 he had about to finished his investigation. Sudipta Majumdar finds out several factors for emerging Siliguri as a business centre. All of these works mainly related to somehow economic history of Siliguri Town areas and one focused on specific aspects of Terai tea industry and labour movement. Even some other articles and papers related to political involvement of the people of Terai in Naxal Movement published so far in academic journals and magazines, focus on specific aspects of this movement but no means micro-level studies undertaken in ethnic angle wise. None of the scholars touched the society, demography and agriculture, land settlement, education and anti colonial movements including ethnic

conflicts in their investigation regarding Terai region of Darjeeling. Thus Darjeeling Terai is virtually a virgin soil in this respect from researcher point of view. Here lies the relevance and importance of the present study.

The pertinent question which induced me to start the research work is the continuous changes of Siliguri sub-division in terms of social, economic, educational and political arena. On the other hand it is difficult to say specifically the composition of the population of this region in pre-colonial rule however it is an acknowledge fact that the Rajbanshis were the largest single majority group of the people in Terai in colonial period. Though, it is also evident that the Dhimals and the Meches were the majority of the population in the northern bank of the river Mahananda before coming of the tribal settlers from Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas who were mostly engaged in tea industry in Terai. The higher caste Hindu settlers who were engaged in Government sectors, legal profession, managers and accountant in tea gardens mainly inhabited in rural areas of Terai. But the most important factor is that a large number of refugees from East Pakistan, Nepalese from Nepal and lower caste Hindu and Muslims infiltrators from Bangladesh were settled this region after colonial rule and we found a new change and trend in demography of this region. The rapid change in the demographic structure of Terai within proposed period had led a deep impact upon the social, economic and political life of the region.

The whole study has been organised into Seven Chapters excluding introduction.

The first Chapter entitled “Geo-Historical Profile of Darjeeling Terai” attempts to give a description of the geographical location of the Terai areas of Darjeeling district in present West Bengal because Terai is situated in Uttranchal, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Nepal. Here an attempt has been made to construct a historical outline of Terai region of Darjeeling district from 6th century A.D to till the annexation of the Colonial Government in 1850 which is almost uninhabited region filled with furious wild animals and dense forest. Here the history of Darjeeling Terai region can be studied in two different angle or dimension i.e northern bank of the river Mahananda and southern bank of the said river. The history of the northern bank of the river Mahananda or the history between Mechi-Mahananda region is an unwritten from. The reason can be traced in the historical fact that the northern bank was invaded and annexed by different foreign powers in different times. The history of the southern bank of the river Mahannanda or

the history of Siliguri is much written because it was included with the Terai of Darjeeling in 1880.

The second Chapter entitled “Demographic Profile and Social Structure of Terai” focuses on the enormous demographic change of Terai. In this chapter the demographic changes in Terai has been discussed in two phase’s i.e pre-Independence and post-Independence period. It is true that in pre-Colonial period there were sages, saints and also furious animals in the dense forest of Terai but apart from these the Meches and the Dhimals were one of the earlier settlers who resided in the upper reaches of the Terai i.e northern part of the river Mahananda. In the lower lands of Terai i.e southern part of the river Mahananda the Koches were the earlier inhabitants of this area followed by the Rajbanshis. After the establishment of the colonial rule in Terai a large number of caste Hindu Bengalis had migrated to these areas who were mostly engaged with Government services, professional lawyer and other working sectors. After the establishment of tea plantation the Oraons, Mundas, Santhals and Nepalis had migrated. The Biharis had come in Terai, after the establishment of railway lines and communication. They were followed by the Marwaries. The refugees from East Pakistan had also migrated to this area after the partition of India in 1947 and from that time Siliguri sub-division witnessed the enormous growth of population. During post-Independence period Darjeeling Terai recorded abnormal growth in population and the police stations of Siliguri, Phansidewa and Naxalbari recorded a phenomenal growth in population. Despite the migrant’s heterogeneous character in language, way of life, caste, culture formed a plural society marked by considerable socio-cultural differentiations.

The third Chapter entitled “Economic Changes: Agriculture and Plantation Economy”. It further divided in two different sub-chapters, Settings A: “Agricultural Evolution and Classification of Land” and Settings B: “Rise and Growth of Tea Industry in Terai”. In the first part of this chapter (settings: A) an attempt has been made to know about the pre-Colonial land system and different agricultural crops which were produced in this area. After the annexation of Terai in 1850 the colonial government made various rules, regulations and land revenue settlement to govern this tract. A new type of land system was developed by the Government which is better to called *jotedary* system in this region. The owner of the *jotes* is called *jotedars* and most of them were the Rajbanshis. An attempt has also been made to explore the *jotedar-adhiar* relationship marked by multiple forms of surplus extraction and dependency in the Colonial period. It

prevailed till the end of the colonial rule. But after the introduction of the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1953 all the colonial land rules were superseded. One of the aims of this work in this chapter is to study the agrarian class structure, its formation and deformation from the pre-colonial period to the end of the colonial rule.

In the second part of this chapter (settings: B) focuses on the rise and growth of tea industry in Terai and its commercial importance in this region during the concerned period. Here an attempt has been made to know about the forces and factors that led to the growth of tea plantation in this region. At the same time, attempt has been made to look consolidation of the European-owned and controlled tea plantation economy- a typical form of colonial economic penetration and exploitation on the one hand and how the Bengalis gradually entered into this venture. Here an emphasis has been given upon the Colonial policy and attitude with regards to this commercial crop and analyse the different factors responsible for the beginning of the decline of the Bengali entrepreneurs in the tea industry in post Independence period.

The fourth Chapter entitled “Educational Scenario of Darjeeling Terai” highlights the radical transformation of Terai especially Siliguri rural areas from an educationally backward tract to an educational hub of North Bengal within a very short period. Here an attempt has been made to look educational development in Terai’s rural areas including tea garden areas.

The fifth Chapter throws light on the “Urbanization of Siliguri: Union Board to Corporation”. After a thorough study on urbanization of Siliguri, it became evident that the process of development in Siliguri did remain more or less constant towards the end of the colonial rule in India. A new dimension followed with the partition of India in 1947 reflected the progress of the transport system specially railways and road transport. Further, the Chinese aggression of 1962 attracted the then Central Government of India towards the strategically important place Siliguri because the distance from Siliguri to Nathula or Chumbi valley of China was closer than the distance to Calcutta. Thus for the protection and safety of the North-Eastern part of India the importance of Siliguri gradually increased.

The sixth Chapter is entitled “Political Transition: Agitation to Confrontation” in Darjeeling Terai which is the reflection of the agriculture based various social-economic groups and social classes of the Rajbanshi people for the loss of their land. It is

remarkable that throughout the colonial period Darjeeling Terai remained more or less free from any mass movement or mass conflict, though tension were not entirely absent. But it is interesting to see with the socio-political changes that took place after Chinese aggression of India in 1962 and moreover the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 Terai became one of the ethnic confrontation centres at the national as well as provincial level.

Chapter Seven notes the Epilogue or conclusion which sums up the research findings and analysis.

This research work is perhaps the first ever attempt to make a comprehensive study of the historical, social, economical, educational and political transition of the plain portion of Darjeeling district popularly known Siliguri sub-division. A wide variety of tools and techniques are available and used by the scholar in this field. However, this type of micro-level research often suffers from lack of qualitative data or primary source material but the present study is based on primary data or sources, mostly unpublished materials were consulted either in District Magistrate Office of Darjeeling, or Divisional Commissioner's Office in Jalpaiguri, or in West Bengal State Archive in Calcutta. A fruitful appendix is a very good proof to establish this comment. Besides primary sources, several books though few in numbers, on the subject have provided valuable supplementary information for the study. The researcher has also used local journals, magazines, souvenirs, news papers, historical journals, unpublished Ph. D thesis and M. Phil dissertation as well as filled surveys and interview has been used to clarify the problem.