

ABSTRACT

TITLE: SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRANSITION OF DARJEELING TERAI (1864-1994)

The 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. 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). 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.

In this study 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 demographic changes which constitutes a major element in the society, economy and politics of 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 Oraon, 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.

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 developed in the colonial rule in this region called the *jotedari* system. The owner of the *jotes* was called *jotedars* and most of them were the Rajbanshis. A typical *jotedar-adhiar* relationship had emerged which is 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 replaced by new policies of the independent India. The colonial policy in the terai and introduction of commercial crop like tea had led to the economic transformation of the economy of the region as well as the rise and decline of the *Bengalee* entrepreneurs in the tea industry in post Independence period.

The thesis highlights the radical transformation of Terai especially Siliguri town 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. 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.

It has taken up the rise and ethnic confrontation of various social and ethnic minority groups for the loss of their land due migration due to partition (1947) and infiltration since 1971. On the whole it has taken up the social, economic and political transition of the Darjeeling Terai from the colonial to the post colonial and independent India.