

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF URBANIZATION IN NORTH BENGAL

2.1 Introduction

North Bengal comprises the six northern districts of West Bengal viz. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Maldah. Although there is no administrative area named North Bengal, but by convention it is referred these six districts. The present North Bengal is a product of the post-independence period. After the partition of India, the pre existing district boundaries were modified, the new district of West Dinajpur was formed which was later bifurcated into North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur in 1992 and the Princely State of Cooch Behar was annexed as a district of West Bengal.

North Bengal is bounded by river Ganga in the south, the state of Bihar and Jharkhand in the west, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan in the north and Assam and Bangladesh in the east. Therefore this region shares three international boundaries besides having common boundaries with the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Sikkim and Assam.

The topography of the region ranges from the high mountains to flat plains. The southern districts of Maldah, Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur are in the plains and the rest of the districts fall under hilly terrain and *Tarai* in the northern part.

2.1.1 Darjeeling District

2.1.1.1 Location and size: The district Darjeeling lies in the northern most part of the state of West Bengal having the shape of an irregular triangle, geographically divided among hills and plains. The hilly tracts of Darjeeling are included in the eastern Himalayas and constitute a portion of the Indian Himalayan Region, while the plains are included in the *Tarai* and *Dooars* region. Geographically, the district is located between 26° 27' N to 27° 13' N latitude and 87° 59' E to 88° 53' E longitude. The district shares its boundary with three different nations, viz. Bangladesh in the south-east, Nepal in the west and Bhutan in the north-east making it strategically very significant. Besides it also shares boundary with the neighbouring states of Sikkim in the north and Bihar in the south-west. The district also shares boundary with Jalpaiguri district in the east and Uttar Dinajpur district in the south. Despite its difficult terrain, Darjeeling

is one of the most densely populated areas among about hundred districts included in the Indian Himalayan Region. The area of Darjeeling district is 3149 sq. km.

2.1.1.2 Physiography: Darjeeling district is the only district of West Bengal consisting hills and mountains as a part of the mighty Himalayas. Geographically, hilly areas of Darjeeling are a part of the Shivalik Range or Outer Himalayas. Beyond the mountains in the north, starts the flat plain of the *Tarai* in the south and south-eastern part of the district. Thus, the physiography of Darjeeling district can be broadly divided into hills and plain land. The natural slope of the district is from north to south.

2.1.1.3 Climate: Due to its distinctive topographical features having hills in a large portion of the district surrounded by the plain lands of *Tarai* towards the south and south-east, Darjeeling district has two different climatic conditions. The hills have a temperate weather condition, with pleasant summer and cold winter with occasional snowfall. On the other hand, the marshy tract of *Tarai* is humid and warm, showing typical tropical and sub-tropical climatic conditions depending upon the elevation. The maximum and minimum temperature in the hilly area of Darjeeling district remains around 25° C and 0° C respectively. The maximum temperature is usually recorded during the monsoon season when the humidity of the air is also very high. On the other hand, the lowest temperature is recorded during the cold winter, which stays from December to March. For the plains of Darjeeling district, as per the available temperature records, the maximum temperature usually stays around 37° C during the monsoon months of July and August when the moisture content in the air is also very high. The minimum temperature recorded on the plains is around 7° C during the winter months of January and February. The rainy season in the district starts from June and continues upto September. The rainfall is very heavy and annual average rainfall crosses 300 cm mark for most of the places.

2.1.1.4 Soil: The soil of Darjeeling district falls under warm per humid eco-region under the Eastern Himalayan Agro-Ecological sub region. The soil types of the district along with their proportion to total geographical area are as follows ¹: i. Medium deep to very deep fine loamy soil (35%), ii. Sandy loam soil (35%), iii. Shallow to medium deep loamy soil (30%).

2.1.1.5 Drainage: Darjeeling district by its typical topography is enriched with numerous rivulets coming down from the mighty Himalayas in the north and flowing to the *Tarai* region in the south and south-east. The major rivers flowing through the district are Teesta, Mahananda, Jaldhaka, Rangeet, Rammam, Balason, Mechi, Ghish etc. Due to its hilly topography for a large

portion of the terrain, no rivers in Darjeeling district is navigable throughout the year and are prone to landslides and floods during the monsoon season.

2.1.1.6 Natural vegetation: Darjeeling district is very rich in natural vegetation due to its diversified geographical characteristics and numerous species of plants, trees and shrubs grow in the district. Depending upon the elevation from mean sea level, the natural vegetation changes widely. The natural vegetation of the district can be classified into the following five categories² : i. Tropical semi-evergreen forest, ii. Tropical moist deciduous forest, iii. Sub-tropical hill forest, iv. Eastern Himalayan wet temperate forest, v. Alpine forest.

2.1.2 Jalpaiguri District

2.1.2.1 Location and size: Jalpaiguri situated at the foothills of the Himalayan Mountain is that part of the geographical region known as *Duars* in the state of West Bengal. The area east of the river Teesta is called *Eastern Duars* and the western portion is known as *Western Duars*. According to some people the word '*Duars*' comes from the Sanskrit word '*Dwar*' which means '*the gateway*' as it is literally the gateway to the hills of Darjeeling, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. Jalpaiguri district lies between 26° 16' N to 27° N latitude and 88° 25' E to 89° 53' E longitude. The district shares international border with Bhutan in the north and Bangladesh in the south-west. Besides it also shares state boundary with the neighbouring state of Assam in the east. The district also shares district boundary with Darjeeling district in the north and west and with Koch Bihar district in the south. The total length of the district is 150 km from east to west direction while its maximum breadth from north to south is 72 km. with an area of 6227.89 sq. km.

2.1.2.2 Physiography: The district is rectangular in shape running from west to east. The western part is slightly undulating and covered by paddy fields and bushy jungles, while the eastern part of the district presents a flat strip of land. The entire topography is crisscrossed with streams, rivers and hills. Elevation of the district from mean sea level is 89 metres on the alluvial plains but it gradually increases to about 2000 metres in the northern part which is on the foothills of the Himalayas. This part of the state has been popularly known as the land of '*Tea, Timber and Tourism*'. Three distinct physiographic units can be identified in the district, i. The northern hilly terrain which is part of the sub Himalayan range, ii. The central tract, locally known as the *Bhabar*, iii. The gently sloping alluvial plain in the south locally called the *Tarai*.

2.1.2.3 Climate: The main climatic characteristics of Jalpaiguri district is oppressive heat, high humidity and heavy precipitation. The district experiences hot season from the month of March to May followed by monsoon season which lasts from June to early October. November, December and January are usually the coldest and the driest months. The maximum temperature in the district may go upto 38° C while the minimum temperature recorded is around 7° C. During the monsoon season the sky remains heavily clouded and the average annual rainfall in the district is 344 cm. Thunderstorms are common during the pre-monsoon months of April and May.

2.1.2.4 Soil: The soil in major part of the district is alluvial, brown and shallow black in nature.

2.1.2.5 Drainage: There are numerous rivers and streams in Jalpaiguri district. They originate from Sikkim, Bhutan and Darjeeling hills and flow north to south ward direction, with the only exception of river Torsa which originate from Tibet. Two kinds of river systems are found in the district. The Brahmaputra river system constituting rivers like Teesta, Jaldhaka, Torsa, Kaljani, Raidak and Sankosh. While the other one is the Ganga river system with river Mahananda and its tributaries.

2.1.2.6 Natural vegetation: It is believed by some that the district Jalpaiguri has derived its name from the word '*Jalpai*' trees (Olive trees) which grow in abundance in the forests covering the northern hilly terrain. The district is blessed with rich natural vegetation. The presence of vast hilly tracts covered with dense forest and sparkling streams flowing through them attract tourists from all over the world. The forests covering about 27 % of the total geographical area of the district are home to a number of species. The vegetation is mostly deciduous semi-evergreen with *Sal* as the dominant species.

2.1.3 Koch Bihar District

2.1.3.1 Location and size: The Koch Bihar district lies in the north-eastern part of the state of West Bengal. The total area of the district is 3387 sq. km. Geographically, the district lies in the foothills of the Himalayas and mainly constituted of plain land with marshy riverine areas known as *Tarai*. The district shares its border with Bangladesh in the southern part. The state of Assam lies in the eastern side of the district. District Jalpaiguri forms the northern and western boundary for Koch Bihar. Geographically Koch Bihar lies between 25° 57' 56" N to 26° 32' 46" N latitude and 88° 47' 40" E to 89° 54' 36" E longitude.

2.1.3.2 Physiography: Topographically, the district Koch Bihar chiefly comprises of plain land and marshy tracts at some places. Due to existence of many rivers and rivulets it is very prone to floods during the monsoon season. There are no hills or mountains or large water body creating any natural physical division of the landmass in the district. Considering the nature of general surface configuration, relief and drainage pattern, distribution of different types of soil, climatic condition, the formation of geology and forest tracts, the district Koch Bihar falls under *Barind* track. As the Himalayan mountain end abruptly at the junction of the border of Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar district, the general slope of the land is from north to south and south-east. The network of rivers and small streams has taken an important part over the years in formation of soil and landmass in this area.

2.1.3.3 Climate: Climate of Koch Bihar district is characterized by warm, moist summer, heavy rainfall and cool winter. District Koch Bihar being located in the sub-tropical climatic region under the influence of south-west monsoon experiences five seasons. Winter is long ranging from November to mid February followed by a short spring of about a month span. Summer starts from mid March and continues till the arrival of monsoon season, which by far is the longest season usually starting from June and continuing upto the first week of October. Autumn is usually the month of November. Being close to the Himalayas, climate is more affected by the hills and is less warm than the southern or south-western districts of West Bengal. Winter months are generally dry and scattered to heavy and very heavy rainfall is spread over rest of the nine months. The south-west monsoon being obstructed by the Himalayas causes heavy to very heavy rainfall in the district which often crosses the 250 cm mark annually. The highest rainfall usually occurs in the months of July and August, ranging from 60 cm to 80 cm in a single month. During the summer season, the maximum temperature usually crosses 36° to 37° C while the lowest temperature is generally recorded in the month of January and February touching 5° to 7° C mark.

2.1.3.4 Soil: The district consists of alluvial soil, generally blackish brown in colour and composed of sand, clay and silt. The soil is loose and sandy throughout the district. The soil is mostly acidic with ph value ranging between 4.7 to 5.8 and is rich in nitrogenous substances and phosphate with considerable presence of organic matter. Due to availability of plant nutrients the soil has become very fertile and suitable for paddy cultivation.

2.1.3.5 Drainage: District Koch Bihar has a large network of rivers and rivulets running from north-west to south and south-east direction, depending upon the general slope of the land. All the rivers have originated in the Himalayas and after crossing the district, either enter the state of Assam or the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. The streams of Koch Bihar bring debris and silt from the Himalayas but are shallow in depth. During monsoon, the velocity of water almost gets doubled, and even with a small rain in the mountains, the streams overflow causing flood and destruction of lives and agricultural product. Thus, despite the existence of many rivers in the district, navigation through the river and river trade are not common, as during monsoon it is dangerous to navigate and in dry season the water level is too shallow to navigate. The most important rivers of the district are Teesta, Jaldhaka, Dharla, Torsa, Mansai, Shutunga etc.

2.1.3.6 Natural vegetation: The land in the district of Koch Bihar is well cultivated and densely populated in most of the areas thus limiting the presence of dense forests to a small extent. The constricted tracts of forest land can be observed in the areas close to *Bhutan Dooars*, and eastern and north-eastern part of the district. The important species are *Sal, Teak, Sishu and Khair*.

2.1.4 Uttar Dinajpur District

2.1.4.1 Location and size: Uttar Dinajpur district lies between 25° 11' N to 26° 49' N latitude and 87° 49' E to 88° 30' E longitude. The total area of the district is 3140 sq. km. The district shares international boundary with Bangladesh in the east and state boundary with Bihar in the west. On the north the district shares boundary with Darjeeling district and on the south with Maldah district.

2.1.4.2 Physiography: The region is flat and gently sloping towards south. There is no hill in the district and the highest elevation does not exceed 30 metres from the mean sea level. The district is divided in two micro regions, viz. i. Islampur-Goalpokhar plain, and ii. Sudhani-Mahananda-Gamari plain.

2.1.4.3 Climate: Uttar Dinajpur district is not too hot and humid as it is situated to the north of the Tropic of Cancer. The Himalayas located very close, helps the district to remain cool and comfortable. The summer begins from the middle of March with May being the hottest month. The maximum temperature in the district sometimes crosses 40° C mark while the minimum remains around 10° C mark. Monsoon enters the district in the early part of June and continues till September. The monsoon showers are fairly heavy making it flood prone. Winter starts by the

middle of November and continues till February with January being the coldest month. The annual average rainfall in the district is about 160 cm.

2.1.4.4 Soil: The district falls under *Barind* track, which is a geological formation of old alluvium. The soil in the district may be classified as old alluvium, alluvium and new alluvium. The texture of old alluvium varies from stiff clay to clay loam. The colour is deep and in reaction neutral to slightly acidic. The new alluvium has been formed recently having shallow black and brown colour consisting of sandy loam mixed with gravel.

2.1.4.5 Drainage: Mahananda, Nagar, Gamari, Chhiramati and Tangan are the main rivers of the district. The general direction of the rivers is from north to south with their destination in river Ganga. The beds of the rivers are well below the level of the country, therefore heavy rainfall leads to flooding. The channels of the rivers are well marked with very little evidence of shifting. The rivers are of little use from the purpose of communication during greater part of the year due to shallow water level.

2.1.4.6 Natural vegetation: The district is not deficient in vegetation. *Khejur, Jackfruit, Mango, Custard Apple, Tal* and *Coconut* plants are readily available. The forests are tropical in nature with species like *Sal, Sisu, Segun, Bamboo, Hijal* and *Palash* easily available.

2.1.5 Dakshin Dinajpur District

2.1.5.1 Location and size: Dakshin Dinajpur has a very unique location. Three sides of the district, i.e. north, east and south shares international boundary with Bangladesh. The western side of the district shares boundary with Uttar Dinajpur while on the south-western side lies Maldah district. The latitudinal extent of the district is from 25° 10' 55" N to 25° 35' 15" N and the longitudinal extent is from 88° 09' 07" E to 89° 00' 30" E. The total area of the district is 2219 sq. km.

2.1.5.2 Physiography: The district is generally flat, slightly sloping southward. The region appears to be a continuation of *Barind* track which is a geological formation of old alluvium. The surface is undulating without any presence of hill. The elevation on average is about 15 metres from the mean sea level. The district can be sub divided into two micro regions, viz. i. The northern part of the district referred to as the Sudhani-Mahananda-Gamari plain, and ii. The south-eastern part of the district may be referred to as the Balurghat plain.

2.1.5.3 Climate: As the district is located in the northern part of West Bengal and close to Darjeeling Himalayas, therefore the climate of the district is generally cool and comfortable. The highest temperature rarely rises above 40° C mark, while the lowest temperature lies around 10° C mark. The winter is cold and pleasant. Rainfall in the district is associated with monsoon winds which generally starts blowing in the first week of June and continues upto September. The annual average rainfall in the district is about 150 cm.

2.1.5.4 Soil: Dakshin Dinajpur district is situated on a plain land. The soil type of the district can be broadly divided into two groups: i. Alluvium, and ii. Laterite. The C.D. blocks of Balurghat, Hili and Kumarganj predominantly have alluvial soil while in the C.D. block of Tapan laterite soils dominate. The rich alluvial soil has enabled double cropping and even multiple cropping in the district. As the rivers overflow their banks every year, the soils are further enriched allowing farmers to reap a bumper harvest.

2.1.5.5 Drainage: There are three main rivers in the district, viz. Atryee, Punarbhaba and Tangon. Two lesser important rivers are Ichamoti and Jamuna. During rainy season flood occur due to overflowing of water. All these rivers are being silted and depths are being reduced gradually. The rivers are generally snow fed from the mighty Himalayas in the north and are rain fed during the monsoon season. Most of the rivers flow from north to south following the general slope of the area. It is believed that river Punarbhaba and Atryee were once connected to the mighty Teesta and the course of these two rivers formed the two channels of Teesta, later due to shifting of Teesta these two rivers have lost their volume and force.

2.1.5.6 Natural vegetation: Concentration of forest is mostly along the eastern and southern part of the district. *Mango, Jackfruit, Custard Apple, Khejur, Tal, Peach* and *Coconut* are available in abundance.

2.1.6 Maldah District

2.1.6.1 Location and size: The district Maldah lies between 24° 40' 20" N to 25° 32' 08" N latitude and 87° 45' 50" E to 88° 28' 10" E longitude. The district shares international boundary with Bangladesh in the east and with the state of Jharkhand in the west. On the north the district shares boundary with Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur and on the south lies Murshidabad district. The total area of the district is 3733 sq. km.

2.1.6.2 Physiography: Maldah district consist of mainly low lying alluvial plains sloping towards the south. The north-eastern part of the district contains few elevated tracts. Some of these highlands have elevation upto 40 metres from the mean sea level. The river Mahananda flowing from north towards south divide the district into eastern and western part. The eastern part is comparatively high and undulating while the western part is low and fertile. Three broad sub-regions can be identified in the district on the basis of nature of topography and soil: i. *Barind* – The *Barind* region is of mature alluvium which lies on the eastern margin of river Mahananda. This region is made up of the ancient alluvial humps that are remnants of old riverine flood plain which remained unaffected subsequently by inundation and renewed silting. ii. *Diara* – The *Diara* is a relatively well drained flat land formed by the fluvial deposition of newer alluvium in the transitional zone between the *Barind* upland and the marshy *Tal* tract. The soil in this region is light with sandy appearance and very fertile. iii. *Tal* – The *Tal* is mostly composed of bog land formed in many marshy pockets around vestigial inland drainage. It lies to the west of river Mahananda and to the north of river Kalindri. The streams in this zone have switched over to new courses, leaving many dead or dying channels that only retain water flow during the rainy season.

2.1.6.3 Climate: The climate of the district is very hot and sultry during the summer season with plentiful rain and moisture in the air throughout the year. The proximity of the Bay of Bengal in the south and the alignment of the Himalayas in the north largely determine the climatic characteristics. The maximum temperature in the month of April and May often crosses 40° C mark while the minimum temperature recorded during the month of January is around 9° C. Annual rainfall in the district on average is about 150 cm. with maximum from south-west monsoon.

2.1.6.4 Soil: The entire area is covered with alluvium, which however is of two different ages displaying different physical and physiographic characteristics. On the east of river Mahananda is the older alluvium forming the *Barind* track. This soil is red in colour containing iron and slightly acidic in character making unfertile for cultivation. To the west of river Mahananda the soil is light loam. It is recently formed alluvial consisting of a mixture of clay and sand. This soil is most fertile and neutral in reaction.

2.1.6.5 Drainage: Rivers in the district constitute an important feature upon its landscape. Important rivers in the district are Ganga, Mahananda, Fulahar, Kalindri, Tangaon, Punarbhaba,

Pagla and Bhagirathi. Most of the rivers in the district are of Himalayan or sub-Himalayan origin and flows towards the south. Due to devastating flood particularly in the western part of the district, huge amount of life, property and agricultural land goes into the river Ganga every year.

2.1.6.6 Natural vegetation: The district has a small vegetation cover. There is alternation of beels and village shrubberies with the drier jungle in *Barind* region. The areas which are subject to frequent inundation are usually covered with seedy grasses. Some portions of *Barind* region are covered by jungles which chiefly consist of thorny scrubs and bushes mixed with *Pipal*, *Bat*, *Simul* and *Pakur* trees. *Mango* tree is very common across the district and the district is world famous for mango production.

2.2 History of Urban Development in North Bengal

With the primacy of Kolkata and other South Bengal cities and towns, urbanization in North Bengal appears lackluster. But a quick look at the history will show that urban centres and that too quite flourishing ones were present in North Bengal. The history of North Bengal reveals very early encounters with the people of Bhutan and Tibet, widespread rule of valiant kings and chieftains from central and western India. Thus the history of North Bengal, although not adequately documented, shows successive shifts in power and consequent shifts in the territorial location of the seat of power. The history of urban development in North Bengal can be divided into three distinct phases: i. Pre-British Period, ii. British Period, and iii. Post-Independence period.

During the Pre-British period, the urban development was associated with the rise of political power. Therefore, it was very fragmented and easily declined with the fall of political power. Urbanization during British period has got many features characteristic to ‘merchant-capitalism’ and ‘colonialism’. Thus, the important towns that developed during this phase served the interests of the Britishers in some way or other. During the post-independence period, the rate of urbanization proved to be much rapid, with no supporting industrialization and increase in urban infrastructure and facilities. This shows that the legacy of the British period is still continuing and the urban centres of North Bengal are still acting as nodes for siphoning off the regional resources.

A retrospective look into the urban situation in North Bengal will be done in this section. During the early urban development of the region, the natural physical division of North Bengal

probably contributed to the formation of three separate historical backdrops, against which the urban centres flourished. In the plains, district of Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Maldah have a common history of belonging to the ancient kingdom of Pundravardhana for about 1800 years (1500 B.C to 320 A.D) ³. Since then and before the coming of the British this area was ruled by a succession of Hindu and Muslim rulers of whom King Shashanka and Hussain Shah, the Afghan Governor was very well known. The East India Company took over in 1765 A.D when they obtained the Diwani of Bengal ⁴.

The district of Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar formed part of Kamrup in the early historic period. Several dynasties of Ahom Kings ruled there upto 15th century A.D., when the last dynasty fell before the invasion of the Afghans. Hussain Shah ruled the territory including the present district of Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar from about 1497 to 1521 A.D ⁵. The Muslim onslaught towards eastern Assam was deterred by the Ahom King at about this time and a disturbed condition continued when several Koch chiefs became powerful. One of them was Hajo, whose descendents were the Koch Kings. The Koch territory gradually broke up into smaller parts under various descendants of the family. Finally, with the interference of the East India Company in 1772, the Koch Bihar Kingdom broke up into three smaller parts: i. The Cooch Behar state, ii. The Chaklajat Estates, zamindars belonging to the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, and iii. The Baikunthpur Estates, belonging to the Raikats, a collateral branch of the Cooch Behar family. These two estates “between them covered nearly the whole of the permanently settled portion of the Jalpaiguri District” ⁶. The western Dooars was annexed by the British from the Bhotias in 1865 and the district of Jalpaiguri came into existence in 1869.

The hill district of Darjeeling, which previously belonged to the Raja of Sikkim, has a history linked with that of Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan. Different parts of the district have often changed hands, finally to come under the British power. The area of Kalimpong sub-division of the district was wrested from the Sikkim Kingdom by the Bhotias in 1706. The Gorkhas, in 1780 conquered this area. Again the whole of this area was surrendered by them to the British according to the ‘Treaty of Titaliys’ in 1817. Although the East India Company returned the area to the Raja of Sikkim after a pact, they continued to wield power over the area. The suitability of the Old Gorkha Station of Darjeeling as a sanatorium was brought to the notice of the Governor General Bentinck. Finally, in 1835, the British could get hold of most of the hilly territory of the district through a deed of grant executed by the Raja of Sikkim. The Tarai part was annexed in

1850. The western Dooars was handed to the British by the Bhutanese in 1865 and in 1866 the Kalimpong sub-division was transferred to the district of Darjeeling⁷.

2.2.1 Urban Centres of Pre-British Period

The urban centres of North Bengal rose and fell against this historical backdrop. As mentioned earlier, the political instability kept the urbanization at a very low level in this region till the coming of the British. The oldest urban centre in this region is Bangarh. The ruins of Bangarh came to light during the excavations carried out by a team from Calcutta University in 1937 - 41. It is situated in Gangarampur P.S of Dakshin Dinajpur district on the bank of river Punarbhava. It was also known as Kotivarsha in the Gupta period. Kotivarsha has been mentioned in the copper-plate inscriptions of Kumar Gupta I and Budha Gupta found in Damodarpur (Bangladesh). Goswami⁸ has ascribed the earliest stratum, excavated from Bangarh, to the Maurya or early Sunga period. The excavation revealed the signs of prosperous condition of the town. Evidence of a well planned town with good architecture and craftsmanship, spinning, use of bullock cart and horse, written language, coins, gold, copper, iron and terracotta are found. The Buddhist monastery there attained fame during the reign of the Pala Kings. During the early part of the Muslim period, Bangarh was known as Devkot and was the capital of the Khilji's till about 1220 A.D. It was connected to Lakhner (in Birbhum district) by an unusually wide and high embanked grand trunk road with ferry services on the big rivers.

Like Bangarh, the ancient city of Gour was also known differently at different time. The first mention of it was found in the 5th century B.C. as Gaudapura. During the reign of the Pala kings the city of Gauda attained great splendor. This position of Gauda was mentioned during the reign of the Senas, when it came to be known as Lakshmanavati. After the conquest of Bengal by Md. Bakhtyar Khilji, Devkot was made the capital, but Ghiyasuddin Iwaz Khilji again shifted the capital to Gauda or Gour-Lakshmanavati in 1220 A.D. Mosques and other architectural monuments, built during its days of glory are now in ruins, situated partly in the district of Maldah and partly in the district of Rajshahi (Bangladesh). It was also known as Jinnatabad or heavenly city, for a short time when it was the headquarter during Humayun's rule. The city was reoccupied during the governorship of Munim Khan, but that occupation ended in a disaster, as a severe epidemic broke out which took a toll on population by hundreds. The impact was so horrendous that the survivors fled the city in sheer terror. Gauda ceased to be a capital from that

time. “Both under the Hindu and Muslims, Gour enjoyed the status of a metropolitan city..... In the 15th and 16th centuries it covered an area of approximately 20 sq. miles and was fortified with a rampart and a moat 150 feet wide. It was an important centre of trade and used to be visited by the Arabs, Abyssinians, Afghans, Portuguese and Chinese.”⁹

Next came to prominence is the town of Pandua in Maldah district. It is located 18 km. from English Bazar on the road to Balurghat. During the reign of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, Pandua was the capital of Bengal. Adina mosque is the only remnant of the town of Pandua.

The three towns of the Barind division, described above have declined. The only town of pre-British period in this area that still lives on, is Malda, now known as Old Maldah to distinguish it from English Bazar, which is also known as Maldah now. It has an admirable position for river traffic, and probably rose to prosperity as the port of the Muhammedan capital of Pandus. In the 18th century it was the seat of thriving cotton and silk manufacturing and both the French and the Dutch had factories there. In 1680, the British too established factory there. After the battle of Plassey, the supreme power of Bengal passed into the hands of the British, but the district of Maldah came under their direct administration only in 1765. Prior to the coming of the British in 1680, Old Maldah was the most important town in the district. In December 1680, a new factory at a nearby place, which later came to be known as English Bazar, was started by the British. With the establishment of the town of English Bazar, the importance of Old Maldah began to decline, and by the time the district of Maldah came into existence, the decline was almost complete. The new town of English Bazar has not only deprived the old town of Maldah of its importance but has also usurped its name. To distinguish the old town of Maldah from English Bazar, it is now referred to as Old Maldah.

In the North Bengal plains the rise of urban centres has been still more sparse. The only two towns worth mentioning are Kamtapur or Kamrupanagar and Koch Bihar. The ruins of Bhitargarh, an ancient city, indicate that it must have been a large and strong fortification in old days. Gait mentions Jalpesvara (in Jalpaiguri district) as a capital of an old Kingdom¹⁰. Kamtapur was made the centre of administration in the first half of the 13th century and continued to be the main cantonment even after the capital was taken back to Kamrup. The Khan King Niladhawja (1440 – 1460 A.D.) rebuilt the town of Kamtapur and repaired the fort of Kamtapur. Because of the successive Muslim invasions, the fort of Kamtapur was built quite

strongly. It was made so invincible that it could withstand the attack of the army of Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah, but ultimately in 1498 it fell.¹¹

The ruins of Kamtapur are located on the west bank of river Dharla, which formed the defence of the city on one side. The river has shifted its course further to the east, but the old course, which now occupies the eastern side of the old city, shows that formerly it was a mighty river. The city is of an oblong shape about 30 km. in perimeter of which about 8 km. is defended by the old channel of river Dharla. The rest was fortified by a huge bank of earth and by a double ditch. The place is now called Gossanimari and is situated 13 km. to the east of Dinhat on the road connecting Dinhat and Sitai. Kamtapur was also the capital of Koch Kings for sometimes.

The first Koch King Viswasingha moved his capital from Chikangram (in Assam) to Koch Bihar, where he built a grand city Hingulavas, now known as Mahakalguri.¹² Rup Narayan, the 10th Koch King, shifted his capital from Atharokotha to Guriahati in the early 18th century. This constitutes, more or less the present town of Cooch Behar. This is the only town in North Bengal plains that exists from the pre-British days. During the reign of the Koch Bihar Maharajas, the town has developed in a planned manner. The close connection with the British was reflected in the formation of the Town Committee of Cooch Behar in 1885 and the municipality in 1944.

The district of Darjeeling, which is in the Darjeeling - Sikkim division of the eastern Himalayas sub-region, was sparsely populated and was politically a very unstable area. It did not have a single urban centre till the coming of the British.

2.2.2 Urban Centres of British Period

The first British town in the region is English Bazar, the initial development of which was centred on a factory established in 1680. The town of Darjeeling and Kurseong was next developed as summer resorts of the British administrators in India towards 1840. The town of Jalpaiguri came into existence in 1869 as the head quarter of the district of Jalpaiguri. The other towns of the British period also served the administrative or trading purpose of the colonial rulers. These towns generally had two distinct parts; the developed, well maintained European quarters and the ill kept native section. The total number of towns that came into existence during the British rule was 12. Towns of the British period are enumerated here with the year of

their being considered as towns for the first time. Where ever possible, the initial primary function of the towns has also been mentioned.

Sl. No.	Urban Centre	Year of establishment	District	Primary functions
1	English Bazar	1680	Maldah	Manufacturing, Procurement of raw materials and Administration.
2	Darjeeling	1839	Darjeeling	Sanatorium.
3	Jalpaiguri	1869	Jalpaiguri	Administration and Cantonment
4	Kurseong	1879	Darjeeling	Sanatorium.
5	Mathabhanga	1897	Koch Bihar	Administration.
6	Dinhata	1897	Koch Bihar	Administration, Trade and Railway station.
7	Haldibari	1897	Koch Bihar	Market place.
8	Kalimpong	1931	Darjeeling	Trade and Administration.
9	Siliguri	1931	Darjeeling	Administration and Communication.
10	Hili	1941	Dakshin Dinajpur	Railway station and Administration.
11	Tufanganj	1941	Koch Bihar	Administration.
12	Mekliganj	1931	Koch Bihar	Administration and Trade.

2.2.3 Urban Centres of Post-Independence Period

The increase in the number and size of the towns in the post-independence period is quite spectacular. Although the urban amenities are fewer than desirable, but an increase in their number is a great leap forward. The number of towns in North Bengal has increased to 45 in 1991, 48 in 2001 and 131 in 2011. Therefore during the period from 2001 to 2011 there has been a very rapid increase in the number of urban centres in North Bengal with almost all the districts witnessing an increase in their number. In the following section an effort has been made to enlist urban centres of North Bengal across the various districts from 1991 onwards along with their status.

Sl. No.	Urban Centre	District	Status	Population
1	Bairatal	Darjeeling	Census Town	4703
2	Cart Road	Darjeeling	Census Town	13572
3	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	73062
4	Jaldhaka Hydal Power Town	Darjeeling	Census Town	3097
5	Kalimpong	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	38832
6	Kurseong	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	26758
7	Mirik	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	7022
8	Siliguri	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	216950
9	Uttar Bagdogra	Darjeeling	Census Town	12064
10	Alipurduar	Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	69613
11	Alipurduar Railway Junction	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	16322
12	Checha Khata	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	6009
13	Dabgram	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	147217
14	Dhupguri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	30375
15	Domohani	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	12853
16	Falakata	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	15536

17	Gairkata	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	7725
18	Jalpaiguri	Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	68732
19	Mainaguri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	21430
20	Mal	Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	20395
21	Odlabari	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	9907
22	Paschim Jitpur	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	10871
23	Uttar Kamakhyaguri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	9092
24	Uttar Latabari	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	12170
25	Bhangri Pratham Khanda	Koch Bihar	Census Town	6151
26	Cooch Behar	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	71215
27	Dinhata	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	17697
28	Guriahati	Koch Bihar	Census Town	15336
29	Haldibari	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	10870
30	Kharimala Khagrabari	Koch Bihar	Census Town	6269
31	Mathabhanga	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	17336
32	Mekliganj	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	8205
33	Tufanganj	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	16418
34	Dalkhola	Uttar Dinajpur	Census Town	10652
35	Islampur	Uttar Dinajpur	Statutory Town	45240
36	Kaliaganj	Uttar Dinajpur	Statutory Town	37817
37	Kasba	Uttar Dinajpur	Census Town	8221
38	Raiganj	Uttar Dinajpur	Statutory Town	151045
39	Balurghat	Dakshin Dinajpur	Statutory Town	126225
40	Gangarampur	Dakshin Dinajpur	Census Town	31177
41	Hili	Dakshin Dinajpur	Census Town	6823
42	English Bazar	Maldah	Statutory Town	139204
43	Mangalbari Samundai	Maldah	Census Town	24939
44	Old Maldah	Maldah	Statutory Town	13021
45	Sahapur	Maldah	Census Town	6609

Source: Town Directory, Census of India 1991.

Table 2.3 List of Urban Centres across North Bengal in 2001

Sl. No.	Urban Centre	District	Status	Population
1	Bairatal	Darjeeling	Census Town	5405
2	Cart Road	Darjeeling	Census Town	13663
3	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	107197
4	Kalimpong	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	42998
5	Kurseong	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	40019
6	Mirik	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	9141
7	Pattabong Tea Garden	Darjeeling	Census Town	1633
8	Siliguri	Darjeeling / Jpg.	Statutory Town	472374
9	Uttar Bagdogra	Darjeeling	Census Town	15774
10	Alipurduar	Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	72999
11	Alipurduar Railway Junction	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	15899
12	Banarhat Tea Garden	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	14473
13	Bholar Dabri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	10011
14	Checha Khata	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	6847
15	Dhupguri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	38130
16	Falakata	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	19379
17	Gairkata	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	8724
18	Jalpaiguri	Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	100348
19	Jaygaon	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	38689
20	Mainaguri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	27106
21	Mal	Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	23218
22	Paschim Jitpur	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	13396

23	Sobhaganj	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	4894
24	Uttar Kamakhyaguri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	10547
25	Uttar Latabari	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	14450
26	Bhangri Pratham Khanda	Koch Bihar	Census Town	4113
27	Cooch Behar	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	76874
28	Dinhata	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	34273
29	Guriahati	Koch Bihar	Census Town	18901
30	Haldibari	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	13185
31	Khagrabari	Koch Bihar	Census Town	19787
32	Kharimala Khagrabari	Koch Bihar	Census Town	7233
33	Mathabhanga	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	21107
34	Mekliganj	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	10835
35	Tufanganj	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	19310
36	Dalkhola	Uttar Dinajpur	Census Town	13895
37	Islampur	Uttar Dinajpur	Statutory Town	52738
38	Kaliaganj	Uttar Dinajpur	Statutory Town	47650
39	Kasba	Uttar Dinajpur	Census Town	9835
40	Nachhratpur Katabari	Uttar Dinajpur	Census Town	5113
41	Raiganj	Uttar Dinajpur	Statutory Town	165212
42	Balurghat	Dakshin Dinajpur	Statutory Town	143321
43	Gangarampur	Dakshin Dinajpur	Statutory Town	53533
44	Aiho	Maldah	Census Town	5409
45	English Bazar	Maldah	Statutory Town	161456
46	Kachu Pukur	Maldah	Census Town	5343
47	Kendua	Maldah	Census Town	5773
48	Old Maldah	Maldah	Statutory Town	62959

Source: Town Directory, Census of India 2001.

Table 2.4 List of Urban Centres across North Bengal in 2011

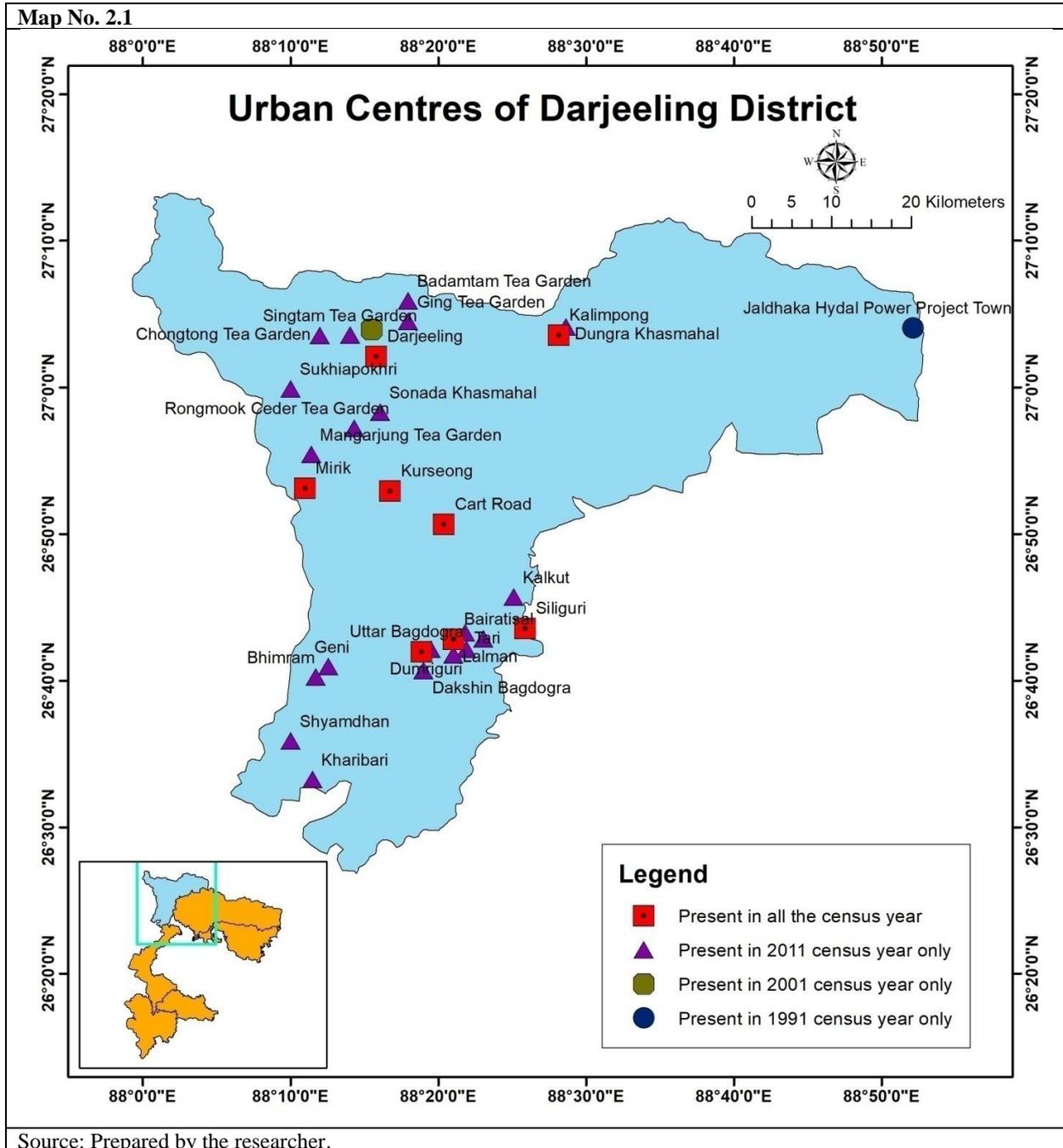
Sl. No.	Urban Centre	District	Status	Population
1	Badamtam Tea Garden	Darjeeling	Census Town	6102
2	Bairatisal	Darjeeling	Census Town	4916
3	Bara Mohansingh	Darjeeling	Census Town	15616
4	Bhimram	Darjeeling	Census Town	11058
5	Cart Road	Darjeeling	Census Town	14444
6	Chongtong Tea Garden	Darjeeling	Census Town	5802
7	Dakshin Bagdogra	Darjeeling	Census Town	2647
8	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	118805
9	Dumriguri	Darjeeling	Census Town	13416
10	Dungra Khasmahal	Darjeeling	Census Town	6789
11	Geni	Darjeeling	Census Town	8747
12	Ging Tea Garden	Darjeeling	Census Town	4089
13	Jitu	Darjeeling	Census Town	5892
14	Kalimpong	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	49403
15	Kalkut	Darjeeling	Census Town	9184
16	Kharibari	Darjeeling	Census Town	6660
17	Kurseong	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	42446
18	Lalman	Darjeeling	Census Town	6894
19	Mangarjung Tea Garden	Darjeeling	Census Town	5644
20	Mathapari	Darjeeling	Census Town	11529
21	Mirik	Darjeeling	Statutory Town	11513
22	Rongmook Cedar Tea Garden	Darjeeling	Census Town	5150
23	Shyamdhan	Darjeeling	Census Town	5192
24	Siliguri	Darjeeling / Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	513264
25	Singtam Tea Garden	Darjeeling	Census Town	5792

26	Sonada Khasmahal	Darjeeling	Census Town	11635
27	Sukhiapokhri	Darjeeling	Census Town	4450
28	Tari	Darjeeling	Census Town	14558
29	Uttar Bagdogra	Darjeeling	Census Town	25044
30	Alipurduar	Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	65232
31	Alipurduar Railway Junction	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	10733
32	Banarhat Tea Garden	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	15652
33	Bholar Dabri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	12670
34	Binnaguri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	58840
35	Birpara	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	10821
36	Chakiabhita	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	5251
37	Chalsa Mahabari	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	4973
38	Checha Khata	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	7613
39	Dabgram	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	119040
40	Dakshin Khagrabari	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	7469
41	Dakshin Odlabari	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	4997
42	Dakshin Rampur	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	6392
43	Dhuppuri	Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	44719
44	Falakata	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	19716
45	Gairkata	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	7577
46	Jagijhora Barabak	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	6474
47	Jalpaiguri	Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	107341
48	Jateshwar	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	8963
49	Jaygaon	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	42254
50	Kharia	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	61661
51	Laskarpara	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	7137
52	Lataguri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	4981
53	Mainaguri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	30490
54	Mal	Jalpaiguri	Statutory Town	25218
55	Mangalbari	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	5934
56	Matialihat	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	4215
57	Mechiabasti	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	9592
58	Odlabari	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	14194
59	Parangarpar	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	11408
60	Paschim Jitpur	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	14334
61	Samuktola	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	8132
62	Sisha-Jumrha	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	4130
63	Sobhaganj	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	5488
64	Telipara Tea Garden	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	11535
65	Uttar Kamakhyaguri	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	12022
66	Uttar Latabari	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	16350
67	Uttar Madarihat	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	9631
68	Uttar Satali	Jalpaiguri	Census Town	18454
69	Baisguri	Koch Bihar	Census Town	5021
70	Baneswar	Koch Bihar	Census Town	4841
71	Bhangri Pratham Khanda	Koch Bihar	Census Town	4379
72	Chakchaka	Koch Bihar	Census Town	8582
73	Chhota Laukuthi	Koch Bihar	Census Town	5480
74	Cooch Behar	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	77935
75	Dhaliabari	Koch Bihar	Census Town	4383
76	Dinhata	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	36124
77	Guriahati	Koch Bihar	Census Town	21064
78	Haldibari	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	14404
79	Kamat Phulbari	Koch Bihar	Census Town	5339
80	Khagrabari	Koch Bihar	Census Town	23122
81	Kharimala Khagrabari	Koch Bihar	Census Town	7844

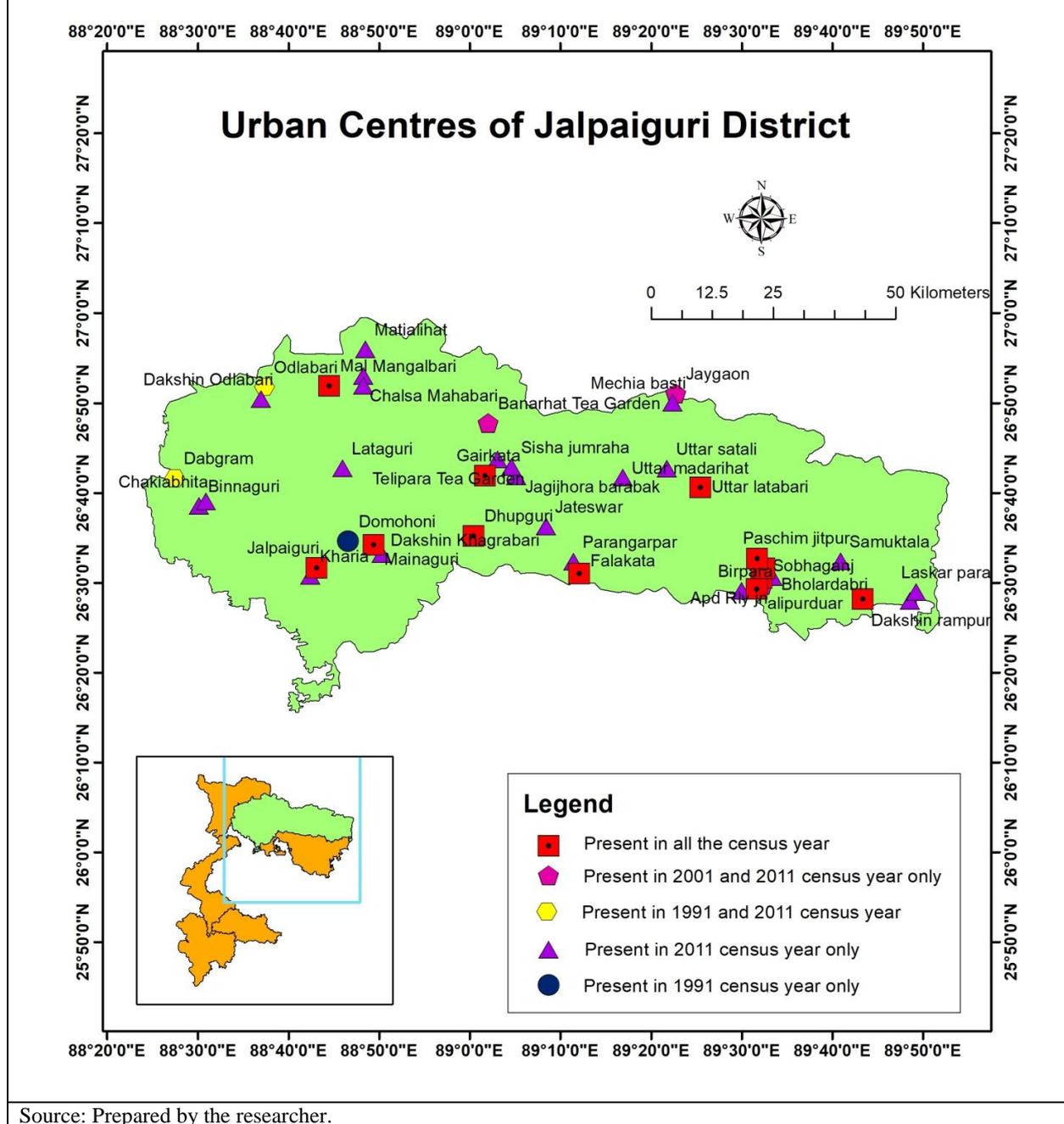
82	Mathabhanga	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	23890
83	Mekliganj	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	9127
84	Nagar Changrabandha	Koch Bihar	Census Town	4483
85	Tekagach	Koch Bihar	Census Town	12418
86	Tufanganj	Koch Bihar	Statutory Town	20998
87	Chopra	Uttar Dinajpur	Census Town	5777
88	Dalkhola	Uttar Dinajpur	Statutory Town	36930
89	Hanskunda	Uttar Dinajpur	Census Town	5939
90	Islampur	Uttar Dinajpur	Statutory Town	54340
91	Itahar	Uttar Dinajpur	Census Town	6022
92	Kaliaganj	Uttar Dinajpur	Statutory Town	53530
93	Kasba	Uttar Dinajpur	Census Town	10067
94	Nachhratpur Katabari	Uttar Dinajpur	Census Town	6011
95	Raiganj	Uttar Dinajpur	Statutory Town	183612
96	Balurghat	Dakshin Dinajpur	Statutory Town	153279
97	Chak Bhrigu	Dakshin Dinajpur	Census Town	6269
98	Dakra	Dakshin Dinajpur	Census Town	5268
99	Gangarampur	Dakshin Dinajpur	Statutory Town	56217
100	Gopalpur	Dakshin Dinajpur	Census Town	7016
101	Harirampur	Dakshin Dinajpur	Census Town	5021
102	Par Patiram	Dakshin Dinajpur	Census Town	3225
103	Aiho	Maldah	Census Town	5898
104	Alipur	Maldah	Census Town	17347
105	Bagbari	Maldah	Census Town	8660
106	Baksinagar	Maldah	Census Town	7255
107	Baliadanga	Maldah	Census Town	12379
108	Bamangram	Maldah	Census Town	13550
109	Bandhail	Maldah	Census Town	6175
110	Bara Suzapur	Maldah	Census Town	15808
111	Birodhi	Maldah	Census Town	3838
112	Chanchal	Maldah	Census Town	5570
113	Chaspara	Maldah	Census Town	7731
114	Chhatianmor	Maldah	Census Town	5582
115	Chhota Suzapur	Maldah	Census Town	11216
116	English Bazar	Maldah	Statutory Town	205521
117	Jadupur	Maldah	Census Town	7585
118	Jagannathpur	Maldah	Census Town	13454
119	Jalalpur	Maldah	Census Town	5460
120	Jhangra	Maldah	Census Town	5022
121	Kachu Pukur	Maldah	Census Town	5752
122	Karari Chandpur	Maldah	Census Town	10941
123	Kendua	Maldah	Census Town	6452
124	Krishnapur	Maldah	Census Town	16470
125	Milka	Maldah	Census Town	12581
126	Nazirpur	Maldah	Census Town	8778
127	Old Maldah	Maldah	Statutory Town	84012
128	Rangabhita	Maldah	Census Town	5464
129	Sahapur	Maldah	Census Town	9906
130	Silampur	Maldah	Census Town	12664
131	Sonatala	Maldah	Census Town	10589

Source: District Census Handbook, Census of India 2011.

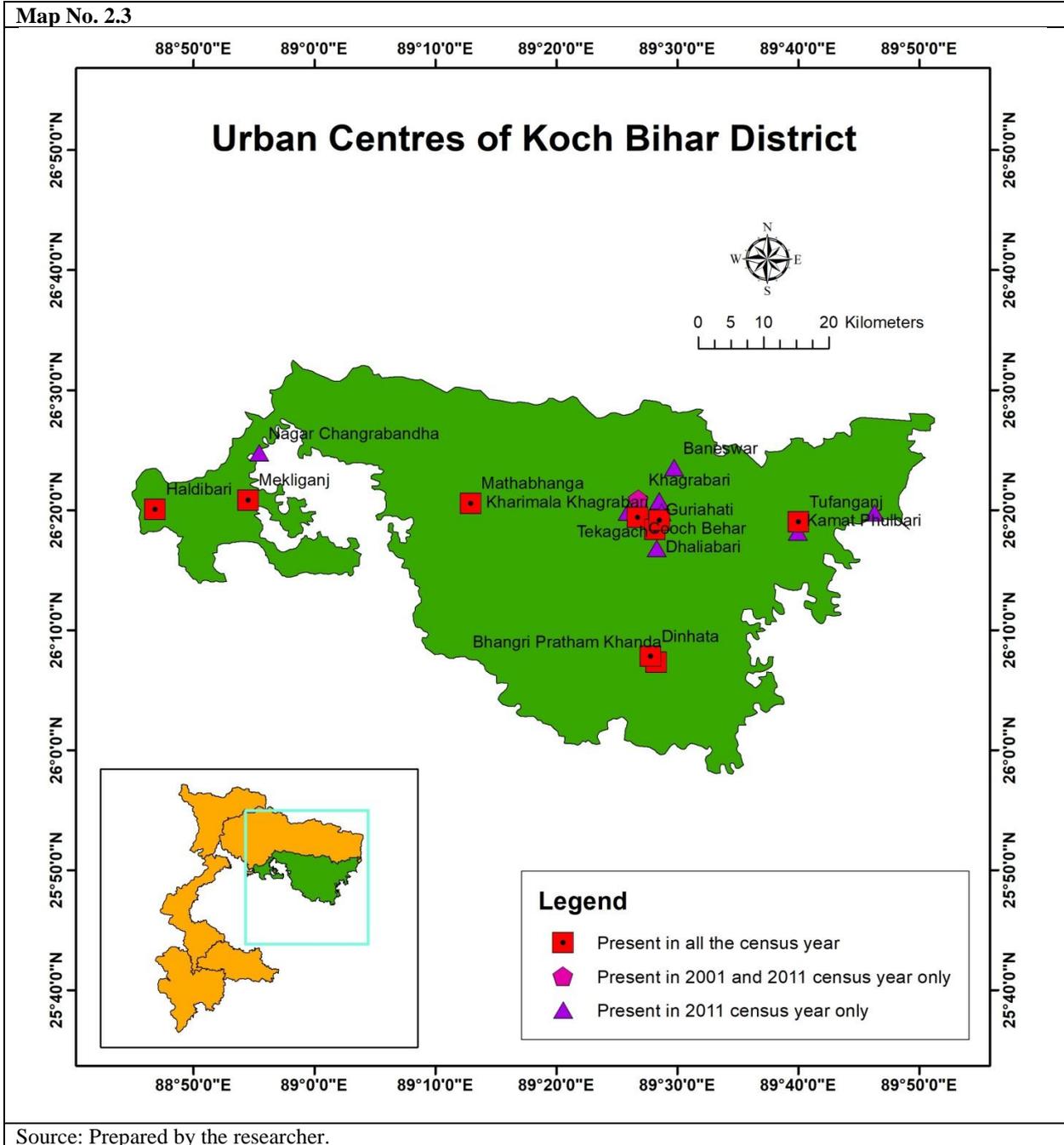
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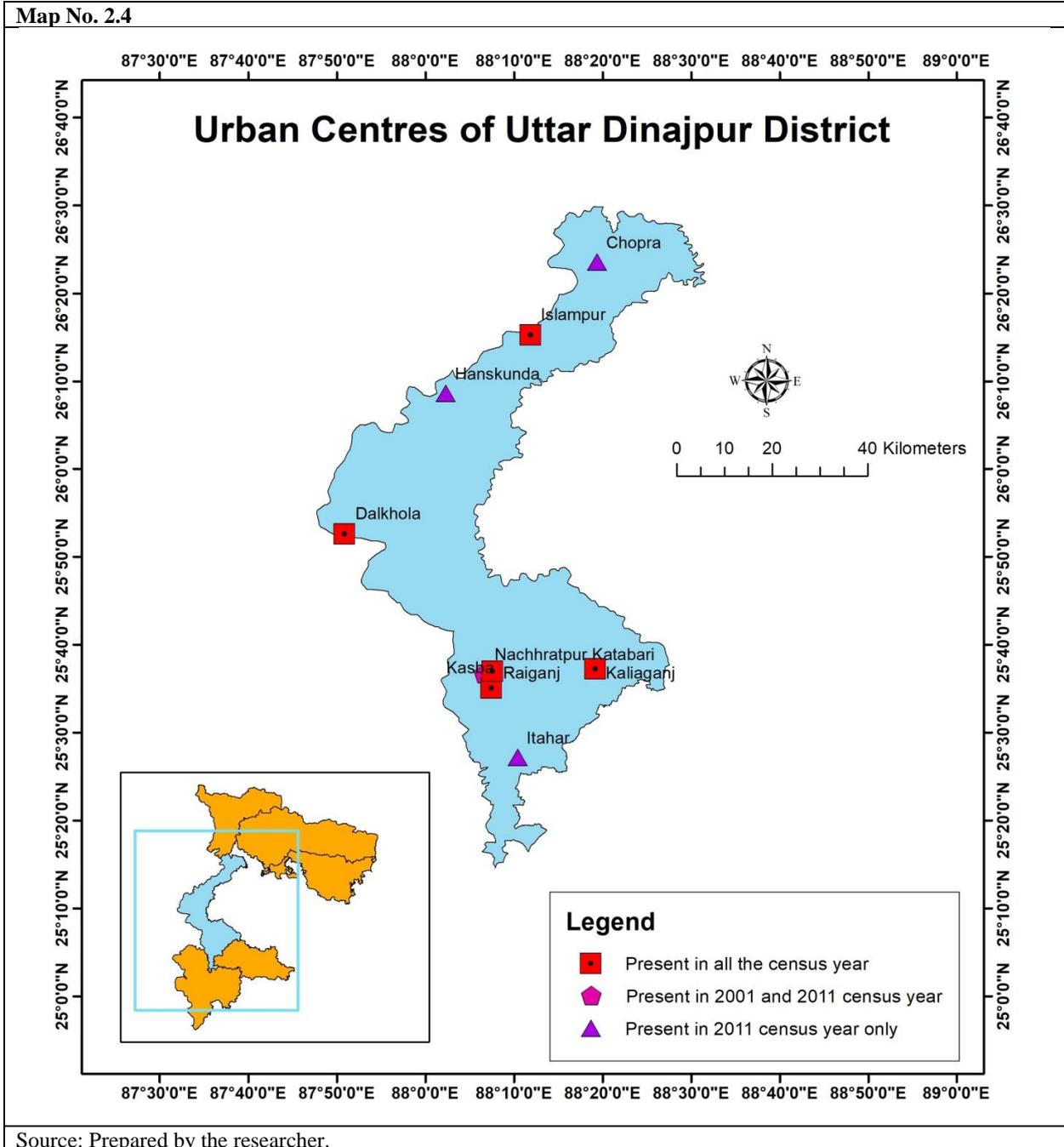
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Map No. 2.3

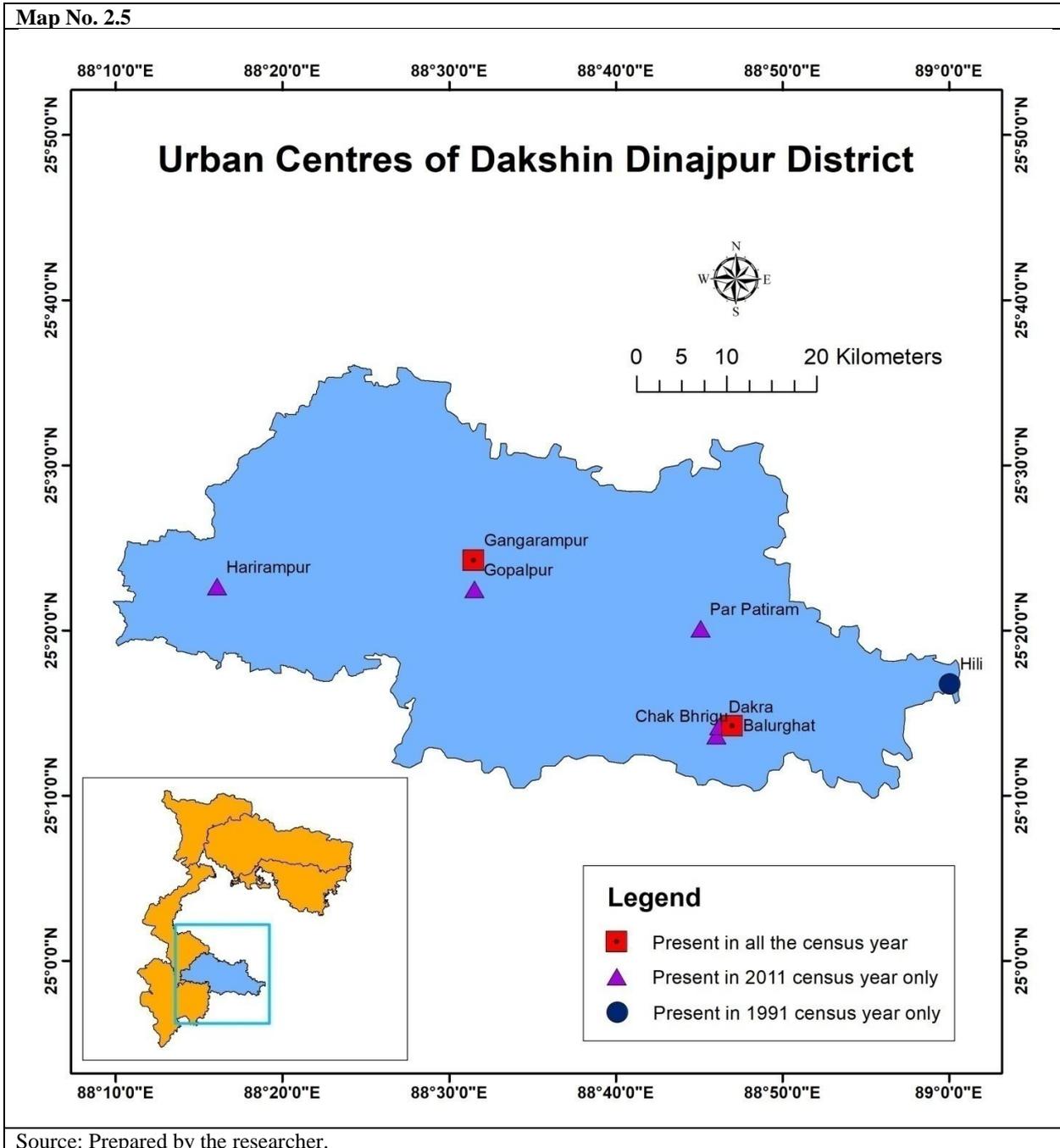


Map No. 2.4



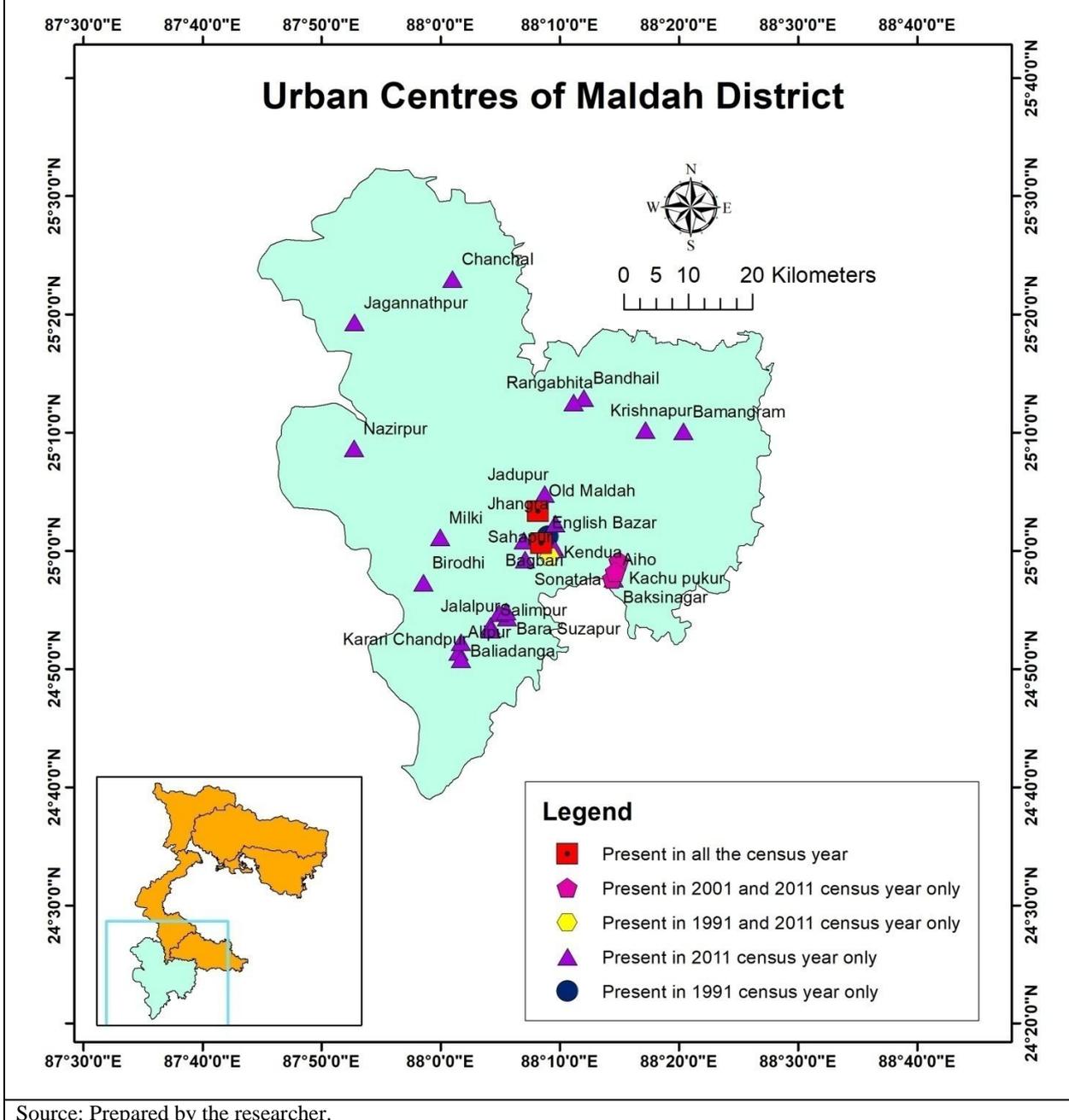
Source: Prepared by the researcher.

Map No. 2.5



Source: Prepared by the researcher.

Map No. 2.6



2.4 Summary

Therefore, North Bengal is not a single entity rather it is a mosaic of a variety of physical setting. On one hand there is the hilly district of Darjeeling, and on the other hand the *barind* track of Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Maldah. Jalpaiguri district has a sub-Himalayan location and forms part of the Tarai region while Koch Bihar is essentially flat in character. Based on this physiographic variation, the climate, soil and natural vegetation also varies among the districts to a certain extent. Thus it is imperative to keep in mind this natural physical variation within North Bengal for a proper understanding of the overlying social and cultural variation.

The history of urbanization and growth of urban centres in North Bengal is governed by a number of factors. In the early time it was the political kingdoms and their capital cities which formed the mosaic of urban structure in this region. The urban development tends to flourish in a climate of settled political dominance. However, this region has witnessed an array of political struggle for supremacy among various groups from different parts of India and neighbouring countries. This resulted in a truncated urban development during the early time with very few urban centres flourishing and developing. The most important among them are Bangarh, Kamtapur, Gauda and Pandua. The British period saw a steady progress in urbanization in this region to meet the colonial interests. The town of Darjeeling and Kurseong was developed to meet as sanatoriums and also to give some relief to the European people from excessive heat of the summer season. Many new urban centres were also developed during this period which served as administrative and trading centres. After independence during the initial years, the pace of urbanization did not pick up. Gradually from 1991 onwards this region witnessed rapid urbanization for the first time. This resulted in an increase in the number of urban centres many fold and the increase has been almost uniform across all the districts. An interesting feature of this rapid urbanization is the tremendous increase in the number of census town. Increase in the number of statutory town has been rather very limited. Therefore, urbanization is taking place by conversion of rural areas to urban centres without any improvement in basic infrastructure or amenities usually associated with any urban centre. This is creating an urban structure very much unsustainable in the near future until and unless the issues of basic urban infrastructure and amenities are taken up in war footing.

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