

Chapter- II

Socio-Economic Profile of Cooch Behar District

The Background of the Present Study

General Features:

With a view to making an empirical study on the problem cited in the foregoing section characterizing the very basis of the present research study i.e., Development through IRDP of a backward area of West Bengal, Cooch Behar region is chosen for a sample study. The reasons identified for stress on the area of study and the region chosen have also been pointed out earlier. In delineating research questions to be explored through empirical study, the need of relevant analytical information regarding the region under reference is being presented below. One thing, however, kept in mind is to avoid too much of focus beyond the aspects related to our study.

Origin of the District:

'Koch Bihar' is the northeastern frontier district of India which was formerly one of the feudatory states under the British Indian Government. It deserves mention that in accordance with the treaty of 1773, 'Koch Bihar' came to be a tributary state and it was commonly admitted that the state of 'Koch Bihar' "had made only a partial and voluntary surrender of its rights and maintained its independence unimpaired in its domestic administration".¹ In the later parts of 40s of the 20th century, it was ruled by the king of 'Koch Bihar' named Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan. As a step to transfer the power to the Indian hands the British Government made an announcement in the British Parliament on February 20, 1947 which posed a serious uncertainty to the Indian feudatory states.

"On August 14, the necessary adaptations of the Government of India Act of 1935 were put into effect by the Indian (Provisional Constitution) Order,

1947.”² By 15th August, 1947 most of the states contiguous to India merged and were included in Indian Federation following the declaration issued by Nehru to the states on 25th July, 1947. ‘Koch Bihar’ did not participate in it before that. On 15th August, 1947 India officially became a Dominion. Then on 28th August, 1949 Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan came forward and ceded his territorial administration to the ‘Dominion Government’ of India. This transfer of administration officially took place on 12th September, 1949. Then ‘Koch Bihar’ was administered as a Chief Commissioner’s Province. This Chief Commissioner was appointed by the Government of India. Under Section 290A of the Government of India Act, 1935, the Government issued an order by which ‘Koch Bihar’ was transferred and merged with the Province of West Bengal on 1st January, 1950. Since then ‘Koch Bihar’ or present Cooch Behar is being administered as a District of West Bengal.³

The records of history placed the territory under the former ‘much bigger kingdom of Kamrup’. In the later period Kamrup was bifurcated, of which western part came to be identified as ‘Kamata’ containing Cooch Behar.⁴ The former name (Koch Bihar) was first used in ‘Shah Jahan Nama’ in the middle of the 17th century. “But the balance of probability lies in favour of the etymology that Koch Bihar means the land of the Koch”⁵ who are the native residents of the region. These Koches (Rajbangshis) are a “sub-Himalayan tribal community with strong Mongoloid traits”.⁶ The available historical records suggest that during the rule of King Vishu or Visvasingha (1496-1553?) the ‘Koches’ had become semi-Hinduized and took the name of Rajbangshis.⁷ The district town bearing the same name “Cooch Behar” “is situated on the river Torsa at 26°19’86” north latitude and 89°23’53” east longitude”.⁸

It deserves mention here that the wave of freedom movement emerged throughout India could not boost up the aboriginal residents because they followed the older track and thought of a self-ruled Country where they were living.

At present, the factors which influence commonly the socio-economic, political and cultural life of the individuals of the district, are as below:

Location and Area:

Geographically Cooch Behar is a part of the Himalayan Terai of West Bengal. It lies between the 25°57'40" and 26°32'20" latitude in the Northern Hemisphere. The eastern-most longitude of the district is 89°54'35" east and its western-most longitude point is 88°47'40" east.⁹ According to the survey of India, the total area of the district is 3345 sq. km. excluding enclaves. There are 1165 Mouzas in the district.

Boundaries:

Even though there is no natural boundary of the district, the exception is that at the extreme southern part of Tufanganj sub-division, the Raidak river and for about 5 miles to the north of Mekhliganj thana, the Jaldhaka river form the boundary. The northern boundary and most part of the western boundary of the district are formed by the Jalpaiguri district. While the southern boundary is formed by the district of Rongpur, Bangladesh, the eastern boundary is formed by the district of Goalpara of Assam.¹⁰

Topography and Geology:

Cooch Behar, an expanded part of Himalayan Terai, has generally flat lands with a slight slope in the southeastern part. There are, however, slight ups and downs. There is no hill or mountain; there are little barren lands and most of the lands are cultivated in the district. The soil is alluvial but it is sandy and loose. The depth of this kind of soil is 6" to 3'. Generally below this surface is all bare sand.

Climate:

The district climate is highly humid with seldom excessive temperature. The winter season starts from the mid-November to the end of February. This is followed by the summer from the month of May. The month of March may commonly be regarded as the Spring and October may be regarded as Autumn in the district. The monsoon season is from the mid-June to October. The two seasons – summer and winter dominate the district. The summer is characterised with heavy rainfall.

The average rainfall and number of rainy days during the year 1989 are as below:

Table 1.1
Average Rainfall During the Year 1989

Month	Actual MM.	Number of Rainy days	Month	Actual MM.	Number of Rainy days
January	3.2	1	July	970.8	21
February	16.8	1	August	273.8	12
March	1.4	1	September	653.8	22
April	29.7	4	October	177.4	6
May	781.3	18	November	30.8	3
June	692.4	18	December	10.5	2
Total	3581.90				109

Source: The Official records of District Rural Development Agency, Cooch Behar, under IRDP, 1990-91.

The records of rainfall in the year 1989 of the district shows that short or heavy rainfall is available in every month of the year. The month of July is recorded as the rainiest month in the year. The southwest monsoon causes about 70 percent rainfall in the district. The Table shows that there are total rainfall 3581.90 MM and about 109 rainy days in the year. Even though the district has not ever experienced drought situation in its true sense, the rainfall in every year controls heavily the economic life of the district.

Temperature:

The records of meteorological observation done in Cooch Behar take the meteorological conditions in the district as a whole. The winter season starts from the middle of November when temperature begins to decrease steadily. January is the coldest month of the year. Then the temperature begins to rise from the beginning of March. April is the hottest month of the year. If any rainfall does not occur in the months of April and May, the temperature increases to a great extent. Notwithstanding the records show that the temperature by itself is not excessive, though dampness in the air makes the weather unpleasant.

River System:

The main rivers in the district of Cooch Behar flow slantingly from north-west to south-east. Most of the rivers originate from the Himalayas and then enter into the surface of Cooch Behar from the Western Duars to Jalpaiguri district. Afterwards they pass on to the Rangpur district of Bangladesh and discharge their

waters into the Brahmaputra. The rivers in the district become calm in the summer losing its devastating form. But in the monsoon session even an ordinary rainfall in the hill areas and the Himalayan vicinity easily causes the rise of water which overflows the banks of the rivers. Very often this sudden overflow destroys the crops and even homesteads. By the end of October, water in the main rivers comes down progressively and by March the current of the rivers becomes slow.

The six main rivers which flow on the surface and cut through the district from the southeastern direction are: Tista, Jaldhaka, Torsa, Kaljani, Raidak and Gadadhar.

There are, however, a large number of rivers in the small district which have changed their trends frequently. In course of time, there have been created a large number of abandoned channels of the rivers. The heavy rainfall in the monsoon session helps the channels to accumulate water. These *bils* and marshes are used for producing fishes. These *bils* also help the cultivators in the high jute productive district by providing water for the steeping of jute. In the winter session the cultivators also use the accumulated water of the *bils* for cultivation. These *bils*, abandoned channels – locally known as ‘*Chbara*’, ‘*dara*’, ‘*doba*’ or ‘*kura*’ have a great influence on the economic and social life of the district. A poor section of the people belongs to Namasudra Community and Kaibarta lives on the bank of the *bils*. Most of them are landless and they have no earning scope but fishing. They belong to the poorest of the poor class. Their fishing is neither a way for profit nor even a livelihood and a way of life. Of late, the undertaking of *bils* by the Government, semi-Government and Government controlled Co-operative Societies augments the plight of the community to a great extent.

Economic Condition Of The District – Some Related Issues:

Population:

The census records of 1991 show that 21,71,145 people have been counted in the district of whom 20,06,934 live in the rural areas and only 1,64,211 live in the urban areas. The following Table shows the classifications of rural and urban people by sex:

Table No. 2.1
The Classification of Rural and Urban People by Sex

Sl. No.	Item	1981	1981	1991	1991
		Cooch Behar	West Bengal	Cooch Behar	West Bengal
1.	Population				
	a) Total	17,71,643	5,45,80,647	21,71,145	6,80,77,965
	b) Male	9,15,461	2,85,60,901	11,22,306	3,55,10,633
	c) Female	8,56,182	2,60,19,746	10,48,839	3,25,67,332
2.	Rural Population				
	a) Total	16,49,383	4,01,33,926	20,01,648	4,93,70,364
	b) Male	8,52,016	2,06,17,489	10,35,418	2,54,42,210
	c) Female	7,97,367	1,95,16,437	9,66,230	2,39,28,154
3.	Urban Population				
	a) Total	1,22,260	1,44,46,721	1,69,497	1,87,07,601
	b) Male	63,445	79,43,412	86,888	1,00,68,423
	c) Female	58,815	65,03,309	82,609	86,39,178
4.	Density of Population (Per sq.km.)	523	615	641	677

Source: Census of India 1981 and 1991; cited in Key Statistics of the District of Cooch Behar-1996-97, Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Government of West Bengal, Cooch Behar.

The data furnished in the Table (No. 2.1) show that Cooch Behar district is predominantly rural. Out of the total population of 1991 in the district, 21,71,145 or 92.19 percent live in the rural areas with 51.73 percent males and 48.27 percent females. The remaining 1,69,497 or only 7.80 percent are living in the urban areas with 51.26 percent males and 48.74 percent females. The density of population is 641 per sq. km. and it is 94.68 percent to the state density of the population.

With the formation and implementation of the new Constitution in independent India, a large number of the population specially a major section of the former aboriginal residents have been identified as Scheduled Castes.

As per records of 1991 census, 76.44 percent Hindus, 23.34 percent Muslims, 0.07 percent Christians, 0.02 percent Buddhists and 0.10 percent Jains of the total population are living in the district. The following Table shows the population by religion:

Table No. 2.2
Population by Religion – 1991

Sl. No.	Religious Community	Male	Female	Total	Percentage to the Total Population
1.	Hindus	8,58,559	8,00,774	16,59,733	76.44
2.	Muslims	2,60,777	2,45,951	5,06,728	23.34
3.	Christians	763	704	1,467	0.07
4.	Sikhs	178	37	215	0.01
5.	Buddhists	179	174	353	0.20
6.	Jains	1,151	942	2,093	0.10
7.	Others	299	252	556	0.02
Total		11,22,306	10,48,839	21,71,415	100.00

Source: ibid. (Key Statistics of the District of Cooch Behar – 1996-97).

It is revealed from the above Table that the Hindu community constitutes the bulk of population in the district followed by the Muslims. The other communities are too significant to play any role in the socio-economic, political and cultural life of the district. The district is not, however, multi-religious and multi-religious affluent cultural exchange has not occurred. Nevertheless, it has happened between the two major religious communities. A large number of people belonging to the Hindu community migrating from East Pakistan after independence, rehabilitated themselves. This has an impact on the characteristics of the district because the migrated community had more cultural sophistication than that of the natives.

One thing better to mention here is that the growth of population in the district has intensified the problems faced by the people of hinterlands specially, to a great extent. The following Table shows the growth of population in the district during the period (1971-1991):

Table No. 2.3
Growth of Population During 1971-1991

Year	Total Population	Year	Total Population	Year	Total Population	Growth of Population (in %) during 1971-1991
1971	14,14,183	1981	17,71,643	1991	21,71,145	53.52

Source: Census of India, 1971, Cited in Majumdar, Durga Das: West Bengal Gazetteers-Koch Bihar, Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1997, p. – 36; and, Census of India, 1991, Series-26, West Bengal, District Census handbook- Koch Bihar-Part-XII-B, Directorate of Census Operations, West Bengal, p-(XXI).

The Table envisages that the growth of population during the period 1971-1991 numbered 7,56,962 from 14,14,183 i.e., 53.52 percent. The spread of population mainly in the rural areas is highly skewed in the sense that most of the population live in the rural areas. This numerous growth rate and the scattered nature of the population in the rural areas create a set back in the way to development.

To have an observation on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population in the district who need special attention for development, we may look into the SC and ST population growth during the last two decades. The following Table shows the sex wise distribution of SC and ST population and their growth during the period (1971-1991) in the district:

Table No. 2.4
Distribution of SC/ST Population by Sex

Year	Scheduled Caste			Scheduled Tribe		
	Male %	Female %	Total	Male %	Female	Total
1971	3,46,364 (52.08)	3,18,656 (47.92)	6,65,020	5,430 (51.17)	5,181 (48.83)	10,611
1981	4,55,877 (51.62)	4,27,207 (48.38)	8,83,084	5,310 (52.55)	4,795 (47.45)	10,105
1991	5,80,384 (51.65)	5,43,335 (48.35)	11,23,719	6,957 (52.40)	6,318 (47.60)	13,275
Percentage of growth SC/ST Population during (1971-91)			68.97%			25.11%

Source: Census of 1971; Cited in ibid. p.-37; and, Census of India, 1981, 1991; Cited in Key Statistics of the District of Cooch Behar-1996-97, op. cit.

As per the 1991 Census, Cooch Behar has a high concentration of schedule caste population. The SC population is 11,23,719 or 51.76 percent to the total population with 51.65 percent males and 48.35 percent females. It is found that there were no wide variations in the male and female population during the decades. During 1971-1991, the growth of Scheduled Caste population is found 4,58,699 or 68.97 percent. The total number of Scheduled Tribe population is 13,275 with 52.40 percent males and 47.60 percent females and it is only 0.61 percent to the total population. The growth of Scheduled Tribe population is not high and it is only 2664 or 25.11 percent. A bulk of population is however of the backward classes.

Occupational Distribution:

The incidence of poverty among the population of the district chiefly in the rural areas may be analysed through the distribution of population according to the different categories of workers and non-workers. The following Table reveals that the total main working force in the district is 30.56 percent of the total population. As per data available, the total number of cultivators is 3,19,642 and it is 14.72 percent of the total population. Of the total main working population 7.96 percent is agricultural labourers and 2.17 percent is engaged in household and other than household industry i.e., manufacturing, processing, repairing etc. The workers engaged in other services are 5.71 percent of the total population.

Table No. 2.5
Distribution of Population According to Different Categories
Of Workers and Non-Workers by Sex

Sl. No.	Categories	Population (number)			% to total Population
		Male	Female	Total	
1.	Total Main Workers	5,97,823	65,601	6,63,424	30.56
2.	Cultivators	3,06,789	12,853	3,19,642	14.72
3.	Agricultural Labourers	1,42,935	29,829	1,72,764	7.96
4.	Workers for household and other than household Industry (Manufacturing, Processing, Repairing etc)	35,383	11,791	47,174	2.17
5.	Workers in other services	1,12,716	11,128	1,23,844	5.71
6.	Marginal workers	3,444	31,014	34,458	1.59
7.	Non-Workers	5,21,039	9,52,224	14,73,263	67.85
8.	Total population (No. 1+6+7)	11,22,306	10,48,839	21,71,145	100.00

Source: Compiled from the records published in Economic Review – 1998-99, State Planning Board, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta.

The Census Report of 1971 found 284 persons only per 1,000 as workers of whom 82.6 percent were exclusively related to agricultural pursuits.¹¹ The census of 1991 (Table 2.5) shows that the number of main workers (30.56%) is much lower than Non-workers (67.85%). The slowdown and stagnatory economic growth, higher degree of economic non-empowerment of the people or the insignificant scope of employment are supposed to have a combined effect of the

poorest industrial condition and a heavy burden on the traditional agricultural system. These happen to cause inadequate means of earnings for the occupational groups coupled with overall backwardness in the district.

Another statistical record of 1998 diagnoses that the magnitude of poverty of the people who need actual assistance is uneven and acute. The tables presented below show some idea on the distribution of vested lands and the recording of 'Bargadars'¹² in the district:

Table 2.6
Distribution of Vested Lands for Agricultural Purpose
To The Landless and Small Farmers

District/State (as on 30 th September 1996)	Area of Vested land Distributed (Hectares)	Number of beneficiaries				% to the total number of population in the District /State
		Schedule dCastes	Scheduled Tribes	Others	Total	
Cooch Behar	24976.97	80775	4730	35357	120862	5.57
West Bengal	417737.58	890524	489674	1151479	2531677	3.71

Source: Land and Land Reforms Department, Government of West Bengal; Cited in ibid. p-108.

Table No. 2.7
Recording of Bargadars in the District

(As on 30.9.98)

(Area in Hectares)

Year	Bargadars Recorded								% to the total number of population in the District
	Scheduled caste		Scheduled Tribe		Others		Total		
	No	Area	No	Area	No	Area	No	Area	
1995-96	49,125	19441.62	937	500.90	32,317	13410.04	82,379	33352.56	3.79
Upto 30.0.98	49970	19598.99	939	501.52	32996	13531.49	83905	33632.00	3.86

Source: Key Statistics of the District of Cooch Behar; and, ibid. p-109.

The data contained in the above Tables (No.2.6 and 2.7) help further to understand the high incidence of poverty prevailing in the district. It is commonly accepted that the living conditions of the agricultural labourers (as Table 2.5 shows), landless persons and Bargadars is very poor. It is also a fact that the agricultural labour households do not possess any income-generating assets. The income of these people completely depends on the number of days of agricultural

employment and the wages they receive. As agricultural employment is seasonal, lack of supplementary occupations causes the considerable expansion of poverty in the rural areas. The Table 2.6 envisages that the total number of landless and small farmers who got vested lands for agricultural purpose is 1,20,862 formed 5.57 percent to the total number of population in the district as against 3.71 per cent in West Bengal. Perhaps, a better picture may emerged if only the total rural population of both the district and the State are taken for calculating the percentage of the beneficiaries (Bargadars receiving vested lands). In that case the percentages would be 6.04 for Cooch Behar District and 5.13 for the State. The justification of such calculation is that beneficiaries are chosen only from the rural population. Table 2.7 shows that the total number of Bargadars is 83,905 or 3.86 percent to the total number of population in the district. Here, too, the percentage of Bargadars recorded as 4.12 in place of 3.79 for Cooch Behar District if according to the principle stated above in regard to table no. 2.6. The rural population of the district is taken as 100.

Agriculture and Related Issues:

Cooch Behar district is predominantly an agricultural land. The eastern part of the present district was locally known as 'chaul-i-stan' in the past. But, we have no authentic historical evidences by which we can get a complete picture of the then agricultural economy.

"The Rakam Charcha Settlement" which worked out a survey of 1868-70 in the former state was important. The Settlement recorded the classification of land in the areas in 16 classes according to the quality of soil and the crops grown. The Settlement found out that there were 14,32,205 bighas cultivated land out of a total area of 21,23,696 bighas settled. There were 4,87,523 bighas of cultivable fallow and 42,926 bighas uncultivable fallow lands. In addition to this there were 1,14,542 bighas of waste lands which was not settled and remained Khas of the king.¹³

The following Table will show the land utilization statistics, ownership distribution of land-holdings and the Area and production of Principal Crops:

Table No. 3.1
Some Land Utilization Statistics in the District

(in hectares)

Year	Area (According to Village Papers)	Area under Forest	Current fallow	Other fallow land	Net Cropped area
1997-98	331815	5729	2.9	2700	249085

Note:- Figures are Provisional.

Source: Socio-economic and Evaluation Grants, Agriculture Department, Government of West Bengal; Cited in *ibid.* p -74.

Table No. 3.2

Ownership distribution of Land-holdings in Cooch Behar District

Sl. No.	Holding Size	(%) to total holdings	(%) of total area
1.	Below 1 ha.	51.99	41.40
2.	1-2 ha.	26.39	31.70
3.	2-4 ha.	12.20	21.50
4.	Above 5 ha.	9.42	5.40

Source: Annual Plan on Agriculture, Cooch Behar, 1986-87, Agriculture Department, Government of West Bengal.

Table 3.3

Area and Production of Principal Crops

Name of crops	Area ('000 Hectares)		Production ('000 tonnes)	
	1995-96	1996-97	1995-96	1996-97
Aus (Rice)	53.48	49.3	62.8	74.0
Aman (Rice)	230.6	227.9	285.5	286.3
Boro (Rice)	17.3	16.6	35.1	40.4
Wheat	18.1	21.3	29.5	33.2
Gram	----	----	----	----
Other Pulses	9.5	----	4.7	----
Rape and Mustard	7.5	6.1	3.5	3.2
Jute (1)	81.6	85.4	618.0	648.5
Sugarcane (2)	-----	@	----	2.5
Dry Chillies	1.3	4.8	0.8	5.1
Potato	8.6	----	172.4	----
Ginger	0.4	0.4	0.7	0.8
Tobacco	10.0	----	7.5	----

Notes: (1) Production in terms of 1000 bales of 180 kgs. each.

(2) Production in terms of Gur.

(a) Less than 50 hectares.

Source: Directorate of Agriculture, West Bengal; cited in *Key Statistics of the District of Cooch Behar, 1996-97, op. cit.*

However, the records on the land utilization statistics and the ownership distribution of land-holdings are portrayed in Tables 3.1 and 3.2. Table 3.3 reveals that Aman Rice is the principal crop as food production and jute is the principal

economic crop. Tobacco is also considered as one of the principal economic crops in some areas of the district. In recent years the district has achieved remarkable progress in producing winter vegetables and captured the markets of Assam and Meghalaya. Along with this the peasants of the district have shown tremendous interest in Boro cultivation. These have been reflected in the ever-increasing demands for irrigation facilities.

Irrigation:

Although the average annual rainfall in the district is heavy, the dry spell during the crop session is also frequent. While the cultivators have found economic feasibility in modern production, they need the access of water to produce double and even triple cropping in the lands. Indeed, this may ensure higher real wages even to the agricultural labourers and enhance their position within the local village economic system by increasing agricultural employment. For this, in order to ensure production as a whole, the arrangements for irrigational devices specially in the Rabi and Kharif crops are felt necessary. However, attempt is made to indicate the prevailing irrigational installations in the district.

Based on the irrigation survey the following Table shows the areas irrigated for the year 1971-72 in the district. The figures also show the targeted areas for irrigation of 1974-75.

Table No. 4.1

Areas irrigated and its Potentialities (Areas in Acres)

Sl. No.	Classification	Area Irrigated	Targeted Area
		1971-72	1974-75
1.	Pre-Kharif Crops	290	2,000
2.	Kharif Crops	2,849	5,000
3.	Rabi Crops	13,855	30,000
4.	Vegetables	501	3,000
Total		17,495	40,000

Source: "West Bengal Gazetteers Koch Bihar" op. cit., pp 64-65.

It is evident from the above Table that the 1970s discharged poor irrigational facilities when only 17,495 acres of land found irrigated in the district.

The following Table displays the records of the area irrigated by different sources in the district in 1994-95.

Table 4.2
Area Irrigated by the Different Sources in the District
(in hectares)

Year	Govt. Canal	Private			Deep Tubewells, Shallow Tubewells *	Other Sources	Total Area
		Canal	Tank	Well			
1994-95	598	1700	1920	--	9844.55	11967	26029.55

Note: * Indicates under only Government Sector.

Source: *Key Statistics of the District of Cooch Behar- 1995, op cit.*

The data contained in the Table (No. 4.2) reveal that the irrigational facility is very poor and overall installations are not satisfactory in the district. The relatively very low irrigation intensity in Cooch Behar District compared to the major districts of West Bengal like Burdwan, Birbhum, Hoogly, Bankura, Midnapore, Murshidabad, etc. constrains modern agricultural development potentiality. According to the records of 1997-98 of Irrigation and Waterways Directorate, Government of West Bengal, the percentage of area irrigated only by government canals has been 24.86 percent in Burdwan district, 14.09 percent in Birbhum district, 8.03 percent in Hoogly district, 17.86 percent in Bankura district, 17.86 percent in Midnapore district and 4.21 percent in Murshidabad district to the total areas irrigated by government canals in West Bengal. Whereas, it has been only 0.04 percent in the district of Cooch Behar.¹⁴ Interestingly, agriculture, the determining factor of economy is still the most neglected sector in the district. The worse scenario, however, is that percolation has been in the opposite order – the Bargadars Patta-holders¹⁵, small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers¹⁶ etc. who deserve most have got the least. This has caused the widening economic and social gap not only in the urban areas but also in the villages themselves. Consequently this economic imbalance has made the face of poverty still uglier in the district.

Forestry:

At present, Cooch Behar district has no large forest (Table No. 3.1 shows the forest area). The Patlakhowa forest is the only forest area in the northwestern part of the district where the river Torsa enters. The surface of Cooch Behar was formerly full of forest and jungles. These forest areas were gradually eradicated and cleaned for ever-increasing cultivation and habitation. Due to this continuous

process of human habitation, growing birth rate and infiltration, specially after independence the wild animals have become more or less scarce in the district.

Animal Husbandry:

The district of Cooch Behar comprises an area where the cattle are of very inferior breed. It has no surplus land for growing fodder crops. However, the district is not rich in animal husbandry. As per records available of the periods 1966-1991, it is evident that there is a variation of livestock in the district. The following Table shows the variation and present position of livestock in the district under study:

Table No. 5
Variation and Present Position of Live-stock in the District

Sl. No.	Item	1966	1991
1.	Cattle	5,09,218	10,67,048
2.	Buffalo	83,268	10,242
3.	Sheep	10,452	8,553
4.	Goat	1,27,733	3,95,259
5.	Horses and Ponies	861	91
6.	Pig	2,718	4745
7.	Poultry	3,16,624	95421
Total		10,50,874	15,81,359

Source: 'West Bengal Gazetteers, Koch Bihar', op. cit., P. 80 ; and, The Official Records of DRDA, Cooch Behar, Under IRDP—1998-99.

The above Table No.5 apparently envisages that the number of cattle has increased progressively while the number of buffaloes has decreased remarkably. The record of 1990-91 shows that the number of goats is very much more than that of 1966. The record of poultry shows also a remarkable decline.

Fisheries:

The district of Cooch Behar has many resources of fisheries like tanks, bils, canals, marshes etc. The total water-area that the district comprises is approximately 6,000 hectares. Formerly these water-areas were of bil-fisheries. Now more than 50 percent of these water-areas are used as capture fishing. The production of the capture-fishery is only 25 percent of the total requirements of the year.¹⁷ Of late, efforts have been undertaken to boost up the production of fish through the implementation of different types of fishery development schemes. Moreover, the Induced Breeding and Bundh-cum-Portable Hatchery

operation has solved the problems initially by producing scientific fish culture and quality fish seeds. The Fish Farmers Development Agency (FFDA), The Central Fishermen's Cooperative Society widened the scope of utilizing bils, tanks, closed canals, etc.

The Government had established FFDA scheme and subsidized money under the Integrated Rural Development Programme. Besides, a number of cooperative societies in the district which have a role to play are the following:

Table No. 6
Fishery Cooperative Societies

Sl. No.	Name of the Societies	Number of Societies
1.	Central Fishermen's Cooperative Society	1
2.	Registered Primary Fishermen's Cooperative Societies	64
*3.	Potentially Viable Fishermen's Cooperative Societies	47
* The District Assistant Register of Cooperative Societies declared their societies as potentially viable Fishermen's Cooperative Societies. In reality, these are the Registered Primary Fishermen's Cooperative Societies.		

Source: ibid. (Official records of DRDA).

The Primary Cooperative Societies get long-term lease of Jalkars from the Land Reforms Department. These are also eligible to come under the FFDA. The District Fisheries Department with the help of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the members of the Fishermen's Cooperative Societies by providing various apparatus viz., nets, boats etc. and necessary funds. The basic aim of the Department is to raise their purchasing capacity and necessary funds through which they can take up scientific fish cultivation.

Sericulture:

Sericulture is an agro-based Village Cottage Industry. Though it is a labour intensive Cottage industry, it is a completely non-traditional trade in the district. It is economically viable and has a wide potentiality for development. Perhaps, if the industry be developed with all available potentialities it may be able to generate a large number of employment at its various stages of processing like silkworms, rearing, reeling and weaving. Now the programme is being accelerated by the Sericulture Department which supplied planting materials free of cost.

Industry:

Here an attempt essentially not with widening stress is made to exhibit the 'District Industrial Profile' of Cooch Behar through an analytical observation. It deserves mention that before the merger of Cooch Behar State with the Indian Federation, it had a self-sufficient economic system with its indigenous production. The needs and requirements of the natives were not high and they adapted themselves with the things available to them.

It was recorded on the basis of 1935-36 report that only 2.6 people were dependent on industry. By a Royal Order 'the Department of Industry and Agriculture' was formed for industrial development. The prevailing indigenous industries were – rearing, spinning, pottery, smithy, etc. As per record of early 1970s, the district was totally deficient in industries and lacked any adequate infrastructure. "There is no big industry licensed under the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951, and there are only a few small factories registered with the Chief Inspector of Factories, West Bengal".¹⁸ In 1972, the total small scale industrial units numbered only 560. The following statistical records show the different categories of registered industrial units in 1972:

Table No. 7.1

Registered Small Scale Industrial Units in Cooch Behar District in 1972

Sl. No.	Types	Number of Units
1.	Food Products	84
2.	Textiles	225
3.	Beverage Industries	8
4.	Chemical and Chemical Products	22
5.	Footwear and other weaving Apparels	12
6.	Woodwork other than Furniture	53
7.	Furniture	19
8.	Metal Products	18
9.	Building Materials	7
10.	Tobacco Products	24
11.	Clay Modelling	17
12.	Printing and Publishing	10
13.	Miscellaneous	61
Total		560

Source: "West Bengal Gazetteers – Koch Bihar", *op. cit.*, P. 86.

The district is still industrially backward, and there is no large or medium scale industry. The prevailing small scale and cottage industrial sector is not even improving in a considerable direction. The district has, however, been declared as a 'Backward District' in 'A' category.¹⁹ It is claimed that the backwardness in the industrial sphere is caused due to locational disadvantages, scarcity of infrastructural facilities and inputs. The native industries which are mainly based on minimum infrastructural facilities and local inputs have been developed only to fulfill the requirements of the people. The utilization of the greatly plenty social skill is observed in the handicraft, tiny and cottage sector. These small and cottage industrial trades are :Pati (both artistic, superfine and ordinary quality), Bamboo craft, Pottery (concentrated mainly in the areas of Tufanganj), Dhokra and Fatia handloom (Cotton ordinary variety), Bidi making, Carpentry, Bakery etc. Some other small industries which are developing today – Tailoring, ready-made-garments, Wool-knitting, repairing of machines etc. The following Table Nos. 7.2 [I] and 7.2 [II] show the statistical record of industry and the number of the people employed and the number of small scale trading units and the workers employed:

Table No. 7.2 (I)

Number of Registered Factories and Workers Employed

Year	Number of Registered Factories	Number of Workers Employed
1996	27	848
1997	27	848

Source: Chief Inspector of Factories, West Bengal; cited in Key Statistics of the District of Cooch Behar – 1996-97, op. cit.

Table No. 7.2 (II)

Number of Small Scale Industrial Units (Registered with Cottage and Small Scale Industries Directorate) and Workers Employed

Year	Units registered during the year	Cumulative total units upto the end of the year	Additional workers employed during the year	Cumulative total of the workers upto the end of the year
1995-96	140	7,139	628	37,424
1996-97	247	7,386	1,343	38,767

Source: Directorate of Cottage and S.S.I., Government of West Bengal; cited in ibid.

The data depicted in the Tables here above show that there are 27 registered factories (according to the 1997 records) in which only 848 workers

(0.03 percent to the total population) are employed. The Table 7.2 (II) reveals that during the year 1996-97, there are 247 registered small-scale industrial units in which 1343 additional workers (0.06 percent to the total population) are employed. The cumulative total units upto the end of the year numbered 7386 where cumulative total workers numbering 38,767 (1.78 percent of the total population) are employed.

In the 1980s with the implementation of IRDP in the district, a wider segment of the population had been identified and certain suitable industries had been projected for infrastructural development. The training for augmenting relevant skills of the youth initiated by the IRDP had been a need of the moment. The rural youth had been imparted training under TRYSEM (Training of Rural Youths for Self-Employment) so that the youths immediately could be assisted to get self-employment. Now the programme and the sub-component (TRYSEM) have merged with SGSY (Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana) and the programme is taken with care for implementation.

However, it is evident from the foregoing analysis that the District of Cooch Behar is characterized by over-whelming agro-economic base with the lowest urbanization and the poorest industrialization. The overall communication network is insufficient to sustain steady development. Although agriculture is considered as the mainstay of the economy, the sector has not caught up to any significant extent due to unfavourable climatic condition, inadequate perennial irrigation facilities and the traditional technique of farming. The agrarian character of the district is chiefly attributed by the traditional crops. As the traditional industries with their age-old technologies and ever-declining tendency of demand on their productive goods constrain the industrial sector, the scene of the industrial sector is not encouraging. Inadequate electrification, unorganized market system, insufficient banking system are dominating the economy of the district. The district as a whole is weak in modern infrastructure resulting in low per-capita income and purchasing capacity.

Administrative Divisions:

At the moment when Koch Bihar Merger Agreement was signed on 28th August, 1949 and the subsequent transfer of power under the Government of

Federal India on 12th September 1949, the State has 8 police Stations viz., Kotwali, Dinahata, Sitai, Tufanganj, Mathabhanga, Sitalkuchi, Mekliganj and Haldibari. There were five sub-divisions, viz., Cooch Behar Sadar, Dinahata, Tufanganj, Mathabhanga and Mekliganj. Cooch Behar Sadar comprises Kotwali Police Station, Dinahata sub-division comprises the two Police stations – Dinahata and Sitai, Tufanganj sub-division comprises Tufanganj Police station, Mathabhanga sub-division comprises Mathabhanga and Sitalkuchi Police stations and Mekliganj sub-division comprises Mekliganj and Haldibari Police stations. On 1st January 1950 when Cooch Behar, the then Chief Commissioner's Province merged with the province of West Bengal, the Government of West Bengal issued several notifications for regularizing the prevailing administrative jurisdictions.²⁰

However, Cooch Behar district now comprises previously existing and further regularized five sub-divisions namely, Cooch Behar Sadar, Dinahata, Tufanganj, Mekliganj and Mathabhanga with their headquarters rather sub-divisional towns bearing same names. Cooch Behar town is also the headquarters of the district. Of late, the district comprises within its surface 12 blocks and 128 Gram Panchayats. The name of the sub-divisions, Blocks and the number of different Gram Panchayats are presented below:

Table No. 8

Sub-divisions, Blocks and Nos. of Gram Panchayats in the District

Sl. No.	Name of the Sub-divisions	Name of Blocks in the Sub-divisions	Nos. of G.P. in the Blocks
1.	Sadar Sub-division	i) Cooch Behar –I	15
		ii) Cooch Behar – II	13
2.	Dinahata Sub-division	i) Dinahata –I	16
		ii) Dinahata –II	12
		iii) Sitai	5
3.	Tufanganj Sub-division	i) Tufanganj –I	14
		ii) Tufanganj –II	11
4.	Mathabhanga Sub-division	i) Mathabhanga –I	10
		ii) Mathabhanga –II	10
		iii) Sitalkuchi	8
5.	Mekliganj Sub-division	i) Mekliganj	8
		ii) Haldibari	6
Total	5	12	128

Source: The Official Records of District Rural development Agency, Cooch Behar, Under IRDP—1988-89.

All the sub-divisional towns are constituted as Municipalities in the district. Recently, by a Government notification, the Town Committee of Haldibari has been converted into a municipality. Thus, there are six municipalities in the district.

Financial Institutions and Marketing System:

During the period of Royal regime in Cooch Behar certain indigenous financial institutions had flourished. The rich peasants of the rural areas used to deposit their savings even precious metals to the merchants of the urban areas through which they found themselves security. The merchants met also in exchange of that saving some of the needs of the investors. On 1st July 1929, the first financial institution namely 'Kamala Bank' was opened in Cooch Behar. It was completely a full-fledged non-scheduled bank. The State Bank of India took the financial liabilities and the responsibility of business from 14th January 1967 under the State Bank of India Act, 1955.²¹

The present financial institutions which are performing in the district consist of Commercial Banks, Cooperative Banks, Post Office, Life Insurance Corporation of India and a large number of moneylenders. The financial institutions, specially all the Commercial Banks are credit-linked institutions which were closely related to the credit-linked programmes like IRDP, SESRU, presently SGSY, etc. The successful implementation of these credit-linked programmes depends largely upon the flow of credit from the banking institutions. This flow of credit also depends upon the number of branches of the banks which are functioning in the district. Presently, there are 95 credit bank branches which are financing under the rural development programmes.

The markets of the agricultural products have a paramount importance in a growing economic social system. These are very important where production is steadily growing and the level of price is in fluctuation. To characterize and point out the objectives of the marketing system Durga Das Majumder observes, "The efficiency of the marketing system depends on channelizing the growers' surplus to consumers at reasonable prices, having due regard to the margin and costs involved in the process without burdening the consumer and ensuring remunerative prices to the growers to induce them to produce more".²² The

Marketing Branch of the State Agriculture Directorate has implemented certain schemes to achieve the above objectives in all the districts of West Bengal.

The Directorate of Agricultural Marketing, Government of West Bengal has established 28 Regulated Markets in the State level. These Regulated Markets are considered to be the most important fields for proper marketing. These markets not only provide some sort of legal protection to the producers but also provide certain facilities for the smooth flow of the growers' surplus. These also help to strengthen the economic position and bargaining powers of the producer-sellers.

The total markets in the district are of many categories: Principal market, Primary market, secondary market, small primary market etc. For instance, Dinhata market is a Regulated market which is considered to be the principal market. Nazirhat market is considered to be secondary market and Sahebganj market is notified as Primary market.²³

The West Bengal Agricultural Product Marketing (Regulation) Act, 1972 considered that 'Agricultural Produce' means any produce of agriculture, horticulture, pisciculture, sericulture, forestry, animal husbandry and any related kind of production. However, all these agricultural products may generally be marketed in the Principal, Primary, Secondary and small Primary markets in the district. But, in this market system the producers are not in many cases the sellers. The market is not a field of the producers and consumers. In fact, the market functionary further includes the traders, commission agents, brokers, weighmen, measurers, ware-housemen etc. This business community is locally known as Faria, Paikar, Bapari, Babu (popularly called so by the innocent farmers), Aratdars (an urban community plays the role of middlemen between productive goods and marketings) etc. All these classes play the role of feudal intermediary classes who are quite powerful and an organized urban business community. In this regard, the following hazards are to be identified: (a) the illiteracy and the lack of adequate awareness of the producers; (b) prior indebtedness of the producers to the traders; (c) a marketing in which the producers cannot sell their produce but with the help of the 'Aratdars' with deduction price; (d) unregulated markets having many unfair charges and unauthorized deduction; (e) false weight and measures; (f) lack stocking power of the producers and lack of warehouses; (g) lack of grading

facilities; (h) lack of marketing information. These are the various factors which have resulted in the deprivation to the producers of reasonable prices for their produce. In order to remove these defects, various steps have been taken, yet much more remain to be done.

This backward rural economy of the district is further worsened by cross-border trading (smuggling). This has grown at present more than ever along the closed sector-area where the district abut on Bangladesh. The people engaged in this trading, clandestine in nature merely detected and largely unrecorded, attract the serious attention of investigators. As William Van Schendel observed, "smuggling is an important economic activity all along the India-Bangladesh border".²⁴ This unrealistic, non-restrictive and unenforced economic relation has inevitably been affecting day by day the socio-economic, political and cultural indigenous character of the entire rural district.

Communications:

After the merger of Cooch Behar, the Government of West Bengal faced mostly the need for an improved means of Communications. In course of time, the communication between the district headquarters and five sub-divisional headquarters has been established in a modern way. All the blocks of the district were connected with the sub-divisional headquarters and afterwards, villages more or less have been connected with the block headquarters. The 31 NH passes through the district touching Cooch Behar district town. The Jalpaiguri-Siliguri State Highway has been extended and connected with Haldibari.

Formerly, there was a district or local Board to maintain the roads of the district. Afterwards, the Public Works Department (PWD) took over the responsibility for maintaining a number of 'Kancha' roads in the villages too.

At present, the North Bengal State Transport Corporation serves well all over West Bengal, a part of Assam and Bihar. Apart from this, the private vehicles, rickshaws are serving well in the district. In case of goods transportation, the rickshaw-van locally known as 'Thela' has been taking the place of former bullock-carts.

The main Railway Station in the district is New Cooch Behar Railway Station connecting Assam with Calcutta. The communication through Haldibari

Railway Station which was formerly an important Railway Station was snapped because the entire southern part of the route fell in the territory of former East Pakistan. In addition to this, there are certain branch railway stations which establish communication with the main railway station.

Previous to such modern communication, transportation and marketing system, Cooch Behar State can actually be characterized as an old, 'isolated but self sufficient village economy'. In this economic system the marketing of agricultural produce occupied an insignificant place. However, the rapid expansion of modern communications has broken up the old, stereo-typed 'village community' based on self-sufficiency. Commercialization and specialization in agriculture, the expansion of various types of irrigation facilities, the increasing use of money in the rural areas thereafter have turned the marketing of agricultural produce to be quite very important.

Local Self-Government:

In the princely state of Cooch Behar, much detail regarding the kind of rural administration was not available prior to 1864. The then tenants were exclusively controlled by the 'Dewaniyas' who were the large 'Jotedars'. The power of this institution was highly reduced with the settlement operations and, however, the people were enabled to get recorded rights over their lands. In 1876, petitions were sent to the Deputy Commissioner for organizing and granting of a scheme of 'Choukidari System' that had already come into effect in Jalpaiguri and Rangpur. The Government granted the prayer and the system of 'Choukidari' was in action. Subsequently, the 'Cooch Behar Village Choukidari Act' was passed in 1893-94 to overcome some difficulties which existed prior to the Act.²⁵ Durga Das Majumder was of the opinion in this regard that "this was the only partially self-governing organization in existence in Koch Bihar in the rural areas till they were replaced by the creation of Gram and Anchal Panchayats under The West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957".²⁶

Contrarily, the Cooch Behar Town Committee Act was passed in 1885 for the urban administration which was subsequently amended in 1897. During this year the Act was extended to the sub-divisional towns of Dinhata and Mathabhanga. It was also extended to the Haldibari bunder. In 1931, the Act was

further extended to the town of Mekliganj. The Town Committee of the Royal ruling State was converted into a Municipality under the Cooch Behar Municipal Act of 1944.²⁷ At present, there are six municipalities, viz., Cooch Behar, Dinhata, Tufanganj, Mathabhanga, Mekliganj and Haldibari which are functioning in the district.

In fact, the implementation of the self-governing institutions in Bengal was first introduced and Bengal was divided into a number of Unions by the Bengal Choukidari Act in 1870. In 1885, The Bengal Local Self-Government Act was passed and the second panchayat system was established on the platform of this Act. Then in 1919, the Bengal Village Self-Government Act was passed and Union Board was established under this Act. But the policies undertaken by these Acts were not followed and put into effect in the former state of Cooch Bihar. After the merger of the State, the West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957 had been extended to the districts from 7th June 1958 to 8th June 1960. Then on the district was covered by Gram and Anchal Panchayats. Afterwards, major changes have taken place in the Panchayat system through the Zilla Parishad Act of 1963 and the Panchayat Act of 1973.

Of late, the amended form of Panchayati-Raj through many amendments between 1978-1995 is functioning throughout West Bengal. The inherent character of this three-tier Panchayati-Raj is the decentralization of power and it “denotes the transference of authority, legislative, judicial or administrative, from a higher level of Government to a lower”.²⁸

A Brief Sketch on Per-Capita Income:

For a fuller understanding of the incidence of poverty and economic backwardness prevailing in the district, we need to focus on the per capita income in the district and its varying nature in West Bengal including the rural-urban variation in different years.

The Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics in its report pointed out the per capita annual income of the rural and urban population of West Bengal (Internal Production and Services) during the years – 1983-84, 1984-85, 1987-88 and 1988-89. The Table is as below:

Table No. 9.1

Per-Capita Income in the Rural and Urban Areas in the State

Year	Per-Capita Income (Rs.) on the Common Price Level		
	Rural	Urban	State
1983-84	1570 (71)	4066 (183.89)	2211
1984-85	1774 (73.21)	4518 (186.46)	2423
1987-88	2248 (72.77)	5261 (170.31)	3089
1988-89	2528 (73.85)	5827 (170.23)	3423

Notes: (i) The figures in parentheses are counted Per-Capita Income (in percent) to the Average State Per Capita Income.

(ii) The state Per-Capita income in different years is taken as 100.

Source: *Statistical Abstract, W.B., 1988-89 (Combined Issue)*, Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Government of West Bengal.

The data of the Table 9.1 reveal that the per-capita income of the rural people is found relatively very low compared to that of urban people. In 1983-84 it is found that the per-capita income of urban Cooch Behar was more than 258% of that of rural Cooch Behar people. This percentage variation between urban and rural people in Cooch Behar in the three other years of Table 9.1 did not appreciably change. The urban Cooch Behar percentages of those three years of rural Cooch Behar were 254%, 234% and 230% respectively. We find in this Table further that the percentage of urban Cooch Behar per-capita income was pretty higher than the State's figure as a whole, namely, 183.89%, 186.46%, 170.31% and 170.23% for the respective years. So besides the overall poverty of Cooch Behar people, the lopsided position of the district in rural-urban variation signifies the necessity to improve the distressing position of the rural people of Cooch Behar specially. However, we may look into more facts about Cooch Behar's position in West Bengal compared to other districts in general.

Since the intensive margin of annual per capita income of the people of rural Bengal is found relatively low (Table 9.1) than urban people, it is further needed to focus on the per capita income of the people of Cooch Behar District vis-à-vis other districts of West Bengal for the year 1988-89. The record is presented below:

Table No. 9.2
District Wise per Capita Income of West Bengal in 1988-89

<i>On the basis of existing value of Money</i>					
Districts	Per capita income	Percentage to the* per capita income of the State	Districts	Per capita income	Percentage to the* per capita income of the State
1. Calcutta	5450	159	9. Purulia	3003	88
2. Howrah	4307	126	10. Bankura	2994	87
3. 24 Parganas	4126	121	11. Nadia	2799	82
4. Burdwan	3985	116	12. Jalpaiguri	2776	81
5. Hoogly	3945	115	13. Midnapore	2515	73
6. Darjeeling	3412	100	14. West Dinajpur	2435	71
7. Birbhum	3348	98	15. Malda	2254	66
8. Murshidabad	3162	92	16. Cooch Behar	2154	63

Notes: *State Per-Capita income Rs. 3423= 100 is taken district-wise index.

(i) 24 Parganas (North and South combined)

(ii) West Dinajpur (North and South combined)

Source: *ibid.*

The district-wise data on the Per-Capita income and its percentage to the per capita income of the state of West Bengal in the year 1988-89 are available from the Table No. 9.2. The Table presents here that the per capita income of the districts like Calcutta, 24 Parganas (North and South combined), Burdwan, Hoogly is relatively high compared to that of the other districts. It signifies essentially relatively high earnings and the level of employment in the combined crucial sectors of agriculture and industry. It, however, reflects the track of reducing poverty.²⁹ The per capita income of Darjeeling district is found equal to the state per capita income in the year. Interestingly, while the districts are in a better position in terms of annual per capita income, the district of Cooch Behar ranked the lowest in position (it was Rs. 2154 or 63 percent to the state per capita income).

Further, it appears more important to focus on the Index of per capita income of the rural-area dominated district of Cooch Behar in comparison with the other districts of West Bengal during the year 1983-84, 1984-85, 1987-88 and 1988-89. The records are furnished in following Table:

Table No. 9.3

District-wise Index of Per Capita Income of the Rural People of West Bengal in the year 1983-84, 1984-85, 1987-88 and 1988-89 (Per head income of the rural people on the existing value of money=100)

Sl. No	District	Index of per capita income				
		1983-84	1984-85	1987-88	1988-89	Average
1.	Burdwan	145	144	150	143	145.5
2.	Birbhum	128	121	136	126	127.7
3.	Howrah	116	114	110	114	113.5
4.	Bankura	111	105	118	112	111.5
5.	Hoogly	108	112	111	108	109.8
6.	Purulia	104	104	110	104	105.5
7.	Darjeeling	104	102	99	98	100.7
8.	24 Parganas (North & South Combined)	100	101	97	95	98.3
9.	Jalpaiguri	103	98	94	94	97.3
10.	Midnapore	90	84	95	90	89.7
11.	Nadia	86	102	85	84	89.3
12.	Malda	87	85	86	82	85.0
13.	Murshidabad	77	87	79	79	80.5
14.	Cooch Behar	81	83	73	72	77.3
15.	West Dinajpur (North & South combined)	73	75	66	67	70.3
Total State		100	100	100	100	100.00

Source: ibid.

It may conveniently be illustrated from the Table (No.9.3) that the district of Burdwan achieved in deriving the highest rural per capita income and ranked the first position in terms of District-wise index during the years under reference. The Birbhum district had the next position bearing 127.7 average index of per capita income. The districts of Howrah, Bankura, Hoogly, Purulia and Darjeeling were relatively in a better position in recording per capita income in different years and ranked above the state average index. Contrarily, other districts specially Cooch Behar and West Dinajpur (North and South combined) remained far below the state average index (77.3 and 70.3 respectively).

Directions for Empirical Study:

The evidences available in the foregoing analysis with statistical records are not supposed to be less than sufficient for understanding the magnitude of poverty prevailing in the district of Cooch Behar. Against the prevailing backdrops and constrains, the district government machinery (District Planning Committee, District Planning Coordination Committee, DRDA etc.) has taken effort to provide planned development and hoped to follow the objectives that planning "is an exercise in social engineering. It is essential to ensure that development takes place speedily and that it facilitates the establishment of a social order in which the ideal of economic growth, social justice and self-reliance are realised and harmonized. Economic growth has, therefore, to be integrated with social justice".³⁰ The approach, however, underlying the basis of the objectives of the District Plan signifies that investment policies should be directed towards the furtherance of economically developed labour intensive industries. "The policy should be to have labour intensive products for domestic and foreign markets by the application of economically sound labour techniques in industrial and agricultural production. Above all, production must be based on "social necessity" rather than social demand".³¹

Keeping in mind the given objectives to be followed, the District machinery introduced a centrally sponsored Programme viz., IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) in all twelve blocks of Cooch Behar district with the same footprints of other districts as well as the states. Theoretically, the programme was more realistic and had intersectoral linkages in the priority sectors based on area needs vis-à-vis resources available in the region. It deserves mention that apparently it was the most important multivariate programme in the way to uplift the identified families remaining Below-Poverty-Line (BPL).

The issues coupled however appear a fundamental question: how far IRDP and its components were successful in a backward district of West Bengal? (Details are produced in the methodology of the present study in the foregoing section). This nature of the study proposed herein can be a challenging and fruitful area of research so far.

Cooch Behar-I and Dinhata-II Blocks and some Gram Panchayats included in the district of Cooch Behar of which native features are delineated, were undertaken to elicit necessary information on the performance of different schemes and sub-component under IRDP. It is hoped that an assessment may be made of the different strata of the poor (i.e., destitute, very very poor, very poor, etc.) have received benefits proportionate to their respective percentage among the poor. It is not enough to count the number of beneficiaries from a category of the poor. It is also necessary to keep in view the quantum of relief offered to each such category for assessing whether the scheme and its sub-component have been implemented in an equitable way.

Notes and References

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- 4 **ibid.** p-1.
- 5 **Ibid.** p-2.
- 6 **Taniguchi, Shinkichi**: “The Rajbangshi Community and the Changing Structure of Land Tenure in the Koch Bihar Princely State” in Taniguchi, S.; Yanagisawa, H.; Shinoda, T. and Oshikawa, F. (ed.): *Economic Change and Social Transformation in Modern and Contemporary South Asia*, Kunitachi, Tokyo: Hitotsubashi University, 1994, p-57.
- 7 “Extracts from Dr. Francis Buchanan-Hamilton’s Account of the District of Rangpur, 1810” (hereafter Buchanan. Hamilton’s Account) in *Jalpaiguri D.H.*, PP-CXXXII; Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed: *Koch Beharer Itihās*, Pt.1, Cooch Behar, 1342, Ch. VII; and Majumdar, Durga Das, op. cit., pp-30-31; cited in Dasgupta, Ranajit: *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p-6.
- 8 *Census 1961, West Bengal – District Census Handbook, Cooch Behar*, Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, p-11.
- 9 *Annual Action Plan – 1998-99*, District Rural Development Agency, Cooch Behar, under IRDP, TRYSEM, GKY, DWCRA, ITK, p-1.
- 10 **Majumdar, Durga Das**: op. cit., p-2.
- 11 **ibid.** p-125.
- 12 In Bengal share cropping is locally known as ‘*barga*’ or ‘*Bhagcha*’ and the cultivators of the respective lands as a ‘*Bargadar*’. The recording of the ‘*Bargadars*’ is done under the ‘*Operation Barga*’ through which the share croppers are given some legal rights and security of the cultivation.
- 13 **Majumdar, Durga Das**: op. cit. p-62.
- 14 *Economic Review – 1998-99*, Statistical Appendix, State Planning Board, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta, p-100.
- 15 The lands already seized by the Government of West Bengal are vested under the land reform legislation to landless or poor peasants. These lands are provided with ‘*Patta*’ for establishing their ownership and right to them. The individuals who hold the ‘*Patta*’ are known as ‘*Pattaholders*’.
- 16 In accordance with the land reforms legislation of West Bengal the concept of ‘*Small Farmer*’, ‘*Marginal Farmer*’ and ‘*Agricultural Labourers*’ can be defined: (i) *Small Farmer*: A cultivator with landholding less than 2 ha. or class I irrigated land less than 1 ha.; (ii) *Marginal Farmer*: A cultivator with land holding less than 1 ha. or class I irrigated land less than 0.5 ha.; and (iii) *Agricultural Labour*: A person with no land other than homestead and drawing 50% income from agriculture.

- 17 *Annual Action Plan – 1998-99*, op. cit. pp-6-7.
- 18 Majumdar, Durga Das: op. cit. p-86.
- 19 *District Plan 1988-89 – Cooch Behar District*, Government of West Bengal, Office of the District Magistrate, Cooch Behar, p- VI.
- 20 Majumdar, Durga Das: op. cit. p-6.
- 21 *ibid.* p-90.
- 22 *ibid.* p-97.
- 23 *Development of Regulated Markets in West Bengal: Action Plan for 1990-91 for Dinbata Regulated Market*, West Bengal, State Marketing Board, Calcutta.
- 24 Schendel, Willem Van: *Easy Come Easy Go: Smugglers on the Ganges*, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, Erasmus University, 1992, p-3.
- 25 Majumdar, Durga Das: op. cit. p-166.
- 26 *ibid.*, p-166.
- 27 *ibid.* pp- 166-67.
- 28 White, Leonard D.: “Decentralization” in *Encyclopaedia of Social Science*, Vol. 5, New York: Macmillan, 1959; quoted in Mukhapadhyay, A.K.: *The Panchayat Administration in West Bengal*, Calcutta: The World Press Pvt. Ltd., 1980, pp-4-5.
- 29 Gazdar, Harris and Sengupta, Sunil: (Stated an explanatory note that “the rate of employed in West Bengal was higher than in most other Indian States. According to a recent national survey the average number of person days a year for which an adult agricultural labourer in West Bengal was employed was the second highest among the major States at 178, compared to the national average of 137 days [NCAER, 1996]”). “Agricultural Growth and Well-Being” in Rogaly, Ben; Harris-White, Barbara and Bose, Sugata (ed.): *Sonar Bangla? – Agricultural Growth and Agrarian Change in West Bengal and Bangladesh*, New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 1999,p-88.
- 30 “An Approach to the District Plan”, *District Plan – 1988-89*, op. cit. p-(ii).
- 31 Hebbar, C.K.: *Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) – Retrospect and Prospect*, New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1991, p-71.