

CHAPTER THREE

SILIGURI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION AREA: A HISTORICAL PROFILE

3.1 A General Geography

The city of Siliguri, situated at 396 feet above sea-level and on the banks of Mahananda river (length of 91.7 Kms. and earlier name was Mahanadi – a Bengali corruption of Mahaldi, the Lepcha name of the river), is a witness as to the importance of ‘geographical location’ in the growth and development of a place. Siliguri is situated at the base of the Himalaya Mountains in the plains. It is the largest city in the area of North Bengal and the third largest city in West Bengal, after Kolkata and Asansol. Presently, 33 Wards of the Siliguri Municipal Corporation falls within the district of Darjeeling and the remaining 14 Wards within Jalpaiguri district. It connects the hill station towns of Darjeeling, Gangtok, Kalimpong, Kurseong and Mirik with the rest of India. Siliguri has three main seasons, summer, winter and monsoons. Summer temperatures rarely exceed 38°C. It is considerably cooler than the southern and central regions of West Bengal. During this season, tourists from all over India stop in Siliguri en route to the cooler climes of the northern hill stations. Winters are relatively cool and temperatures range from a high of 15°C to a low of about 3°C. Light rain and dense fog are seen during this season. During the monsoon season between June and September, the town is lashed by heavy rains often cutting access to the hill stations and Sikkim. The climate is suitable for growing tea and the surrounding region has many tea gardens.

3.2 Few Pages from the History of Siliguri

There has been no archaeological excavation in the district of Darjeeling. As such, the surface finds do not clearly add to the knowledge of pre-history of the place (Walsh 1904 : 20-21). The present district of Darjeeling is a creation of 19th century and a result of the almost accidental involvement of the British Indian Government in the affairs of the neighbouring Himalayan States. The origin of the history of Darjeeling can be traced to the Treaty of Titaliya of 1817 which enjoined

upon the Raja of Sikkim to refer to the arbitration of the British Government all disputes between his subjects and those of the neighbouring states. It was the disputes on the Sikkim-Nepal frontiers eleven years later in 1828 that one of the two officers, Captain Lloyd, deputed to deal with the situation, spent six days in Darjeeling, a large village at that time and got attracted by its advantages as a site for a sanatorium. Persuasion began and finally after the approval of the Court of Directors, General Lloyd succeeded in obtaining the execution of a deed of grant by the Raja of Sikkim on 1st February, 1835. By 1840, a road was made from Pankhabari. Slowly and gradually, markets, hotels, private residences came up and above all buildings for accommodation of the sick were built around 1849. The area of Darjeeling further expanded with the annexation of the 'Terai' (foothills of the Himalayas) and a portion of the Sikkim Hills in 1850 owing to the internal rebellion in Sikkim. Finally, what is now Kalimpong subdivision was ceded to the British by a treaty in November, 1865 (Banerjee et al 1980 : 93-94).

The district was administered by the Deputy Commissioner and was divided into two subdivisions – the Headquarters Subdivision (960 sq. miles) comprising the hill areas and the Terai Subdivision (274 sq. miles) comprising the whole of the country at the foot of the hills. Hanskhawa near Phansidewa was the headquarters of the Terai Subdivision between 1864 and 1880. In 1880, the headquarters was shifted to Siliguri which at that time, a part of Jalpaiguri district, was transferred to Darjeeling district with a small surrounding area. With this, the Darjeeling district reached its present shape (Banerjee et al 1980 : 94).

The administrative history of Siliguri, thus, can be traced to 1880 when it was made the headquarters of the Terai Subdivision. It is to mention here that between 1891 and 1907, the Terai Subdivision was absorbed into the Kurseong Subdivision, with Kurseong being the headquarters. Thus, upto 1907, there had been a Deputy Magistrate at Siliguri working under the Subdivisional Officer, Kurseong. Besides, he was also responsible to manage the Terai Government Estate under the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling. Finally, in 1907, the subdivisional headquarters of the plain area was shifted again to Siliguri, thus re-establishing the Terai Subdivision which had been absorbed into the Kurseong Subdivision (Dash 1947 : 42-43).

From time immemorial this place was situated on the communication map between eastern and western India. Besides, it bore importance as a route to

Sikkim and China via Bhutan and Tibet. Notwithstanding, one does not find any mention of the place in any of the ancient literature.

The etymological meaning of the term 'Siliguri' are varied. However, two of them are worth mentioning. One is 'sili' or 'rock' plus 'guri' or 'place', i.e., a rocky place. Another is 'sili' signifying heavy rainfall and 'guri' referring to place, i.e., place of heavy rainfall. The original village of Siliguri was to the south of where we have the Saktigarh Colony today. The area was under Jalpaiguri District and Rajganj police station. It was a small village at that time.

The growth and importance of Siliguri started when the North Bengal State Railway (operating under the Eastern Bengal State Railway Company) was extended to Siliguri with meter guage in 1878 with the purpose of promoting the interests of European tea planters. Very soon, a narrow guage was completed between Siliguri and Darjeeling by the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Besides, the Cart Road to Darjeeling was steadily improved. Thus, Siliguri became the transshipment point from the meter guage railway to the narrow guage railway and the Cart Road. Later on, the opening of the roads and railways in the Terai as well as road connection with the Western Duars and Assam via the Coronation Bridge over the Tista, gradually and rapidly increased the business importance of Siliguri.

Siliguri's position as a focus of communication and the resultant growth of its business activities helped secure its administrative importance. From a small village with a population of 784 in 1901, it rapidly rose to the status of the Subdivisional Headquarters in 1907; the Union Board in 1938; the Municipal Council in 1949; and finally to that of the Municipal Corporation in 1994. With the establishment of the Subdivisional Headquarters, various inspection bungalows were erected as well as few rice milling and timber sawing industries were established. A sub post office came up in the year 1907. Later on, it was upgraded to the Head Post Office in 1968. The Siliguri Hospital was established sometime in the last decade of the 19th century. However, with the growth, Siliguri witnessed the usual urban problems. As Dash (1947 : 264) writes, "Its growth has been rapid, haphazard and without proper direction. The result is an unhealthy urban area with deplorable drainage and inadequate water-supply. Adequate remedies for these defects have not yet been devised." At another place, he maintains that in spite of the fact that Siliguri urban area was expanding as an important communication and distributing centre, the sanitation and drainage system of the town was not adequate and at par with its rapid expansion. The defective sanitation and drainage

system was most evident in and around Siliguri Bazar area. Dash (1947 : 245) mentions in this regard, "The Siliguri Bazar was originally managed by an Officer of the Northern Bengal State Railway for the Benefit of the Railway employees. But in 1887 it was transferred to the District authorities in the expectation that the defective sanitation and drainage would be remedied and some control exercised over its expansion. It then came under the management of the Darjeeling Improvement Fund.....Drainage and water-supply problems have not yet been solved and need much more resolute treatment than so far they have received."

Regarding mode of communication in the past, in and around Siliguri, Hooker (1854 : 282) describes during the second half of the 19th century in this way, "A more uncomfortable mode of conveyance was surely never adopted; the camels pace is more fatiguing, but that of the elephant is extremely trying after a few miles, and is so injurious to the human frame that the Mahouts (drivers) never reach an advanced age, and often succumb young to spine disease, brought on by the incessant motion of the vertebral column." From this, one may very well discern that the whole region, including Siliguri, was densely forested. During O'Malley's time (1907 : 136), the modes of conveyance had improved a bit. He wrote, "Strong bullock carts equal to very rough work ply along the few roads where the gradient is not too severe for wheeled traffic....." It was only after the First World War that a passenger automobile service was introduced between Siliguri and Darjeeling. Road administration in the past was the responsibility of both the Public Works Department and the District Road Committee. The former maintained more important roads in the District. The latter derived funds from the road cess and there existed District Road Fund and one of its Branch was located in Siliguri which collected cess within the Siliguri police station. Besides, there were six numbers of roads measuring about 67.9 kms. were maintained by the Siliguri Local Board.

The land measurement of Siliguri and adjoining areas started in the year 1891. During those days, the whole area was covered with deep forest and there was abundance of wild animals like tiger, leopard, elephant, deer, reptiles and birds. Besides, the area was prone to different types of diseases, the most fatal being malaria-kalajwar.

Table 3.1 : Increase in the population of Siliguri Subdivision

Year (1)	Population (2)	Increase Percent (3)
1872	47,985	
1881	63,038	31
1891	72,993	16
1921	75,787	4(for three decades)
1931	80,258	6
1941	90,014	12

Source : Bengal District Gazetteers, 1947

At the time of independence, the Siliguri Subdivision had an area of 22 percent of the District area and a population of 24 percent of that of the District. The population density was 349 and it was almost evenly distributed throughout the Subdivision with density varying from 342 in the Siliguri Thana to 366 in the Phansidewa Thana. The area of the subdivision under forest cover was small and large areas were well cultivated, much being under tea. As it lay almost wholly in the plains, a much higher density of the population might have been expected in the context that the neighbouring Sadar Subdivision of the Jalpaiguri District with many points of similarity carried a population of 540 persons to the square mile. Dash (1947) mentions that one of the reasons of this low density might be the unhealthiness of the Terai, rendering the importation of aboriginal tribes from the Chota Nagpur and the Santhal Parganas to develop tea gardens.

Despite the low density of population of the Siliguri Subdivision, one remarkable aspect was the abnormally high expansion of the Siliguri urban area. Dash in his 1907 edition of the Gazetteer had described Siliguri as a swampy malarious village close to the foot of the hills with a population of 784. In 1941, it had a population of 10,487 – a 73 percent increase over the 1931 figure of 6,067. In 1941, Siliguri had an area of 3.6 square miles and the population density of 2,913 persons per square mile. Dash lay down in this regard, “An indication of rapid expansion is found in a remarkable disparity between the number of males (7,121) and of females (3,366). This expansion has taken place in spite of unhealthy and insanitary conditions and has no doubt been due to Siliguri’s increasing importance as a focus of communications. The town’s population is just under 12 percent of the population of the Subdivision.” (Dash 1947 : 55)

The administrative head of Siliguri Subdivision was known as the Subdivisional Officer. He had the powers of a Munsiff and Small Causes Court Judge up to Rs.50. Besides, he had powers to depose of rent and other suits under Act X of 1859 (Dash 1947 : 43) His civil work was, however, light. Under him was a Sub Deputy Magistrate who looked after the government estates, D.I.Fund (Darjeeling Improvement Fund), treasury and registration. In 1887, Mahabirsthan Market grew up out of the D.I.Fund.

Administration in the Darjeeling District which also included Siliguri Subdivision suffered from peculiarities due to the special application of various enactments. The Bengal Tenancy Act was not in force and Act X of 1859 and Act VIII of 1879 regulated the rights and liabilities of the rural population. The Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919 was in force only in Siliguri Town area in the whole district (Dash 1947 : 44).

Darjeeling, which included Siliguri Subdivision had no representative in the Legislative Council constituted under the Government of India Act, 1919. It was excluded and declared a backward tract. As such, the expenditure for the internal administration of the district, including Siliguri Subdivision was not subject to the vote of the legislature. The overall administration of the district was vested in the Governor-in-Council. However, any Act passed by the legislature which extended to the whole of Bengal automatically applied to the Darjeeling District, unless the Governor-in-Council directed otherwise.

Under the Government of India Act, 1935, Darjeeling started sending representatives to the Bengal Legislative Assembly. However, it is worth noting here that for the purpose of election to that body, Siliguri Subdivision was excluded from the District and was included in the Jalpaiguri-cum-Siliguri General Constituency.

As the region was earthquake-prone, the practice of making brick and RCC houses was almost absent. Almost all the houses were made out of wood which was easily available. The only buildings made of brick at the time of independence in 1947 were the Siliguri Town Station Building, adjacent Railway Quarters, Post Office, Court, Treasury Building, Prison Building and the house of Harsunder Majumdar- 'Harhari Kutir'(presently demolished)- on the Station Feeder Road. However, on the other side of the Mahananda river in 1947, there stood the most beautiful RCC two-storeyed house of Siliguri called 'Padma Niwas' owned by

Santbir Lama. Presently, it houses the Guest House of Indian Oil Corporation (Chattopadhyaya 2000 : 17).

As far as residential areas are concerned, Hakimpara developed as a conglomerate of government officers and officers of private tea and jute companies who settled in Siliguri after it earned the status of sub-division in 1907. Similarly, Babupara developed as the residential area of the clerks of these concerns. The habitat which developed in the vicinity of the police station came to be known as Thanapara. Perhaps Milanpally, on the western side of the Station Feeder Road, got its name because of its mixed population which included lawyers, petty traders and businessmen, small jotdars, few marwaris and some bengalis. Besides, there were Mahanandapara on the skirts of river Mahananda and Tikiapara- the area of coal-ball makers (Chattopadhyaya 2000 : 17).

3.3 Local Governance in Siliguri in Pre-Independence Period

The first form of official self-governance in Siliguri town area was the constitution of the 'Union Board' in March, 1938. However, prior to that some form of locally organized institution was present which looked after the public utility services, though in a meager way.

Sanitary Committee – It was in the year 1915 that a Sanitary Committee was formed under the presidentship of a renowned lawyer Surendranath Bhattacharya. Its initial activities involved overseeing the sweeper in the disposal of night soil near the banks of Mahananda and Phuleswari rivers and later to Tikiapara. The method of disposal was simple – digging the ground, depositing and covering it (Chattopadhyaya 2000 : 16). It was under the presidentship of George Mehbart that during 1926-29, provision was made for night lamps on wooden poles on the major roads.

Local Board – Till 1921, there was no District Board, Local Board or Union Committee in the Darjeeling District unlike other districts. As such, many of the responsibilities of the District Board, medical and veterinary relief and village sanitation were met by the Darjeeling Improvement Fund under the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling (Dash, C.I.E. 1947 : 243). This D.I.F. existed even after the formation of District Board and Local Boards. The District Board in the Darjeeling District was introduced in the year 1921 under the Bengal Local Self-Government Act, 1885. This Board came into effect from 1st of April, 1922. Under

the same Act, three 'Local Boards' were also constituted and one of them was 'Siliguri Local Board'. Out of the 10 elected members in the District Board of Darjeeling, three were elected by the Siliguri Local Board.

The Siliguri Local Board consisted of 12 members and all of them were nominated members. Out of these twelve members, two were officials as ex-officio members, four were representatives of the Tea Industry, and the remaining six were non-officials. In 1940-41, three out of the twelve members were Europeans. This Board had 'elected official' as the Chairman (Dash, C.I.E. 1947 : 243).

The Siliguri Local Board acted as agent of the District Board. It did not have any independent source of income. Among its activity, the most important work was the repair and maintenance of minor roads. The following table 3.2. shows its main heads of expenditure in the year 1940-41.

Table 3.2 : Heads of Expenditure of the Siliguri Local Board, 1940-41

Main Head (1)	No. of Sub-heads (2)	Expenditure in Rs. (3)
General Administration	18	1,600
Minor(Veterinary) Departments	26	1,000
Civil Works	45	30,500

Source : Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, 1947

Union Board – The first form of self-governance in Siliguri town area was the constitution of the 'Union Board' in March, 1938 and its first president was advocate Laxminarayan Mazumdar (Chattopadhyaya 2000 : 16). It was constituted under the Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919. It is noteworthy that it was the only Union Board in the district. It consisted of nine members. Dash (1947) mentions that in the year 1940-41, the Union Board of Siliguri raised Rs.5,400 in taxation and received grants of about Rs.1,600. Dash lays down the main items of expenditure in that year as follows :

Table 3.3 : Main Items of Expenditure of the Union Board of Siliguri, 1940-41

Heads (1)	Expenditure in Rs. (2)
Roads	350
Drainage	325
Conservancy	4,500

Sanitation	540
Schools	400
Dispensaries	200
Miscellaneous	1,300

Source : Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, 1947

Before independence, the Union Board was responsible for providing public utility services. During those days, water supply were not available beyond Railway Station and Railway Colony despite the fact that the quality of drinking water was unhealthy during that time and thus the region was prone to many deadly diseases like malaria and kalajar. The same was true with provision of electricity.

During this period, Burdwan Road, Station Feeder Road, Hill Cart Road and Hospital-Court Road till prison had stone and brick surfaced roads. The other areas of the present Corporation area had a sporadic habitation, uninhabited land and jungles. Mention may be made of the present economic hub Khalpara, which was covered with water and water-hyacinth for most part of the year. The major roads near court, treasury, prison, post office, hospital and police station were lighted during night hours with kerosene-lamps. Besides, there was a wooden bridge on the river Mahananda which was constructed way back in 1878.

Regards education, the first school was founded in 1890 by an indigenous Christian Sashibhushan Chakraborty. The name of the school was Missionary Public Primary School and was located in the premises of the D.I. Fund Hat. Besides, two other schools were there in the pre-independent time, namely, Bengali Girls M.E. School in Babupara and Siliguri High School near Court. The present Additional District Library was the only public library and it was then known as Terai Harsundar Library. The only cultural institution was Mitra Sammilani on the Hill Cart Road and the only motion picture theatre was Tripti which is now extinct. The markets were Mahabirsthan and D.I.Fund Hat.

However, it is to be noted that though a Union Board was constituted in Siliguri in March, 1938 under the Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919, it was not endowed with enough technical knowhow and financial strength to cope effectively with the pressing problems of sanitation and drainage, particularly in the Bazar area. It is worth noting here that the Darjeeling Improvement Fund

realized nearly Rs. 12,000 from the Siliguri Bazar but its contribution to the Union Board was too meager (Dash, C.I.E. 1947 : 245).

Nonetheless, with regard to the conservancy system, the activity of the Board was fair enough. The operation involved 'hand removal to the trenching ground' type. In 1938, the conservancy of the Bazar area was handed over to the Union Board by the Darjeeling Improvement Fund. A contribution of Rs.2000 was made in this regard by the Fund (Dash, C.I.E. 1947 : 245).

3.4 Urban Governance and Development in Siliguri in the Post-Independence Period (1947-1994) : The Period of Siliguri Municipality

At the time of independence in 1947, the population of Siliguri was about 10-12 thousand. The Siliguri Municipality was established on 24th May, 1949 through a gazette notification under the Bengal Municipal Act of 1932. Initially, it was located in an abandoned wooden house of Md. Khuda Baksha on the Hill Cart Road, opposite of Meghdoot Cinema Hall. The first chairman of the municipality was the then Sub Divisional Officer (SDO), Mr. Sachindra Mohan Guha and the Vice-Chairman was Birendra Nath Roy Sarkar. Besides, State Government nominated other Commissioners were Abaninath Bhattacharya, Prodyut Kumar Basu, Bimal Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Digendranath Roy Sarkar, Mangturam Agarwala, Bindeswari Mishra, Ramapada Chattopadhyay, Haricharan Majumdar, George Mahbert, Dr. Kshirodnath Chattopadhyay and Dr. Gopal Chandra Ghosh. (Shibprasad Chattopadhyay, Purobarta, SMC, 2010, pg.29-30)

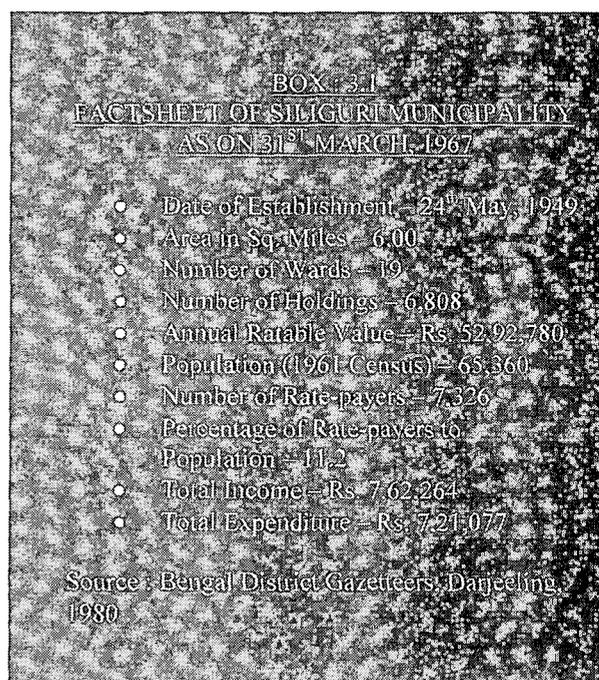
On 26th October 1952, the then Governor of West Bengal, Mr. Harendra Kumar Mukhopadhyaya laid the foundation stone of the Pour Bhawan at its present location which was inaugurated by Mr. Bireswar Majumdar (father of Naxal leader, Charu Majumdar) on 26th January, 1960 (Ghatak 1983).

With the amendment of the Municipal Act in 1956, provision was made for three-fourth elected Commissioners and the remaining one-fourth members nominated by the Deputy Commissioner of the Darjeeling District. The first elected Chairman under the amended Act was Jagdish Chandra Bhattacharya. Thereafter, leaving aside administrator Chairman on few occasions, the successive Chairmen of the Siliguri Municipality were Jiban Krishna Dutta, Krishnendra Narayan Choudhury, Swapan Kumar Sarkar, Ashok Narayan Bhattacharya and

Bikash Ghosh. In 1994, with the conversion of Siliguri Municipality to Siliguri Municipal Corporation, the nomenclature of Chairmen changed to Mayor.

The Siliguri Municipality started off with 8 wards and gradually increased to 16, 19, 30 and finally 47 in 1994 when it was elevated to the status of a Corporation. It had no Standing Committee functioning in the 1950s and 1960s. The administrative set up of the Municipality comprised of five departments – General Administration, Collection, License, Public Works and Sanitation and Public Health.

In the post-1947 period, Siliguri's population started increasing at a very fast pace beginning with the settlement of thousands of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan following the partition of the country in 1947 and the communal riots in 1950. As a result, during 1951-61, Siliguri town witnessed a 101.5 percent population growth. This unprecedented influx to Siliguri town was mainly due to the urbanization process which started taking place prior to independence and expansion of the tertiary sector. Thus, total number of workers employed in industry and construction in Siliguri urban area during this period rose from 2,194 to 5,744 persons, i.e., a rise of 162.6 percent in a decade (Siliguri Planning Organization 1965 : 9). From 1931 onwards itself, Siliguri Subdivision in general and Siliguri town in particular began to attract more and more immigrants from the Indian plains, particularly from Bihar and Rajasthan, in search livelihood and fortune. The bulk of these immigrants were traders, transport workers and white-collar employees. This immigration was witnessed because Siliguri town was an entrepot market and the most important transport node in north-eastern India. Thereafter, events like the Indo-China war in 1962, Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 and 1971; and the disturbances in Assam contributed in a major way for the inflow of settlers in Siliguri. As a result, the importance of Siliguri as a business and trading hub grew in leaps and bounds. This growth was further compounded due to its strategic position and entry points for the tourism



BOX : 3.1
FACTSHEET OF SILIGURI MUNICIPALITY
AS ON 31st MARCH, 1967

- Date of Establishment – 24th May, 1949
- Area In Sq. Miles – 6.00
- Number of Wards – 19
- Number of Holdings – 6,808
- Annual Rateable Value – Rs. 52,92,780
- Population (1961 Census) – 65,360
- Number of Rate-payers – 7,326
- Percentage of Rate-payers to Population – 11.2
- Total Income – Rs. 7,62,264
- Total Expenditure – Rs. 7,21,077

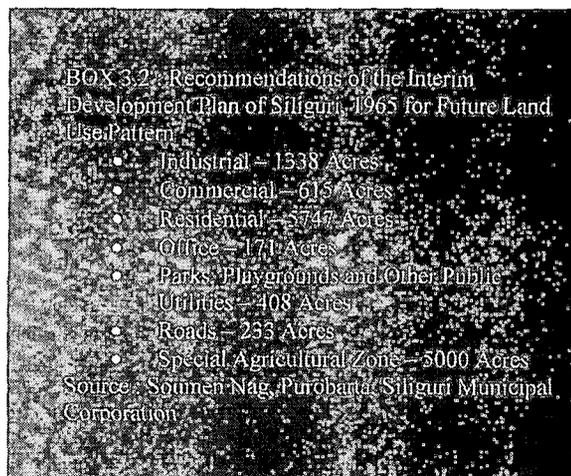
Source : Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, 1980

map of North Bengal which provided an impetus to attract big business houses and entrepreneurs to this booming city.

Talking of refugee influx in the district from former East Pakistan in the aftermath of partition, the number increased from 15,738 (8,931 males and 6,807 females) in 1951 to 38,162 (21,194 males and 16,968 females) in 1961. Out of these, over 57%, i.e., 21,794 (12,053 males and 9,741 females) lived in urban areas, mainly Siliguri town. Out of the total 8 refugee colonies in the district, 4 were in Siliguri town. This refugee influx helped in the growth of Siliguri town in many ways. The Refugee Rehabilitation Department made donations to colleges and schools for the construction of more buildings to meet the ever-increasing demand for education from the new settlers. In addition, the Department opened a market on a 3-acre plot of land at an expense of more than Rs. One Million for the benefit of about 800 refugee traders and named it Bidhan Market. Besides, the State Government advanced more than Rs. 1.5 lakh for the construction of roads, making sanitary arrangements and arranging water supply in the refugee concentrations within the Siliguri Municipality limits. (Subdivisional Officer, Siliguri quoted in Banerjee et al 1980).

This influx continued unabated in the aftermath of Indo-China War, creation of Bangladesh and disturbances in Assam. Besides, it attracted tradesman, businessman, labourers, job-seekers from other states, too. It was late realization on the part of the Siliguri Municipality to envision a development plan in the context of fast pace of urbanization of Siliguri town. The obvious result was the unplanned, haphazard growth with its bearing on the public and utility services.

It was after fifteen years of the establishment of the Siliguri Municipality that on 13th June, 1964 'Siliguri Planning Organisation' was established under the Development and Planning Department of the Government of West Bengal. At that point of time the population of Siliguri was about 65 thousand. For the purpose of future land use pattern of Siliguri, the Organisation prepared an 'Interim Development Plan for Siliguri' in 1965. This plan also sought to provide a futuristic mapping of the Environmental Impact Assessment of the town. Later on, in 1967, SPO prepared a 'Comprehensive



Development Plan' of the town. However, in due course, it was rightly felt that SPO was unable to deal effectively the manifold urban problems facing Siliguri primarily due to two reasons – one, SPO was a recommending authority and not an implementing authority and two, the area of the town was not confined to administrative jurisdiction of Siliguri Subdivision as urbanization process resulted in its expansion to the neighbouring Jalpaiguri district.

Thus, on 1st April, 1980 Siliguri Jalpaiguri Development Authority was established under the West Bengal Town and Country (Planning and Development) Act, 1979. The earlier SPO got subsumed into this newly formed SJDA. The SJDA prepared an 'Outline Development Plan' in 1986 for 260 sq. km. of the SJDA's area (about 22.47 % of the Authority's area) which included the whole of 15.5 sq. km. of the Siliguri Municipality. This plan got the approval of the State Government in 1992. In 1994, Siliguri Municipal Corporation and SJDA jointly brought out an 'Approach Paper' on urban development of Siliguri. This paper highlighted the need for 6,100 new residential units every year to meet the problems of housing in the city. However, it failed to identify the areas where such complexes would come up as well as for which income-group such complexes would be constructed.

Finally, SJDA came up with the 'Perspective Plan 2025 : Siliguri Jalpaiguri Planning Area' in February, 2004. The effort of such plan was initiated in May, 2002 and the task of the preparation of the plan was given to the Department of Architecture and Regional Planning, I.I.T., Kharagpur. The project was funded by UNICEF. The vision of the Plan as laid down reads thus, ".....There will be improved infrastructure and services, shelter for all, health and hygiene along with social amenities, encouraging the development of the body and the mind within an ecologically sustainable framework."(SJDA 2004 : xiii)

A brief overview of the efforts of the Siliguri Municipality with regards to the issues undertaken for study are as follows :

Sanitation – With regard to conservancy, manual scavenging was the primary mode. There

BOX : 3.3
Fact Sheet of Sanitation in Siliguri in
1967

- Number of Nightsoil Tanks – 13
- Number of men and women deputed for nightsoil removal - 108
- Number of coolies deputed for removal of sullage – 9
- Per day production of sullage – 3,250 gallons
- Number of refuse-trailers for road-cleansing – 5

Source : West Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, 1980

were men and women of various denominations for collecting nightsoil from service latrines. The Municipality maintained nightsoil tanks for the purpose of transportation of nightsoil. It also maintained personnel and refuse trailers for cleaning of public roads and drains. There were coolies deputed for the removal of sullage. However, road-side drains in the 1950s and 1960s in Siliguri utterly failed to serve the purpose of carrying waste water and excess rain. According to Siliguri Planning Organisation, "Five out of six drains are kutcha and are to no specification in shape or gradient; nor are they maintained properly to fulfil their dual roles. This has resulted in the patches of filthy drains interspersed with dry and partially-blocked stretches." Besides, haphazard construction of houses had also added to the difficulties of the drainage system. It may also be mentioned that during these decades, storm water from the area 8 to 9 km. north of the town used to enter Siliguri posing grave drainage problems. As such, the Interim Development Plan prepared by the SPO sought to improve upon the drainage system thus, "A network of open brick and mortar storm-water drains will be constructed to carry the rain-water to suitable outlets. An inlet time of 10 minutes will be adopted for major road drains, with less inlet time for minor roadside channels, depending on the area drained. The latter would have pitched trapezoid sections while the former would be paved ones. A self-cleansing velocity would be maintained.....The river Mahananda is the obvious drainage outfall for the municipal area.....the Fuleswari may be properly trained to serve as the trunk drain" (Siliguri Planning Organisation 1965 : 20). Siliguri Municipality reported no 'khatals' and slaughter houses till 1967.

Water Supply – Interim Development Plan for Siliguri, 1965 laid down the then position of water supply arrangements in Siliguri. The Report maintained that 3 out of every 10 houses did not have any drinking water supply of their own; 8 out of every 10 houses do not find their present source of supply sufficient to meet their requirements conveniently and would welcome additional supply, especially for drinking; 65.5 % of water supply came from individual shallow ring wells; and Siliguri Municipality provided 30 such wells for public use. The Plan of the SPO recommended the followings with regard to improvement of water supply in the town :

- (i) In the initial stages, an average per capita per day consumption of 10 gallons was proposed for 75 percent of the population through street taps;

- (ii) About 25% of the population would be supplied 30 gallons per capita per day through individual house connections;
- (iii) It recommended the then scheme of water supply to be extended by the addition of another four 80,000-gallon reservoirs to the only existing reservoir erected by the Public Health Engineering Department.

Transportation, Pollution and Urban Forestry – It was after the partition that need was felt to directly connect Siliguri with Calcutta and as such National Highway No. 31 was constructed. The estimated figure of carts and pack animals in urban Siliguri in August 1947 were 300 and 414 respectively (Banerjee et al 1980 : 313). Though the figures of motorized vehicles is not available exclusively for Siliguri town but in the District, there were 202 taxis, 101 trucks, 42 buses in public service and about 381 private vehicles (287 cars, 34 motor cycles and 60 lorries), all licensed in 1944 (Banerjee et al 1980 : 313). One may, however, discern that a sizeable number of them might have plied in Siliguri. In 1961, the Siliguri Local Board maintained 14 village roads, two of which were pony tracks and the rest jeepable, though unmetalled. (Banerjee et al 1980 : 311). The figures of 1967 show that there were 33 nos. of buses plying daily within the Siliguri (local) route covering route length of about 32 kms. It may be noted that during the decade of 1960, there were no leading transport operator based in Siliguri. Almost all of them operated from Darjeeling and Kalimpong. It was on 15 May, 1968 that the North Bengal State Transport Corporation started a daily express bus service between Siliguri and Calcutta. From the above figures on motorized vehicles, one may make an assumption that pollution from vehicular emission would have been too meager to attract attention of the Municipality regarding urban social forestry. Moreover, the town was sparse and one may assume that a whole lot of mature trees would have been present along the streets. This is evident from the fact that Siliguri Municipality did not maintain any park till 1967 (Banerjee et al 1980 : 455). However, the haphazard urbanization process, the fast pace of population growth and unprecedented growth in the number of motorized vehicles resulted in the cutting of tree tracts available as well as increase in the volume of air pollution, in particular, the suspended particulate materials. The time has, thus, come to seriously give attention to include urban social forestry in the developmental planning process of Siliguri rather than planting saplings for the sake of planting those only on some important days in a year.

Slum Improvement and Urban Poverty Alleviation – The Siliguri Municipality had no ‘bustee’ at least till 1967 as reported by the Chairman (Banerjee et al 1980 : 450). However, the early years of 1990s saw 48 recognized slums in Siliguri. This can be attributed to the inflow of migration into the city, even more vigorously, in the decades of 70s and 80s which outweighed the natural growth of the city due to Bangladesh war, Assam disturbances and establishment of some important State Government offices. This becomes evident with the growth in population density (persons per square km.) from 4193 in 1971 to 9903 in 1981 to 14624 in 1991 (ILGUS 1992-93).

It is to be noted that Siliguri has experienced a very slow pace of industrialization in the decades of 70s and 80s and actually the total number of industrial units declined between 1971 (174 number of units employing 8324 persons) and 1985 (162 number of units employing 8338 persons) (Ghosh et al 1995 : 192) Thus, lack of industrialization has made a service and market town with majority of employment avenues in the tertiary sector. Again, one finds disguised unemployment in the tertiary sector in 1992 with 3 shops per 100 population, making majority of shops operate at the subsistence level. Ghosh et al (1995) maintains that “Lack of expansion of the organised sector associated with the ever expanding informal sector has resulted in serious unbalanced economic growth. The informal sector can expand absorbing unskilled labour without any major capital expenditure..... The major occupations in the informal sector in Siliguri are the following – street corner vendors, hawkers, rickshaw pullers, road-side repair shop workers, lottery ticket sellers and suchlike. The average earning of a worker in the informal sector vary between Rs. 15 and Rs. 40 per day.” They further lay down, “As urban infrastructure trails behind the growth of population, slums have emerged in plenty throwing a serious challenge to the local body as well as the state government.”

BOX 3.4

Factsheet of Slums in Siliguri based on ISS Survey, 1992

- Number of Recognized Slums – 48
- % of Population in Slums to the Total Population – 21.57
- Slum Dwellers living Below poverty Line – 47
- % of slum population without any formal education – 40
- % of slum population being migrants – 80
- Distribution of migrants in 24 sample slums in the ISS Survey – Bangladesh (38); Orissa (19); Bihar (18); West Bengal other than Darjeeling District (17); Nepal (5); and Sikkim (3).

The slums in the early years of 1990s could be classified into three categories – (i) refugee colonies in the heart of the town (relatively better off and the municipality was obliged to provide physical and social infrastructure in these areas); (ii) squatter settlements in the encroached railway land (the municipality had no control over this land and consequently reluctant to provide physical infrastructure in these areas); and (iii) squatter settlements in the river beds (poorest among slums and unfit for human settlements)

The attempt for slum improvement and urban poverty alleviation in Siliguri was the Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums (EIUS). It was launched in 1981 and was locally known as '*basti*' development programme. The components of EIUS were paving the lanes within slum area, street lighting, low cost sanitation on community basis, drainage improvement and supply of potable water from spot sources.

In 1984, UNICEF assisted Urban Community Development (UCD) Programme was launched. It was the first town in West Bengal where this Programme was launched. This programme emphasized on providing basic social services, such as, pre-natal care for women, training programme for skill formation for women, pre-school facilities, immunization of children below one year, etc. The name of the programme was changed to Urban Basic Services (UBS) scheme in 1986 with the structural changes like, district, rather than town, being the unit of operation; appointment of district co-ordinators; and constitution of monitoring committees at the town, district, state and national levels. From 1991-92, UBS was changed into Urban Basic Services for the Poor (UBSP). Ultimately, the institutional structure of UBSP was subsumed with Swarna Jayanti Sahari Rozgar Yojana in 1997.

The Nehru Rozgar Yojana, an income generating programme, was launched in 1989 which had three major components – micro-enterprises; urban wage employment for the unskilled workforce (Siliguri was not eligible for it as it was restricted to towns with population less than one lakh); and the creation of employment through shelter upgradation scheme. The micro-enterprise component provided for bank loans upto Rs. 35,000 and a subsidy of 25 %. The shelter upgradation component provided for assistance up to Rs. 4,000 per household which included 75% HUDCO loan and 25% government subsidy.

Besides, a state sponsored programme Liberation of Scavengers Programme (LSP); eradication of illiteracy programme in cooperation with the Department of

Mass Education of the Government of West Bengal; and low cost sanitation component of the Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT) were also in operation in Siliguri to improve the appalling living conditions of the slum dwellers in pre-1994 period when Siliguri Municipality was elevated to the status of the Municipal Corporation.

3.5 Siliguri Municipal Corporation : A Brief Profile

The Siliguri Municipal Corporation was constituted on 12th January, 1994 under the Siliguri Municipal Corporation Act, 1990. The provisions of this Act was similar to that of the West Bengal Municipal Act, 1993 with the following variations :

- (a) The Mayor is the First Citizen of the Corporation.
- (b) The Mayor nominates one of the Councilors as the Deputy Mayor.
- (c) The Chairman, elected by the Councilors, will exercise the powers in the Corporation similar to that of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.
- (d) The administration of the Corporation is to be run by the Mayor-in-Council consisting of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor and maximum of 10 other elected members of the Corporation.
- (e) In order to run the administration of the Corporation in a smooth and decentralized manner, there will be the provision of Borough Committees at the intermediate level between the Corporation and the Ward. These are groups of contiguous wards. Each Borough Committee, constituted by the Councilors of the wards of the concerned Borough, is to supervise the civic administration of the Borough area.
- (f) The Chief Administrative Officer of the Corporation is to be known by the designation Chief Executive Officer.

Thus, the variations were mainly related to changes in nomenclature rather than structural and functional changes, except for the provision of constitution of Borough Committee as an intermediate level between Corporation and Wards.

However, with the enactment of the West Bengal Municipal Corporation Act, 2006 (West Bengal Act XXXIX of 2006 and the assent of the President of India was first published in the *Kolkata Gazette, Extraordinary*, of the 29th May, 2008), the Siliguri Municipal Corporation Act, 1990 was repealed (along with the respective Corporation Acts of Asansol, Chandannagore and Durgapur). As such,

at present, the basic legal framework for municipal governance of SMC is the West Bengal Municipal Corporation Act, 2006. In all, this Act consists of 8 Parts, 25 Chapters, 403 Sections and 5 Schedules. In 2007, an amendment was made to this Act and is known as the West Bengal Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2007 (West Bengal Act XXIX of 2007).

The upgradation of Siliguri from a Municipality to a Corporation was announced in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly on 12th May, 1990. It was on 15th May, 1994 that the first election to the Siliguri Municipal Corporation was held. Late Bikash Ghosh was elected the first Mayor of the city and remained to be so till 2008. Mr. Nurul Islam took him over as the Mayor. The present incumbent is Mrs. Gangotri Datta.

Since the creation of the Siliguri Municipal Corporation on 12th January, 1994, the administration of municipal affairs was carried out as per the provisions of the Siliguri Municipal Corporation Act, 1990. However, with the enactment of the West Bengal Municipal Corporation Act, 2006, the earlier Act was repealed. As such, at present, the municipal affairs of Siliguri are conducted in accordance with the provisions of the latter Act. Besides, there are a host of other Acts and Rules of the Central Government and State Government which aid and provide guidelines in the management of the affairs of Siliguri.

The Municipal Corporation of Siliguri was constituted with 47 wards, adding 17 wards more to the erstwhile 30 wards of the Siliguri Municipality. At the time of its establishment as Corporation, its population was approximately 0.37 million (as per 1991 census). However, the population of 30 wards of the earlier Municipality was a high 2.27 lakhs (1991 census) with area being 15.54 sq. km., thereby maintaining a high population density (person per sq. km.) of 14624. On the other hand, the added area constituting 17 wards (14 in Jalpaiguri district and 3 in Darjeeling district) consisted of 1.49 lakhs population within 26.36 sq. km. area, thereby maintaining a population density of 5652 per sq. km. As a result, the population density of Siliguri at the time of its elevation to Corporation came down drastically to about 8985 persons per sq. km. (as per 1991 census). With further increase in the pace of urbanization, the population density of Siliguri as per 2001 census increased to 11271 persons per sq.km. The fast pace of urbanization process has, thus, put a formidable challenge before the SMC authority with regard to the provision of basic public services. This task is to be further seen in the backdrop of 48 notified slum pockets before the establishment of the Corporation and their

substantial increase to 154 nos. at present. Few basic information and the Ward-wise population status of Siliguri are laid down in Tables 3.4 and 3.5.

Table. 3.4. : Basic Information on SMC and SMC Area

Sl. No. (1)	Particulars (2)		Figures/ Names (3)	Sl. No. (1)	Particulars (2)		Figures/ Names (3)		
1	Longitude		44.26	19	Nos. of Government Libraries		6		
2	Latitude		26.43	20	Nos. of Children benefitting under MDM Scheme		30340 (appr.)		
3	Hieght above Sea-level (in metres)		122	21	Nos. of Markets	Under SMC	6		
4	Area (in sq. km.)		41.91			Under D.I.Fund	1		
5	Av. Annual Rainfall (in cm.)		323			Others	19		
6	Population (2001 census)		472374	22	Nos. of Stadiums		2		
7	Population Density (per sq.km.)		11271	23	Nos. of Parks		47		
8	Decadal Growth Rate of Population (1991-2001)		4.8 %	24	Nos. of Lodgings and Hotels	Under SMC	4 (2 in Siliguri & 2 in Kolkata)		
9	Literacy Rate		79.31 %			Others	153 (appr.)		
10	Nos. of Households		96496	25	Nos. of Community Halls	Under SMC	1		
11	Nos. of BPL Families		22889			Others	56		
12	Nos. of Wards		47	26	New Trade Licences (2009-10)		18551		
13	Nos. of Boroughs		5	27	Birth Registration (2009-10)		12122		
14	Nos. of Employees	Permanent	789 (sanctioned)	28	Death Registration (2009-10)		2206		
		Temporary	1200 (appr.)	29	Slum Statistic (2001 Census)	Nos. of Notified Slums	154		
15	Nos. of Electricity Poles		23680			Slum Population	173111		
16	Rivers flowing across Siliguri	Mahananda, Phuleswari, Jorapani, Panchonai and Mahishmari				Nos. of Slum Households	33231		
		17	Length of Roads (in km.)	Under NHAI	3 (appr.)	30	Nos. of TCGs under SJSRY		875 (Upto March, 2010)
				Under PWD	17 (appr.)		31	Nos. of Beneficiaries under IGNOAPS	
Under SMC	1397.56 (appr.) both pucca & kutch	32		Nos. of Hospitals	Govt.	1			
18	Nos. of Educational Institutional		Govt. Aided Colleges		4	Private Nursing Homes	33		
		Private Colleges		1	33		Under IPP-VIII Extension Scheme	Matrisadan	11
		Polytechnic College		1		Health Centre		8	
		I.T.I.		1		Sub-Health Centre		61	
		Govt. Aided H.S.Schools		12		OPD Centre under SMC		1	
		Govt. Aided Secondary Schools		19					
		Govt. Aided Primary Schools		94					

Source : Purobarta, 2010, Siliguri Municipal Corporation

Table 3.5 : Ward-Wise Data of Siliguri Municipal Corporation as per Census

2001

Ward No. (1)	Area in Acres (2)	Area in Sq. Km. (3)	Total Population (4)	Male (6)	Female (7)	Total SC (8)	Male SC (9)	Female SC (10)	Total ST (11)	Male ST (12)	Female ST (13)
1	570.5	2.3	17843	9990	7853	2796	1471	1325	191	100	91
2	371.5	1.5	11436	5835	5601	677	353	324	299	136	163
3	251.25	1.02	11753	6469	5284	580	336	244	176	90	86
4	280.75	1.13	20028	11238	8790	1337	715	622	56	27	29
5	301.05	1.22	15326	8502	6824	2468	1333	1135	54	28	26
6	50.95	0.2	9023	5483	3540	181	95	86	16	10	6
7	81	0.32	9889	5239	4650	288	174	114	6	4	2
8	49.5	0.2	7843	4572	3271	172	96	76	0	0	0
9	70.5	0.28	7306	3960	3346	71	50	21	29	22	7
10	191	0.77	4720	2558	2162	211	91	120	49	31	18
11	41.05	0.16	2933	1648	1285	67	33	34	4	1	3
12	58.95	0.24	3772	2050	1722	108	66	42	7	3	4
13	69.25	0.28	5070	2623	2447	252	129	123	79	39	40
14	80.75	0.32	6407	3258	3149	373	184	189	54	26	28
15	84.05	0.34	8103	4094	4009	373	180	193	7	3	4
16	60.05	0.24	5984	2967	3017	232	106	126	8	7	1
17	49.95	0.2	5485	2821	2664	343	171	172	39	22	17
18	40.65	0.16	8440	4431	4009	2770	1491	1279	52	27	25
19	49.35	0.2	3233	1670	1563	293	146	147	0	0	0
20	60	0.24	9869	5110	4759	2508	1280	1228	9	5	4
21	80.55	0.32	5875	2897	2978	1124	555	569	21	13	8
22	119.45	0.48	10293	5232	5061	1532	791	741	15	6	9
23	70	0.28	6205	3127	3078	959	490	469	153	71	82
24	120.05	0.48	11165	5740	5425	1847	940	907	48	26	22
25	129.95	0.25	8525	4486	4039	310	174	136	130	67	63
26	60.85	0.24	4873	2521	2352	438	219	219	14	10	4
27	89.15	0.36	5630	2866	2764	291	139	152	37	15	22
28	170	0.69	9578	5070	4508	2042	1029	1013	27	12	15
29	170	0.69	4783	2462	2321	144	82	62	17	7	10
30	108	0.43	6510	3238	3272	853	419	434	15	7	8
31	200.05	0.8	13414	6881	6533	2853	1473	1380	64	31	33
32	319.95	1.29	11845	6333	5512	1137	614	523	311	164	147
33	280.15	1.13	13543	7217	6326	1713	974	739	126	82	44
34	319.85	1.28	16560	8671	7889	3779	1955	1824	79	43	36
35	481	1.94	14945	8142	6803	3740	1929	1811	115	53	62
36	239	0.96	13553	7026	6527	4636	2413	2223	273	136	137
37	160	0.64	14431	7468	6963	3531	1828	1703	51	24	27
38	161.45	0.65	11235	5768	5467	1243	634	609	40	19	21
39	194.07	0.78	11237	5911	5326	579	304	275	38	22	16
40	579.03	2.43	18164	9448	8716	2446	1255	1191	163	87	76
41	800.45	3.24	12951	6836	6115	1756	933	823	229	118	111
42	1029.68	4.15	14711	7741	6970	6592	3426	3166	435	215	220
43	439	1.77	9661	5291	4370	1208	653	555	46	25	21
44	182	0.73	11522	6017	5505	2092	1089	1003	74	32	42
45	66.23	0.26	7117	3754	3363	438	236	202	238	116	122
46	900.21	3.63	21222	11569	9653	2316	1222	1094	648	317	331
47	170.22	0.68	8363	4415	3948	1313	690	623	382	196	186
Total	10452.4	41.9	472374	250645	221729	67012	34966	32046	4924	2495	2429

Source : Siliguri Municipal Corporation

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