

## Chapter 7

Conclusion

C O N C L U S I O N

We conclude our discussion in the following order :

- (a) First, we summarise the general trend of development of the region as dependent on the natural resources and their use.
- (b) Second, we try to understand what general objectives of improvement are likely to fulfil the requirements of the region.
- (c) Third, we try to find our specific objectives which might ensure a balanced regional development.

a) General Trend

i) The region of North Bengal has recently overcome the situation when 'The dragging feet of urbanization remained bogged down in the mire of economic backwardness" (Bhattacharya,1984).

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ii) It has been observed that the economy of North Bengal is chiefly based on agriculture.

iii) It has further been observed that the role of linkage is extremely important in the formation and development of the economy of North Bengal.

iv) Attempts of generating small scale industries depending on local resources (mostly agricultural) have been successful to a great extent.

v) It has been observed that a good number of promising urban centres have emerged, and also some older urban centres have lost importance for which special care should be taken.

b) General Objectives

It is very difficult to set up the general objectives which ensure balanced regional development and thus fostering national integrity over a long span of time. Not only the concept of regional development and national integrity varies widely but at the same time the occurrence of catastrophies in unforeseable future as the result of natural calamities, political

reformulation, industrialization etc. can make the relevance of the existing objectives questionable. In this way, the general preference of the planners exists on the continuous process of learning.

Basically, three schools of thought are prevalent. The third among them is actually a compromise between the first two. The first two schools can be distinguished as the 'rural fundamentalism' and the 'urban fundamentalism'. The 'rural fundamentalists' believe that the burden of the urban areas increases as a result of the migration from the rural areas where the major number of people reside. Improvement of rural areas, it is argued, will decrease the migration and thereby the pressure on the urban areas will be maintained below the elastic limit. On the other hand, it is further argued, that relatively low standard of living of the rural people will enable the Government to develop a region at a lower cost. The 'urban fundamentalists' argue in a different way. Centralised investment, specially in the secondary and tertiary section, produces job opportunities and increases productivity

as well as savings. Furthermore, in this modern world the international connections exist solely through cities. And, these connections are of utmost importance from the viewpoint of property. Because only these connections keep us acquainted with the modern technology of production, management and innovations. The third school follows a path which takes the plus points (in the context of the region under consideration) of both the 'Urban fundamentalism' and the 'rural fundamentalism'. From this point of view the graded hierarchy of services and employment opportunities of the settlements starts from the urban centres and goes down to the smallest villages.

We have decided to follow the third school. In a region where the economy is mostly based on agriculture, any consideration for the improvement of urban areas must also be linked with the improvement of rural areas. In this consideration we follow the idea of growth pole put forth originally by Perroux (1950,1955). His theory was further developed by Boudeville

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(1961, 1964). Specifically, the relevance of the theory to the Indian context was advocated by Misra (1974, 1978). According to his suggestions the development planning for the different regions of India should aim at the development into a systematic order comprising of basically the four tiers of hierarchy in descending order which is given as

- i) Growth Pole
- ii) Growth Centre
- iii) Growth Points
- iv) Service Centres.

The growth pole or large city is the regional centre. The growth points or small towns and service centres maintain close relations with the villages. For a region, the villages actually form the 5th and the 6th Order places in the hierarchical order which are given as follows :

- v) Central Villages
- vi) Villages

The growth centres are the medium order towns which maintain the link between the regional centre on the one hand and the growth points and service Centres on the other.

According to the advocates of this theory, the existence of a hierarchical order mentioned above ensures maximum decentralization of socio-economic services. We formulate the specific objectives for making the contributions of the urban centres more effective to the regional economy of North Bengal in the light of above concept in the following manner :

- i) Comparison of the existing urban hierarchy and the model urban hierarchy ( according to the idea of growth pole mentioned above).
- ii) Pinpointing the urban centres which need special attention regarding development to the extent of promoting higher order functions.
- iii) Suggesting improvement of the linkage system which is so important in the context of North Bengal. We do this depending on the regional imbalances described in some earlier chapter.

c) Specific Objectives and Plan

i) In a previous chapter we have formulated the hierarchical order ( Table 4.1) of the urban centres of North Bengal depending on the central functions following Davies's (1967) method. There we observed a noticeable similarity between the actual number of urban centres in the different grades and the theoretical number of urban centres in the different grades according to  $K = 3$ .

Comparing that hierarchy and the model hierarchy (according to the idea of growth pole strategy), we can say that Siliguri behaves as the growth pole of the region. The urban centres Jalpaiguri and English Bazar behave as the growth centres. The role of growth points are performed by such urban centres like Koch Bihar, Darjiling, Balurghat, Raiganj, Kurseong, Alipurduar and Kalimpong. The remaining 28 urban centres, namely Islampur, Dinhata, Mal, Mathabhanga, Odlabari, Old Maldah, Kaliaganj, Mainaguri, Mekhliganj, Uttar Bagdogra, Tufanganj, Falakata, Haldibari, Dhubguri,

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Gangarampur, Hilli, Alipurduar Railway Junction, Dalkhola, Cart Road, Jagannathpur, Gaikata, Dabgram, Jhaljhalia, Dómohini, Jaldhaka Hydel Power Project, Guriahati, Uttar Latabari and Kasba are take the role of Service Centres.

ii) As discussed in previous chapters, we have observed that all the urban centres noted above are not having necessary central functions. For instance, the sub-regions including Maldah and West Dinajpur on one hand and Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar on the other are depending on a single university and a very small number of colleges. There should be further improvement in this regard.

It has further been observed that the urban centre of Balurghat ( a city, and also a district headquarters) is sadly deprived of the central functions because of the absence of the railways and national highways. An exactly similar situation is witnessed in the case of another district headquarters, Koch Bihar, which suffers for similar reasons such as except for the presence of an unimportant Meter Guage (branch)

railway line the town is virtually cut off from important railway connections. From the data of the 1991 census (complete report of which is yet to come out) we see that still today Koch Bihar has not been able to attain the status of a city and Balurghat has not improved in a significant way during the decade 1981-91. But, a look at the map of the region of North Bengal will convince all that from the point of view of the location of these two urban centres an improvement in transport has great effect on increasing the scope of the central functions which will ensure the development of the whole region.

Another important urban centre is Dabgram. According to 1991 census, this is now a city. Interestingly enough it is still having a very low centrality score. An improvement in this direction will ensure a rapid growth of a commercial city region having nucleus at Siliguri.

Raiganj, though deprived of good railway connections, has attained the status of a city in 1991. This

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has been possible because of its location on the national highway and its closeness to another promising urban centre, namely English Bazar (a city, according to 1991 census). This urban centre also has a great potential provided it is given proper attention regarding railway connections.

During the selective case studies we have seen that the urban centre of Alipurduar is having a very strategic location. Improvement of this urban centre regarding higher education, health and local communication is very important.

iii) "Towns are the products not of gaps, valleys, bays and estuaries, but of man's use of these features for his routes. Nodality is imparted by the convergence of established routes, and is as lasting, but not more so, than the routes. If, for one reason or other, trade should leave its old channels, the life-blood of town is withdrawn, and they decay (Smailes, 1961). Such is the fate of Domohini, Haldibari and Jalpaiguri. We have discussed about such a situation

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in detail in the previous chapters. The only solution for saving these urban centres from decay is improving linkages in such a way that the urban centres do not fall away from the existing trade-routes.

Furthermore, after English Bazar the entire length of the B.G. railway through the region consist of a single track allowing only one train to move at a time. Work is, of course, in progress for making this route double tracked. <sup>Until is</sup> ~~this~~ complete, the linkage system of the region remains definitely dwarfed. This is one of the reasons though not the main one, that English Bazar is much more dependent on Calcutta with which it has a very good linkage. Secondly, as stated earlier, the railway network should be a wider one, especially providing greater coverage to the districts of Koch Bihar and West Dinajpur. Similarly, the national highways should cover those two districts with a greater mileage.