

## Chapter 2

### Urban Growth and Urbanization in North Bengal in Spatial and Temporal Perspective

Main discussions are on

- A Historical Evolution
- B Emergence of New Towns in North Bengal
- C Urban Growth in North Bengal
- D Ranking of the Urban Centres
- F The size-classes of urban centres

Urban Growth and Urbanization in North Bengal

The growth and development of urbanization in north Bengal have generated an interest in the minds of many scholars. The geographical environment, the social transformation and the changing political pattern have influenced the townscape to such an extent that each major town & city of the five districts of North Bengal has become a distinct cultural entity, representing certain distinctive elements.

A. Historical Evolution

In 1780, Rennell made a reference to the fame of two towns (i) Old Maldah and (ii) Koch Bihar (Rennell, 1780).

The urban heritage of Maldah may also be traced to Panini's writings in 5th Century B.C. where he mentions 'Gaudapada' (from which the word, 'Gauda' came) in Eastern India, the ruins of which are found today in the present old Maldah. During the reigns of the 'Pala' & the 'Sen' kings, 'Gauda' attained a great splendour (Ghosh, 1961). The district Maldah came into existence under the British informally only in 1813 although the East India Company obtained the Diwani of Subah of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the Emperor Shah Alam

in 1765 (Havell, 1972). In 1882 a treasury was established in Maldah but it was actually in 1859 when a Magistrate and collector was placed in the district that the treasury started functioning.

The Khen Raja Niladhvaj founded the city of 'Kamatapur' in Koch Bihar in the early part of the 7th century which later formed a part of the Koch kingdom founded by Biswa Singh. At the time of permanent settlement in 1793 the East India Company settled the zamindari with the Koch Bihar King in his own name. This is the origin of the Chaklajot estates of Koch Bihar in Rangpur district and of the present-day Indian and Bangladesh enclaves in this region. From this time the extent of Koch Bihar was confined to the present Koch Bihar district.

The district of Jalpaiguri as an administrative unit came into being in 1869 with the amalgamation of the Western Duars district. The latter formed in 1864, comprised the land between Tista and Sankosh rivers. The district had three sub-divisions namely,

- i) Sadar with Head Quarters at Mainaguri
- ii) Buxa with head quarters at Buxa
- iii) Alipurduar and Dalimkote alternatively.

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In 1867, Dalimkote (at present Kalimpong) was transferred to Darjiling district (Grunning, 1911).

The district West Dinajpur comprises an area which in ancient times formed a part of the Kingdom of Pundrabardhana (the countries of Pundras). Some interesting legends are there about the origin of the Pundras in the Mahabharata. During the times of Mahabharata Bannagar was the capital of a mythical King. Its ruins are found today a little north of Gangarampur of the present district. The discovery of a number of inscriptions of the Gupta period in West Dinajpur bears ample testimony to the sway of the Guptas over Pundravardhana. During the reign of Akbar, the district of West Dinajpur was included in the Sarkars of Tajpur and Pinjore. In 1780, a court was established at Tajpur. In 1905, a revolutionary movement started in the district and it continued to figure in the reports of the Government as a troubled district. The name of Dinajpur is derived from the name Raja Ganesh who assumed the title of Danujamardana deva. The district took its present shape in August 1947, with the partition of Bengal (Majumdar, 1977).

In the development of Darjiling district the following factors took an important role :

- i) its development as a Sanatorium or health resort and

ii) the development of tea plantations.

The historical significance of these two factors cannot be ignored. Darjiling is the first of a series of hill stations to be developed by the Colonial rulers for their own use. Imitating the character of a British town in its layout, Darjiling created a typical atmosphere meant only for the foreigners while the success of the experiments in the production of commercial tea opened a new horizon for the economic exploitation of its unique physical environment (O'Malley, 1907).

In connection with the opening of the tea plantations, there was an enormous demand for labour needed for the clearing of forest, the construction of all-weathered roads and the railways -- the first of its kind in the world at such high altitudes, and in the wake of that the physical, economic and social character of the entire region underwent rapid changes. Other economic factors responsible for the growth of this town were the availability of wood and timber from the forests for its use as fuel and used for manufacture of charcoal and <sup>Tea</sup> chests and their use as building materials for different purposes, the hotel trade and commercial activities based on increasing items of agricultural products of specialized nature like oranges among fruits and important condiments like ginger and cardamom.

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The original idea of developing Darjiling as a frontier town with a strategic bearing seems to have had mellowed down with time during the British rule.

The urbanization of North Bengal has undergone major changes in the later part of the 18th Century. Rennell, who surveyed and prepared his "Memoir of a map of Hindostan" or "The Atlas of Bengal and Bahar in VIII parts" describes the nucleus development of old Maldah. According to him Englazabad ( English Bazar ) sprang up around the silk and cotton factory of Maldah. In 1810, Buchanan Hamilton visited this region and states that the principal means of communication was along the river and mentions the excellent roads of English Bazar. To him the town had many good, closely-built houses and it seemed to be a city of Europe than most of the country towns of Bengal. He also mentions old Maldah as a highly prosperous business centre of cotton and silk manufacture, having French and Dutch factories.

Like most other parts of India, the urbanization of North Bengal is an accretion of time, The most tangible changes associated with the urbanization of North Bengal have also been the most visible ones and these have centred around the growth in size and number of the urban places as part of the landscape. Thus, the history of the urban

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evolution of North Bengal is one of the gradual transformation and assimilation of different cultures and social groups which have developed in different periods of Indian history and have kept their ever-lasting impression on different elements of the townscape. The copper plate inscriptions in Hilli remind us of the ancient Guptas (448 A.D.). The tank Mahipaldighi in Bansihari Police Station of West Dinajpur remind us of Pala King Mahipala; Gaur was the principal city of Magadha country. Lakhnauti thrived during the Muslim rule; Bannagar was the capital of a mythical king, the unearthed buildings of which are found today on the bank of river Purnabhaha. The rule of the Sen dynasty over North Bengal was replaced by Mohammad Bakhtyar Khalji in 1201 A.D., establishing the muslim rule in the region. The impact of British culture is clearly visible with the establishment of a number of educational institutions meant for the children of European descent, attracting students from all over the country and some of them acquiring a high fame in the long run are functioning in full form still today.

Among the newly formed districts, Darjiling came up first in 1850 with the establishment of Deputy Commission's Office. The district of Maldah came into existence in 1859 when the Magistrate and the Collector was placed in charge

of the district; the district of Jalpaiguri as an administrative unit came into being in January 1869. Until January 1950 Koch Bihar used to be a feudatary state in political relations first with the British Government and then with the Government of India. The formation of the district took place on 1st January, 1950. West Dinajpur born first after the partition of India in 1947, came into its present shape in 1956.

However, the rapid urban growth which is a characteristic feature of the development of many other regions of the country was not witnessed in the newly formed districts mentioned above for a long time prior to the independence of the country. In 1876, Hunter records only the five following towns in the region as a whole: they are Darjiling Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, English Bazar and Maldah. The rise of the cities and their growing areal influence initiated a change in the patterns of life of the people living in the immediate surroundings of them.

This did not happen in the region where for nearly a period of one-and-a-half-century the urban centres were not large enough to exercise that influence and it was not till 1971 that the first city emerged which, considering its size, was far from that position. However, the



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emergence of these towns had an important role to play in shaping the socio-economic character of the region as a whole. For instance, Darjiling came up as a sanatorium in 1829 and after the completion of roads under the skilled supervision of Lord Napier and the laying out of the station it had grown into a town in a short period. "The successful political deal with the king of Sikkim in 1835 bringing the chunk of country containing the rural settlement of Darjiling into the lap of British rulers initiated the most profound change in the economic and social history of North Bengal" ( Bhattacharya, 1984). According to the report of Lloyd and Chapman, in 1836 there were only a few huts and a population of about 100 in 1839 which swelled within a very short period into about 10,000 in 1849 due to large immigration from Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, the latter providing slave labour to a growing market for employment. The establishment of three large cantonments in North Bengal, two of them being in Darjiling (Jalpahar & Lebong) and the third at Buxa in Jalpaiguri district has completely altered the previous cultural landscape and has added a new pattern to the physical structure of the city.

The construction of the Darjiling Pankhabari road in 1840 and the Hill Cart Road in 1861 ushered in a new history, providing easy communication between the hills

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and the plains for the first time, extending direct access from the hills through the plains in the south to Calcutta -- the premier city, port and the capital of British India in those days. In 1881, the Darjiling Himalayan Railway was opened which again established for the first time direct and the quickest possible surface transport between Darjiling and Calcutta.

The first Hydel power station in India was established here as well. The construction of the Railways and the roads contributed immensely to the development of tea industry which slowly made itself as the economic backbone of the hill region (O. Malley 1907). By 1870, there were 56 tea gardens in the hill region using 11000 acres of land and in 1874, the area under tea had increased to 18,888 acres, employing 19,000 people.

The scene showing urban centres changed gradually, but very slowly. The record may not be impressive but is considered significant for a region which apart from the development of tea Industry which in its wake brought in the all weather roads, railway etc, remained utterly neglected and was rather avoided for dread<sup>a</sup> diseases especially black fever. The record at the beginning of

the twentieth century shows that a number of new towns had been added to the picture by that time. They are Kurseong in Darjiling district and Buxa cantonment in Jalpaiguri district. In 1901 there were only 10 towns. The actual development of towns is noticed during the period onwards from 1931 which gave birth to Siliguri (Class I town in 1981), Balurghat (Class I town in 1981), Alipurduar and Raiganj.

B. Emergence of New Towns in North Bengal

A look at the emergence of new towns taken in chronological order gives a clear picture in this regard. The new towns listed for census years are as follows :

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1901 | Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, Darjiling, English Bazar, Kurseong, Dinhata, Mathabanga, Old Maldah, Haldibari, Buxa Cantonment.              |
| 1931 | Siliguri, Kalimpong, Lebong, Jalapahar.   |
| 1941 | Hilli, Tufanganj, Mekhliganj  |
| 1951 | Raiganj, Alipurduar and Balurghat   |
| 1961 | Mainaguri, Domohani, Kaliaganj, Dhubguri, Gangarampur, Mal, Falakata, Islampur.   |
| 1971 | Dalkhola, Guriahati, Alipurduar Railway Junction.   |
| 1981 | Dabgram, Cart Road, Uttar Bagdagra, Uttar Latabari, Odlabari, Gairkota, Jaganathpur, Jhaljhalia, Kasba, Jaldhaka Hydel Power Project. |

During this entire period of eight decades the appearance of new towns has neither been uniform in number nor in spatial consideration. As it appears, the largest number of additions was in 1961 followed by that in 1981. On the other hand, only three centres have disappeared from the list out of which one, that is Buxa cantonment, has been abandoned and has turned into ruins today whereas the other two centres namely Lebong and Jalapahar were amalgamated with Darjiling town.

C. Urban Growth in North Bengal

There is a clear distinction between urbanization and urban growth (Smailes, 1961). Urban growth is a spatial and demographic process and refers to the increased importance of towns and cities as concentrations of population within a particular economy or society. Urbanization, on the other hand, is a spatial and social process which refers to the changes of behaviour and social relationship which occur in society as a result of people living in towns and cities. (Clark, 1982). Further, urban growth is considered as "increases in urban population" (Drakasis-Smith, 1986) in contrast to urbanization which according to Drakasis is growing concentration of urban population.

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However, in order to understand the pattern of growth it is necessary to find out the level as well as the scale of urbanization and this can be measured by the proportion of urban to total population whereas the scale may be measured by taking the absolute number of urban population (Bose 1973).

Hence the nature of urban growth and its resulting pattern can better be understood from a detailed analysis of various attributes. Some of these are (i) decennial growth rate of population; (ii) size and spacing of urban units; (iii) worker nonworker ratio; (iv) classification of workers according to their distinctive occupation; (v) sex ratio etc.

The decennial growth rate along with the spacing of urban units in the region may be taken up for a detailed analysis.

The table (2.1) represents the decadal growth of urban population during the last 80 years. The increasingly rapid rate of growth of urban population is an important feature followed by an uneven nature of growth and together they have played an important role in altering the status of the urban centres in the region. Two towns during this

period, namely Siliguri and Balurghat have developed into cities in 1981. It may be necessary in this connection to note that according to Indian Census, urban places having a population 100,000 and above are treated as cities and others with a smaller population as towns. Though urban population has been continuously on the increase at varying rate throughout the region, English Bazar experienced a decline in one decade 1911-21 ( -4.81).

In contrast, exceptionally high rates of growth like 107.76 per cent and 101.66 per cent were experienced by Koch Bihar and Haldibari during 1941-51, resulting mostly from in-migration following partition<sup>(a)</sup> in 1947. It is, however, not possible to analyse the trend of growth for the towns of West Dinajpur prior to 1951-61 as it was then a part of erstwhile East Pakistan. It, however, shows abrupt increase in the decade 1951-61 which was 108.69 per cent. In the same decade Mækhliganj recorded an unprecedented growth of 150.29 percent. The rate of growth was also very high (101.67 per cent) in the case of Siliguri but it was less than that in the previous decade, with an all time record of 209.72 per cent in one decade for the entire region. The growth rate has also been remarkably

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(a) Foot note: The undivided India winning independence in 1947 from British rule was partitioned into two independent countries, namely India and Pakistan (West and East )

Table 2.1

Decadal variation in the growth rate  
of Urban population in North Bengal

( in Percentage)

City/ town	1971-81	1961-71	1951-61	1941-51	1931-41	1921-31	1911-21	1901-11
Siliguri	57.80	48.90	101.90	209.72	72.85	x	x	x
Balurghat	67.74	148.41	48.99	x	x	x	x	x
English Bazar	37.07	33.95	44.44	29.37	38.06	14.44	-4.81	3.80
Koch Bihar	27.93	49.48	26.11	107.76	35.17	3.28	5.72	3.66
Alipurduar	31.43	88.25	16.24	x	x	x	x	x
Raiganj	52.09	33.76	108.69	x	x	x	x	x
Jalpaiguri	11.74	13.17	18.13	48.60	46.43	30.59	26.60	18.14
Darjiling	32.62	5.47	20.97	23.44	28.51	-4.82	17.12	12.30
Mainaguri	27.18	44.37	x	x	x	x	x	x
Kalimpong	22.03	-6.67	50.54	39.46	36.26	x	x	x
Kaliaganj	26.39	46.21	x	x	x	x	x	x
Islampur	67.69	65.44	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dhupguri	37.37	58.01	x	x	x	x	x	x
Gangarampur	53.74	53.13	x	x	x	x	x	x
Kurseong	9.37	22.48	14.43	37.95	14.01	15.61	15.63	24.73
Mal	36.85	20.54	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dinhata	23.77	3.81	93.33	65.38	40.54	9.87	24.93	51.86
Palakata	66.83	12.18	x	x	x	x	x	x

City/ town	1971-81	1961-71	1951-61	1941-51	1931-41	1921-31	1911-21	1901-11
Matha- bhanga	20.53	31.33	64.00	41.54	23.69	21.07	15.40	35.62
Dalkhola	31.66	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Haldibari	40.47	16.63	38.24	101.66	25.84	-17.04	8.84	24.10
Hilli	-0.57	1.06	-27.73	20.05	x	x	x	x
Tufanganj	16.56	21.19	49.96	64.02	x	x	x	x
Mekhliganj	20.04	11.28	150.29	4.47	x	x	x	x

Source : Compiled from the census of India of the respective years.



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rapid for Balurghat, with a record of 148.41 per cent in 1961-71. Partition of Bengal naturally triggered off the flow of people from East Pakistan and this is reflected in most of the towns, especially those near the border, swelling the population almost overnight.

In 1971, the concept of urban agglomeration was first introduced which indicating urban concentrations where more than one unit joining together in their respective sprawl, gave rise to a spatially continuous stretch of urbanized area. In 1971, there were two such cases in the region: (1) English Bazar Urban Agglomeration and (2) Koch Bihar Urban Agglomeration. In 1981, another feature was recorded for the first time. It was the outgrowth, meaning quasi-urban units lying beyond the actual boundary of the mother town where urbanization has already started.

According to the census of India 1981, the number of urban agglomerations in the region has increased to six, including new ones like Mainaguri out growth, Raiganj urban agglomeration and Balurghat urban agglomeration.

Table 2.2

Growth rate of urban population in North Bengal by Districts

(in percentages )

	1971- 1981	1961- 1971	1951- 1961	1941- 1951	1931- 1941	1921- 1931	1911- 1921	1901- 1911
Darjiling	55.58	24.60	53.09	62.44	33.77	51.48	16.78	14.89
Jalpaiguri	84.94	35.75	87.19	138.22	46.43	28.01	25.91	14.39
Koch Bihar	26.58	35.28	42.38	87.09	48.76	4.46	9.29	12.33
West Dinajpur	54.04	75.50	135.98	563.28	-	-	-	-
Maldah	42.88	33.95	44.44	29.37	38.06	14.44	-4.81	3.80
West Bengal	31.61	28.41	35.97	35.52	63.69	15.01	7.16	13.70

Source : Compiled from the Census of India of the respective years.

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Table (2.2) shows that the districts of North Bengal have experienced more or less a steady increase in the absolute number of urban population as it is directly reflected in the percentage of urban to total population from 1901 onwards except in the period 1911-21 with negative results in the districts of Jalpaiguri (-25.91) and Maldah (-4.81). It is evident that the decennial growth rate of urban population for both the districts as well as in the region had declined during this decade.

The growth rate was the highest in the decade 1931-41. It is because the World War II acted as a big impetus to the economic activities to keep the supply base strong for war bases in the Asiatic front. In the pattern of growth again there is recognizable changes detectable from the decade 1941-51 onwards when the rate of growth had been remarkably high in all the districts, except Maldah. Since the number of urban centres is a significant factor in having a larger total capacity of drawing in rural population or other migrants, and this finds full expression in all the districts recording an increasing number of urban centres, the latter remained almost static in Maldah, offering least scope for in-migration and this having a poor over-all record of concentration of urban population as shown in the growth rate.

For the other four districts this has undoubtedly been due to immigration -- a one way traffic from across the international boundaries. The year 1947 was indeed a landmark in the demographic history of the State, and of India as a whole. There was a huge exodus of Muslims to Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) and counter influx of the non-Muslims to India on the eve of partition (Gopal Krishnan & Chandana, 1973). In the case of the towns of North Bengal in-migration of displaced persons far exceeded the out-migration of the Muslims, and consequently many towns, especially those like Raiganj, Alipurduar and Balurghat, sprang suddenly into importance, appearing as urban centres for the first time in 1951. The tempo of urban growth was maintained during 1951-61 when urban population increased by 135.98 per cent in West Dinajpur and 87.19 per cent in Jalpaiguri, both of them bordering on East Pakistan. At the same time, the number of urban centres increased from 23 to 28 during the period from 1951-61 to 1961-71.

In contrast, the decade 1961-71 witnessed a considerable fall in the growth rate of both the total population and the urban population. The district of West Dinajpur has registered the highest rate of growth

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(75.50) per cent among all the districts of the region. Being agriculturally rich, the growth of urban population in the urban areas is attributed largely to the growth of tertiary sectors engaged in the transportation of agricultural surplus and also due to an accident of history - the influx of in-migrants from Bangladesh. (Ghosh, 1971). The other four districts of North Bengal - Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, Darjiling and Maldah, which are among the least urbanized areas of the State had relatively higher rates of growth in 1951-61 and 1961-71. In 1981, the highest growth rate was recorded by Jalpaiguri (84.94) per cent and the lowest rate of growth was in the district of Koch Bihar (26.58 per cent ).

Thus, starting from Darjiling in the Northern extremity of the region where the district town of the namesake alone with a population of 57,603 accounted for 55.19 per cent of the total urban population of the Sadar Police Station, the same pattern is found in the case of the other urban centres like Siliguri (66.37 per cent) Balurghat (48 per cent) and English Bazar (32.99 per cent) respectively.

Table 2.3

Percentage of Urban Population to total  
Population in North Bengal by districts 1941, 1981

	1981	1971	1961	1951	1941
Darjiling	27.86	23.05	23.16	21.22	15.45
Jalpaiguri	14.08	9.60	9.11	7.23	3.28
Koch Bihar	6.91	6.83	7.01	7.48	4.18
West Dinajpur	11.14	9.34	7.48	5.82	-
Maldah	4.78	4.22	4.16	3.75	3.22
North Bengal	11.44	9.25	8.82	7.80	4.46
West Bengal	26.49	24.75	24.45	24.80	21.24

Source : Compiled from the Census of India of respective years.

The role of urban growth does not, however, give a full picture unless the distribution of urban population is considered in the context of the total population. This is shown in Table 2.3 for each district of the region.

It is clear from the above table that the percentage of urban population to the total population has been much higher in the district of Darjiling all through the period from 1941-81 than all the districts as well the average for the whole region. This, however, does not give a true picture since being one of the smallest districts of the state, it has a small total population for its difficult terrain and as such the urban population makes a larger percentage of the total. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a steady growth has been maintained by all the districts with a lone case of reversal in 1961 for Koch Bihar.

Considered in terms of the concentration of urban population as expressed by its spatial distribution in different districts, the rate of concentration has been far below the state's average in each censal year for all the districts, barring Darjiling coming near to it.

Further, strangely enough it has also been lower than the regional average in many cases. In short, the rate of urbanization has been rather slow in the region as a whole as compared with most of the other districts of West Bengal. In Koch Bihar from the decade 1961-71, the growth rate was relatively low than in other prior decades.

In spite of these facts, there are a few cases of urban centres which in no uncertain term, have positively contributed to increasing the pace of urbanization in the region.

In 1981, the two towns, namely Siliguri and Balurghat, have acquired the status of class I towns in terms of the categorisation made by the Indian census for those reaching a population of 100,000. Siliguri, a sub-divisional headquarters of Darjiling district, is rather a newly emerging urban centre which is growing into a sprawling and throbbing city with extensive commercial and industrial activities, transport and communication network along with educational and other urban facilities. Now, looking at the distribution of urban population it may be noted here



that, the next larger town of the district of its namesake, Darjiling, happens to be the district headquarters, and two other towns -- Kurseong and Kalimpong-- are Sub-divisional headquarters. In the district of Darjiling, Jalpaiguri and Maldah the urban population is almost entirely concentrated in the headquarters of the district and sub-divisional administration. West Dinajpur is an exception in the entire set up where a number of urban centres other than basing on administrative activities, have developed mainly as centres of trade and commerce. They are Kaliaganj, Gangarampur, Hilli, Dalkhola etc. However, the location of the community development administration in these places has also played a very important part in their urban development.

To be more specific, Darjiling, Kalimpong and Kurseong are the three hill Stations which have derived their importance from their being the seats of administration and also trading centres. Siliguri along with its surrounding areas, which is already undergoing a rapid process of urbanisation, is one of the few recognised growth centres of the State. The Municipal town

with a population of over 154,378 (1981) has emerged as the major urban centre of North Bengal and the gateway to Assam, Sikkim, Bhutan and northern Bihar with immense potential for development.

Siliguri is emerging as the new centre of development because of its proximity to the tea producing areas of West Bengal and having an advantageous location for despatching tea to other regions. It is also a trading centre of timber and hardware goods maintaining surface transport link with Calcutta on the one hand and Assam, Bihar, Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan on the other. Its latest importance is in functioning as a tea auctioning centre where bidders arrive from different countries of the world.

D. Ranking of Urban Centres :

'The uneven distribution of urban population is revealed from the percentage distribution of area and the population of the divisions of a unit' (Gibbs, 1961)  
A division may be treated as more populous if it possesses higher share of the total population than its share of the total area. The urban centres

of North Bengal have been taken as individual units when the urban areas of the different urban centres form the divisions. (Table 2.4, 2.5).

However, it is important to keep in mind that neither the population size, nor the population density is a true indicator of urbanization (Jones 1970). Better indicators are the growth rate of population and the degree of congestion. We have already discussed and compared the growth rate of population of the urban centres of North Bengal earlier in this section.

One can note that, English Bazar records the highest density in both 1971 and 1981, i.e. 13,247 persons per sqkm and 17,065 persons per sqkm respectively. The second position is taken by Balurghat where the density was 10,531 persons per sqkm in 1971 and 13,569 persons per sqkm in 1981. But the growth rate during the decade 1971-81 gives a different picture of ranking which was 57.8 per cent for Siliguri and 67.74 per cent for Balurghat against only 37.07 per cent for English Bazar. A similar type of ranking as in the case of growth rate may be obtained using the degree of congestion. The degree of congestion of a particular town is expressed by  $(X-Y)$  where X is the percentage

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Table 2.4

Ranking of Urban Centres (1971)

Total area of N.B. 205.3 sqkm

Total Urban population 686,660

Urban Centres	Area in Sq. km.	Urban Population	Density in Sq. Km.	% of Urban area to the total urban area of North Bengal	% of Urban Population to the total urban Population of North Bengal	Rank of the town/ (X-Y)
	1	2	3	4 (X)	5 (Y)	6
Siliguri	15.54	97,484	6,273	14.19	7.57	6.62(III)
Darjiling	10.6	42,873	4,044	6.24	5.16	1.08
Kalimpong	8.7	23,430	2,697	3.41	4.23	-.82
Kurseong	5.1	15,425	3,320	2.39	2.48	-.09
Jalpaiguri	10.08	55,159	5,472	8.03	4.91	3.12
Alipurduar	9.30	36,667	3,942	5.34	4.52	.82
Alipurduar Railway Junction	7.20	17,787	2,470	2.59	3.51	-.92
Dhupguri	14.6	16,808	1,151	2.45	7.11	-4.7
Mainaguri	12.38	15,808	1,276	2.30	6.03	-3.7
Mal	2.6	10,951	4,211	1.59	1.27	.32
Domohani	18.57	7,706	415	1.12	9.04	-7.9
Falakata	4.9	7,194	1,468	1.05	2.39	-1.3

Table t.4 Contd.

	1	2	3	4(X)	5(Y)	6
Koch Bihar	8.29	53,684	6,475	7.82	4.04	3.78
guriahati	5.1	8,980	1,760	1.31	2.48	- 1.17
Dinhata	1.6	11,737	7,335	1.71	.77	.94
Mathabhanga	1.9	9,167	4,824	1.34	.92	.42
Haldibari	1.5	5,098	3,399	.74	.73	.01
Tufanganj	.9	4,209	4,677	.61	.43	.18
Mekhliganj	3.9	3,777	968	.55	1.89	-1.3
Balurghat	6.37	6,7088	1,0531	9.77	3.10	6.67 (II)
Raiganj	10.6	4,3191	4,075	6.29	5.16	1.13
Kaliaganj	9.0	2,1169	2,352	3.08	4.38	-1.3
Islampur	13.9	1,5715	1,131	2.29	6.77	-4.48
Gangarampur	9.0	1,4809	1,645	2.16	4.38	-2.2
Hilli	3.7	6,096	1,648	.89	1.80	- .91
Dalkhola	2.12	5,622	2,651	.82	1.03	- .21
English Bazar	4.63	6,1335	1,3247	8.93	2.25	6.68 (I)
Old Maldah	3.2	6,691	2,091	.97	1.56	-.59

Source : Calculations based on data available in the Census of India, 1971, Vol. 22, West Bengal Part 1A, General report.

Table 2.5

Ranking of Urban Centres ( 1981 )

Total urban area (North Bengal) 313.4  
 Total Urban Population (North Bengal) 1081556

Name of the Urban Centre	Area in Sq. km.	No. of Urban Population	Density	% of Urban Population to the total of North Bengal	% of Urban area to the total of North Bengal	(X-Y)	Rank of the town
	1	2	3	4(X)	5(Y)	6	7
Siliguri	15.53	154378	9940	14.27	4.96	9.31	I
Darjiling	10.57	57603	5449	5.33	3.34	1.99	
Kalimpong	8.68	28885	3328	2.67	2.77	-.1	
Kurseong	5.05	18008	3566	1.67	1.61	0.06	
Cart Road	17.99	11038	614	1.02	5.74	-4.72	
Jaldhaka H.P.	.81	3533	4361	.33	0.26	.07	
Uttar Bagdogra	1.63	8708	5342	.81	0.52	0.29	IV
Jalpaiguri	10.08	61743	6125	5.71	3.22	2.49	
Alipurduar	10.89	48605	4463	4.49	3.47	1.02	
Alipurduar Railway Junction	8.64	22968	2658	2.12	2.76	-.64	
Mal	2.56	14991	5859	1.39	.82	.57	
Domohani	18.57	10339	557	.96	5.9	-4.94	

Table 2.5 Contd.

	1	2	3	4 (X)	5 (Y)	6	7
Falakata	4.92	11998	2439	1.11	1.57	-.46	
Dhupaguri	14.55	23098	1587	2.14	4.64	-2.5	
Mainaguri	12.38	19568	1581	1.81	3.95	-2.14	
Dabgram	45.86	76402	1666	7.06	14.63	-7.57	
Gairkata	2.96	5955	2012	.55	.94	-.39	
Odlabari	9.27	6887	743	.64	2.96	-2.32	
Uttar Latabari	6.68	8667	1297	.80	2.1	-1.3	
Balurghat	8.3	112621	13569	10.41	2.65	7.76	II
Raiganj	10.64	60343	5671	5.58	3.39	2.19	
Kaliaganj	9.0	26817	2980	2.48	2.87	-.39	
Islampur	14	26353	1882	2.44	4.47	-2.03	
Gangarampur	9	22767	2530	2.11	2.87	-.76	
Hilli	3.7	6061	1638	.56	1.18	-.62	
Dalkhola	2.12	7402	3491	.68	.68	0	
Kasba	3.90	6362	1631	.59	1.24	-.65	
Koch Bihar	12.09	67327	5569	6.22	3.85	2.37	
Guriahati	5.1	12774	2505	1.18	1.63	-.45	
Dinhata	3.26	14536	4459	1.34	1.04	.3	
Mathabhanga	1.9	11053	5817	1.02	.61	.41	

Table 2.5 Contd.

	1	2	3	4 (X)	5 (Y)	6	7
Haldibari	1.5	7130	4753	.66	.47	.19	
Tufanganj	.9	4906	5451	.45	.29	.16	
Mekhliganj	3.9	4534	1163	.42	1.24	- .82	
English Bazar	4.63	79010	17065	7.31	1.48	5.83	III
Old Maldah	2.39	5655	2366	.52	.76	- .24	
Jaganathpur	4.2	3952	941	.37	1.34	- .97	
Jhalijhalia	3.2	8579	2681	.79	1.02	- .23	

Source : Calculations based on data available in  
Census of India, 1981, Series-23, West Bengal.



of urban population of the centre to the total urban population of the region and  $Y$  is the percentage of urban area of the centre to the total urban area of the region. The positive signs of  $(X-Y)$  indicate that the associated centres contain a larger share of urban population corresponding to their respective areas. It means that the particular urban centre is congested and the degree of congestion is measured by the value of  $(X-Y)$  itself. The negative signs indicate just the reverse. The tables 2.4 & 2.5 show the degree of congestion of the urban centres of North Bengal in 1981 and 1971 respectively. Further, they show the following interesting cases.

- a) In 1971, the first three urban centres according to the degree of congestion were English Bazar, Balurghat and Siliguri. In 1981, the order changed to Siliguri, Balurghat and English Bazar.
- b) In 1971, there were 26 urban centres in North Bengal, out of which 13 enjoyed the positive value of  $(X-Y)$ . Those urban centres were Siliguri, Darjiling, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Mal, Koch Bihar, Dinahata, Mathabhanga, Haldibari, Tufanganj, Balurghat, Raiganj and English Bazar. All these urban centres retained almost the same value of  $(X-Y)$  in 1981.

For Siliguri only the degree of congestion increased at a relatively high rate (from 6.62 to 9.31); for Balurghat the degree of congestion increased from 6.67 to 7.76. But for English Bazar the degree of congestion decreased slightly from 6.68 to 5.83. In 1981, we see 17 urban centres enjoying positive value of (X-Y) out of which one has just zero for (X-Y).

These figures indicate that the degree of congestion is consistently increasing in most of the urban centres of North Bengal. And, the very high rate of this process enjoyed by Siliguri has given the urban centre the character of a regional centre.

E. The Size-Classes of Urban Centres :

The urban areas are graded into six classes by the census authorities according to their respective population figures in the following order :

Class I	- with population 1,00,000 & above
Class II	- with population 50,000 to 99,999
Class III	- with population 20,000 to 49,999
Class IV	- with population 10,000 to 19,999
Class V	- with population 5,000 to 9,999
Class VI	- with population below 5000

According to this, the urban centres of North Bengal fall into a number of classes with the predominance of lower than upper class centres.

The size classes of urban centres of North Bengal which act as seats of administration are given below :

Table 2.6

Size - Classes of Urban Centres

Sl. No. Town/City	1981	1971	1961	1951
1. Siliguri	I	II	II	III
2. Balurghat	I	II	III	IV
3. English Bazar	II	II	III	III
4. Koch Bihar	II	II	III	III
5. Alipurduar	II	II	III	III
6. Raiganj	II	II	III	IV
7. Jalpaiguri	II	II	III	III
8. Darjiling	II	III	III	III
9. Maynaguri	III	IV	IV	-
10. Domohani	-	V	V	-
11. Kalimpong	III	III	III	IV
12. Kaliaganj	III	III	IV	-
13. Islampur	III	IV	V	-

Table 2.6 Contd.

Sl. No.	Town/City	1981	1971	1961	1951
14.	Dhupguri	III	IV	IV	-
15.	Gangarampur	III	IV	V	-
16.	Kurseong	IV	IV	IV	IV
17.	Mal	IV	IV	V	-
18.	Dinhata	IV	IV	IV	V
19.	Falakata	IV	V	V	-
20.	Mathabhanga	IV	V	V	VI
21.	Dalkhola	V	V	-	-
22.	Haldibari	V	V	VI	VI
23.	Hilli	V	V	V	V
24.	Tufanganj	VI	VI	VI	VI
25.	Mekhliganj	VI	VI	VI	VI

Source : Census of India of the respective years.

Table (2.6) shows the classifications of the urban centre with administrative responsibilities. In this respect the lowest position is taken by Tufanganj and Mækhliganj which in 1981 had 16.56 percent and 20.04 percent decennial growth rate as compared with 21.19 percent and 11.28 percent in 1971.

Siliguri and Balurghat, the two cities are in Class I, having a population of 1,54,378 and 1,12,621 respectively in 1981. The case of Dabgram, a non-municipal town, is quite peculiar. In 1971, Dabgram mouza in spite of being geographically contiguous to Siliguri Municipality and a population having slightly more than 38,000, was still considered to be a rural area as it failed to satisfy other norms prescribed by the census for an urban area, whereas in 1981 it has been considered as an urban area with a population of 76,210. As a matter of fact, Dabgram forms an integral part of Siliguri in all considerations, physical, social and economic. There cannot be any reason for showing it separately apart from avoiding municipal responsibilities since Dabgram lies in Jalpaiguri district.

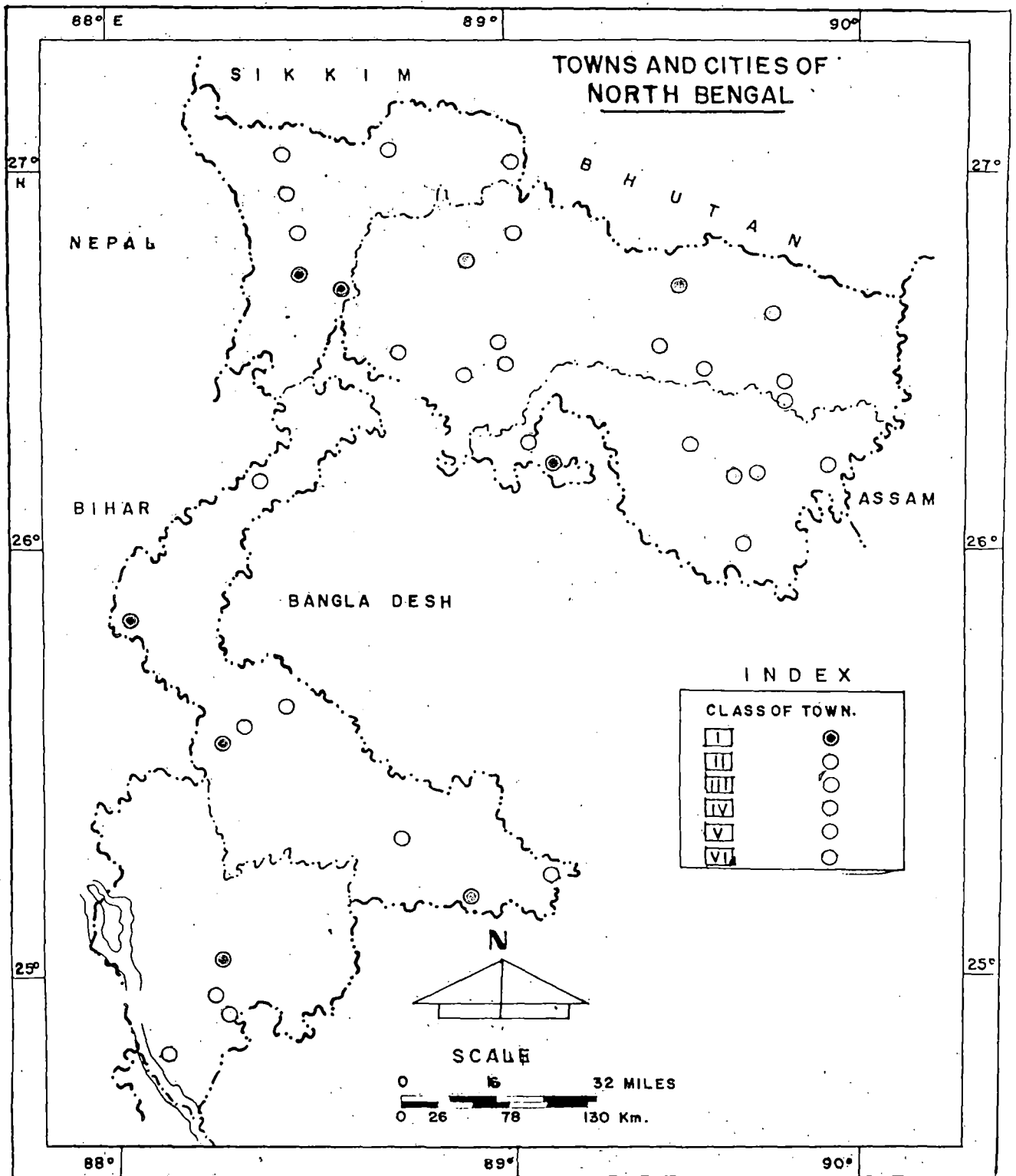


Fig. - 3

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The following 5 towns namely English Bazar, Koch Bihar, Alipurduar, Raiganj and Jalpaiguri have earned their respective berths in Class II in 1971 and remained in the same position in 1981 while Darjiling has climbed from a class III to the position of a Class II centre in 1981. The towns which got 'promoted' from class IV to Class III are Alipurduar Railway Junction, Dhupguri, Islampur and Gangarampur. Those towns which climbed the ladder from class V are Guriahati, Mathabhanga, Domohani and Falakata. In the case of Jalpaiguri, its prosperity centred round the tea gardens about 180 of which are spread over the entire district. During the decades of 1931-41 and 1941-51 the growth rate of this town remained almost at the same level which stood at 46.43 per cent. There was a fall in the growth rate in 1951 and 1961 when it slid down to 18.18 per cent and 13.17 per cent respectively, declining further to 11.74 per cent in the following decade. As it appears, the town is losing its importance to the newly emerging city of Siliguri, both as a centre for tea-industry and as a trading centre or supply base for the tea gardens. The town seems to be doomed to stagnation except for the fact that there is some scope for setting up industrial units based on timber and fibres, especially Jute, in the town.

In the case of Koch Bihar town, the population has grown three-fold (107.66 per cent) in the decade 1941-51 as compared with a much lower growth rate in the previous decade (35.17 per cent). This is due to large amount of immigration from the erstwhile East Pakistan. The growth rate shows abrupt fall in the following decade, 1951-61, to 26.11 per cent with a recovery in the next two decades with 49.48 per cent in 1971 and 27.93 per cent in 1981.

Except some servicing and repairing units, Koch Bihar has no industry worth the name. Trade and commerce and other services account for 65 per cent of the male workers. The importance of the town is due to the presence of the headquarters of North Bengal State Transport which employs 19 per cent of the male workers of the town.

Further, the importance of Koch Bihar lies also in its being the principal urban centre of a tobacco-producing and processing area.

Among the towns added to the list in 1981 in the region as a whole are as follows. Cart Road appeared as a Class IV town; Uttar Bagdagra, Uttar Latabari, Oldlabari,



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Gairkata, Jhaljhalia and Kasba as Class V towns having population between 5000 to 9999. Two new towns have appeared as Class VI centres in 1981. They are Jagannathpur and Jaldhaka Hydel Power Project with a population of 3952 and 3553 respectively.

Thus, the total number of towns increased from 28 to 38 with an urban population increasing from 686,660 in 1971 to 1,081,556 in 1981. The commercial growth of most of the towns in response to agricultural development in their service zones, the expansion of industrial activities in many of them like Siliguri, Maldah etc and the provision of education, health, administrative and financial services are the salient features of urbanization, contributing to greater concentration of urban population and taking a part in the spatial development of urbanization in the region.