

CHAPTER III: AREA AND THE PEOPLE

For the purpose of this study the village Purba Rangia has been selected which falls under Atharakhai Gram Panchayat, Siliguri Sub-division in Darjeeling district, West Bengal. It is a newly established village and the people of this village mostly depend on stone based occupation. However, various institutions, important places are adjacent to the village and particularly the district Darjeeling, it has an importance from various points of view. Its location, climate, scenic beauty, forests, hills and so on are famous in all over the world. In this regard the details of this district are mentioned first and later about the studied village and locality.

District- Darjeeling

Geographical and Administrative location: The district of Darjeeling located at the extreme north of the state, West Bengal which touched the boundary line of Sikkim. The district of Darjeeling lies between $26^{\circ} 31'$ and $27^{\circ} 13'$ north latitude, and between $87^{\circ} 59'$ and $88^{\circ} 53'$ east longitude. The principal town, which is also the administrative headquarters of the district, is Darjeeling, situated in the lower Himalayas in $27^{\circ} 3'$ north latitude and $88^{\circ} 16'$ east longitude. (L.S.S. O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 1).

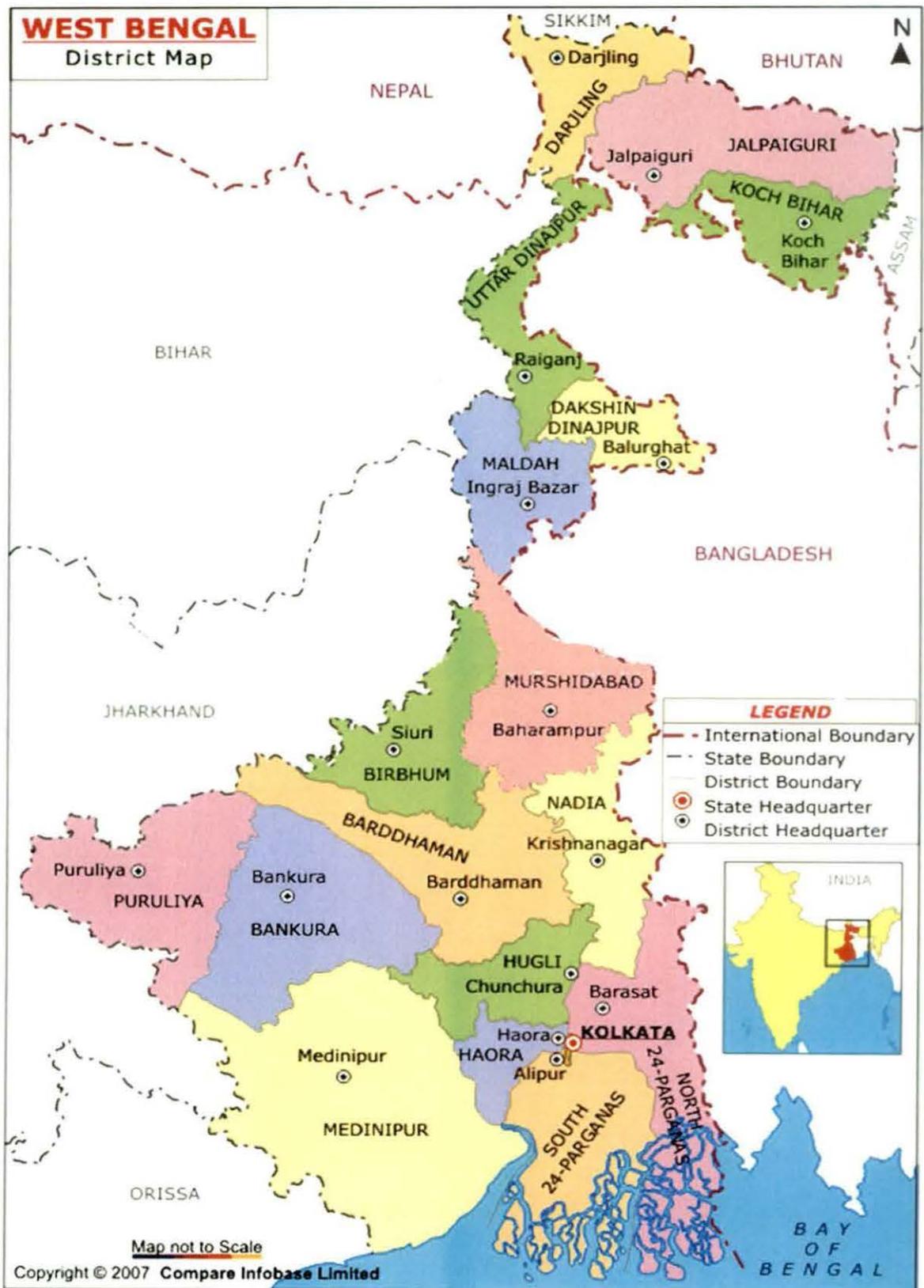
Historical background: The name Darjeeling is a corruption of *dorje*, the precious stone or ecclesiastical sceptre, which is emblematic of the thunderbolt of Sakhra (Indra) and of ling, a place. It means therefore the place of the *dorje*, the mystic thunderbolt of the Lamaist religion, this being the name by which the Buddhist monastery which once stood on Observatory Hill was formerly known.

The history of Darjeeling presents a late chapter in the extension of British rule, for it was not until the beginning of the 19th century that the East India Company was brought into direct relations with the tract of country which now bears the name. The intervention of the British was successful in preventing the Gurkhas from turning the whole of Sikkim and the hills west and south of the Tista into an outlying province of Nepal; and Sikkim,

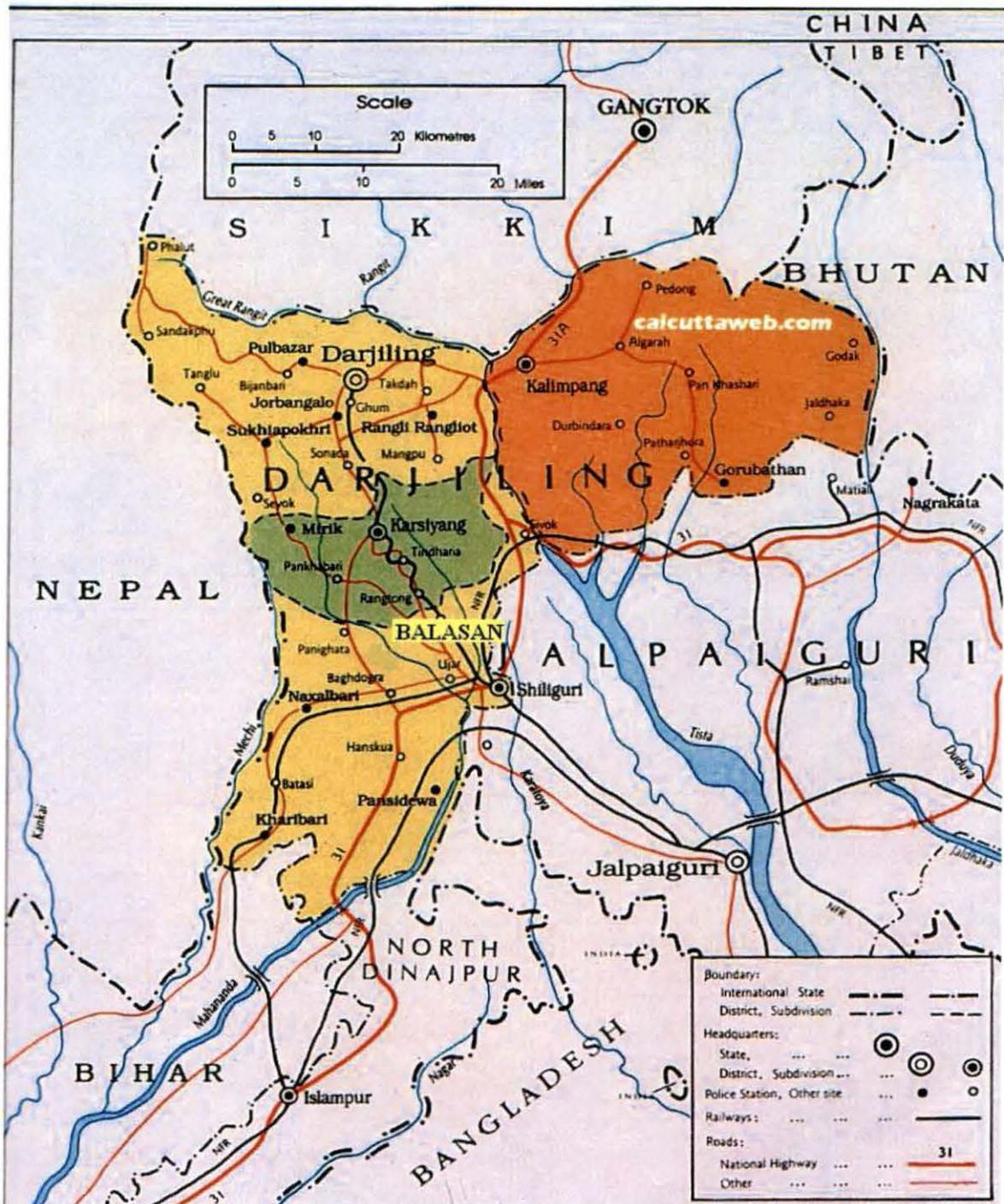
including the present district of Darjeeling, was retained as a buffer between Nepal and Bhutan. The year 1866 may be taken as marking an epoch in the history of Darjeeling. Peace was established within its borders; and thenceforward began the march of progress and civilization. Rapid progress was now at last made in the development of the communications of the district, which the Sikkim expedition of 1860 and the Bhutanese war the year before had shown to be vitally essential.

The hill territory of Darjeeling having thus been ceded, General Lloyd and Dr. Chapman were sent in 1836 to explore the country, to ascertain the nature of the climate, and to investigate the capabilities of the place. And on receipt of their reports, it was finally decided to adopt Darjeeling as a sanitarium. By 1840 a hotel had been started at Kurseong and a second at Darjeeling; and at the latter place some 30 private houses had been erected, and nearly as many more locations had been taken up at Lebong. According to Captain Herbert, two-thirds of the population of Sikkim, had been forced by the oppression of the Rājā to fly from Darjeeling and its neighbourhood, and to take refuge in Nepal. The Sikkim Rājā had prohibited his subjects from going to Darjeeling and helping in establishing the new settlement; and various expedients were proposed to repopulate the country, e.g., to invite the Lepcha refugees to return, to import labourers from the indigo concerns in Rangpur and Ramgarh (i.e. Gaya and Hazaribagh), or to procure settlers from Nepal and Bhutan. For the tea plantations needed labour, more immigrants were consequently attracted to the district, these immigrants had to be fed, clothed and housed, and all this stimulated trade. The Darjeeling is famous for the beauties of the snowy range and colours of snowy mountains. Darjeeling is blessed with the natural beauties of Kanchenjunga. The Swiss Alps, which, though barely possessing half the sublimity, extent, or height of the Himalaya, are yet far more beautiful. The wonderful play of colours on their snowy flanks, from the glowing hues reflected in orange, gold and ruby, from clouds illuminated by the sinking or rising sun, to the ghastly pallor that succeeds with twilight, when the red seems to give place to its complementary colour green. Apart from these, so many eye catching natural beauties are there that make Darjeeling more attractive. However, the two most important factors in the development of the district have been the choice of Darjeeling for a health resort and the subsequent planting of tea in the hills (O'Malley, 1907, reprinted 2001: 1-37, 231).

Map 1: Map of West Bengal



Map 2: Map of Dajeeling District



Geographical setting

Area and Land: It contains a total area of 1,164 sq. miles and consists of four subdivisions namely Darjeeling Sadar, Kalimpong, Kurseong and Siliguri. In shape the district resembles an irregular triangle, of which the apex projects into British territory, while the base rests on Sikkim. It is a frontier district, running up between Nepal and Bhutan and stretching from the plains of Bengal on the south to the state of Sikkim on the north. The British frontier is demarcated from the latter state by a series of rivers and mountain torrents, from Nepal on the west by the lofty Singalila chain of mountains, and from Bhutan on the north-east by the Jaldhaka river, while its south-eastern and southern boundary marches with the British District of Jalpaiguri and Purnea (O'Malley, 1907, reprinted 2001: 1).

River: The valleys on the south-eastern side of the Singalila ridge are drained by the Mechi, Balasan and Mahananda rivers; and all the remainder of the Darjeeling hills is drained by the Tista and its tributaries, except the extreme eastern end, where the chief effluent is the Jaldhaka. The principal rivers of Darjeeling are Tista, Great Rangit, Ramman, Little Rangit, Rangnu, Mahanadi, Balasan, Mechi, Rilli and Jaldhaka (O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 7-11).

Soil: The soil in the Tarai is composed of Alluvium, a light sandy loam being most common. In the hills the greater portion of the underlying rock consists of what is known as Sikkim gneiss. The constituents of the gneiss occur in varying proportions, and the soil varies in the same relation. That most commonly met with is a rather stiff reddish-coloured loam; but its composition varies from almost pure sand to stiff red clay. Part of the area, however, is composed of the rocks of the Daling series consisting of slates, schists and quartzites. These comprise a narrow strip of country extending from west to east along the northern boundary of the district, of another narrow strip to the south along the lower hills, and between these two of a tract about 8 miles wide on either side of the Tista. Further to the south is a narrow belt occupied by the foot-hills, composed of rocks belonging to the Nahun group and consisting of soft sand-stones, frequently micaceous and sometimes calcareous

The hill cultivators themselves recognize only three kinds of soil, white soil, red soil and black soil. Of these three, black soil is the richest, white soil is considered always poor, while red soil occupies an intermediate position, requiring heavy manuring to give as good an outturn as black soil. Land abounding in large rocks is usually composed of the latter soil, and is most suitable for dry crops, such as *maize* and *marua*, owing to the rich vegetable mould it contains (O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 78).

Forest: The most remarkable feature of the forests of Darjeeling is the wonderful variety of species that they contain; there are, in fact, probably few places in the world in which so many different types of forest exist within so small an area. At the highest altitudes, from the elevation of 8,000 to 12,000 feet, forests of silver fir (*Abies Webbiana*) are found interspersed with grassy slopes which are dotted here and there with the whitened stems of dead trees. These gradually merge into extensive rhododendron forests, which at present useless from an utilitarian point of view, owing to their remoteness and inaccessibility, but present scenery of a very picturesque character. Lower down are thickest of bamboos, which at 6,000 feet give way to forests of chestnut, maple, oak, magnolia and laurel, the chief source of supply of timber and firewood to the station of Darjeeling. Still lower down the oak disappears, and the chief species are maple, birch, alder and the graceful *pipili* (*Bucklandia populnea*). At the level of 4,000 feet these trees of the temperate zone are replaced by mixed forests, which, with the exception of the *tun* (*Cedrela toona*), are of little value except for fuel. At 3,000 feet the upper limit of the *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) is reached, and this tree is the chief constituent of valuable forests in the lower hills, extending from the extreme west of the district to the Chel river on the east, where it ceases abruptly, probably owing to change in the geological formation. Besides the *sal* forest, the Tarai, as the lower foot hills and adjacent plains are called, contains swamp, river-bed and savannah forests (O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 110).

Flora: The vegetation of the Darjeeling district is peculiarly rich in the number species and peculiarly varies in its character, as might be expected from a consideration of its climate and physiography. Broadly speaking, the vegetation of the district shows two well-marked zones- a tropical zone from the plains up to about 6,000 feet. The lowest part of the tropical zone comprising the slopes leading up to the base of the outer hills is characterized, especially in its western half, by forests of *Shorea robusta* (*sal*), with a

mixture of other trees such as *Dillenia pentagyna*, *Butea frondosa*, and species of *Terminalia* and *Eugenia*. Here and there also occur large stretches of Savannah forest of such species as *Dillenia pentagyna*, *Butea frondosa*, *Eugenia obvata*, etc. Along the river banks *Dalbergia Sissoo* is fairly common, accompanied by *Acacia Catechu*, *Bombax malabaricum*, *Nauclea cordifolia*, *Garuga pinnata*, etc. Patches of mixed forest also occur formed by a great number of species, of which the more common are *Schima Wallichii*, *Terminalia tomentosa*, *Terminalia myriopteron*, *Artocarpus Chaplasha*, *Bombax malabaricum*, *Dillenia indica*, *Eugenia Formosa* and many species of figs. This mixed forest also extends up the valleys and lower spurs to about 3,000 feet, sometimes with sal predominating, although other very common trees are *Cedrela*, *Duabanga*, *Careya*, *Lagerstroemia*, *Mongolia*, *Michelia*, and many *Leguminosae*. At higher elevations still, up to about the limit of the tropical zone, this forest still continues, but its general character is altered by the more frequent appearance of such species as *Engelhardtia spicata*, *Castanopsis indica*, *Cerasus Puddum*, *Alnus nepalensis*, *Bucklindia populnea*, *Juglans regia* (the walnut), oaks and maples. Several species of palms occur in the tropical zone, such as *Areca*, *Wallichia*, *Phoenix rupicola*, *Caryota urens*, *Plectocomia*, and climbing *Calami*. Screw pines, one true pine (*Pinus longifolia*), various species of bamboo of the genera *Dendrocalamus* *Arundingria*, etc., are quite common. The shrubby element in the vegetation is made up by *Acanthacere*, *Melastomacoe*, *Rubiance*, *Urticaceoe*, etc. Of climbers there are many species of *Ampoledeae*, *Cucurbitaceae*, *Conrolculaceae*, *Apocynacae*, *Asciepiadaceae*, *Smilax*, *Dioscorea*, *Rhaphidophora*, the latter being especially conspicuous. The herbaceous vegetation is well represented by *Malvaceae balsams*, *Polygonacae*, orchids, *Scitamincae*, and *Aroidae* with many other widely distributed species. Tree ferns are fairly common, and other ferns such as *Darallia*, *Pteris*, *Asplenium*, *Nephrodium*, *Polypodium*, *Angiopteris*, *Gleichenia*, etc., abound. In swampy places tall grasses of the genera *Saccharum*, *Thysanolaena*, *Erianthus*, *Anthistiria* are very common. In cleared spots, a scrub of *Artemisia* and *Leucosceptrum canum* is very common.

The temperate zone is characterized by forests of gigantic trees, consisting chiefly of oaks, chestnuts, magnolias, *Michelias*, laurels, maples, birches, and on the Singalila ridge conifers. Of the shrubby vegetation, the chief species belong to *Clematis*, *Berberis*, *Ilex*, *Rosa*, *Rulus*, *Contoncaster*, *Spiraea*, *Ancuba*, *Lenicera*, *Osbeckia*, *Vaccinium*,

Pentapterygium, *Ericaccae*, *Polygonum*, etc. A few rhododendrons grow within the altitude of the greater part of the district, but the rhododendron forests are found only on the high points above 8,000 feet along the Singalila ridge. Dwarf bamboos abound. The herbaceous vegetation is composed of such plants as aconites, violets, many balsams, Potentillas, Fragarias, Chrysosplenium, gentians, Campanulus, lilies, etc. (O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 13-5).

Fauna: Although the Darjeeling district is small in size, it contains a rich variety of fauna, owing to the great difference between the climatic conditions of its northern and southern parts. Among the larger Carnivora, the leopard (*Felis pardus*) is found in this northern tract, and occasionally the ounce (*Felis unica*), the clouded leopard (*Felis diardi*) and lynx (*Felis isabilina*), but these are only stray visitors from higher altitudes. In the Tarai the tiger (*Felis tigris*) and leopard (*Felis pardus*) are common; while the large tiger-cat (*Felis chaus*) have their habitat in both tracts. Leopards are numerous in the valleys throughout the district. The principal species of Viverra are the large civet-cat (*Viverra zibetha*), the lesser civet-cat (*Viverra malaccensis*), the tiger civet (*Prindon pardicolor*), and several species of the Parad-oxura and mongoose family. The jackal (*Canis aureus*) is the only representative of the genus *Canis*; the wild dog (*Cyon rutilans*) of the genus *Cyon*. The elephant (*Elephas Indicus*) is found in the large forest tracks at the foot of the hills. The wild pig is found throughout the district. The spotted deer (*Axis porcinus*) is only found west of the Balasan river. The barking deer (*Cervulus aureus*) is found over the whole of the district. Among the Ursidae the Himalayan black bear (*Ursus torquatus vel Tibetanus*) and the common Indian sloth bear (*Ursus labiatus*) are common. The Malayan sun-bear (*Ursus malayanus*) has also once been met with. The genus *Lepus* include the common Indian red-tailed hare (*Lepus ruficudatus*) and the hispid hare (*Lepus hispidus*); the latter however is very rare. Other mammalia are monkeys, squirrels (of which the two Himalayan flying squirrels are worthy of note) and several species of porcupines, martens, moles, civets, rats and mice. In the northern portion of the district the moonal pheasant (*Lophophorus impeyanus*), tragopan (*Cerionnis satyra*), blood pheasant (*Ithagenes cruentus*), kalij pheasant (*Euplocamus leucomelanus*), the common wood partridge (*Arboriola torqueola*), wood-cock (*Scolopax rusticola*) and red jungle-fowl (*Gallus ferrugineus*) are met with; and in the southern part, the lesser florican (*Sypheotids bengalensis*), red jungle-fowl, red spur-fowl (*Galloperdix spadiceus*), pea-

fowl (*Pavo cristatus*), kalij and black partridge (*Francolinus vulgaris*), besides several species of quail, snipe, duck and waders. There are about 47 species of snakes in the district, of which 17 are more or less poisonous. The following species are most frequently found: the hamadryad or king cobra (*Naia bungarus*), the common cobra (*Naia tripudians*), the karait (*Bungarus caeruleus*), the banded karait (*Burgarus fasciatus*), one viper (*Vipera russelli*), and several of the genus *Trimeresurus*. The python is found in the Tarai and the lower valleys. The longnosed fish-eating crocodile has been seen in the Mahanadi river, but it is rare. The fish found in the district include the mahseer, the *katli*, the fresh-water shark and many others (O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 15-19).

Climate: Owing to the tropical situation of the town of Darjeeling, the seasons largely follow the course of those in the plains, the cold weather, hot weather and rains, but there are two short periods-and those the most delightful in the year-which correspond in some ways to an English autumn and spring. The cold weather is divided into two portions. The first at the end of the rains is mild and pleasant, the atmosphere being tolerably clear, and generally free from mist and cloud. This is the autumn, if autumn there be in Darjeeling. Towards the beginning of December, the first touch of winter comes with hoar-frost; and at the end of that month and in January, the ground is sometimes frozen almost the whole day. The air is cloudless, dry and bracing; in the early morning it is very cold, but later in the day there is bright sunshine, and it becomes pleasantly warm, though it remains bitterly cold in the shade. As the evening comes on, it is cold and chilly, and the nights are clear and starry. Occasionally snow falls in January and February, but such an occurrence is comparatively rare, and heavy falls of snow are very uncommon. In March a brief Himalayan spring is ushered in with high blustering winds; it is very short, lasting only till the end of the month. During April and May there is a short-lived summer accompanied by showers of rain, which becomes heavier and more frequent till the setting in of the rains in the beginning of June. For three months after this, Darjeeling is exposed to the full force of the monsoon, drenched with rain, and shrouded in mist.

The mean temperature is about 42° in the cold-weather months from December to February. A rapid increase of temperature takes place during March and April owing to the warmer air which penetrates through the valleys from the plains; and thereafter, from

May to December, when more or less heavy cloudy prevails, mean temperature is steady at or slightly above 60°. In October northerly winds begin, cloud is much less than previous months, and rainfall occurs mainly owing to cyclonic storms which generally recurve towards North Bengal at the end of the season. The lowest average minimum temperature is 35° in January and the highest 58° in July.

During the cold-weather months very little rain falls in the Darjeeling hills. November and December are almost rainless, and the light showers which fall in January and February occur. Rainfall is somewhat more heavy in March, and there is a considerable increase in April, owing to thunderstorms. Very heavy rainfall is generally from June to September, specially on the lower slopes (O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 19-23).

The People: The population of Darjeeling is exceedingly heterogeneous. The majority of the people in the hills are Mongolian origin, belonging chiefly to various Nepalese castes, but also including a large number of Lepchas, Bhotias and Tibetans. Together with hill men are found the denizens of the plains, who have been attracted to the hills by the prospect of easily acquired wealth, the Madhesias held in great contempt by the stalwart Nepalese. Among them are Marwari merchants, the Jews of the Himalayas, Bengali clerks, Hindustani mechanics, Punjabi traders and even Chinese carpenters. In the Tarai the mixture of races is equally great. Here the aboriginal Koches, or Rajbansis as they prefer to call themselves, are most numerous and not less than 52 per cent followed by the Mundas and Oraons from Chota Nagpur and the Santals from the uplands of the Santal Parganas. Darjeeling owes a large proportion of its population to the advent of immigrants. Barely half of the inhabitants have, in fact, been born in the district. In the Tarai it receives numerous settlers from the adjoining districts of Purnea and Jalpaiguri, who engage in cultivation, and a large number of coolies from Chota Nagpur and the Santal Parganas, who are attracted by the wages given in the tea gardens. But the great bulk of the immigrants come from Nepal, chiefly as labourers in the tea gardens; and in the hills the population is mainly Nepalese. The early immigrants are, however, dying out, their place being taken by their children born in Darjeeling, while the flow of fresh immigrants is growing less. Most of the latter settle in the district, but some only come for a short time, and then return to Nepal with their savings. In Darjeeling more than three quarters of the population are Hindus followed by Buddhists and among the

Buddhists, Lepchas, Bhotias and Murmis are numerically high. The Muhammadans form less than 4 per cent of the total population followed by Animists and Christians (O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 48-60). In 2001, the total population was 1609172 and the density of population was 511. Among them the male was 51.62 per cent and the female was 48.38 per cent and the sex ratio is 937; and the rural was 67.66 per cent and urban was 32.34 per cent. The total literate male was 80.10 per cent and the female was 62.90 per cent (Census of India, 2001).

Economy: The backbone of economy of Darjeeling is tea, timber and tourism. However, the great majority of the population are dependent on agriculture, either as cultivators tilling their own fields or as labourers employed on the tea gardens. The industrial classes are relatively unimportant, few per cent of the total population being engaged in manual industries. Of these the major percentage are workers, who are distributed over various occupations, such as tailors, carpenters, masons, wood-cutters etc. The commercial and professional classes are still smaller (O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 152).

The physical configuration of the district makes the conditions of agriculture in different parts exceedingly varied. The strip of country at the foot of the hills contains level stretches of alluvial soil admirably suited for rice cultivation. The cultivation of tea, is however, so predominant in the whole tract that two-thirds of the rural population are resident on the tea plantations. Tea, which occupies nearly one-third of the cropped area, is the all-important crop of the district. The principles crops are maize, paddy and cardamom. Among the other crops may be mentioned potatoes, tobacco, *kodo (Paspalum scrobiculatum)*, various millets and pulses, and sugarcane, which grown in small plots near the cultivators' homesteads. The principal cold-weather crops are wheat, barley, mustard and buck-wheat. Apart from these, a large variety of fruits is grown in the valleys and on the slopes where the rainfall is not excessive, such as plums, peaches apples, pears, mangoes, plantains and oranges. The vegetables are those of tropical as well as of a temperate zone, the commonest being the potato. Among other vegetables the commonest are brinjals, sweet potato, chillies, garlic, onions, pumpkins and yams. A large number of English vegetables have been introduced and are grown successfully, such as rhubarb, tomatoes, turnips, cauliflowers, beans, peas, beet-root, carrots, parsnip, leeks and celery, while mint, parsley and thyme are common garden herbs. In the Tarai

the common domestic animals do not differ from those found elsewhere in Bengal, oxen being used for agriculture, buffaloes reared for their milk and for sale, and goats and pigs reared for food (O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 77-87).

The main trade of the district is with Calcutta, the chief exports being tea, jute, gunny-bags, wool, cardamom and maize, and the imports being composed of European piece-goods, cotton yarn, rice, kerosene-oil and salt. Rice is also imported from Dinajpur, and coal and coke from Raniganj coalfields. From Nepal food-grains, cotton piec-goods, manufactured wool and hides, potatoes sheep, goats, cattle and poultry are imported in return for European piece-goods and cotton twists, salt, kerosene-oil, tobacco and food grains. The trade with Sikkim is of much the same character, but smaller in volume. Most of the Bhutan trade passes through the district of Jalpaiguri but a fair quantity of the silk fabrics manufactured by the Bhutanese is imported into this district. The exports to Tibet consist chiefly of cotton piece-goods of European manufacture, and the imports of wool. Besides these articles, cotton yarn, silver, copper, brass and iron sheets, rice, maize and tobacco are exported, and yaks' tails, musk, horses, mules, sheep, and blankets are imported (O'Malley 1907, reprinted 2001: 162).

Subdivision- Siliguri

Siliguri is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas in the plains of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of northern part of West Bengal. It is bounded by Kurseong on the north, Bangladesh on the south, Jalpaiguri on the east and Nepal on the west. Siliguri is a very important town and known as the gateway to the North-East India. It is the transit point for air, road and rail traffic to the neighboring countries of Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and China and also to the North East Indian states. It is an important trade hub for the whole West Bengal. The town Siliguri is famous for Tea, Transport, Tourism and Timber and these are the blood vein of the region. Siliguri is a paradise of scenic beauty and famous for its great weather and bio-diversities. It is a charming place to enjoy the beauty and splendor of the region as it is blessed with various eye catching beauty of nature, forests, rivers, wild animals etc. and various natural resources. There is a wonderful balance between industrial state and ecology.

Map 3: Map of Siliguri



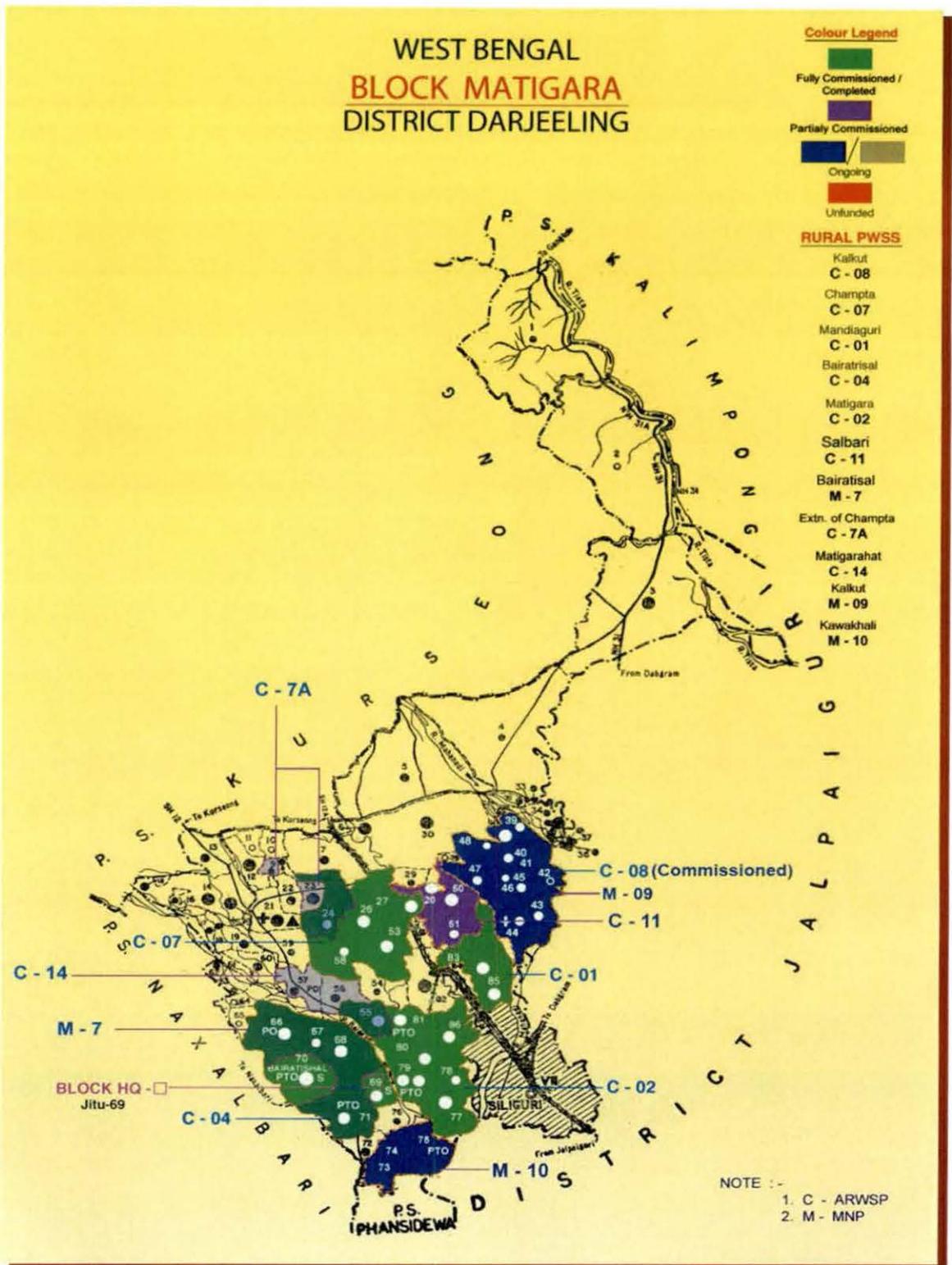
The immense natural scenic beauties really charm the visitors of far and away to have a look on it. Siliguri was a village in the district of Jalpaiguri which was transferred to Darjeeling district in 1907 by forming the sub-division and in the same year it was declared a sub-division (Mahakuma) by the British administration. Siliguri was recognized as a non-municipal town in 1931; and in 1949, it was conferred as Municipality. Now it is a Municipal Corporation with 47 wards. The only source of earning of this little village was agriculture, but presently the economical growth of Siliguri is dependent on four 'T's - Tea, Transport, Tourism and Timber and these are the main industries flourishing in Siliguri. Today in case of agriculture or trade and commerce or service, at every sector Siliguri is making its strong base. After partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 and the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, the Siliguri became a crowded refugee center. With the increase of its area (in 1950 it had an area of 15.54 sq. km and presently it has an area of 117.54 sq. km out of which 68.90 sq. km and 48.64 sq. km fall under the district of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling respectively), rapid population growth is continuously being occurred as in 1901 the population of Siliguri was 738 only which reached 6067 in 1931, 97484 in 1971, 472374 in 2001 (Siliguri Jalpaiguri Development Authority, 2012; and Siliguri Municipal Corporation Report, 2001) and 701,489 in 2011; and based on Census data of 2011 the city agglomeration had a population of 1,901,489 and still growing at a fast rate (Bangla immigrants to be pushed back; cited in The Times of India, 5 November 2011). The rapid urbanization is taking place in Siliguri and with it a number of new economic sectors and sources of earning are getting emerged. The present importance of Siliguri as a city started to gain ground since the Indo-Chinese border tussle in 1962, which was a turning point from where the present city ushered. The strategic importance of the city unleashed a plethora of changes to the tune of economic, social and demographic changes and gradually, the city turned out to be the 'Gateway' to entire North East, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh even some extent China and Myanmar too. Such development witnessed on influence of outsiders from different parts of the country and outside who have settled here mainly due to political, economic and social causes. The population of the town continuously increased leading to its expansion because of many immigrants from Nepal, Southern Bhutan apart from Eastern Bengal. Plenty of migrations have occurred into Siliguri in search of work for

living and the highest was when people came from the erstwhile East Bengal during the partition of India. In addition, people from adjacent Indian states like Bihar, Jharkhand states of Eastern India and other parts of India have also come to the city in search of livelihood ([http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Siliguri# History](http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Siliguri#History)). However, migration from various places and migration for various reasons like economy, socio-political etc. are leading towards an abnormal growth of population. Siliguri is a rapidly developing as a metropolis in West Bengal. The town, Siliguri has been provided with various urban amenities like markets, shopping malls, luxury hotels, restaurants, medical college, hospitals, nursing homes, several educational institutions from school to university level, recreation centers etc. and around 189 factories of medium to small scale based also got emerged in and around the Siliguri. Apart from these, several industrial projects and townships have grown up in Siliguri town. Today the present Siliguri has become the second largest city in West Bengal. Siliguri is the Bengali majority city, with a notable presence of the Rajbanshi, Nepali, Bhutia, Behari, Marwaris, Gorkhas, Assamese, Gujrati, and others (Indya Tour, 2014). The mentionable matter is that among the Bengali people, the Rajbanshi is the largest and important group of people of North Bengal who are agriculturist by profession mainly. The spot of this research work, village Purba Rangia is located very nearer to the Siliguri town where the Rajbanshi is the largest group of people.

Atharakhai Gram Panchayat where the Studied Village is situated

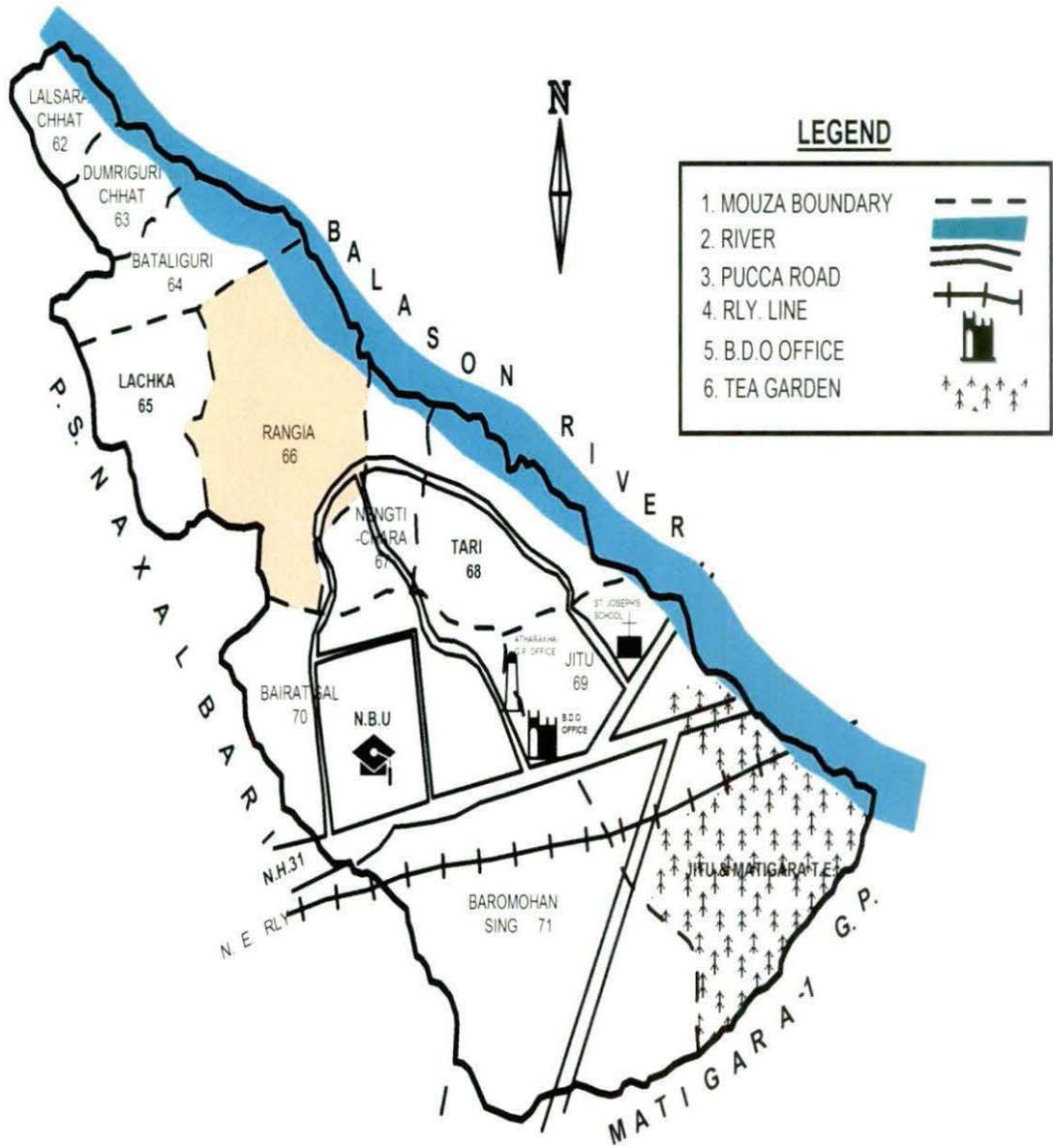
Administratively the studies village, Purba Rangia is situated under Matigara block of Atharakhai Gram Panchayat and the said GP office is around 3 km away from the studied village, Purba Rangia. This G.P. is located to the west of the Matigara police station and 2 km away from it. The gram panchayat, Atharakhai covers an area of 1283.59 hector and consisted of 10 mouzas viz. Lalsara, Dumgurir Chhat, Lochka, Bataliguri, Rangia, Nengtichhara, Bairatishal, Tarijote, Jitu, Baromohon Singh. The panchayat is bounded on the east by Pramodnagar, on the west by Checkpost, on the north by Lalsara and on the south by Diglijote.

Map 5: Map of Matigara Block



Map 5: Map of Atharakhai Gram Panchayat

MAP OF ATHARAKHAI GRAM PANCHAYAT UNDER MATIGARA BLOCK,
P.S. MATIGARA, DIST. DARJEELING



SCALE: 2" = 1 MILE

Table 3.1: Demographic Outline of the Studied Area

Demographic standards	West Bengal	Darjeeling District	Matigara Block	Rangia Mouza
Population	91,347,197	1,842,034	129326	3682
Male	46,927,389	93,47,96	68004	1848
Female	44,420,347	9,07,328	61322	1834
Sex Ratio	947	971	901	992
Literate population	62,614,556	13,28,218	71,006	2029
Literacy rate	77.08	79.92	64.23	64.21
Total worker	36,53,8878	6,99,972	47,063	1582

Source: Census of India 2011.

The total population of Atharakhai Gram Panchayat was 50849 out of which males were 28984 (57.00%) and females were 21865 (43.00%). The overall population of scheduled castes was 21865 and scheduled tribes was 9153 and the total OBC (Other Backward Classes) population was 1526. The sex ratio at Atharakhai Gram Panchayat was 754.38 (National Panchayat Portal, Gram Panchayat Schedule, Sponsored by Department of Panchayati Raj, 2011).

Educational Institution and Other Offices: There were twelve primary schools of which two were government primary schools and rests were government sishu siksha kendra¹; four high schools of which one was english medium girls high school. The facility of higher education was available here because of the presence of University, B. Ed. college and library. There were other offices also like – West Bengal Board of Secondary Education- regional office, West Bengal Council for Higher Secondary education- regional office, and three post offices. Besides these, Gram panchayat office, Irrigation office, BDO office, BLRO office and Backward Classes Welfare Department office were there.

Health Centre and Other Necessary Facilities: In Atharakhai gram panchayat there were three primary health centres, 18 polio booths, and 68 anganwadi centres setup in different villages under this gram panchayat. Besides these, 450 wells, 35 taps and 48 tube-wells

¹ *Sishu siksha kendra:* A mission of the Government of India and its objective is to bring all the children between 5-9 years under primary education.

were found to be setup through panchayat level in different villages. Considering the facilities, the schemes like Old Aged Pension, Antaday Anna Yojna (A.A.Y), Annapurna Yojna and Indira Awas Yojna were implemented through panchayat office. In this context, total 142 persons were given the old aged pension. Total 465 families were taken under the scheme of Antaday Anna Yojna (A.A.Y). The scheme like Annapurna Yojna covered 26 families only and at the same time only 81 families were benefited under the scheme of Indira Awas Yojna.

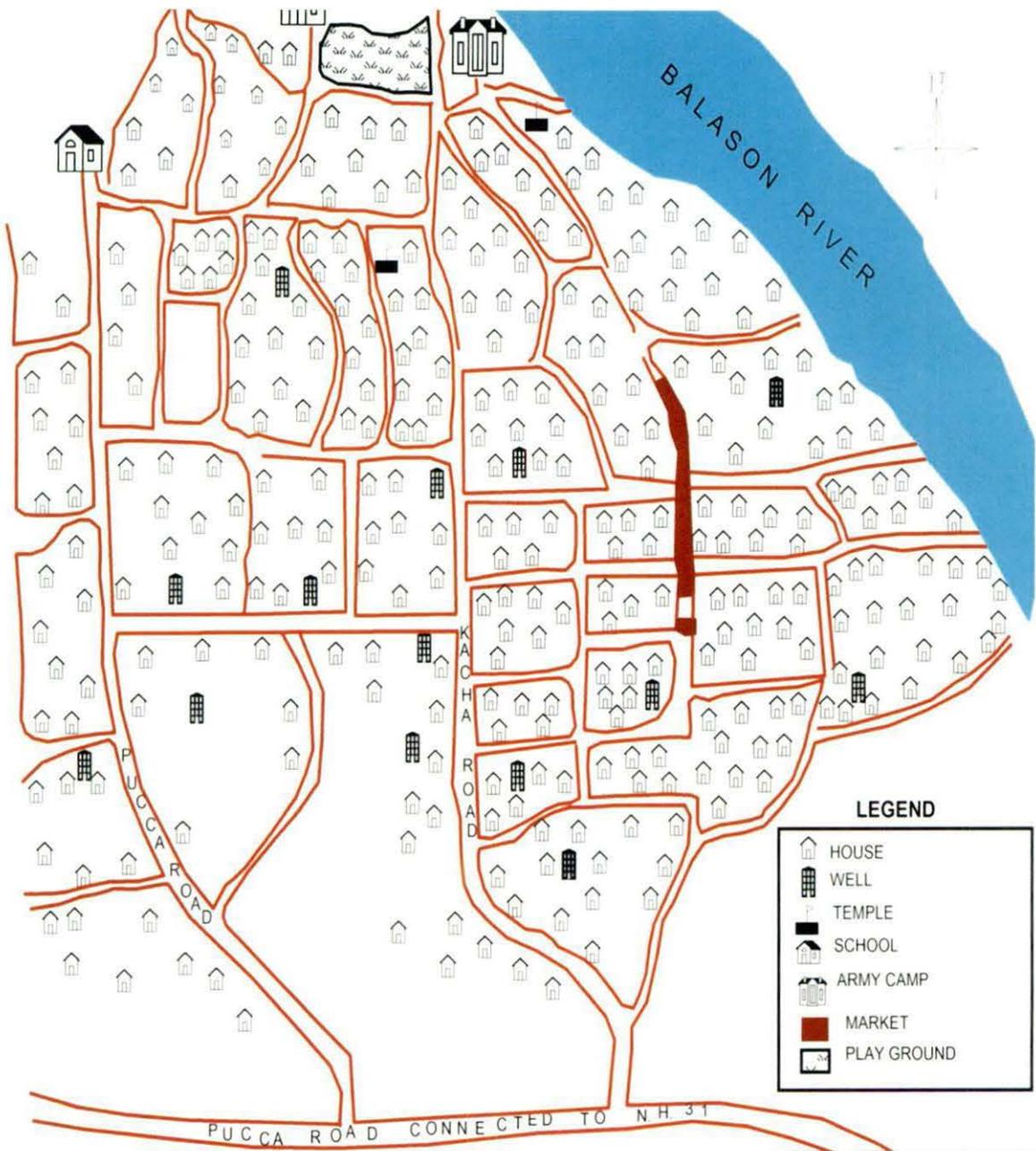
Studied Village- Purba Rangia

The studied village, Purba Rangia is situated on the Balasan River basin which is very nearer to the Siliguri town, and it was established by some present migrated people. However, before going to the detail discussion of the studied village, we may go through the definition of village. In this concern, M.N. Srinivas (1969) has tried to define a village in this way “A body of people living in a restricted area, at some distance from other similar groups, with extremely poor roads between them, the majority of the people being engaged in agricultural activity, all closely dependent upon each other economically and otherwise, having a vast body of common experience, must have some sense of unity”. But in this context, the studied village, Purba Rangia is something different because the agro based economy was totally absent and instead of agriculture, the stone based occupation became the backbone of their economy and still it is going on.

Location of the Village: The village which is adjacent to Siliguri town laid at the foothill of the Himalayas in the district of Darjeeling. The full address for communication was- Village – Purba Rangia, Post office – New Rangia, Police Station – Matigara, District – Darjeeling, State – West Bengal, Pin – 7734013. The village, Purba Rangia was bounded on the east by Blasan River, on the west by Army camp, on the north by the village Tarabari and on the south by the village Chaitanyapur.

House type and settlement pattern: The houses were mostly *kachha* type and few were semi-*pucca*. The houses were made of wattle walls, corrugated tin roof and *kachha* platform. Most of the houses were composed of 1 to 2 little rooms. The settlement pattern of the village was mostly bi linear type.

Map 6: Area Map of Purba Rangia Village



People: The total population of the village was 1434, out of which males were 729(50.84%) and females were 705(49.16%); and the sex ratio was 967. Among the villagers 1331(92.82%) belonged to Rajbanshi community, where the males were 675 and the females were 656; and their sex ratio was 972. However, the rest of the population belonged to Brahmin, Kshatriya, Teli, Kapali, Jugi, Namashudra, Biswakarma; Santal and Muslims.

Migration: All the studied families in the village were migrants who came from the adjoining districts, states and country also. It is surprising that a large number of studied families migrated from Bangladesh while the rest from various districts and states of the country like Assam, Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The pattern of migration was of various types such as inter-district, inter-state and inter-country migration.

Table 3.2: Pattern of Migration of the Studied Families

Pattern of Migration	Inter-district	Inter-state	Inter-country	Total
No. of family	42	6	202	250
	16.80	2.40	80.80	100.00

Table 3.1 reveals that major percentage (80.80%) of the studied families was under the category of inter-country migration. It was known that most in cases they had to leave their early residence, land and properties and so on, and as a result they had to come here with homeless, landless as well as resourceless in condition.

Table 3.3: Distribution of Studied Families on the Basis of Causes of Migration

Child Workers' Family	Causes of Migration				Total
	Economic problem	Familial problem	For getting job	Political unrest	
No. of Family	45	30	53	122	250
	18.00	12.00	21.20	48.80	100.00

The studied families migrated here mainly for political unrest followed by other factors like for getting job, poverty and familial problem. Finally they settled down at Purba Rangia village and engaged themselves in stone based work.

Education: In the context of education 50.44 per cent village people were literate, and among the male and female it was 58.25 per cent and 42.10 per cent respectively. In the studied village there was only one Sishu Siksha Kendra (SSK) and four Anganwadi centre. However, there was no other government educational institutions within the village. But under Atharakhai Gram Panchayat there were four high schools, B. Ed. College, University and library. Besides these, there were several government offices like West Bengal Board of Secondary Education- regional office, West Bengal Council for Higher Secondary education- regional office, three post offices, Irrigation office, BDO office, BLRO office, Backward Welfare Class office were under Atharakhai Gram Panchayat. These were about 1-3 km from the studied village and the people of the studied village had to visit these places to meet their needs.

Transport and communication: The village roads were mostly *kachha*² type. Both for inter-village and intra-village communication the villagers used the *kachha* roads. Within the village there was only one pucca road which was made of stone and it was connected to the main road. They had to cover a distance of around 2-3 Km to reach the National Highway. There was no transportation as such within the village. Though, the villagers mostly used the bicycle to go for long distance but many of them were found to go on foot.

Economy: Stone based work was a single decisive factor in the formation of the studied village in Balasan River basin. Almost all the families in the studied area were primarily or secondarily involved in stone based work for maintaining their livelihood. Their involvement in other works was a seldom happening factor.

² *Kachha:* A *kachha* is a building made of natural materials like mud, bamboo, grass, thatch or sticks.

Market and other important places: The village has one little market known as 'Purba Rangia Sishabari Bazar'. But all the daily necessary things were not available there. Therefore, all the villagers had to depend on weekly market, 'Matigara Hat' which was held on Tuesday in every week at Matigara and it was about 5 km from this village. Besides these, often they went to Shivmandir Market and brought what they needs. The Shivmandir Market was about 2 Km from the village. Siliguri was the nearest town of this village and the villagers had to cover a distance of around 10 Km to visit this place. Besides these, the great recreation centre, Science City and City Centre were not so far from the village and these were about 6-7 Km from this village. The nearest big Railway Station was NJP Station and the villagers had to cover a distance of around 18 Km to go there. Besides these, there was also a famous market known Bagdogra Airport market which was about 7 Km from this village. The Gram Panchayat Office was about 2 Km from the village and the villagers were mostly found to go there on foot.

Health Centre and other necessary facilities: There was no health centre within this village. The village has three medical shops of them one was allopathy and two were homoeopathy but many of the required medicines are not available there. Therefore, many of them went to Shivmandir market for purchasing required medicines and they had to cover a distance of around 2 Km to go there. For better treatment many of them had to go to Matigara Primary Health Centre and North Bengal Medical College which were around 6-12 from this village.

Total five government wells were setup through panchayat level but all of these wells were uncovered throughout the year. Besides this, the villagers also used the river as another source of water. There was a club known as 'Naba Yuba Sangha' which was the only recreational centre within this village.

The schemes like Old Aged Pension and Indira Awas Yojna (IAY) were implemented through Panchyat level. But only one person could able to enjoy the scheme like Old Aged Pension and at the same time only one family was benefited under the scheme of Indira Awas Yojna (IAY).

Religious place: A temple locally known as ‘Sarbojanin Hari Mandir’ hold an important position in the heart of the village as well as villagers because almost all of the villagers were very much virtuous and according to them the God ‘Hari’ was their protector who always took care of them. The great religious festival of the village known as *Astam Prahar*³ was celebrated by the villagers in the month of *Chaitra* or *Baishak* (according to Bengali calendar) at the ‘Hari Mandir’(Hari temple). The another temple known as ‘Rath Mandir’ was also an important religious place in the studied village where all of the villagers celebrated another great festival known as ‘*Rath Yatra*’⁴ in the month of *Ashar* (according to Bengali calendar) in every year and recently the ‘*Durga puja*’⁵ was also celebrated at the village ground.

Burial ground: The open river bed was generally used for funeral obsequies by the villagers.

River: The Balasan River comes down from Himalayas and passes beside this village. Apart from some domestic courses, various natural resources like stone, sand etc. of the River were the important economy of the studied people.

Studied People- The Rajbanshi

In my studied village several castes, communities and ethnic groups like Rajbanshi, Namsudra, Jugi, Kapali, Brahmin, Teli, Biswakarma, Muslim, Santal were lived in the studied village but the present research work primarily conducted on Rajbanshis. They were 1162 in number of which males were 594 and females were 568 and the sex ratio was 956. According to Census 2001, the total number of Rajbanshi population in Darjeeling district was 129,904.

³ *Astam Prahar:* Devine meditation for day and night.

⁴ *Rath Yatra:* A ceremonial procession centred around a chariot carrying a holy image, specifically the procession of the Hindu God *Jagannatha*.

⁵ *Durga Puja:* The worship of Goddesses *Durga*.

Table 3.4: Proportion of Rajbanshi Population to the total SC Population in West Bengal

SL. No.	Name of the scheduled caste	Total population	Proportion to the total SC population (%)
1	All scheduled castes	18,452,555	100.00
2	Rajbanshi	3,386,617	18.40

Source: Census of India 2001, West Bengal.

Note: The data according to Census of India 2011 has not been published yet.

They are the major group of people in North Bengal. They have their cultural heritage and so on. In the context of present study, various aspects of the traditional life of the Rajbanshis have been discussed one after another-

Historical Background of the Rajbanshi

The history of the origin of Rajbanshi is a mystery. It is said that they belong to the great 'Bodo' family that entered India in the 10th century B.C., from the east and settled on the banks of the Brahmaputra and gradually spread over Assam and the whole of North and East Bengal (Sanyal, 1965: 10).

The first introduction in the modern history of the people living in the furthest north of Bengal is found in the accounts of invasion of Baktyar Khilji when he entered Tibet in 1206 A.D. (J.A. Vas in Rangpur Gazeteer, 1911: 8 places the date as 1203 A.D.). It is reported that time between the century Lakshnavati and Tibet lay the hill or rather the jungle tract which was inhabited by three non-Indian Mongoloid tribes, the Koch, the Mech and the Tharu. Hodgson reports in 1849 A.D. that Hajo founded the Koch kingdom. The Koch belong to Tamulian extraction and lived before the Aryan come. Hajo's grandson Visva Sinha became Hindu, renounced the name Koch and adopted Rajbanshi. In his opinion Kuvach was identical with Koch. In Assam the Koch were divided into three sects (a) Kamthali and (b) Madai (c) Kolita. In Rangpur they had two sects (a) Rajbanshi and (b) Koch. Dalton describes that the very appearance of the Kochs shows that they are non-Aryans. He considers them as belonging to the dravidian stock

and probably a branch of the great Bhuiya (belong to Bodo, Mech tribes) family. Hunter observed that about the close of the fifteenth century are Koch king Hajo founded a kingdom at Kamrupa. His grandson Visva Sinha, together with his officers and all people of the condition apostatised to Hinduism. A divine ancestry for the chief was manufactured by the Brahmins. The converts abandoned the name Koch and took that of Rajbanshi. Hunter also notes that in Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Cooch-Bihar, the name Rajbanshi, which literally means 'Royal Race', is adopted by the cultivators and respectable men, that of Koch being restricted to labourers and specially to the palanquin bearers. Hunter places the Rajbanshi under 'semi-hinduised aboriginals'. Rowley describes the inter marriage with Koch tribes with Hindu has considerably changed their old habits. They resemble the Bengalees more than any other people. One class of this tribe, the Rajbanshis worship Hindu deities and have adopted Hindu manners. H.F.J.T. Maguire, in his comments on the census report of Rangpur of 1891, states, in his memorandum NO. 706-X- 1-3 dated 16th March, 1892, that, 'among the Rajbanshi there is a distinction between those who have adopted the *Vaishnav*⁶ faith and the followers of god *Siva*. The latter appear to be Koches proper being of mongoloid origin and having come from the north. They are closely allied to Kuris and form a small minority of the tribe of Rajbanshis. The former are of dravidian stock and are more numerous and respectable, forming the main body of the agriculturists. The Rajbanshis have become to all intents and purposes Hindus and their claim to rank as sudras (kshatriyas) was admitted by the pandits of Rangpur Dharma Sabha'. O' Donnell writes- 'Another interesting tribe is the Rajbanshi or Koch of North Eastern Bengal, the localisation of whose racial position was long been a subject of dispute. They are however, only the third wave of mongols who have advanced through the eastern passes the first being the chandal, the second the koch and the last the Assam'. Risley describes that Koch, Koch-Mandi, Rajbanshi, Palliya and Desi belong to a large dravidian tribe of North Eastern and Eastern Bengal amongst whom three are grounds for suspecting some admixture of mongoloid blood. The transformation of Koch into Rajbanshi, the name by which they are now known in Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Koch-Bihar, is a singular illustration of the

⁶ *Vaishnav*: According to Hindu mythology the *Vaisnavs* are the worshipper of Lord Krishna.

influence exercised by fiction in the making of caste. 'Now the great majority of Koch inhabitants of Northern Bengal invariably describe themselves as Rajbanshis or Banga Kshatriyas'. 'They keep Brahmans, initiate brahmanical ritual in their marriage ceremony and have begun to adopt brahmonical system of *gotras*'. In respect of the last point they are now in a curious state of transition as they have all hit upon the same *gotra* (Kasyapa) and they habitually transgress the primary rule of brahmonical system which absolutely prohibits marriage with in a *gotra*'. Grieson comments, 'there can be little doubt that the original Koches were the same as the Bodos. The Koch, Mech and Bara or Bodo all connoted the same tribe or at most different sects of the same tribe. The name Koch in fact connotes a Hinduised Bodo who has abandoned his ancestral religion for Hinduism and ancestral Bodo language for Bengali or Assamese. Rajbanshi are the Hinduised Koch of Rangpur and Goalpara'. 'Those Koch who are now Hindus are principally known under the name Rajbanshi. The Rjbanshi dialect bears many close points of resemblance to the dialect of East Bengal'. Gait describes the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, 'as a synonym of Koch, this represents a real caste and in this sense only it may be entered in the schedule. The term is also a little of Tiyars, Kaibarthas, Namasudra and other fishing castes, also of Barua Mugs in Chittaganj and of Bagdis, Mals etc. In Tippra the term is applied to Tippras and to Hindus who have lost caste by eating with hillmen. In Burdwan persons using this little are usually Bagdis if fishermen and Kaibarttas if cultivators'. Thompson states- 'the Rajbanshi are the indigenous people of Northern Bengal and the third largest Hindu caste in the province. Their total number has been exaggerated by the fact that a number of fishermen caste in Mymensingh, Nadia and Murshidabad returned themselves as Rajbanshi. In 1901 many Koches in North Bengal were returned as Rajbanshis. Many of the Rajbanshis have now taken sacred thread and were prepared to use force in support of their claim to be returned as Kshatriyas'. Peter then comments, "the Rajbanshi have now to some extent regularised the anomalous position in which they formed themselves until recently owing to the fact that upon assumption of the Kshatriya status they all adopted themselves into the same *gotra* (Kasyapa) with the result that all marriages amongst Rajbanshis as Kshatriyas would, upon a strict interpretation of Hindu law, have been invalid owing to their being with the same *gotra*". Porter also states- 'Koch, Palia, Rajbanshi were originally the same. The

Kaivarttas of Assam and North Bengal have more affinity with Rajbanshis. They all claimed to be recorded as Rajbanshis and all Rajbanshis claimed to be a recorded as Kshatriyas at the beginning of the 19th century. The more backward and illiterate members of the Rajbanshi caste still maintain practices inconsistent with orthodox Hindu belief'. S.K. Chatterjee writes, 'the masses of North Bengal areas are very largely of Bodo origin or mixed Austric-Dravidian-Mongoloid. They can now mainly describes as Koch i.e., Hinduised or semi-Hinduised Bodo who have abandoned their original Tibeto-Burman speech and have adopted the northern district of Bengali'. 'They are proud to call themselves as Rajbanshis and to claim to be called Kshatriyas'. 'Nothing much is definitely known about the Kochs of North Bengal prior to 16th century; they may be described as western Bodos, an extension of the great Bodo race of Assam and East Bengal which at one time peopled the entire Assam valley from Sadia right up to North Bengal'. 'With the full Hinduisation of the Kochs, and the rise in power of their chiefs, Kshatriya origin was, as was natural, found out or suggested for them'. 'Bisu or Bisa was the real founder of Koch power. He ruled from 1496-1553 A.D. Bisu embraced Hinduism and took the name of Biswa - Sinha'. 'He himself was a worshipper of *Shiva*⁷ and *Durga*⁸, revived the *Shakta*⁹ Shrine at Kamakshya. This is an old shrine of hoary antiquity and of mongoloid or possibly even earlier Austric origin'. 'It witnessed the final Brahmanisation of a pre-Aryan cult. It is a symbol of the final Aryanisation or Hinduisation of the Indo-Mongoloids of North Eastern India' (Sanyal, 1965: 10-13). Many scholars and historians have started and it has been observed that the sanskritized Rajbanshis and the unsanskritized Kochs are very much the same kind of tribe, and that initially they were of one single tribe known as the Koch. These Koches had a very powerful kingdom, established by a man called Hajo. Later, Hajo's grandson, Bisu annexed the surrounding kingdoms and consolidated his kingdom, establishing a city called Koch-Bihar, which is still existent in India even today. The Brahmins were awed by this powerful Koch king so they elevated him to the Kestri (warrior) rank and

⁷*Shiva*: The most powerful god of the Hindu pantheon and one of the god heads in the Hindu Trinity. He is perhaps the most complex of Hindu deities. He is recognized by putting his shrine in the temple separate from those of other deities.

⁸ *Durga*: According to Hindu mythology *Durga* is the most powerful Goddess who is the remover of all obstacles.

⁹ *Shakta*: Worshipper of mother Goddess.

conferred upon him the title of Rajbansi. It is after this that the Koch metamorphosed into the present day Rajbanshi, as has been stated. It is stated that after the Koch king was conferred the title of Rajbansi, many Koches became Muslims and many did not desire to be called Rajbansi, thus this remained as Koch, retaining their traditions, religion, culture and tribal identity to a degree of purity. There are scholars who identify these Kochs as people of mongoloid stock and the Rajbansis as of dravidian descent. There is a story that these Rajbansis and descendants of the progeny of a Bengali man and an Arkani woman. Regarding the migration of these people into the kingdom, the facts are hazy, however, it can be estimated the time was approximately 250 years to 230 years ago (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1334-1335).

Physical features: They are Mongoloid in feature. Their skin colours are pigmented darkly, they are tough and of medium stature. They have short wide noses with round prominent nostrils and depressed nasal roots giving the noses a flattish appearance. Their eyes are narrow or slanted (almost almond shaped), large ears, thick and full lips and thick, black hair (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1334).

Language: They use the language of the Koch, who have still today retained their culture and traditions as Kochs. However, these who call themselves true Rajbanshis do not use the Koch language, but instead speak a language of their own calling it Rajbansi *Boli* or *bhasa*. It is found that this language they speak is similar to the language spoken by Bengalis of West Bengal in India, since many inflexions, intonations, words, verb usages, etc. are the same. While these people speak their own language within their own community, when communicating with other tribes they use Nepali (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1334-1335). The details of the Rajbanshi language is given below -

Language Name:	Rajbanshi
Alternative Name (s):	Koch, Koch, Rajbongshi, Rajbansi, Rajbangsi, Tajpuri, Tajpuria, Kamptapuri.
Dialect Name (s):	Bahe, Central Rajbanshi, Western Rajbanshi, Eastern Rajbanshi.
Spoken in:	Nepal, India, Bangladesh.
Language Code:	rjb (Former code: RJB).

Status: Living
Family: Indo-European
Sub group: Bengali-Assamese
Sub grouping Code: IEIACA

(MultiTree: A Digital Library of Language Relationships; <http://linguistlist.org/forms/langs/LLDescription.cfm?code=rjb>).

Social Structure and Social Organisation

Social life is the essence of human life. It is a composite whole of the wave of diverse social organizations and phenomena, the background to social organization and social structure, therefore, needs mention. For Firth (1961: 35-40) social organization is the way things get done over a time in the community. It is the arrangement of elements for getting things done (in particular action). The social structure is that important system of elements which lasts and which everybody takes account of. The social structure offers a number of courses of action. The social structure is a definable morphological element, the social anatomy; it is maintained and given its ultimate form by organizational decisions (cited in Vidyarthi and Rai, 1976: 147). However, it exists in every society. Now the social life of the studied Rajbanshi people is being mentioned.

Family: Rajbansi families are of three types- joint or composite unilineal, nuclear or conjugal-natal, and composite-conjugal-natal or a mixture of both joint and nuclear under a single roof. Among these three types, the nuclear family pattern is most prevalent. In a Rajbansi family, even after the marriage of the eldest son, he and his spouse remain in the same house, eating in the same kitchen, with no change except for the daughter-in-law or *buhari* being an addition to the household. This situation remains unaltered until the marriage of the next son. Up till this time, the head of the household (the father) is the sole authority and everyone is supposed to work and act according to his (father's) directions. It is after the second son marries that the nuclear families begin to emerge. Rajbansi society is a patriarchal one and can be seen from the fact that after the death of the family head, the responsibility and authority are both transferred naturally to the

eldest son. In spite of this, any rites or rituals that involved in the family must be attended by all the sons, whether they are living within the same roof or in separate nuclear families. This is so, because the role of sons in Rajbansi society is of paramount importance. In the light of such glaring evidence a scholar stated blandly that these people are of a matriarchal society. It can be thus stated that, the Rajbansi society is purely matriarchal and no evidence is available regarding their tendency towards matriarchy today (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1335-1336).

Marriage: While marrying, Rajbanshi people are very careful and avoid the marriages between agnates *had nata jogaune* (*had* meaning bone or agnatic kin, *nata* meaning relationship, *jogaune* meaning avoidance). According to their tradition, they must keep an interval of seven generations in the agnatic lineage and five generations in the matrilineal lineage. Seven generations must also be kept as an interval in their *guru kul* (the abode or the family of one's guru) lineage and three generations in their meet lineage (somewhat like the blood brother relationship in other tribes throughout the world). It is only after this that they are permitted to intermarry, however, this rule is not strictly adhered to by the Rajbanshis themselves, as has been observed (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1335).

Kinship: The Rajbanshi people claim descent from the *surya bansi* (solar dynasty) *Kshatriyas* (warriors) and state their *gotra* as *Kashya* (*kashya*- a holy shrine in the Gharwal mountains of Uttar Pradesh, India). Basically they have seven *thars* (clan) namely, Rajbanshi, Lakhat Rajbanshi, Rajpuriya, Koche, Ramaniya, Kahal, Koal Makra, Woang Rajbanshi. Besides these, there are the Muslims too (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1335).

Economy: Traditionally they are agriculturalists and they survive on the produce of their labour. They mainly cultivate paddy, betel, tobacco, mustard, jute etc. and also grow several vegetables in small gardens around their houses. Their income is limited and consequently their economic standard never rises. The reasons for this economic stagnation are: extravagance; possession of very little cultivable lands; great population increase; unwilling to accept modern farming techniques to mention a few, as has been observed. Livestock rearing is also done by the people, as has been observed, but only as

an economic contingency on which they can fall back. Bull and buffaloes (male) are seen to be reared under some sort of compulsion i.e. till the land. They do possess cows, buffaloes (females), goats, chickens, pigeons, etc. for milk and proteins. They are found to carry their farm produce like milk, curds, *ghyu*, etc. to the nearby local markets or *hats* (weekly market) and the money they earn is used to add a slight boost to their sagging economy. Besides, livestock breeding and farming, they are good weavers and some are also employed in government or private sectors. This is another source from which they draw extra money into their community. Now-a-days some of them have also engaged in various jobs- services, business and others. But all these are not enough and the Rajbansi are still in economic doldrums (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1344).

Settlement: The houses of traditional Rajbanshi are made of locally available raw materials like wood, bamboo and mud. They keep their houses clean and tidy and do not consider it necessary to have the doorway facing a particular direction (as is very important in other tribal house construction patterns). But if one direction proves inauspicious, then they rebuild the house facing another direction. Rajbanshi houses are found to have doorways facing any one of the four directions. While one house is utilised as the kitchen, the other may be used as the storeroom, bedroom or such. They also have the tradition of constructing a separate house which is used by beggars or by strangers who need shelter for a night or so. This is also used as a parlour for guests or as a conference room. At the centre of these houses is a clean compound, there is a hearth or pit for burning a fire during the winter season and where household members and other people gather to narrate ancient lore, simultaneously absorbing the warmth. The cowsheds are constructed quite a distance away from the dwellings, but not too far. The *thakur than* (altar) is situated to the south-east of the main house. *Thakur* (deity) is worshipped as *kul devta*, by these people (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1335). But now-a-days an influence of modern house type is observed among them. Presently they are coming out of their traditional house architecture and building modern house.

Food and Drinks: Their food is simple and the staple diet is rice. Ordinarily, they eat the food consisting of rice, pulses and curry (veg. curry and fish curry). Sale roti is cooked only on certain occasions to prefer to eat maize and wheat. In Rajbansi society, they all

seem to like a food called *panta bhat* (stalled rice) meaning cooked rice soaked in water. This is soaked the whole night and eaten the next morning. They throw away the water and then pour some oil and add salt to this dish. Onions are also used to flavour this *panta bhat*. They eat *muri* (puffed rice), *chira* (flattened rice) and also eat *dahi* (curd). They drink milk but they don't prefer *ghee* (clarified butter). Though meat consumption is permitted in their society, they do not like people who eat pork, buff and chicken and also those who drink intoxicants. Thought these folks use earthenware pots and metal utensils, guests are served on banana leaves which they say is the way of showing their greatest respect in their society (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1336).

Dress and Ornaments: The Rajbansi people dress up in a very simple way. The men folk wear knee length *dhotis*, and *langautis* (loincloths), while the women wear *paetains* which consist of a piece of cloth wrapped around to cover their breasts and lower torso till their knees. These are their traditional clothes; however, they have begun to wear modern clothes now-a-days. Rajbansi do not have the custom of their married women wearing *sindur* (vermilion), cutting and combing their hair and wearing *tika* (holy mark). They mostly wear silver ornaments. Married women wear silver chains, wristlets and bangles. While making such ornaments, they use almost one to 1.25 kilograms of silver, meaning their ornaments are extremely heavy (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1336).

Political Organisation: Their society is controlled by the village panchayat. In case of community hunting, community fishing in shallow water, marriage, funeral rites and co-operative tilling of land, the order of the village panchayat is observed by everyone. At the present moment the Government have set up village defence parties mainly to prevent theft and robbery. Some of the young men have enlisted themselves and they work under the direction of a commander selected from amongst them. Creation of Gram Panchayat under West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957 has given further impetus to the village people (Sanyal, 1965: 124).

Religious Beliefs and Festivals: They are adherents of Hinduism. They worship various *devis* (Goddesses) and *devtas* (Gods), but the *puja* (worship) to the goddess *Kali* (female shakti-energy) is carried out with great fanfare and enthusiasm. Every village has a

separate but dedicated top this goddess and it is here that she is propitiated. While in some huts, mud mounds are coloured and worshipped, other huts contain images of Kali at the centre, flanked by fairs on both sides. On some road sides, banana trees are also planted, where the worship of *Masan Kali*¹⁰ is done. Every village has an individual *gram devta* (village deity) and separate from other villages. In some villages, this deity is housed in a hut while in other villages, it is placed beneath a tree. Among the deities they worship some are *Sarbamangala*¹¹, *Bisahari*¹² and *Dulai Chandī*¹³. *Puja* is also performed to the man's skull or *khappar*, and to clay deities located in their fields. These clay deities are worshipped in the fields to ensure protection of the crops from natural disasters and the *khappar* is worshipped so that *bhuts* (ghost) and *preths* (demons) do not trouble them. The Rajbansi people who worship such deities naturally do dabble in the realm of *jadutona* (white or black magic), *mantra-tantra* (incantations and spells) and the priests of such activities, the *dhamis* and *jhankris* act as mediators. Rajbansi worship *Bisto thakur* (the water god), *Burma thakur* (protector from fire) *Pawan thakur* (protector from storms), *Basumati thakurani*¹⁴ and *Mahakal Thakur* (god of mountains and forests). There are other deities such as: *Shiva*, *Dharam thakur*¹⁵ and *Laxmi thakurani*¹⁶. Rajbansi festivals are called *pawani*¹⁷. Though the Hindu festivals of *dasai*¹⁸ and *tihar*¹⁹ are

¹⁰ *Masan Kali*: Images of Goddesses *Kali* who is worshipped on different occasions for the purpose of purification of the houses. Especially on some occasions like birth, marriage and death this deity is worshipped by these folks. In this connection the pigeon or duck is sacrificed to this deity.

¹¹ *Sarbamangala*: Many ancient literatures and texts have depicted the existence of Mata *Sarbamangala*. This deity is worshipped by these folk people for the wellbeing of family.

¹² *Bisahari*: The blind deity i.e. the deity of the snakes is worshipped by these folk people.

¹³ *Dulai Chandī*: The Goddesses *Chandī* is associated with good fortune as well as disaster. One of her auspicious forms is *Dulai Chandī*.

¹⁴ *Basumati thakurani*: The earth-deity, is regarded as the mother of all living things and the giver of food.

¹⁵ *Dharam thakur*: The Hindu god worshipped by these folk people as one of their special village gods. He is a fertility god and a healer of disease. He is represented by a shapeless stone daubed with vermilion and is normally placed under a tree or placed in the open, but sometimes enshrined in a temple. The worship mainly takes place in the months of Baisakh, Jaistha and Asarh on the day of full moon.

¹⁶ *Laxmi thakurani*: The Hindu Goddess of wealth, prosperity (both material and spiritual), fortune, and the embodiment of beauty. She is said to bring good luck and is believed to protect her devotees from all kinds of misery and money-related sorrows. She is worshipped daily in homes.

¹⁷ *Pawani*: Traditionally, the Rajbanshi people celebrate their own festival such as the *Pawani*.

¹⁸ *Dasai*: *Dasai*, which is celebrated during Sept-Oct. It is known as Durga Puja and this is the greatest festival in Hindu society.

¹⁹ *Tihar*: The name *Tihar* means the festival of lights, where many candles are lit both inside and outside the houses to make it bright at night. People pray to the Goddess Laxmi, the consort of Lord Vishnu during *Tihar*. The Goddess Laxmi is also considered to be the main Goddess of wealth and good fortune.

celebrated by them, they do so in a different way. On the *astami*²⁰ (eighth day) and the *nawami*²¹ (ninth day), of *dasai*, blood sacrifices are offered to the goddess *Durga* as is done by other Hindus, but on the tenth day or *vijaya dashami (tika)*, these people do not wear any *tika* or *jamaro*. Similarly, in *tihar* too. They perform *Laxmi puja* in their own way, but the custom of *bhai tika*²² is not at all prevalent. Besides the above festivals, there are some unique to the Rajbansis and reflect their socio-cultural importance (Bisht and Bankoti, 2004: 1344-1345).

The area under study namely Purba Rangia village located at Balasan River basin adjacent to Siliguri town and lies at the foothill region of the Himalayas. The River Balasan downwards from Himalayas with natural resources to a great extent like sands, stones, boulders etc. which are used as the raw materials for urban constructions and it emerged out as a prime earning source for the people working in the stone field. The Balasan River bed provided them the land to establish a new residence. Several castes, communities and ethnic groups lived in the studied village but most of them belonged to Rajbanshi community, a chief scheduled caste of North Bengal. The present research work mainly conducted on this community. It is said that they belong to the great 'Bodo' family. Those Koch who are now Hindus are mainly known under the name Rajbanshi. The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, as a synonym of Koch. Their dialect holds several close point of similarity to the dialect of East Bengal. However, due to various reasons the traditional life which includes family, marriage, kinship, settlement, economy, food and drinks, dress and ornaments, political organisation, religious belief and festivals etc. as well as socio-cultural life of the studied Rajbanshi people have been affected seriously. Due to several reasons they have been forced to migrate here and for survival they engaged themselves mostly in stone based work. However, it has a great impact on their life and in particular the children of those families as well as their overall development may be affected by it and these issues will be examined in the following chapters primarily.

²⁰ *Astami*: It is the second day of Durga puja.

²¹ *Nawami*: It is the third and final day of Durga puja.

²² *Bhai tika*: On the fifth or last day of *Tihar*, brothers take *tika* (holy mark) from sisters. The sisters also offer sweets and other food items and cloths to their brothers. It is believed that brothers become safe from death and other evils after taking *tika* and garlands from their sisters during *Tihar*.

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