

CHAPTER- III

DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION

ROADWAYS

In the earlier chapter it is found that after the establishment of PWD in Bengal, all the previous powers and functions of the Military Board concerning public works had been transferred to the newly formed PWD. In the initial years this department tried to confine its activity for fulfilling the recommendations of the pre-existed Military Board for developing transport and communication system of Bengal Presidency.¹ It is not improper to say that after the establishment of Darjeeling as the sanatorium of Bengal for the English, all the major efforts regarding the improvement of road communication system in the region since the fourth decade of nineteenth century seemed to be concentrated upon the demand of easing Calcutta's communication with that of Darjeeling. For this reason, various proposals were received and several measures were adopted by the Government of Bengal since the time mentioned. It is interesting to note that at that time there were two ways to reach Darjeeling. One through Malda-Dinajpur and the second through Purnia. Both of the routes commenced from the Ganges at Godagari and Rajmahal respectively. In fact, the first was the old military line (185 miles) between Berhampur and Rangpur through Malda and Dinajpur for sending troops.² In 1840, the EEIC started to construct a more direct road from Murshidabad through Dinajpur coined as 'the Darjeeling Road' after improving the line of road communication between Barasat and Murshidabad through Krishnanagar, aiming at reaching Darjeeling in shorter ways.³ The Dinajpur route, measuring 196 miles from the Ganges at Burgatchi to Pankhabari achieved its popularity very soon. The increasing demands for necessity

of bridging and repairing the same route from the officers of the EEIC all over the country compelled Executive Officers of Darjeeling for estimating the cost of the work and to forward the plan to the Military Board for issuing order through the Superintending Engineers.⁴ The Company officials used to visit Darjeeling in search of European climate using the line when Darjeeling was developed as a sanatorium.⁵ The second line through Purnia known as 'Major Napier's Line' measuring 110 miles from the Ganges to Titalyah was generally used for military purposes to convey forces from Berhampur cantonment through Rajmahal. It was at the time when the Company tried to connect Darjeeling with a more direct route to Calcutta, several opinions aroused from military as well as civil officials for promoting both the lines. Interestingly, while the civil officials like Welby Jackson, Judge of the Sudder Dewanny and Nizamut Adawlut, on Deputation to Darjeeling, urged the Government for developing 'Dinajpur line' due to existence of two civil headquarters and for passing through a richer country; the military officials like Dr. A. Campbell, Superintendent of Darjeeling proposed for 'Purnia line' with some modifications and changes in tracts from Kishenganj to Purnia to take the line via Kutee Ghat, Bysa Factory and Kusbah instead of Lalbary Ghat, Bebeegunge and Berrrely Ghat.⁶ However, by summing up all the proposals, it is found that most of the opinions were in favour of searching for more direct route from Rajmahal to Darjeeling with constant appeals to the Government for renovating both of the earlier routes of communication into more modest way to avail them all through the years.⁷ The 'Dinajpur line' by this time from Burgatchi to Pankhabari had been receiving the Government allowance for repair and maintenance of road, bridges and drain bridges of rupees 4226 per annum, averaging rupees 21-13 per mile.⁸ The tradition of improving the same line in subsequent years were also visible through the Register of letters received from Superintending

Engineers of First, Second and Third Circle, 1854-1858 by the Chief Engineer of Lower Provinces.⁹

Despite this, it was being clearly understood from the very beginning of the second half of nineteenth century that the 'Purnia line' would be the main line of communication with Darjeeling as against the Dinajpur line' in near future. The distance factor, the approach of railroads to Rajmahal on the bank of river Ganges and above all the pressure of military officials for despatching force easily from Berhampur Cantonment, made it possible. There was evidently another cause that could not be ignored. It was the Government decision that took a specific road policy since the establishment of the PWD throughout the province. It had been determined that a complete system of road network consisting of imperial roads and the small or district roads would frame the road network of the province and that network of roads had been targeted to pass through every districts by the first category and connected to it by the second category.¹⁰ Following the policy, a good metalled road between Calcutta and Darjeeling had been sanctioned and the cost being assumed at rupees 21,00,000.¹¹ As a result, the search for new line of communication between Rajmahal and Darjeeling was started side by side with the development of pre-existed Purnia road.¹² However, it was not till 1860 when the East Indian Railway was extended to Munger, the passengers from Calcutta tried to have a teste of a new journey through the new line of communication from Caragola Ghat to the foot of hill through Purnia, Kishenganj, Titalya and Siliguri.¹³ The Ganges and Darjeeling road for 136 miles with one unbridged river at Sakrigalighat was opened for traffic in 1866.¹⁴ After the opening up the new road, the 'Old Darjeeling Road' through Dinajpur was abandoned mostly though it was still maintained by the PWD and still acted as the chief line of communication between Murshidabad and Dinajpur.¹⁵

The series of 'A Statistical Account of Bengal' of W.W. Hunter for Bengal districts are the major source of information of road communication system of all over Bengal till the beginning of the seventh decade of nineteenth century. The following table furnishes the total mileage of roads under the public authorities, depending on the pre-mentioned source for the North Bengal districts.

Table No-3.1

Total Mileage of Roads in North Bengal Districts till the beginning of seventies of Nineteenth Century

District	Total Length	Imperial managed by PWD	Provincial managed by District authority	Municipal	Remarks
Darjeeling	427 miles	93 miles	234 miles	100 miles	
Jalpaiguri	318 miles	77 miles	241 miles	nil	
Coochbehar	104 miles	...	....	....	All the roads were under the management of Superintendent of Public Works employed by the state
Dinajpur	332 miles	130 miles	202 miles	....	The Darjeeling High Road from Murshidabad to Darjeeling was the Imperial line that went through the district of Dinajpur.
Malda	177 miles	.....	177 miles	....

Source: W.W. Hunter. A Statistical Account of Bengal. Vol. X: Districts of Darjiling and Jalpaiguri, and State of Kuch Behar. London: Trubner & CO. 1876.

W.W. Hunter. A Statistical Account of Bengal. Vol. VII: Districts of Maldah, Rangpur and Dinajpur. London: Trubner & CO. 1876.

From the above table it is clear that Darjeeling possessed highest mileage of roads and Malda owned lowest position for the same amongst the districts of North Bengal. Being a native state Cooch Behar maintained a minimum numbers and miles of roads

according to its necessity. The following table exhibits the basic road statistic by category of the districts of North Bengal as drawn by Hunter.

Table No-3.2

Roads of North Bengal (Imperial and Provincial) as mentioned by W.W. Hunter

District	Road by Category					
	Provincial				Imperial	Length
	Local	Length	Municipal	Length		
Darjeeling	Little Rangit river to Gok and Kalbang	6	Cart road to Dhutiria factory	8	Darjeeling Hill Cart Road from Siligory to Darjeeling station	48
	Rangnu to Rangli rangliot	10	Darjiling town to Little Ranjit	10	Saddle to Jalapahar	2.5
	Balasan to Nagri	4	Cart road to Hopetown and Balasan	16	Pankhabari to Siligory	16
	Nepal Road from little Rangit to Nepal frontier	20	Darjiling station to Jallapahar	2	Saddle to Rangbi	7
	Tista river to Mann's Hut and Sivak	12	Darjiling Station to Rangnu	8		
	Takda towards Rangli Rangliot	6	Karsiang to Pankhabari	6		
	Great Rangit to Tista bridge	8	Darjiling Station to Great Ranjit	12		
	Tista river to Kalimpong	6	Takvar to Great Ranjit	8		
	Kalimpong to Damsang	14	Darjiling Station to Little Ranjit	10		
	Damsang to Llaba	12				
	Llaba to Dalingkot and Kiranti	38				
	Garidhura to Nuksarbari	12				
	Garidhura to Phansideva	16				
	Matigarh to Phansideva	10				
	Nuksarbari to Karaibari Hat	6				
	Karaibari to Phansideva	12				
	Nuksarbari to Matigarh	12				
	Karaibari to Adhikari Hat	6				
	Matigarh to Champasiri	12				
	Gurumara to Great Tista	12				

Jalpaiguri	Jalpaiguri station through the western Dwars Subdivision as far as the Sankos ferry	77		Portions of the Darjeeling Road from Titalya to Siliguri	27
	Mainaguri to Ambari	26		Jalpaiguri town to Titalya	29
	Mainaguri to Kuch Behar town of which within the district	11		Portions of Kuch Behar Buxa Road from Alipur and Buxa	21
	East bank of Tista to Domahani Hat through Dunga hat	6			
	Mainaguri to Domahini Hat and Dunga Hat	9			
	Jalpaiguri to Siliguri through Ambari Phalakata	27			
	Jalpaiguri to Boda	30			
	Jalpaiguri to Dalingkot of which within the district	29			
	Jalpaiguri to Kuch Behar of which within the district	26			
Cooch Behar				Portions of Dhubri to Jalpaiguri Road	48
				Portions of Kuch Behar to Buxa Road	12
				Portions of Kuch Behar to Rangpur Road	24
Dinajpur	Gangarampur Road	18		Portions of Darjeeling High Road	130
	Rangpur Road	24			
	Bogra Road	30			
	Maldah	40			
	Purnia Road	48			
	Nekmard Fair Road	36			
Malda	Rajmahal Road	18			
	Dinajpur Road	25			
	Tartipur Road	26			
	Metalled road in civil station of English Bazar	3			
	Un-metalled road in civil station of English Bazar	5			
	Umirti to Nimasarai Road	7			
	English Bazar to Nimasarai Road	4			

Tartipur to Baragharia Road	10			
Simultala to Sadullapur road	3			
Sastanitala to Kaliachak Road	11			
Rohanpur to Parbatipur Road	12			
Rohanpur Road	20			
Sibganj Road	2			
Kansat Road	10			

*spellings inputted in original form.

Source:

W.W. Hunter. A Statistical Account of Bengal. Vol. X: Districts of Darjiling and Jalpaiguri, and State of Kuch Behar. London: Trubner & CO. 1876.

W.W. Hunter. A Statistical Account of Bengal. Vol. VII: Districts of Maldah, Rangpur and Dinajpur. London: Trubner & CO. 1876.

Some conclusions can be drawn on the road network of North Bengal depending on Hunter's famous 'A Statistical Account of Bengal' series. Firstly, there was only one road thoroughly managed by the PWD from imperial fund in North Bengal till the beginning of 1870's which might be called the 'Imperial Line' in strictest sense from Calcutta to Darjeeling known as the 'Darjeeling High Road' passing through the districts of Rajshahi, Malda, Dinajpur, Purnia, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling. Similarly, there were also some roads in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling which were also managed by the PWD. In the hill areas of Darjeeling the places which were generally developed as sanatorium and for implementing Government projects- most of the roads were maintained by the PWD. Side by side, the roads in Jalpaiguri district which were used for maintaining communications with Bhutan, Coochbehar and Assam were managed by the PWD. However, instances were also prevailed to hand over the management of roads from the PWD to the district authority in Jalpaiguri district for better governance and maintenance.¹⁶

Secondly, without a handful instance of existence, all the roads whether maintained by the PWD, the district or municipality were un-metalled in character. Darjeeling scored the highest in having metalled road. Malda, Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri also had a few miles of metalled road in the vicinity of district headquarters.

Thirdly, following the road policy of the Government, roads between districts were constructed from the local fund as feeders of the imperial roads. Thus, different district roads connecting neighbouring districts e.g. Dinajpur-Purnia road, Dinajpur-Rangpur road, Dinajpur-Malda road, Dinajpur-Bogra road, Malda-Purnia road, Malda-Rajshahi road, Rangpur-Jalpaiguri road, Darjeeling- Purnia road etc. existed from previously or not, were made of or repaired in new form. Besides the roads mentioned earlier, there were also two types of roads. Few roads were there in all the districts of North Bengal which were connected between important trading centres of neighbouring districts traversing throughout their entire length.¹⁷ The roads belonged to the second category which were connected only between the stations within the districts and maintained by the district authorities.¹⁸

Fourthly, it is evident from the table that the road development programme in all the districts of North Bengal were not equally happened. There was certainly fascination from the Government in this regard. Report on Administration of Bengal 1871-72, clearly reports this issue as: 'the money was however very unequally distributed some favoured metropolitan and other districts which collected very little, got a disproportionably large share of the assignments, while other remote and little visited districts got much less than they collected'.¹⁹

Lastly, in spite of having several references of various roads in all the districts of North Bengal either imperial or district or municipal, which were seemed to be sufficient

in numbers in those days, were practically remained open for traffic hardly for eight months of a year due to inundation of the roads. That is why the travellers used to prefer the river communication if affordable.

Since the late sixties of nineteenth century some administrative changes had been occurred in the history of North Bengal. After the defeat of the rulers of Sikkim (1861) and of Bhutan (1864) by the hands of the English, while the district of Darjeeling took its present shape, it became the summer capital of Bengal administration. Consequently, the division of Coochbehar was created after the Bhutan war for better governance comprising the territory of Western Duars, Coochbehar, Darjeeling, Garrow hills, Goalpara, and with other parts since 1st January, 1866.²⁰ In continuation to this, the district of Jalpaiguri was formed in 1869.²¹ Side by side, Jalpaiguri was chosen as the official headquarter of the Rajshahi division since the amalgamation of Rajshahi and Coochbehar division into a single Commissionership from 10th September 1875, till India achieved its freedom.²²

Therefore, the concentration of the British Government, since the time mentioned obviously was fallen upon the development of the new zone centring Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri. Thus, it was found from the communication statistics shown by Hunter that Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri got the highest places as against other districts of North Bengal. Moreover, the increasing tea producing areas in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts helped to develop the road network of these districts for the sake of tea industry by the Government or by the tea garden owners, whatever the cases might be.

In 1874, when a devastating famine in Eastern India broke out, the Government adopted the scheme for construction of several roads in Bihar and North Bengal for relief operations²³ though the report²⁴ describes about the character of these roads as only

earthworks. However, an important change took place in 1885-86 in the administration of the PWD in North Bengal. The Jalpaiguri Division was abolished and the subdivisions of this division had been distributed between the Darjeeling and Rajshahi Divisions.²⁵

The introduction of tea industry first in Assam, then in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri led to the development of road network in these regions. An imperial line was set up from Central India through North Bengal towards Assam for the supply of labourers to the tea gardens. This line of road known as the Central Emigration Road ran east from Dinajpur district through Jalpaiguri district as far as Haldibari station and thence through the Cooch Behar state passing through Mekhliganj, Patgram, Mathabhanga and Cooch Behar.²⁶ This road was maintained regularly as it was supposed to be the life line of tea belt. Therefore, grants were allotted to the Jalpaiguri District Board to carry out the repairs of the ferry on this road.²⁷ When railways were introduced in North Bengal this road had been serving as important feeder to the Eastern Bengal Railway, Northern Bengal State Railway and Cooch Behar State Railway.²⁸

The eighties of the nineteenth century stands for a major landmark in the constitutional history of India. It was Lord Ripon, the Viceroy of India who dared to pass his famous resolution on 'Local Self Government' in India on May 18, 1882 for decentralising the power to the Indians.²⁹ Ripon, though not totally succeeded to introduce the system in all of departments of the Government due to resistance from his fellow administrators, he definitely and remarkably brought a change in the administrative set-up of the communication system of the country through it. However, when the said system was introduced in Bengal, under the provisions of Act III of 1885, the management of roads were bestowed upon three agencies. The PWD got the responsibility of maintenance of important roads of the district, the roads of second

category came to the hands of District Boards while rural roads were decided to be handed over to the local boards or under the management of rural zamindars.³⁰ The statistics shows that the outlay on roads that were embanked and bridged, but not metalled was highest in the Rajshahi Division.³¹ Report on the Administration of Bengal³² states that Rupees 892, Rupees 749 and Rupees 93 were expended by the District Boards of Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Malda respectively in the maintenance of trees on the sides of the district roads and in replacing by new ones the trees that had withered. However, the following table (Table No-3.3) on road statistics of North Bengal districts exhibits the pattern of road development till the last of nineteenth century in the districts of North Bengal.

Table No-3.3

Statement showing the length of roads maintained by Public Authorities in North Bengal

Name of District	Length of metalled roads maintained by the PWD			Length of unmetalled roads maintained by the PWD			Length of metalled roads maintained by the Local authorities			Length of unmetalled roads maintained by the Local authorities			Total length of metalled roads			Total length of unmetalled roads		
	1891-92	1895-96	1899-00	1891-92	1895-96	1899-00	1891-92	1895-96	1899-00	1891-92	1895-96	1899-00	1891-92	1895-96	1899-00	1891-92	1895-96	1899-00
Dinajpur	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	20	20	20	109 2	107 3	102 6	20	20	20	109 2	107 3	102 6
Darjeeling	113	133	156	231	243	185	nil	nil	nil	351	368	351	113	133	156	582	612	536
Jalpaiguri	8	8	8	nil	nil	nil	27	27	27	531	706	660	35	35	35	531	706	660
Malda	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	3	3	3	538	538	531	3	3	3	538	538	531
Cooch Behar																		

* Data for Cooch Behar is not available.

Source:

1. *Report on the Administration of Bengal: 1891-92*. Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot. 1893.

2. *Report on the Administration of Bengal: 1895-96*. Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot. 1897.

3. *Report on the Administration of Bengal: 1899-1900*. Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Press. 1901.

While the railways started to expand its journey in North Bengal, road network in the region grew up rapidly with the help of railway feeders. Important commercial, as well as administrative centres which were not traversed by the railways, were connected by these feeders. Hunter points out that a road from the nearest point of rail route to Darjeeling, close to the south-eastern border of Malda district might be laid out as to pass through the grain mart of Rohunpur.³³ For better coordination a complete programme of feeder roads to the Eastern and Northern sections of the Eastern Bengal State Railway and the Bengal Central Railway had been prepared in 1895-96 with the joint assistance

of the Manager, Eastern Bengal State Railway, the Commissioners of the Presidency and Rajshahi Divisions and the Agent and Chief Engineer of the Bengal Central Railway. In this programme the feeder roads had been arranged in their order of importance and ‘two officers of the PWD, with suitable staff, had been deputed to survey and prepare estimates of the proposed roads’.³⁴ The following table (Table No-3.4) exhibits some of the important railway feeders in the districts of North Bengal till the first decade of twentieth century.

Table No-3.4

Railway Feeder Roads of North Bengal

District	Road
Dinajpur	Ghoraghat to Hili, Phulbari to Pirganj in Rangpur, Phulbari to Bauchanda in Rangpur, Phulbari to Samjhia, Phulbari to Patiram, Kachudanga to Berhampur, Nitpur to Sibpur, Sibpur to Damdama, Sibpur to Sitahar in Bogra, Parbatipur to Rangpur, Ghoraghat to Samjhia.
Malda	Rajmahal to English Bazar
Darjeeling	.....
Jalpaiguri	Central Emigration Road
Cooch Behar	Central Emigration Road

Note- Feeders to the Bengal Duars Railway has been excluded.

Source-

W.W. Hunter. *A Statistical Account of Bengal*. Vol. VII: Districts of Maldah, Rangpur and Dinajpur. London: Trubner & CO. 1876.

Imperial Gazetteer. Bengal: Native States and French Possessions. Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Press. 1907.

RAILWAYS

Railways in North Bengal was a later ages development as against its other counterpart related to transport and communication system not in Bengal Presidency but all over India. Before the introduction of railways in North Bengal the passengers used to travel through the East Indian Railways to Sahibganj, thence crossing the river Ganges through ferry at Caragola Ghat and proceeded to Darjeeling by a long and tedious journey.³⁵ It is not known why the East Indian Railways did not cross the Ganges for extending itself to the foot of the hill while the Government tried a lot to reach the same anyway which was discovered by constructing a metalled road known as the 'Darjeeling road'.

The formation of the Eastern Bengal Railway in 1857 which started operation in 1859 rather be regarded as the beginning of railways in North Bengal. Mr. J. Danvers' report which can be regarded as the first annual report accompanied by a general review of the history of railways in India published on 12th March, 1860 strongly suggested for the expansion of the operations of the same line to Darjeeling.³⁶ At that time the line was extended up to Koostea and was expected to be ready to open in May, 1862 while the final report of the Chief Engineer for extending the line beyond the Ganges had been under considerations due to heavy estimated cost of £12,768 per mile.³⁷

In the month of January 1863, the Indian Branch Railway Company made definite proposals for the construction of a light railway in extension of the Eastern Bengal Railway Company from Ranaghat via Bhugwangolah to the Ganges, opposite Burgatchee, with branches to Dinajpur through to the foot of the Darjeeling hills.³⁸ Against this project the Eastern Bengal Railway Company lodged a complaint on the ground that their Company had a prior claim to such concession with draft plan and

estimates as the Government may be prepared to give for an extension to Darjeeling.³⁹ Hence it was thought that consideration of the relative advantages of the alternative lines would not be much longer postponed by the Government.⁴⁰ Several surveys were made and their reports were received accordingly.⁴¹

It was also published in the Government Report that the final survey and estimates of a new narrow gauge line of 211 miles long, from the Ganges through the districts of Pabna, Rajshahi, Bogra, Dinajpur, Rangpur and Jalpaiguri to the foot of the hill of Darjeeling to serve the enormous quantities of agricultural products viz. jute, rice, tobacco, sugar, silk, tea and many others of the districts of the said region had been laid before the Government of India in September, 1872.⁴² The Government of India also accepted the views of Lt. Governor of Bengal in November, 1872 for constructing the line that could be most paying line in India in near future with its branches through major trading centres of the traversing districts.⁴³

A plan of opening a new line was sanctioned to the Northern Bengal Railways Company from Ganges at Sara on the bank of river Padma in Pabna district to Jalpaiguri in addition to an order of surveying the line from the north of Jalpaiguri to the end of the Darjeeling Cart Road.⁴⁴ The work of the same line was started. During its construction it was considered to connect it with that of the nearest station of Eastern Bengal Railway Company i.e. Poradaha through a ferry opposite the Padma.⁴⁵ However the line was opened for traffic on the 1st April, 1878 between Poradaha and Jalpaiguri and between Jalpaiguri and Siliguri on 10th June, in the same year with interruptions for several times during the rains and was not finally opened till 1st of November, 1878.⁴⁶

It was since the very beginning of the discovery of Darjeeling as a preferred hometown that was supposed to belong 'European climate' for the British officials and

troops; the aim of the British masters was to reach Darjeeling safely and comfortably. Within a few months of opening of the Northern Bengal State Railways the line achieved tremendous growth in its passengers and goods carriages.⁴⁷ It was hoped, as published in the Annual Administrative Report of the Bengal Presidency,

that the delay and difficulty now experienced in getting passengers and goods to and from Darjeeling and the Northern Bengal State Railway terminus will be obviated by the construction of the tramway, and also that the prosperity of the hill stations of Darjeeling and Kurseong will be thereby rapidly developed, and that the Northern Bengal State Railway will itself feel the benefit of the increased traffic.⁴⁸

Accordingly, the Darjeeling Steam Tramway Company Limited was formed for constructing a tramway between Siliguri and Darjeeling. The Annual Administrative report of Bengal Presidency: 1878-79 remarks on the formation of the said Company as:

In 1878, a Company, called the Darjeeling Steam Tramway Company Limited, has been formed, under an agreement entered into between Mr. Franklin Prestage, as trustee on behalf of the Company, and the Secretary of State for India in Council, for the purpose of constructing, maintaining and working a steam tramway from the terminus of Northern Bengal State Railway at Siliguri to Darjeeling. The tramway is to be constructed upon the existing cart road between the above two stations, the Government paying the Company for maintenance of the road with all the bridges, embankments and other works necessary for that purpose, while the Company have undertaken at their sole cost to strengthen the existing bridges and other works so as to carry their tramway with its equipment in safety.⁴⁹

The estimated cost of that line was decided Rupees 15,73,294 while the gross earnings would be Rupees 3,08,472.⁵⁰ The work was commenced in April, 1879 and within one year the rails were almost laid into Kurseong.⁵¹ The line was finally completed for opening throughout Darjeeling station on the 4th July, 1881, though it was opened for traffic from Siliguri to Ghoom some months earlier.⁵² In 1914 a workshop for this line was set up at Tindharia. A narrow gauge extension of DHR of 70 miles was opened up to Kishenganj to facilitate the jute trade and border trade of Nepal. Another extension of this line was extended to Gyalikhola through Sevoke in 1915. This 30 miles long line was ceased to operate in 1950.

It is evident from the above that the British Indian Government tried their best to open up North Bengal mostly for commercial purposes by penetrating the land through the Northern Bengal State Railways and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways intending to connect the staple food and commercial crops producing districts of the region with Calcutta. Henceforth, the branch lines were also opened for connecting the major trading centres of the districts with the main line which was connected with the Eastern Bengal State Railways beyond the Ganges. The Report on the Administration of Bengal for the year 1872-73 mentions this matter as:

In connection with the Northern Bengal Railway scheme may be mentioned two extensions or branches which have been proposed. One is to connect Cooch Behar country with the railway; it is to be 38 miles long and must be constructed, if at all out of the surplus of the Cooch Behar Rajah...the Cooch Behar estate will pay two-thirds of the cost of the whole branch line...The second suggested extension was to be in the valley of Tista, up which a reconnaissance was to be made with

a view of ascertaining how far a line could be taken, at reasonable cost, to some point which would serve as a point of departure for the Central Asian Trade.⁵³

The Bengal Duars railway was the only line in Bengal constructed for serving a particular agricultural industry i.e. the prosperous tea industry in Duars and also to open up new areas of Western Duars.⁵⁴ Consequently, in April, 1891, a contract was signed between the Government of India and Ms. Octavius Steel with favourable terms for constructing a new line from Barnes Junction on river Tista, opposite Jalpaiguri to Dam-Dim with a branch from Lataguri to Ramsaihat, on the western bank of Jaldhaka.⁵⁵ Both of these sections were opened for traffic in 1893.⁵⁶ In addition to these, supplementary agreements for three branches of the line which were the southern extension from Barnes Junction to Lalmonir Hat, the western extension from Dam Dim to Bagrakot and the eastern extension from Mal to Madari Hat, were made with the same Company in March, 1898; September, 1900 and November, 1901 respectively.⁵⁷ All the branches were opened in 1900, 1902 and 1903 respectively.⁵⁸

There were also two lines in North Bengal besides the above-mentioned lines. The first was the Coochbehar State Railway though regarded as a separate state railway line and the only line in Bengal owned and maintained by the State authority of Coochbehar, it was originally an extension of the Eastern Bengal State Railway and Bengal Duars Railway. It was supported by the Government sources which suggested for the railways from Jalpaiguri on the Northern Bengal State Railways through Coochbehar, fifty-five miles in length to meet the extension of Assam line on Eastern Bengal State Railways to be arranged from local or provincial sources.⁵⁹ The line of 2 feet 6 inches gauge was opened from Mogulhat to Coochbehar for goods traffic on 15th September, 1893 and for passengers on 1st March, 1894.⁶⁰

An agreement between the Coochbehar Raj and the manager of the Eastern Bengal Railway Company was concluded for handing over the management of the line to the hands of the said Company for two years.⁶¹ The Indian Railway Act of 1890 with some minor modifications in favour of the Coochbehar state was adopted for the administration of the line.⁶² The extension of the line from the right bank of the Torsa river to was sanctioned in 1895-96 and surveys for the same was followed.⁶³ However, the line was extended to Alipur Duar in 1900 after bridging Kalchini river and extended to Rajabhatkhawa and Jayanti in 1901.⁶⁴

The second line was the Assam Bengal Railways which was extended to the region in various ways. The first railway in Assam was opened in 1881 from Amlapatti of Dibrugarh, the tea producing district and river Dinjam; which was extended to Makum collieries in 1884. It was reorganized 1891 as the Assam Bengal Railway for concretizing the business relations between Assam and Bengal with its headquarter at Chittagong. Between 1887 to 1891 a branch line between Parvatipur on the Northern Bengal State Railway line and Manihari through Katihar was opened which was linked up with the Assam Behar State Railway with a branch line from Parvatipur to Rangpur.⁶⁵ Similarly, from Gitaldaha in Cooch Behar a branch railway had been opened to connect Dhubri in Assam through Bamanhat since 1901.⁶⁶

INLAND NAVIGATION

It has been found earlier that the waterways were the traditional mode of transportation which were being used by the Bengalese and also by the foreigners who used to travel the land for commercial as well as other purposes from the unknown past due to comfort, security and various other causes which were also impossible to avail from road communication system of that time. The non-existence or a handful existence of 'all weather' roads in northern part of Bengal and Eastern Bengal due to non-existence of hard surface for longevity of roads, shortage of required good road building materials, six months pervading rain and yearly appearing floods causing heavy damages in existing road networks; hardly inspired the patrons of these areas to construct any good road in modern sense.⁶⁷ Moreover, the existed highways, were not out of dangers of highway piracy though river piracy were acute in some southern districts of Bengal including Sundarbans.⁶⁸ In comparison to this, the waterways of this region was far ahead of these hindrances. Side by side, while the rains of Bengal caused a great obstacle before the road communication, it at the same time benefitted the waterways by opening up 'all direction routes' for all types of burden by connecting all major rivers through tributaries, distributaries, rivulets, marshes etc.

Before going through any detail on the developmental process of water communication system in North Bengal it is proper to look at some features of the said system till the first half of the colonial rule in North Bengal. The colonial policy of 'non-interference' in India, as seen in social arena was maintained totally in the system of communication structure of Bengal.⁶⁹ The traditional system of transport and communication was followed accordingly without affecting the system minimum. Moreover, being properly acquainted with the river communication system of England

and as a maritime power, the Company preferred the system of water communication as against the roadways. This could be a cause for settling themselves finally in Calcutta except choosing other places as suitable to settle. It was also equally relevant for other European powers in Bengal. All of them settled and set up their factories in riverside towns. In fact, it was the basic difference between the early Muslim rulers of Bengal and the Europeans. The attitudes of both of them towards Bengal could easily be understood through this point. While the Muslims came to invade Bengal, it seems to be probable that the basic concern of the Europeans was business. However, it was found that the wealth after the Battle of Plassey were transported by rivers from Murshidabad to Fort William, the English headquarter of Bengal.⁷⁰ Side by side, the river networks of Bengal specially North Bengal facilitated for the development of commercial activities of the region due to location of major commercial centres at the banks of major rivers, which is shown in the following table. Naturally, the English East India Company preferred the system for their business related activities. The colonial official records clearly reflect the traditional picture of collecting local products from different marts and *hats* and stocking the same to the riverside 'depots' all through the dry seasons till the river rose high in required level during the rains for sending the whole merchandise to Calcutta or upper countries.⁷¹ Thus, appointment of James Rennell as the Surveyor and later on as the first Surveyor General of India for preparing a detail map on river network of Bengal with detailed note on commercial activities through it hints for the colonial attitude towards inland navigation.⁷² There might also be a vital cause which should not be ignored behind the colonial preference of inland navigation as against the roadway transportation. The EEIC always sought for a system which was without any financial burden and it was the inland navigation system which not only fulfilled all of their

aspiration, but also succeeded them to earn huge revenues by imposing tolls at major points of river networks all over Bengal.

Table No-3.5

Major commercial centres of Rajshahi Division on major rivers

Name of District	Name of river	Name of Commercial centres	Items of business
Darjeeling	Mahananda	Siliguri, Tetulia	Tea
Jalpaiguri	Tista	Jalpaiguri, Baura hat	Jute, tobacco, rice
	Mujnai	Falakata	Tea,
Coochbehar	Tista	Haldibari	Jute, Tea
	Tista	Mekhliganj	Tobacco
	Sankosh	Bakshirhat	Rice, paddy, jute, oil seeds
	Dharla	Dinhata	Tobacco, Jute
Dinajpur	Mahananda	Churaman	Rice,
	Kulik	Raiganj	Rice, Jute
	Tangan	Bangshihari	Rice
	Purnabhaha	Damdama, Champatala, Nawabazar, Gangarampur, Khardaha	Rice, Molases,
	Atrai	Patiram, Balurghat, Kumarganj, Samjhia,	Rice
Malda	Mahananda	English Bazar, Old Malda, Rohanpur,	Silk, Indigo

Source:

W.W. Hunter. *A Statistical Accounts of Bengal*. Vol. VII, Vol. X. London: Trubner & CO. 1876.

District Gazetteers of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Dinajpur and Malda.

From the table, it is clear that the inland navigation system in the districts of North Bengal except the district of Darjeeling was the major means of transportation from commercial point of view. Moreover, the company officials also used that system during most of the parts of the year as most of the administrative centres of North Bengal were grown up on major river sides shown in the following table.

Table No-3.6

Administrative Centres of North Bengal on major rivers sides

District	Administrative centres	River
Dinajpur	Dinajpur	Punarbhaba
	Balurghat	Atrai
	Raiganj	Kulik
Malda	English Bazar, Old Malda, Rohunpur, Nawabganj	Mahananda
Jalpaiguri	Jalpaiguri	Kharla
	Mynaguri	Tista
	Alipurduar	Kaljani
	Falakata	Mujnai
Coochbehar	Coochbehar, Dinhata	Dharla or Torsa
	Mathabhanga	Jaldhaka
	Haldibari	Tista
	Mekhliganj	Tista
Darjeeling	Siliguri	Mahananda

Source- W.W. Hunter. *A Statistical Accounts of Bengal*. Vol. VII, Vol. X. London: Trubner & CO. 1876.

District Gazetteers of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Dinajpur and Malda.

There are paucity of sources dealing with reference of water convenience as a tool of public transport in North Bengal in the early days of the English East India Company. However, foreign travellers of late Mughal days left dispersed description of North Bengal at the time of traversing the land through rivers. These descriptions were mainly associated with the contemporary towns of North Bengal viz. Rajmahal, Gour, Pandua and Coochbehar. During the early years of Company rule the first reference of travelling the Company officials through the rivers of North Bengal in indigenous convenience was found in the description of survey operations made by Major Rennell. His report published as 'The Journal' in later days not only hints for the river routes but did not forget to mention contemporary mode of convenience used by the Company officials in rivers. The boats generally used at that time were of different sizes for different purposes and of different names viz. Pinnace, Budgerow, Pulwar, Dingee, Bhuwaleea, Kosha, Chip, Woollack, Purrindah and many others.⁷³ Besides, the indigenous literature like 'Devi Choudhurani' (1884) of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, later translated in English by Subodh Chunder Mitter, written on the plot of indigenous reaction to colonial rule also furnish some picture about the popular means of convenience of Bengal rivers. But, these modes of water conveniences were generally used by the Company officials, local zamindars and richer class who themselves either possessed these river carriages or hired the same.⁷⁴ Besides, a fleet of various types of boats with necessary commodities and servants also followed main boat during the travelling and excursions of the officials and royal families.⁷⁵ Whether the lower segment of the society used these or not, had not been ascertained by any record. Perhaps the common people might not usually make a tour beyond his village except attending the weekly *huts* which were not far from their villages. For attending the huts if needed to be crossed the rivers, it was properly arranged by ferries which were maintained by local zamindars or local authorities.

The rivers of North Bengal so far records are available, had been using for trading activities since time immemorial. Ibn Batuta, in the fourteenth century, noticed at Chittagong traversing various canals loaded with trading materials bound for the port of Laknawati or Gour. The *Mongol Kavyas* of late medieval Bengal and of Early colonial rule furnish vivid examples of conveying trading activities through these rivers. The foreign travellers in late Mughal period who visited Gour also repeat the same story through their memoirs.⁷⁶ During the mid-fifties of eighteenth century when the issue of 'private trade' of the English East India Company arose, Bengal became the hunting ground of Company deployed agents and *Gomostas* who soaked all produces of villages through their tyranny.⁷⁷ These collected items were generally transported through rivers.⁷⁸ In fact, the river network of North Bengal till the end of the eighteenth century made it possible to build up the natural and dependable system of water communication in this region. Two major rivers of Eastern India, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra with their offshoots and tributaries constructed a natural river network in North Bengal till the time mentioned as it is found in the Eastern districts of present Bangladesh. Then, all the rivers were interlinked with each other and there was no village in Bengal which did not possess any water route within few miles of it.⁷⁹ At that time two major rivers viz. Mahananda and Tista of North Bengal poured their water to the Ganges. Then, Tista with its three springs viz. Karatoya, Atrai and Punarbhaba not only communicated with Calcutta through the 'Nadia rivers' but Calcutta-Dacca trade also carried on following the route. In fact, strictly speaking, being treated as the hinterland for supplying local produce at Calcutta and Dacca, both of which are situated in downstream; the rivers of North Bengal were naturally chosen by all the classes of businessmen who used to collect their trading items at the riverside marts for conveying the same easily to their destinations.

The district gazetteers and other official records of the English East India Company and colonial government provide useful information regarding internal trade of the province carried by rivers of North Bengal. Most of the early colonial records furnish the story of collecting the local produce at the riverside depots due to non-availability of good roads till the rivers rose for plying all types of loaded boats and transporting the same to their destiny.⁸⁰

It was the waterways which the English East India Company initiated for introducing the public transport system experimentally before the introduction of the railways. Regular steamer service was started in the Ganges from Calcutta to Allahabad in 1834 under the direct supervision of the English East India Company though there were several references of experiments which were started much earlier of its introduction.⁸¹ These services were mostly confined for transporting Company officials and Government stores to upper countries, though, the services in its initial stage were very frequent. The journey was time bound averaging 27 to 38 days for which rates were high and booking was full of uncertainty.⁸² However, in 1844 the Indian General Steam Navigation Company, an English private enterprise followed by five other companies by 1860, was set up to develop steam navigation between Calcutta and Allahabad by commencing steamer services.⁸³ It is true that there was no direct steamer service in North Bengal but a passenger service was there between Rajmahal and Malda since the very beginning of the pre-mentioned service was started. Even, after the introduction of railways to the up countries due to which the Ganges Steamer service was abandoned, the Rajmahal – Manikchak Ghat Steamer service for all through the year and under the District Board was still alive.⁸⁴ During the rainy season, it was extended to Englishbazar through Kalindri and Mahananda which on its way stopped at Nurpur, Araidanga, Kotwali and other places.⁸⁵ Lambourn remarks, “there is a steam ferry from Manikchak across the

Ganges to Rajmahal, which in the rains becomes a ferry service on three days of the week from Rajmahal to English Bazar via the Kalindri in connection with the East Indian Railway. There is also a steamer service on alternate days in the rains from Rajmahal through the Pagala (Pagla) to Kansat and across the Ganges".⁸⁶ After the introduction of railways to Lalgola, as Lambourn points out, "a line of steam-boats runs daily except Mondays throughout the year from Lalgola to Nimsarai up the Mahananda in connection with the Ganges steamer service and the Eastern Bengal Railway service".⁸⁷ A ferry service from Lalgola to Godagari was started after the opening of the Katihar–Godagari railway in 1909 which had given the railway communication to Malda district.⁸⁸

TRANSPORTATION IN HILL REGION

Transport and communication in hill region of North Bengal stands for transport and communication in sub-Himalayan area of present Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts and that of Duars or presently Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts. Though the EEIC first came in touch with the Duars region of North Bengal than that of Darjeeling, it was not definitely prior to the year of 1772 that they came in contact with that region.⁸⁹ In fact, it was due to Tibetan policy of the EEIC, which compelled them to have a better communication network in the Duars since the seventies of eighteenth century.⁹⁰ It was also available from the reports of the royal commissions proceeded to Tibet through Bhutan.⁹¹ During the days of hostilities between the Company and sub-Himalayan countries like Bhutan or Nepal or Sikkim, the communication problem of the hill regions of North Bengal were perceived by all the officials of the EEIC that might be the cause of major setback of the English troops in the wars against the pre-mentioned powers.⁹²

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century when the EEIC tried to settle commercial relations with that of Tibet, she found Bhutan as a 'buffer state' acted as the middleman in Indo-Tibetan trade due to its geographical location. The royal families of Bhutan engaged themselves in these trading activities.⁹³ Their agents or Bhutiya merchants used to climb down with their merchandise following the river courses in different fairs and huts as far as Rangpur, Coochbehar and Assam all the years round except the monsoon.⁹⁴ These gateways to Bhutan from India are commonly known as '*Duars*' or gates. There were eleven gateways or Duars in Western Duars between river Manas and Tista viz. Dalimcote, Zumercote or modern Mynaguri, Chamoorchee, Luckeeduar, Buxa, Bhulka, Bara, Goomar, Reepoo, Cherrung, Bagh or Bijnee with seven other Duars of Assam known as Eastern Duars through which Indo Bhutan trade relations were carried on.⁹⁵

The imported items from the side of Bhutan were generally composed of *tangan* horses, blankets, walnuts, rock salt, musk, cow tails, oranges, madder and many others while in return woolen cloth, indigo, sandal, red sandal, asafetida, nutmegs, cloves and coarse cotton with swine, cattle, rice, betel leaves, tobacco, dried fish and many others were exported from India of which a large volume were re-exported to Tibet with importing some Tibetan products viz. tea, silver, gold and embroidered silk goods and in the whole process the ‘*Narrainee Rupee*’ of Coochbehar being treated as the common exchequer.⁹⁶ However, the merchandise in that trade usually were conveyed by ponies or mule in the hill region. It was found that before the formation of the district of Jalpaiguri, all the major communication network of Duars were grown up depending on the Bhutan trade and all the trade routes of that kind were well set up and maintained by the local chiefs due to heavy profit of all the parties engaged in it.⁹⁷ Buxa of present Alipurduar district was regarded as the gateway of the Bhutiya traders and all the official missions from India to Bhutan and Tibet and all the major routes of communication in Duars in the last decades of the nineteenth century were connected to it.⁹⁸ In addition to this, these Duars were also used by the Bhutiya chiefs for frequent raids in the bordering lands of its neighboring align territories which were the causes of bitter relations between the English and Bhutan.⁹⁹

Considering the strategic importance of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling, military cantonments were set up in these places. During the Anglo-Bhutan War of 1864, reinforcements were sent from the military stations of Buxa, Balla, Patlakhawa, Dalimkote, Chamurchi, Jalpesh and Darjeeling.¹⁰⁰ During the war a fine road between Coochbehar and the military station at Buxa through Alipurduar was constructed perceiving its strategic importance.¹⁰¹ That road was under the management of the PWD and were passable for cart traffic all through the year.¹⁰²

If Buxa was regarded as the gateway to Bhutan, similarly Titalya of Darjeeling district might be treated as the gateway to Darjeeling and Sikkim. In fact, there was a difference between Duars and Titalya in early British age. Rennell in his maps depicted the Duars connected with main line of communication between Calcutta or Murshidabad with Dellamcotta or Dalimkote through Dinajpur and with Buxa through Rangpur and Coochbehar.¹⁰³ But, interestingly, Titalya was at that time connected with another branch road with Rangpur.¹⁰⁴ Hence, it can be imagined that the emergence of Titalya as a junction and business point was a later days' development particularly after the setting up of Darjeeling. However, the hill subdivision of Darjeeling district lays in the periphery of sub-Himalaya region and that of the plain belong to Terai.

It has been found that the strategic importance of Darjeeling and Duars were very important before the British Government in India and its predecessor the EEIC due to existence of common boundaries with the states of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet. But the commercial importance of these places were not lesser than any place. In fact, these were the centres for international commercial intercourses between these countries and India. A report was received in 1864-65 from the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling on the subject of trade between Darjeeling and these countries which clearly ascertained that the volume of trade was increasing day by day, although the volume of import was higher than that of export.¹⁰⁵ As the trade was favourable for India due high internal demands of the merchandise of these countries, the Government decided to encourage the traders by providing them proper accommodation at the Lebong spur in one hand and by inducing the Marwaris and other merchants residing at Rangpur and Coochbehar for engaging in export trade with these countries.¹⁰⁶ Let us have a look at the trade routes from Darjeeling to these countries.

Table No-3.7

Trade routes to Darjeeling from Sikkim, Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal

Country	Route I	Route II	Route III	Route IV
Sikkim	via Namchee to the Great Rangeet	via Chadam to the Great Rangeet	via Zeeme to Goke	via Trumduc to Lebong
Tibet	from Chola, Yakla, Nithai, Cumra and Dangsa, all of which meet in Sikkim through which via Gangtok and Dikeeling.			
Bhutan	via Sangbey and Jungtsa to Dalimkote, and thence crossing the Sumlien Ghat to Peshok	from Paroo passing the frontier of Thibet and Bhutan and thence via Chola, Yakla and Nithai passes in Sikkim to the Great Rangeet		
Nepal	via Elamghuree in Nepal thence crossing the Mechi to Nagree	via Mayoong in Nepal to Goong	via Toonglong and Falaloong to Samaboong near Goke	

Source: Annual Report on the Administration of the Bengal Presidency for 1864-65.

Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Office. 1865. pp. 179-80.

As regards Duars trade was also very much important to the Government of Bengal. Due to confrontation with Bhutan and Sikkim for a long time the traders abandoned the route between India and Bhutan or Tibet via Sikkim. After the occupation of Duars by the English, it was visited by large number of traders. The items were carried by them far beyond Darjeeling to Titalya, Jalpaiguri, Rangpur and Coochbehar. Even, it was found that the Tibetan traders used to come down as far as Caragola on the Ganges for selling their commodities.¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, no cesses were levied on Duars for the benefit of trade.¹⁰⁸ The roads already existed were repaired and to afford greater facilities it had been proposed to extend the Caragola and Siliguri road along the banks of the Tista to its junction at Rongchu, so as to bring the road within easy distance of the frontier of Tibet.¹⁰⁹

These routes were the common routes generally used for trading activities between Darjeeling and the above-mentioned countries. Despite this, there were some routes which were very much important to the English for maintaining diplomatic relations with these countries. It was basically due to shifting of capitals or key administrative centres of these countries at different places at different times. Therefore, it was found that political missions to the same country were sent in different times through different routes.

The discussion, on the factors responsible for the development of transport and communication system in the hill region of North Bengal seems to be incomplete without discussing the role of tea industry in that region. Though experiments on tea cultivation in the Darjeeling hill was started in 1840's by the active support of Dr. Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling;¹¹⁰ that industry began to be developed in extensive form in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri since 1856 and 1874 respectively.¹¹¹ The exportation of tea

from this region was growing rapidly and for that purpose, the development of communication system was urgently required. Side by side, the question of exportation of forest wood from that region seems to be an important issue for this purpose.

From the above discussion it is clear that the strategic and commercial importance of the hill areas of North Bengal were the sole factors towards the development of transport and communication system of the region. Now let us have a look on the development of communication in this region.

It is found that the Hill Road from Pankhabari to Darjeeling Chaurasta, which had been started to construct by Lt. Napier in 1839, was completed by 1842.¹¹² Side by side, a direct road from Jalapahar Cantonment to Darjeeling Chaurasta termed as 'Calcutta Road' was opened for traffic by General Lloyd by January, 1839.¹¹³ The Hill Road was the 'Old Military Road'.¹¹⁴ Rupees 8 lakhs were then expended for the construction of that road. It was extended up to Darjeeling Chaurasta through Pankhabari, Kurseong, Dow hill, Sinchal, Jorbunglaw and Ghum. This was 40 miles long and nearly 300 bridges were there on the full length of that road.¹¹⁵

The Darjeeling Hill Road was too steep and narrow that it was regarded inadequate to meet the demand of increased traffic for Darjeeling town. Hence, decision to construct a new cart road of 25 feet wide and comparatively less steep was taken in 1861.¹¹⁶ That road was opened for traffic in 1869.¹¹⁷ Major George E. Bulger, in his famous travelogue (1869) has depicted a pleasant description of his visit to Darjeeling through a part of that road. Hunter in his 'A Statistical Account of Bengal' describes 34 roads in the district of Darjeeling as maintained by imperial, district or by local authorities.¹¹⁸ It is interesting to note that some roads were urgently constructed or repaired during the fights with

Bhutan or Sikkim. For example, Rangeet to Tista road (8 miles long), having been urgently required owing to operations in Bhutan, was completed in April, 1865.¹¹⁹

The Administration Report of Bengal for the year 1899-1900 provides a list of roads of Darjeeling district under the management of the PWD which were- Darjeeling Hill Cart Road, Tista Valley Road, Lebong Road, Peshok Road, Old Military Road, Tista Bridge to Rishi Road, The Pankhabari Road, Simanabasti Road and Senchal Road.¹²⁰ O'Malley has given the description of roads in the hill and Terai areas of Darjeeling through his Gazetteer.¹²¹

The maintenance and construction of the roads in Darjeeling in the first decade of twentieth century were carried out by several agencies. O'Malley quotes, "the most important roads are in charge of the Public Works Department; they aggregate 336 miles, of which 173 miles are metalled and 163 miles are unmetalled... Besides these, 49 district roads, with a total length of 297 miles and 5 village roads with a length of 10 miles, are kept up by the District Road Committee".¹²² Though, the Hill Cart Road was under the authority of the PWD, its maintenance and annual repair was entrusted to the Railway Company for a commission of 15% on the amount expended.¹²³ In this connection it is interesting to note that while the roads under the supervision of the PWD had been maintained by its own staff, the Road Cess Committee had to depend upon the tea planters of Darjeeling hill and Terai for the maintenance of the roads under its authority due to non-existence of its own staff and the confidence of the Government to rely on them arguing that they would be the best agency for that due to their special economic interest for the development of communication in that region.¹²⁴

The mountainous nature of the country, heavy rainfall, landslips, heavy construction and repairing cost always stood as the permanent barrier for the road development

programme in the hill areas of Darjeeling.¹²⁵ In addition to these, the earthquakes and cyclones frequently damaged the roads, drains and buildings of Darjeeling hill which caused huge financial burdens for restoring the situation.¹²⁶ Even it was found after the visit of cyclonic storm in Darjeeling in 1900 that a new PWD was formed called as the Darjeeling Special Repairs Division for taking over the charge from the Municipality all the roads, drains and buildings; and for the restoration of the same Rupees 89,867 were expended of which Rupees 48,867 were spent on roads alone in 1899-1900.¹²⁷

It has been found earlier that after the conclusion of the Bhutan War when the Duars was annexed by the British and when the tea industries were flourishing rapidly in this region the Government decided to set up a better communication in this land. Most of these roads were targeted to flourish the new born tea industry of this zone. Special attention was given to the development of means of communication in Duars. The Report on the Administration of Bengal for the year 1892-93 points out two classes of roads were being dealt with, viz. those serving as feeders to the Duars Railway, and those required for opening up the eastern part of the district.¹²⁸ Separate schedules had been drawn up by order of the Lt. Governor of Bengal and giving a complete list of existing roads in the Eastern and Western Duars as well as new lines of roads were proposed in the year of 1895-96.¹²⁹ Depending on the scheme, progress of road development in that region were going on rapidly.

The roads of this region was under the management of three agencies viz. the PWD, the Jalpaiguri District Board and the Alipur Duar Local Board.¹³⁰ Though it is impossible to separate the character of these roads from that of railway feeders, the following table exhibits the road statistics in Duars till the beginning of twentieth century.

Table No-3.8

Major Roads in Duars

Section of Duars	Name of Road	Length in miles	Metalled/Unmetalled	Managed by	Nearest stations
Eastern Duars	Latiguri-Metali Road	19	Metalled	PWD	Latiguri, Chalsa
	Ramsaihat-Sulkapara Road	10	Metalled	PWD	Ramsaihat
	Sulkapara-Thaljhora Road with a feeder to Nagrakata Station (1 mile)	8.5	Metalled	<i>PWD</i>	Nagrakata
	Banerhat-Chamurchi Road	6.25	Unmetalled	PWD	Banerhat
	Ramsaihat-Gairkata Road	12	Mostly unmetalled	<i>PWD</i>	Ramsaihat
	Gairkata-Birpara Road	7.5	Unmetalled	PWD	
	Gairkata-Dhupguri Road	8.25	Unmetalled	PWD	
	Gairkata-Binnaguri Road	4.5	Unmetalled	PWD	Binnaguri
Western Duars	Dam-Dim to Fagu Tea Estate in Darjeeling district			District Board	
	Hantapara Tea garden to Falakata			District Board	Madari Hat

	West of Torsa river to Rajabhatkhoa		Partly metalled	District Board	Rajabhatkhoa
	Coochbehar to Buxa		Partly metalled	District Board	Buxa
	Jainti-Raidak Road			PWD	Jainti
	Bhalka-Chakchaka Road			District Board	

Source:

John F. Grunning. Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Jalpaiguri. Allahabad: The Pioneer Press. 1911. pp. 117-20.

Grunning points out that most of the roads in Jalpaiguri Duars were constructed and improved for the sake of tea gardens and the fund in this regard were collected not only from the District fund but from the Government Estates Improvement Fund and the Western Duars Market Fund.¹³¹

Now, let us have a look on the conveniences of the hill region of North Bengal. From Rennell onwards the word ‘stages’ have been frequently used in the official and unofficial documents of the Company. It is a term used by the Postal Department, which means the place of interval where the bags of parcels were transferred from one Dak bearer to another. Since the initial years when the postal system had been introduced by the Company Government, the Postal Department also introduced the *palki* services on the principal roads where postal stages were available. In these stages, the travellers were also accommodated by food and other necessities at the Dak Bungalows. In 1850’s it has been found that the higher officials of the Company used to travel through *palkis* of the Postal Department for their journey to Darjeeling.¹³² Side by side, bullock carts, pony

and some other types of conveniences were also available.¹³³ When railway had been extended till Sahebganj, same types of descriptions have been found available in the travelogues of the travellers bound for Darjeeling. An example of that type of descriptions is-

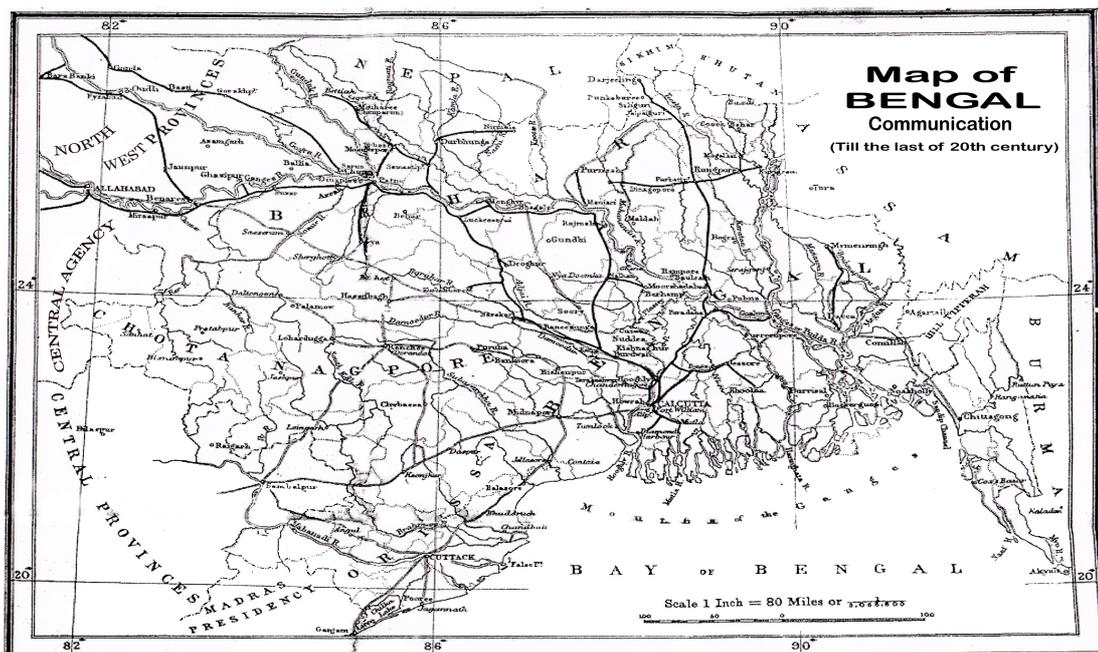
Prior to the year 1869 the only means of transit was by the East India Railway as far as Sahibgunge (219 miles from Calcutta) with a 5 hour river-crossing to Karagola Ghat, thence by bullock cart, to the river opposite Dingra Ghat; and from there by one of the following modes of transit-gharry, or palky dak, pony or hackery cart, to the foot of hills past Purneah, Kissengunge and Titalya ... until Siliguri was reached; and thereafter a tedious journey of 48 miles through the Terai via Pankabarie, Kurseong, Dow Hill and Jorebungalow when the traveller landed tired and worn out at the Chowrasta, Darjeeling.¹³⁴

While the vehicles of the plain found incapable of carrying passengers and luggage in the hill, coolies were made available from Pankhabarie to carry luggage upwards.¹³⁵ Sometimes, the coolies took the ill-afford travellers up to Darjeeling through doolies.¹³⁶ The New Cart Road having been opened for traffic in 1869, the *tangas* carried the travellers up to Tung.¹³⁷ In 1880, when the railway was opened up to Tung, passengers dropped in the station and reached Darjeeling by hiring *tanga*. The system was remained unchanged until railway was extended to Darjeeling in July, 1881.

As regards, carts drawn by bullocks and buffalos were the commonest mode of transportation in the Duars. Tea bags were exported from the gardens of Duars to nearest railway stations or river ports through these carts even in the beginning of the twentieth century.¹³⁸ In the initial stage of founding tea gardens in hills and Duars when the railways had not been introduced, the machines were transported through rivers from

Calcutta to the nearest river side stations and then transported by bullock carts to the gardens.¹³⁹ The European planters and officials used to employ elephants for travelling through the dense forest covered with wild beasts and poisonous snakes; and uneven land full of rivers and jhoras.¹⁴⁰ On the roads to Buxa or to Bhutan and Sikkim borders pack ponies or human carriers were used for transportation.¹⁴¹ For transportation of commodities between the town of Kalimpong and the DHR in the Tista valley, the Kalimpong Ropeway Company was formed in 1928.¹⁴² This was opened for operation in 1930 by Lady Stephenson.¹⁴³ Accordingly, branch ropeway from Darjeeling to Bijanbari was opened for traffic in January, 1939.¹⁴⁴

Map No- 3.2



Source: *Report on Administration Bengal: 1900-01*. Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Press. 1901.

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