

CONCLUSION

The work, through its chapters has been targeted to fulfil some of predetermined objectives which try to identify the changes in the policies of the Government during the period from 1854 to 1962 and their effects on the transport and communication system of North Bengal. This chapter is devoted to general observations found out and also on issues which emerge from the discussion of the earlier chapters. The chapters of this work have been divided into seven aiming at seeking answers to some queries.

The transport and communication system in North Bengal has gone through a series of evolution. The earliest reference of communication system of North Bengal found from the Mahabharata testifies the notion of existence of a long-run road from North-East India to Western India through North Bengal and Upper India. This road with its branches served for centuries as the trunk line of communication. Though this road has been referred by many travellers of later ages till the ninth century A.D, the character of rivers of the region and the natural calamities through the ages partially destroyed the road. As regards, weakness of central powers and advent of their regional counterparts resulted for the total or partial abandon of this road. While the Muslim rulers came to power, they constructed several royal roads basically to communicate different administrative centres of the province. However, the character of these roads were multifarious. Military, commercial and religious- all of the purposes had been served by these roads.

It seems that the waterways was more accessible to North Bengal, especially in the southern and north eastern part of North Bengal due to availability of navigable rivers and channels. This natural way of communication had been frequently used by the rulers, nobility, merchants, travellers and the commoners. Rivers were so much associated with

the daily lives of North Bengal that the changes in courses of rivers due to devastating flood or by other reason, hampered the livelihood of the region.

Different types of bullock carts, horse carts, palanquins, doolies were principal road vehicles of that time. Elephants, horses, *tangans*, buffaloes were excessively used as war animals, commercial animals and as domestic animals used for multifarious purposes. But, walking the way was the common rule. For water convenience, different shapes and sizes of boats with different names e.g. *Kosa*, *Bazra*, *Mayurpankhi*, *Saptadinga*, *Pansi*, *Dingi*, *Pinnace*, *Bhaulia*, *Soona Mooka* and many others sailed the rivers of North Bengal throughout the year.

The era of British political supremacy in Bengal was initiated by the Battle of Plassey. In the early years, the English East India Company did not follow any definite transport policy in Bengal. Rather, they pursued existing traditional line. Hence, most of the business of the said Company had been carried on through rivers and channels. Moreover, surveys for exploring both road and water communication of newly acquired region were simultaneously performed by the Company. For road communication, only a few roads within the periphery of the towns and to communicate the military cantonments, scattered throughout the province of Bengal, for military purpose, were constructed and maintained by the Military Board of the English East India Company. But, most of these roads were poorly maintained and mostly unfit to traverse during wet seasons. Consequently, the unsatisfactory working of the Military Board towards the Public Works, attracted the notice of the Government in 1850. Accordingly, a commission was appointed to enquire into the matter, which found the Military Board as unfit to carry on the load of Public Works and suggested to set up a new Department. As a result, on 21st April 1854 with the order no. 430 of 1854 of the Military Department,

the Public Works Department of Bengal was established. In the early years while the PWD followed the line of pre-existed board; the constitution and organizational set-up of this Department was timely revised and modified by the Government.

The wide spread Mutiny of 1857 seems to be strongest probable cause before the implementation of specific transport and communication policy by the colonial Government of Bengal. A new road scheme, with an imperial line of road or a network of Trunk Roads which would pass through the district level principal towns and stations throughout the province was introduced accordingly. Since the introduction of Bengal Act III of 1885 or the Bengal Local Self-government Act of 1885, construction and maintenance of provincial roads came to the hands of local authorities. This was further extended by the Bengal Village Self-government Act, 1919. However, funds collected from road cesses, from the tolls on the rivers, roads, bridges and ferries; were generally devoted to the construction and maintenance of roads and bridges.

During the years of World War I and World War II, transport and communication system in Bengal, was under heavy pressure. Experiencing from the events, a road development committee While the Defence of India Act 1939 or Act XXXV of 1939 was creating great hindrances towards easy growth of transportation in the country, at the same time the Government of India set up a Technical Sub-Committee to consider the future of road transport and road-rail relations in the country and also convened a national conference of Chief Engineers at Nagpur in 1943 to constitute a future road plan for the country. This Twenty Years Road Development Plan was accepted by the Government of Bengal with modifications in 1946 for implementation.

Independence in 1947, not only bifurcated the province of Bengal, but equally bifurcated its communication system. Hence, the Government of West Bengal, had to

pay sincere attention towards the restoration of normal communication throughout West Bengal. The wars with Pakistan also caused for the implementation of rapid road development programme in that state. However, the pace of road development was not adequate which was acutely perceived during the war tensions between India and China. As a result, the road policy of the Government was radically changed and the road development projects especially in the northern bordering districts of West Bengal were implemented.

Inland navigation, among various modes of transportation, always proved to be the most accepted and accessible way of communication in Bengal throughout the ages. Even, more than two decades ago before the introduction of railways in Bengal, motorable steamers started to ply across the Ganges. But the inland navigation in Bengal, since the introduction of railways, faced so much inconvenience and negligence from the Government that the system could not grow up as expected though there was strong possibility to develop. However, the waterways in Bengal, received the notice and favour of the Government during the years of World War I and World War II due to shortage of railway and shipping facility. But the tragic Partition of 1947 gave a tremendous blow towards the said system by bifurcation of the major routes.

The railways, although youngest of all the modes of transportation in Bengal, always received topmost priority from the Government in comparison to other means of transportation. But the causes for the introduction of railways are to be summarised only from commercial and military point of view. Commercially while it was intended to open up Indian markets from various perspective, militarily it was regarded to be an efficient mode of convenience for sending forces quickly to the disturbed region. Accordingly,

most of the Trunk lines with their feeders were opened for traffic within the first decade of twentieth century.

Since the railways were introduced in Bengal, the specific policy of the Government was to convert other modes of transportation- roadways and waterways as the feeders to the railways. Though roadways could not grow in all the regions of Bengal as the strong mode of transportation due to various reasons, railway always faced strong competition from inland navigation especially from the region of Eastern Bengal. But the colonial Government seems to avert the competition by fake negotiations or to remain aloof from the events.

Development of transport and communication system in North Bengal since the year 1854, had gone through a series of evolution affected by multifarious factors. Among the most notables, 'Darjeeling factor' was one of the basic reasons for the same. In fact, it was the attraction of the Government towards Darjeeling, the most preferable hill station and sanatorium of colonial Bengal, that caused for the setting up proper transport and communication system between Calcutta and Darjeeling. Therefore, a throughout communication facility between the places was found to be developed by roadways and railways. Moreover, lack of adequate communication system in northern part of North Bengal which was mostly perceived during the days of tensions with the bordering countries of North Bengal viz. Bhutan and Sikkim, was also a factor behind the development of communication system in that region. Economically, North Bengal being one of the richest land of manifold agricultural and forest products, logically attracted the attention of the colonial Government that resulted for the development of transport and communication system of North Bengal. Thus the basic object of the colonial Government to develop the transportation system in North Bengal was to facilitate

agrarian trade of the region. To improve the system, several railway feeders were constructed as a network throughout the interior of the districts where the railways could not reach properly.

The rate of progress of development of transport and communication for all of the districts of North Bengal, however were not occurred in the same manner till the last of the nineteenth century. For holding total length of metalled roads, the district of Darjeeling acquired highest position and the district of Malda scored lowest, while for holding total length of unmetalled roads the district of Dinajpur ranked first and Malda stood last. As regards, for processioning railway lines in hands, the district of Jalpaiguri and Malda scored highest and lowest respectively. As regards, for railway feeders Jalpaiguri ranked first while the district of Malda scored last.

Of various modes of transportation, waterways seems to be most accepted form which grew and developed in North Bengal as a natural process or without any Government preference. The riverine character of North Bengal Basin led to the flourishing of water communication of this land. However, there was no reference of plying motorable steamers in the rivers and channels of North Bengal except the district of Malda. It is probable that as the vast agrarian track of the district of Malda was not supported by railways and roadways properly, steamer services did not face any competition from any segment.

Despite of this, the water communication system which was the usual mode of transportation of every districts of North Bengal except the hill region, was basically provided by the country boats. Different types and sizes of country boats especially made for carrying different types of commodities, sailed the rivers and channels of North Bengal. However, the character of this transportation was varied by sub-regions.

Coochbehar being an ally of British Government in India followed the same policy in respect to the transport and communication system of the state. Hence, the PWD of the state supervised all of the road communication system of the state. However, most of the road development was confined to the limits of Coochbehar and sub-divisional towns only. The overall condition of roads of the state was very chaotic. But while its railway was concerned, the state was well served by the railroads due to commercial reasons in comparison to its roadways. However, most of the merchandise of Coochbehar were carried by rivers.

The effects of development of transport and communication of North Bengal were seen from various perspectives. Commercially, the volume of all types of inter and intra-regional trade had been increased tremendously. It was mostly due to the introduction and expansion of railways in North Bengal, although internal river trade statistics also provides for the increase in volume of trade between north eastern part of North Bengal and Dacca, Narayanganj, Sirajganj and Calcutta.

The development of transport and communication of North Bengal led to the growth of plantation industry in that region. It was found to be evident that number of tea industries in hills and Duars of North Bengal had increased by multiples. This industry was benefitted largely by the increased facilities of exportation of tea, importation of labourers, coals, and other materials required for the gardens provided by the railways.

It was not only the tea plantation industry, but other agrarian economy of North Bengal also flourished much due to development in communication system. Jute was the first and foremost in that segment. Jute cultivation area was extended rapidly due to the increased facility of communication. Some other agricultural items like rice, tobacco, pulse, oil seeds were also benefitted. Therefore, development in communication system

of North Bengal paved the way for commercialization of agriculture in North Bengal. Likewise, some new trading centres appeared which mostly deserted the traditional business centres.

Introduction of railways and development of existing system of communication of North Bengal led to the growth of population in towns and some of the centres of trade. Hence, the changed demographic pattern of some places of North Bengal, resulted for the cultural assimilation. Besides, political awareness in North Bengal was also an indirect by-product of the development of communication system. Indian national leaders and their messages to fight for the motherland were carried by railways to North Bengal.

The results of development of transport and communication system of North Bengal have not always proved to be fruitful. Huge exportation of agricultural staples resulted for the local price hike of these items and also of possibility of scarcities. Even, the railway was equally accused to be responsible for creating devastating floods by hindering normal drainage.

When the World War II broke out, the Government of India apprehended the drawback of the communication system of the country specially in Eastern India while the region was severely threatened by the Japanese. Hence, strong road policy was introduced in North Bengal as it was the only mode of transportation in war days due to engagement of railways for long distance war transportation. Several roads and bridges were constructed and improved at that time in this region. Accordingly, a post war reconstruction scheme was taken into hands for the development of road and river communication of Bengal.

With the tragic event of Partition, India achieved its freedom. The districts and police stations of undivided province of Bengal were divided and distributed among West Bengal and East Pakistan. Accordingly, people and their wealth, land and its geographical elements like courses of rivers and channels were also bifurcated. Therefore, natural communication system of Bengal was heavily affected. All the districts of North Bengal except the district of Darjeeling were bifurcated in such a way that the normal communicational set-up of the land had been totally broken. Its communication with the southern tract of the state had been separated by a foreign territory. Hence, the Partition brought about a major dislocation in the communication system of North Bengal.

It was the challenge before the new-born Government of India and West Bengal to restore the dislocated communication of North Bengal since beginning year of independence. In that stage utmost priority was given to restore the road communication within the districts of North Bengal. The basic recommendations of the Nagpur Plan was followed for the same. Major fund at that time was provided from the Central Road Fund and from some other fund. Waterways also received the Government favour at that time. It seems that the total failure of railway network in North Bengal due to Partition was the basic cause for the development of roadways and waterways in this region for that particular phase. However, the railway succeeded to revive to some extent after the successful completion of Assam-Bengal Railway link Project. In spite of this, the progress of development could not achieve its target or required level.

When the Sino-Indian Border Dispute in northern border of the country was started, the Government of India perceived the slow rate of communicational development in North Bengal as a great draw back for the security of the country. Accordingly, rapid

communicational development of this region was followed by the Government. New road and rail projects in North Bengal were implemented. However, for unknown reasons these projects were abandoned when the war tension averted. Here lies the present issue of Doklam. The Peoples' Republic of China in her border (Chinese occupied Tibet) has set up a well-established communicational machinery to provide all the facilities to its military for several years. On the other hand, India either has under-estimated the issue or has not done anything. Understanding this weakness China dared to threaten India. If India could maintain its communicational set up in the northern borders of North Bengal, the Doklam episode might have been appeared in different way.

Therefore, it may be summed up that-

1. The geographical location, economic and strategic importance of North Bengal were the most valuable factors that compelled the colonial Government of India to follow the specific policy towards the transport and communication of North Bengal since the establishment of Public Works Department (1854).
2. The colonial Government of India, though introduced a separate plan of transportation in India for the outcome of World War II, the fear of Japanese attack through north-eastern India compelled the Government to follow a specific transport policy in the region. The post war reconstruction plan was one of the by-product of this war.
3. The tragic Partition of the country in 1947 and specifically the Radcliffe Award that trifurcated India and bifurcated North Bengal had abruptly destroyed the transport and communication system of North Bengal. This was the most valuable factor that affected the rail, road and riverine communication of the region.

4. North Bengal had received the attention of the country and the Government of India in 1962, when the Sino-Indian Border conflict was started. It revealed the hollowness and weakness of the transport policy of the Government in relation to the defence of the region. So the transport and communication system of North Bengal became an integral part of the national defence.