

**GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT AND  
COMMUNICATION OF NORTH BENGAL (1854-1962)**

**A Thesis submitted to the University of North Bengal  
For the Award of Doctor of Philosophy in History**

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**April, 2018**

## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled 'GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION OF NORTH BENGAL (1854-1962)' has been prepared by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Ananda Gopal Ghosh, Professor (Retd.), Department of History, University of North Bengal and Dr. Ashim Kumar Sarkar, Principal of Gour Mahavidyalaya, Malda. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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## CERTIFICATE

We certify that Sri Biswarup Saha has prepared the thesis entitled 'GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION OF NORTH BENGAL (1854-1962)', for the award of Ph.D. degree at the University of North Bengal, under our guidance. He has carried out the work at the Department of History, University of North Bengal.

  
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## **Abstract**

The state of West Bengal is the by-product of Partition of 1947. Though it is one of the worst victims of the Partition for being bifurcated, it still persists as one of the best examples for maintaining unique geo-climatic variations. North Bengal or the northern part of West Bengal also belongs this characteristic feature. This region comprising eight northern and northeastern districts of West Bengal viz. Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda; inherits some special characteristics from geo-climatic and strategic perspectives which give itself a unique identity from other parts of West Bengal. Consequently, the scholars have been attracted to make their journey on different facets of North Bengal.

Transport and communication system, being a vital part of economy and commerce, seems to be a neglected area of study when North Bengal is concern. Though some research works have been carried out on different issues of transport and communication system of the Gangetic West Bengal, no scholarly attention is visible in respect of northern part of West Bengal. A few writings on local periodicals and popular journals have been published on transport and communication of North Bengal. Neither any of these documents has perfectly followed the proper methodology of scholarly pursuit nor depict a concrete picture of the entire region. In this back drop, this project i.e. 'Growth and Development of Transport and Communication of North Bengal (1854-1962)' has been chosen as the topic of thesis. The period what has been selected for study, covers the period starting from 1854, whence for the first time the English East India Company wanted to formulate a specific policy towards the development of transport and communication in the then Bengal Presidency and proceeds up to the year 1962, after which the independent Government of India once again realised the need to renew the transport and communication system of North Bengal.

The aim of this thesis is to identify the changes in Government policies during the period from 1854 to 1962 and their effects on the transport and communication system of North Bengal. The indigenous reaction as well as impact on regional economy due to introduction of modern transport and communication system in that region is to be examined. Whether there was any sub-regional variation in the progress of development also is to be investigated.

In order to understand the transport and communicational pattern of North Bengal, data have been collected from primary and secondary literary sources. Different enquiry committee reports, survey reports, PWD reports, Railway Board reports, Annual Administration reports, District Administrative Reports, Revenue Board Reports, Central and State Legislative Assembly Proceedings and many other Government records are consulted. Apart from these references and valuable notes from West Bengal State Archives (Kolkata), National Library (Kolkata), The Asiatic Society (Kolkata) have been collected as research materials. Personal records, Zamindary family records, traditional merchant family records are also scrutinized. Celebrated works of eminent scholars are consulted as secondary works. Articles, journals, unpublished documents, reviews, periodicals are extensively used. Oral sources have also been utilized to reach into a logical and empirical conclusion.

Concentrating upon the issue of ‘Growth and Development of Transport and Communication of North Bengal (1854-1962)’ following hypotheses have been developed for testing.

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

This doctoral dissertation has been divided into seven chapters with sub-chapters aiming at seeking answers to some queries on the related issue. Analysing the data, it is found that the transport and communication system of North Bengal had gone through a series of evolution. Long-run highways with their branches served the region for centuries. But due to various causes this inland transportation system had been disappeared. However, the basic character of pre-colonial system of transportation of North Bengal was to depend on roadways and waterways equally. Different types of carts and different types and sizes of boats rolled on and sailed on the roads and rivers in those days respectively. Though, the English East India Company had not followed

specific transport policy merely hundred years after their acquisition of political supremacy in Bengal, it was in 1854 the Government introduced a specific policy towards transportation of the country by setting up the Public Works Department.

While the issue of development of transport and communication system of North Bengal is concern, the Government of Bengal was influenced by various factors which could not be seen in any other parts of Bengal. There might be political, economic and military and administrative considerations behind the issue. After the introduction of railways while the subordination of roadways and waterways under the railways as feeders, had been found as the common characteristics of Bengal transportation; it was partially or minimally applicable for North Bengal. However, regional, national and international events influenced the process of development of transport and communication system of North Bengal due to regional economic development, strategic consideration of the Government and mobility of forces. This seems to be relevant for both the cases of colonial and post-colonial days. The construction and maintenance of roads, waterways, railways and airfields were done accordingly. However, the progress of works was not satisfactory at all.

*“Dedicated to my parents”*

## **Preface**

Transport and communication system is one of the key factors which determines various developmental issues of a region. This research works aims at assessing the growth and development of transport and communication system of North Bengal or northern part of West Bengal from the term of mid nineteenth century to the end of the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Though the discussion follows with quantitative description of the transport and communicational development of the said region, some related issues like phase wise Government strategies and their consequences behind the developmental process have also been studied. Whether there was any sub regional variation in that field has been investigated. Side by side, the indigenous reaction as well as impact on regional economy due to introduction of modern transport and communication system in North Bengal has also been examined in this thesis. Though postal system is a part of communication, it has been excluded from the area of research.

North Bengal as a region has been characterised by unique identities from geo-climatic, economic and strategic perspectives. Many of the administrative and other set ups of this region have been introduced considering the issues. Therefore, the transport and communicational set ups of this region might have been influenced by these factors also. In this thesis an attempt has been made to search for the influences of these factors on the transport and communication system of North Bengal. Simultaneously, historical events might have influenced the transportation system of North Bengal. Hence, the period of study has been chosen within the limit of 1854 to 1962. While the first was important due to establishment of Public Works Department, the sole public agency for maintaining transport and communication system of Bengal; the last was important due to advent of Sino-Indian War. In this thesis, an effort has been made to look at the

development of transport and communication of North Bengal from these geo-climatic, economic, strategic and historical perspectives.

In this connection, I would like to take this opportunity, while it is difficult to acknowledge individually, to express my humble gratitude to the individuals and institutions who have rendered me cooperation and assistance for concluding the thesis.

Most importantly, I owe a deep sense of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Ananda Gopal Ghosh, formerly Professor of the Department of History, University of North Bengal, under whose inspiring supervision and guidance this thesis has been carried on and accomplished. It seems to be impossible for me to complete the work without his persistent suggestions which he has been provided me by carving out his busy academic and literary assignments throughout the entire period of my work of last five years. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my co-supervisor, Dr. Ashim Kumar Sarkar, Principal, Gour Mahavidyalaya; from whom I have received valuable suggestions regarding my work. I am also deeply grateful to Dr. Kamalesh Chandra Das, formerly Associate Professor, Balurghat College, who always provides me parental affection and thought provoking suggestions which have assisted me to inculcate into the thesis.

I specially thanks to Dr. Dahlia Bhattacharya, Head of the Department of History, Dr. Bijay Kumar Sarkar, Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal and all of my teachers and existing staff of the said Department for their helpful guidance, suggestions and supports. I am also thankful to the authority and colleagues of my college, i.e. Jamini Mazumder Memorial College, who provide their best support to me all the way for finishing the work smoothly.

I owe my debt of gratitude to Sri Saudas Paul, former Superintending Engineer, PWD (Roads), Northern Circle, Government of West Bengal; Sri Arpan Kumar Saha, retired Joint Director of Agriculture, Burdwan Range; Sri Binoy Kumar Saha, Ex-

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I offer my special thanks to all the staff of National Library (Annex), Kolkata; the West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata; University Library, University of North Bengal; North Bengal State Library, Cooch Behar; District Library, Balurghat; District Record Office, Dakshin Dinajpur District Collectorate, Balurghat; Malda College Library (P.G. Section); who have been kind enough to permit and provide me rare documents preserved in their custody.

Finally, no word is sufficient to acknowledge my indebtedness to my parents, my brother, sister and their families who have constantly encouraged me to do the job. My wife Mithu and my daughters- Bidita and Baitalee have always inspired and motivated me. All of them have sacrificed much by relieving me of the daily chores of domestic duties during the entire period of research and put up with considerable inconvenience

and accepted various demands cheerfully so that the thesis could be successfully completed in due time.

No work can be claimed as errorless. I am solely responsible for errors or omissions in this thesis.

## **Glossary**

*Dak road* : Postal Road

*Dustak* : Right of duty-free trade

Private Trade : Personal Trade

*Shahi Sharak* : Royal road

*Tarik* : Official held responsible for collecting tolls on merchandise at ferries

*Zamindary Dak* : A part of postal activity maintained by the Zamindars

## **Abbreviations**

ABR- Assam Bengal Railway

BDR- Bengal Duars Railway

CSR- Coochbehar State Railway

DHR- Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

EBR- Eastern Bengal Railway

EEIC- English East India Company

EIR- East Indian Railway

NBR- Northern Bengal State Railway

NBSTC- North Bengal States Transport Corporation

PWD- Public Works Department

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## **Introduction**

Transport and communication system is one of the main ingredients on which economic development of a nation depends. The extension of facilities of transportation is the most essential condition for the successful commercial development of a country. A good system of communication by land, water and air is one of the most important of all the requisites for the prosperity of a nation. This system is not only related to economy but an inevitable organ of socio-cultural assimilation that helps to exchange the views of people with others.

The transport and communication system in the beginning of civilization was very simple. Initially man, then assisted by animals were the only means of transport. Presently, man calls to his service water, wind, stream, electricity, light, fossil and even the power of atoms for carrying goods locally and distantly. As a result, a journey which required months a hundred years ago can be completed to-day in a few days or even in a few hours.

Transport and communication system of the world can basically be divided into three major heads- land, water and air. These are also subdivided into several categories. Of various modes of transport, because of relief and climate, only in a few countries all the systems are present, while in others only two or three types are existed. Though all of these three broad categories of the said system are available in India; the regional variations also persist equally.

Indian civilization is now regarded as one of the earliest civilizations of the world. Several empires had been grown up in India through the centuries. Changes in internal and external boundaries of India had been occurred accordingly. Modern Indian internal and external administrative structure is the by-product of British rule. However, last

remarkable internal and external changes were occurred by the British Government in India. While internally, India's provincial and district level boundaries were demarcated in modern form by the British Government in India; its external boundary has also been shaped its present form by the same Government. Despite of this, the provincial administrative system created by the British Government in India and adopted by the independent Government of India later, is not proved to be a suitable division from geographical and social-cultural perspectives. Many of the provinces in India inherit the heterogeneous identity from these two perspectives and the present state of West Bengal is the best example of this kind.

The transport and communication system of West Bengal in ancient times remained in obscurity due to lack of sufficient reliable data. Yet, several references are found in historical texts on ancient internal and external trade and trade routes of Bengal most of which were connected by land or water through Tamralipta, the ancient port of Bengal. In pre-medieval period when regional powers began to flourish in different nook and corner of India, new roads were constructed and new water routes were discovered for the smooth conduct of inter-state foreign policy and trade. It seems that Bengal under the Palas and the Senas was not the exception.

Chronological references on construction of *Shahi Sharaks* or royal roads were found since the consolidation and expansion of the Sultanate in Bengal. This trend of building royal roads had been taken forward by Muslim rulers of Bengal. However, in the early days of the Company Raj when its surveyors were restlessly travelling through different parts of Bengal, they found the land almost as roadless. Bengal, at that time, as they viewed, was mostly river centric in terms of transport and communication with a handful existence of *Shahi Sharaks* which were passable only in dry season. Different

types of bullock carts, horse carts, palanquins, doolies were principal road vehicles of that time. 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 on rivers of Bengal throughout the year.

There was no clear transport policy of the Government of the English East India Company not in Bengal but all over India till the first half of the nineteenth century. A few roads constructed and maintained under the direct control and supervision of the Military Board of the EEIC till that time, were targeted to meet the urgent needs of the cantonments and towns or to fulfil imperial demands. However, the Company tried to follow a concrete transport policy in the Bengal Presidency with the establishment of the Public Works Department (PWD) in 1854. Gradually the roadways, railways and waterways were developed. But this process of development had gone through a series of evolution. Several factors in the course of Indian history held responsible as the determinates towards the transport policy of the Government. Two World Wars were the best suited example of this kind in colonial period. Similarly, the transport policy of independent Government of India had been equally modified due to the Partition in 1947 and equally for the Sino-Indian War of 1962.

In recent times the word North Bengal has often been used by the popular newspapers, electronic media, academic scholars and most of all by the Government. Though this term was coined by the colonial officialdom to describe the land of the north of the river Ganges and Padma i.e. presently the districts of Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Cooch Behar of West Bengal; this geographical region mostly inherits the similarity of the Rajshahi Division of undivided Bengal Presidency; comprising eight districts e.g. Rajshahi, Pabna,

Malda, Dinajpur, Bogra, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling. In spite of special status of Cooch Behar as an independent native state, it was also regarded within the periphery of North Bengal. In fact, North Bengal geographically and strategically inherits some special characteristics which give itself unique identity from other parts of Bengal. Geographically it is a mixture of three heterogeneous geo-climatic zones which are associated with the sub-Himalayan region, Terai-Duars region and Gangetic plains respectively. Hence, this region produces so many agricultural commodities and forest resources. Strategically, while it is internally surrounded by three provinces of India; it is externally bounded by four foreign nations. Thus, it truly becomes a corridor. Therefore, the transport and communication system of North Bengal bound to be unique from any part of Bengal.

The history of research on different facet of North Bengal is not as old as Calcutta-centric South Bengal. The academic and scholastic pursuits on North Bengal have so far been dominated by socio-cultural and political themes. Though today's world seeks to measure the development or non-development of a particular region by economic perspective, it can be said that this region as a whole has rarely been seen from the point of modern economic angle. Transport and communication system, being a vital part of economy and commerce, seems to be a neglected area of study when North Bengal is concern. Though some research works have been carried out on the issue of transport and communication system of the Gangetic West Bengal, no scholarly attention is visible in respect of northern part of West Bengal. A few writings on local periodicals and popular journals have been published on transport and communication of North Bengal. Neither any of these documents has perfectly followed the proper methodology of scholarly pursuit nor depict a concrete picture of the entire region. In this back drop, this project i.e. 'Growth and Development of Transport and Communication of North Bengal (1854-

1962)' has been chosen as the topic of thesis. The period what has been selected for study, covers the period starting from 1854, whence for the first time the EEIC wanted to formulate a specific policy towards the development of transport and communication in the then Bengal Presidency and proceeds up to the year 1962, after which the independent Government of India once again realised the need to renew the transport and communication system of North Bengal.

It must be mentioned that the references of some parts of present nation of Bangladesh will be made very frequently in the proposed dissertation because of the interconnection of both the lands in respect of transport and communication for a long time. Though, North Bengal now comprises of eight districts due to division of districts for administrative purposes, old district jurisdiction have been generally followed for averting the confusions. Besides, the analysis has been confined to the limits of various modes of transportation e.g. the roadways, the railways, the waterways and the airways. Though, the Telegraph and Postal communication is a vital part of communication system, it has been excluded from the discussion.

The aim of this dissertation is to identify the changes in Government policies during the period from 1854 to 1962 and their effects on the transport and communication system of North Bengal. The indigenous reaction as well as impact on regional economy due to introduction of modern transport and communication system in that region is to be examined. Whether there was any sub regional variation in the progress of development also is to be investigated.

Literature review is an important part of a thesis. But it can be stated without any hesitation that the transport and communication of North Bengal is mostly an unexplored

area in the field of intellectual world. Insufficient materials mostly compel the historians and researchers to overturn from historical enquiries on North Bengal in respect of transport and communication.

Before over viewing literature it is worth mentioning that there is no literature directly related to this proposed dissertation area. Till now no major publication has covered up the proposed area completely. Never the less, two published dissertation papers which are partly related to this proposed area of study are mentioned below. Firstly, *The Marwari Community in Eastern India : A historical survey focusing North Bengal* by Dr. Narayan Chandra Saha, (Decent Books, New Delhi, 2003) where Dr. Saha has studied the Marwari Community as a business community of North Bengal. Though he has tried to explore the periphery of business of the said community with a minimal introduction of transportation, its angle of study is totally related to trade and commerce. Secondly, *Colonial Economy in North Bengal: 1833-1933* by Sujit Ghosh (Paschimbanga Anchalik Itihas O Loksanskriti Charcha Kendra, Kolkata, 2016) where he has studied the economy of North Bengal within a part of colonial frame. In his book, Sri Ghosh has included two descriptive chapters on railways and communication set-up of North Bengal within his time frame. Despite this, neither the time frame of the book nor the aim of the author for writing this book, fail to fit with this thesis in toto, The strongest drawback of this book perhaps lies in the absence of logical queries behind the development communication system of the region.

Some of the related dissertation papers of Department of History, University of North Bengal are also worthy for mentioning. These are-

1. Utpal Roy. *Growth and Development of Railways in North Bengal and its Impact on Society and Economy (1870-1950)*. 2014.

2. Bhawna Rai. *History of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and Its Socio-Economic Impact on Darjeeling (1880-1999)*. 2014.
3. Ashim Kumar Sarkar. *Social, Economic and Political Transition of A Bengal District: Malda (1876-1953)*. 2010.
4. Ananda Gopal Ghosh. *The Factory of the English East India Company of Malda (1757-1833)*. 1981.
5. Sujit Chandra Guha. *Silk Industry of Malda and Murshidabad from 1660 - 1833: A study of Its Production, Organization, Production Relations, Market and the Effect of Decline on the Economy of the People*. 2005.

The above mentioned research projects, excluding first two, though do not directly deal with this area of study; have thrown much light on the transport and communication system of colonial North Bengal. The researchers have studied the transportation of the region as a part of trading activities of the colonial masters. Accordingly, first two theses, though are unique primary works in their field; these are a minimal part of this study. In this connection different works at the other branches of social sciences viz. Geography, Economics and Commerce have been examined. Although several dissertation papers related to transport and communication system of North Bengal is available, all of these are beyond the time frame of this study. Some of these are mentioned below.

1. Chaya Rani Paul. *Problems of Development in Darjeeling Hills with Special Reference to Rural Areas since Independence*. N.B.U: 1996.
2. Krishna Ghosh. *Industrial Development in North Bengal* N.B.U: 1981.
3. Partha Chandra Chakraborty. *Performance and Appraisal of North Bengal States Transport Corporation from 1967-68 to 1987-88*. N.B.U: 1990.

4. Purnima Saha. *Problems and Prospects of Development of Siliguri and Jalpaiguri Towns: A Comparative Study*. N.B.U: 1991.
5. Ranjit Roy. *Economic Changes in Siliguri and Problems of Its Urban Development*. N.B.U: 1985.
6. Shyamal Mukhopadhyay. *Urban Development in North Bengal: Its Process, Character and Future Trends*. N.B.U: 1977.

After reviewing all the above dissertation papers it is perceived that this proposed area of research i.e. the Growth and Development of Transport and Communication of North Bengal (1854-1962) is a virgin area of study. However, some secondary sources, where the references of transport and communication of North Bengal are made rarely are also reviewed. Some of these are written in 'Queen's Language' and some are in vernacular. These are overviewed in the following.

Sunil Kumar Munsii. *Geography And Transportation In Eastern India Under The British Raj*. First Edition. Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Company. 1980.

This is one of the most valuable books on transportation in Eastern India under the colonial hegemony. The total work has been done depending on the primary sources or government records those have been included to its bibliography. He starts his journey with an introduction on 'inherited base' where he includes the experiences of colonial surveyors like Major James Rennell, Francis Buchanon, W.W.Hunter and many others on the then Bengal's geography and transportation and then comes forward with the development of roadways, stream navigation and railways under the company and the Raj. Side by side the full work has been enriched with the addition of maps, tables, diagrams.

The writer has confined his journey within the framework of colonial rule. He has travelled only within the boundary of main imperial line of transportation. The general mode of transportation, which was carried out through indigenous bullock carts on road, through country boats on river are out of his analysis. Side by side the air transportation has been excluded. Though the term Eastern India has been used, the author mainly has confined his journey within the periphery of the then Bengal Presidency. He has studied all the matter as the competition against the railways.

Sukla Bhaduri. *Transport And Regional Development: A Case Study Of Road Transport Of West Bengal*. First Edition. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company. 1992.

This work is a nice attempt by the author to establish the notion of inter-relationship between ‘transport and regional development’ through a case study of road transport of West Bengal. The author has made her journey from the very beginning of the twentieth century till 1974. She starts with the historical development of roads in colonial Bengal and after a careful journey she has come to conclusion with the view that regional development mostly depends on good transportation. Though she has made her journey on different facades of road transportation of modern Bengal, she avoids spending not even a single line on railways and other modes of modern transportation. In fact she has studied the developmental process deeply connected with the roadways transportation and her district wise analysis on the present picture of roadways through different sources like PWD Road map, Lead Bank Survey, Annual Administrative Reports, RTO Reports and many others support her hypothesis. She has agreed with the govt. attitude which was clearly recognized by the *Annual report on the Administration of the Bengal Presidency for 1860-1861* indicating govt. intentions to connect the districts as well as provinces through metalled roads for the benefits of communication. But the author

bypasses the other motives of the govt. i.e. to suppress the uprisings and to communicate the districts in urgency like during draught and flood and so many others at an early ease. However, this is a nice effort by the author to look into two separate issues with a separate angle.

Amitabha Roy. *Sanko Theke Setu (A chronological outline of the road bridges of West Bengal)*. First Edition. Kolkata: West Bengal State Book Board. July, 2000. (In Bengali)

In introduction the writer claims that it is not a ‘history’ book rather a collection of information relating to bridges of Bengal in a chronological order. It deals with general information in relation with the history of bridges built in different parts of Bengal since the unknown past to the construction of Second Hugli Bridge or Vidyasagar Setu. Besides it provides valuable information on major rivers of West Bengal in the annexure.

The writer emphasizes much on the bridges constructed on various rivers of southern part of west Bengal and concentrates deeply on two bridges i.e. the Howrah Bridge or the Rabindra Setu and the Second Hugli Bridge or the Vidyasagar Setu. The writer ignores to mention or puts the instance of step motherly in the cases of bridges particularly of North Bengal. He does not provide even a single line on the Farakka Barrage without which one cannot imagine to reach Calcutta from that of the Northern part of Bengal.

Narendra Krishna Sinha (Ed.). *The History Of Bengal (1757-1905)*. First Edition. Calcutta: University of Calcutta Publication. 1967.

After the publications of two rich volumes of ‘History of Bengal’ edited by Ramesh Chandra Majumder and Jadunath Sarkar respectively by the University of Dhaka on ancient and medieval Bengal, the readers had been waiting anxiously for the third

volume which would be on history of modern Bengal. This volume minimizes the hopes and aspirations of the readers. It is an enriched volume on modern Bengal viewed mostly from socio-political and economic angles of the then Bengal (1757-1905). Its three sections cover all the above segments. In this edited volume there are three chapters related to economic history, viz.

1. Administrative, Economic and Social History (1757-1793) by N.K.Sinha,
2. Agrarian Relations in Bengal (1859-1885) by Binoy Kr. Choudhury,
3. Foreign and Inland trade by Dr. Nilmani Mukherjee.

Amongst these the third chapter depicts an overall picture of trade pattern of nineteenth century Bengal. Here he adds a subtitle entitled as ‘the transportation system’ where he remarks that the transportation was mainly river oriented. For North Bengal, he quotes, “The main river routes of the region were the rivers of the Ganges and of the Brahmaputra. Almost all other rivers of Bengal were tributaries or distributaries of these two main lines of communication”. While he mentions some ‘hats’ or marts of each district which were flourishing centres for trade and commerce of the then Bengal; he does not describe how the trade or commodities were carried out between Calcutta and these centres i.e. the author keeps silence mentioning the trade routes. He even does not mention the land routes.

Subodh Kumar Mukhopadhyay. *Prak Palashi Bangla (Social and Economic Life-1700 to 1757)*. First Edition. Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi Publication. 1982. (In Bengali)

It’s a very useful work on pre-Plassey society and economy of Bengal. The author has tried to depict the socio-political scenario of Bengal (1700-1757). It contains twelve chapters related to previously mentioned subject. In its fourth chapter entitled as ‘*banijya*

*o jogajog*'(trade and communication) he gives valuable information on trade and communication. Though there were some roads in West Bengal, North Bengal and the eastern part of Bengal, he adds, “was mainly river centric”. He comes to conclusion with the view that the roads which were existed then were mainly mail roads. He mentions some routes of communication. Amongst these his hints for Calcutta-Dhaka trade route through the river Atrai attracts and grows doubt simultaneously to his work. The chapter on ‘mail runner’ is also very informative.

Gokul Chandra Das. *Banglar Nauka*. First Edition. Calcutta: Pragatishil Prakashak, April, 2011. (In Bengali)

This work is a valuable addition to the history of river transportation or particularly to the boat industry of Bengal. The author refers many quotes from the extract of the travelogues of European sailors, Christian missionaries, general visitors, higher officials even honourable ladies of some dignified officials who travelled by boats. Above all he collects some sketches of James Hornell and James Princep on Bengal Boats and all of these are included to this book. In conclusion the writer hints to some points which are the probable causes behind the degradation and disappearances of this indigenous and eco- friendly industry i.e. the boat industry. Had there been a chapter relating to various water routes of Bengal, the effort of the writer may be fulfilled.

There are also some vernacular books on regional history which throw light upon various themes on the related areas of the concerned. Most of these are journals and periodicals and written in Bengali. But most of these are Some of these are as follow-

1. Dhananjoy Roy. *Dinajpur Jelar Itihas*. First Edition. Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi Publication. 2006.

2. Ichhamuddin Sarkar (Ed.). *Darjeelinger Itihas* by Sree Harimohan Sanyal (1880). Kolkata: Mitram. 2005.
3. Malay Sankar Bhattachartjee (Ed.). *Maldaha Charcha(1)- A collection of essays on Malda*. Malda: Bangiya Prakashak O Pustak Bikreta Sabha. 2011.
4. Onkar Bandyopadhyay. *Jana Ajanar Maldaha*. Malda: Fifth Edition. 2006.
5. Pradyot Ghosh. *Maldaha Jelar Itihas* (First Part). Calcutta: Pustak Bipani. 2004.
6. Binay Barman and Kartik Chandra Barman (Ed.). *History and Culture of North Bengal*. Kolkata: Pragatishil Prokashak. 2015.
7. Anandagopal Ghosh and Supam Biswas (Ed.). *Paribartaner Dharai Tista-Banger Jalpaiguri Jela*. Kolkata: Pragatishil Prakashak. 2016.

These volumes and many others are mainly the efforts from their writers or editors to look the concerned region on various angles. All of these may inform the readers to these concerned areas or districts, but these writings are not beyond suspicion in all occasion as most of these have not followed proper references and mostly relied upon local oral data. Here, in this connection, I would like to mention two efforts from the little magazines of North Bengal and one from Calcutta. The first is *Madhuparni's* (a Bengali periodical) special six volumes related to six districts of North Bengal. These volumes under the general editorship of Ajitesh Bhattacharjee thrust upon almost all the aspects of society, polity, economy and culture of North Bengal through the ages. Many scholars have tried to write the communicative history of North Bengal in different volumes. But in many of them we find the absence of using proper references. Secondly, several volumes of *Kirat Bhumi* (a Bengali periodical of Jalpaiguri) are also too much remarkable for the northern part of North Bengal.

*Swadesh Charcha Lok*, another socio-cultural journal in Bengali also must be mentioned in this respect. Its two special volumes i.e. Book Fair-2006 and that of 2007 entitled as '*Sekaler path ghat*' (antiquated roads and harbours) have made its special journey to cover up all the roadways and waterways since the unknown past to post colonial India and Bangladesh and present a more distinct picture than all the others to the readers. Amongst the articles enclosed '*Prak Oupanibeshik Yuge Uttarbanga-Bhutan-Assam Sarak Banijyapath*' by Partha Sen, '*Cooch Behar Jelar Sekaler Path*' by Abhijit Das, '*Lokgane Path O Ghatir Byanjana*' by Dinesh Roy, '*Gour-Maldaha Jelar Atit-kaler Path Parichay*' by Kamal Basak, '*Jalpaiguri: Smrity Bismritir Ghatir Katha*' by Goutam Guha Roy and '*Je Path Gekhhe Sabkhane*' by Dhananjoy Roy are very informative but special references should be made to the last one. Mr. Roy through his article has covered all the six districts of North Bengal and describes the developmental process of road ways and railways in these districts in the colonial period. But the major drawback of this article is that the writer avoids mentioning any reference to his support.

All the above mentioned books, journals, periodicals, little magazines are very useful materials from where we may be able to get valuable information and we can imagine the overall picture on transport and communication of North Bengal. All the above might be great efforts to give a new addition to the knowledge world, but all of these have some drawbacks and also the research gaps simultaneously. For example, all the discussed works fail to depict the clear picture or 'road map' both on land and water of colonial Bengal or North Bengal. Besides who were involved with those various systems? - No one attempts to answer. Again when the mode of communication of this particular region was mainly riverine, why the govt. did not continue it or why did the Government encourage the establishment of roadways and railways in lieu of traditional system- these questions must be answered.

From the above discussion it is clear that a detailed study on the growth and development of Transport and communication of North Bengal has not yet been done. Thus a detailed analysis on the pre-mentioned work may be a unique opportunity to discover North Bengal from a separate perspective. The study has attempted to search for the answers of the following queries through the chapters.

1. What were the characteristic features of traditional transport and communication system of North Bengal in pre-colonial era?
2. What were the causes behind the establishment of Public Works Department in 1854? How far the transport policy of the colonial Government of Bengal was differ from that of the pre-colonial age?
3. What were the developments in the sphere of transport and communication of North Bengal since the establishment of the Public Works Department in 1854?
4. What were the impacts of new system of transportation on society, economy and politics of North Bengal?
5. Did the Second World War compel the colonial Government to initiate a new transport policy in North Bengal?
6. Was the post independent phase a major dislocation in respect of transport and communication in North Bengal?
7. What were the effects of the Sino-Indian War of 1962 in respect to the transportation and communication in North Bengal?

This doctoral dissertation has been divided into seven chapters. In CHAPTER-1 entitled as 'PRE-COLONIAL SET UP' a journey has been made to explore the pre-colonial transport and communication set up of North Bengal aiming at comprising and contrasting it with the system of later times. Although, the word 'Pre-Colonial Age'

literally denotes for the period before the advent of colonial rule, it is unjust to regard the term always as a political phenomenon when the political hegemony shifted to the hands of colonial powers from their indigenous counterpart. Infact in Bengal, as accepted commonly, the process of political control had been started to be shifted to the hands of the English East India Company in 1757, though it was not till 1765 when the said Company was granted the '*Diwani*' for achieving the supremacy which afterwards influenced and overpowered all other fields of society and economy of indigenous uniqueness. Most of the Western measures were accepted and adopted for all the human needs accordingly. Thus the indigenous society and economy as like political field, had been colonised gradually. As the study begins with the establishment of the Public Works Department (PWD) in 1854, which seems to be the turning point of the introduction of modern ways towards transport and communication system of the then Bengal on colonial line based on European methods and techniques; it is not illegitimate to regard the pre-1854 era as the Pre-colonial Age in this perspective. Hence, in this chapter Pre-colonial set up relates to all of the transport and communication system of North Bengal till 1854.

CHAPTER-2 of this thesis thrusts upon the changed administrative policy of the Colonial Government which had formulated the road policy as well as the transport and communication policy of the colonial Government of Bengal. This chapter deals with the perspective of establishment of the PWD and its administration in Bengal Presidency emphasising special importance to North Bengal.

CHAPTER-3, entitled as 'DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION' mostly relates to the quantitative description of development of transport and communication system of North Bengal since the middle of nineteenth century till the beginning years of thirties of twentieth century. This chapter has been

subdivided into four sub-chapters viz. ROADWAYS, INLAND NAVIGATION, RAILWAYS and TRANSPORTATION IN HILL REGION. The objective of this chapter is to search how far communicational development had been occurred in the concerned region during the proposed time frame. The issue of Government strategy towards the development of various ways of communication e.g. roadways, waterways and railways in North Bengal have been analysed.

Next to CHAPTER-3 i.e. CHAPTER-4 deals with consequences of introduction of new system of transportation on society, economy and culture of North Bengal. This chapter also aims at searching for indigenous reactions towards the implementation of the Government policy in the transport and communication sector.

CHAPTER-6 surveys the nature of transport and communication system of North Bengal in the perspective of the World War II. This chapter also makes its journey to have a query on the reflection of Government policy which was adopted due to the outcome of the World War II or more precisely due to probable Japanese invasion in that region.

The Great Partition of Bengal followed by the independence of India in 1947 and its impacts on transport and communication of North Bengal is the basic point of concentration of CHAPTER-7.

Lastly, the consequences of the Sino-Indian War of 1962 on the transport and communication system of North Bengal is the chief area of study of CHAPTER-7. It aims at seeking the developments in the sphere of transport and communication system of North Bengal as the result of outcome of the war.

Concentrating upon the issue of ‘Growth and Development of Transport and Communication of North Bengal (1854-1962)’ following hypotheses have been developed for testing.

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 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.
3. North Bengal had received the attention of the country and the Government of India in 1962 when the Sino-Indian Border conflict was appeared to be a war. It revealed the hollowness and weakness of the transport and communication policy of the Government of India 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.

In order to understand the transport and communicational pattern of North Bengal, following methodology has been adopted for collecting data.

- A. The proposed research work is designed depending on empirically testable documents. Data have been collected from primary and secondary literary sources. The records of various missions led by reputed officials to the courts of different rulers of northeast India and neighbouring countries from Calcutta, travelogues

dealing with North Bengal have been scrutinized in order to know the traditional system of transportation in the proposed region. Different enquiry committee reports, survey reports, PWD reports, Railway Board reports, Annual Administration reports, District Administrative Reports, Revenue Board Reports, Central and State Legislative Assembly Proceedings and many other Government records are consulted. Apart from these references and valuable notes from West Bengal State Archives (Kolkata), National Library (Kolkata), The Asiatic Society (Kolkata) have been collected as research materials. Personal records, Zamindari family records, traditional merchant family records are also been scrutinized.

- B. Celebrated works of eminent scholars are consulted as secondary works. Articles, journals, unpublished documents, reviews, periodicals are extensively used.
- C. Oral sources have also been utilized. Interviews of retired Government officials, members of different merchant families, carpenters who are engaged themselves in boat building hereditarily, boatmen, fishermen, retired servicemen who were in the job of different modes of transportation and of many others are taken to reach into a logical and empirical conclusion.

## CHAPTER-I

### PRE COLONIAL SET-UP

To begin with, the chapter in detail, let us have a look at the term and geography of the study. The present study covers the region of 'North Bengal' or north and north-eastern part of West Bengal. Surprisingly, no reference of the term 'North Bengal' without a single mention of the word 'Anuttarbanga', found in Kamauli Copper plate of Manorath, have been discovered in ancient and medieval texts.<sup>1</sup>

Focusing at the term though some attempts have been made to detect North Bengal as an administrative unit since unknown past,<sup>2</sup> it is not beyond suspicion. It is assumed that the term had been invented as a geographical definition.<sup>3</sup> The northern or north-eastern part of Bengal Delta surrounded by river Kosi in the west, river Ganges in the south and river Karatoya in the east with ancient alluvium has been identifying as the North Bengal Basin since the very beginning of the British regime.<sup>4</sup> This periphery of North Bengal Basin is synonymous for Greater North Bengal in undivided Bengal.

There was also a British version of Northern Bengal (including Purnia) which meant for the country, 'bounded on the north by the lower Himalayan ranges, on the west by the river Koosee (Kosi), on the east by the Juboona, (Jamuna) a branch of the Brahmapootra (Brahmaputra), and on the south by the Ganges, locally called Pudda (Padma)'.<sup>5</sup> The periphery of modern North Bengal more or less suits best with that geographical definition.

Scholars have tried a lot to search for the geographic and cultural periphery of North Bengal since the last quarter of nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> But, North Bengal stands for north of Bengal in strictest sense. Depending upon O'Malley<sup>7</sup>, Dr. Radhakamal Mukherjee has tried to detect the characteristic physical features of North Bengal. He has observed:

North Bengal extends from north to south between the lower spurs of the Himalayas and the Ganges. In the north there is an unhealthy submontane tract, the Terai, from which the country gradually slopes southwards in a wide alluvial plain, watered by the rivers flowing southwards from the Himalayas and broken only by the Barind. This is a comparatively high belt of laterite formation, an outcrop of the “old alluvium” lying on the confines of Dinajpur, Malda, Rajshahi and Bogra...<sup>8</sup>

Presently, North Bengal as a land and as a region includes eight north and north-eastern districts of West Bengal. These are Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Coochbehar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda; although there is no separate administrative unit of this kind except a development unit of Government of West Bengal named as Uttar Banga Unnayan Parshad is visible anywhere in present West Bengal.<sup>9</sup>

North Bengal, both as a term and land has gone through a series of evolution. As a land, while its geographical definition was discovered as North Bengal Basin by the colonial geographers, it was confined to the limits of the Ganges and the Karatoya. This geographical division had been authorised by the contemporary Government of Bengal more or less through their ‘Division’ system. Needless to say that despite of frequent changes in the periphery of Divisional boundaries<sup>1</sup> due to birth of new districts e.g.

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<sup>1</sup> For the origin of Bengal districts and Divisions in British period vide Rai Manomohan Chakrabarti Bahadur. *Summary of Changes in the jurisdiction of Districts in Bengal: 1757-1916*. Calcutta: 1918.

Malda, Bogra and Pabna for the prevention of crime in remoter parts of large districts<sup>10</sup>; the existing boundary of Rajshahi Division in the late nineteenth century comprising of eight districts of northern and north-eastern Bengal viz. Rajshahi, Pabna, Bogra, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Malda, Darjeeling and Coochbehar was the echo of the geographical term North Bengal Basin. It is still surprising why the British Government did not adopt the title 'North Bengal Basin' in place of Rajshahi Division when the periphery of both of these geographical and administrative regions was almost the same. It may be assumed that the place name like Burdwan (in case of Burdwan Division), Rajshahi (in case of Rajshahi Division) as divisional headquarter was more favourable than that of the geographical terminology to the colonial masters.

North Bengal, so far its antiquity has been discovered did not possess any unique political identity since time immemorial. Politically though some minor dynasties had ruled over some smallest portion of the region with minimum influences, it was basically the parts and parcels of two great ancient empires of Eastern India. While one of them was centred around Pundravardhana, the second was centred on Pragjyotishapura. River Karatoya stood as the natural boundary of these two empires.<sup>11</sup> Indian classical literature since the compilation of the Epics, the Puranas and the Smritis, introduced the region as the part and parcels of these two empires.<sup>12</sup> References of Pundra Vasudeva and Bhagabhadra of respective kingdoms in the Mahabharata<sup>13</sup> undoubtedly support the notion. During the time of Harshavardhana, it was governed by Sasanka, the king of Gour and by Bhaskaravarman, the king of Kamrupa. In medieval days the region was under the jurisdiction of Sultans of Gour, Maharajas of Cooch Behar and kings of Sikkim and Bhutan. It was only the British who captured the whole land and unified it under one umbrella. When the area was ceded to the territory of the British (except Koch Behar as it was under crown's alliance and ruled by the Koch kings) it was included under the

jurisdiction of Rajshahi Division. When the decision of Partition of Bengal in 1905, was planned and implemented by Lord Curzon, the whole area excluding Darjeeling was ceded to the territory of newly found Eastern Bengal and Assam Presidency.<sup>14</sup> Although, the decision of Partition of Bengal was abandoned due to nationwide protest termed as the Swadeshi and Boycott, the Great Partition of 1947 intersected the region again into a new dimension. ‘The districts of North Bengal’, as observed by Ananda Gopal Ghosh, ‘were the worst sufferers of the Partition’ as against its southern counterparts.<sup>15</sup> Four of the districts of Rajshahi Division remained in India and other four came to the hands of newly formed East Pakistan i.e. today’s Bangladesh.<sup>16</sup> Cooch Behar, the only native state as mentioned earlier signed the instrument of accession with the Govt. of India on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1949<sup>17</sup> and further got the status of a district of West Bengal in 1950.

North Bengal as its heterogeneous political identity also inherits a plenty of variations from geographical perspective. It is characterised by three heterogeneous geographic and climatic situations. Its northern part is closely connected with the Himalayan climate and geography. The middle of the region is closely related to the climatic geography of Himalayan Terrain and Duars, and the lower or the southern part is connected with the graphical climate of the Gangetic Basin. Thus relation with three distinct geography and culture truly applies the theory of ‘North Bengal within North Bengal’.<sup>18</sup>

As stated earlier there was no reference of North Bengal till 1850’s. Since the time mentioned the references of ‘Northern Bengal districts’ were found here and there in colonial administrative reports.<sup>19</sup> Despite the acquisition of Diwani in 1765, the EEIC did not show their similar attention towards all parts of North Bengal. They were found to be interested only to administer the most fertile and previously familiar part i.e. the

south and eastern part of North Bengal. Though they were not totally unknown to the north and north-eastern part of the said region, it may be assumed that the existence of the align regime and the so-called forest belt hindered them to remain aloof from the region. They even surveyed the territory in 1780's by Major James Rennell aiming at searching for traditional communication system facilitating the movements of forces easily to different important stations.<sup>20</sup> Its natural resources and agriculture failed to attract them.

However, it is more or less proper to say that the British were found to be interested to the northern part of Bengal since the later decades of the eighteenth century. Strategic and eco-political factors attracted them more towards the region. Northern part i.e. the Darjeeling Himalayan region attracted their attraction due to close connection with European climatic situation. The Terai and Duars i.e. the north-eastern part, which was once felt as the jungle belt got utmost priority when its rich natural resources like timber and tobacco (afterwards tea) were supposed to strengthen the colonial economy. Besides, the Company officials intended to settle a trade relation with Tibet through the ways of North Bengal Terai and Duars which is supposed to be the chief feature of 'Eastern Himalayan policy' of the English East India Company till the middle of the nineteenth century. Simultaneously strategic location and existence of several borders viz. the Indo-Bhutan, the Indo-Nepal, the Indo-Sikkim and the Indo-Tibet borders compelled the colonial masters to pay special importance to the region. Thus, one of the best answer behind the colonial efforts for the acquisition of Darjeeling not only as a sanatorium for the young recruits of the Company, but as a strategically important place might be hidden on this strategic consideration.<sup>21</sup>

The strategic and commercial importance of North Bengal having been realised, the English East India Company tried to link up the region with their administrative setup. Thus proper communication system was developed. But development is a process or series of evolution in existing system. Likewise, the development of transport and communication system in North Bengal has gone through a series of evolution. The primitive history of North Bengal still remains unknown. Few examples of Neolithic settlements having been found in recent excavations at Kalimpong and at Bangarh near Gangarampur in the district of Dakshin Dinajpur, it is assumed that the lower and eastern part of Bengal delta were beneath the Bay of Bengal for a long time. Sedimentation in Himalayan Rivers and changes in their courses made it possible to grow up the said land in later ages.<sup>22</sup> Who can say that this might not be a clue for the delayed process of Aryanization of that part of Bengal? Thus it may be assumed that the Aryan migration not in Bengal but whole of Eastern India was a later Vedic.<sup>23</sup> Hence it is thought that proper communication system did not grow up smoothly in that zone in the early years of Indian civilization as against other places of India.

In the Early Vedic period the Aryans were confined to the Land of Seven Rivers. Their infiltration to the interior of Eastern India especially in Bengal was a later Vedic phenomenon not before the early centuries of the Christian era which might have been occurred 'either in the wake of military campaigns or for more peaceful pursuits' like initiation to Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism.<sup>24</sup> Thus, no reference of Eastern India has been found in the Vedic texts except showing neglect and full of slights.<sup>25</sup> But during the composition of the Mahabharata that negligence found to be disappeared. Though the routes of migration have not been clearly detected, it seems the Aryan migration to Eastern India was started and they became familiar to Banga, Magadha, Kalinga and many other ancient *Janapadas* of the East.<sup>26</sup> This may be assumed that both waterways

and roadways might have been used by the Aryans. North East India being the byproduct of two great river systems- the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, closely connected with each other through their distributaries and tributaries, it can be imagined that the Aryans might have easily migrated to their destination. For that reason, all the ancient capitals those were acted as administrative and commercial centres were setup on the bank of rivers. These centres also were shifted accordingly when changes in river courses occurred. Simultaneously several references of Mahabharata implied the theory of existence of sub-continental roadways which were used for military expeditions and commercial ventures.<sup>27</sup>

Greater North Bengal, at that time including the districts of Rajshahi, Pabna, Bogra, Dinajpur and Rangpur of present Bangladesh was under the jurisdiction of Pundravardhana and Pragjyotishapura. Perhaps the Mahabharata is the earliest reference that clearly depicts the knowledge and attitude of the Aryans towards North East India including North Bengal. References of long-distance trade with present North Bengal and Assam through land and river routes with various examples of ferries are found in the Mahabharata. Invasion to Pundra by Bhima<sup>28</sup> and Pragjyotisha by Arjuna<sup>29</sup> recognize the existence of long-run highways from Delhi or beyond to North East India through North Bengal. During the time of *Rajasuya Yajna* by king Yudhishtira, elder brother of the Pandavas for the acquisition of *Rajachakrabortin*, Vasudeva, the Pundra king; Aakarsha, the Bange king and Bhagadutta, the Pragjyotisha king with huge tributes were present at Indraprastha, newly found capital city of the Pandavas.<sup>30</sup> Again, at the time of the War of Kurukshetra, these kings fought the war with their huge elephant squads against the Pandavas.<sup>31</sup> Besides reference of Karatoya and Lohitya as greatest pilgrimage centres of Eastern India in the Tirtha Parva of the Mahabharata and visiting the places by the Pandavas implied the existence of proper communication. All the examples prove the

existence of long-run highway from North-East India to Northern India through North Bengal.

This can be assumed from the references of the Mahabharata that the rulers of Eastern India formed an alloy against the Pandavas under the leadership of Jarashandha, the ruler of Magadha<sup>32</sup> and the joining of most of the rulers of eastern India against the Pandavas in the War of Kurukshetra was the outcome of this. As a result, there was the possibility of a long-run road from Eastern India to Western India through the Gangetic Valley where most of the prosperous kingdoms flourished. Following this route, Bhima and Arjuna, the Pandava brothers subjugated the rulers of Eastern India for *Rajasuya Yajna* and *Ashvamedha Yajna* of Yudhishtira, the Pandava king. Vasudeva Krishna, the ruler of Dwarka, subjugated and beheaded Naraka, the Pragjyotisha king, to lift the blockade of Pragjyotisha road.<sup>33</sup> These are the strong indications of long-run highways between the said regions. Besides, the ancient legend of the escape of Bana's daughter Usha, by Aniruddha, son of Sri Krishna, the Dwarka ruler and fight between the two hostile armies also seems to be a strong evidence behind this assumption. The Ushaharan Road in Gangarampur subdivision of Dakshin Dinajpur District is still memorizing the story. Chronological references of Bengal especially the region of North Bengal is available from the scriptures of third century B.C. Then it was represented as Pundravardhana. Despite of the antiquity of Pundravardhana having been detected not prior to the Mauryan period, it seems older than thought.<sup>34</sup> It could be probable that the trading relationship between Pundravardhana and northern India had been established in pre-Mauryan time perhaps mostly in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. when the *Mahajanapadas* and the *Janapadas* started to be flourishing through commerce and military expansion. In fact, all India inland transport network had been developed at that time. Thus, we find several references of Banga, Pundra, Pragjyotisha and many others in the Ramayana and

the Mahabharata. The Buddhist sources including the Jatakas refer a very good network of roads in Eastern India of that time mentioned. It seems that the shift of political activities from Northern India to Eastern India and growth of several *Janapadas* or *Mahajanapadas* in that region fastened the rapid growth of communication system. All the administrative centres were interconnected with roads which encouraged the national trading activity. An old Brahmi inscription in Prakrit language having been found at Mahasthangarh in Bangladesh, clearly denotes that the region probably came to the hands of the Mauryas<sup>35</sup> and it is probable that proper communication between this region and Pataliputra, the Mauryan capital were set up in due time. Similarly, as the Arthashastra refers to *Navyavakashika* of Kotivarsha,<sup>36</sup> who was a rendezvous of merchants and businessmen and as Pundravardhana is famous for producer and exporter of different kinds of cloths,<sup>37</sup> it seems that there was certainly a long-run royal road which was between Pundravardhana and Pataliputra.

This could be probable that the royal road might have been extended up to Burma border. The references of *Dukulas* (cloths) of Banga and Pundra and *Patrorina* (cloth produced from saliva of a kind of maggot) of Magadha and Pundra in the Arthashastra strengthened the assumption.<sup>38</sup> Several references of Pundra, Pragjyotisha, Manipur and many other places of Eastern India in the epics especially in the Mahabharata suspects that compilation of present version of the Mahabharata was occurred in that period. Though the early administrative division of Pundravardhana kingdom could not be known, but it is clear that Pundravardhana having been conquered by the Guptas; it was converted to a *Bhukti* (division) and Kotivarsha as a *Vishaya* (district).<sup>39</sup> Therefore, it is logical to imagine that the pre-mentioned system of communication was present during the time of the imperial Guptas.

The itineraries of foreign travellers are very much useful for imagining ancient Bengal communication and transportation. Basically, being interested to trade and commerce, Strabo, the author of *Periplus*, Ptolemy and many other western travellers referred so many items produced in North Bengal in the list of exports from India to Western world. The Greek historians referred some products of Pundravardhana and Varendri and few from the Terai and Duars region of the Himalayas which were imported to the markets of Europe through the port of Gangaridai.<sup>40</sup>

The Chinese travellers were magnificent in this respect. Their itineraries were more relevant than their European counterparts. The first reference went back in 126 B.C. when Chang Kien, the Chinese ambassador at Bactria submitted his famous report mentioning a continental overland route from southern China to Afghanistan through India. It can be imagined that pre-mentioned royal road was connected to various ports and harbours of Eastern India of that time through cross roads for exporting as well as importing merchandise. References of that road as a part of famous silk route connecting China and Western Asia from Burma border to North Western frontier through North Bengal were also available in Chinese sources of later days. Hiuen-Tsang also travelled some portions of that road in the seventh century A.D. for visiting the places of Karnasuvarna, Kajangala, Gour, and Pundravardhana and after crossing a big river which is supposed to be Karatoya, he finally reached Kamrupa at the kingdom of Bhaskaravarman. Kia-Tan who visited India between 785 and 805 A.D. also quotes for a land route starting from Tonkin to Magadha which joins first at Kamrupa, afterwards crossing Karatoya and touching Pundravardhana it crossed the Ganges at Kajangala and finally reached Magadha.<sup>41</sup> But no reference of that road is available since the early years of ninth century A.D. It seems that frequent changes in courses of rivers of northern part of Bengal, decay in silk trade and rise of regional powers with a history of constant struggle

among themselves abandoned the age-old royal road. Besides references of another route from North Bengal through the passes of the Himalayas past Sikkim and Chumbi Valley to Tibet and China were also available from the later Chinese texts and that route became the corridor for the Buddhist pilgrimage from China and Tibet to Magadha through the centuries.<sup>42</sup>

It is found that no reference of pre-mentioned royal road regarded as a portion of 'Silk Route' which was referred by the Chinese travellers in several times as the chief highway from North East India to North West India through North Bengal till first quarter of the ninth century A.D. was seldom available from any foreign or indigenous source which testifies the notion of non-existence or abandoned of the road. It can be imagined that rapid changes in river courses in north and northeastern Bengal occurred in due time which cut off the traditional lines of inland communication. Again, the *Matsanyaya* which is thought as one of the darkest episode of Bengal followed by natural degradation in trade left negative consequences on communication system of Bengal. However, it does not mean that the country remained roadless or without having proper communication. The establishment of the Pala dynasty in Bengal and their expansion in all-over Eastern India seems to have restored the situation. The alternate routes through different regional headquarters were discovered as a natural event. During the time of the Palas, the road networks of North Bengal might have been restored again. Establishment of royal capitals by different Pala kings in different places of North Bengal and scattering of huge number of scholastic centres known as *Viharas* or *Mahaviharas* perhaps resulted the rapid growth and development of inland communication system in North Bengal. Alberuni, in the eleventh century, refers to sixteen travel roads starting from Kanauj to different directions in his famous itinerary.<sup>43</sup> One of these was extended to Bari and from thence to Kamrupa through Bihat (Betia of Bihar) and Tirhut. He also hints that Nepal

was in the north from Tirhut and there was a gap of three hundred miles to Bhoteswar (Bhutan) from Nepal.

It seems that Kajangala or Rajmahal in the north and Rangamati of Rangpur district in the east were regarded as the gateways of North Bengal through the ages. While the first one always stood as the junction of all roads of Eastern and Northeastern India proceeding towards North and Western India, side by side the later possessed the same for all roads proceeding towards Assam and beyond. Periplus in the first century mentions this route being used for silk trade of Tibet or China targeting to export to Europe. It seems that the pre-mentioned Nepal route was the common route coming from Tibet towards Central India followed by hundreds of Buddhist travellers from Tibet to India or vis-à-vis. Horses might have been imported to Laknawati along this track in the beginning of thirteenth century as Tabaquat-i-nasiri says.<sup>44</sup> The Kathasaritsagara of Somedeva in the eleventh century A.D. (1053-1081) refers to Pundranagara or Pundravardhana as a flourishing trade centre properly connected with trade network of Pataliputra.<sup>45</sup> Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy indicates on a road from Pundravardhana to Mithila, then passing through Pataliputra, and Buddha Gaya on to Varanasi and Ajodhya and finally proceeding to Sind and Gujrat.<sup>46</sup> It is surely a trade route which probably connected Sourashtra, the early-medieval Indian seaport of Western India with Gour, Varendri and beyond. There was a separate trade route from Uttara Rada to Kamrupa through Pundravardhana which was used for carrying out business activities between West Bengal and North Bengal.<sup>47</sup>

The impacts of Muslim rule in Bengal since the early years of the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. were unanimous. Needless to say, that the transport and communication system in Bengal got a new impetus for the direct patronage from the crown. A proper road network had

been developed since the early years of the Bengal Sultanate for connecting different administrative centres and considering military needs. Being familiar to the Central Asian climatic geography and highly depending on cavalry from military perspective, the Bengal Turks were naturally fond of good roads. Thus, several roads were made of. Simultaneously river logged Bengal and its dependency over river communication system since unknown past also gave a chance to the rulers of Bengal to include navy to the royal force.

Depending on Tabaquat-i-nasiri, it seems that Baktiyar Khalji concentrated to set up basic administrative infrastructure in his newly acquired territories. He divided the whole territory into different administrative units posting his Amirs as heads of the said units.<sup>48</sup> It seems that proper communication system mainly road communication system connecting all of the administrative headquarters was developed accordingly. It can also be assumed that he might have built up Devkot-Ghoraghat road before he started to invade Tibet as Ghoraghat on the bank of Karatoya was regarded as the border between Laknawati and Kamrupa kingdom. Baktiyar preferred to invade Tibet by road due to his dependency over cavalry and that is why he followed the age-old Kamrupa road through Ghoraghat and Rangamati.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the bases of 'Shahi Sarak' in the Sultanate period had been started to build up centring around Devkot and Laknawati. Consequently, Giyasuddin Iyus Shah constructed a high embanked royal road between Devkot and Lakhnor or Rajnagar of present Birbhum district with a view to save and open the roads from the rains of Bengal.<sup>50</sup> The traditions of constructing high embanked roads were carried on by all the remarkable rulers. For example, Hussain Shah constructed a high embanked road from Gour to Ghoraghat.<sup>51</sup> This tradition of erection of *shahi sharak* reached its utmost position when Sher Shah, constructed the *Badshahi sharak* known as *sharak-i-azam* from Sonargaon to Lahore. This royal road was upgraded by the British

rulers as the Grand Trunk Road. Sher Shah benefitted commerce, postal activities and fulfilled his military needs through this road.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the tradition of constructing royal roads which had been started during the early days of the Muslim invaders in Bengal developed gradually throughout the Muslim rule in Bengal centralizing their provincial headquarters which were Devkot, Laknawati, Gour, Pandua, Tanda, Rajmahal and Murshidabad.

The water communication system in North Bengal seems to be grown up all through the ages. Dr. P. C. Chakraborty has rightly observed the role of water communication through the rivers of Bengal by saying that:

the chief routes of internal trade were probably the waterways of the province, in proximity to which stood the principal towns. The role of rivers in the economic geography of Bengal cannot be over-estimated. They fertilized the soil by the silt which they carried; they eliminated, to a large extent, the need for artificial irrigation: and being navigable far inland throughout the year, they served as ‘corridors’ or ‘natural routes’ for long-distance traffic. It is probable enough, although statistical data are lacking, that throughout the ancient and medieval periods they bore the greater part of the inland traffic of the province.<sup>53</sup>

Being the byproduct of two great river system of India i.e. the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, North Bengal rivers with their tributaries and distributaries always remained navigable throughout major parts of the year and easily accessible to all India water transport network. During the age of the Mahabharata, the Pandavas were familiar with two rivers of North Bengal i.e. Karatoya and Lohitya which is similar to the Brahmaputra.<sup>54</sup> Bhaskaravarman, the Kamrupa king of the seventh century A.D. positioned his royal navy with that of the royal army at Kajangala or Rajmahal while

intending to invade the kingdom of Gour and he passed up the Ganges with his army and navy through Bengal, Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh for participating in the Kanauj Assembly on the invitation of Harshavardhana.<sup>55</sup> Hiuen-Tsang, the famous Chinese traveller of that time also travelled Karnasuvarna and Pundravardhana by crossing the river Ganges at Kajangala. He even visited the kingdom of Bhaskaravarman travelling through the age-old Kamrupa road after crossing a great river 'Ka-lo-tu' which is likely to be the Brahmaputra.<sup>56</sup> Probably, it is true that the water communication in that land was commonly used for transportation of armies and merchandise. Chronological references of water communication of North Bengal are common from various indigenous sources from the time of the Palas who maintained a higher class royal navy with squads of fleets which were timely used for regional invasions.<sup>57</sup> The Senas of Bengal also followed the line of their predecessors. Lakshmana Sena, the last remarkable Sena king of Bengal also used to possess similar types of navy.<sup>58</sup> The sultans of Bengal also followed the same tradition all through their reign as their Hindu predecessors except a short break of early Muslim rule in Bengal when cavalry had been regarded as the chief ingredient of the royal force.<sup>59</sup> Ibn Battuta in fourteenth century referred to the 'Blue river' of Chittagong being used for carrying merchandise to Laknawati,<sup>60</sup> the capital of Bengal through Sonargaon, the port of Eastern Bengal.<sup>61</sup> It seems the rivers being connected with all India waterway networks always became favourable to the royal families for comfort, secrecy and security. It is evident that even during the reign of Murshid Kuli Khan, Nawab of Murshidabad in the early part of eighteenth century, the royal families of Dacca visited Murshidabad court in the rainy season when traversing from Dacca through river Ganges to the upward countries.<sup>62</sup> Side by side, references of *Saodagar* or Bengalee merchant communities since the time of the Palas throughout the Muslim period vividly found in the *Mongal Kavyas* proves the notion of prevailing

healthy water communication system. Here it is interesting to note that after the twelfth century A.D. not even a single reference of Bengal merchants dealing with caravan trade of North India has been found from any source. Does it hint for the collapse of inland trade of Bengal followed by the process of 'eastward march' of Bengal rivers as remarked by Dr. Radhakamal Mukherjee,<sup>63</sup> which cut off the previous road networks. Perhaps the yearly appearing floods collapsed the road networks for which the rulers and merchants rapidly attracted towards inland navigation which is more accessible although the years having less maintenance cost. In fact, that eastern march of Bengal rivers changed the riverine geography of Bengal which was also noticed by James Rennell in the last quarter of eighteenth century.<sup>64</sup> There was also a strong indication of thieves in the highways and full of forest with wild beasts all-over North Bengal as mentioned by Ralph Fitch (1538-91) which positively hindered the travellers to travel long-distance alone.<sup>65</sup>

Early medieval and medieval internal trade routes of North Bengal as found in indigenous and foreign literature were of two types- roadways and waterways, though waterways were preferred much for business in the early medieval and medieval Bengal. The nagaras, directly connected with roadways and waterways, were the chief centres for internal business. Kotivarsha in Damodarpur Copper Plate and Pundravardhana in Kathasaritsagara were examples of these kinds.<sup>66</sup> The *hattas* or *hats* also carried on same activities. The references of different types of tax collecting officers of the Pala-Sena Bengal in tolls e.g. *tarikhs* who was responsible to collect tolls on merchandise at ferries<sup>67</sup> proves the notion of healthy trading activities depending on better communication system.

The routes of communication in pre-colonial India- roadways or waterways, whatever might be; should not be characterized by any specific route like trade route,

military route or by any other, as it today. The Chinese travellers not only in Bengal, but all-over in India traversed by same routes which were at the same time characterized by trade route, military route and pilgrimage route.<sup>68</sup> Hiuen-Tsang's itinerary citing on Buddhist monasteries in North Bengal from Kajangala to Kamrupa through Pundravardhana seems to be a perfect example of this assumption.<sup>69</sup> Yet, as a natural event origin of communication network always depends on requirement of man. He always sought for best way which is shorter, chief and safe. Thus, it was found that the Chinese ambassadors in the first half of fifteenth century, proceeded from Chittagong to Nawabganj in Malda by boat through rivers and from thence to the court of Pandua in Malda by foot.<sup>70</sup>

Lack of good network of communication system and also scattering dense forest compelled the Muhammadan rulers of Bengal to accept the traditional rulers of Bengal as zamindars who started to rule more or less independently in northeastern, eastern and western parts of Bengal province.<sup>71</sup> The Bengal land revenue settlement of Todarmal in the sixteenth century, timely revised by Shah Suja and Murshid Kuli Khan in the early eighteenth century established the Bengal zamindars as a more constructive class of landed gentry. It is understandable that the advent of big traditional zamindars in different places of Bengal including Northern Bengal helped to develop good network of communication between the zamindaries and that of the provincial capitals and divisional headquarters like *Sarkars* or *Chaklas*. These zamindars following the royal orders had to secure the highways and waterways from offences like dacoities and piracies for the smooth conduct of business.<sup>72</sup>

The pre-colonial transportation system in northern part of North Bengal seems to remain more in obscurity in comparison to its southern counterpart. The southern districts

which had been closely linked up with the imperial political, administrative and financial set-up naturally caught the colonial attraction as against the northern districts. Side by side, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri under the jurisdiction of align Sikkim and Bhutan Raj respectively remained aloof from the outer world for a long time. Coochbehar, despite of a foreign country, was commonly famous to the outer world as against Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri due to its rich heritage as a part of ancient Pragjyotisha and Kamta-Koch kingdom of later days. Thus, it can be said that studying history and other related issues on the districts of Coochbehar is easier than those of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling.

The origin of three extreme north and north-eastern districts of North Bengal viz. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar was politically differed from that of the southern districts of the region. While most of the southern districts were more or less remained under same sovereignty in ancient and medieval period, the case was different when it dealt with the north. Coochbehar was under the sovereign powers of Pragjyotisha rulers in ancient times while Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri were under the control of the rulers of Tibet. Since the early medieval times when brother empires of Tibet were grown up in Sikkim and Bhutan, major parts of Darjeeling and some portions of Jalpaiguri came to the hands of the respective powers. In medieval times when Kata-Koch kingdom grew up centring around Coochbehar, the Raikat families took over the charge of most of the areas of Jalpaiguri district. However, we do not possess sufficient data to analyse the communicative history of the region. Darjeeling being a strategic point of communication supposed to act same as it did in the early part of the twentieth century. This could be probable that the hill areas of Darjeeling as a traditional trading region sends off branches of roads for trading and religious activities with Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet which were still existed in the early twentieth century.<sup>73</sup> The Tibetan pass through Chumbi Valley was the age-old 'Silk Road' as stated earlier. It seems that this route was

frequently used by the rulers of Tibet for invasions and sending royal embassies to the courts of Bengal or vis-à-vis in medieval days.

The Bengal Duars which were collectively reorganized to form the districts of Jalpaiguri in 1869 were mainly retained their stands as the entry points of the merchandise to Bhutan or vis-à-vis. Though the ancient history of the land is not clearly known, it seems that some semi-independent rulers like Jalpes, Prithu and many others who governed the land for some years, might have been concentrated to construct and develop the communication system of that region. The advent of Raikatas as rulers of that land commonly known as Baikunthapur seems to develop the traditional communication system and also to establish better communication system with their mother empire ruled from Coochbehar. Side by side water communication through river Karatoya and Tista also have been flourished as a natural event.

The transport and communication of Coochbehar in pre-colonial and colonial period generally depended on Rangpur district of present Bangladesh. The famous trade route from Magadha to Kamrupa that was further extended to southern China intersected the land of Rangpur and several branches were sent off. It can be imagined that a tributary line was set up between Coochbehar and Rangpur as the former was one of the entry point to Bhutan. There was also a proven line of trade sending off the main route via Darjeeling, Sikkim and Tibet. It was the most popular route to Tibet and the Indo Tibetan relations through the ages has been carried on using this route. The Kamta kings also tried to construct and repair several roads for the betterment of trade and commerce.<sup>74</sup> These roads were most common to indigenous literature as *malli* or *ali* (for example *darpar-malli* or *baro-ali*). Thus Nilambar, the Kamta king set up a new road from

Coochbehar to Ghoraghat through Rangpur which served as the principal road between the places.<sup>75</sup>

The earliest reference of North Bengal in terms of communication and transportation found in the Mahabharata as stated earlier probably hints for the use of animal caravans. Though the Mahabharata referred the region from military point of view discussed as expeditions of Bhima and Arjuna and the valour of Pundra Vasudeva, Bangasena, Akarsha, Bhagadutta; it seems that huge army with them might have used traditional roadways or waterways. Vasudeva, the Pundra king and Bhagadutta, the Pragjyotisha king reached the court of Indraprastha during the time of incarnation of Yudhishtira with huge tribute those might be carried by caravans. The extensive use of elephant squad by all the kings of Bengal in the War of Kurukshetra<sup>76</sup> proves that it was the popular means of convenience all over Bengal through the centuries due to availability of the animal in the forests of Bengal in large scale and unavailability of good quality horses in Bengal. Despite this, it seems that common people used to travel by foot which was the basic characteristics of means of communication all-over Bengal all through the ages. Hiuen-Tsang, the famous Chinese visitor in seventh century and all other visitors of later ages travelled the places of North Bengal by foot.<sup>77</sup>

Several instances of Palanquins as the common convenience for the use of royal families and of the richest class from the Palas onwards are vividly found in the indigenous literature and inscriptions. The use of horses though not unknown to the rulers of Bengal,<sup>78</sup> might have been started vigorously since the establishment of the Muslim rule in Bengal. Side by side the bullock cart had been regarded as the common means of transport all-over Bengal since road communication started to be developed or when rains and occasional floods did not hamper to traverse. Side by side, ponies or packed animals

like donkeys, horses and mules were regarded as the chief convenience of the hill regions of the North.

In comparison to roadways it is the fact that Bengal always depended upon its waterways through the ages.<sup>79</sup> Then it was possible to communicate any nook and corner of Bengal through the Ganges, Bhagirathi, Brahmaputra, Padma, Meghna and their tributaries and distributaries. Communication between eastern and southern Bengal through North Bengal was chiefly maintained by Karatoya.<sup>80</sup> In the *Charjagiti* and *Mongal Kavyas* the references of boats and different parts of a boat e.g. *haal* (rudder), *gun* (tow), *khol* (hull), *daar* (oar), *paal* (sail), *kachhi* (anchor) and many others have been so excessively used that it might be proper to assume that boats had been regarded as an integral part of day to day life of Bengal.<sup>81</sup> The Bengal army, following the ancient Indian military tradition always comprised of five ingredients which are infantry, cavalry, elephant squad, chariots and royal navy.<sup>82</sup> Lakshman Sena, the last remarkable Sena king in Bengal frequently used high-speed *Chhip* boat for traversing long way quickly.<sup>83</sup> The royal navy during the time of independent sultans of Bengal comprised of different types of vessels like *Ghurab*, *Jalia*, *Kosa*, *Pansi*, *Pasta*, *Markosh*, *Lakhai*, *Balia*, *Machoa*, *Konda*, *Guthar*, *Chhip*, *Dingi*, *Bachhari*, *Paloyar*, *Balam*, *Bepari*, *Patil*, *Patua*, *Bhar or Jung*, *Khalu*, *Dham* and of many others.<sup>84</sup> There were also several references of boats viz. *mayurpankhi* and *saptadinga* used for amusement or travelling the royal families or merchant class and for carrying merchandise in the *Mongal Kavyas* of Medieval Bengal. Jagajjiban Ghosal in his *Manasamongal* refers to several woods for the construction of good boats.<sup>85</sup> Alivardi Khan, the Nawab of Bengal used different kinds of boats viz. *Bajra*, *Mayurpankhi*, *Bhaulia*, *Piyara*, *Mahalgiri* for hunting and excursions.<sup>86</sup> In those days, the Kaivarta community generally treated as the fishing community of Bengal in Varendri or North Bengal probably attached with that convenience. The ferries in rivers

since the time immemorial stood for a good substitute of bridges. Sometimes it was well operated by females.<sup>87</sup> However, references of bridges and culverts made of bamboos and woods were also available in the Charjapadas.<sup>88</sup>

In 1757, the English East India Company achieved the political supremacy of Bengal. It was achieved by winning over the Battle of Plassey depending on the diplomacy of Lord Clive, the Governor of Bengal and the Calcutta Council. Although most of the scholastic pursuits dealing with the causes of the said battle basically related to the political conflict between the Nabob of Suba Bengal and the EEIC, it is evident from the general terms of agreement between the Company and the conspiring team of Nabob's court signed on 4 June, 1757;<sup>89</sup> and also from the post-battle settlement between Mirjafar, new nabob of Murshidabad and the Company; that there must have commercial interest of the said Company. Thus except huge financial payments, tributes to the officials of the EEIC and monopoly in some trading activities like saltpetre, opium etc. the English achieved no territorial gain without having the zamindary right of all the land between Calcutta and the sea.<sup>90</sup> Hence, the overall question related to the political supremacy of the British power in Bengal after the Battle of Plassey decided by several wars between the Bengal Nabobs and the EEIC, was spin around the matter of financial benefit of the EEIC and more significantly of its employees' concerned. It was found within less than a decade that the 'Private trade' and misuse of '*Dustak*' by the officials of the EEIC and their agents were the major causes for hostile relations between the warring parties of Nabob of Bengal and the EEIC.<sup>91</sup> However, the EEIC at the same time, also succeeded to overcome the hurdle of quest of power from the similar trading Companies like the Dutch and the French. Side by side the Company got the right of extracting the revenues of Midnapur, Burdwan and Chittagong in lieu of financial penalties before the acquisition of Diwani in 1765.<sup>92</sup>

It is clear from the records of the EEIC that the business of the factories at Calcutta, Cossimbazar, Dacca and Patna achieved tremendous growth since the Battle of Plassey.<sup>93</sup> Depending on the evidences from the official records of the Company and contemporary personal letters, Ramesh Dutta has rightly observed that every village in Bengal had come under the periphery of the private trade of Company officials.<sup>94</sup> It is beyond any doubt that the said trading activities were mostly confined within the limits of the riverside village marts or suburbs because of the paucity of all-weather trunk roads throughout Bengal or higher road transportation cost in comparison to waterways. At that time, the routes of Jalangi and Atrai were used to communicate Dacca with Calcutta.<sup>95</sup>

Henry Vansittart, the Governor of the EEIC in Bengal (1760-1764) appointed and instructed James Rennell to make a survey of the entire province of Bengal for his own interest to inquire into the safest passage to Calcutta from Eastern and Northern Bengal.<sup>96</sup> He was also instructed to prepare a 'journal' with necessary information of all the villages with their production details and other things and all the channels connected with the mainstream.<sup>97</sup> The detail of the survey published long after his demise named as 'The Journal' (1911) by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, clearly proves the Company's official motive to acquaint with the country, especially Northern and North-eastern Bengal for more financial activities. Even he surveyed the land with his teammates after receiving special instructions from Lord Clive in 1767, the next Governor of Bengal for preparing a complete map of Bengal, Bihar and Orrisa and of the Mughal Empire which was made and handed over to the Governor on 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1767 during the time of his final return to England from India for the use of Robert Orme.<sup>98</sup> It is still a surprise why he did not publish his work when he was in service in India, while he got tremendous fame after publishing his first work depending on it styled as 'Description of Roads in Bengal and Bahar' in 1778 by the order of the Court of Directors of the English East India Company

for the assistance of the young officials joined the service in a remotest place or in time of their sojourn due to necessity arose.<sup>99</sup> This was also followed by a same kind of work named as the 'Bengal Atlas' (1781). Finally, he endeavoured to publish his last work with all illustrations on this issue styled as 'The Memoire of Map of Hindoostan or the British Empire' in 1791.

Let's have a fresh look on all the works of Major James Rennell, the first Surveyor General of India. G.W. Macgeorge seems to be partly accurate to say that the appointments of Rennell and other surveyors for preparing detail maps of Bengal or other parts of the country was due to 'accompanying armies in the battlefield'<sup>100</sup> rather than assisting the Company to expand business and trade. But, the draft proposal and reports of Rennell's survey clearly hints for the expansion of trade with an object to secure the protection of Dacca and Chittagong and other territories of the company by sending troops easily by road or river in case of emergencies. He was appointed for the causes of strategic, commercial and military purposes.<sup>101</sup>

The works of Rennell depict a clear picture of contemporary communication system of North Bengal. He used to travel the places of present Coochbehar, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district for the purpose of his survey while surveying most of the places of eastern Bengal districts with a small passage of Dinajpur district by way of rivers and marshes.<sup>102</sup> While surveying the land of Coochbehar and other parts of Bengal Duars with the frontier of Morang and Purnia district, he was assisted by a team of sepoy's under Lieutenant Morrison for saving him from the Sanyasi-Fakirs who started an uprising against the Company rule and after a pitched battle between the two groups Rennell faced severe casualties.<sup>103</sup> He was sent back to Dacca for treatment by means of Palanquins and native boats after six days of the incident.<sup>104</sup> It is interesting to note that Rennell's

work 'The Journal' what was published later by the Asiatic Society does not contain any distance table prepared for existing road network without spending few pages for inland navigation networks.<sup>105</sup> His 'A Description of Roads in Bengal and Bahar' (1778) was rather a systematic work on the description of inland communication system of Bengal in comparison to his 'The Journal'. He had tried to publish a proper 'travel guide' depending on road networks connecting different important administrative and commercial centres throughout Bengal with detail descriptions on postal 'stages' where proper accommodations for halting could be availed. It not only furnishes the route map of major roads proceeding from or toward Calcutta, Murshidabad, Patna and Dacca but of the crossroads between important strategic, military and commercial depots with complete descriptions of rivers or fords which had to cross over. It is thus beyond any doubt that it was truly a ready reference to the servants of the Company for many years after its publication providing detail knowledge on Bengal roads in the early years of the Company regime. Though he does not spend any sentence on his source of knowledge or about the origin of these roads or conditions of these roads which are seemed to be the major drawbacks of this valued work, some common conclusions can be drawn from this work about the existing condition of the roadways of that time.

Firstly, Hunter and many other Company officials of later ages who are in the opinion of non-existence of roads in India especially in Bengal in pre-colonial age<sup>106</sup> perhaps might not be right. Rennell's description of roads with route charts between important stations has proved the notion futile, although some later versions of Government Gazetteers especially dealing with Bengal districts claims the 'Description of Roads' as the paperwork rather existed practically.<sup>107</sup> It is true that these roads as described by Rennell were not any kind of highways or even any sense of modern kind of roads. He also does not forget to point it out that most of these were surrounded by or

through the jungles, groves, paddy fields, marshes etc. and only passable for three to four months of any year.<sup>108</sup> None of the roads were bridged properly rather fordable or crossable by ferries.

Secondly, it seems that there were only a handful of trunk roads in the province. Most of these were between the places starting from Murshidabad as it was the seat of Bengal Nabobs in pre-colonial and early-colonial days. However, these roads were very handful in North Bengal.<sup>109</sup> After the Battle of Plassey these roads seemed to be extended up to Calcutta for its stand as the official headquarter of the EEIC in Bengal. However, it is clear that northern part of Bengal was then connected to provincial or regional headquarters or important commercial or military centres through some trunk roads viz. Murshidabad-Delmacotta Road, Murshidabad-Rangpur Road, Patna-Rangpur Road, Calcutta-Rangpur road, Rangpur-Buxaduar road and Patna-Bisney road. Here it is interesting to note that at that time, Malda and Dinajpur was connected to Murshidabad; Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri were closely connected to Rangpur; while Darjeeling was connected to Purnia. It can be assumed that being the capital of Kamta-Koch kingdom Coochbehar naturally kept its direct communication with that of the nearest imperial sittings of the Mughals which was at Rangpur at that time. Thus road communication with Murshidabad which grew up as the capital of Bengal in 1704 through the district of Dinajpur with Coochbehar seems to be the part of later days' development. It seems that the roads between important traditional centres were the traditional roads of the region developed during the rules of Mughals or later Mughals. The crossroads between 28 important stations<sup>110</sup> of all-over Bengal might have been developed in early colonial age for administrative, financial or military purposes- whatever the cases might be.

Thirdly, the Company records till the third quarter of the eighteenth century did not possess sufficient data about the maintenance of these roads. Yet, the EEIC used to maintain a good network of postal ‘stages’ throughout the major roads. In fact, after the acquisition of ‘*Diwani*’ the Company tried to set up good postal networks between the places due to administrative and financial transactions. For that purpose, Clive introduced some postal reforms in 1766, though it should be remembered that there was no full-fledged Postal Department in India till 1774.<sup>111</sup>

Rennell’s ‘Bengal Atlas’ (1781) compiled from his original survey and published by order of the Honourable the Court of Directors for the affairs of the EEIC was a first-hand work before the officials of the said Company for familiarizing them with different routes of Bengal inland navigation connecting important places with that of the major commercial centres viz. Calcutta, Murshidabad, Dacca and Patna. The basic object of publishing the ‘maps of Bengal’ was in the words of Rennell, ‘to render them portable to those who travel over the extensive country’.<sup>112</sup> The Bengal Atlas, according to Markham, Rennell’s biographer, ‘was a work of the first importance both for strategical and administrative purposes, and is a lasting monument of the ability and perseverance of the young Surveyor General’.<sup>113</sup> Thus it is found that both of his works jointly gave a clear idea about the communication system of Bengal in the early years of the EEIC’s administration.

From the map of Rennell it can be seen that the major line of communication between Calcutta through Murshidabad and Northern Bengal districts in Major Rennell’s time was through the Rangpur line, though a separate line was from the first was originated at Boalia to reach Malda and Dinajpur and extended up to Delmacotta. The major line of inland navigation between Calcutta or Murshidabad and North Bengal went through the

district of Rajshahi and depending upon the tributaries and distributaries of Ganges and Brahmaputra one could reach his destination. The following table shows the major routes of inland navigation of North Bengal which were used for communicating Calcutta or Murshidabad from North Bengal or vis-à-vis.

Table No- 1.1

**Distance of district towns of North Bengal from Calcutta and Murshidabad**

Place	River route	Distance in miles from	
		Calcutta	Murshidabad
Cooch Behar	Jalangi-Brahmaputra-Dharla-Torsa	666	572
Jalpaiguri	Ganges-Mahananda-Tangan/Punarbhava- Atrai-Tista	434	242
Malda	Ganges-Mahananda	303	106.5
Dinajpur	Ganges-Mahananda-Tangan/Punarbhava	354	162

Source: James Rennell. *A Bengal Atlas: Containing Maps of the Theatre of War and Commerce on that side of Hindoostan*. London, MDCCLXXXI (1781).

Besides, it is still worthy to note that the road communication system between the stations of North Bengal was available only for three to four months in dry seasons when the rivers got swallowed for plying the burden of merchandise. However, describing the routes of inland navigation he did not forget to mention the alternate routes available both in wet and dry seasons respectively. From the months of May through October when the

rivers rose high the inland navigation made available for any size of burden to all the directions. Yet, it is not improper to say that the communication system in Bengal inherited some unique features also. For example, the merchandise, at first were collected from the interiors of the country and transporting by roadways or waterways were stored at the riverside depots besides the main line of riverine communication and finally started for destination if the depth of water was manageable.<sup>114</sup> The officials of the EEIC used to travel the province with their guards by foot or by various types of 'palanquins',<sup>115</sup> although they generally intended to make their journey more comfortable by using 'budjrow' (*bajra*), a special kind of leisure boats when water communication was found to be available and the currents and winds in the river were calm. The sepoys of the Company generally used to make their journey by foot following the main lines of roads or cross roads.

The geographical knowledge of the company on the province of Bengal appeared to be very timid till the Battle of Buxer. The EEIC used to depend upon the indigenous guides even during the time of war for searching new routes of communications.<sup>116</sup> It seems that Rennell was appointed by Vansittart to overcome this shortcoming. Therefore, he was ordered to survey the tract of eastern and northern Bengal. Perhaps, the strategic location of North Bengal and also of its commercial importance inspired the English East India Company to pay special attention towards the land since the acquisition of Diwani (1765). That is why Major Rennell prepared a separates maps of this tract in his 'Bengal Atlas'.<sup>117</sup> In fact the Company tried to initiate a separate policy towards North Bengal since the last years of 1760's due to several causes. Politically it was the track for growing a new tension facing from the 'sanyasi and fakirs' who started to attack and plunder Company's territory, although there was no separate political agenda of these plundering community who were found in Bengal especially in the northern and eastern part of

Bengal since the beginning of eighteenth century.<sup>118</sup> Strategically, the region was the natural boundary between the Company's territory and that of the align neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Coochbehar. Economically, since the early days of the Company's establishment in Bengal, the Company officials sought for a shorter way to Tibetan China through Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. Thus since the very beginning of the 1770's the Company tried to concentrate the region in a new angle. Besides, Tobacco and timber of the Duars and Coochbehar region attracted the Company towards the land.

It is, therefore, found that it was Major Rennell who seems to convince the Company to realize the importance of North Bengal. In fact, the EEIC in Bengal though achieved its political power and prestige after the Battle of Plassey in 1757; could not achieve its constitutional right over the land of Bengal till 1765 before the acquisition of *Diwani* from Shah Alam II, the Mughal emperor who was regarded as the constitutional ruler of India. From then onwards the Company mostly concentrated and engaged themselves for its administrative and financial reconstructions. Thus no expansion policy towards the north was taken by the Company. Basically, the colonial expansion policy in Bengal from its initial years never deposed of even a single evidence for the same till they faced any problem from the native rulers hindering their trade. Even after the victory over the Battle of Plassey the Company sought for hassle free trade. After the acquisition of *Diwani* they got the chance of collecting the revenues of Bengal, most of which would be invested in trading activities. Even, a native power could be able to succeed to maintain its existence, fulfilling the financial and other requirements of the colonial Government without hampering the British Paramountcy. Perhaps, it is the clue of securing the independence of Coochbehar by the Cooch kings throughout the colonial period only by concluding Subsidiary alliance with the Company.

The military history of the EEIC clearly depicts that its military strength was very nominal in the early years and mostly depended upon the strength of the native sepoys. But the conflict between the Company and Mir Kasim led to a sudden increase in its army. The number of 'Sepoy' battalions in Bengal, according to Dodwell, 'rose from one in 1757 to nineteen in 1764'.<sup>119</sup> The institution of Bengal army had been reorganized throughout the colonial period time to time starting from the last term of Robert Clive as the Governor of Bengal. In fact, the army of the EEIC was the sole factor behind its power and prestige. Robert Orme has perceived this rightly.<sup>120</sup> Although, the management of the EEIC's administration in India known as the Governor-in-Council in the early years of the said Company; composed of three different boards- the Board of Trade, the Board of Revenue and the Military Board which looked after all the managerial part of the EEIC;<sup>121</sup> a portion of the military forces had been posted in distant parts from the Presidency headquarter, since the early days of the Company Raj. These centres were styled as 'cantonments' where forces were installed temporarily or permanently for maintaining law and order or other military purposes. It is probable that the absence of good network of communications, ignorance about the geography and climate of distant places and to handle the indigenous reactions after the acquisition of Diwani forced the Company authority to set up the Cantonments. Besides Dumdum, Berhampur and other important cantonments; Major Rennell also mentions some cantonments in Northern and Eastern Bengal.<sup>122</sup> It is to be noted that all such cantonments were grown up on trunk roads of Bengal and the management of these roads were handed over to the hand of the 'Military Board' for their strategic importance.

It was since the early years of 1770's when the EEIC started to involve the affairs of North Bengal. The severe Famine of 1770 and its drastic impact on northern and north-eastern districts compelled the authority of the EEIC to keep intimate with the region.

Besides, the outbreak of the Sanyasi-Fakir uprising which has been regarded as one of the indigenous response towards the administrative reforms of the EEIC<sup>123</sup> and its rapidity in a vast area of northern and north-eastern districts of Bengal gave so much trouble before the administration of the EEIC that decisions were made for suppressing the same with brutality.<sup>124</sup> In the meanwhile, tensions between Cooch kings and the Bhutiyas in the northern frontier of the Company's territory and Cooch Behar's urge for assistance gave a chance to the Company to involve in the matter of North Bengal.<sup>125</sup> In fact, it was Warren Hastings who was the active supporter for carrying on the 'Bhutiya trade' which was extended up to Tibet and China. For this reason, he firstly concluded a treaty with Coochbehar in 1773 during the time of Bhutanese aggression,<sup>126</sup> by which he secured the same line of trade in Coochbehar state and also strengthened the security of Company's territory by positioning Coochbehar as a 'buffer state' between Bhutan and Bengal. Secondly, depending on this treaty he defeated the Bhutiya army and by concluding a treaty in 1774 he tried to get an opportunity to actively participate the Tibetan trade. For this purpose, some missions were sent to Tibet but all came in vain.<sup>127</sup> It is interesting to note that Hastings was so fond of his ambition that he provided much facilities to the Bhutiya merchants.<sup>128</sup> It seems that the inland navigation and road communications were developed for this purpose. It can also be said that Rennell in his Map, cites nearly ten roads<sup>129</sup> most of which were used in those days for Bhutiya trade connecting Duars with Rangpur through Cooch Behar. However, it can be said that Hasting's attitude towards betterment of Tibetan trade was engraved with his return to England.

The sudden increase in Company's expenditure in war purpose made an instant effect by shortening the budget amount in infrastructural development purpose. Thus after the natural calamities of 1787 followed by crop failure and devastating famine, the

urge for Government relief and repeal of land revenues had not been paid the heed.<sup>130</sup> It seems that the Government in most cases rejected the demand of infrastructural development of transportation. That was found to be evident for the urge of dredging the Atrai river for facilitating transportation which was refused by the Government showing the paucity of funds.<sup>131</sup> Besides, special provision was laid down in the Regulation IV of 1813 for levying on boats, Rafts, Timbers and the like, passing through the Bhagirathi, Jalangi, Mathabhanga and Churni rivers; and that Regulation had been rescinded by Regulation VIII of 1824 for ‘determining the rates of toll’ and for ‘providing for the better collection of the toll’ and for the ‘secure navigation of the aforesaid and other navigable rivers’.<sup>132</sup> The zamindaries came under the grip of the Permanent Settlement had to maintain roads under their jurisdiction and had to make these roads accessible to the travellers without any fear of robbers.<sup>133</sup> Accordingly, Regulations VII of 1822 and IX of 1833 were enacted for imposing the road cess upon the zamindars for procuring the cost of repairs of roads.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, town duties for maintaining the roads in good order was also thought to be implemented.<sup>135</sup> In fact, speaking truly that the EEIC in Bengal never invested for making roads from their revenues till the middle of nineteenth century. Rather, they either imposed cess or duties on the zamindars or bestowed the zamindars on their benevolence for improving the inland means of transportation. That is why, it has been found that Maharaja Tarak Nath Rai Bahadur constructed several metalled roads in the district of Dinajpur.<sup>136</sup>

The episode of surveying Bengal what was started by appointing James Rennell by the English East India Company had been continuing by its later Surveyor Generals who engaged themselves totally towards the task. Being a part of the military wing who were basically the members of the army crop of “Bengal Engineers” their basic intention was to find out the military needs for the use in war purposes. Thus till the end of eighteenth

century the surveys in Bengal mostly followed the line of Rennell though sometimes his findings were critically opposed by his successors. However, the first survey in modern line had been carried on by William Lambton in 1802 and followed by George Everest termed as the “great Trigonometrical Survey” (1830-43) where the survey was made with more detail and accuracy.<sup>137</sup> Side by side, the ‘statistical survey’ by Francis Buchanan Hamilton who was appointed to report on the topography, history, antiquities, the condition of the inhabitants, religion, natural products, agriculture, natural calamities, art & architecture and commerce of some Bengal and Bihar districts also equally is an important work.<sup>138</sup> The descriptive volumes of Bengal districts regarding the same issue written by Walter Hamilton published under the head of “The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statics of Eastern India” in 1838 however, ignore the existence of roads in Northern part of Bengal. The ‘revenue survey’ of 1850’s and Hunter’s detail survey reports published as ‘A Statistical Accounts of Bengal’ in ten volumes also furnish the clear picture of transportation in Bengal.

The base of communication network in North Bengal in modern lines seem to be grown up in pre-colonial era. Before the advent of colonial rule most of the administrative centres, trading centres were connected by roads and rivers. Yet, it seems that the basic character of these roads was especially administrative, military, commercial. As the rural economy was based on self-sufficient village economy and the village people were mostly confined to their villages, the necessity to traverse were merely felt. It was the British who connected the village economy with that of the colonial economy. Thus, the basic character of roads was bound to be changed in colonial regime. However, when the EEIC tried to intrude the land by taking advantage of the Battle of Plassey (1757), all the important centres of North Bengal were connected by roads or by water to Murshidabad, Patna and Calcutta. The works of Major Rennell, although had been published merely

after twenty-five years of the establishment of British supremacy in Bengal; the findings of his works were mostly the echo of pre-colonial set-up. The English East India Company did not construct any road in North Bengal in the very beginning of their acquisition of Diwani. The initial efforts were made by them were to develop the communication system of the land by means of employing convict labourers to repair the olds or construct the new ones.<sup>139</sup> ‘Murshidabad Road’ between Murshidabad and Dinajpur which was one of the major trunk roads of this region till India achieved her freedom, was the great instance of that kind. In fact, it served as a major ‘Dak Road’ used for conveying parcels between Calcutta and Dinajpur through Murshidabad.<sup>140</sup> The water communication was more favourable in those days as against the roadways. After the Battle of Plassey, Edward Thronton remarks, ‘the money was packed in seven hundred chests, which being placed in one hundred boats, the whole proceeded down the river in procession, with banners waving above, and music pealing around them’.<sup>141</sup> Hence, it can be presumed that after the acquisition of Diwani, revenues from districts were sent to Calcutta through rivers. Alexander Dow has rightly observed, “the easy communication by water from place to place, facilitated a mercantile intercourse among the inhabitants. Every village has its canal, every Pergunna (Pargana) its river, and the whole kingdom the Ganges, which, falling, by various mouths, into the bay of Bengal, lays open the ocean for the export of commodities and manufactures”.<sup>142</sup> Yet, the river communication in those days were mostly time bound. In 1755 it was found that a boat from Malda laden with a bell of cloths could safely reached at Calcutta by 45 to 50 days,<sup>143</sup> although time mostly depended upon the factors of heights of water and velocity of currents of the rivers.<sup>144</sup>

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## CHAPTER- II

### NEW ERA OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION SINCE 1854

The EEIC as the case of Bombay and Madras had set up a separate administrative unit in Bengal known as ‘Presidency of Fort William in Bengal’ in 1699 to conduct business smoothly in that province.<sup>1</sup> But, the Company had tried to establish its civil and military administrative set-ups with timely modification after the acquisition of Diwani in 1765. Though it was found that the Company intended to set up civil administration known as district administration, it was basically depended upon the military set-up. In fact, the unknown land and also the scare for indigenous reaction against the rule of the EEIC compelled the strategy makers of the said Company to depend upon its military powers. Thus, all the portfolios of the early regime of the EEIC were hold by the military officials and that is why all the initial efforts towards any administrative development relating to the administration of the EEIC, credits must went to the Company’s military force.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Governor of the Presidency of Bengal enjoyed topmost power in the administration, he had a specific line of administration which had also been followed by the Governments of other presidencies in India. According to Dodwell,

the Governor had a council of two civil members with the commander-in-chief when that post was not joined to his own. He enjoyed the same power of overruling his council as the Governor General. Under the Governor in Council were three boards- the Board of Trade, the Board of Revenue and the Military Boards- which conducted the detail of administration, and normally were presided over by a member of council.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, a council termed as Governor-in-council of the Presidency of Fort William in Bengal, better known as the 'Calcutta Council'<sup>4</sup> comprised of the Governor of Presidency of Fort William in Bengal with three other members including Commander-in-chief, was set up to look after all the matters of the EEIC in Bengal. Thus the Governor in Council occupied the supreme position both in civil and military affairs of the Company in Bengal.<sup>5</sup> The Battle of Plassey was a strongest proof of direct involvement of the Calcutta Council in Bengal politics. However, a Select Committee, as remarked by Niranjana Dhar, 'was instituted in 1756 to expedite matters, to cope with emergency situations and to deal with secret affairs'.<sup>6</sup> Three separate wings of the Governor in Council or Governor General in Council which was reformed by the Regulating Act and afterwards, hold responsible for three distinct affairs of the EEIC. While first two Boards viz. the Board of Trade and the Board of Revenue basically dealt with the matters of business; collection of revenues and civil justice of the EEIC concerned; the third organ i.e. the Military Board was chiefly responsible for the military affairs of the EEIC. This Board was also responsible for the matter of public works whether civil or military of the Company in Bengal. All the civil and military buildings were constructed, maintained under the direct supervision of this Board. Prior to the introduction of railways, a number of trunk roads, bridged and metalled were constructed and maintained under the supervision of military engineers, connecting the more important military and commercial centres of the region.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, Later on an attempt was made to give a general control over local road operations in Bengal to the Military Board without having necessary increase of authority.<sup>8</sup>

The road policy of the EEIC since its acquisition of political supremacy in the Presidency of Bengal was very weak in strictest sense. The extraordinary neglect with which the subject of improved road communication was treated by the early Government

of the EEIC cannot be ascribed altogether to want of funds but by some other factors e.g. the imperialistic concern and attitude of racial supremacy of the British employees.<sup>9</sup> The roads as a general rule, were constructed if the necessities had been recognised by pressing. “Fair-weather roads”, as stated by G.W. Macgeorge, “were constructed by, and for the use of, armies on the march, but these were neglected almost as soon as they had fulfilled their immediate purpose, and those absolutely necessary for the control of newly acquired territories were only kept open by constant reconstruction”.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the character of roads under the Military Board was chiefly military, based on the notions of overcoming immediate needs. Similarly, the reports from Military Board to the Governor General from 1841 to 1849 clearly revealed the ‘chaotic conditions under which the provision and maintenance of the principal roads were then carried out’. These reports hinted towards the absence of cooperation between the Departments.<sup>11</sup> In addition to this, ‘the powers of supervision exercised by the Military Board in Calcutta were as extensive as its financial and executive authority was limited’.<sup>12</sup>

The temporary measures can’t be a fruitful solution of permanent needs. In fact, till the middle of nineteenth century the EEIC had mostly arranged the administration and economy of Bengal according to their needs. In this circumstance, the urge for strong road policy of the Government was bound to be raised. Accordingly, the activities of the Military Board regarding the maintenance and supervision of roads were repeatedly criticised by the officials of the Government. Even, Marquis of Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India, recorded that ‘the constitution of the said Military Board, was faulty, its duties far too onerous, and its work badly done in consequence’.<sup>13</sup>

The unsatisfactory working of the system for the superintendence and execution of public works attracted the notice of Government and early in 1850, the Honourable Court

of Directors ordered the assembly of a Commission at each Presidency for the purpose of enquiring into the whole subject.<sup>14</sup> These instructions were carried into effect in December 1850 and the Bengal Commission submitted its report in March 1851. They expressed an unanimous and strong conviction of the utter unfitness of the Military Board for the superintendence of public works whether civil or military, and suggested an entirely new scheme for the management of the department, which scheme was eventually adopted with the consent of the Honourable Court. The principal features of this scheme were-

1. that the control of the Department of Public Works should be taken from Military Board and vested in Provincial Chief Engineers.
2. that each Provincial Government should exercise control over Public Works,, Civil and Military, in its respective Province under certain limitations of power in respect to the sanction of new projects;
3. that the Chief Engineers should be assisted by the Superintending and Executive Engineers;
4. that the separate office of Chief Engineer, as before constituted should be abolished.

Consequently, on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1854, the Governor General in the Military Department issued orders (No 430 of 1854) establishing a new scheme for the control and management of the Department of Public Works under the Bengal Presidency with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> May 1854. With the introduction of new department, the age-old Military Board was abolished in 1855. An extract from the order no. 430 is the following.

The Department of Public Works, Civil and Military, will be removed from under the superintendence of the Military Board and will be placed under the management of one officer to be designated as Chief Engineer, in each of three

great Divisions of the Bengal Presidency, viz. the Lower Provinces<sup>2</sup>; the North Western Provinces; and the Punjab including the territories beyond the Jumna. Under each Chief Engineer will be appointed Superintending and Executive Engineers. Every official communication received by the Chief Engineers and their proceedings thereon shall be submitted to the Local Governments are now reported to the Government of India. Chief Engineers will communicate with the Head of Departments: Revenue, Judicial, Marine etc. regarding the buildings and other public works connected with each.<sup>15</sup>

A Secretary to the Government of India for the Department of Public Works was appointed. Lieutenant W.E. Baker of the Bengal Engineers of late Military Board was appointed as the first incumbent to this post. The staff of engineers were drawn from several sources. Basically, the Engineer Corps of late Military Board, Artillery, Royal regiments supplied the same. The Thompson College at Roorkee was referred for being the future supply line of engineers and subordinates for this department.<sup>16</sup> However, the Provincial Engineers were decided in 1892 to be recruited from the Indian Engineering Colleges from the most distinguished students and by promotion from the upper subordinate ranks.<sup>17</sup>

The organizational evolution of the PWD can be summarised as decentralization of control over the sub-organizations. The central authority of Public Works in India since the second half of nineteenth century fall into four classes- Buildings and Roads,

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<sup>2</sup> The Charter Act of 1833 (No. 38) provided for the division of The Presidency of Bengal into Bengal and Agra Presidencies. The Presidency of Bengal was renamed as the Presidency of Lower Provinces of Bengal. Assam was recognized as a separate province under a Chief Commissioner in 1874. Later on, the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was created in 1905 by merging three eastern Divisions of Bengal with Assam.

Irrigation, Railways and Military. In the year of 1882, the Military Works Branch was separated from the PWD. In 1905, Railway Branch in the PWD was abolished after shifting the whole Branch to the Railway Board. The Secretary of the Agriculture and Industries Department assumed the Secretariat functions in the Public Works Department since the beginning of twentieth century and three Departments viz. Agriculture and Industries, Public Works and Irrigation continued to be under one Secretary till the reforms were introduced in 1937.<sup>18</sup>

As regards Buildings, Roads, and Irrigation, the delegation of powers to Provincial Governments was very clear. Each Local Governments had its Public Works Secretary who was responsible for maintenance and construction of its irrigation works, public buildings and roads. Chief Engineer of Bengal Province played dual role- firstly as Chief Engineer and secondly as the Secretary to the Bengal Government.<sup>19</sup> However, the functions of these two posts were discharged without confusion. All documents relating to the substantive and executive charge of the Department were signed as Chief Engineer while all those appertaining to the Secretariat, as Secretary; 'no document being signed conjointly as in both capacities'.<sup>20</sup> For a considerable period, Chief Engineer in Bengal was responsible for both Irrigation and Buildings and Roads as both were under the control of the PWD. Until 1927 the Chief Engineers of the Irrigation and Public Works (Roads and Buildings) Department acted as the Secretary to the Local Government. In 1927-28 the Secretariat functions were separated from the functions of the Chief Engineer. However, till that time, the same staff, as a rule, responsible for both Irrigation and Buildings and Roads. The Province was divided into Public Works 'Divisions', which comprised of single civil districts, or portions or groups of districts whatever the case might be. Each division was in charge of an Executive Engineer, who was 'immediately responsible for the up-keep and improvement of all works within his

charge'.<sup>21</sup> The functions of Executive Engineers were multifarious, though they were well assisted by a group of Assistant Engineers who were in training for higher functions as Subordinate Engineers, Observers and Supervisors. They were either in-subordinate control of a portion of the division or in charge of a separate work. Five or six PWD divisions were grouped into a 'Circle' which was under the charge of a Superintending Engineer. He was responsible for all the works within his Circle and all important estimates of any work from Assistant or Executive Engineers under his Circle had to forward to him mandatorily for scrutiny.

The Lower Provinces of Bengal comprised of several PWD Circles. Amongst these, The 1<sup>st</sup> Circle was comprised of Calcutta, the 24 Paraganas, Hooghly and Burdwan; the Bengal districts south and west of the Grand Trunk Road; the change of the 1<sup>st</sup> division, of the Grand Trunk Road itself and the Raipore Mail Road. Again, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Circle was comprised of the 2<sup>nd</sup> division of the Grand Trunk Road as far as Kurrunnassa; the Bengal districts north of the Trunk Road and bordering the Ganges and Brahmaputra, including Assam, Sylhet and Dacca.<sup>22</sup>

Since the establishment of Lieutenant Governorship in Bengal by the Charter Act of 1853,<sup>23</sup> Lt. Governor of Bengal had a staff of five secretaries amongst them two were for Public Works. While one of the Public Works Secretaries was concerned with irrigation, marine and railways, and the other was the in-charge of road and buildings. The Roads and Buildings branch administered five circles, three of which were controlled by the Superintending Engineers and two by Executive Engineers, designated as the Inspector of Works whose duties were to inspect and supervise the works done under the Engineers employed by the District Boards and to exercise professional control over their proceedings. The Imperial and Provincial buildings and roads in these districts were in

charge of the District Engineers, where the District Boards concerned had accepted the responsibility for their upkeep, and of the Inspectors of Works in certain Districts in which those bodies had not accepted such a responsibility. The Superintending Engineers have control of Public Works divisions held by Executive Engineers, and they also acted as Inspectors of Works in their circles.<sup>24</sup>

In 1905 when new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was set up, by the inclusion of six Divisions of Eastern Bengal and Assam, viz. Chittagong, Dacca, Rajshahi, The Assam Valley, the Surma Valley and Hill Districts<sup>25</sup> the PWD was under the general charge of a Chief Engineer, who was also a Secretary under the member-in-charge of revenue and agriculture to the Local Government and was aided by an under-Secretary.<sup>26</sup> The superior engineering establishment was divided into two services, imperial and provincial. The main roads were usually under the Provincial PWD and local roads were constructed and maintained by Local Boards and Municipalities.<sup>27</sup> Eastern Bengal and Assam each formed a circle-in-charge of a Superintending Engineer. The executive staff included 8 Executive and 4 Assistant Engineers. Local works in Eastern Bengal were generally entrusted to a District Engineer, deputed by the District Board. He had to work under the supervision of an Inspector of Works.<sup>28</sup>

Now, let's have a look towards the road policies of the Government of Bengal within the period of study. The Mutiny of 1857 brought fresh and strongest possible proof of the necessity for improved means of communication.<sup>29</sup> Annual Report on the Administration of Bengal for 1860-61 laid down clear terms and the policy of the Government towards development of roads. The Government had been relieved, the report said, 'in a great measure during the past year from pressing necessity of providing military accommodation for troops and has been able to give practical attention to the formation

of a system of imperial roads throughout the provinces'.<sup>30</sup> The leading features of this scheme had been, the report says,

to provide one main line of Road, at least, in each District, which shall pass through principal Town or Station and be continuous, that is in connection with the main lines of the next District; so that District may be connected with District and the Roads be of general public advantage, as well as of local benefit. At the same time the communications with adjacent Provinces not under the jurisdiction of the Bengal Government have been maintained, and the Imperial Lines have been designed to afford the means of easy communication between the chief centres of population, and to secure to every part of the country a proper outlet for its produce and rarely access to the great channels or thoroughfares of commerce. The existing Trunk Roads and their branches form the first instalment of the projected system.<sup>31</sup>

However, by 1880-81, certain new considerations were strongly emerging in the road policies of the Government. Sunil Kumar Munsii has rightly observed,

Consolidation of administration by projecting the arms of law and order into inaccessible parts of the region- both in the heartland as well as in the northern border areas where railways could not be immediately extended- was fast becoming an imperative for the colonial set-up due to repeated tribal uprisings and the strategic significance of the border zone. Two regions which were getting significant attention in road development were the Himalayan region and the Chota Nagpur region...As for the roads in the Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and other Himalayan and Sub-Himalayan districts, it was noted that the roads opened up communication between the frontier and the plains.<sup>32</sup>

The funds generally collected from the tolls on the rivers, roads, bridges and ferries; were devoted to the construction and maintenance of local roads and bridges.<sup>33</sup> As regards, the Government of India and its provincial counterpart time to time imposed road cesses for the improvement and construction of roads. The Bengal Road Cess Act of 1871 was enacted accordingly to impose rates on houses, mines and other immovable property which might in no case exceed one-half anna in each rupee of the net profits of the land-holders. This was revised in 1878 to one anna on the rupee for the said purpose.<sup>34</sup> The collected fund was intended to construct and maintain the roads, canals and other means of communication in every district. As regards, the Road Cess and the Public Works Cess Act of 1880 was an Act which stood for the levy of a road cess and a public works cess on immovable property imposed for the construction and maintenance of district roads and other means of communication of provincial public works. Accordingly, proclamation issued in 1873, stated that, “every taxpayer is encouraged and invited to claim that the tax shall be fairly applied to the village roads and local paths or water channels in which he is interested. The Government will use every effort to see that such local claims are fairly met, and that every taxpayer derives a fair benefit from the tax which he pays”.<sup>35</sup> But, interesting to note, the Public Works Cess is paid into Government, and the local committees had nothing to do with its expenditure.<sup>36</sup>

Since the time of Lord Ripon, the Governor General of India, a new scheme of rural self-government had been incorporated to Indian administration. Bengal Act III of 1885 or The Bengal Local Self-government Act of 1885 laid the provisions for the constructions and functions of District and Local Boards where special provisions were amended for their specific works regarding the Public Works.<sup>37</sup> On the formation of the District Boards, all roads and bridges; were placed under the control and administration of the District Boards under the provisions of section 73 of the Act. In accordance with

section 3 of the Act, the old establishment was retained under the new management. The District Boards had taken the place of the District Road Committees and had to execute same works with the same trained establishments. The District Board Engineers were either supplied by loan from the PWD or to be engaged independently. However, in most districts of Bengal, Local Boards were entrusted with the administration of the grants for village roads.<sup>38</sup> During the time of famines the workers employed for local works were largely devoted to road making which assisted the Government largely for relief works.<sup>39</sup>

The Bengal Village Self-government Act, 1919 provided for the Union Board which would control all roads, bridges and waterways within the Union and had the power for laying out or make new roads; construction of new bridges; divert, discontinue or close any road or bridge; widen, open, enlarge or otherwise improve any road or bridge; deepen or otherwise improve waterways; and provide for lighting of any road or public place within the Union.<sup>40</sup>

The roads in Bengal forming main line of communication in the first decade of twentieth century, were classed partly as Provincial and partly as District Roads on the basis of control. Similarly, these were also divided into six classes like metalled, unmetalled and so on according to their character.<sup>41</sup> These were maintained by the provincial and district fund respectively. There were also minor roads which were classed as municipal, local, military or cantonment, and village roads. The District Boards received funds from the province at irregular intervals for the construction of new roads specially intended to serve as railway feeders.<sup>42</sup>

By a resolution of the Council of State on 9th February 1927, a Road Development Committee was constituted with members from both Houses of Central Legislature under the chairmanship of Mr. M.R. Jayakar, 'to examine the desirability of developing the

road system of India, the means by which such development could be most suitably financed, and to consider the formation of a Central Road Board for the purpose of advising in regard to, and coordinating the policy in respect of, road development in India'.<sup>43</sup> The Commission in its Report suggested for a unitary road development scheme in India which would coordinate centre and provinces relating issues on roadways. As regards recommendations were made for the improvements of local roads required for motor transport in addition to a view of allocation of more funds in future from the Local Government and local bodies.<sup>44</sup>

During and after the World War II, transport and communication system in Bengal as same as the all Indian scenario, was subject to a very heavy pressure. The War which commenced in 1939 led to a tremendous increase in work, resulting in several changes in the Secretariat of the Provincial Government. A Defence Section was established in 1939 which became a branch of the Home Department in 1942. It dealt with the A.R.P. measures, enemy aliens, Administration of the Defence of India Act and Rules, Air Force, aerodromes, removal of records, evacuation and such other things connected with Civil Defence, the coordination of transport and its use for the carriage of goods to relieve railway congestion, the rationing of motor spirit, gas etc.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, a Directorate of Civil Supply as a separate branch of the Commerce and Labour Department was created in 1942. This Directorate was merged into the Department of Civil Supply and the distribution of essential consumption commodities. At that time several new roads were constructed in Eastern India for military purposes.<sup>46</sup>

However, paucity of sufficient metalled roads required for frequent military movements, caused for anxiety of the Government which resulted for setting up a Technical Sub-Committee on Transport by the Department of War Transport,

Government of India in 1943 to 'consider the future of road transport and road-rail relations in the country'.<sup>47</sup> In 1943, the Government of India also convened a national conference at Nagpur delegated by all the Chief Engineers of the provinces and states of the country to constitute a road plan throughout the country. The plan approved by the Conference of Nagpur, proposed for four types of roads viz. National Highways, Provincial Highways, Major District Roads and Other District Roads which would fulfil inter provincial, provincial, districts and rural communicational requirements throughout India and terms were laid down for acquiring lands for the construction of roads accordingly.<sup>48</sup> The plan was finalised for implication by the Government of Bengal with modifications in 1946.<sup>49</sup> It is to be mentioned here in this connection that the during the days of War, the Central Government of India and State Government of Bengal laid down various rules under the Defence of India Act 1939 or Act XXXV of 1939 which were accused for creating great hindrances towards easy growth of transportation in that country.

India achieved its freedom in 1947. But, Bengal was bifurcated. Consequently, its broken communication was to be restored naturally. As a result, while the Nagpur Plan was tried to be implemented,<sup>50</sup> at the same time, organizational establishments of the PWD was reconstituted for handling the situation.<sup>51</sup> The Five Year Plans with its other deserving aims were implemented to develop the road networks of Bengal. The Northern Circle abolished in 1947, was regenerated with the head office establishment at Jalpaiguri for supervising and maintaining the road communication system in North Bengal. The Sino-Indian War of 1962 which threatened the security of India greatly, affected the communication policy of the Government. The road networks of the northern bordering districts of West Bengal as well as India had to be reshuffled for strategic reason.

Although, the native state of Cooch Behar maintained its special status during the British rule and has been included to Indian Union as a district, its history of communication is equally important as other parts of Bengal and even India. All the principal roads of Cooch Behar during the Cooch Behar Raj was under the management of the Superintendent of Public Works who was employed by the state and equally 'a good native officer with practical training at the head'.<sup>52</sup> But, since the colonial influence and control over the Cooch Behar Raj had been tighten, the PWD in Cooch Behar state came to the subordination of Vice President of the Regency Council.<sup>53</sup> During the colonial period the road policy of Cooch Behar state was to maintain east-west communication. While the west line was to maintain for connecting its subdivisions, the east line was important to Coochbehar for maintaining its communication with Calcutta through Rangpur, the nearest British headquarter.<sup>54</sup> As regards, there were also a prolonged strategy behind the improvement of road communication in Cooch Behar for opening and linking the villages with the railways.<sup>55</sup> It is no be noted that the State of Cooch Behar followed the policy of the British Government in India for Public Works funding. For example, a 'Communications Improvement Fund' was created in 1891-92, for the construction and maintenance of roads from the 'Government grants and share mainly from road cess and ferry collections'.<sup>56</sup> However, some roads equally important to the Government of India as Cooch Behar state were maintained by the All India Road Development Fund in 1930's.<sup>57</sup> The annually returning floods which occurred great devastations in the existing road system and absence of sufficient bridges and culverts on the roads forced the native Government for procuring heavy expenditure on these segments every year.<sup>58</sup> In this connection, it is interesting to note that all the road improvement works were done under the supervision of PWD as there was no Local Bodies in Cooch Behar State. After the merger of Cooch Behar state into West Bengal,

the PWD of the latter took over the charge of roads and bridges from the PWD of Cooch Behar state.

The inland navigation was the most accepted and accessible way of communication in Bengal all through the ages. But, in comparison to other means of communication, the inland navigation in Bengal was surprisingly shown the negligence from the Government all through the colonial period, although the initial step towards the modernization of Indian transportation was introduced in this segment by introducing motorised steamer services in the Ganges.<sup>59</sup> The Report of the Inland Water Transport Committee says,

sustained efforts to maintain the waterways, quite apart from undertaking some improvements, were unfortunately, conspicuous by their absence. With the guiding principle of balancing expenditure by revenue from tolls etc. it was inevitable that a vicious circle should set in. While expenditure curtailed to the barest minimum to keep well within income, inadequate maintenance of waterways and high toll charged, discouraged large-scale operation on a number of waterways thus resulting in decrease in volume of traffic and deterioration of the waterways.<sup>60</sup>

Since the railways has been introduced by the colonial Government in India, it was the basic policy of the Government to introduce and uphold the railways as the chief way of transportation in India and to conceive the roadways or waterways as the feeders to the railways.<sup>61</sup> But, interestingly, since the railways were introduced, debate arose regarding the issue of this proposed Government policy of communication. There were strong appeals even before the Board of Control to favour inland navigation in lieu of introducing railways.<sup>62</sup> In spite of preference received by the Government towards the railways, the attitude towards the inland navigation seems to be rightly understood from the report on waterways of Eastern Bengal and Assam in 1909. The report comments,

the existence and development together of railways and waterways are desirable first because these two means of transportation are the complements of each other and ought to contribute according to its special merits to the public good. Secondly, because viewed broadly the industrial and commercial development which will result from the improvement of the means of communication must in the end profit both railways and waterways.<sup>63</sup>

Despite of verbal approval for the necessity of the waterways being as relevant as the railways for maintaining healthy communication of Bengal,<sup>64</sup> while the steamer companies of Eastern Bengal and Assam proposed the Government for improving the waterways at the cost of the state; nothing was considered for the upgradation of the system.<sup>65</sup> Although, during the days of the World War I, the Report of the Inland Water Transport Committee says, “the shortage of railway and shipping facilities gave some importance to inland water transport and attempts were made towards better maintenance of some of the waterways...”.<sup>66</sup> Same situation was also seen till the advent of the World War II when the pre-mentioned ways of transportation were heavily engaged for war transportation.<sup>67</sup>

From 1859 to 1860 the questions relating to Ferries were dealt within the Revenue Department and from 1861 to 1878 it was a subject of the Judicial Department and from January to December 1879 this branch functioned as a Branch of the Finance Department. In January 1880 it was transferred to the Municipal Department and was a part of it till May 1891, after which it ceased to have a separate existence and was managed by the District Boards according to Government Notification No 217- LSG, dated 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1905.<sup>68</sup>

Sir Macdonald Stephenson projected first railway line in India in 1843 and it was during the time of Lord Dalhousie the first line began to operate from Bombay to Thane in 1853. Although the first contract between the Court of Directors of the EEIC and the East Indian Railway Company for the construction of a short experimental line of railway in Bengal was signed in August 1849 and the route which had been selected for it was only 121 miles from Howrah to Raniganj via Burdwan; the work began in 1951 and the line was finally opened for traffic in February, 1855.<sup>69</sup>

Questions since the establishment of the railways have been raised on the issue of causes for the establishment of railways in India. The introduction of railways in India, from the Indian point of view, seems to be the by-product of the Industrialization in England which had been regarded as a ground for surplus investment, lucrative employment and an easy means of capturing Indian market for the British manufactured.<sup>70</sup> But, the military policy of the Government of the EEIC were also equally responsible for setting up a speedy mode of communication which would capable of sending troops immediately to a distant place when necessity arose.<sup>71</sup> However, Lord Dalhousie through his 'Railway Minute' thought that the railways would initiate great social, political and commercial advantages in India for which he recommended to construct 'trunk lines' throughout India which would connect all the principal cities and ports in India.<sup>72</sup> The Court of Directors accepted proposed 'Dalhousie Minute' and within two decades from the beginning most of the Trunk lines in India were constructed and opened for traffic under the Guaranteed system.<sup>73</sup> Lord Mayo in 1869, projected the idea for developing the feeders and branches to the Trunk lines for connecting the districts with all India railway network<sup>74</sup> and this would introduce the state railway schemes especially 'in the north Bihar plains and in northern and eastern Bengal' to open the regional markets and to export the products of the concerned region.<sup>75</sup> In the same way,

the native states also contributed funds to the Government of India for constructing their railways.<sup>76</sup>

Most of the remarkable and prosperous railway lines in India since their introduction were under the control and management of the Companies. In 1920, a committee under the chairmanship of Sir William Acworth, was appointed to look into the question of management, finance, future control and organization of the railways. Consequently, the Central Assembly unanimously decided in favour of state management of the railways. Hence, it was enacted in 1923 to take over all the railways by the Government on termination of their contract.

Traditionally, from engine to wagon- all of the parts were imported from Great Britain and only were fitted in India. It was till the beginning of twentieth century when the East Indian Railway and Rajputana-Malwa Railway began to build engines and wagons at their workshops, other large railways were moving in the same direction.<sup>77</sup>

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## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> The Company officials used to visit Darjeeling in search of European climate using the line when Darjeeling was developed as a sanatorium.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> Following the policy, a good metalled road between Calcutta and Darjeeling had been sanctioned and the cost being assumed at rupees 21,00,000.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> The Ganges and Darjeeling road for 136 miles with one unbridged river at Sakrigalighat was opened for traffic in 1866.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup> The roads belonged to the second category which were connected only between the stations within the districts and maintained by the district authorities.<sup>18</sup>

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'.<sup>19</sup>

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 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1866.<sup>20</sup> In continuation to this, the district of Jalpaiguri was formed in 1869.<sup>21</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> September 1875, till India achieved its freedom.<sup>22</sup>

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 operations<sup>23</sup> though the report<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> The statistics shows that the outlay on roads that were embanked and bridged, but not metalled was highest in the Rajshahi Division.<sup>31</sup> Report on the Administration of Bengal<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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’.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1860 strongly suggested for the expansion of the operations of the same line to Darjeeling.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> Hence it was thought that consideration of the relative advantages of the alternative lines would not be much longer postponed by the Government.<sup>40</sup> Several surveys were made and their reports were received accordingly.<sup>41</sup>

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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup>

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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> However the line was opened for traffic on the 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1878 between Poradaha and Jalpaiguri and between Jalpaiguri and Siliguri on 10<sup>th</sup> June, in the same year with interruptions for several times during the rains and was not finally opened till 1<sup>st</sup> of November, 1878.<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup>

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.<sup>49</sup>

The estimated cost of that line was decided Rupees 15,73,294 while the gross earnings would be Rupees 3,08,472.<sup>50</sup> The work was commenced in April, 1879 and within one year the rails were almost laid into Kurseong.<sup>51</sup> The line was finally completed for opening throughout Darjeeling station on the 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1881, though it was opened for traffic from Siliguri to Ghoom some months earlier.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup>

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.<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> Both of these sections were opened for traffic in 1893.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> All the branches were opened in 1900, 1902 and 1903 respectively.<sup>58</sup>

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.<sup>59</sup> The line of 2 feet 6 inches gauge was opened from Mogulhat to Coochbehar for goods traffic on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1893 and for passengers on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1894.<sup>60</sup>

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.<sup>61</sup> The Indian Railway Act of 1890 with some minor modifications in favour of the Coochbehar state was adopted for the administration of the line.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> However, the line was extended to Alipur Duar in 1900 after bridging Kalchini river and extended to Rajabhatkhawa and Jayanti in 1901.<sup>64</sup>

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.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, from Gitaldaha in Cooch Behar a branch railway had been opened to connect Dhubri in Assam through Bamanhat since 1901.<sup>66</sup>

## 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.<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup> These collected items were generally transported through rivers.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup>

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.<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup> 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".<sup>86</sup> 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".<sup>87</sup> 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.<sup>88</sup>

## 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.<sup>89</sup> 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.<sup>90</sup> It was also available from the reports of the royal commissions proceeded to Tibet through Bhutan.<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup>

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.<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup> 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.<sup>95</sup>

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.<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup>

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.<sup>100</sup> During the war a fine road between Coochbehar and the military station at Buxa through Alipurduar was constructed perceiving its strategic importance.<sup>101</sup> That road was under the management of the PWD and were passable for cart traffic all through the year.<sup>102</sup>

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.<sup>103</sup> But, interestingly, Titalya was at that time connected with another branch road with Rangpur.<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup> 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.<sup>106</sup> 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.<sup>107</sup> Interestingly, no cesses were levied on Duars for the benefit of trade.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup>

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;<sup>110</sup> that industry began to be developed in extensive form in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri since 1856 and 1874 respectively.<sup>111</sup> 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.<sup>112</sup> 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.<sup>113</sup> The Hill Road was the 'Old Military Road'.<sup>114</sup> 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.<sup>115</sup>

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.<sup>116</sup> That road was opened for traffic in 1869.<sup>117</sup> 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.<sup>118</sup> 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.<sup>119</sup>

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.<sup>120</sup> O'Malley has given the description of roads in the hill and Terai areas of Darjeeling through his Gazetteer.<sup>121</sup>

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".<sup>122</sup> 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.<sup>123</sup> 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.<sup>124</sup>

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.<sup>125</sup> 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.<sup>126</sup> 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.<sup>127</sup>

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.<sup>128</sup> 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.<sup>129</sup> 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.<sup>130</sup> 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.<sup>131</sup>

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.<sup>132</sup> Side by side, bullock carts, pony

and some other types of conveniences were also available.<sup>133</sup> 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-

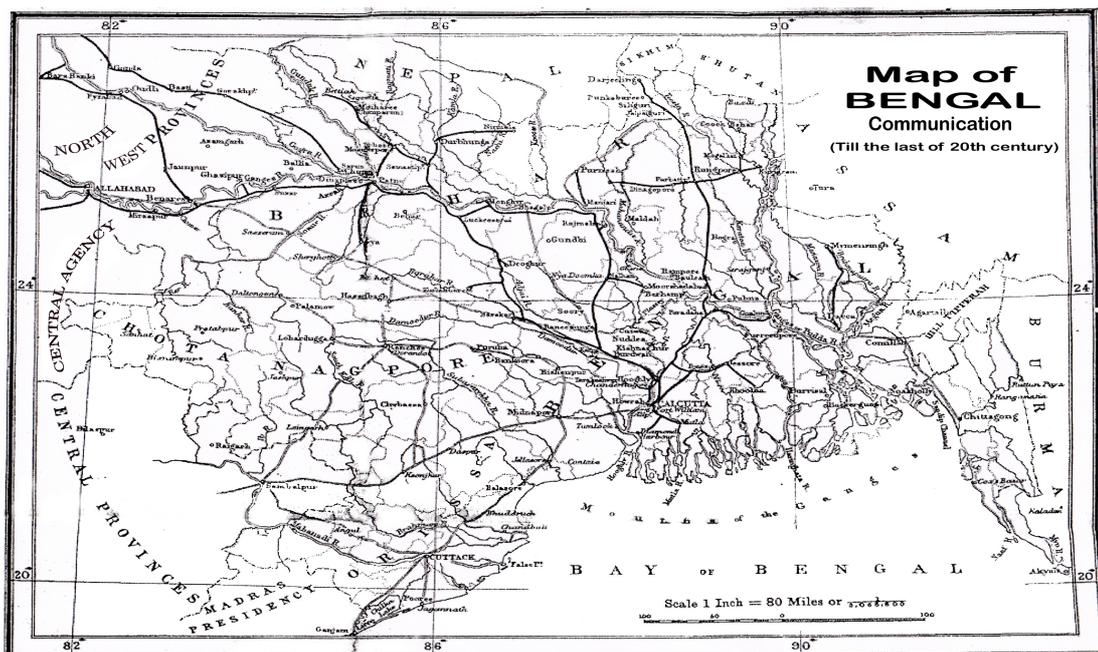
Prior to the year 1869 the only means of transit was by the East India Railway as far as Sahibgunge (219 miles from Calcutta) with a 5 hour river-crossing to Karagola Ghat, thence by bullock cart, to the river opposite Dingra Ghat; and from there by one of the following modes of transit-gharry, or palky 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.<sup>134</sup>

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.<sup>135</sup> Sometimes, the coolies took the ill-afford travellers up to Darjeeling through doolies.<sup>136</sup> The New Cart Road having been opened for traffic in 1869, the *tangas* carried the travellers up to Tung.<sup>137</sup> 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.<sup>138</sup> 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.<sup>139</sup> 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.<sup>140</sup> On the roads to Buxa or to Bhutan and Sikkim borders pack ponies or human carriers were used for transportation.<sup>141</sup> For transportation of commodities between the town of Kalimpong and the DHR in the Tista valley, the Kalimpong Ropeway Company was formed in 1928.<sup>142</sup> This was opened for operation in 1930 by Lady Stephenson.<sup>143</sup> Accordingly, branch ropeway from Darjeeling to Bijanbari was opened for traffic in January, 1939.<sup>144</sup>

Map No- 3.2



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

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**CHAPTER- IV**  
**EFFECTS OF INTRODUCTION OF NEW MODES OF**  
**TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION**  
**ON**  
**SOCIETY, ECONOMY AND POLITICS OF NORTH BENGAL**

In previous chapter it is found that the introduction of new modes ushered a new era to the history of transport and communication in North Bengal. Before 1854, the said system in North Bengal owed the heritage of primitiveness in modern sense. North Bengal remained aloof from the outer world chiefly due to lack of proper communication. Though the southern and north-eastern part of North Bengal was partly penetrable due hereditary pre-colonial and early-colonial communication set-up, the northern section had been mostly impenetrable for lack of communication.

Since the colonial economic policy found to be clear to open up the extreme corner of the country to exploit the economy of India, as like all Indian perspective, all the wings of transport and communication system in North Bengal had been flourished tremendously as a developmental policy of the Government.

In a clear vision it is evident that the basic objective for developing communication system in a region had surely been achieved by the introduction of new modes of communication in North Bengal. The road policy of the colonial Government for establishing major roads and several other types of roads- inter provincial, inter or intra districts or the local roads followed by timely enacted rules and regulations had developed the basic road network of North Bengal. For internal navigation though there was no principal line of waterways in North Bengal suited for plying river steamers all

through the year, short distance steamer services were also introduced in the district like Malda where the rivers were partly open all the year round. Moreover, since the last three decades of the nineteenth century when the Government took initiatives to penetrate railways to all the districts of North Bengal, the transport and communication network of North Bengal definitely started to formulate a complete shape. In this perspective, let us have our journey whether there was any effect of that development of transportation on society, economy and politics of North Bengal.

Transport and communication, being closely related to the economic system of any state or region, it is logical to search for economic effects first. The utmost output of introduction of new modes of transport and communication system in North Bengal was the increase of volume of all kinds of trade in North Bengal. In fact, Report on the Administration of Bengal for the year 1872-73 clearly depicts the objective of establishment of Northern Bengal Railway. It was remarked, “the Northern Bengal Railway will pass through some of the richest and most populous districts in Bengal which have hitherto been cut off from the markets of the world for half the year”.<sup>1</sup> The internal trade report of Bengal clearly indicates that the volume of trade had been gradually increasing after the setting up of railway communication system in North Bengal.

Table No-4.1

## Internal Trade Statistics of North Bengal (Railways)

1878-79		1880-81		1881-82		1882-83		1883-84	
Maunds	Rupees								
1725896	21079015	2657228	31644446	3226860	30825613	4263011	38590198	5119052	46069423

Source:

1. For the year 1878-79 to 1880-81 - Report on the Internal trade of Bengal: for the year 1880-81, Published by the Government of Bengal, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1881, p-27.
2. For the year 1881-82 to 1883-84 - Report on the Internal trade of Bengal: for the year 1883-84, Published by the Government of Bengal, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1884, p-39.

The report indicates that the total volume of merchandise carried by Northern Bengal State Railway in 1882-83 had become almost trice and valued more than double within five years than that of 1878-79. Furthermore, it is found from the railway returns that the Northern Bengal State Railways carried 90,17,737 maunds of merchandise valued of Rupees 6,54,72,446 in 1888-89.<sup>2</sup> Thus it is found that the within a span of ten years between 1878-79 to 1888-89 the North Bengal State Railways carried the merchandise more than five times double as it was in 1878-79.

The growth and development of modern transport and communication system in North Bengal led to the growth of commercialization of agriculture. In fact, North Bengal owes the heritage of high agricultural productivity of variable staples, fruits and cash crops according to regional variations since unknown past. This region not only produces high quality of food grains, but same kinds of tea, tobacco, jute and timber which are rarely comparable with other parts of Bengal. In this circumstance, let us have a look to the effects of introduction of new modes of transport and communication system on the agricultural economy of North Bengal. After the successful introduction of tea plantation industry in Assam, the same was introduced experimentally first in Darjeeling hills in 1840,<sup>3</sup> then in Jalpaiguri in 1874.<sup>4</sup> Within the limits of last days of the nineteenth century the area under tea plantation industry in North Bengal was increased

tremendously both in hills and plains.<sup>5</sup> It is truly speaking that successful introduction of tea plantation industry in Assam with lucrative profits, the British planters poured their capital in the same industry first in Darjeeling hills and later in the Duars of Jalpaiguri. Investments were made not only by the Europeans but by the investors from Indian origin.<sup>6</sup> Though there were several factors responsible for the steady growth of that plantation industry in that particular regions, the role of easy means of transportation might not be undermined. It is interesting to note that after the enactment of the Scheduled District Act or Act XIX of 1874, the Jalpaiguri Duars came under the jurisdiction of that Act. The benefits of that Act specifically the availability of desired land, has been regarded by the scholars as a great impetus towards the establishment and flourishing of tea industry in Duars.<sup>7</sup> But, in its initial phase, the plantation industry in Duars faced some acute problems. These problems were mostly related to the transport and communication system of that region. In fact, most of the tea gardens in the early phase of development of tea plantation industry in Duars were set up amidst the dense forest having full of wild beasts and far away from locality.<sup>8</sup>

There was no way of easy means of transportation in Duars at that time. It is found in W.W. Hunter's 'A Statistical Account of Bengal' that there was no road in Western Duars at that time maintained by the PWD except a major road (77miles) under local administration from Jalpaiguri to Sankosh ferry through western Duars.<sup>9</sup> The only means of convenience of that time was bullock cart which used to reach the tea planters from Jalpaiguri town to their gardens along with dry food, water, medicines and gun within three to five days.<sup>10</sup> Evidences for exporting tea from gardens to trading or exporting centres by caravans of bullock carts with attending armed guards for preventing the bullocks and drivers of the carts were also available from various sources.<sup>11</sup> Even, in the early years of the opening of railways, when Calcutta was communicated with Jalpaiguri

by the railways, tea-boxes were boarded at Jalpaiguri Station.<sup>12</sup> It is also logical to assume that the huge transportation cost with full of uncertainty in jungles might have reduced the margin of profits and enthusiasm of the planters. Same problem related to transportation in tea plantation industry in Darjeeling district was felt in 1873 which was supposed to be removed when the railway to the foot of the hills was made.<sup>13</sup> Thus, J.F. Grunning has rightly observed, “the Bengal-Duars Railway was constructed in order to assist in opening up the Western Duars and in developing the tea industry”.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, it has been found that the numbers of tea gardens in Duars were increased within few years of the opening up the Bengal Duars line and its extensions.<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to note in this perspective that the labour problem for setting up the gardens was not felt seriously in the hill areas of Darjeeling due availability of Nepali labourers from Eastern Nepal, but in Terai and Duars gardens they had been proved quiet incapable to employ as workers due to rapidity of Malaria, Terai fever, Cholera and other diseases.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the Dhangurs of Chota Nagpur were employed as the labourers in these gardens.<sup>17</sup> But due to rapid increase in numbers of tea gardens when needs for more labourers were realised, railway assisted the planters to have a permanent supply line of the labourers who were collected from Hazaribag, Chota Nagpur, Santal Paragana.<sup>18</sup>

The volume of export of tea also increased after the introduction of Darjeeling Himalayan Railways, Bengal Duars Railways or as a whole North Bengal State Railways.<sup>19</sup> The following table based on the Returns of Rail and River Borne Trade of Bengal shows how the tea plantation industry was developed and benefitted by the establishment of railways.

Table No -4.2

**Export of Tea from North Bengal by railways (in Maunds)**

Year	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895
Total	357957	351396	345767	379876	389424

Source:

*Returns of the Rail and River-Borne Trade of Bengal for the year 1891, 1892, 1893, 1894 and 1895* (Published quarterly), Published by Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta.

From the above table it is being found that large amount of tea had been exported by rail from North Bengal. It is interesting to note that for a long time there was a little demand of tea in the tea producing districts of North Bengal which resulted the up traffic of tea almost nil.<sup>20</sup> In the early years of introduction of tea industry in Darjeeling almost all the tea bags were exported to Calcutta by Caragola road, river, and by Eastern and ... This picture was gradually replacing since the opening of Northern Bengal State Railways.<sup>21</sup>

The opening of railways in North Bengal proved to be a sole factor towards the development of tea industry by importing huge amount of coal in the region. Since 1860's machinery for rolling and sifting tea had been introduced and was being extended in the gardens and in most cases the driving power was steam.<sup>22</sup> Initially, forest wood was used to apply for that. But, in the report to the Offg. Commissioner of the Cooch Behar Division, No-214C, dated 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1873; Major B.W. Morton, Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling clearly mentions, "with the introduction of steam machinery and the extension of gardens, there will soon be a great difficulty as regard to wood for fuel, tea-boxes and charcoal. I doubt if the present system of selling timber

from the forest reserves will then be found to answer'.<sup>23</sup> However, the opening of railways in North Bengal solved the problem of importation of coal to supply in the tea industries. For instance, while the Northern Bengal State Railway imported 411644 maunds of coal and coke in 1882.<sup>24</sup> The volume of import was increased to 650904 maunds in 1890-91.<sup>25</sup> Hence, the volume of import of coal and coke was being increased gradually in subsequent years.

Same as the tea plantation industry in Darjeeling hills and the Terai and Duars area of Jalpaiguri district, introduction of new modes of transportation and easy means of communication system in North Bengal also helped to flourish other agrarian economy of North Bengal.

The production and exportation of raw jutes in all the districts of North Bengal rapidly increased after the commencement of railways in North Bengal. Despite the absence of any jute manufacturing industry except hand-made gunny bags in North Bengal, it was only for the availability of easy means of communication system which not only easily exported the raw jute to the mills of Calcutta, Dacca and Narayanganj, but inspired the jute farmers to grow this cash crop year by year for earning more profits from cultivation.

Statistical data shows that not only tea and jute were exported from North Bengal, but some other agricultural items like rice, tobacco, pulse, oil seeds, wood and many other items were also included to the list. The following table exhibits the volume (in maunds) of downward traffic of Northern Bengal State Railway including Assam-Bihar Section for the year 1890-91 and 1891-92.

Table No-4.3

Downward traffic of Northern Bengal State Railway including Assam-Bihar Line

Chief Staples of Traffic & Year	Down Traffic	
	1890-91	1891-92
Jute (raw)	40,97,121	36,52,782
Gunny Bags and cloths	4,47,121	4,01,074
Gram and pulse	35,619	43,996
Rice	11,51,270	8,26,651
Paddy	16,15,031	8,89,567
Other food grains	31,187	38,079
Hides of cattle	63,133	57,231
Tea	2,82,913	3,57,464
Tobacco	3,86,973	5,33,660

Source:

*Report on the Administration of Bengal: 1891-92.* Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Press. 1893. p. 210.

The introduction of modern communication system in North Bengal led to the growth of internal business. Various categories of commercial centres flourished as important business centres which gradually changed the characteristics of traditional commercial centres of North Bengal. Consequently, the status of traditional business centres were degraded or abandoned. For example, most of the principle commercial centres in pre-railway era were categorically river ports where commerce were being carried out through rivers. But the Internal Trade Report of Bengal, mentioning the decrease in the total quantity of raw jute registered along the Nuddea rivers- stationed at Jungypore (on the Bhagirathi), Nuddea (on the Jalangi) and Kissengunge (on the

Mathabhanga) during the year 1880-81 to 9,47,031 maunds, against 13,06,790 maunds in 1879-80 and 14,79,980 maunds in 1878-79, clearly denotes that after the establishment of railways, the trading activities of North Bengal both import and export of materials was steadily replacing by railways.<sup>26</sup> For example, Dumer appeared as an important place of Duars tobacco business after the introduction of railways and that 'had attracted a great part of population of Ghoramara, which was fast being deserted as a trading place'.<sup>27</sup>

It has been found earlier that the colonial Government in its initial stage towards the development of road communication system in North Bengal tried to communicate Darjeeling by roads with Calcutta. For the said purpose 'Darjeeling High Road', a metalled road from Caragola on the Ganges to the foot of hills was constructed. Some roads were consequently made of after the advent of Darjeeling as sanatorium and summer capital of Bengal province. Some strategic roads were also constructed in the hills when wars broke out with Sikkim and Bhutan.

The construction of these roads were not only expensive but also laborious. The migrant tribes of Santal Paragana since 1850's might have been employed as the workers for constructing roads in plains and the traditional collie community of the hills might have been used in hill region for the same purpose.

This was also evident in case of railway establishment.<sup>28</sup> Official reports provides that all the labours for laying out the rails and other constructional works in the Bengal Duars railway were to be imported I 1892-93 from outside in absence of local labours.<sup>29</sup> Similar to these, in some cases, both in road and railway constructions, local poor people were engaged as a measure of famine relief.<sup>30</sup> Though employment of 'whites' in all higher posts was the common feature in all the cases to the Government and non-

Government organizations related to communication administration and managements, all the subordinate posts were generally lying into the hands of Bengalee middle class.

At the same time, introduction of new system stood for the cause of rapid decrease in traditional water transportation system that resulted huge unemployment related to that sector. In fact, before the advent of railways as like most of Bengal waterways was the best means of transportation both for long and short term communication.

When the railway was established, it was the dedicated policy of the Government as well as the railway Companies to reduce the river traffic and to flourish the railway system in Bengal. It is evident from the reports of the Collector of Tolls of Bhagirathi river, Jalangi river and Mathabhanga river that the deteriorating condition of the rivers for paucity of waters and changes in river courses had been steadily decreasing the river traffic of Bengal and the rate of decrease was growing higher due to reduction in railway freight rates during the rainy seasons by the Railway Companies to 'draw the river traffic to the railway'.<sup>31</sup> Statistics shows that 100% and 94.95% of total exports of jute carried by railways in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur respectively in the year 1897-98 had been increased in comparison to the totals of 1896-97.<sup>32</sup>

The following table containing three year statistics on imports and exports of some essential items\* (in maunds) to and from North Bengal<sup>#</sup> carried by railways and rivers clearly denotes how the river transportation was decreasing gradually by the pressure of railway supremacy.

Table No-4.4

**Rail and River Borne Statistics of some essential items\* (in maunds) to and  
from North Bengal#**

Items	Imports/Exports by rail			Imports/Exports by river		
	1881-82	1882-83	1883-84	1881-82	1882-83	1883-84
Jute	11,35,475	17,42,925	9,62,563	3,75,890	4,00,124	3,47,861
Gunnies (pieces)	4,263,610	9,104,413	4,671,660	4,623,685	4,312,844	3,210,741
Food-grains	4,91,193	2,62,752	2,29,860	8,02,133	5,32,183	5,18,039
Tobacco	2,07,181	2,90,478	3,11,408	11,024	4,549	6,975
Salt	4,25,647	4,60,789	5,23,522	1,59,869	1,27,730	1,25,260
Cotton piece goods	90,04,481	88,45,987	90,51,840	3,38,227	2,17,291	1,63,493

Source: Report on the Internal trade of Bengal: for the year 1883-84, Published by the Government of Bengal, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1884, pp-42-44.

Note- # North Bengal stands for chief importing or exporting districts of Rajshahi Division of un-divided Bengal.

\*Among the items included in the table only salt and cotton piece goods were imported and the rest were exported from North Bengal.

Thus the basic character of long-distance transport and communication system of North Bengal had been altered by the introduction of railways. Now railway stood for

maintaining long-distance communication, while waterways and roads were valid for short term convenience. But rapid decrease in long-distance water transportation logically resulted huge unemployment to that sector. Despite this, in one occasion railways also stood for employment. After the opening of railways, the authority of the Northern Bengal State Railway decided to set up stations within four miles from the commercial centres so that the merchandise could easily be transported to the railway stations or vis-à-vis.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, the railway feeders were being constructed to maintain the communication line between railway stations and traditional commercial centres.<sup>34</sup> Some information regarding that case has been provided earlier. However, these roads were heavily used for despatching and receiving merchandise as well as passengers by bullock carts or by any other means that led to the cause of huge employment. That case was also applicable for short distance river communication in North Bengal.

It was hoped that the introduction of railways would positively initiate a tremendous boom in the trade and commerce of North Bengal. In fact, the railways had achieved to fulfil that objective. But, due to tremendous increase in volume of trade of food grains from North Bengal, the average price of food grains in the interior of North Bengal had been increased as against the price of all over Bengal. The following table on average retail prices of food grains in the interior of North Bengal during the year 1897, as compared with the average of the three previous years clearly supports the assumption.

The communicational development and scarcity in Bengal specially in North Bengal were the co-related issue of colonial regime. Professor Biplab Dasgupta has rightly observed, “in 1770, some development of road transport under the British, for military purposes, helped to take away food surpluses from the villages in the good years for

feeding the urban population and the army, which left nothing to fall back upon when the disaster struck in the form of draught. The self-sufficiency of the pre-British village economy was destroyed by the colonial penetration, while no measure was taken to provide food insurance in deficit years".<sup>35</sup> It was the most common picture of Bengal throughout the colonial regime and this colonial exploitation was boosted by the introduction and penetration of new modes of communication system in North Bengal.

The frequently visited scarcity and famines impelled the Government to adopt specific 'Famine Policy'. It has been previously mentioned that as a famine measure the Government utilised the famine stricken people for construction of new roads in North Bengal. Hunter points out that the collector of Malda proposed for construction of new roads opposite Rajmahal to the grain mart of Rohunpur through English Bazar so that grain could be easily transported if scarcity arose.<sup>36</sup>

It is the common observation of the Indian writers that the introduction of railways in India proved to be a general cause for devastating floods in Indian rivers due to river sedimentation caused by bridging and obstruction in natural drainage of the country. But, no scholastic pursuit has not ever tried to taste the theory in the perspective of North Bengal. Rather, it has been observed that the nature of rivers of the region which frequently changes their courses resulted a great hindrance towards the construction and maintenance of permanent railway lines or roads. However, it has been found that a flood appeared in its devastating form in Dinajpur town due to construction of railway line.<sup>37</sup> The situation was controlled by cutting the Darjeeling High Road.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the observation on effects of floods by the introduction of modern means of communication is equally applicable to North Bengal.

Table No- 4.5

District		Wheat		Barley		Rice, best sort		Rice, common		Marwa		Maize or Indian corn		Gram		Arhar	
		Average price for three years (1894-96)	Average price for 1897	Average price for three years (1894-96)	Average price for 1897	Average price for three years (1894-96)	Average price for 1897	Average price for three years (1894-96)	Average price for 1897	Average price for three years (1894-96)	Average price for 1897	Average price for three years (1894-96)	Average price for 1897	Average price for three years (1894-96)	Average price for 1897	Average price for three years (1894-96)	S. CH.
Average price in Bengal																	
Dinajpur	12 6	8 1	16 13	8 0	10 12	7 0	13 7	8 15	...	...	12 4	11 8	...	15 9	9 1	16 14	10 14
Jalpaiguri	11 13	7 15	13 3	...	9 6	5 15	13 8	8 9	...	...	...	...	...	17 3	10 3	19 14	12 11
Darjeeling	7 14	6 0	8 14	7 8	5 3	5 0	10 15	7 15	11 0	12 7	11 0	18 10	14 10	12 1	7 6	7 12	5 12
Malda	14 13	9 0	18 2	11 0	10 8	6 12	12 11	9 2	...	...	...	25 5	17 13	15 14	9 8	12 9	...

Source- Report on the River-Borne Traffic of the Lower Provinces of Bengal, and on the Inland Trade of Calcutta and on The Trade of Chittagong Port for the year 1897-98, Published by the Government of Bengal, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1899, Appendix 1. p. 5.

The well-established communication network in North Bengal had left some non-economic benefits too. First of all, the continuous flow of migration of different non-Bengalee communities in North Bengal seems to be happened rapidly after the introduction of modern communication system in North Bengal. Labour supply in tea gardens of North Bengal through direct road and rail communication seems to be increasing faster than before. That resulted the rapid increase in population in Jalpaiguri district mainly in the 'tea belt' or western Duars. Similarly, the population of hills in Darjeeling and Kurseong. Another immediate result of the introduction of railways in North Bengal was the influx of Marwari, Punjabi, Bihari, Gujrati, Kashmiri and many other non-Bengalee communities in North Bengal.<sup>39</sup> Though there were many factors to migrate, it was the establishment of railway communication which had greatly encouraged the Marwari community to migrate to the districts of North Bengal as other parts of India.<sup>40</sup> The Internal Trade Report of Bengal shows that in 1880-81 a good number of Oswal Jains dominating the traditional Mugh traders in tobacco trade, exported maximum quantity of tobacco collected from Rangpur to Calcutta through Northern Bengal State Railway.<sup>41</sup>

The introduction of easy means of communication led to the growth and spread of western education in North Bengal. The DHR contributed to the flourishing of western education in Darjeeling and Kurseong.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, at the same time, several schools were going to be started at the districts and mufassil of North Bengal. The common fascination of the managements of most of the schools was to recruit the faculty from outside chiefly from Calcutta which was made possible only after the restoration of proper communication system. Similarly for attending examination at Naoga the students of Balurghat High School used to avail railway.<sup>43</sup> Till 1940's when whole of North Bengal had no option to achieve higher education in any of its districts, railways

were the only option to those who dared to achieve the same from Calcutta or Rajshahi or from other places.

The most prominent result of improved communication system in North Bengal was the development of tourism in the region specially in Darjeeling. It was seen earlier that since Darjeeling had been developed as the sanatorium, the British and European residents of India were attracted to its natural beauty and climate. In spite of tedious journey they even attracted to the 'Himalayan queen' by any means. Before the advent of railways in North Bengal when the Government opened the Darjeeling Highway from Caragola to the foot of hills, the staging bungalows accommodated the travellers with food and fodder. In 1907, there were seventeen travellers' bungalows including three dak-bungalows in Siliguri, Kurseong and Pankhabari in the district of Darjeeling where the travellers could get accommodations by having passes.<sup>44</sup> Even, some hotels were also set up to accommodate the travellers in the hills of Darjeeling.<sup>45</sup> The number of hotels were increasing rapidly when Siliguri and Darjeeling were well communicated with Calcutta by railways. Though many factors are responsible for the increase of population of a place or region, it is evident the population of Darjeeling town had increased between 1881 to 1901 from 7,018 to 16,924 (214.15%);<sup>46</sup> chiefly due to the introduction of railways in Darjeeling hills.

Introduction of easy means of communication led to the growth of feelings of oneness which also stood for the development of nationalism in North Bengal. It is interesting to note that most of the districts had 'court' stations like Malda court station, Siliguri court station; which was the epicentre of developing nationalist feelings. Truly speaking, same as to all Indian character, the lawyers of districts and subdivision courts of North Bengal belonged to first class intelligentsia who had up to date knowledge on

burning political issues which were easily circulated to other parts of the districts through their clients. Similarly the newspapers and periodicals well circulated by the railways and mails even to the interiors while awarded the people about their heritage, at the same time made them aware about the colonial exploitation. Thus introduction of modern means of communication led to the growth of nationalism in North Bengal.

While establishment of new roads and railway positively led to the growth of nationalism; it played a vital role towards strengthening it. The top ranked national and provincial leaders availed the benefits of railways to develop organized political movements. Hence, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das came to Darjeeling.<sup>47</sup> Subhash Chandra Bose came to Balurghat in 1928.<sup>48</sup> He also came to Jalpaiguri.<sup>49</sup> All of them were received tremendous support from the local population. The revolutionists got huge benefits from the railways. Inter district revolutionary activities were sprung out due to available communication provided by the railways of North Bengal.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the railway mails were targeted by them for accumulation of money. Hili Mail Rubbery of 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1933 was the best example of this kind.<sup>51</sup>

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## **CHAPTER-V**

### **THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION OF THE REGION**

It was not more than two decades after the ‘Great War’ and oath of nations for sustaining peace through the ‘League of Nations’ the world was once again confronted to a global conflict.<sup>1</sup> The world-wide Second World War was fought between 1939 and 1945. While the historians are not unanimous to their opinion regarding the causes behind the ‘War’ and who or what was to blame for the war, most of the opinions goes against Hitler who was blamed to be largely responsible for it. Eberhard Jackel, a German historian perhaps might have been right to say when he argues, “Hitler’s ultimate goal was the establishment of a greater Germany than had ever existed before the history. The way to this greater Germany was a war of conquest.....where the German nation was to gain living space for generations to come”.<sup>2</sup>

The war was started initially as a struggle for supremacy and confrontation between the Axis and Allied powers in Europe, but within a short while it was revealed as a world-wide phenomenon affecting most of the countries of the world. In the words of K.T.Shah, “ two thirds of the earth’s land surface, three fourths of its population, nine-tenths of its industry, are in the grip of the struggle. Every land is a death trap, every sea a danger zone, every sky a battle ground for the aerial navies of the world grappling in the blue”.<sup>3</sup>

In the East, Pearl Harbour, the US naval base in the Hawaii Island in the Pacific having been attacked by Japan on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1941, full-fledged war sprung up in the Asian continent. Why did Japan joined the war by confronting the USA, a nation which

maintained a manageable distance from the power rivalry of Europe for a long time – it is not the right place to search for the causes. But, by May, 1942 Japan had captured most of the parts of ‘Far Eastern Countries’ with all parts of British Burma and a knocking at the door-bell of the eastern borders of British Indian Empire.

Though India had no issue relating to the war, the country was engaged in it so intimately and thoroughly that might be no less than any of the belligerents. But surprisingly, it was not by intention but by compulsion of the Indians to involve in the war. From ethical and economic point of view, there was no ground before the Indians to attach with the war. Moreover, the Government of India Act, 1935 provided the clause for non-utilizing the Indian wealth to any non-Indian matters. So, it was only the imperial considerations for forcibly joining India in the war. K.T.Shah perhaps rightly argues, “we, in this country particularly, even if we have not entered the war of our own free will, have been committed to it by our rulers”.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the British administrators realised the matter clearly that without having the full support from the subjects of the colonies more specifically the resources of the colonies, it was quiet impossible for them to carry on long term war against the Axis powers. India, as against other colonies of the East, being most populous, suited best for recruiting in ‘every branch of fighting service together with full complement of auxiliary services’; agriculturally and industrially well-developed ‘to feed, clothe, pay, train, arm and equip’ the army for the war related; naturally caught the attention of Great Britain.

However, on the declaration of war against Germany’s step to invade Poland on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939; similar to the case of British Commonwealth, numerous crown colonies and protectorates: Indian Empire was attached to the war effort of the British without having any consent to the Indians.<sup>5</sup> Though the Congress leaders were well

acquainted with the Fascist rule and also the British imperialistic attitude, it was resolved at the Congress Working Committee at Wardha on 14<sup>th</sup> September, 1939 that the Congress would agree to support the war efforts of the British if the British Government clearly clarify the 'aim and object' of the war.<sup>6</sup> The Congress Working Committee even made clear intimation to the British regarding 'a post war independence pledge and a national Government to the centre'.<sup>7</sup> But according to Shekhar Bandyopadhyay, "the London Government was not prepared to offer anything that might bind its hands in any post-war negotiations on constitutional issues".<sup>8</sup> What Lord Linlithgow, viceroy of India offered on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1939, was only the proposal for after-war possibilities of constitutional amendments in the Government of India Act, 1935 without having a single word in key issue.<sup>9</sup> At the same time the British Indian Government tried to keep closer with the Muslim League by appeasing them. In fact, the British Government tried to avert any Indian nationalist urge at that time though the war was far from Indian sub-continent at that time. Never the less, in response to these, following the order of the Congress Working Committee, all the Congress Provincial Ministries resigned between 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1939 for creating constitutional problem.<sup>10</sup>

In the meantime, the German victory over Europe, German air attack over Britain (Battle of Britain), change in British Ministry compelled the British Government to negotiate with the Indian political parties. Yet, Lord Linlithgow's 'August Proposal' on 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1940, a fresh proposal promising the expansion of the Executive Council to include more Indians, the establishment of an advisory war council with Indian members, giving full weight of minority opinion and recognition of dominion status after the war in return of full cooperation of all segments of Indians to Britain's war effort was rejected both by the Congress and Muslim League.

Never the less, the colonial policy in India supposed to be changed since December, 1941 by Japanese intervention and rapid aggression to the Asian countries.<sup>11</sup> By March, 1942 most of the South-Asian colonies viz. Hong Kong, Borneo, Manila, Singapore, Java, Sumatra fell into the hands of Japan. But since the fall of Rangoon on 8<sup>th</sup> March followed by fall of Andaman and Nicobar Island on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1942, the British Government realised the fact better that the security of India could be threatened by the Japanese at any time and the whole hearted cooperation of the Indians must be opted to combat the challenge. In these circumstances, advised by US president Franklin Roosevelt and Chinese leader Chiang Kai Shek, the Crip's Mission was sent to India by Winston Churchill, the British prime minister of Coalition War Cabinet, for negotiating the Indians.<sup>12</sup>

Let us have a look to the spread of war in Indian subcontinent during the Second World War. Japan made the character of World War II 'a total war' in South-East Asia. All the wings of Japanese military strength viz. army, navy and air force with mutual cooperation and understanding with high enthusiasm were deployed to encroach the British, French and Dutch colonies of South-East Asia. It has been seen earlier that the British Indian Empire was threatened from its eastern part when Rangoon fell to the hands of Japanese Army on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1942. At the same time Japan initiated heavy air and naval attack through the Indian Ocean and within a few days' strike Maldives, Colombo, Andaman and Nicobar Islands were occupied. In fact, being a Pacific country war strategy of Japan primarily depended upon its naval and air strength. All of the Japanese aggression in South-East Asian region took place not by army but by its naval and air force. Even the Indian Ocean Front which was far from the Japan archipelago was also commanded by Japanese Navy and Air Force bombers carried by armoured naval air carriers.<sup>13</sup>

Indian port cities like Vishakhapatnam (6<sup>th</sup> April, 1942), Madras (12<sup>th</sup> March, 1943), Cocanada, Chittagong (5<sup>th</sup> December, 1942) and Calcutta faced Japanese air raid and bombing. Even all other Indian port cities like Bombay, Karachi and many others were also highly alerted against the possible air attack of Japan. It is interesting to note that the Japanese might have targeted the Indian ports from three perspectives. Firstly, These ports were the only receiving and despatching centres of the Allied Forces to India. Secondly, these were the supplying centres of food, dress, arms and ammunitions for soldiers fighting wars against the Japanese in South-East Asian Fronts. Lastly, These ports were also used for collecting and supplying Petroleum and Gasoline used by war vehicles, railways and trucks. So, destructing the ports the Japanese tried to cut off the supply line of the Allied powers.

The aim and object of Japanese aggression started to be clear as the war progressed. In fact, Japan more or less enabled to achieve its goal to acquire a vast territory of its desired 'Asian empire' comprising whole Far East and South-East Asia without the mainland of China and India within March, 1942. Japan, in fact, realised the lack of strength of the British forces at the time of invasion and occupation of Burma. It is more doubtful to observe why Japan did not initiate any annexation to the British Indian mainland even when Colombo, Andaman and Nicobar Islands fell to its hand. There might be some causes behind this. Firstly, Japan might have been satisfied with that empire which could supply her daily food (rice), minerals, Petroleum and lot of revenues. For this reason she did not need to have the British Indian Empire. Rather, she turned towards Southern China which could fulfil all of her needs.

Secondly, The experience of facing strong nationalised anti-Japanese encounter of the Chinese people against the Japanese aggression perhaps discouraged the Japanese

troops to invade Indian mainland which could have awakened the same nationalised feelings to Indians.

Thirdly, Japan was well aware of the fact that the US and British allied troops will come to this region very soon to reoccupy the lands from the Japanese which they had occupied from the British, French, Americans, Chinese and the Dutch. Therefore, it was more expectable for Japan to protect its territories by constructing a barrier to the US-British force to enter the region through water. That is why Japan occupied the Andaman and Nicobar Island and set up a permanent air base for air attacks and deployed the Japanese battle ships in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean to guard India and Burma. This was also the probable cause behind the Japanese air raid at 'major ports' of India which were the receiving centres of the British-US force.

In this occasion, it is perhaps proper to have a notice to the Japanese war strategy in India. Japan as seen from the very beginning of its war attempt in the borders of British India i.e. Burma, was reluctant to make any invasion in the interior parts of British India.<sup>14</sup> The probable causes and clues for this has been mentioned earlier. What Japan used to do only – they occasionally made air raids from their air carriers in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean and from Andaman air bases to the Indian port cities. But, this war strategy was changed accordingly as time elapsed and war situation changed. As the war situation in Europe was changing and the Axis powers were defeating in the hands of the Allies in various middle Eastern and Russian fronts, Japanese help to the Axis powers was earnestly required. But, as Japan had no direct land contact to the said region, the possible way to help the Axis powers by the way of India.<sup>15</sup>

Indian political situation at that time was flowing in a difficult channel. Indian colonial government faced heavy mass mobilisation in Indian National Congress led

Quit India Movement which was purely targeted to expel the colonial rule from the Indian sub-continent. But, it was well known to all that the Congress leaders though were anti colonialism and anti-British in India, they were also against Fascism.<sup>16</sup> The Japanese knew it clearly that if they dared to invade India, Indians will support the British to that issue. On the other hand, India being a vast country Japan needed to have large army which they did not have at that time for invading India. However, the urge of Subhash Chandra Bose and the foundation of Indian National Army to free India gave Japan a chance towards achieving their goal. By supporting Bose and INA, Japan did not try to help him for making India free, but got the chance to use him.<sup>17</sup> But when time came, Japan did not provide Subhash and INA proper assistance as they promised earlier.<sup>18</sup>

Let us have a light on the British war strategy as against its Japanese counterpart. It was found that there was no specific Governmental war strategy in India till the very beginning of the Japanese invasion in Burma. What the Government of India did – to enact a parliamentary legislation on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1939 that came into force since 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1939 for the term of six months, known as ‘The Defence of India Act, 1939 (Act XXXV of 1939)’ where the Governor General declared ‘emergency’ in India due to starting of war and to provide for special measures to ‘ensure the public safety and interest and the defence of British India’.<sup>19</sup> But from military point of view, India was not capable of well-equipped army to defend Japanese army. Even, it was found that there was no modern military air base in British India which could defend the Japanese air attack. Then British Indian navy was also so weak to counter the same at the Bay of Bengal. For these reasons, British force retreated from Rangoon after minimal defence, Andaman and Nicobar Island fell to the hands of Japan without any counter and the Japanese Air Force partially bombarded costal ports of India. Actually, the British

Government, though included India like all of its colonies with its war efforts against the Axis powers, was too much confident about the fact that India would not be attacked by the Axis powers viz. Germany and Italy as the war was confined to the Western European land for more than two years and India was far from Europe. But, it was realised that they were wrong when Hitler invaded Russia and Japan's declaration of war against the Allied powers which, according to Sumit Sarkar, 'within four months swept the British out of Malaya, Singapore and Burma and threatened to bring its empire in India to a sudden end'.<sup>20</sup> Sarkar further says, "the British in the mid 1942 had little confidence in their own ability to defend Bengal and Assam in case of a full-scale Japanese invasion, and were preparing to withdraw to the Chota Nagpur plateau defence line".<sup>21</sup> As precautions the Government of Bengal ordered to seize all country boats of Bengal and destroy them. Side by side policy of 'scorched earth' was being effectively imposed by the Government as a war tactic to counter further Japanese advance.

It was inevitable to the British Government to have British-American joint venture to counter further Japanese invasion to British India. Actually it was an war time negotiation between the Allied powers depending on 'Lend Lease', where the USA joined actively after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbour. Since May, 1942, the US troops had been received by the British Indian authorities.<sup>22</sup> They were feed, paid, clothed and supported by other needs by the Indian Government from the Indian revenues.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, some Chinese were also trained at Ramgarh Training Centre, Bihar by the US trainers at that period. These Chinese inhabitants were also paid regularly by the India Government though they had no attachment to British India.<sup>24</sup> This is one of the references of common economic exploitation of the British colonial Government. However, US aerial assistance was sought for combatting Japanese Air attack, developing Royal Air Force in modern lines and transportation of troops to

Eastern Fronts. Similarly US Army with its full squadron were deployed to assist and train the British force in modern warfare for the said purpose. However, it was also evident that multinational military wings like Australia, Nigeria and many others also came to India during the war years which had occurred a great social and reciprocal problem amongst themselves at that time.<sup>25</sup> To receive and despatching these force from the 'Major Ports' viz. Karachi, Bombay, Cochin, Madras, Vizagapatam, Calcutta and Chittagong, 'The Major Ports (Dangerous Cargo) Control Order', 1944 was published in the Gazette of India.<sup>26</sup> Side by side, road and railway communication system between pre-mentioned ports to the war fronts were rapidly developed.<sup>27</sup>

It is not surely illegitimate to pay heed on Calcutta of that time. Calcutta being the provincial headquarter and being regarded as the most secure place obtaining port and railway stations for supplying and receiving war materials and forces, was targeted by the Japanese for bombarding to cut off its communication and supply lines. Thus since 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1942 to December, 1944 Calcutta was bombarded and raided periodically by Imperial Japanese Army Air Force (IJAAF).<sup>28</sup> Side by side, utmost priority was given by the War Department to the security and maintenance of Calcutta. Besides, US engineers, flying officials and special groups for developing and maintaining air and railway stations and ports were deployed by the War Board at Calcutta.<sup>29</sup> Troops having debarked at the port were transported to Kanchrapara and Camp Angus for rest generally for three consequent days and resent to the Eastern Front by rail, river or air.<sup>30</sup> Strategically, Calcutta was been prepared by the allied force to counter air raid by the Japanese. At that period some air bases shown in the following table were set up in war urgency at some points of present state of West Bengal.

Table No-5.1

**Air Bases of Bengal (West Bengal) during World War II**

Place	Air Base Name	Remarks
Asansol	RAF Asansol	World War II USAAF Airstrip
Hijli	Hijli Airfield	World War II USAAF Airstrip
Chakulia	Chakulia Airfield	World War II USAAF Airstrip
Pairadoba	Pairadoba Airfield	World War II USAAF Airstrip
Dhubulia	Dhubulia Airfield	World War II No. 99 Squadron RAF
Garhbeta	Digri Airfield	World War II No. 159 Squadron RAF
Guskara	Guskara Airfield	World War II USAAF Airstrip
Jhargram	Dudhkundi Airfield	World War II USAAF 444 <sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group
Kanchrapara	Kanchrapara Airfield	World War II USAAF Airstrip
Pandaveswar	Pandaveswar Airstrip	World War II USAAF Airstrip
Salboni	Salboni Airfield	World War II USAAF Airstrip

Source: 28/02/2017 List of airports in West Bengal - Wikipedia  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_airports\\_in\\_West\\_Bengal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_airports_in_West_Bengal)

It is seen from the above table that the airstrip those had been grown up during the storming years of the Second World War were concentrated upon the costal and southern districts of Bengal. It is clear from their locations that the policy behind this was chiefly to secure Calcutta, the provincial capital of Bengal and to counter the possible attack of Japan through the Bay of Bengal. It is interesting to say that at that time the British Government did not initiate to set up any air base in North Bengal though 'the Eastern Front' was not too far from that region. However, in 1945, Raja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, the Maharaja of Coochbehar started to operate air services in Coochbehar for

his personal use.<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, a small air landing ground was set up at Bagdogra during this time. Dash remarks,

There is a landing ground two miles south of Bagdogra Railway Station to which there is access by road at all seasons of the year. There is a runway north and south of marked length 15,00 yards but further ground at either extremity is usable and air approaches in these directions are good. The W.N.W.-E.S.E. runway was only marked 500 yards in length but has not been maintained. Air approaches from the W.N.W. are moderately good.<sup>32</sup>

Before going through any detail on transport and communication of war days let us look at some basic features of war days related to this issue. It is evident that like all other sectors of economy Indian transport and communication sector also faced rapid growth till the fall of Rangoon or first quarter of 1942. But, when Japan involved in the War having vanquished most of the colonies of European powers in South-East Asia some natural crisis behind the transportation system arose. Most crucial amongst these in roadways of those days was crisis in motor fuels. Paucity of motor vehicles mainly jeeps and trucks for civilian use stood second in that segment due to huge military procurement. Third but not the last in that category was paucity of tyres due to crisis of rubber also cannot be neglected. Railways were also suffered a lot due to heavy use for military transportation and for deficit of iron and steel required for paving new lines and manufacturing wagons. Same issue was appeared in water communication system as most of the country boats were destroyed in fear of Japanese invasion in coastal districts of Bengal. Moreover, the Central and State Government of Bengal laid some provisions at 'The Defence of India Act, 1939 (Act XXXV of 1939)' which also caused a blow on free growth of transport and communication system.<sup>33</sup>

The World War II which commenced in 1939 led to a tremendous increase in work, resulting in several changes in the Secretariat of the Provincial Government. A Defence Section was established in 1939 which became a branch of the Home Department (Established in 1937) in 1942. It dealt with A.R.P. measures, enemy aliens, administration of the Defence of India Acts and Rules, Air Force, aerodromes, removal of records, evacuations and such other things connected with Civil Defence. In 1940 a Provincial Transport Authority was established to deal with transport of Civil Defence, the coordination of transport and its use for the carriage of goods to relieve railway congestion, the rationing of motor spirit, gas etc.... Accordingly, A directorate of Civil supply as a separate branch of the Commerce and Labour Department was created in 1942. This Directorate was merge into the Department of Civil Supply which was created in 1943. This Department dealt with the supply and distribution of essential consumption commodities.<sup>34</sup>

It is true that North Bengal did not face any attack from the Japanese side though it was nearer to the War Front of Eastern India than that of Calcutta. However, alert for Japanese attack was received from the Government of Bengal to the Government of Coochbehar on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1942.<sup>35</sup> Coochbehar became the cantonment of US force. Its air strip was used by the US fighter planes for fueling.<sup>36</sup> The convoy of military trucks laden with soldiers were transported towards the Eastern front through Patlakhaoa-Coochbehar-Dinhata-Sahebganj road. Consequently, the road was properly maintained for keeping it in well to do condition. The fuels were transported by rail within 24 hours from Calcutta. The bridges on rivers were also maintained in those days regularly. During these days traffic of Darjeeling bound ways had become very much busy because of its nature of 'hill resort and convalescence centre for the military'.<sup>37</sup>

To understand the nature of development of transport and communication of North Bengal in the context of the World War II, we should have an idea of the said system of pre-war days. Of the different modes of communication, highest mileage of roads belonged to the districts of Dinajpur while the district of Malda had the least. Amongst those roads Jalpaiguri belonged highest miles of PWD maintained roads while Malda owned the minimum. However, the district of Darjeeling had highest miles of metalled roads.<sup>38</sup>

In 1938 A.J. King, a special officer on Road Development Project appointed by the Government of Bengal, produced a detailed report to the Government on that issue. Interestingly, he provides an existing picture of district communication system depending upon road and railways.

Table No-5.2

**District-wise distribution of railways and roads in the districts of North Bengal  
as prepared by A.J. King (in miles)**

District	Railways	Roads maintained by	
		Government	District Board and Local Boards
Dinajpur	131	14	431.3
Malda	85.5	Nil	317.6
Jalpaiguri	187	128.2	561.4
Darjeeling	50.5	59.3	45.2

Source:

A.J. King. *Comprehensive Report on Road Development Projects in Bengal*, vol. VI. Calcutta: Government of Bengal. 1939.

The road picture of Bengal what A.J. King had discovered, was the picture of uneven distribution of roads. For example, the Northern districts of North Bengal viz. Darjeeling

and Jalpaiguri belonged maximum mileage of Government roads in comparison to the districts of Dinajpur and Malda. Therefore, he observed,

The road problem in the province is, therefore, not the simple one of merely improving short lengths of existing or providing short length of additional road with the object of bettering a system already mostly in existence, but rather one of developing in the entire area covered by the Province a complete new road system in the development of which use is made to the greatest extent possible of the existing roads with metalled and unmetalled.<sup>39</sup>

King recommended four different classes of roads to make a complete system of road network for the province. These were-

1. The Trunk Roads for direct communication by reasonably direct routes across the province, connecting the headquarters of all the districts.
2. Inter-district main roads to connect headquarters of adjacent districts.
3. District main roads to connect the sub-divisions and major centres of importance.
4. District secondary roads to connect the interiors.

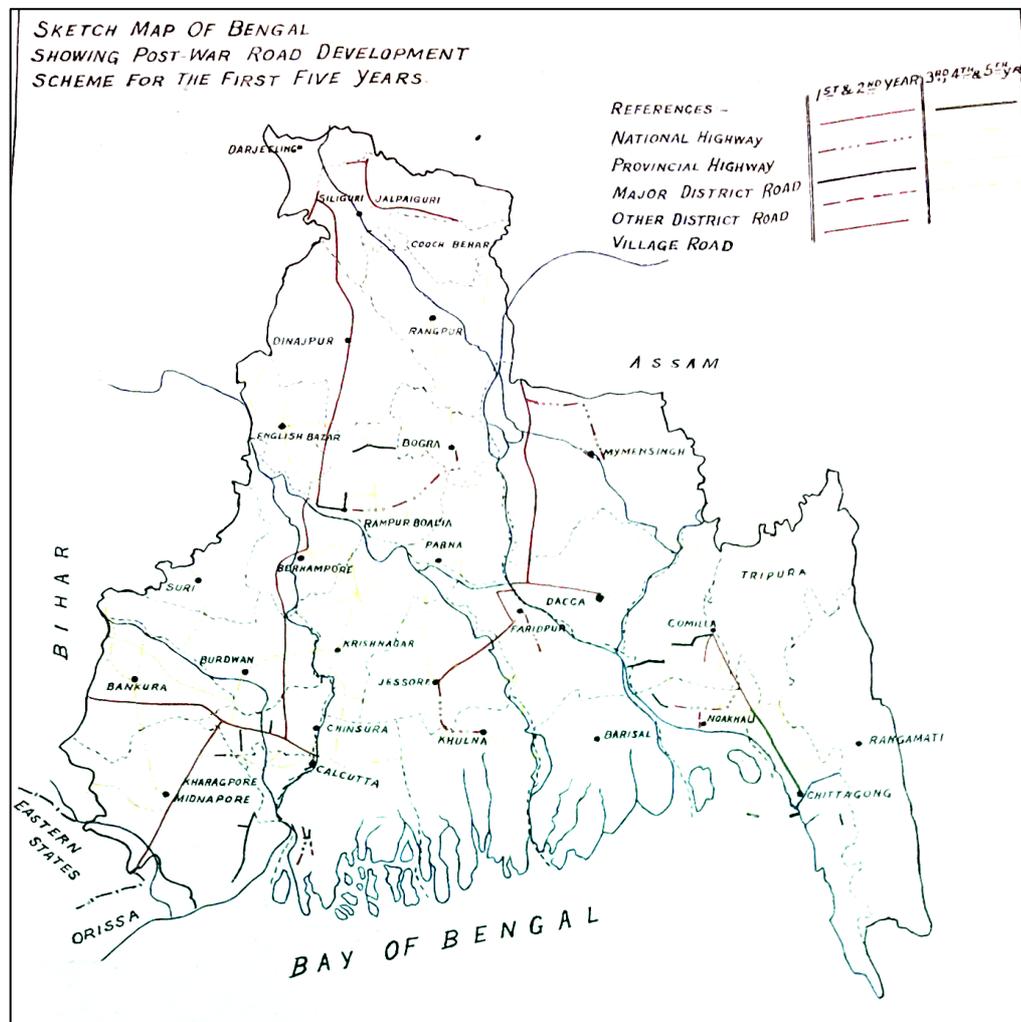
While Mr. King through his report recommended to implement a basic road policy of the Government, at the same time it was aiming to minimise the problem of rail-road co-ordination. But the Government was alarmed by the progress of war. Hence, the strategic consideration became the key issue before the Government. Accordingly, Chief Engineers in charge of roads of all the provinces and states met at Nagpur in December, 1943 to consider way and means of evolving a planned and co-ordinated system of road to meet the requirements of India.<sup>40</sup> The Nagpur Plan however, envisaged four types of roads all over the nation categorised as National Highways, Provincial Highways, Major

District Roads and Other District Roads. Interestingly, here for the first time, strategic concern was taken as the topmost priority.

A special officer was appointed by the Government of Bengal to formulate a post-war road development plan which would be a modification and the combination of King's Plan and Nagpur Plan respectively. The outline of this plan was laid down and was discussed at the Commissioner's Conference in each division with all of the subordinate officers of the districts.<sup>41</sup> Finally, the Government of Bengal, adopted Twenty Years Road Development Plan in 1946 while phasing the same for five years programmes according to priority of works. In fact, though this plan emphasised on development of roads throughout Bengal, it also targeted to develop some of the water routes for maintaining bypass connection. It is interesting to note that no river route in North Bengal except the dredging of river Karatoya in the district of Dinajpur, Bogra and Rajshahi was included to this programme.<sup>42</sup> However, following the sketch map (Map No-5.1) on roadways under the first phase programme it seems to be quite capable of understanding the development of roadways of North Bengal in the post-World War II period.

Map No-5.1

### Sketch Map of Bengal Showing Post War Road Development Scheme for the First Five Years



Source: Government of Bengal. *Post-War Reconstruction: Bengal Government's Plan*.

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## **CHAPTER- VI**

### **POST PARTITION TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION OF NORTH**

#### **BENGAL**

Since the early years of the forties of twentieth century, it was clearly revealed that the demand of Indians for independence would not be postponed for long time. The Quit India Movement of 1942, role of Indian National Army and Subhash Chandra Bose, the Naval Mutiny of 1946, forced the colonial Government of India to grant independence to India.<sup>1</sup> Besides, the role of the Home Government of Great Britain under the Labour Party which always supported for the cause of Indian freedom, post-war internal problems of the colonials powers which encouraged the process of decolonization all over the world, international pressure from great powers like the USA and China supporting the cause of Indian freedom and British futile attempts through several 'Missions' were mostly responsible for granting independence to India.<sup>2</sup>

A burning debate since the early days of independence has been persistent among the scholars on the issue of inevitability of Partition of India. Though some scholars have opined that the Partition could have been averted if the Indian leaders were prepared to leave their demands in the line of religion.<sup>3</sup> In spite of anti-Partition demonstration and propaganda by some Indian parties, personalities and groups of people in several places of India, the British Government as declared by Lord Mountbatten on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1947 quite perceived that, 'it has been impossible to obtain agreement either on the Cabinet Mission, or any other plan that would preserve the unity of India ... and the only alternative to coercion is partition'.<sup>4</sup> The events following the Cabinet Mission's proposals in 1946 were mostly responsible for Partition.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the constant demand of Pakistan by the Muslim League, non-acceptance of Cabinet Mission Plan by the major

parties of India, Direct Action Day of the Muslim League followed by communal riots in several provinces mainly eastern and western sides of India, apprehended the British Government that it would be better for them to quit India by transferring the power to Indians as soon as possible.

The British Indian Government with the negotiations of the Muslim League and other national parties created two independent states according to the line of religion. The Indian Independence Bill was presented before the House of Commons of Great Britain on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1947; approved by the House of Lords on the 16<sup>th</sup> and finally received the assent of the king on Friday, eighteenth July.<sup>6</sup> The Partition of certain provinces of eastern and western sides of India viz. Bengal and Punjab was logically the outcome of Muslim League's demand for separate statehood for the Muslims.<sup>7</sup> The Indian Independence Act of 1947 provides, "The Dominion of Pakistan will include the territories which on August 15 are included in the provinces of East Bengal and West Punjab".<sup>8</sup> While India remained as a unified nation when its boundary was concerned, new born Pakistan suffered much by its divided two eastern and western wings viz. East Pakistan and West Pakistan having an uncommunicated land gap of thousands of miles by foreign nation between the two which was only communicated by air services.

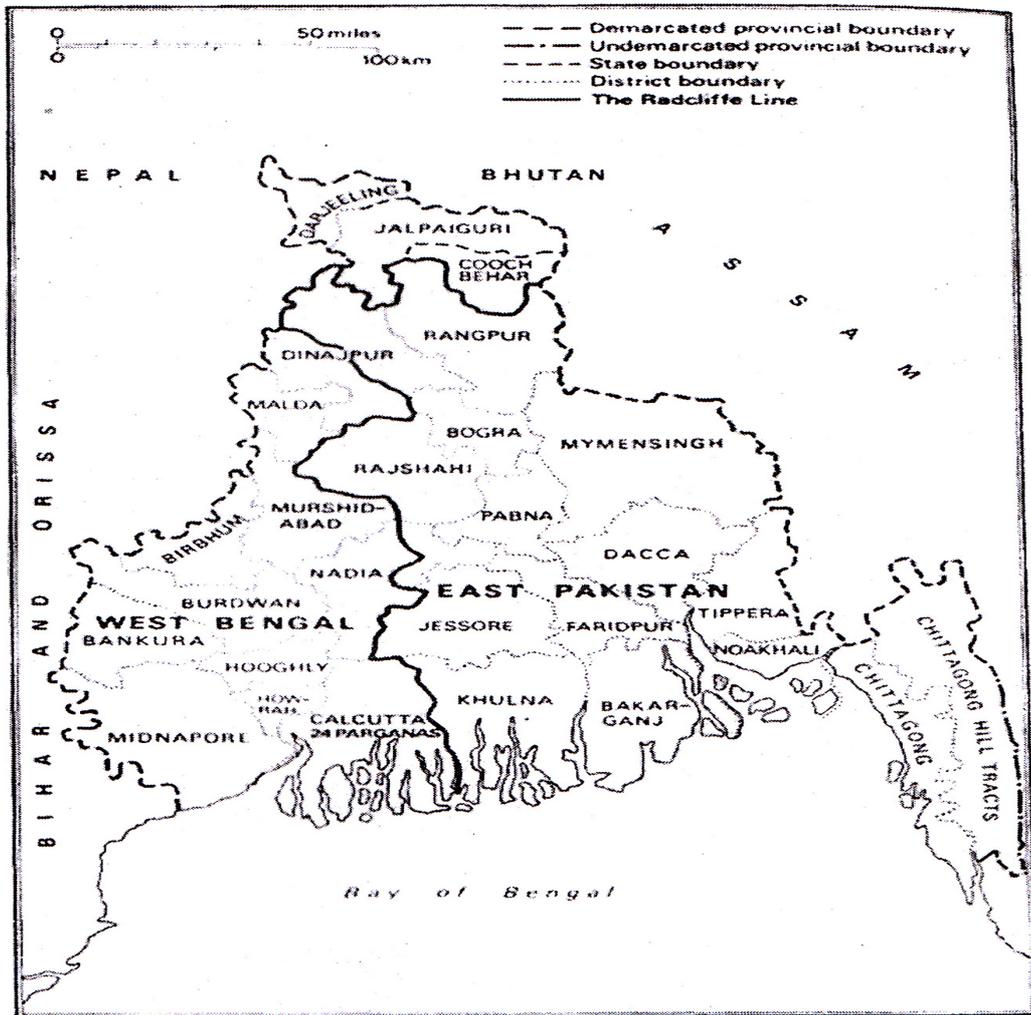
Since the 'Great Partition' was made, Bengal became one of the severely affected provinces suffered much by the so-called Partition of India in 1947. The Indian Independence Act provides that Bengal as constituted under the Government of India Act of 1935 will cease to exist and two new provinces i.e. East Bengal and West Bengal will come into existence after the Partition though it was almost a week before placing the Bill to the House of Commons, The function of demarcating the boundary between the eastern and western parts of Bengal was entrusted to the 'Bengal Boundary

Commission' constituted by the Governor General on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1947, Reference No. D 50/7/47/R, after the Muslim majority districts of the province had decided in favour of Partition. The members of the Commission as well as their Chairman were appointed and their 'terms of references' were drawn in consultation with the leaders of the principal Indian parties. This Commission consisted of Sir Cyril Radcliffe (Chairman), Mr. Justice Bijan Kumar Mukherjea (Calcutta High Court), Mr. Justice Charu Chandra Biswas (Calcutta High Court), Mr. Justice Abu Saleh Muhammad Akram (Calcutta High Court), and Mr. Justice S.A. Rahman who were instructed to 'demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of Bengal on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, it will also take into account other factors'.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, The Commission after preliminary meetings received large number of memoranda and representations by interested parties through public sittings at Calcutta from 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1947 to 24<sup>th</sup> July, 1947, where arguments were presented by numerous parties on both sides.<sup>11</sup>

The Commission faced several issues while demarcating the boundary line between East and West Bengal. Amongst these North Bengal related matters were closely connected with four districts viz. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Malda and Dinajpur where the Commission received several representations from opponent parties. However, 'in absence of any reconciliation on all main questions' the Commission declared the 'Award' by gazette notification on eighteenth August, 1947 though argument arose intending to accuse Lord Mount Batten to have influenced Sir Radcliffe for drawing the line in India's favour.<sup>12</sup>

Map No-6.1

**Division of province of Bengal on the basis of Radcliffe Award**



Source: Sir Cyril Radcliffe Award, The Schedule, Annexure A

The districts of North Bengal was the part of undivided Rajshahi Division. Only the native state of Coochbehar was ceded to it after its merger to Indian union. While drawing the line, Radcliffe, as stated by Lucy Chester, “seems to have preferred existing administrative lines, using district, tehsil, *thana* and even village boundaries”.<sup>13</sup> The following table shows the division of *thanas* (police stations) of Rajshahi Division between East and West Bengal on the basis of the Award.

Table No-6.1

**Division of thanas of districts of Rajshahi Division between West Bengal and East Pakistan**

District	Total no. of <i>thanas</i>	West Bengal	East Pakistan
Darjeeling	12	Pulbazar, Sukhiapokri, Darjeeling, Jore Bungalow Rangli Rangliot, Mirik, Kurseong, Kharibari, Siliguri, Phansidewa, Kalimpong, Gorubathan (All of <i>thanas</i> were included to West Bengal)	-----
Jalpaiguri	17	Rajganj, Jalpaiguri, Mal, Mitiali, Maynaguri, Nagarkata, Dhupgori, Madarihat, Falakata, Kalchini, Alipur Duars, Kumargram,	Tetulia, Panchagarh, Boda, Dabiganj, Patgram
Malda	15	Harischandrapur, Kharba, Ratua, Gajole, Bamangola, Manikchak, English Bazar, Malda, Habibpur, Kaliachak	Bholahat, Gomostapur, Shibganj, Nachole, Nawabganj
Dinajpur	30	Raiganj, Itahar, Hemtabad, Kaliaganj, Kushmandi, Banshihari, Gangarampur, Kumarganj, Tapan, Balurghat (western side of Calcutta-Siliguri main line)	Atwari, Baliadangi, Thakurgaon, Ranisankail, Pirganj, Birganj, Haripur, Bochaganj, Kasharul, Khansama, Biral, Dinajpur, Chiribandar, Parbatipur, Nawabganj, Ghoraghat, Balurghat (eastern side of Calcutta-Siliguri main line), Phulbari, Porsha, Patnitala, Dhamoirhat,

Source: Sir Cyril Radcliffe Award, The Schedule, Annexure A

It is perhaps the transport and communication network of North Bengal that suffered most due to Partition of Bengal. Though the district of Darjeeling as a whole was included to West Bengal, the Radcliffe line was drawn such a way that the district was separated geographically like an island from other parts of West Bengal.<sup>14</sup> Again, from the angle of transport and communication, Darjeeling was remained aloof from other parts of West Bengal except the adjacent district of Jalpaiguri. Though the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways did not experienced any mutilation as the line confined within the

district of Darjeeling; it seems that the Partition made the line useless as it was previously connected directly by Calcutta-Siliguri main line which was cut off by the Partition. Moreover, Tetulia which had been playing the role as the gateway of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district from the southern districts since the beginning of development of road communication in that region, having been placed under East Bengal, the pre mentioned districts were disconnected to other parts of West Bengal for having no direct road communication.

Jalpaiguri is the first district mentioned in Annexure- A of Radcliffe Award that was divided by the Bengal Boundary Commission in 1947. Its five prosperous *thanas* viz. Tetulia, Panchagarh, Boda, Dabiganj, Patgram were handed over to East Bengal. Tetulia, an important junction of road communication system, having been fallen into the hands of East Bengal, Jalpaiguri lost its main trunk line of communication. Side by side, the natural communication system of the district of Jalpaiguri which was closely connected to neighbouring Rangpur districts of East Bengal in pre partitioned days by rail, road and river, were also interrupted due to bifurcation of the province. In comparison to roadways, the district of Jalpaiguri faced a strong obstacle to its railways for the Partition as all of its railways were closely connected to Eastern Bengal. First of all, the main line towards North Bengal termed as North Bengal State Railways, a branch line of Eastern Bengal State Railways that linked North Bengal with that of Calcutta, was forced to stop operation as the entire southern portion of the route between Haldibari, the extreme corner of Kooch Behar state after which the railways entered in Jalpaiguri district came to the hands of East Bengal. Similarly, a large part of the Barnes-Lalmanirhat section of Bengal Duars line had gone to East Bengal at the time of partition.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the railways ceased to be confined to the district.

The district of Malda achieved to sustain its communication with Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal through the district of Murshidabad and Nadia for having the *thana* of Kaliachak within the district by the division of *thanas* on the basis of the Radcliffe Award between East and West Bengal, though five of the *thanas* of the district concerned viz. Bholahat, Gomostapur, Shibganj, Nachole and Nawabganj went to the hands of East Bengal. If Kaliachak had not been included to West Bengal in 1947, the position of North Bengal would be as same as East and West Pakistan from geographical point of view. Similar to the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, the district of Malda suffered from Partition from the angle of communication. Its main line of communication of railways and roadways were cut off. Godagari-Katihar section (76.50 miles within the district) of Eastern-Bengal Railways which was opened for traffic in 1909 were bifurcated by the Radcliffe Award. This section of meter gauge line had to be satisfied to operate till Singabad of Habibpur *thana* due to transfer of next pre-mentioned five *thanas* to East Bengal after Partition. Again, the main line of communication of the district connected by one of the main District Board Road extended between Nawabganj and English Bazar, total 32.50 miles in length, 12.79 miles of which was metalled, bridged and drained throughout; that had been maintaining the trading and administrative relations between Rajshahi district, Nawabganj, Sibganj, Gomostapur on one hand and the *diara* and English Bazar on the other.<sup>16</sup>

Though Dinajpur was slightly a Muslim majority (ratio between Muslim and non-Muslim population according to 1941 census was 50.2 and 49.8) district, it was divided between East and West Bengal. Ten *thanas* of that undivided district came into West Bengal and the remaining with Dinajpur, the district headquarter went on East Bengal. Same to the case of other divided district of Bengal in terms of the Radcliffe Award, newly appeared district of West Dinajpur had to face a great difficulty while its

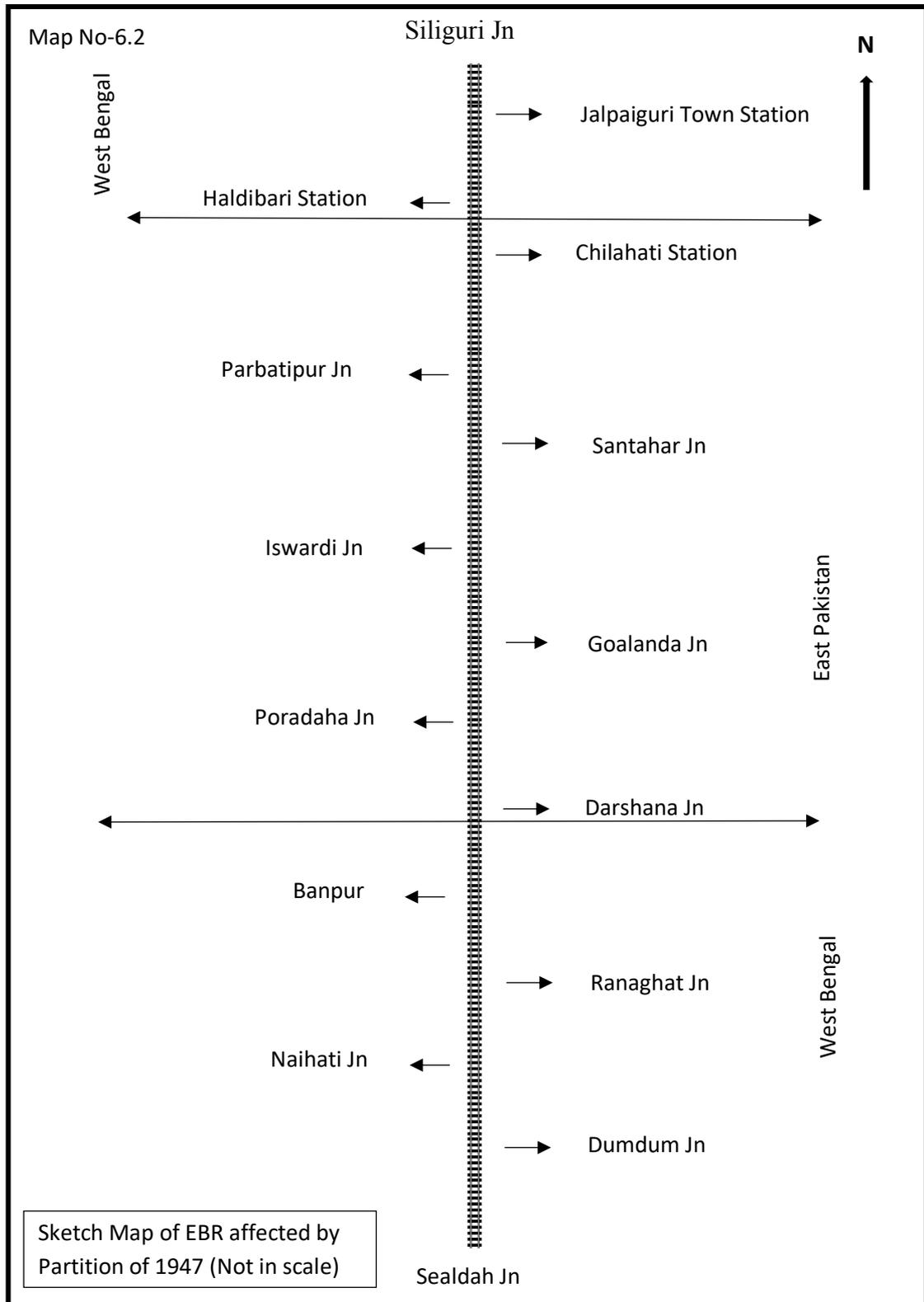
communication network was concerned. The age-old long-run Murshidabad Road which maintained the communication between Murshidabad and Dinajpur; thence between Dinajpur and Darjeeling (Darjeeling Road) from the beginning of colonial rule, was cut off by the division of the province. Similarly, all other district roads which communicated administrative and commercially important places of West Dinajpur with the district head quarter and other such places of post Partitioned Dinajpur district in pre independent days were also closed. While the district was well served by the Calcutta-Siliguri broad gauge line and Parvatipur-Katihar meter gauge line in pre-Partition days; the Radcliffe line having been drawn in such a way that the whole of the broad gauge line within the district had been fallen into East Bengal. Similarly, Parvatipur having been fallen into East Bengal by the decision of Bengal Boundary Commission, West Dinajpur had to satisfy her for having a segment of Parvatipur-Katihar meter gauge line confined between Radhikapur and Raiganj, 20 miles in length.<sup>17</sup>

Coochbehar in comparison to other districts of North Bengal was not included to West Bengal in 1947 as it was not a part of British empire in India though it was a feudatory and tributary state under the Government of British India. However, the 'Instrument of Accession' was signed between the Government of India and the ruler of Cooch Behar on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1949 by which 'the king of Cooch Behar ceded full and extensive authority, jurisdiction and power of the state to the Dominion Government of India'.<sup>18</sup> It became a part of the state of West Bengal on 1st January, 1950 'by means of an order under S. 290 (a) of the Government of India Act of 1935'; almost immediately after which the Government of West Bengal passed the Cooch Behar Act, 1950 for configuring Cooch Behar as a district with administrative set-ups.<sup>19</sup>

The Radcliffe Award had no interest on Cooch Behar as it was not a part of Bengal Presidency. Before its merger with India Cooch Behar was surrounded by Assam in the east; Jalpaiguri in the north and north-west; by East Bengal now Bangladesh in the west, south and south-east. The district of Rangpur in East Bengal surrounded the Coochbehar state from the west, south and south-east corner while the international boundary was laid down in 1947. Generally, it is thought that there was no boundary dispute between Coochbehar and the then Bengal or East Bengal - whatever the case might be, as there was not a single line utilised for the same in the Radcliffe Award; it can be positively stated that the issue of 'Indo-Bangladesh Enclaves' also known as the 'Chitmahals' though originated long before the starting of British rule, was also persistent during Partition.<sup>20</sup> If the issue was solved by Radcliffe, the future history of Indo-Bangladesh relation related to it might not hampered.

The Cooch Behar state possessed 'a tolerably good system of roads' during the Raj.<sup>21</sup> The road network of Cooch Behar in pre-Partition days was basically connected with its counterpart of the neighbouring district of Rangpur through which it maintained its connection with Calcutta, the headquarter of the then Bengal Presidency.<sup>22</sup> Similar to the neighbouring district of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar also suffered heavily from that of Partition. Its fundamental road scheme, which was as stated by Durgadas Majumdar, "to construct roads mainly in the north-south direction and establish connections with road systems of Rangpur on the one hand and of the Western Duars on the other, to utilize the river crossing facilities existing in these districts and establish the east-west communications by a circuitous route" was completely upset.<sup>23</sup> While the railways was concerned, the state of Cooch Behar faced a total upset due to Partition. Unlike the district of Jalpaiguri, all of the branch lines of Cooch Behar remained moribund as most

of the lines were coming from Rangpur district which was transferred to Pakistan due to Partition. Its communication with Calcutta and Assam, both were discontinued.



Source: Amiya Basu(Ed). *Banglay Bhraman*. Pratham Khanda. Kolkata: Prachar Bibhag. Purba Banga Railway. 1940 (In Bengali)

Now let's have a look to the internal navigation of North Bengal during the time of Partition. The Bengal rivers, except the district of Darjeeling, always had been proved the eligibility for being a potential natural means of transportation since the unknown past. Most of the rivers of Bengal except the Ganges and a few others have been originated and fed by springs and *jhoras* of North Bengal and passing hundreds of miles through the plains of East and West Bengal or vis-à-vis met the Ganges or Brahmaputra river system. Thus being an integral part of any one of the major river system of Eastern India, the North Bengal rivers proved the best way for being a natural system of communication in undivided Bengal. For example, most of the rivers of Cooch Behar having been flown down through Rangpur district of present Bangladesh, major portion of total volume of trade were carried on by rivers from the marts of Cooch Behar and other parts of undivided Bengal through Rangpur districts.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, major part of internal and external exports of most of the agricultural produces and timbers from all corners of North Bengal were carried through rivers.<sup>25</sup> Even during the time when the railways had been penetrated almost all the districts of North Bengal, the river borne traffic was also very high in any of the districts of North Bengal.

It was found earlier that the World War II gave an impetus to indigenous river traffic of Bengal due to engagement of railway cargos and lorries for the war supply. Side by side, shortage of gasoline and tyres also collapsed the internal road transport system. In comparison to these, the indigenous river transportation system not only survived but got a boom.

The courses of rivers of North Bengal itself seems to be a curse which was faced acutely at the time of Partition of 1947. The courses of rivers were also bifurcated by the Radcliffe Award though there were provisions to 'take into account other factors', one

of which was certainly the existing river system.<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note here that the Muslim League demanded whole of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district to include in East Bengal 'to have control of the catchment basin of the river Tista for the maintenance of flow of that river and for resuscitation of other North Bengal rivers', but that that proposal was boldly defended by the report submitted by Justice B.K. Mukherjea and Justice C.C. Biswas, non-Muslim members of Bengal (Pre-Partition) Boundary Commission on 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1947.<sup>27</sup> However, consideration of that 'other factor' for Partitioning North Bengal rivers was dismissed by the Commission and the courses of North Bengal rivers were divided according to the division of *thanas*. Therefore, the traditional river transport system of North Bengal had been using basically for inter-regional trading activities had been collapsed due to Partition.

It is still quite surprising why no reference of river transport statistics have been found since the early years of Partition, though, it is logical to say that the Partition which cut up the courses of North Bengal rivers into pieces, resulted the collapse of riverine trading relations of North Bengal with eastern districts of pre-partitioned Bengal. Yet, in comparison to the Governmental effort for the development of roadways and railways in North Bengal, it is evident that neither the Government of India nor the Government of West Bengal tried to revive the riverine communication system. Therefore, the series of 'Statistical Abstract of West Bengal' or any of the Government version since the Partition did not mention anything about this. It can be assumed that the separation of North Bengal rivers from chief river routes of Bengal through East Bengal due to bifurcation of courses of rivers for Partition, Governmental efforts for setting up road and railway communication with bridging major rivers between districts for administrative and other purposes were the probable causes for the disappearance of river communication system in North Bengal.

Despite these, a small scale of riverine trade of agricultural commodities and potteries were also still existed in most of the districts of North Bengal when the rivers rose in rainy seasons between river side village hats or collection centres and towns or exporting depots.<sup>28</sup> But that picture was also disappearing rapidly due to gradual shortage of depth of water in the rivers for sedimentation and the rapid development of road communication and transportation system in all the nook and corner of the districts of North Bengal.

Table No-6.2

**Road mileage Statistics by Types in North Bengal districts excluding Cooch Behar for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1947 (in miles)**

Types	West Dinajpur	Malda	Darjeeling	Jalpaiguri	Total	
Works & Buildings Dept.	0	0	329.4	259.8	589.2	
District Board	578.4	633	353.3	752.7	2317.4	
Municipality	0	41.4	54	15.1	110.5	
Total	578.4	674.4	736.7	1027.6	3017.1	

Source: Government of West Bengal: Works and Building Department: *Administration Report for the period from 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 1949*. p. 7.

As a result of partition, new born state of West Bengal came to be divided into ‘two severed parts, the northern districts being separated from the southern tracts by a foreign territory.’<sup>29</sup> It is clear from the above paragraphs that all the ways of communications viz. roadways, railways and waterways of North Bengal had been split up due to Radcliffe Award. It is also applicable to the overall scenario of new born West Bengal. Therefore, the basic need after the Partition was to restore the broken communication network of North Bengal especially to link up the communication network of North Bengal with

that of other parts of West Bengal to communicate Calcutta by crossing the Ganges. A large portion of Calcutta-Siliguri Railway line having been intercepted by East Bengal, the only alternative route via Sakrigalighat, Manihari Ghat and Katihar with a slow crossing on the Ganges at Sakrigalighat was remained in the hands of travellers of North Bengal at that time.<sup>30</sup> Thus, K. Lahiri, rightly observed consulting with Government documents that ‘the main present need of the Northern region is an arterial road to connect it with Calcutta’, starting from Tildanga, nearest railway station opposite the Ganges in the district of Murshidabad and leading up to Balurghat in West Dinajpur through ‘Malda, Gazol, Banshihari, Gangarampur and Patiram with a branch from Bangshihari to railway station Kaliaganj on the Katihar-Parvatipur railway route’.<sup>31</sup> He further added that an extension road from Kaliaganj through Raiganj up to Bihar border might be constructed to communicate Kisanganj of Purnia section of Bihar-Assam National Highway later on.<sup>32</sup>

Roads were classified after independence as National Highways, State Highways, District Board roads and other minor roads maintained by PWD, Municipalities, District Boards, Union Boards and other agencies. But, West Bengal at that time was, as stated by A.K. Mitra, Superintendent of Census Operations and Joint Development Commissioner, West Bengal for 1951 census, “deficient even in arterial roads while the district board and village feeder roads are inadequate. The extent of this deficiency can be appreciated only by comparison with other states of India and the advanced countries of the west”.<sup>33</sup> The roads though few in number, length and proportion; in comparison to other types, which were maintained by the Works and Buildings Department, were in good condition. But, the condition of village roads mostly maintained by self-governing union boards were too worse to pass even in bullock carts between June to October. However, keeping in mind that there were also few fair weather motorable roads in the

villages those are mostly maintained by the district boards. But the district board roads were hardly maintained regularly, even their surface were not smooth as mostly these roads were ‘earth banks with or without soiling raised from low fields on either side’.<sup>34</sup> The following table shows the basic road statistics of four districts of North Bengal at the very beginning of independence. It is true that the Partition of India was a major setback for the Government documentation and publication also. The political turmoil faced by the Partition hindered the Government agencies to collect adequate data for preparing authentic statistical abstract of any subject. Therefore, any statistical report published for the year of 1947 was, according to N. Chakravarti, Director of Provincial Statistical Bureau, Government of West Bengal in 1948 and editor of Statistical Abstract: West Bengal 1947, “not therefore perfect, nor is it complete”.<sup>35</sup> However, the following table will give an outline of road statistics of four districts of North Bengal at the time of Partition.

Table No- 6.3

**Road mileage both metalled, Unmetalled and Village roads maintained by PWD, district and local boards at the time Partition (in miles) of North Bengal districts excluding Cooch Behar**

District	PWD	District and local authorities			
		Metalled	Unmetalled	Total	Village road
Dinajpur	14.6	34	10	44	617
Malda	0	41	240	281	519
Jalpaiguri	131.7	242	443	685	63
Darjeeling	370	21	332	353	---

Note: Length of Metalled and Unmetalled road maintained by PWD are not found separately.

--- denotes data not found.

Source: Government of West Bengal: Provincial Statistical Bureau: Statistical Abstract: West Bengal 1947, Superintendent Government Printing, Alipore, West Bengal, 1948, pp-171.

It is clear from the above table that most of the roads of above mentioned districts were maintained by the District and local authorities like District Boards, Union Boards, Municipalities and others. These roads were mostly unmetalled. However for total mileage of roads Jalpaiguri district possessed the highest position. While the PWD was concerned, its sharing in total percentage of road maintenance in North Bengal districts was very limited except the district of Darjeeling as always. The notion of special fascination of road development of Darjeeling through the chief Government agency or PWD thus proves again. It is found from the table that Jalpaiguri, the only district in North Bengal more or less maintained an equal ratio in road development from all the road developing agencies.

The Government of West Bengal since its inception tried its best to develop road communication network of West Bengal.<sup>36</sup> The Government tried to resume all the works which were a part of the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of road development plan or Nagpur Plan relating to Provincial Highways and Major District Roads of unified Bengal Government. But amongst such kind of 30 works of all-over Bengal, only one i.e. Gangarampur-Ibrahimpur District Road in present Dakshin Dinajpur district was the part of North Bengal.<sup>37</sup> Besides, in 1947, the District Development and Consultative Committees of various districts were directed to submit their revised recommendations for roads in consultation with the superintending Engineer for the inclusion in Government's Road Development Programme to meet the exigencies arising for Partition. Similarly, steps were also taken to draw up in consultation with I.G.P, a special Border Road Programme in the districts bordering on East Pakistan for meeting up same

exigencies created in these areas by dislocation of normal means of road transportation due to division of the province.<sup>38</sup>

In this connection, it is proper to have a look on the road administration of chief Government agency at the early years of independent West Bengal. It was the 'Works and Buildings Directorate' which was responsible for road development and maintenance in Bengal presidency since the 1930's.<sup>39</sup> Although, the question arose regarding the issue of expansion of Works and Buildings Directorate in connection with the implementation of the Road Development Programme in West Bengal and it remained under consideration of the Government.

The organization under that department underwent some changes in 1947. The Northern Circle was abolished. Of the three divisions under it viz. Rajshahi, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling, entire Rajshahi Division having fallen into the hands of East Bengal Government, other two divisions were amalgamated and the reconstituted Darjeeling Division was placed under the Presidency Circle. As regards to the Central circle, the jurisdiction of Berhampur Division underwent slight changes by including West Dinajpur and Malda district to it. However, a new division designated as the North Bengal Road Construction Division was opened with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1948 under the Development Circle for road construction in North Bengal. Sri A.K. Ghosh, Officiating Executive Engineer, was placed in charge of the division with effect from the date.<sup>40</sup>

In connection with the with the implementation of road development programme in West Bengal a separate Roads Organization was set up under the Works and Building Directorate in 1948. A post of Deputy Chief Engineer was sanctioned for taking charge of the Road Development Branch. Sri P. C. Neogi was appointed to that post with effect

from 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1948.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, a post of special Chief Engineer was created w.e.f. 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1948 for taking charge of the Road Development Branch and all the circles viz. Road Planning Circle, Road Construction Circle No-I and Road Construction Circle No-II came under the superintendence of that office. North Bengal Road Construction Division which was formerly under the Development Circle was placed under the Road Construction Circle No-II. In addition to this, a new division under Road Construction Circle No-II designated as Malda Construction Division was opened on 9<sup>th</sup> June, 1948. Sri J.K. Banerjee was the first Executive Engineer of that division. Side by side, a new division designated as the Survey Division No-II under the Road Planning Circle was opened with effect from 11<sup>th</sup> June 1948.

Two new subdivisions designated as the Mechanical and Transport Subdivision and water Craft Subdivision were created under that division. While the former was intended for overhauling and maintenance of machineries purchased for mechanised construction of roads, the latter was intended to for transport of road materials by river routes. Since the merger of Cooch Behar state with Indian Federation and inclusion of Cooch Behar as a district in West Bengal, Cooch Behar State Public Works Department was merged with the Works and Building Directorate of West Bengal. After this merger steps were taken to absorb the staff of the former Cooch Behar Public Works Department in the Works and Building Directorate and Shri B.L. Garr, late Chief Engineer was appointed as the temporary Executive Engineer.

Now, let us look at the road finance till the beginning of 1950's. The Jayakar Committee under the chairmanship of M. R. Jayakar in 1927 reported that the Central Government should take active responsibility for funding towards the construction of new roads and repairing the old ones. It resulted the accumulation of a fund coined as

‘Central Road Fund’ in 1929 by imposing a tax surcharge on petrol in order to provide annual grants to provinces to lessen their financial burden for continuing their road developing activities.<sup>42</sup> Other taxes viz. revenues and custom duties on imported motor vehicles, bicycles and spares, excise duties on tyres, any receipt under Indian Motor Vehicles Acts imposed on road users were also merged with that fund. Till the Central Government decided to formulate post war road development programme starting from 1946-47, as Sukla Bhaduri remarks, “the cost of developing an improved system of road communication in the province was being met almost exclusively from the Central Road Fund”.<sup>43</sup> Besides, a National Highways grant were also provided in addition to that fund to the provinces for contracting and maintaining National Highways. In addition to these, a special funding from the Central Government were also received to continue the ‘Border Road Programme’ in the districts bordering on East Bengal. On the other hand, various district boards and municipalities in West Bengal were provided a portion of Motor Vehicles Tax on ad hoc basis in order to enable them to incur immediate expenditure on essential road repairs.

The Government of West Bengal also entirely from its State Road Plan Fund started a grant in aid scheme for the improvement of village roads by local enterprise though it was decided that small road projects not exceeding Rs.15000.00/- would be done by that scheme though provision was made for taking one third burden of such work by local contribution.<sup>44</sup>

It’s the time to have a look on road development programmes of North Bengal for the first three years of independence. The Government of India adopting the Twenty Year Road Development Programme of British Indian Government, gave utmost priority on constructing national highways. In this connection it is interesting to say that at the

very early year of partition, portion of NH34 lying in the districts of Malda and West Dinajpur were not existed as it today. It was Bihar-Assam National Highway, presently NH31 and Siliguri-Gangtok National Highway were the national highways those traversed some portion of North Bengal. However, work was in progress on Kamala Tea Estate of Bagdogra section of Bihar-Assam National Highway which the Government of India desired to be thrown open for traffic by 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1948, but only 9.75 miles from Bagdogra to Bihar border was under execution by the Government agency of West Bengal till the end of March, 1949.<sup>45</sup> A direct road link was established between Bihar and Assam through the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar with the completion of works on a link up alignment of Bagdogra section in 1950.<sup>46</sup> Simultaneously, works of a new bridge over Rambijhora on Siliguri Gangtok National Highway was also in progress and nearing completion till march, 1950.

Annual Administrative Report of Works and Buildings Department, Government of West Bengal fails to provide sufficient data regarding road development for the year 1947-48. However, it is found that special fund was allocated to West Dinajpur District from the Motor Vehicles Tax Receipts for repairing some deplorable roads with bridges under the district board. It was utilised by the Government agency. Between 1948-50, it was found that North Bengal attracted much importance of the Government and some important roads were started to be constructed from the provincial revenues which were the following –

- (1) Construction of a main road on the eastern side in Part II of the Kalimpong Development Area.
- (2) Construction of the west main road on the eastern side in Part II of the Kalimpong Development Area.

- (3) Construction of approach road Nos. 5 and 19 in Part II of the Kalimpong Development Area.
- (4) Laying 2" semi-grouting on the road surface of the 1<sup>st</sup> mile of the Ghoom-Simana Bustee Road.

Besides, 82 miles of fair weather roads in West Dinajpur under the District Board was permanently taken over by the Government for administration, control and maintenance. Side by side, consequent upon the decision of employing heavy earth cutting and earth moving machineries both as a measure of paucity of labours, three sets of earth cutting machineries with ancillaries were purchased by the department in 1949. But heavy repairing of these machineries cost through private agencies, proposals were forwarded to the Government for sanction for setting up a well- equipped Central Workshop with two field units at Krishnanagar of Nadia district and Malda.<sup>47</sup>

The Partition of India in 1947 has arisen so much hostility and conflict between India and Pakistan that several border skirmishes and three full-fledged wars between two brother nations have been occurred. Though all the confrontations were chiefly concentrated to the western boundary of India and it was only in 1971 when eastern boundary was the chief battle ground for assisting Bangladesh liberation war; Central Government of India apprehended the necessity to strengthen the communication network of bordering districts of East Bengal. Therefore, special fund were allocated to the bordering districts for road development. Similarly, air strips at Jalpaiguri and Balurghat in West Dinajpur were started to be constructed by the Works and Buildings Department of West Bengal for military as well as transportation purpose. Construction of Jalpaiguri air strip was completed in 1949<sup>48</sup> and construction and extension of air strip

at Balurghat with an well communicating road leading to district head quarter was in progress till March of 1950.<sup>49</sup>

It is found earlier that the river communication in North Bengal almost collapsed caused by the Partition. The Governmental policy for stressing upon the road development by opening new routes side by side maintaining and repairing old ones with bridges also hindered the possibility of reviving the system. However, due to shortage of railway wagons for transporting road construction materials the Works and Buildings Department decided to use navigable water channels and issued permits to indigenous water carriers. Hence the report says, "Acute difficulty was nevertheless felt in movement of materials to North Bengal districts including Malda and West Dinajpur...in the matter of movement of coal for brick burning and steel to these districts. To supplement the normal movement amenities, the road and river routes were explored and the departmental watercrafts and trucks were employed for transshipment of materials over the Ganges and movement of materials from riverine points to interior areas particularly of Malda and West Dinajpur."<sup>50</sup>

It is clearly perceived from the Census Report of 1951 why the Government of India or its provincial counterpart of West Bengal tried to develop the road communication system of North Bengal. It is found from the report that Government's intention towards the construction of a trunk road or arterial road between Ganges and Balurghat through Malda, Gazol, Bansihari, Patiram with two extensions- one from Bansihari to Raiganj via Kaliaganj and second from Gazol to Bamangola was to open up a vast agricultural tract and to link up existing busy trading centres. Similar to this, extension of Jalpaiguri-Siliguri State Highway up to Haldibari and Dewanganj hat at Cooch Behar district, extension of Bihar-Assam Highway through Cooch Behar district, road project from

Mainaguri to Changrabandha in Cooch Behar were taken for improving tobacco and jute trade of Cooch Behar, side by side providing important road connection between Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts. At the same time rehabilitation of Siliguri-Gangtok National Highway, road projects of Bagdogra-Kamala Tea Estate and Matigara-Phansidewa road were also taken for improving Sikkim trade and jute trade of Siliguri region respectively.<sup>51</sup>

As stated earlier Assam used to maintain its railway communication with Calcutta and other parts of India through EBR. From Parvatipur Jn. On EBR a line through Lalmanirhat, Moghalhat, Gitaldaha, Bhurungabari, Pateswari and Sonahat went up to Golokganj of Assam. Except Gitaldaha and Golokganj all of the stations of this line fall into the hands of East Pakistan which disconnected the rail communication not with Assam, but a major part of former CSR. Therefore, the Government of India restore the railway communication with Assam in 1947. It was the famous Assam Railway Link Project. The project was sanctioned to implement on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1947. On 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1950 the railway was opened for traffic. The following table shows how the railway succeeded to reconnect its communication with Calcutta.

Table No- 6.4

#### **New routes of Assam Railway Link Project**

From	To	Gauge	Under the jurisdiction of
Calcutta	Sakrigali Ghat	Broad	E.I.R
Manihari Ghat	Kisanganj	Meter	E.I.R
Kisanganj	Siliguri	Meter	D.H.R

Siliguri	Bagrakote	Meter	New line
Bagrakote	Madarihat	Meter	B.D.R
Madarihat	Hasimara	Meter	New line
Hasimara	Alipurduar Jn.	Meter	C.S.R
Alipurduar Jn.	Fakiragram Jn.	Meter	New line

Source: Karnail Singh. *A Complete Story of the Assam Rail Link Project*. Government of India, Ministry of Railways. 1951. pp. 1-5.

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## **CHAPTER- VII**

### **SINO-INDIAN WAR AND THE NEW PHASE**

Within the spell of fifteen years of independence India engaged in two wars with its neighbours- one was fought for Kashmir with Pakistan and other for ‘border disputes’ (1962) with China. While the first was the episode of unending tag of sentiment that seems to have been chronic between India and Pakistan since 1948; later was the naked example of Chinese aggression to Indian territory. Though India under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru always stood for mutual coexistence and cooperation with China and it was one of the first countries which recognized (7<sup>th</sup> December, 1949) the People’s Republic of China set up by the Chinese Revolution in October, 1949; pressed for Communist China’s representation in UN Security Council and encouraged China’s endeavour to support North Korea during ‘Korean Crisis’ in 1950; China in return thought aggressively.<sup>1</sup> It was the ‘Chinese betrayal’ or more precisely according to Rana Satya Paul, “Chinese militarism and its policy of expansionism was again out for a hunt...what other countries in Asia had witnessed from China during the long course of history...and this time China’s vicious eyes fell on India”.<sup>2</sup>

Researches since the beginning of the Sino-Indian War on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1962; have been made by the scholars on the probable causes for Chinese invasion in India. The Chinese version regarding this war always has accused Nehru responsible for the war.<sup>3</sup> Even, Neville Maxwell, reputed Australian journalist in his famous book ‘India’s China War’ and in his interview to The Times Of India holds Nehru and the ‘Indian Forward Policy’ responsible for the Chinese attack as an act of self-defence.<sup>4</sup> However, the Indian official commentary and most of the Indian scholars do not support this view.<sup>5</sup> India regarded that invasion as a neo-imperialist aggression. Most of the reasons provided

explaining China's attack on Indian soil, may be briefed as China's diplomatic strategy for emerging herself as the leader of Asia.<sup>6</sup> In fact, China was jealous to follow her traditional expansion policy in a new frame after the advent of People's Republic of China or 'Red China' under the leadership of Mao Zedong. But its physical boundary surrounded by ocean, barren land and Soviet Russia hindered her to follow the same.<sup>7</sup> It was only the south i.e. the South-East Asia which could satisfy her ambition. But China perceived as Rana Satya Paul might has been rightly thought that 'amongst all the non-communist countries in Asia, where India alone has some strength to cross swords with the mighty dragon to contain...China within her present frontiers vis-à-vis India and defend the non-communist world from further Chinese encroachment'.<sup>8</sup> For achieving its desire to dominate the whole of South-East Asia and to browbeat India, China had been working on pronged strategy against India and the Sino-Indian War of 1962 was a part of this.

The question of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet seems to be the basic cause for the Sino-Indian border disputes. China since the early days of the British regime in India had been claiming over Tibet, which had been claimed as the integral part of China for the Tibetans having been regarded by the Chinese as one of principal five clans of the Chinese empire.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the Tibetans ruled under the sovereignty of Dalai Lamas were reluctant to accept the Chinese sovereignty. Similarly, due to strategic consideration the British Indian Government wished to maintain Tibet's existence as a buffer state between two empires.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, at Simla Convention in 1913-14, a treaty was signed between British India and Tibet where representatives of both the Government mutually acknowledged the McMahon Line, a boundary line between 'inner and outer Tibet', that is supposed to be extended for 550 miles from Bhutan in the west to 160 miles east of the great bend of the Brahmaputra river in the East mostly

along the crest of the Himalayas. However, since the day the treaty was signed, China did not recognize the line.<sup>11</sup>

India since independence made it clear that Tibet was an independent country and also recognized China's suzerainty over it. But China as stated earlier intended to annex Tibet. In the beginning of 1950, as stated by Shiv Kunal Verma, "in a meeting held in Kalimpong, West Bengal, between the Tibetans and the Chinese, General Yuan Zhongxian, PRC's ambassador to India, had submitted a three-point proposal that clearly said Tibet could either accept Chinese sovereignty peacefully or face the military might of the Peoples' Liberation Army".<sup>12</sup> Consequently, a meeting was held at the Foreign Secretary Office of Krishna Menon, in New Delhi to decide the stand of India in the forthcoming situation along with Baldev Singh, Defence Minister and General K.M. Cariappa, Commander-in-chief of the Indian Army and off course Sardar K.M. Panikkar, India's first ambassador to China; but no decision for adapting any 'hard line' was made though there was a proposal from B.N. Mullik, head of India's Intelligence Bureau at that time and author of famous book 'The Chinese Betrayal', for military intervention to save Tibet from Chinese invasion and safeguarding India's boundary from future Chinese attack.<sup>13</sup> It is more interesting to say that it was not only B.N. Mullik but also some parliamentary members most notable amongst them Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Home Minister to the Government of India and Sri Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Minister for Industry and Supply, who advocated to follow hard line of military intervention in Tibet.<sup>14</sup> But Nehru convinced by Krishna Menon, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, was reluctant to engage any confrontation with China at that time.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1950 when the Chinese troops invaded Tibet for its declared mission to 'liberate Tibet', India maintained a status quo with China and a treaty was concluded between two nations in 1951 where India accepted Chinese sovereignty

and suzerainty over Tibet in return of Chinese promise not to overrun Tibetan freedom.<sup>16</sup> But China in return, occupied Tibet on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1959 in the name of restoring peace by putting down the Khampa Rebellion, a violent uprising since 1957 of the Khampa tribesmen in South-East Tibet who always proved to be a hurdle for establishing Chinese supremacy over Tibet and wished to restore Dalai Lama's sovereignty over Tibet.

After the fall of Lhasa into the hands of the Chinese, Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), a reputed Indian politician might have been rightly observed the Chinese attitude towards India and perhaps one of the probable cause for the Sino-Indian border conflict. He says, "Tibet is the palm of the hand and now that the Chinese have it, they want the five fingers without which the palm is useless. The five fingers are Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and the North-East Frontier Agency".<sup>17</sup>

Sino-Indian Border issue came to the light since China had conquered Tibet in 1950. The question was acute in Eastern and Western sectors where the borders between India and Tibet were undefined but mutually recognised long before the problem arose. Though, a treaty of friendship popularly known as 'Panchsheel' or following five principles between India and China was signed in 1954, it was found that there were several instances of provocations from the Chinese side for arising border issues. Even, the maps published by the Chinese Government of that time showed 50,000 square miles of Indian territory as Chinese territory and the Chinese troops in several times intruded into the Indian territory to hold their demand without facing any serious protest and resistance from its Indian counterpart.<sup>18</sup> Side by side, the Chinese official version always complained the opposite or claimed the territories where they had intruded as their own land.<sup>19</sup> In fact, China intended to have Western sector chiefly named as Aksai Chin of Ladakh for strategic purpose. There was no way for China to communicate and control

over Tibet without having Aksai Chin which was a foreign land. Therefore, the Chinese Government constructed a national highway (G219) from Sinkiang to Lhasa through Aksai Chin in 1956-57.<sup>20</sup> It was published in the Chinese maps in 1958 and interestingly when India protested against this activity China replied for having Aksai Chin of its own region.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, being the birth place of Sixth Dalai Lama, China claimed NEFA as the part of Tibetan empire. She even protested against posting of Indian guards at the trading town of Tawang.

War clouds between India and China began to gather since the beginning of 1959. In this year pro Tibetan Khampa Rebellion was subdued such a manner that Tibetan religious leader Fourteenth Dalai Lama with his followers sought political asylum to India. He as stated by Mridula Mukherjee, “was given asylum in India but not allowed to set up a government-in-exile and dissuaded from carrying on political activities”.<sup>22</sup> But this act by the Indian Government with massive support and sympathy of Indians as well as most of the political parties of India including some prominent leaders within the Congress towards the Dalai Lama and off course Tibet against the Chinese hostility and aggression; deeply resented Communist China.<sup>23</sup> She even exaggeratedly protested against the Dalai Lama’s political activities in Kalimpong, Indian army’s provocation and assistance to the Khampa rebels; and warned that the role of India Government to that matter was not beyond suspicion that might hamper the Sino-Indian friendship.<sup>24</sup> These allegations were however refuted by the Indian Government.

A series of talks between the Government of India and its Chinese counterpart or Jawaharlal Nehru and Chou En-Lai had been conducted to settle the disputes amicably in the amidst of series of border fighting between two forces since 1958.<sup>25</sup> In 1960, Chou En-Lai visited India and proposed to settle the border disputes amicably by withdrawing

Chinese claim over NEFA in return of Indian claim over Aksai Chin. But, Nehru being the prime minister of India, a sovereign nation was unwilling to concede these which has been regarded by Neville Maxwell (Neville Maxwell, *India's China War, First Jaico impression*, Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1970) as an act of stupidity that stimulated to increase Chinese hostility.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, a joint committee was set up to submit a report by September, 1960 on disputed border issues. But all the official and unofficial efforts proved to be futile.<sup>27</sup>

Ramachandra Guha perhaps has rightly observed, “while the end of the war can be thus explained, its origins are harder to understand”.<sup>28</sup> Though a series of recorded and unrecorded border skirmishes between border forces of conflicting nations were going on since the occupation of Tibet by China, it was not since 1961 when the possibility of large scale border conflict arose by the order from the India Government to its army to counter possible Chinese attack.<sup>29</sup> From April to August, 1961, and followed by January, April, May, June and July, 1962; the Chinese forces intruded into Sikkim, Ladakh and NEFA. However, the Chinese were unable to penetrate deep into Indian interior due to ‘Forward Policy’ of the Indian forces.<sup>30</sup> The Chinese attacked the Indian border posts again in September and first of October. The strength of the Chinese attack was increasing day by day. It proves the notion that the Chinese had gathered the military and non-military resources in Tibet needed for war through six to eight months before the starting of full-fledged war and even the port of Calcutta was utilised for sending non-military articles without having any information to the Government of India.<sup>31</sup>

On 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1962, the Chinese started their massive attack on Indian soil in NEFA from the direction of Tawang and Kibithoo; in the Chip Chap Valley and the Pangong Lake areas of Ladakh. By 24<sup>th</sup> October, as stated by V.D.Mahajan, “the Chinese

were well across the McMahon Line through a 25-mile wide sector to a depth of 8 miles into the Indian territory".<sup>32</sup> On that day, the Chinese premier Chou En-Lai approached Nehru to come to an negotiation which was refuted by India.<sup>33</sup> At the same time Nehru also approached to the Western powers for aid and it was followed by sending reinforcement by the USA and Britain and an oral support for the same from Canada and France.<sup>34</sup> China again started a massive attack across most of NEFA on 15<sup>th</sup> November, but except taking the advantageous situation to intrude into the plains of Assam, it declared a unilateral ceasefire to be effective from the midnight of 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1962; withdrawing its frontier guards behind 12.5 miles of line of actual control in NEFA and on Ladakh front existed between India and China.<sup>35</sup>

The Sino-Indian Border conflict left deep consequences on India. In the eve of declaring cease fire, the Chinese forces had possessed the mountain gateways and key passes in the plains of Assam and threatened the whole of Assam and its oil fields. All the nook and corner of NEFA was under direct threat of Chinese subjugation. In the extreme part of war an 'Emergency' was declared in India.

The Central Government faced a nation-wide criticism and the non-alignment policy of Nehru was highly condemned by the opposition.<sup>36</sup> The dismissal of K.P.S. Menon from the Cabinet and immediate election result of losing some prominent Congress won seats to the opponent stalwarts like J.B. Kripalani, Minu Masani, Rammonohar Lohia were the immediate internal political consequences of the China War. Moreover, the strategic policy of India towards its neighbouring countries had also been changed due to Chinese Border Conflict. India since then came to be closer to the 'Western Block' for having military aid, even India's relation with Soviet Russia remained same as it before.

The war strategy between two states appeared to be separate since the beginning of the border conflict. It is clear that China prepared herself to win over by adopting war preparations long before arising the issue. A road throughout northern border was constructed by Red China from its southern province to Eastern Tibet. This road assisted the Peoples Republic of China to control over Tibet. Moreover, China engaged herself throughout several months before the war for infrastructural development in border areas of NEFA for smoothening the movement of its heavy artillery.

In previous chapter it has been found that the Government of West Bengal from its own earnings and with the help of Central Government tried its best to restore the communication system of West Bengal which was collapsed due to the Partition of Bengal in 1947. The objective of road development programme in West Bengal was to 'lay a network of road connecting every village, every industrial centre and every market of the state'.<sup>37</sup>

A new organization was set up exclusively in the First Plan period, for constructing and improving roads.<sup>38</sup> At that phase importance was given to connect every district headquarter with Calcutta and every subdivisional town with the district headquarter by road.<sup>39</sup> However, the Government of West Bengal could not achieve its goal in any district of North Bengal till the beginning of 1960's.<sup>40</sup> Rather, the district communication system of that time mostly depended upon the pre-independent road networks with a minimum channelized modification due to partition. The following figure indicates the poor progress in road mileage under the administration of PWD in North Bengal till 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1955.

Table No-7.1

Mileage of roads (in miles) maintained by Works and Buildings Department in West Bengal during First Plan Period

District	31 <sup>st</sup> March 1951			31 <sup>st</sup> March 1952			31 <sup>st</sup> March 1953			31 <sup>st</sup> March 1954			31 <sup>st</sup> March 1955		
	Total	Metalled	Unmetalled												
West Dinajpur	26.2	18.2	8	18.2	18.2	-	18.2	18.2	-	18.2	18.2	-	18	18	-
Malda	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Jalpaiguri	252.2	209.8	42.4	251.6	209.2	42.4	251.6	209.2	42.4	250.2	207.8	42.4	238.5	214.1	24.4
Darjeeling	333.4	245.7	87.7	329.9	255.1	74.8	329.9	251.6	78.3	329.9	249.6	80.3	356	268	88
Cooch Behar	661.6	57.5	604.1	661.6	57.5	604.1	661.6	57.5	604.1	661.1	57.8	603.3	661.1	57.5	603.6

Source- Government of West Bengal: State Statistical Bureau, Statistical Abstract: West Bengal 1954 & 1956, Superintendent, Government Printing, West Bengal Government Press, Alipore, West Bengal.

Note- data not found for the district of Malda.

Works were taken up for development of National Highways directly financed from the Central Government and a large number of other roads from Cooch Behar Development Fund, from state's share of allocation from the Central Road Fund and from other allotments made from the state's own revenue resources.<sup>41</sup> During the First Plan period progress in the mileage as well as developmental works of National Highways in North Bengal except the district of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri was very marginal in comparison to the southern part of West Bengal.

It was the Government idea that there should not be any village in West Bengal that would be beyond two miles from a metalled road.<sup>42</sup> Though the expectation was far from the reality, it was true that the Government had tried its best to develop the communication system of the villages and suburbs through the local bodies. In spite of non-availability of year wise data for all the years of First Five Year Plan period, the following table on degree of accessibility by roads in the districts of North Bengal as on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1956 gives an idea about the road development in rural and suburban areas till the beginning of Second Plan period.

Table No-7.2

**Degree of Accessibility by Roads as on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1956**

Name of District	Total area in sq.km.	% of total area within / beyond			
		5 km.	5 to 10 km.	10 to 15 km.	15 km.
West Dinajpur	3586.63	48	36	14	2
Malda	3646.46	36	37	13	14
Jalpaiguri	6159.8	59	28	10	3
Darjeeling	3003.6	49	34	14	5
Cooch Behar	3455.32	37	22	19	21

Source- Sukla Bhaduri. *Transport and Regional Development: A Case Study of Road Transport of West Bengal*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, First Publication, 1992 p. 125.

A new scheme for construction of village roads by *shramdan* was started in West Bengal in 1952.<sup>43</sup> Though no specific record was found on specific road related to that scheme, the available record provides that hundreds of roads were constructed in that scheme till 1955-56 and that mileage per 100 sq. km. had been increased to more than double or thrice till 1960-61 in all the districts of North Bengal.<sup>44</sup>

Table No -7.3

**Comparative table on Mileage of roads maintained by local bodies in North Bengal as on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1956 & 1961**

Mileage of roads (in miles) maintained by												
District & Year	District Board						Municipalities					
	March, 1956			March, 1961			March, 1956			March, 1961		
	Total	Metalled	Un-metalled	Total	Metalled	Un-metalled	Total	Metalled	Un-metalled	Total	Metalled	Un-metalled
West Dinajpur	441	2	439	809	3	806	44	7	37	43	20	23
Malda	93* (493)	17	76* (476)	465	9	456	42	20	22	45	25	20
Jalpaiguri	401	157	244	343	113	330	17	9	8	27	13	14
Darjeeling	324	14	310	303	3	300	114	45	69	117	63	54
Cooch Behar	...	...	...	...	...	...	29	16	13	30	17	13

Source- Government of West Bengal: State Statistical Bureau, Statistical Abstract: West Bengal 1953 & 1962, Superintendent, Government Printing, West Bengal Government Press, Alipore, West Bengal, 1957 & 1964 respectively.

...= There was no District Board in Cooch Behar.

\*- Data inputted in these fields might have printing errors. The probable figures for the same have been shown in the brackets.

Now, let's have a look to the road development programme in North Bengal during the Second Plan period. In that phase trace was given upon setting up direct road communication between police stations within the districts in the Second Plan period and that was restored almost all the all the districts of North Bengal accordingly.<sup>45</sup> Annual Administrative Report of Public Works Department for the year 1958-59, Government of West Bengal clearly indicates that the Department had almost completed the original road construction works in terms of the 5 year Road Development plans which were administered by the Development (Road) Department.<sup>46</sup> However, the Public Works Department used to devote a considerable portion of its time in constructing important roads and bridges, which were left out of consideration in the development plans. Names of some such works were-

- a) Widening narrow section of Peshoke Road under Kalimpong Subdivision.
- b) Bringing Lava Cart Road (Forest Department) to the standard of PWD at Kalimpong.
- c) Construction of a new R.C. Bridge over the river Sukhajhora on Chalsa-Bagrakote Section of N.H.-31.
- d) Construction of wooden bridge over the river Baniadah at the 3<sup>rd</sup> mile of Purbabhog Road in Cooch Behar.

In addition to these, the PWD took initiative to construct new roads and bridges or improvement of old ones under the Central Road Fund (CRF) Works scheme. The names of some important projects under that scheme were<sup>47</sup>-

- a) Improvement of the road from Islampur to Patagore.
- b) Improvement of Jalpaiguri Rangdhamali Road (portion from Patkata Colony to Rangdhamali).
- c) Improvement of Jalpaiguri-Rangdhamali Road (portion from Raikatpara to Patkata Colony) and the link road connecting Jalpaiguri-Rangdhamali Road and Jalpaiguri-Siliguri Road including strengthening of bridges thereon.

The PWD had taken in hand a comprehensive programme of important road and bridge projects in 1959-60. Among these projects more important schemes were<sup>48</sup> -

- a) Improvement of Haldibari-Manikganj Road.
- b) Improvement of Odlabari-Khairantirhat Road.
- c) Diversion of N.H.-31 near the railway crossing at Siliguri.
- d) Widening narrow section of Peshoke Road.
- e) Construction of an approach road in the new sub-jail at Raiganj.
- f) Construction of an approach road to the agricultural farm at Malda.
- g) Protective works of Kaljani bridge on the 9<sup>th</sup> mile of Cooch Behar-Baxirhat section of N.H.-31.
- h) Construction of a guide bank for protection of Raidak bridge on Cooch Behar-Baxirhat section (15<sup>th</sup> mile) of N.H.-31.
- i) Metalling of roads and paths within the parks and gardens at Cooch Behar.
- j) Widening the existing irrigation and waterways Bund for use as P.W. Diversion road from Mathabhanga to Moranga for the portion damaged by the river Mansai.

Side by side schemes under CRF Works projects were also taken up by the PWD for execution. The major projects which were in progress in 1959-60 under that scheme in North Bengal were the following<sup>49</sup> -

- a) Construction of a 380 feet long bridge over the river Kaljani, including approach roads of necessary protective works.
- b) Improvement of Maynaguri-Ramsai Road (12 miles).
- c) Construction of a road from Rangdhamali to Fatapukur via Belacoba railway station.
- d) Improvement of Jalpaiguri-Rangdhamali Road (portion from Patakata Colony to Rangdhamali).
- e) Improvement of Jalpaiguri-Rangdhamali Road.
- f) Widening of Buxa Forest Road from 1<sup>st</sup> mile to 5<sup>th</sup> furlong of 3<sup>rd</sup> mile.

The Government of India as well as the state government of West Bengal had introduced two schemes known as Contributory Village Road Scheme (CVR) and Model Village Road Development Scheme (MVR) in order to induce the people to take active interest in the development of village roads. In both projects the local people had to contribute one third or one fourth of the total expenses and the PWD was responsible for implementation of these two schemes.<sup>50</sup> But, no data has been found regarding the works of these specific schemes in North Bengal.

The following table shows the mileage of roads (in miles) of various categories e.g. National Highways, State Highways, Major District Roads and other metalled and unmetalled roads in North Bengal under the maintenance of Public Works Department as on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1961.

Table-7.4

Mileage of roads (in km.) maintained by Works and Buildings Department in North Bengal during different Plan period (1951-1961)

Mileage of roads (in km.) maintained by P.W.D. in different districts of North Bengal as on															
District	31 <sup>st</sup> March 1951					31 <sup>st</sup> March 1956					31 <sup>st</sup> March 1961				
	NH	SH	MDR	ODR	VR	NH	SH	MDR	ODR	VR	NH	SH	MDR	ODR	VR
West Dinajpur	-	-	-	50	-	45	-	-	50	-	141	128	13	83	35
Malda	-	-	-	-	-	58	-	56	2	-	58	18	149	24	2
Jalpaiguri	139	80	-	155	-	139	69	18	155	-	139	86	64	280	-
Darjeeling	83	80	-	368	-	99	80	14	368	-	99	80	37	389	-
Cooch Behar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source- Sukla Bhaduri, Transport and Regional Development, A Case Study of Road Transport of West Bengal, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, First Publication, 1992, pp-248-50.

NH- National Highways, SH- State Highways, MDR- Major District Road, ODR- Other District Road, VR-Village Road.

- denotes data not found.

The communication system of Cooch Behar State seems to have been suffered most by the Partition of the province in 1947. That is why Durgadas Majumdar seems to have rightly argued that, “after the partition of India and till the Assam Link portion of the Railways was constructed, the only means of egress from Koch Bihar was the air transport”.<sup>51</sup> Some private operators started cargo and passenger air transport to Cooch Behar, Tufanganj, Dinhata, Mathabhanga and Mekhliganj most of which were alive before 1950. In fact it was the largest airstrip owned districts in North Bengal till 1950. Due to policy of the Government airstrips were constructed and developed in all the district towns of North Bengal e.g. at Balurghat, Malda, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar for providing cargo and passenger transportation; Bagdogra in Darjeeling district was largest and best amongst all. This not only responsible for air transport of Darjeeling district but responsible to provide the same facilities to all the neighbouring districts and major parts of North East India.

There were a few bridges on the rivers of throughout West Bengal in pre-independence days. The only bridge of importance in North Bengal of that time is the Coronation bridge or *Bagh Pull* on river Tista at Sevoke. Before the beginning of First Plan period not even a single reference of important bridge which was started to be constructed has been found in available records.<sup>52</sup> In fact, it was mostly a common scenario of all-over West Bengal. Travellers, vehicles with commodities and passengers had to cross all of these by regular ferries.<sup>53</sup> The Government of West Bengal through its official agency i.e. the PWD since its endeavour towards the road development programme in the state adopted schemes during the First Plan period for the construction and maintenance of bridges on important rivers on National Highways, State Highways, Major District Roads and on other roads important for various purpose.<sup>54</sup> Major bridges on Pagla, Mahananda, Behula, Kulik on NH34 and another bridge on Mahananda at

Sonapur and on the Leesh, Gheesh, Kaljani, Raidak, Gadadhar on NH31 had been included in the National Highway works.<sup>55</sup> Out of these bridges on Leesh, on NH31 had been completed and made open for traffic within 1956.<sup>56</sup>

Among the bridges on State Highways in North Bengal, works of iron pillar and wooden bridges on Atrai (131 metre), Punarbhava (134.11 metre), Tangon (73.15 metre), Sreemati on Gazol-Bansihari-Balurghat with branch from Bansihari-Kaliaganj-Raiganj State Highway had been started in 1952 and opened for traffic after completion with a toll at Patiram in 1954.<sup>57</sup> A bridge (128 metre) on Alipurduar-Patlakhawa road over Kaljani beneath the Alipurduar town was started and opened for traffic in 1956.<sup>58</sup> The Kaljani bridge having damaged by a devastating flood the project was adopted again and the bridge was completed before the completion of Second Plan period. During the Second Plan period Gheesh bridge was constructed on NH31<sup>59</sup> and on Buri Tista on Haldibari-Jalpaiguri-Siliguri-Darjeeling State Highway had been completed and opened for traffic.<sup>60</sup>

The journey to the road development programme in West Bengal till the beginning of 1960's had not gone always smoothly. Khagendra Nath Dasgupta, Minister, Public Works and Housing Department, Government of West Bengal comments, 'every river has not been bridged, every part has not been connected. We are far away from our mission, but we are on the right tract'.<sup>61</sup> Side by side, progress of works were also greatly hampered by the unprecedented floods of every year which were very common to North Bengal.<sup>62</sup> In spite of increasing demands from the public for more roads and Governmental efforts to meet up the same, the progress of works was consistent with the availability of funds from year to year.<sup>63</sup>

Map No- 7.1

**Road map of North Bengal, 1961**

Source: *Annual Administrative Report of the Public Works Department for the year 1960-61*. Alipur: Superintendent of Government Printing. 1963.

There were also other factors for which the progress of road works were undoubtedly retarded or even halted temporarily. Amongst these mention may be made of difficulty in fixing road alignments and consequent acquisition of lands. On account

of high density of population, acquisition of homestead lands and structures were not only very costly but also a lengthy process. In many cases, observance of proper geometrics in fixing alignments had been rendered difficult owing to presence of many non-acquirable plots of lands in the route, viz. cremation, burial grounds, temples and mosques etc. Moreover, objections through legal procedure sometimes came on as injunctions on the department that resulted the holding up the total project.<sup>64</sup> Side by side, progress of works were also greatly hampered by the unprecedented floods of every year which were very common to North Bengal.<sup>65</sup>

Let us have a look to the road transport system of North Bengal of that time. The common means of transportation of that time were carts pulled by bullocks or ponies. In some areas of Malda district two wheeled *tangas* also transported the passengers as well as commodities. The well to do people used to have hoses, bicycles and even motor bikes for daily convenience. Government officers were provided jeeps for daily uses. In the Duars region and Cooch Behar higher level Government officers were provided elephants for the same.<sup>66</sup>

Inter district and intra district passenger as well as some amount of commodity transport system was provided chiefly in all the districts of North Bengal by North Bengal States Transport Corporation. Though the Corporation was established in 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1960,<sup>67</sup> it started its service in princely state Cooch Behar in April, 1945 ‘with a fleet of 3 buses and 3 trucks under its Second World War Reconstruction Scheme.’<sup>68</sup> Before the merger of the Cooch Behar state with West Bengal, the state as noted by Durgadas Majumdar, “had procured a few buses which were mainly plied outside the State, that is, for trips to Bagdogra and Siliguri and also up to Purnea in Bihar”.<sup>69</sup> The Government of West Bengal took over the control of the States Transport Service of

Koch Behar under the Home Transport Department after the merger of Cooch Behar State into West Bengal since 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1950.<sup>70</sup> The scheme in the Second Five year Plan provides for extension of bus services to different parts of Cooch Behar and its neighbouring districts which were not well served by railways.<sup>71</sup> For that purpose new buses and old bus chassis including trucks and jeeps were purchased. With the partial improvement of roads regular passenger bus services on more than 31 routes including two express services connecting Jalpaiguri with Balurghat and Balurghat with Khejuria in Malda district along with many special and daily services had been opened to provide cheap transport facility in the districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda. Interestingly, in 1956, a trunk bus service connecting a distance of more than 360 miles from Manikchak Ghat on the Ganges to Baxirhat on the Assam border had been started to operate.<sup>72</sup> Sub-depots at Falakata, Alipurduar, Siliguri and Raiganj with an up-to-date workshop at Cooch Behar were set up within 1960 for the maintenance of services and also to provide maintenance services to other vehicles of State or Central Governmental agencies.<sup>73</sup> Available statistics shows that in 1961-62 daily averagely 110 nos. of vehicles put on road while its length of operation was 5,050 kms.<sup>74</sup> The operational Statistics of NBSTC indicates that while the vehicles of initial Company ran 8.16 lakhs Kilometerage, the figure increased to 21.79 lakhs Kilometerage in 1955-56 and till the last of Second Five Year Plan period i.e. in 1960-61 it reached to 47.98 lakhs Kilometerage.<sup>75</sup>

The China War had left deep consequences to the communication system of the country. Getting lessons from Chinese war strategy, India also followed the same by improving its road communication system in the borders for supplying heavy artillery and troops to the borders urgently. Thus, 'following the invasion of India by her neighbour China', as 'West Bengal- 1964', official publication of Government of West

Bengal cites, '223 miles of National Highways have been widened to 7 metres (23 ft.) pavement width including improvement of hard crust twenty miles of new construction are in progress with another 4 miles already completed. This is in addition to construction and reconstruction of 27 major bridges on the National Highways'.<sup>76</sup> In 1963, thirteen bridges 14 to 90 metres in length in Gazol-Raiganj Division of NH34 had been constructed expeditiously.<sup>77</sup> In 1964 one of the most important bridge on Tista near Jalpaiguri town was completed and opened for traffic. It can be assumed that the Government policy after the China War was to bridging the NH 34 and NH31 all through for smoothening prompt military movements. Thus, Jaldhaka, Torsha, Dayna, Sankosh and Raidak – the most prominent rivers of North Bengal were bridged all along within 1960's.<sup>78</sup> A bridge (52.46 metre) on Little Rangeet on Pulbazar-Darjeeling-Bajanbari road was also completed in 1964. Though, the Farakka Barrage was not the by-product of the Sino-Indian War, its pace of development of construction was fastened by this war heavily.

Respecting the patriotic sentiment of the people, the Government of West Bengal introduced a scheme for village uplifts for immediate execution by the Village Volunteer Forces where schemes were adopted for construction and repair of village roads with many other village improvement works. Though detail statistics of that scheme have not been found, the available data shows that Fifty-two thousand man-days' labour had been contributed to the Defence Labour Banks by members of 60 Village Volunteer Force units in Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling district and the Gram Panchayats in Kalimpong subdivision had drawn up 141 schemes for village uplifts till the beginning of 1963.<sup>79</sup>

In this connection, it is important to mention that the direct result of the China War was to introduce a new road project termed as 'lateral Road Project' by the Government to connect East Assam and New Delhi directly through roads. A series of roads through that project was constructed in North Bengal specially in the Jalpaiguri Duars. One example of that road is the road from Telipara more-Banarhat- Chalsa which connected NH31 towards Assam through the points of Gairkata and Chalsa.<sup>80</sup>

The railway communication of North Bengal was greatly influenced by the Sino-Indian War. It was found earlier that the railway communication was restored in North Bengal by the successful completion of Assam Railway Link Project in 1950. But that new communication was carried on mostly through meter gauge lines. But the meter gauge railway is a weaker railway than broad gauge in terms of its loading capacity and speed. This weakness was greatly felt at the time of war. Hence, the broad gauge project was taken in hand by the Government. The first station of this new line in North Bengal was at Khejuria, opposite Farakka. It reaches Barsoi Jn. Through Malda and Kumedpur, thence to NJP through Kishenganj. From NJP the line enters the district of Coochbehar through Belakoba, Raninagar, Mainaguri, Dhupguri and Falakata. From thence through New Coochbehar, New Alipurduar from where it enters to Assam. The whole line was opened for traffic on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1964.<sup>81</sup>

The strategic importance of North Bengal had increased to several times more after the China War in 1962. A series of military cantonments were set up in the Doors and hills with their official headquarters for providing prompt access to the borders of Bhutan, Sikkim and Darjeeling. In Duars most important amongst these was Binnaguri military cantonment which seemed to be the direct consequence of the China War. Moreover, strength of Bagdogra airbase had been increased. A new air base was set up

at Hasimara in 1963. Both the bases were developed to combat air operations over a large area including North Bengal and for providing air support to Sikkim and Bhutan due to Indian Governmental ties with these foreign countries. Again a helicopter unit at Sevoke had been attached to Indian Army's XXXIII Corps based at Sukna in Darjeeling district. All these units also provide military air services to adjacent military units. During Bangladesh Liberation War all of these air bases with their units provided all kinds of military assistance and services to help the Indian Army and *Mukti Bahini* as they could.<sup>82</sup>

Needless to say that issue of road development in North Bengal during and after the Sino-Indian War of 1962, seems to be a demand for time for overcoming the situation. Therefore, most of the road development projects of North Bengal were abandoned when the war clouds between India and China have been disappeared. The following table (Table No. ) proves the notion. It is not clearly known while perceiving the strategic importance of North Bengal for situating common boundaries with four foreign nations and the North Bengal Corridor- a passage for entering Northeast India, the Government of India has been tightening the military strength of the region from strategic point of view, the Government at the same time ignored the infrastructural development of roadways for achieving its required level in this region. Thus, while the Sino-Indian border issue was raised again in 2017 (Doklam case), the Government of India highly realised the paucity of roads for military transportation.

Table- 7.5

Mileage of roads (in km.) maintained by Works and Buildings Department in North Bengal during different Plan period (1961-1969)

District	Mileage of roads (in km.) maintained by P.W.D. in different districts of North Bengal as on														
	31 <sup>st</sup> March 1961					31 <sup>st</sup> March 1966					31 <sup>st</sup> March 1969				
	NH	SH	MDR	ODR	VR	NH	SH	MDR	ODR	VR	NH	SH	MDR	ODR	VR
West Dinajpur	141	128	13	83	35	141	122	13	187	101	165	128	59	257	114
Malda	58	18	149	24	2	58	18	149	122	24	76	130	34	150	44
Jalpaiguri	139	86	64	280	-	139	86	64	384	29	207	67	156	300	29
Darjeeling	99	80	37	389	-	99	80	37	514	-	102	264	19	345	-
Cooch Behar	-	-	-	-	-	55	5	107	226	-	61	43	161	167	-

Source- Sukla Bhaduri, Transport and Regional Development, A Case Study of Road Transport of West Bengal, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, First Publication, 1992, pp-248-50.

NH- National Highways, SH- State Highways, MDR- Major District Road, ODR- Other District Road, VR-Village Road.

- denotes data not found.

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## 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 Dokalam. 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 Dokalam 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.

# **APPENDIXES**

Appendix-I

## Elephant as a means of transportation



Source: From the collection of Sri Bablu Ghosh, younger member of former Ghosh Estate, Patiram. Dakshin Dinajpur

## Appendix-II

## Steam Roller



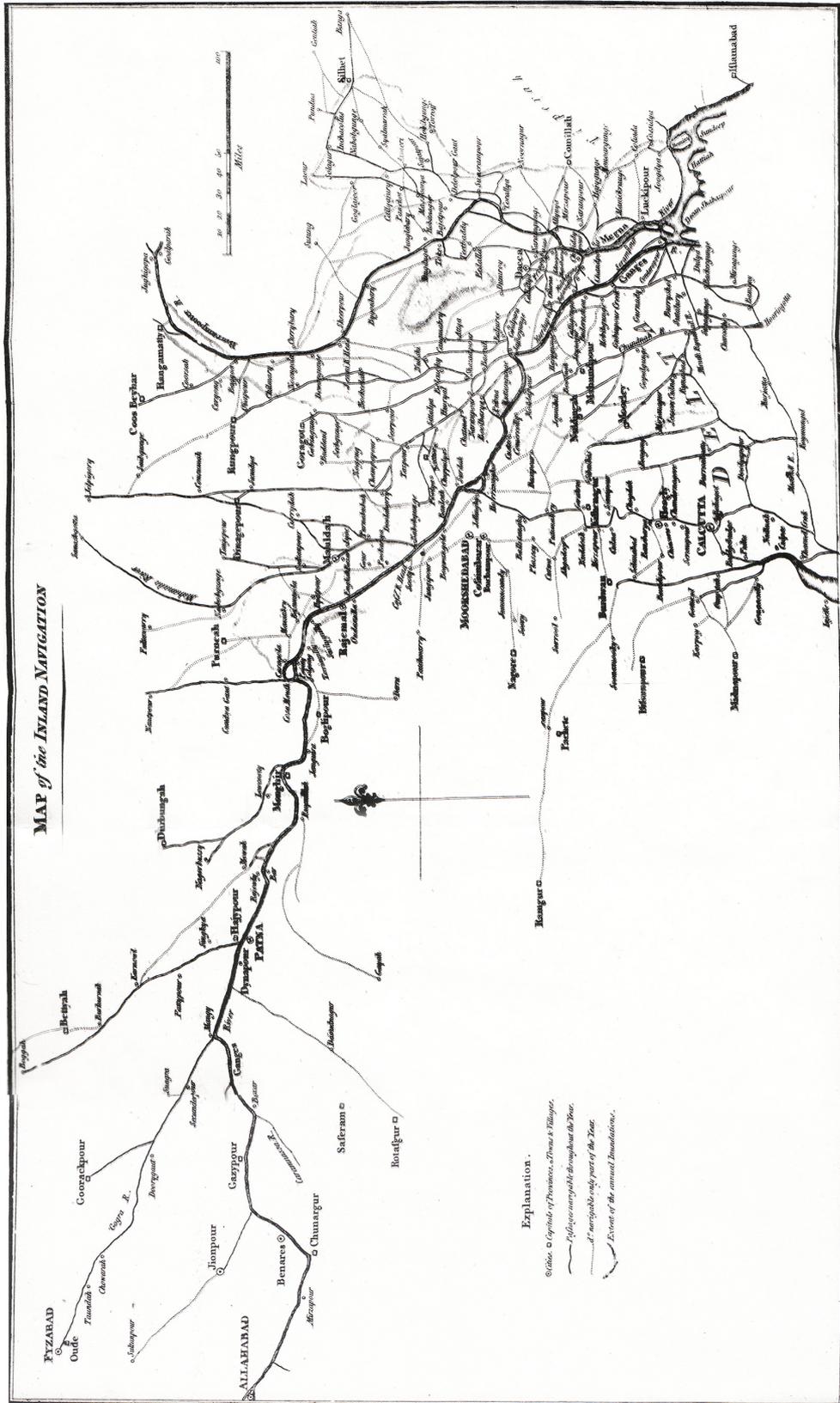
Source: PWD (Roads), Balurghat, Dakshin Dinajpur.

## Appendix-III

**Atrai Bridge and a ferry boat, 1962**

Source: From the collection of Sri Bablu Ghosh, younger member of former Ghosh Estate, Patiram. Dakshin Dinajpur

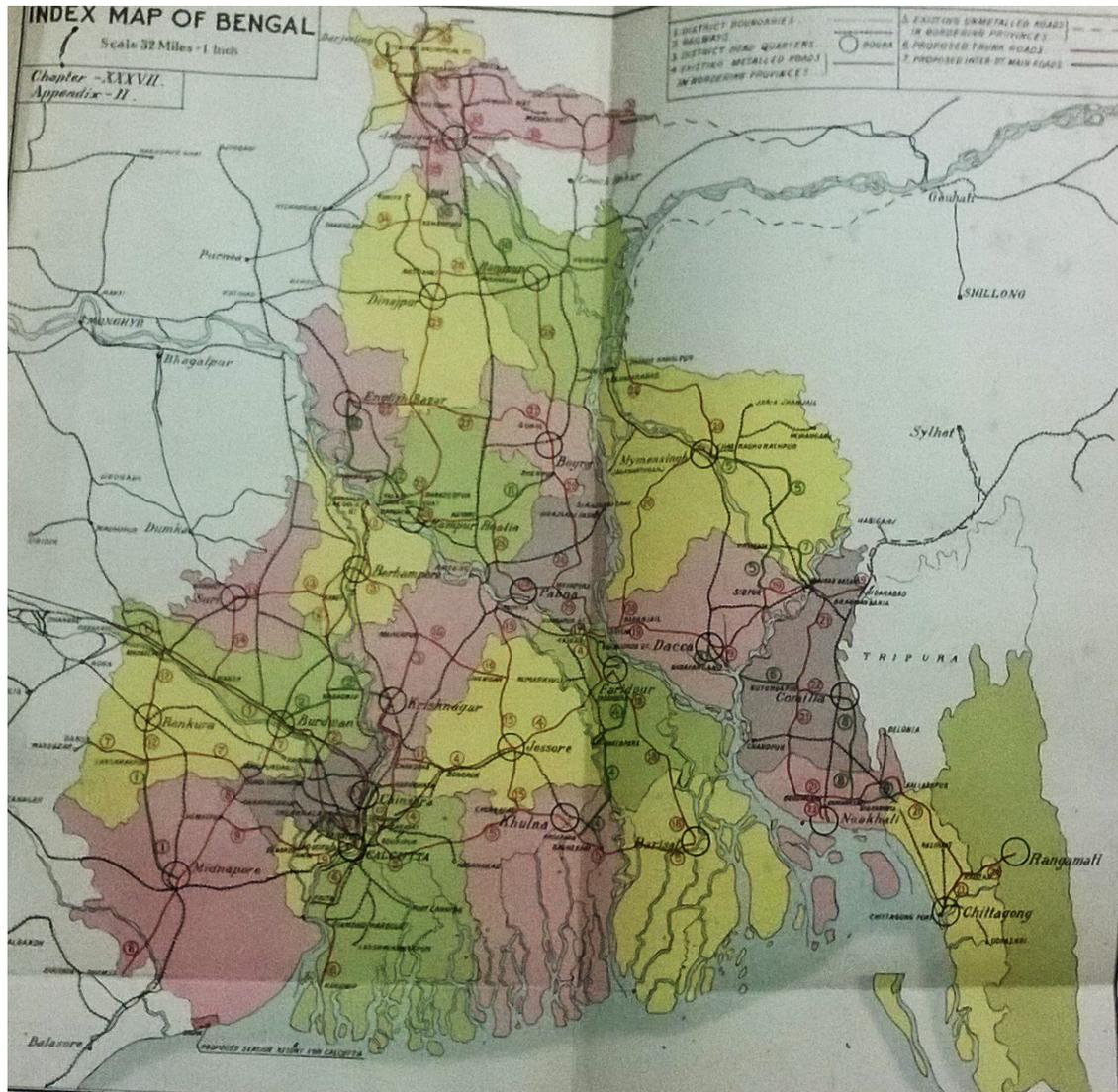
Appendix-IV



Source: Rennell

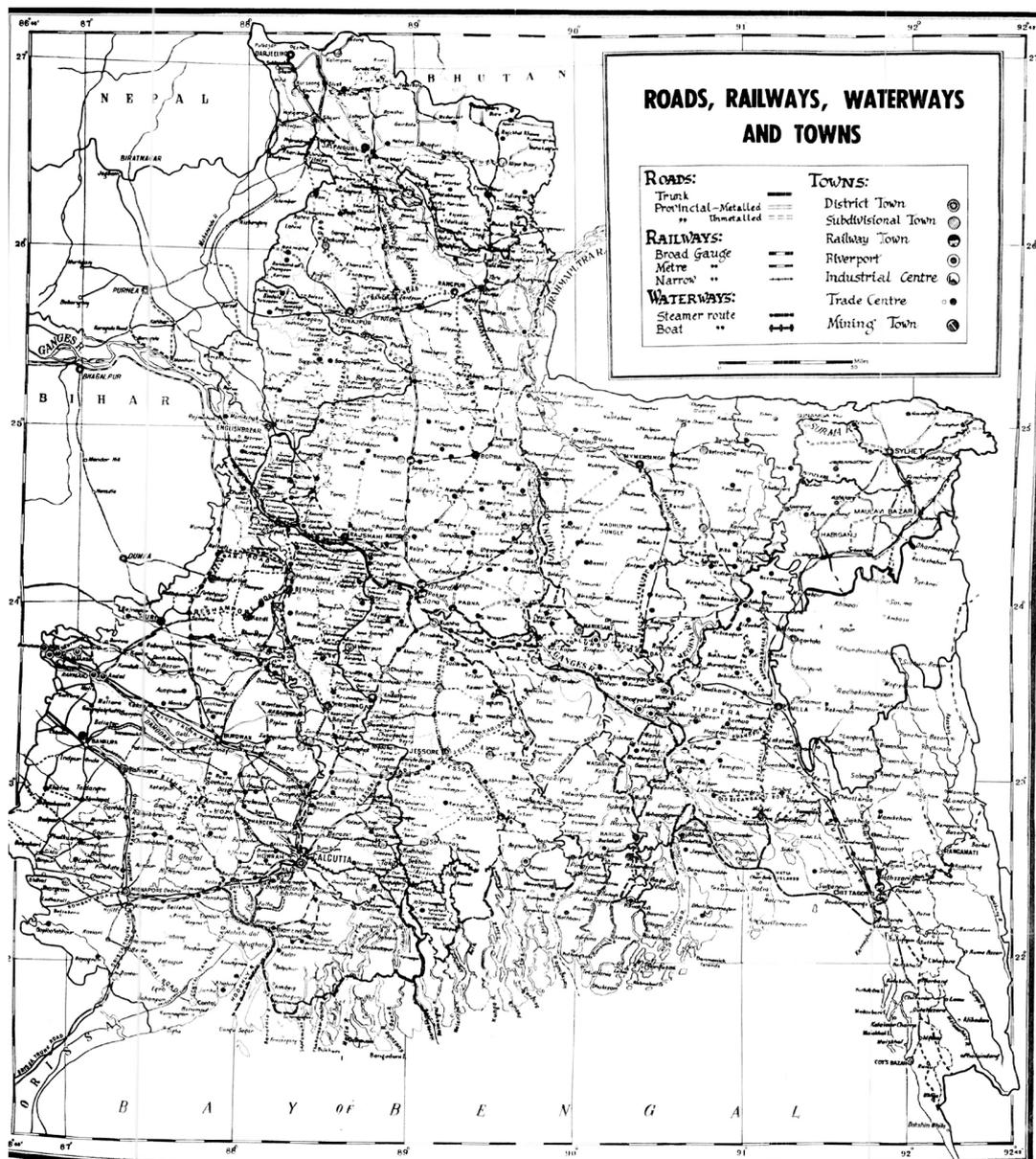


## Appendix-VI

**Road Map of Bengal (Existed and Proposed) created by A.J. King. 1938**

Source: A.J. King. *Comprehensive Report on Road Development Projects in Bengal*, vol. VII. Part-I. Calcutta: Government of Bengal. 1939.

## Appendix-VII



Roads, Railways, Waterways and Towns of Bengal on the eve of Partition

Source: S.P.Sen. Bengal in Maps. Calcutta. 1946.

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## The Partition of India and its consequence on Road Communication system of North Bengal

Biswarup Saha

### Abstract:

*The great 'Partition of India' in 1947 not only gave birth of two independent nations in Indian sub-continent and draw an end to the British colonialism from the Indian soil, but left much negative returns to Indian society, economy and politics. Two provinces of eastern and western side of India were bifurcated on the basis of 'Radcliffe Award'. The eastern partition, created in the province of Bengal for originating East Pakistan, gave a shock to the economic stability of Bengal. 'North Bengal', the term generally used to denote the northern part of West Bengal, also faced a great problem due to Partition of 1947. The 'communication' system of the said region was 'dislocated' by the Partition. However, the Government of West Bengal from its own and central funding tried its best to 're-establish' the system from the early days of independence not only to communicate the dislocated regions, but to restore the broken commercial set up of the areas concerned. But the pace of development was very limited in comparison to the need till the beginning of First Plan period.*

**Keywords:** Partition of India, Radcliffe Award, North Bengal, communication, dislocation, funding, re-establish, First Plan period.

1947 is a landmark in the history of India as it achieved freedom from the bondage of merely 200 years of colonialism. But in return of that independence, India lost her integrity. The British Indian Government with the negotiations of the Muslim League and other major national parties created two independent states according to the line of religion for creating separate statehood for the Muslims.<sup>1</sup> The Partition of 1947 brought about various problems that varied in regions. The present study is an initiative to search for the consequence of

Partition on road communication system of North Bengal or Northern part of present state of West Bengal.

Before going through anything in detail about the subject, let us have a fresh look on literature review. It is true that some scholars have ventured to that field as a part of their study but not a single evidence is suitably fit for the topic. For example, Sukla Bhaduri<sup>2</sup> in her book has described elaborately the development of road transport system of West Bengal with Pre-colonial background. But its major drawback exists on non-availability of any discussion on the effects of Partition on the said system in the context of North Bengal. Sri Narayan Chandra Saha<sup>3</sup> also includes a chapter in his book. Though it is informative, it can also be accused for the same ground. Recently, Bhawna Rai<sup>4</sup> and Utpal Roy<sup>5</sup> in their PhD. dissertation papers have tried to show the picture of railways of North Bengal in the perspective of Partition; but it is seldom related to the perspective of road communication system. Hence for the absence of any detailed previous work, it is quite legitimate to look into the matter a fresh.

It is commonly observed that the Partition is a dislocation in terms of transport and communication system of North Bengal.<sup>6</sup> In this article the main objective is to find out the substantiality of the notion. If the notion is justified then it will be enquired what were the measures that the Government took to improve the road communication system in North Bengal. Side by side, it will also be searched why did the Government tried to improve the system and how far did the Government achieve to fulfil its goal.

Since the 'Great Partition' was made, Bengal became one of the severely affected provinces suffered much by the division of India. The Indian Independence Act provides that Bengal will be divided into two new provinces i.e. East Bengal and West Bengal. It was almost a week before placing the Bill to the House of Commons on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1947, the function of demarcating the boundary between the eastern and western parts of Bengal was entrusted to the 'Bengal Boundary Commission' constituted by the Governor General on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1947, Reference No. D 50/7/47/R, after the Muslim majority districts of the province of Bengal had decided in favour of Partition. The members of the Commission as well as their Chairman were appointed by the Government and their 'terms of references' were

drawn in consultation with the leaders of the principal Indian parties. This Commission consisted of Sir Cyril Radcliffe (Chairman), Mr. Justice Bijan Kumar Mukherjea (Calcutta High Court), Mr. Justice Charu Chandra Biswas (Calcutta High Court), Mr. Justice Abu Saleh Muhammad Akram (Calcutta High Court), and Mr. Justice S.A. Rahman who were instructed to 'demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of Bengal on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>7</sup> While in doing its job, it will also take into account 'other factors'.<sup>8</sup>

The Commission faced several issues while demarcating the boundary line between East and West Bengal. Amongst these North Bengal related matters were closely connected with four districts viz. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Malda and Dinajpur where the Commission received several representations from opponent parties. However, 'in absence of any reconciliation on all main questions' the Commission declared the 'Award' by gazette notification on 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 though argument arose intending to accuse Lord Mount Batten to have influenced Sir Radcliffe for drawing the line in India's favour.<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of The Schedule, Annexure A, of Sir Cyril Radcliffe Award, let us try to search for the effects of Partition on the communication system of the districts of North Bengal or on the notion whether the Partition dislocated the communication system of North Bengal or not. It is perhaps the transport and communication network of North Bengal that suffered much due to Partition of Bengal. Though the district of Darjeeling as a whole was included to West Bengal, the Radcliffe line was drawn such a way that the district was separated geographically like an island from other parts of West Bengal.<sup>10</sup> Again, from the angle of transport and communication, Darjeeling was remained aloof from other parts of West Bengal except the adjacent district of Jalpaiguri. Moreover, Tetulia which had been playing the role as the gateway of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district from the southern districts since the beginning of development of road communication in that region, having been placed under East Bengal, the pre-mentioned districts were disconnected to other parts of West Bengal for having no direct road communication link.

Jalpaiguri is the first district mentioned in Annexure- A of Radcliffe Award that was divided by the Bengal Boundary Commission in 1947. Its five prosperous thanas viz. Tetulia, Panchagarh, Boda, Dabiganj and Patgram were handed over to East Bengal. Tetulia, an important junction of road communication system, having been fallen into the hands of East Bengal, Jalpaiguri lost its main trunk line of communication. Side by side, the natural communication system of the district of Jalpaiguri which was closely connected to neighbouring Rangpur districts of East Bengal in pre partitioned days by rail, road and river, were also interrupted due to bifurcation of the province. In comparison to roadways, the district of Jalpaiguri faced a strong obstacle for its railways for the Partition as all of its railways were closely connected to Eastern Bengal. First of all, the main line towards North Bengal termed as North Bengal State Railways, a branch line of Eastern Bengal State Railways that linked North Bengal with that of Calcutta in those days, was forced to stop operation as the entire southern portion of the route between Ranaghat and Haldibari, the extreme corner of Kooch Behar state after which the railways entered in Jalpaiguri district came to the hands of East Bengal. Similarly, a large part of the Barnes-Lalmanirhat section of Bengal Duars line had gone to East Bengal at the time of partition.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the railways ceased to be confined to the district.

Similar to the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, the district of Malda suffered from Partition from the angle of communication. Its main line of communication of railways and roadways were cut off. Godagari-Katihar section (76.50 miles within the district) of Eastern-Bengal Railways which was opened for traffic in 1909 were bifurcated by the Radcliffe Award. This section of meter gauge line had to be satisfied to operate till Singabad of Habibpur thana due to transfer of next pre-mentioned five thanas to East Bengal after Partition. Again, the main line of communication of the district connected by one of the main District Board Road extended between Nawabganj and English Bazar, total 32.50 miles in length, 12.79 miles of which was metalled, bridged and drained throughout; that had been maintaining the trading and administrative relations between Rajshahi district, Nawabganj, Sibganj, Gomostapur on one hand and the Diara and English Bazar on the other was also cut off.<sup>12</sup>

Same to the case of other divided district of Bengal in terms of the Radcliffe Award, newly appeared district of West Dinajpur had to face a great difficulty while its communication network was concerned. The age-old long run 'Murshidabad Road' which maintained the communication between Murshidabad and Dinajpur; thence between Dinajpur and Darjeeling (Darjeeling Road) from the beginning of colonial rule, was cut off by the division of the province. Similarly, all other district roads which communicated administrative and commercially important places of West Dinajpur with the district head quarter and other such places of post Partitioned Dinajpur district in pre independent days were also closed. While the district was well served by the Calcutta-Siliguri broad gauge line and Parvatipur-Katihar meter gauge line in pre-Partition days; the Radcliffe line having been drawn in such a way that the whole of the broad gauge line within the district had been fallen into East Bengal. Similarly, Parvatipur having been fallen into East Bengal by the decision of Bengal Boundary Commission, West Dinajpur had to satisfy her for having a segment of Parvatipur-Katihar meter gauge line confined between Radhikapur and Raiganj, 20 miles in length.<sup>13</sup>

Coochbehar in comparison to other districts of North Bengal was not included to West Bengal in 1947 as it was not a part of British empire in India though it was a feudatory and tributary state under the Government of British India. However, the 'Instrument of Accession' was signed between the Government of India and the ruler of Cooch Behar on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1949 by which 'the king of Cooch Behar ceded full and extensive authority, jurisdiction and power of the state to the Dominion Government of India'.<sup>14</sup> It became a part of the state of West Bengal on 1st January, 1950 'by means of an order under S. 290 (a) of the Government of India Act of 1935'; almost immediately after which the Government of West Bengal passed the Cooch Behar Act, 1950 for configuring Cooch Behar as a district with administrative set ups.<sup>15</sup>

The Radcliffe Award had no interest on Cooch Behar as it was not a part of Bengal Presidency. Before its merger with India Cooch Behar was surrounded by Assam in the east; Jalpaiguri in the north and north-west; by East Bengal now Bangladesh in the west, south and south-east. The district of Rangpur in East Bengal

surrounded the Coochbehar state from the west, south and south-east corner while the international boundary was laid down in 1947.<sup>16</sup> The Cooch Behar state however, possessed 'a tolerably good system of roads' during the Raj.<sup>17</sup> The road network of Cooch Behar in pre-Partition days was basically connected with its counterpart of the neighbouring district of Rangpur through which it maintained its connection with Calcutta, the headquarter of the then Bengal Presidency.<sup>18</sup> Similar to the neighbouring district of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar also suffered heavily from that of Partition. Its fundamental road scheme, as stated by Durgadas Majumdar, "to construct roads mainly in the north-south direction and establish connections with road systems of Rangpur on the one hand and of the Western Duars on the other, to utilize the river crossing facilities existing in these districts and establish the east-west communications by a circuitous route" - was completely upset.<sup>19</sup> While the railways was concerned, the state of Cooch Behar faced a total upset due to Partition. Unlike the district of Jalpaiguri, all of the branch lines of Cooch Behar remained moribund as most of the lines were coming from Rangpur district which was transferred to Pakistan due to Partition.

As a result of partition, it is clear that new born state of West Bengal came to be divided into 'two severed parts', the northern districts being separated from the southern tracts by a foreign territory.<sup>20</sup> It is also evident from the above paragraphs that all the ways of communications viz. roadways, railways and waterways of North Bengal had been split up due to Radcliffe Award. Thus the substantiality of the notion that the transport and communication network of North Bengal has been dislocated due to Partition- is justified. Therefore, the basic need after the Partition was to restore the broken communication network of North Bengal especially to link up the communication network of North Bengal with that of other parts of West Bengal by crossing the Ganges. A large portion of Calcutta-Siliguri Railway line having been intercepted by East Bengal, the only alternative route via Sakrigalighat, Manihari Ghat and Katihar with a slow crossing on the Ganges at Sakrigalighat was remained in the hands of travellers of North Bengal at the time of Partition.<sup>21</sup> Though there was an option from the passengers of West Dinajpur to travel through the railways from Hili to Darshana to communicate Calcutta<sup>22</sup> till 1952 when the passport system had been introduced by East Pakistan Government, 'the main

present need of the Northern region is an arterial road to connect it with Calcutta', starting from Tildanga, nearest railway station opposite the Ganges in the district of Murshidabad and leading upto Balurghat in West Dinajpur through 'Malda, Gazol, Banshihari, Gangarampur and Patiram with a branch from Bangshihari to railway station Kaliaganj on the Katihar-Parvatipur railway route'.<sup>23</sup> The Governmental report further argues for an extension road from Kaliaganj through Raiganj upto Bihar border to communicate Kisanganj of Purnia section of Bihar-Assam National Highway later on.<sup>24</sup>

Roads all over India, were classified after independence as National Highways, State Highways, District Board roads and other minor roads which were maintained by Public Works Department, Municipalities, District Boards, Union Boards and other agencies. But, West Bengal at that time was, as stated by A.K. Mitra, Superintendent of Census Operations and Joint Development Commissioner, West Bengal for 1951 census, "deficient even in arterial roads while the district board and village feeder roads are inadequate. The extent of this deficiency can be appreciated only by comparison with other states of India and the advanced countries of the west".<sup>25</sup> The roads though few in number, length and proportion in comparison to other types, those maintained by the Works and Buildings Department were in good condition. But, the condition of village roads mostly maintained by self-governing union boards were too worse to pass even in bullock carts between June to October. However, keeping in mind that there were also few fair weather motorable roads in the villages those are mostly maintained by the district boards. But the district board roads were hardly maintained regularly, even their surface were not smooth as mostly these roads were 'earth banks with or without soiling raised from low fields on either side'.<sup>26</sup> The following table shows the basic road statistics of four districts of North Bengal at the very beginning of independence.

Table: 1

Road mileage both metalled, Un-metalled and Village roads maintained by PWD, district and local boards at the time Partition (in miles) of North Bengal districts excluding Cooch Behar					
District	PWD	District and local authorities			
		Metalled	Unmetalled	Total	Village road
Dinajpur	14.6	34	10	44	617
Malda	0	41	240	281	519
Jalpaiguri	131.7	242	443	685	63
Darjeeling	370	21	332	353	NA

**Note:** Length of Metalled and Un-metalled road maintained by PWD are not found separately.

**Source:** Government of West Bengal: Provincial Statistical Bureau: Statistical Abstract: West Bengal 1947, Superintendent Government Printing, Alipore, West Bengal, 1948, pp-171.

It is clear from the above table that most of the roads of above mentioned districts were maintained by the District and local authorities like District Boards, Union Boards, Municipalities and others. These roads were mostly un-metalled. However for total mileage of roads Jalpaiguri district possessed the highest position. While the PWD was concerned, its sharing in total percentage of road maintenance in North Bengal districts was very limited except the district of Darjeeling as always. The notion of special fascination of road development of Darjeeling through the chief Government agency or PWD thus proves again. It is found from the table that Jalpaiguri, the only district in North Bengal more or less maintained an equal ratio in road development from all the road developing agencies.

The Government of West Bengal since its inception tried its best to develop road communication network of West Bengal. The Government tried to resume all

the works which were a part of the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of road development plan or 'Nagpur Plan' relating to Provincial Highways and Major District Roads of unified Bengal Government. But amongst such kind of 30 works of all-over Bengal, only one i.e. Gangarampur-Ibrahimpur District Road in present Dakshin Dinajpur district was the part of North Bengal.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, steps were also taken to draw up in consultation with I.G.P, a special Border Road Programme in the districts bordering on East Pakistan for meeting up same exigencies created in these areas by dislocation of normal means of road transportation due to division of the province.<sup>28</sup>

It was the 'Works and Buildings Directorate' which was responsible for road development and maintenance in Bengal presidency since the 1930's. The organization under that department underwent some changes since 1947. The Northern Circle was abolished. Of the three divisions under it viz. Rajshahi, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling, entire Rajshahi Division having fallen into the hands of East Bengal Government, other two divisions were amalgamated and the reconstituted Darjeeling Division having Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts within it; was placed under the Presidency Circle and the jurisdiction of Berhampur Division in Central Circle underwent slight changes by including West Dinajpur and Malda district to it.<sup>29</sup> However, a new division designated as the North Bengal Road Construction Division was opened with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1948 under the Development Circle for road construction in North Bengal. Sri A.K. Ghosh, Officiating Executive Engineer, was placed in charge of the division with effect from the date.<sup>30</sup>

In connection with the with the implementation of road development programme in West Bengal a separate Roads Organization was set up under the Works and Building Directorate in 1948 with a sanctioned post of Deputy Chief Engineer and Sri P. C. Neogi was appointed to that post with effect from 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1948.<sup>31</sup> Subsequently, a post of special Chief Engineer was created w.e.f. 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1948 for taking charge of the Road Development Branch and all the circles viz. Road Planning Circle, Road Construction Circle No-I and Road Construction Circle No-II came under the superintendence of that office. North Bengal Road Construction Division which was formerly under the Development

Circle was placed under the Road Construction Circle No-II. In addition to this, a new division under Road Construction Circle No-II designated as Malda Construction Division was opened on 9<sup>th</sup> June, 1948. Sri J.K. Banerjee was the first Executive Engineer of that division. Side by side, a new division designated as the Survey Division No-II under the Road Planning Circle was opened with effect from 11<sup>th</sup> June 1948. Since the merger of Cooch Behar state with Indian Federation and inclusion of Cooch Behar as a district in West Bengal, Cooch Behar State Public Works Department was merged with the Works and Building Directorate of West Bengal. After this merger steps were taken to absorb the staff of the former Cooch Behar Public Works Department in the Works and Building Directorate and Shri B.L. Garr, late Chief Engineer was appointed as the temporary Executive Engineer.

It's the time to have a look on road development programmes of North Bengal for the first three years of independence. The Government of India adopting the Twenty Year Road Development Programme of British Indian Government, gave utmost priority on constructing national highways. In this connection it is interesting to say that at the very early year of partition, portion of NH34 lying in the districts of Malda and West Dinajpur were not existed as it today. It was Bihar-Assam National Highway, presently NH31 and Siliguri-Gangtok National Highway were the national highways those traversed some portion of North Bengal. However, work was in progress on Kamala Tea Estate of Bagdogra section of Bihar-Assam National Highway which the Government of India desired to be thrown open for traffic by 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1948, but only 9.75 miles from Bagdogra to Bihar border was under execution by the Government agency of West Bengal till the end of March, 1949.<sup>32</sup> A direct road link was established between Bihar and Assam through the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar with the completion of works on a link up alignment of Bagdogra section in 1950.<sup>33</sup> Simultaneously, works of a new bridge over Rambijhora on Siliguri Gangtok National Highway was also in progress and nearing completion till march, 1950.

Table:2

Road mileage both metalled, Un-metalled maintained by PWD, district and local boards for first three years after Partition (in miles) of North Bengal districts excluding Cooch Behar					
District	District and local authorities			Total	
	PWD	District Board	Municipality	Metalled	Un-metalled
West Dinajpur	98.5	493	0	23.9	567.6
Malda	0	620	41.5	54	607.5
Jalpaiguri	260.5	521	15.2	453.7	343
Darjeeling	329.7	326.9	57.9	297.8	416.7

**Source:** Report on Administration of the Works and Buildings Department for the year 1947-48 to 1949-50, Government of West Bengal, Superintendent of Government Printing, Alipore.

Annual Administrative Report of Works and Buildings Department, Government of West Bengal fails to provide sufficient data regarding road development for the year 1947-48. However, it is found that special fund was allocated to West Dinajpur District from the Motor Vehicles Tax Receipts for repairing some deplorable roads with bridges under the district board. It was utilised by the Government agency. Between 1948-50, it was found that North Bengal attracted much importance of the Government and some important roads were started to be constructed from the provincial revenues. Besides, 82 miles of fair weather roads in West Dinajpur under the District Board was permanently taken over by the Government for administration, control and maintenance. Side by side, consequent upon the decision of employing heavy earth cutting and earth moving machineries both as a measure of paucity of labours, three sets of earth cutting machineries with ancillaries were purchased by the department in 1949. But heavy repairing of these machineries cost through private agencies, proposals were

forwarded to the Government for sanction for setting up a well-equipped Central Workshop with two field units at Krishnanagar of Nadia district and Malda.<sup>34</sup>

It is evident that the river communication in North Bengal almost collapsed caused by the Partition. The Governmental policy for stressing upon the road development by opening new routes side by side maintaining and repairing old ones with bridges also hindered the possibility of reviving the system. However, due to shortage of railway wagons for transporting road construction materials the Works and Buildings Department decided to use navigable water channels and issued permits to indigenous water carriers. Hence the report says, "Acute difficulty was nevertheless felt in movement of materials to North Bengal districts including Malda and West Dinajpur...in the matter of movement of coal for brick burning and steel to these districts. To supplement the normal movement amenities, the road and river routes were explored and the departmental watercrafts and trucks were employed for transshipment of materials over the Ganges and movement of materials from riverine points to interior areas particularly of Malda and West Dinajpur."<sup>35</sup>

It is true that railways always proves to be the cheapest mode of communication as against road communication. But it is surprising why the Government did not rely on development of railway system in the concerned districts rather to develop roadways communication in the early years of independence. Infact, the railway network in all the districts of North Bengal in pre independence period was valid for undivided North Bengal which communicated Calcutta, upper India and North East India with the suitable railway network extending in both parts of East and West Bengal at that time. But, due to partition that network had been collapsed and it became impossible to the Government to restore the same by any means in its earlier form. It was restored partially in 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1950 by the opening of Assam Link line.<sup>36</sup> Besides, it is clearly perceived from the Census Report of 1951 why the Government of India or its provincial counterpart of West Bengal tried to develop the road communication system of North Bengal. It is found from the report that Government's intention towards the construction of a trunk road or arterial road between Ganges and Balurghat through

Malda, Gazol, Bansihari, Patiram with two extensions- one from Bansihari to Raiganj via Kaliaganj and second from Gazol to Bamangola was to open up a vast agricultural tract and to link up existing busy trading centres. Similar to this, extension of Jalpaiguri-Siliguri State Highway upto Haldibari and Dewanganj hat at Cooch Behar district, extension of Bihar-Assam Highway through Cooch Behar district, road project from Mainaguri to Changrabandha in Cooch Behar were taken for improving tobacco and jute trade of Cooch Behar, side by side providing important road connection between Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts. At the same time rehabilitation of Siliguri-Gangtok National Highway, road projects of Bagdogra-Kamala Tea Estate and Matigara-Phansidewa road were also taken for improving Sikkim trade and jute trade of Siliguri region respectively.<sup>37</sup>

From the above discussion it is found that Partition of India in 1947 is rightly regarded as massive dislocation for North Bengal while its communication system was concerned. The Government of West Bengal since its inception had to trace upon the matter of development and re-establishment of the system not only to communicate North Bengal with other parts of West Bengal, but for administrative, commercial and strategic purposes. However, the progress of development of the work for the first three years in North Bengal as compared to the need was very slow due to lack of infrastructure and fund.

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