

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.