

Chapter – II

EARLY ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF JALPAIGURI DISTRICT: AN OVERVIEW

The name Jalpaiguri owes its origin to Bhutanese term “JE – LE – PI – GO – RI” probably meaning the place to exchange warm clothes, blankets etc. with other essential commodities between Bhutan and Jalpaiguri. Again there is a belief that the name of ‘Jalpaiguri’ has originated from the Bengali word ‘Jalpai’ meaning “olive” trees which was a familiar sight in this region till 1900 A.D¹. The suffix ‘guri’ means a place there by meaning where olive trees are available. The name can also be associated with ‘Jalpesh’ (Lord Shiva), the presiding deity of the Hindu Mythology in the entire region. It is deep-rooted in the minds of the locals in the surroundings.

The district Jalpaiguri is situated between 26°16’ and 27°0’ north latitudes and 88° 25’ and 89°53’ east longitudes. Before the partition of the district Jalpaiguri (Alipurduar district was made on 25th June 2014) the area of the district was 6227 sq. kms. But the agricultural area is only 2530.63 sq. kms. having the area in northern part of the district carpeted with tea, forests and other greeneries which give added beauty to this locality. The entire topography of the district is crisscrossed with the rivulets, rivers and hills. This narrow stretch of land (Jalpaiguri district) lying between Sikkim–Darjeeling Himalayas and Gangetic West Bengal has often evoked a sense of romanticism in many a heart since the early British rule veined by mighty rivers like the Tista, Torsha, Sonkosh, Jaldhaka, Raidak, Dyna, Neora, Dudua etc. This piece of land was known as a land of three ‘Ts’ i.e. – Tea, Timber and Tobacco. But the same has been partially changed by Tea, Timber and Tourism after 80’s of the 20th century. A major stretch of the northern area is bordered by Bhutan and hence the name of this area is Dooars which means the ‘Door’ or ‘Passage’. There were eighteen such passages which were used by the Bhutanese people to communicate with the riverine plains of the south for the cause of trade and commerce. Through these

passages people of Dooars and adjacent Bhutan would exchange their views on social aspects, religious activities and mostly commercial purposes². It is very old and trustworthy means of transaction on different significant aspects of the people living either side.

In the early ancient times the Jalpaiguri district formed a part of the kingdom of 'Pragjyotishpur'³ which included the regions of neighboring Coochbehar, Assam and the Rangpur district (now in Bangladesh). The mention of Jalpaiguri is found in the epic of 'Mahabharata' in the 10th century BC, when the king Bhagudutta, ruler of Pragjyotishpur joined the 'Kaurava Sena' in the epic battle of the 'Kuruksheetra' with his Kirat soldiers. His daughter Bhanumoti was the wife of the elder Kaurava, Prince Duryodhana⁴. The Kirats were actually the successors of Tibeto-Burmese speaking Bodo group of tribes. These groups were of the Tibeto-Mongoloid clans. They are called now Meches, Ravas, Kathams and other ab-original people of the district like, the Rajbanshis and the Kooches of the past. According to Prof. Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyaya, Koches too were one of the Bodo tribes. However, the word 'Pragjyotishpur' and the Kirat mentioned in many other ancient texts such as the Ramayana, Harivansha, Brahmandapuran, Raghuvansha etc. (But no reference to the land and people of the present Jalpaiguri is available till the 7th century AD). Though it is based on the Mahabharata or Puranas, it is not acceptable by the modern research persons.

Later *Pragjyotishpur* came to be known as the kingdom of Kamrup was extended towards the Kortoya River to the west. The third reputed king of Kamrup was Jalpeswar mentioned in '*Yogin Tantra*' who flourished in the 1st century AD⁵. According to one legend the *Jalpesh Linga* appeared first during his time and he had built a temple on the site at Jalpesh (the present Jalpesh Temple). Prithwu Raja, the next king has been mentioned by tradition whose capital may still be seen at Bhitargarh, south of the road from Jalpaiguri to Tetuliya. In the later period, there is mention of a prince named Dharma Pala who ruled from West Kamrup to the river Brahmaputra and the traces of his rule could be found in the Coochbehar state. Then we found a change of the dynasty under Niladhvaj who founded Kamtapur⁶. Other two reputed kings were Ckakradhwaj and Nilambar.

But the dynasty fell down before an invasion by Hussain Shah, the Afghan Governor of Bengal who ruled from 1497 to 1521 AD. But when Hussain Shah subsequently undertook an expedition into Assam then he failed and disastrously was defeated by an incursion of the wild semi-hilly tribes, the most prominent of whom were the 'Koch'. Viswa Singha was the founder of the kingdom of Coochbehar in 1496 AD⁷. He was son of Hariya Mandal, a capabal Hindu Mech chieftain of Western Assam. His son Naranarayan (1534 – 1587) expanded the borders of Coochbehar to the extent of becoming an empire in Eastern India. But in subsequent times following their internal weakness, the Koch kingdom was captured by the Bhutanese.

The history of the Roykot dynasty of Jalpaiguri is much linked with the history of the Koch dynasty of Coochbehar. So as an embrayonic form and origin the analysis and explanation of the Koch dynasty plays a significant role.

According to the documentary book – “*Roykot Bansha O Tahar Rajyer Sankhipta Bibaran*” authored by Sri Jagadindradev Roykot, Sisu Singha, the elder brother of the Koch king Biswa Singha on the way to invasion of Gaur won a wide forest region of the Mahananda – Kortoya – Tista and Jaldhaka rivers⁸. The ruler Sisu Singha set up his official headquarter (capital) at Baikunthyapur which lies 10 miles north of Jalpaiguri Sadar. This Baikunthyapur shortly came to be known as Baikunthyapur Pargana and Sisu Singha became known as Sisudev Roykot⁹.

The word ‘*Roykot*’ originated from the *Rajpat* (a part of royal administration) of Koch dynasty. It is said that the elder brother Sisu Singha blessed his brother’s spouse to be the queen of Coochbehar. Thus he sacrificed his kingship for his younger Biswa Singha. For this great sacrifice King Biswa Singha entitled him (Sisu Singha) as Roykot. According to Dr. Hunter – the term Roykot means the Premier and Army General¹⁰. This shows that the Roykots were subjects for the Koch dynasty. But the researcher Dr. Nirmal Roychoudhury opined that both the Roykot and the Koch dynasty enjoyed equal royal status and would show high dignity to each other. This relationship between the two dynasties existed intact for the following five generations from the post Sisudev Roykot’s reign, says Munshi Jadunath Ghosh in his books on Coochbehar¹¹.

According to the researcher Nirmal Ch. Roy – the relation between two dynasties started deteriorating since the reign of Manikyadev Roykot. Meanwhile the Koch king was defeated and accepted the dominance of the Mughal dynasty. But at that time Shibdev Roykot did not accept the dominance of the Mughals. Later on the great powerful Roykot Mahidev strengthened his dominance on Bhot – Koch and Roykot politics by dint of his own power. At that time the Koch king Modnarayan was invaded by the Bhutanese. Then Mahidev Roykot defeated the Bhutanese and saved the Coochbehar Kingdom. Thereafter the Roykot Bhujdev managed the total administration independently from the capital Baikunthyapur. Later on came the history of five successive generations basically the history of contradiction among the Mughal–Bhot–Koch and Roykots. Since 1777 Darpadev Roykot surrendered to the Bhutanese king Devraj and was bound to hand over the possession of 77 mouzas to him¹². During his (Darpadev) time the kingship of the Roykot dynasty started dissolving and the rule of zaminders came up.

Later on the next Roykot Jayantadev shifted his capital from Baikunthyapur to Jalpaiguri to avoid the Bhutanese aggression. Thereafter Sarbadev Roykot defeated the Bhutanese and recovered the lost 77 mouzas of Baikunthyapur. Then the king Bhutan had a good alliance with the British. As a result the then British East India Company being revengive accused Sarbadev Roykot and confined him at Rangpur Jail for three years. After the confinement Sarbadev Roykot returned to Jalpaiguri and set up the present palace. Then there arose internal conflicts within the Roykot family for being the Zaminder and the conflict continued up to the Partition (1947) and independence of India. However, since 1885 to Partition (1947) the history of Jalpaiguri remains around the three great personalities – Prasannyadev Roykot, Rani Asrumoti and culturally educated Jagadindradev Roykot.

In the colonial period or pre-partition (1947) era, Jalpaiguri was the northern most districts in Bengal. The district was bounded on the west by the Purnia district of Bihar, on the east by Goalpara district of Assam and a short of Coochbihar district. On the north it was bounded by hilly kingdom Bhutan and Darjeeling district and on the south by the district of Rangpur and Dinajpur (now

in Bangladesh). By the Radcliff Award of 1947 the five police stations, namely – Patgram, Tetuliya, Pachagar, Debiganj and Boda of the district went to East Pakistan (now in Bangladesh)¹³. Through the Radcliff Award comprising a total area of 672 sq. miles were transferred to East Pakistan¹⁴.

At that time the district consisted of two well–defined geographical and historical administrative tracts. One tract lay on the west of the Tista River to Patgram which came under the British rule after the East India Company had received the Dewani (1765). In 1931 the total area of this tract was 879 sq. miles. The other tract, known as Western Dooars lying on the river Tista, had an area of 2053 sq. miles was taken away from Bhutan at the end of the Anglo–Bhutan War of 1864–65. However, in this perspective of colonial administrative history of the Bengal the new district Jalpaiguri came into existence on 1st January, 1869 by the amalgamation of the Jalpaiguri Sub–Division of Rangpur district (Notification 8th December, 1868) with the Dooars region which was annexed by the British India Govt¹⁵.

But the new district has also two well–defined tracts of different administrative and economic arrangements. One is the Regulation tract which was the portion separated from Rangpur district, as it was administered under the laws and regulations in force in Bengal under the British rule. Another the Dooars was known as the Non–Regulation tract administered under the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874. By this Act Collector–Magistrate or Head of the District Administration, known as Deputy Commissioner was assisted by two Sub–Divisional Officers (SDO) and Superintendent of Police (SP) who was the officer–In-charge of the district police administration¹⁶.

Primordial History of Dooars

The Dooars are the alluvial flood plains in North Eastern India that lie to the south of the outer foothills of the Himalayas and north of the Brahmaputra River Basin. This region was about 30 km. (19 mile) wide and stretches were about 350 km. (220 mile) from the west Tista River in West Bengal to the east

Dhansiri River in Assam¹⁷. The region forms the gate way to Bhutan. It is also known as the part of the “Terai–Dooars Savana and Grasslands Eco–region”¹⁸. In this region there are 18 passages or doors or gateways between the hills in Bhutan and the plains in India. This vast region divided into two parts. Geographically the regions where 7 doors or passages were between the River Dhansiri on the east and Manas on the west is called – ‘Eastern Dooars’ or ‘Assam Dooars’ and the rest 11 dooars or passages were between the River Manas on the east and Teesta on the west is called – ‘Wastern Dooars’ or ‘Bengal Dooars’¹⁹.

The Dooars region of Jalpaiguri district form a parallelogram with a length, east and west of 86.7 miles and breadth, north to south of about 38 miles. The total area by the present survey has been found to be 3268 sq. miles or 774,208.16 acres, excluding tea lands and forest lands, which forms part of this settlement²⁰. It lies between the 26^o13’ to 27^o north latitude, and between 88^o30’ to 89^o55’ east longitude. It is bounded by Darjeeling district and Bhutan to the north, The Manas River and Goalpara district of Assam to the east, Coochbehar and Baikunthapur Pargana of the Jalpaiguri district to the south and the Tista River to the west.

On the eve of Partition (1947) there were four *Tahasils* comprising the whole of eleven parganas lying on the east of the Tista River. These four *Tahasils* were Maynaguri, Falakata, Alipurduar and Bhalka²¹. These four *Tahasils* comprised of eleven *Parganas*. There were 182 *taluks* under the jurisdiction of these eleven *parganas*, and these *taluks* are composed of 11,056 *Jotes* of different sizes. From west to east Western Dooars have eleven doors or passages; these were 1) Dalimkote, 2) Zumerkot or Mainaguri, 3) Chamurchi, 4) Lucki or Lakshi, 5) Baxa or Buxa, 6) Bhulka or Bhalka, 7) Guma or Gommar, 8) Reepoo, 9) Chirang 10) Bagh and 11) Bijni²².

The adjacent area between the River Teesta and Mechi is historically called ‘*Morang*’. The *Morang* is also divided into two parts, respectively the area between the River Teesta and Mahananda called ‘Eastern *Morang*’, and the rest between the River Mahanda and Mechi called ‘Western *Morang*’²³. The narrow land *Morang* between the borders of Bangladesh on the east and Nepal–Bhutan on

the north–west looks like a ‘*Chicken’s Neck*’. Geographically this narrow bordering settlement is of optimum importance to the people of Dooars as well as the Govt. of India. This area is rich in natural resources having dense forest, tea gardens and other seasonal agro–products. The people living in this area are of different cast, creed and languages. Many a times the local people raised voice for separate statehood based on language and religion. Such narrow regionalism must not be encouraged for wider national interest of our country.

However, no reference or historical evidence to the land and people of the Dooars is available till the 9th century AD. From some texts we are able to know that the Dooars was controlled by the Koch dynasty till the early period of the 18th century. In this time Bhutan took possession of this territory later in the wake of quarrels among the members of the Kochbehari Raj Family. Finally, the Western Dooars was annexed by the British in 1865 by the Sinchula Treaty (18th Nov, 1865) after the Indo–Bhutan War (1864 – 65) under the command of Captain Hedayat Ali²⁴. The entire Dooars was into two parts. The eastern part was merged with Goalpara district in Assam and the western part was turned into a new district named Western Dooars which became Jalpaiguri district in the year 1869 (1st January)²⁵. After independence and partition in India in 1947, the Dooars acceded into the dominion of India and it merged with the union of India shortly afterwards in 1949.

However, the Dooars, long ahead of the colonial period was almost an inhabitable land of human being. The larger part of Dooars was full of ferocious wild animals, jungles, rivers and tributaries. The density of human population was so low that no one could find any shelter in the time of approaching hazard. So, questions of developed communication like today was mere a dream. It was mainly because of all over impenetrable forests, deep jungles inhabited by poisonous animals and insects. The geo-physical condition of this vast area was totally hostile to human settlement. As a result the people in this locality used to suffer from malaria, black water fever and many other similar incurable diseases. They were so helpless and hopeless.

Well known regional writer and historian of North Bengal Dr. Ananda Gopal Ghosh, writes in his book that once upon a time Dooars basically was a ‘no man’s land’ (*Pandav barjita desh*). He also opined that at the pre-colonial age it was like a place of ‘*Tanganika of Africa*’²⁶. According to the Colonial Masters - “This was a land only for Saints or the Saitans”. Again they (Colonial Masters) commented - “The British in India at that time not unduly worried about either Saints or Saitans. Although the Dooars was the unhealthiest district, in which malaria and black water fever were rife; climatically there was much to recommend it is a tea-growing area”²⁷.

The economic activities of Dooars started from the introduction of tea plantation. The first tea estate in Jalpaiguri district established at Gajaldoba in 1874 by the British manager Brugham Saheb which close to Malbazar (18 km.)²⁸. Aftermath within a short time entire Malbazar area is covered by numerous tea gardens i.e.-Haihaipather Tea Estate, Toonbari T.E., Songachhi T.E., Mal T.E., Baradighi T.E. Raja T.E., Needam T.E., Newglenko T.E. etc. Within short time entire Dooars was covered by numerous tea gardens and with the rise of tea gardens the socio-economic and demographic pattern of Dooars was going to be changed and this place became a centre of mutual transfer in North Bengal.

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