

Urbanization of the Siliguri town: Understanding the transformation from Union Board to Municipal Corporation (1915-1994)

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Abstract :

Siliguri situated in the foothills of the Himalayas and about eight hundred and forty two feet above the sea level is now a part of the district of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal .During the colonial period there were three police stations under Siliguri subdivision i.e Siliguri, Phansidewa and Khoribari. Siliguri is termed as the uncrowned capital of Northern part of Bengal popularly known as North Bengal. Some notable scholars and academicians have contributed in the studies of urbanization of Darjeeling hill town and very few academic works have been done. The focus was largely on the growing commercial activities of Siliguri after post- partition era. Certain areas of study have not been touched. The proposed article intends to understand the various issues or factors which transformed Siliguri from a sleepy hamlet to a Municipal Corporation within a very short period during 20th century and to find out the importance of its strategic geographical location in the context of ongoing Indo-Chinese conflict after Doklam.

Key Words: Sikkim, Battrish Hazari, Raikat, zamindar, Siliguri, railway, Bangladesh, Municipality , S.J.D.A., jotes, wards, Committee, tea.

Introduction:

Siliguri was a village in the south of Kurseong sub-division near the left bank of the river Mahananda constituting 748 souls in 1901. The village was situated on fairly high ground and its name meant the “the stony site”, presumably because the bed of the Mahananda which is close by is a mass of broken stone brought down from the hills.¹

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Dozey adds that, “Siliguri or the stony plain, according to tradition derived its name from the stones which once lay in myriads on the bed of the Mahanady river which flows to the north of the town.....It is roughly in the centre of the Bengal Terai, which was acquired from Sikkim in 1850.”² Though, later the name of this place was different and the earlier writers, travellers, historians called it as Sannyasikata or Baikunthapur or Battrish Hazari.

A dense jungle touching modern Siliguri is still known as Baikunthapur Forest Range. In Hunter’s *Statistical Account of Bengal* Siliguri’s alternative name was Sannyasikata. Hunter did not mention about the name of Siliguri in his writings. J.D. Hooker in his travelogue described that “Siligoree stands on the verge of the Terai, that low malarious belt which skirts the base of the Himalaya.”³ Hunter also noted that this place was less inhospitable than the northern part of the river Mahananda and chiefly inhabited by the Koch people.⁴ In the words of L.S.S. O’ Malley it is “a tract of reeking moisture and rank vegetation, it has always been dreaded by Europeans, who used, in the days before the railway, to hurry through it as fast they could travel, and if possible in the early morning, in order to get beyond the fatal fever zone.”⁵ Actually in pre-colonial period this place was considered to be a no man’s land situated near the border of Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and Koch Kingdom. The refugees of justice or the Sannyasis were used to take shelter in this dense forest of Baikunthapur till the end of the 19th century.

BAIKUNTHAPUR TO SILIGURI

The Raikats of Baikunthapur⁶ were the collateral branch of the royal family Cooch Behar. During the time of its first two rulers Viswa Singha and Naranarayan Raikat Siswasinhga, a step brother of Maharaja Viswasingha had constructed a house near Siliguri, that part of the country being given to him as “*pet bhata*” (appanage) during the middle of the sixteenth century.⁷ Charu Chandra Sanyal also ascribed this theory in his book entitled *The Rajbansi of North Bengal* and stated “His (Siswasinhga) capital was first built at Siliacguri (Siliguri) in the village of Debgram.....The capital was called Niz-Baikunthopur.”⁸

In course of time, the Baikunthapur Estate temporarily came under the Dewani of English, East India Company and subsequently introduced Permanent Settlement of land

revenue in this region. Nevertheless, in 1621 under the reign of Mahi Dev, the 5th *Raiyat* of Baikunthapur signified his dependence by refusing to hold the umbrella over the Cooch Behar *Raja* at the coronation of Bir Narayan and also refused to pay the annual tribute. In 1773, under the reign of Derpa Dev, the 13th *Raiyat* of Baikunthapur with the help of some bandits basically called Sannyasis and in collaboration with the Bhutias continued attack on the territory of Cooch Behar and nearby possessions of the East India Company. Captain Stuart was sent to subdue the rising and he defeated both Derpa Rev and the Sannyasis and took possession of some parts of Baikuthapur Estate. In the year 1774, after a treaty of Bhutan with East India Company the *Raiyat* Derpa Dev was placed as an ordinary *zamindar* and was assessed of rupees thirty two thousand per year. The *Zamindary* was thereafter named *Batrishazari*.⁹ In this connection it is to be mentioned that during the political struggle between Raikat Derpa Dev and Rudranarayan, the Raja of Cooch Behar, Derpa Dev had brought five thousands soilders -Sannyasis in his capital Baikunthapur. Derpa Dev had captured the fort of Rahimganj with the help of these Sannyasis and in this confrontations many Sannyasis were killed and this changed the name of the place from Baikunthapur to Sannysikhata.¹⁰ And after the formation of Jalpaiguri district on 1st January 1869 with the incorporation of Baikanthapur region and later due to some administrative arrangement made by the Colonial Government in 1880, mainly a tract of the southern part of the river Mahananda became a part of the district of Darjeeling popularly known as the modern Siliguri and the town of Siliguri came into being when the administrative headquarters of Terai sub-division was transferred from Hansqua near Phansidewa to Siliguri at the same period. As a result of this gradually Siliguri started to have a sub-jail, the *kachary*, post office, the S.D.O bungalow, a dispensary¹¹ and many new administrative offices and in this regard, in the early part of the 20th Century, the colonial government drew a structural map for the future planning of a growing “Siliguri” as a transit point.¹²

The development of Siliguri as a town is clearly linked with the development of Sanatorium town of Darjeeling and the flourishing tea industry in this region in the colonial period. Prior to that, Siliguri was a small market centre on the trade route of wool from Tibet. The hill resort of Darjeeling was chosen as a Sanatorium by the British

and the importance of Siliguri lay in its being the transit station for onward journey from the plains to the hills.¹³ In an Eastern Bengal State Railway handbook published in the first quarter of the 20th century describe this place as “The village (Siliguri) is the terminus also of the cart road from Kalimpong and Sikkim, and is thus the focus of the local trade- but is known to the traveler only as a stepping stone on the way to the hills.”¹⁴ Siliguri then a rural settlement gradually acquired a few shops to cater the needs of the transit passengers. The roads and railway connecting Siliguri with Darjeeling were developed next. Actually the geographical location of Siliguri served as a gateway to Darjeeling hills on the one hand and also as a door to Dooars and north eastern part of India gave to its importance.

The first measure step taken to improve communication was the deputation of Lieutenant Napier to construct a road from Siliguri to Darjeeling. This was carried out from 1839 to 1842 and the road now known as the Old Military Road, which is still be seen from Pankhabari to Kurseong and thence on to Dow Hill and Ghum. The section of this road is also now known as the Matigara-Kurseong road. This road was not practicable for wheeled traffic and the development of Darjeeling and the cost of transporting military stores led to search for an alternative road. The result of this search is known as the Hill Cart Road which starts from Siliguri and ends in Darjeeling town. The construction was started in 1860 and the road was completed in 1869. Meanwhile decision was taken to construct a road from the Ghat of Ganges to Siliguri at a cost of Rs.14,68,000. This road is 126 miles long and connects Sahebganj to Siliguri. Therefore, Siliguri became the terminal points of the Ganges Darjeeling Road and Hill Cart Road. Importance of Siliguri as it became a junction on the two roads one leading to the north and the other to south.

In 1860 the East Indian Railway had been extended up to Sahebganj and thereafter it was only necessary to travel by road north of this point in order to get to Darjeeling. In 1878 the Northern Bengal State Railway was opened for traffic up to Jalpaiguri and by the end of that year it had been extended to Siliguri. In 1881 the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Company had opened its steam tramway for traffic up to Darjeeling.¹⁵ Apart from this the *Darjeeling Himalayan Railway a stream tramway*

opened in 1881 by Mess Gillanders Arbuthnot & Co of Calcutta¹⁶ and was also extended to Kishanganj. However, Siliguri was not connected with the Dooars areas but within some period the work was taken up by the *Bengal Duars Railway* and in 1902 Siliguri was connected with Bagrakot and Assam.¹⁷ The Siliguri- Kishanganj line as stated earlier, further extended towards South-west almost upto Nepal border.¹⁸ An Assistant Settlement Officer of Darjeeling Terai states that this railway system has increased the facility of exporting jute from the Terai and importing rice and other articles from Calcutta and the neighbouring districts.¹⁹ However the Colonial Government took several initiatives to construct bridges over the important rivers to connect plains with the hill. In 1892-1893 a bridge was constructed over the Panchanai river on the 4th mile of Darjeeling Hill Cart Road and was opened for both car and railway traffic.²⁰ Moreover, bridges over the river Mahananda and the river Balasan rendered great facility for well communication system of plains with hills.²¹

EMERGENCE OF SILIGURI: UNION BOARD TO MUNICIPALITY

In the beginning of the 20th century Siliguri was just a village but an important village due to its geographical location. Even L.S.S. O' Malley never termed Siliguri as town, in 1907 he stated that in the district of Darjeeling there are only two towns namely Darjeeling and Kurseong but by the end of the said century it emerged as the most important town of the North Bengal as well as the eastern part of India.

In 1907 the Sub-Divisional headquarter was established in Siliguri. The people from different parts of the Sub-Continent had centered around Siliguri particularly due to tea, tourism, timber and transport. The attraction of the business prospect removed the fear of malaria from the hearts of business loving people. Besides tea and timber companies like Mark Mayer, North Bengal Jute Mill, Rsim & Co, Landen Cleark, Raily Brothers and others related with jute business were established in Siliguri.²² These business activities in the southern bank of the river Mahananda had played very important role for the rise of Siliguri as a commercial centre of North Bengal. These commercial activities also changed the demographic structure of Siliguri. So to fulfill the need of growing population in 1915 a "Sanitary Committee" was formed in Siliguri. The first President of this Committee was a renowned lawyer Surendranath Bhattacharjee and

Secretary Kartik Chandra De.²³ To clear the garbage from non-sanitary latrines and clean the roads were the main responsibilities or activities of this Committee. Actually its initial activities involved overseeing the sweeper in the disposal of night soil near the banks of Mahannanda and Phuleswari rivers and later on Tikiapara. The method of disposal was simple; digging the ground, depositing and covering it. In 1925 an Anglo-Nepali Christian named George Mahbert Subba was elected as the President of this Committee and under his Presidentship provision was made for night lamps on wooden poles on the major roads. Lalit Mohan Dhoni popularly known as Khapachand was the main architect of this job.

In Siliguri transport by modern vehicle started after the World War I in 1919. It was first time used by Mr. Stephen, who had four motor vehicles took passenger to Darjeeling. The fare of each passenger to Darjeeling was Rs. 19. However, the bus service of the Terai areas of Darjeeling started in 1925 in the route of Siliguri-Naxalbari.²⁴ The name of the first passenger bus was "Siliguri Motor Service". The owner of the bus was Ganeshram Prasad and the first driver of the said bus was Md. Faridh.²⁵ Moreover, before the formation of Municipality in Siliguri there was only one rikshaw which was pulled by a Bihari person named Janakiram. But after the formation of Municipality there was existence of 450 licensed by-cycles in Siliguri town.²⁶

Siliguri was quite an isolated place with a fewer number of people in 1920s. Sree Satyendranarayan Majumder, a great revolutionary who came in Siliguri in 1920 from Mathabhanga of Cooch Behar wrote some passages in his auto-biography about the isolation of Siliguri during those days. According to him, at that time the population of Siliguri was about 3000 to 4000 soul and most of them were Bengalis along with some Bihari community.²⁷ Some of them opened shops nearby to cater the needs of the growing population. On the other hand, some of the Bengalis came with the Maharaja of Burdawan and some came from Rangpur and other adjoining district to serve as clerks, in the Railway stations, tea gardens, jute godowns, saw mills and other various activities in Siliguri and adjoining areas. The Marwaris worked as money lenders apart from doing some commercial transactions.²⁸ The exorbitant rate of interest rapidly snow balled the original amount of debt making repayment of the total amount next to impossible. As

debts remained mostly unpaid, the Marwaris started acquiring land near Siliguri railway station in lieu of the sum lent. The land holdings near the Town Station, almost totally belong to the Marwaris who have adopted a policy to sell the land to the Marwaris only after 1947. The land value has increased tremendously. In Khalpara, the Marwari dominated area the land value per *khata* (720 Sq.Feet) was less than Rs.10 in 1920 and after the partition of India in 1947 the land value has raised enormously.²⁹

It may be noted that during this period the Burdwan Road, Station Feeder Road, Hill Cart Road and Hospital-Court Road had stone and brick surface roads. The other parts of the present Corporation area had a sporadic habitation, uninhabited land and jungles. Khalpara with many other areas of Siliguri was covered with water and water-hyacinth for most of the year.³⁰ With this growing population the barter economy of the rural areas of Terai transformed into market economy. Siliguri gradually emerged as the best centre for buying and selling agricultural commodities. A weekly market was opened in Siliguri.³¹ An Assistant Settlement Officer during the first quarter of the 20th century observed that “There is no town properly so called in the Terai.” He further stated that in comparison of the thinness of the population there were extraordinarily flourishing centres of trade in Terai. *Hats* (local weekly market) were gradually developed in Matigara, Naxalbari, Panighata, Siliguri and Phansidewa. Apart from jute Siliguri was the largest markets for the consumers of essential commodities.³² Though the population of Siliguri till the thirties of the past century had increased gradually but its overall development was not noteworthy, yet till the first decades of the 20th century there was only one single private owned two-storied *pucca* building named “Harihar Kutir” owned by a lawyer and *jotedar* Harasundar Majumdar³³ on the station Feeder Road. Apart from some Government buildings like railway quarter, hospital etc almost all the houses were made out of wood which was easily available and in this earthquake-prone region the practice of making brick houses was restricted by the Colonial Government which proves that Siliguri though had by then a larger population; there had been little improvement in its performance.

Siliguri for the first time in 1931 was declared as IV class town by the Census of India.³⁴ According to the Census Report of 1931, the total number of population in

Siliguri town was 6067 persons among them 4182 males and 1885 were females. Siliguri town covered an area of 3.6 sq. miles and the density of population was 1685 persons per sq. mile and the total number of occupied houses was 1604 in numbers.³⁵ In 1941 it had a population of 10,487 which shows a 73 percent increase over the previous Census of 1931, among 7121 males and 3366 persons were females. With an area of 3.6 square miles, it has a population density of 2913 persons per square mile.³⁶ Among them the total number of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe population was 839 (excluding Nepali tribes) in Siliguri town. Out of these 140 were belong to the Rajbanshis and the three major tribal population of Terai were 14 souls belong to the Santal, 05 were the Mundas and 02 were belong to the Oraon community. Nepali speaking population consisted 856 souls (with 256 persons remain unstated) and out of them 05 were Manger, 39 were Newar, 34 were Tamang, 49 were Gurung and 54 were Sunawar was the prominent.³⁷ The following table (no 1) will exhibit the real picture:

TABLE NO:1
POPULATION OF SILIGURI TOWN IN 1941

Details of the race, caste and tribes of the population of Siliguri Town.

Muslims		1961
Scheduled Castes		839
Menials	523	
Rajbanshis	140	
Others	150	
Sandals (Tribes)	14	
Meches (Tribes)	0	
Oraons (Tribes)	2	
Mundas (Tribes)	35	
Christians (Tribes)	0	
Others (Tribes)	5	
Plains Hindus (Other than Scheduled Castes)	6758	
Bengalis	3302	
Marwaris	303	
Punjabis	114	
Hindi-speaking	2968	
Others	71	
Nepalis		856
Rai	31	
Sherpa	3	
Chettri	200	

Sanyasi	0	
Brahman	46	
Bhujel	1	
Yogi	3	
Christains	1	
Others	9	
Caste unstated	256	
Manger (Tribes)	65	
Newar (Tribes)	39	
Tamang (Tribes)	34	
Damai (Tribes)	6	
Gurung (Tribes)	49	
Limbu (Tribes)	18	
Kami (Tribes)	20	
Sunawar (Tribes)	54	
Yakha (Tribes)	0	
Sarki (Tribes)	8	
Gharti (Tribes)	0	
Others (Tribes)	13	
Other Hillmen	12	
Bhutia and Tibetan	10	
Lepcha Buddhist	2	
Bhutia Christian	0	
Lepcha Christian	0	
Others	0	
Indian Christians	42	
British	4	
Total	10487	

[Source: *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, A. J. Dash, Government Press, Alipore, Calcutta, 1947, p.86.]

This urban expansion has taken place in spite of unhealthy and insanitary conditions and has no doubt been due to Siliguri's increasing importance as a focus of communications. The town's population is just under 12 per cent of the population of the Sub-division.³⁸ In March 1938 Union Board was formed to replace the Sanitary Committee. The first President of this board was lawyer Laksminarayan Majumdar. He was followed by George Mahbert. Till 1949 George Mahbert was the President of this board.³⁹ It was the only Union Board in the Darjeeling district and has the usual nine members of whom six were Hindus and three were belong to the Muslims. The Board spends about Rs. 1,400 on Chaukidars and establishment and for other purposes raised

Rs. 5,400 in taxation and received grants of about Rs. 1,600 in 1940-41. The following table (no : 2) will exhibit the main items of expenditure for the year 1940-41:

TABLE NO :2

EXPENDITURE OF THE UNION BOARD OF SILIGURI IN 1940-41

Item	Rs.
Roads	350
Drainage	325
Conservancy	4500
Sanitation	540
Schools	400
Dispensaries	200
Miscellaneous	1300

[Source: *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, A. J. Dash, Government Press, Alipore, Calcutta, 1947, p.245.]

A.J Dash observed that though Siliguri from the late thirties of the 20th century witnessed rapid urbanization but the drainage and water supply were quite inadequate.⁴⁰ Most probably it's haphazard and without having proper direction are the main reasons for these defects.⁴¹ In 1938 the conservancy of the Siliguri bazar area was handed over to the Union Board for which a contribution of Rs. 2,000 was made by the D.I.F.⁴²

SILIGURI: MUNICIPALITY TO CORPORATION

The Siliguri Municipality was established on 24th May, 1949 as per the Gazette Notification of the Government of West Bengal dated 29th April 1949 under the Bengal Municipal Act of 1932. Initially, it was located in an abandoned small tin roofed single storied house of Mohammad Khudabox on the Hill Cart Road, opposite of the present Meghdoot Cinema Hall. The first Chairman of the Municipality was appointed by the Government. In those days the S.D.O by virtue of the post used to be the Chairman of the Municipality. Accordingly the first Chairman was the then S.D.O of Siliguri Sachindra Mohan Guha and the Vice-Chairman was Briendra Nath Roy Sarkar. Besides the above

the other State Government nominated Commissioners were Abanindranath Bhattacharjee, Pradut Kumar Basu, Bimal Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Digendranath Roy Sarkar, Manturam Agarwala, Bindheawari Misra, Rampada Chattopadhyaya, Dr. Khirodh Nath Chattopadhyay, Dr. Gopal Chandra Ghosh and George Mahbert. According to the rules of that day three-fourth of the Commissioners were elected and the rest one-fourth were appointed by the Deputy Commissioner. The Chairman used to be a Government servant, but this procedure was abolished in 1956.⁴³ On 26th October 1952, the then Governor of West Bengal, Harendra Kumar Mukhopadhyaya laid the foundation stone of the “Poura Bhawan” at its present location near Siliguri court which was inaugurated by Bireswas Majumdar on 26th January 1960.

The first elected Chairman under the new amendment Act was Jagadish Chandra Bhattacharya. Thereafter, leaving aside administrator Chairman on few occasion, the successive Chairman of the Siliguri Municipality were Jiban Krishna Dutta, Krishnendra Narayan Choudhury, Swapan Kumar Sarkar, Asok Narayan Bhattacharya and Bikash Ghosh. In 1994 with the conversion of Siliguri Municipality to Siliguri Municipal Corporation (S.M.C), the nomenclature of Chairmen changed to Mayor. The Siliguri Municipality started with 8 wards and gradually increased to 19 in 1964, 30 in late 80s of the past century and finally 47 in 1994 when it was elevated to the status of a Corporation.⁴⁴ It had no Standing Committee function in the decades of 1950s and 1960s. The administrative set up of the Municipality comprised of five departments namely General Administration, Collection, License, Public Works and Sanitation and Public Health.⁴⁵

Till the early 70s of the past century the main responsibility of the Municipality was to clean the road, providing electric light, sanitation and others various reforms. In December 1974 Krishnendu Narayan Chaudhuri was elected as the Chairman of the Municipality. In this period due to enormous growth of population in Siliguri Municipality various steps were taken by the Municipality. Rehabilitating the Harijans at Ashrampara, constructing roads, supplying water, providing sanitation, lightening the main roads, watering the roads in summer was done during this period. The major development plans which were taken during this period are as follows:

- i) Proper town planning and water sewage system, to include Shaktigarh, Dabgram, New Jalpaiguri, Hyderpara, Ghogomali and some other adjoining areas of Darjeeling district but administratively belong to Jalpaiguri district came under Siliguri Municipality.
- ii) To set up a Central Bus terminus in the vacant land of Burma Shell, Caltex and Standard Vaccam Oil Company on the southern side of the Town Station.
- iii) To set up markets at Pradhan Nagar, Rabindra Nagar, Babupara and also at Road Station
- iv) To build up a stadium at Tilak Maidan which was at that time was owned by the Defence Department and a proposal was adapted to made a fly-over near *kachari* road.

Under the Chairmanship of Swapan Kumar Sarkar the foundation stone of the Kanchanjunga Krirangan was laid in place of Tilak Maidan and consequently some development plans was taken like to reform the roads adjoining the Maidan, to construct a second rail gate beside Town Station and prepare the connecting roads and broadened Kachari road, Station Feeder Road, Burdwan Road, Bidhan Road and Sevok Road. The plan to bifurcate the only broad road of the city i.e Hill Cart Road, from Road Station to Howrah Petrol Pump near hotel Air view was undertaken during this period. The road was decorated by sodium vapour lamps and tube lights and foot path was constructed. Vapour Lamp was also used in adjoining roads of the Municipality and on Bidhan Road, Haren Mukherjee Road, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Road, Station Feeder Road and Sevok Road. Some parks, libraries, markets, community halls were established by the Municipality.

In 1982 a plan was approved to construct an Electric Crematorium and to beatify the Kiran Chandra Shamshan Ghat. Under the tenure of Ashok Narayan Bhattacharjee beautification works of the main roads were done, community toilets were constructed and few bridges were built. Adult education centres were set up in various colonies and various literacy educational plans were undertaken. In the Assembly Election on 20th May 1991 Ashok Bhattacharjee was elected an MLA and became the Municipal Affairs

and Urban Development Minister of West Bengal. In his place Bikash Ghosh became the Chairman of the Municipality. Though, in this mean time the West Bengal Assembly on 12th May 1990 officially announced to give Municipal Corporation status to Siliguri in place of Municipality. In the first election of S.M.C on 15th May 1994, the “Left Front” won the election and Bikash Ghosh was elected as the first Mayor of the S.M.C.⁴⁶

One of the major factors of this transformation of Siliguri is the Sino-Indian War of 1962. As a result of this to provide security of North-East India, a different outlook towards Siliguri had developed by the than Central Government of India. For the national security a number of Military Offices and Divisions were setup. Along with this a number of Military a number of Military stations and Camps for soldiers of the Indian Army, Air Force, B.S.F and S.S.B were established in this region. In connection with this a number of development programmes and economic assistance were provided which helped in the development of this area. Further, the partition of India in 1947 disconnected North-East India from Northern India similarly the central part of Bengal (West Bengal) was separated from northern part of Bengal. In order to solve this problem the than Government of India had set up the Assam Railway Link Project in November, 1947 as a result of which North Station was established in Siliguri which popularly known as Siliguri Junction. In later period with the formation of New Jalpaiguri railway station in 1964 the importance of Siliguri further increased. Moreover, due to partition of India the geographical importance of Siliguri increased because it became a central place of North Bengal with Balurghat and Malda in western side and Cooch Behar and Alipurduar in eastern side. But before the partition Siliguri as a commercial town was not that important as was Hili (in West Dinajpur) and Haldibari (in Cooch Behar). Due to partition the importance of Hili and Haldibari declined because the trade and commerce of these areas was connected with the districts which now formed a part of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), while the commercial vacuum was filled by Siliguri which emerged as a centre of trade and transport activities.⁴⁷ Thus it can be said that during this period “Siliguri is passing through a process of rapid industrial and urban growth because of the vantage point it enjoys as nerve centre of trade and other communication between the north-eastern states and the rest of West Bengal and Bihar.”⁴⁸ On the other hand the than

Divisional Headquarter of North Bengal Jalpaiguri according to Dr. Chandidas Lahiri, after partition of India, due to reorganization of the boundaries between India and Pakistan, the commercial importance of Jalpaiguri declined and within four decades the commercial importance of Siliguri had largely increased.⁴⁹ But before partition, for fancy goods and large amount of purchase the residence of Siliguri had to go to Jalpaiguri.⁵⁰ Even to by school text books Jalpaiguri was the only nearest options in those days.⁵¹ The devastating flood of Jalpaiguri in October, 1968 further declined the importance of Jalpaiguri for a couple of years while on the other hand trade and commerce was flourishing in Siliguri. In fact, traders migrated from Jalpaiguri to Siliguri to conduct trade because Jalpaiguri became basically a sleepy town as Siliguri was in the pre-Colonial period. According to Dr.C.C Sanyal the flood of 1968 completely washout the hundred years old town Jalpaiguri.⁵² Apart from these after the independence of Burma in 1948 and beginning of the military regime in Burma in 1962 under General Ne Win, a large number of Bengalis migrated to Siliguri with many others part of India⁵³ the Indo-Pak War of 1965, the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, the Anti-Foreigner Movement or "*Bengal Khedao Andholan*" during the late 70s and early 80s of the past century in Assam and North-East India, the communal violence of Bangladesh during the early 90s in 20th century etc helped for the enormous change in the demographic structure of Siliguri town and persuaded rapid urbanization in Siliguri. Actually in the post-partition period of India in 1947 the rapid growth of commercialization in Siliguri is the development of the town as an important traffic and transportation function of North Bengal as well as North-East India. Not only does all road traffic to and from Assam and from frontier areas pass through the town but it is also a major rail road terminus in North Eastern India⁵⁴. Further after the building up of Farakka Barage in 1971, train communication became an uninterrupted feature between Siliguri and Calcutta. It may note that New Jalpaiguri became the first railway station in India to have all the three gauges i.e broad, middle and narrow gauge rail lines.⁵⁵

Due to above circumstances in the post-1947 period Siliguri's population started increasing at a very fast pace beginning with the settlement of thousands of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan following the partition of the country. As a result during 1951-

1961, Siliguri town witnessed a 101.5 per cent population growth. This unprecedented influx to Siliguri town was mainly due to the urbanization process which started taking place prior to Independence and expansion of the territory sector. According to 1961 Census Report Siliguri Municipality covered an area of 4.97 sq. miles and were inhabited by 65,471 persons. Further according to the said Census Report the town had a total number of 464 factories and the establishment of employing about 4814 workers. The principal industries of the town were the rice and flour miles, bakeries, fruit, plywood industry, furniture industry, automobile servicing industry, soap manufacture, sodium silicate manufacture, aluminium utensils manufacture and tea industry. The whole area is rapidly developing into an industrial complex. The growth of the town had started centring round the railway station area with the setting up of godowns and dwelling-cum-commercial establishments. This core of the town has poor accessibility by road and also suffers from bad drainage. The open space in the west and south has rapidly been filled up by large-scale industries like rice-mills, saw mills and setting up of houses for industrial workers. The others areas were mainly residential with a few office buildings interwoven in between the residential houses.⁵⁶

After the construction of the pipelines by the Burma Oil Company in Siliguri town wake came a demand for better housing and the company paid local landlords to built brick and cement houses with modern sanitary fittings. Till then Siliguri did not know of septic tank.⁵⁷ Further for rehabilitation of these refugees the then State Government had sanctioned Rs. 1,50,000 to the Siliguri Municipality to construct new roads, make sanitary arrangements and arrange water supply in the refugee concentrations within the municipal limits. In addition the Refuge Rehabilitation Department opened a market on a three acres plot of land at an expense of more than Rs.10,000.00 for the benefit of about 800 refugee traders and named after the then Chief Minister of West Bengal Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy as Bidhan Market. Half of the eight refugee colonies were within Siliguri Municipality and the persons staying there were mostly employed in urban occupations pertaining to the tertiary sector of the economy.⁵⁸

But apart from this it was late realization on the part of the Siliguri Municipality to envision a development plan in the context of the fast pace of urbanization of Siliguri

town. The obvious result was the unplanned, haphazard growth with its bearing on the public and utility services. Though, it was after fifteen years of the establishment of the Siliguri Municipality that on 13th June 1964 Siliguri Planning Organization was established under the Development and Planning Department of the Government of West Bengal. For the purpose of future land use pattern of Siliguri, the S.P.O prepared an Interim Development Plan for Siliguri in 1965. This plan also sought to provide a futuristic mapping of the Environmental Impact assessment of the town.

Later on 1967, the S.P.O prepared a Comprehensive Development Plan of the town. However, in due course, it was rightly felt that SPO was unable to deal effectively the manifold urban problems facing Siliguri primarily due to two reasons, in the first place, the SPO was recommending authority and not an implementing authority and secondly, the area of the town was not confined to administrative jurisdiction of Siliguri Sub-division as urbanization process resulted in its expansion to the neighbouring Jalpaiguri district. Thus on 1st April 1980 Siliguri –Jalpaiguri Development Authority was established under the West Bengal Town and Country (Planning and Development) Act of 1979. The earlier S.P.O got subsumed into this newly formed S.J.D.A. The S.J.D.A prepared an Outline Development Plan in 1986 for 260 sq.km of the S.J.D.A area which included the whole of 15.5 sq.km of Siliguri Municipality. This plan got the approval of the State Government in 1992. Further in 1994 Siliguri Municipal Corporation and S.J.D.A jointly planned out an “Approach Paper” on urban development of Siliguri.⁵⁹

But the most interesting aspect regarding this spectacular urban population growth of Siliguri is that there has been no support of any type of large scale industries. There is practically no big industry in and around in Siliguri which could be ascribed as the main reason for the high growth as in the case of Durgapur or Kalyani or Haldia. At least on the surface it appears that this growth does not have any production base. This is primarily an out an out commercial centre which cater the growing need of the neighbouring states or countries like Bhutan, Nepal and the North East India. Actually, Siliguri acted as a pull in population movement. This induced migration from rural areas of Siliguri and some adjoining areas of Jalpaiguri. A large percentage of workers are

engaged in non-agricultural activities. Moreover, in comparison between Kalyani and Siliguri it is interesting to note that both the towns are quite different in character. Kalyani is a service town and created in 1950 with a deliberate policy for attracting immigration from the congested Metropolitan Calcutta. In contrary, Siliguri had developed marketing and distribution centre for North Bengal region, lower Assam, North Bihar, Sikkim and Bhutan. Variations in productivity and economic structure in these two towns had resulted in different urban growth rates in these two areas and nature and extent of their impact on the social and economic structures have been quite different.⁶⁰ Durgapur and Kalyani was mainly industrial town and Siliguri a commercial town rather called it a commercial centre and for this reasons on the basis of 1961 Census data Siliguri has been functionally classified as trade and transport town with accentuation of trading in 1971.⁶¹ During the period 1955-1956 to 1964-1965 the number of Limited Companies increased from 37 to 63 in Siliguri. The number of wholesale establishment increased at the same period from 448 to 881. This also helped for the growth of commercial taxes from Siliguri.⁶² During the period between 1961 and 1971, Siliguri Municipality recorded more than double persons per sq.km as regards to the previous decade. Another interesting thing regarding Municipality is that while the urban areas of the three hill sub-division the women compose 44.82 per cent of the population it was only 42.41 per cent in the Municipality areas. It was for the reason that most of the immigrants into the urban areas of the hills, except traders from Bihar and Rajasthan, were permanent settlers, where as a great number of immigrants in Siliguri town were traders, skilled or unskilled workers and day laborers who were non-permanent residents.⁶³ Siliguri Municipality with an area of 15.54 km² has 1, 54,378 souls in 1981 i.e an incensement of 56,894 new persons over the decade (1971-1981). This area and population of the town share about 26 per cent of the total urban area and 55 per cent of the total urban population of the district of Darjeeling respectively. The remaining 45 per cent of urban population are shared by other towns of the district.⁶⁴ The following table (No:3) will exhibit the Siliguri Municipality in 1986 at a glance:

TABLE NO:3

WARDWISE POPULATION OF SILIGURI MUNICIPALITY IN 1986

Ward No.	Name of the Councillor	Occupation of Councillor	Area of the Ward	As per 1981 census
1	Dilip Roy	RSP (Party Whole timer)	Diesel Colony, Mahananda Colony, Gurung Basti, Mallaguri etc.	22600
2	Jagadish Bhupal	Businessman	Khalpara, Tumol Para, Jyotinagar, Goalpatty, Karbala Basti etc.	9231
3	Binimoy Moullick	Businessman	Mahanandapara, Sevoke Road (Part)	4966
4	Samarendra Sarkar	Businessman	Mahanandapara (Part), Dangipara, Fakirtola etc.	3885
5	Rajendra Kumar Baidya	Businessman	Sevoke Road, Khudirampally, Seth Sreelal Market, Bidhan Market etc.	3450
6	Jatindra Nath Dutta (Kalubabu)	Service	Asrampara, Panjabipara, Harijan Colony	9484
7	Ujjwal Chowchury	Party Whole Timer (CPI)	Bibekanandapally, Purba Bivekanandapally, Nitampally	9022
8	Bikash Ghosh	Professor	Hakimpara, Palpara, Ghoshpara	5607
9	Dibish Ch. Roy	Advocate	Collegepara, Hakimpara (Part), Lichubagan	5423
10	Birendra Chanda	Librarian	Subhashpally, Rathkhola, Rabindranagar, Netajeepally, Daspara etc.	7132
11	Santi Chakraborty	Service	Subhashpally, Durgadas colony, Subhasnagar Colony, Jyotinagar, kshudiram Colony etc.	7302
12	Nikhil Guha	Teacher	1 no. Dabgram, Aurabinda Pally, Rathkhola (Part)	5812
13	Rabin Pal	Businessman	Bharatnagar, 1 no. Dabgram colony	5096
14	Vijoy De	Service	Bharatnagar (S), Deshbandhupara (Part), Sramik nagar, Prankrishna colony etc.	12700
15	Ramkumar Agarwala	Businessman	Khalpara, Sarbahara Colony etc.	5606
16	Kanailal Joshi	Teacher	2 no. Jyotinagar, Tumal Para, Goyalpally etc.	15128
17	Plaban Basu	Advocate	Milanpally	9382
18	Swapan Kumar Sarkar	Professor & Advocate	Babupara, Panitanki Colony, Laketown	3448
19	Kamakhya Som	Teacher	Deshbandhupara, Himachal	8492

		Sangha, Laketown (Part), Desbandhu Colony	
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[Source: *Siliguri Purabarta*, Biren Chandra (ed), Siliguri Pourasabha, Siliguri, 1986, pp.76-78.]

The classification of the wards on the basis of population reveals that population in majority of the wards i.e twelve out of nineteen were below the average population of the wards and it was high in just two wards. It also reveals that the wards laying mainly at the centre were smaller in size as well as in population than those were situated on the periphery of the Municipality. It may note in this connection that the Ward I had covers largest area (about 3.48 km^2) because a large portion of it was occupied by railway territory whereas Ward IV had covered only 0.26 km^2 . So there was a wide difference in sizes between the largest and smallest wards. Moreover, it was cleared from the Municipal data that most of the wards i.e Wards XII to Ward XIX were smallest and were located around the centre of the town. The area of the wards was largest towards the north, west and south-east.

According to Census of 1981 the density of population in Siliguri Municipality was 9934 persons per km^2 which was more than double of the district urban average. In comparison with other Class I towns of West Bengal like Kharagpur (7359 persons per km^2) and Burdawan (4582 persons per km^2) Siliguri had recorded higher population density. Actually in case of Siliguri's urban areas about 5 times change was recorded in 1951 as compared to 1941. This is due to influx of immigrants from East Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947. Further noticeable took place during 1971-1981 due to immigration from Bangladesh.⁶⁵ This rapid urbanization brought *bustee* culture in Siliguri and the year of 90s of the past century saw 48 recognised official *bustee* in Siliguri. Though the Siliguri Municipality had no *bustee* at least till 1967 as reported by the then Chairman of the Municipality.⁶⁶ The growth of urban population in Siliguri Municipality in the decade 1981-1991 was 46.83 per cent which was noticeable increase but compared to that of the previous decade i.e 1971-1981 it was less than 58.36 per cent. Moreover one important factor was that Debgram in Jalpaiguri district comprising an area of 21.80 sq. km was annexed to the urban area of Siliguri, showing both Debgram and Siliguri as

one unit and later this additional area along with the Municipal area of Siliguri formed into a one single unit named Siliguri Municipal Corporation in 1994. Though in the time of 1991 Census Debgram had treated as a separate town, showed a striking increase of population of 92.29 per cent which reflects that the people who immigrated from Assam mainly settled down in Debgram area as a result of which Debgram increased so fast in population.⁶⁷ Though, it is also true that 1981 Census proposed “Siliguri however has great growth potential with an almost phenomenal growth of Dabgram on one side, and the growth of Uttar Bagdogra on the other. In between fall North Bengal University and Bagdogra Airport which may vary well serve as link with core city of Siliguri in near future. The Railway colony of New Jalpaiguri is also too near to Siliguri to be left out.”⁶⁸

In considering the community – wise composition of the population of each ward the major community was found in the Municipality can be derived under nine major categories namely Bengalis, Bihari, Marwari, Punjabi, Nepali, Oriya, Tribal, Muslims and others. As per census of 1991 the Bengalis comprises 64.25 per cent of the total inhabitants of the Municipality and the two other important communities were the Biharis (16.25 per cent) and the Marwaris (6.55 per cent). Regarding the specific localities it needs to be mentioned in this connection as a point of further classification that particular forms of *patti*, *colony*, *para*, *bastee* and *nagar* appear in many cases. The meaning between them is not only different other than the fact that at any instances some of them like *colony* and *nagar* generally indicate a newly settled area of the refugees while *bastee* means usually, but not necessarily a slums. In Siliguri the word *para* for a locality mostly stands for a locality developed earlier, quite often indicating the type of people living in. Such as Babupara means locality inhabited by gentlemen, Hakimpara means locality inhabited by the administrator, which actually even now true as the office and residential quarters of S.D.O and other administrators is situated in that locality. All of them together make the old part of the city or the original nucleus around which later development took place giving rise to outward expansion of the Municipality through decades.⁶⁹ Actually after the partition of India in 1947 as a result of migration from East Pakistan by the Bengalis as well as Biharis, Marwaris and many other communities houses were began to built up in the many unsettled parts of the town and the earlier *jotes* were changed into

para, bustee, colony, nagar etc. But the most interesting facts during post- partition urbanization in Siliguri was that it was not supported by any type of large or medium industries as like Durgapur, Kalyani and many other cities of West Bengal. Rather it better to called it as the main centre of trade and commerce and Siliguri emerged as a commercial town and not as an industrial town.

Thus the tremendous growth of Siliguri from a Sanitary Committee (1915) to mere class IV town in 1941 with a population of 10,487 heads and registering an increase of 209.72 per cent in one decade alone between 1941 and 1951 when urban population for West Bengal as a whole increased by only 32.58 per cent in 1961. Between 1941 and 1991, the population of Siliguri rose from a mere 10487 to 216950 which meant an increase of 1015.19 per cent over a period of five decades against 197.68 per cent in the urban population of West Bengal as a whole. In other words it may say that during this period the urban population of West Bengal increased by hardly 3 times while in case of Siliguri it was increased over 20 times which cannot be accounted for without immigration and also more in the form of massive then slow infiltration.

Conclusion

The growth and expansion of Siliguri police station of Darjeeling Terai is meteorically rise from a sleepy hamlet of few settlers to a second Metropolitan City of West Bengal. Soon it began to be compared with Calcutta and came to be known as the second capital of West Bengal. During the early part of the colonial rule it was basically a halt station for the travellers, traders and British officials to Darjeeling and other parts of the hills and very soon due to rapid urbanization it was transformed into fourth Municipal Corporation of West Bengal. In the third quarter of the 19th century with the expansion of tea, transport and timber in Terai the urbanization began and in the early part of the 20th century it had expanded trade. But in the post-partition period due to reorganization of the political boundary Siliguri was converted into a transit point for the transport and communication in North-East India as well as hill and other district of North Bengal.

After the Chinese aggression of India in 1962, the then Government of India became aware of the strategic importance of Darjeeling along with Siliguri. In later period with the development of education i.e. teaching and medical facilities, Siliguri was

converted into a second important town of West Bengal after its capital, Calcutta. However, this transformation of Siliguri from a sleepy hamlet to a Municipal Corporation occupied a significant place but the strategic and geographical location of the area is more important in this rapid urbanization than any other factors In 1862 the Colonial Government with the introduction of green imperialism had began the process of transformation of society, economy in Siliguri and after a century in 1962, the Chinese aggression further transformed the Siliguri politically.

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