

CHAPTER: 1

FROM OBSCURITY TO A SUB-DIVISIONAL HEADQUARTER:

SILIGURI IN COLONIAL PERIOD

Siliguri is a city which spans across the two districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts in the Indian state of West Bengal. The city is situated on the banks of river Mahananda and the foothills of the Himalayas. However, a hundred years before this metropolis was only a small village. This chapter tries to trace the colonial history of Siliguri along with the treatment it received from the colonial rulers and the reasons for its rapid unprecedented development.

L.S.S.O' Malley writing in 1907 never mentioned Siliguri as a town and he stated that in the Darjeeling District there were only two towns- Darjeeling and Kurseong, which between them account for only 21393 persons⁸⁵. Prior to O' Malley, W.W. Hunter in his book 'The Statistical Account of Bengal', finds Siliguri as a place irrelevant to mention. However, Hunter makes a sweeping statement that these places were chiefly inhabited by the Meches and Dhumals, two tribes who are said not to suffer from the unhealthy nature of the climate.⁸⁶ O' Malley wrote about Siliguri that Siliguri was a village to the South of Kurseong Sub- division near the left bank of Mahananda is 26°43' N and 88°26'E. Siliguri was the northern terminus of the Eastern Bengal State Railway, where it is joined by the Darjeeling- Himalayan Railway. It is also the terminus of the Cart Road from Kalimpong and Sikkim and it thus focuses the local trade. Several jute firms are established here and in addition to the permanent shops there is a biweekly Government market. It is the last quarter of 19th century, Siliguri was headquarter of Deputy Magistrate who disposed of criminal work of the *Terai* and managed the large Government estate; initially the office was stationed at Hansquar (Hanskhawa) near Phansidewa, but latter it was moved to Siliguri in 1888 on the extension of the railway to that

⁸⁵O'Malley, L. S. S. *West Bengal District Gazetteer Darjeeling*, Logos Press, New Delhi, (first printed 1907), reprinted 1999, p. 189.

⁸⁶ Hunter, William Wilson. *A Statistical Account of Bengal*. Archeological Survey of India, 1876, Vol. X, p. 67.

place. It also contained a small sub-jail and post office, *dak* bungalow, inspection house, police station and a dispensary with 20 beds, all situated on fairly high ground and its name means “the stony site” presumably because the bed of the Mahanadi close by is a mass of broken stone brought down from the hills.⁸⁷

The area in and around Siliguri was always dreaded by the Europeans at the beginning of the twentieth Century. The Europeans considered it as a fatal fever zone and travelled hastily through this region. Lady Canning caught the mysterious fever which unfortunately ended in her death while stopping to sketch a painting by the roadside on her return trip from Darjeeling. O’ Malley points out that the mortality in this region was mainly caused by fevers, which was generally malaria in nature and was very common in Terai where it accounted for 80% of the total mortality, the death rate from fever was 51 per mile in 1905.”⁸⁸He further admits the average mortality was nearly 60 per 1000 in the ten years ending (i.e. 1890-1900). In 1900 it surpassed 71 per 1000 and the average birth rate in the decade was nearly 19.4 per annum.⁸⁹ The Europeans found this place unsuitable to inhabit but O’Malley confessed that there was however, one race which inhabited this sickly region with comparative immunity, the aboriginal Meches and the Rajbanshis to a certain extent free from fever largely occurring to their cleaning away the rank Jungles around their homesteads and to the high platform on which they erect houses.⁹⁰

This tract of land was also popular for giving refuge to the *sanyasis* who were branded as bandits and robbers. The British official records these *Sanyasis* as “lawless bandits' ' who committed violence under pretence of charity. The *Sanyasis* were held in high veneration by the people of the countryside and put up a stiff resistance to the expanding British power at the end

⁸⁷O'Malley. *Op.Cit.*, p. 209

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 54

⁹⁰Hunter, William Wilson. *Op.Cit.*, Vol. X, p. 67. Hunter pointed out the names of two more tribes, Meches and Dhimals , who did not suffer from the unhealthy nature of the climate.

of the 18th Century.⁹¹ Baikunthapur, a place near Siliguri was considered to be the headquarters of the *Sanyasis*. The Baikunthpur Forest nested these ‘bandits’ who ravaged the country in armed bands numbering hundreds. Glazier⁹² described this area in the following manner, “In 1789, we have an account of a large body of bandits who had occupied the Baikunthapur Forest, Which lies at the northern apex of the district (Rangpore) right under the hills. The forest was composed of tree jungles woven with cane and was impossible except by narrow winding paths known only to the *dakoits*. The collector gathered a force of two hundred *barkandazes* and held all the entrances into the forest. Several skirmishes ensued but months elapsed before any decisive result was obtained. The marauders were at length starved out. Some escaped into Nepal and Bhutan but great numbers were captured including their leaders and several of his principal associates. Within twelve months in this and other parts of the district the collector arrested and brought to trial 549 *dakoits*. Lieutenant Macdonald was also sent with 180 sepoy, and he was successful in arresting the leaders of the gang, but their followers escaped into the hills. A report to the Board of Revenue, dated 29th April 1789, makes mention of the seizure of two dacoit boats of 80 and 100 cubits in length, belonging to head *sanyasis*, and gives a detailed account of the oppressions practised by these scourges, not only on the cultivators, but on the zamindars and their officers, whom they carried off and confined until their demands were satisfied.”⁹³

⁹¹Gupta, M.D. *Sanyasi Rebellion in North Bengal*. Ankur, Calcutta, 1979, p. 9. Also see Lorenzen, D.N., "Warrior Ascetics in Indian History." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, American Oriental Society, 1978, 98 (1), pp. 617–75; Marshall, P.J. *Bengal: the British Bridgehead, The New Cambridge History of India*. Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 96.

⁹² Glazier, E.G. *A Report on the District of Rungpore*. Calcutta Central Press Company Limited, 1873.

⁹³Glazier, E.G. *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Rangpur*, Allahabad, 1911, p. 29. For a detailed study on the sanyasi rebellion see Ghosh, J.M. *Sannyasi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal*. Calcutta, 1930., Chandra, A.N. *The Sannyasi Rebellion*. Calcutta, 1977; Peter, D.V. *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre*. Delhi, 1989, pp. 146-151; In Farquhar, "The Organisation of the Sannyasis of the Vedanta", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1925; Cohn. B.S. "The Role of Gosains in the Economy of 18th and 19th Century Upper India", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, I, No 4, 1964; Roy, N.B. "Naga Sannyasi Geneshgeer and the Kuteh bihar Disturbances of 1787", in H R Gupta (ed), *Jadunath Sarkar Commemoration Volume*,

The land between southern Siliguri and Jalpaiguri was a bone of contention between the Bhotias and Koches.⁹⁴ The Koch Chieftains hotly contested Bhutanese hold over an extensive area which also included the large southern tract of land between Siliguri and Jalpaiguri. However, after the Anglo-Bhutanese war a large area was ceded to Bhutan as a part of the policy to appease the Bhutanese and in the interest of Trans-Himalayan trade.⁹⁵ This move of the Britishers was not acceptable by the Koch Zamindars. The large tract remained subject to plundering by both Bhutanese soldiers and Koch Zamindars. Due to these activities the British Government took control of a large part of this disputed territory in 1842 on an annual rent of Rs. 2000 to the Bhutan Government. But 18 years later in 1860 the payment was discontinued on pretext of an alleged act of aggression. During the campaign of Eden in 1864 these tracts were permanently annexed to the British Dominion".⁹⁶ The proclamation regarding the annexation read that the British Government, under Article 11 of a treaty concluded on the 11th day of November 1865, has obtained from the Government of Bhutan forever the cession of the whole of the tract known as the 'Eighteen Doars' bordering on the districts of Rangpoor, Cooch Behar, and Assam, together with the Talook of Ambaree Fallacottah and the Hill territory. Thus, the territory ceded by the Bhutan Government as aforesaid was annexed to the territories of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen of England. It was further declared that the ceded territory would be attached to the Bengal Division of the Presidency of Fort William, and that it would be under the immediate control of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal.⁹⁷

1958; D H A Kolff, "Sannyasi Trader- Soldiers", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 5, 1968.

⁹⁴Deb, Arabinda. *Bhutan and India: A Study in Frontier Political Relations (1772-1865)*, Firma Klm Pvt. Ltd. ,Calcutta, 1976, pp. 112-132

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 133-160

⁹⁶Proclamation Regarding Annexation of the Duars, 4th July,1866 published in Aitchison, C.U. *A collection of Treaties, Treaties Engagements and Sanads relating to India and neighbouring countries.* Vol 2, CXI, Calcutta, 1909, p. 306

⁹⁷Ibid.

In the days of the Dooars war (1864-65), Chandra Shekhar the “Sixteenth *Raikat*”⁹⁸ Petitioned the Government stating the services he had rendered to Eden’s mission and supplies provided to the Bhutan Duar Force “Amounting to fifty or Sixty thousand rupees”⁹⁹ and in lieu of his service the British Government should restore the Zamindari rights of his forefathers over the large tract of land ceded to the Bhutanese. The British Government rejected the plea of Chandra Shekhra Deva and henceforth the areas south of Siliguri were permanently annexed by the British Government. Thus the area which was considered as no man’s land became part of the southern sub-urban of Siliguri towns.

Siliguri’s importance to the British increased because it served as a gateway to Darjeeling. Darjeeling was annexed to the English East India Company on the 1st February, 1835 from the Raja of Sikkim. The District’ was part of the dominions of the Raja of Sikkim. In 1707 what is now the Kalimpong subdivision of the District was taken from the Raja of Sikkim by the Bhutanese. The Rajas later became engaged in unsuccessful struggles with the Gurkhas who had seized power in Nepal and invaded Sikkim in 1780. During the next thirty years they ravaged Sikkim as far as the Tista and conquered and annexed the Terai. In the meantime war broke out between the East India Company and the Nepalese at the end of which in 1817 by the treaty of Titalia the tract which the Nepalese had seized from the Raja of Sikkim was surrendered to the Company. The Company reinstated the whole of the land between the Mechi and the Tista to the Raja and also guaranteed his sovereignty. Sikkim was consequently made as a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan.

⁹⁸ The *Raikats* were a branch of the Koch royal family. Siswa Singha, the founder of the house, had held the umbrella over the head of his step brother, Maharaja Viswa Singha at the time of his coronation in 1529-30. His successors at Baikunthpur had to resist persistent encroachment of the Bhutanese, the Mallas of Nepal. Also see S. C. Ghosal, *A History of Cooch Behar*, 1942, Chapter XIU, The Baikunthpur Estate of Biswa Singha survived for 410 years (1545-1955). It was abolished under the Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1954; Sanyal, C.C. *The Rajbanshis of North Bengal*, Calcutta, 1965, p. 8.

⁹⁹ Deb, Arabinda. *Bhutan and India: A Study in Frontier Political Relations (1772-1865)*, Firma Klm Pvt. Ltd. ,Calcutta, 1976, p.94

Bound by the Treaty, the Raj had to refer to refer all the disputes of the land to the British. Ten years later disagreements on the Sikkim-Nepal frontiers arose and were referred to the then Governor General. Two officers, Captain Lloyd and Mr. Grant, were assigned in the year 1828 to deal with the disputes and disagreements of the region Mr. Grant reported according to the Governor General Lord William Bentinck the numerous advantages promised for a Sanitarium at Darjeeling and also recommended its occupation for military purposes as the key to a pass into Nepal. The Governor General then assigned Captain Herbert, the Deputy Surveyor-General, to examine the country with Mr. Grant and in due course the Court of Directors sanctioned the project. General Lloyd (formerly Captain Lloyd) was directed to open negotiations with the Raja on the first convenient occasion and this occurred when General Lloyd was assigned to enquire into the causes of an incursion from Nepal of Lepchas who had taken refuge there from Sikkim. He succeeded in procuring the execution of a deed of grant by Sikkim's raja on the 1st February 1836.

This was an unconditional cession of what was then inhabited mountains, but in 1841 the Government decided an allowance of Rs 3000/- per annum as compensation for the Rajah and this was raised to Rs 6000/- per annum in 1846. The relation between the Raja and the British Government deteriorated after 1860, the grants were withdrawn and the area was annexed from Sikkim Government.¹⁰⁰ After the cession of the territory General Lloyd and Dr. Chapman were sent in 1836 to explore and investigate the climate and the capabilities of the place. They spent the winter of 1836 and part of 1837 doing this and when it was finally decided to develop the site as a Sanitarium, General Lloyd was appointed a 'Local Agent' to deal with applications for land which began to pour in from residents of Calcutta.

In 1839 Dr. Campbell, British resident in Nepal, was reassigned to Darjeeling as Superintendent. In this capacity he was in charge not only of the civil, criminal and fiscal administration of the District but also of political relations with Sikkim.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 40.

In the meantime relations with Sikkim deteriorated. The increasing significance of Darjeeling under free institutions was a source of frustration to the Lamas and some leading men of Sikkim, headed by the Dewan Namguay, who were sharers in a monopoly of all trade in Sikkim and lost their rights over those slaves who settled as free men and British subjects in the Darjeeling territory. Frequent kidnappings and demands for the return of slaves took place; however the climax was reached when in November 1849 Sir Joseph Hooker and Dr. Campbell were made prisoners, while travelling in Sikkim with the permission of the Raja and the British Government. Various demands were made as conditions of release but the Sikkimese eventually released both the prisoners unconditionally on the 24th December 1849.

In February 1850 a small force entered Sikkim and remained on the north bank of the Great Rangit River for a few weeks. But the serious retaliatory action taken was the removal of the grants of Rs. 6,000 from the Raja and the annexation of the Terai and the portion of the Sikkim hills enclosed by the Great Rangit on the North, Tista on the East and the Nepal frontier on the West. The area annexed was 640 square miles in extent. Immediately after annexation of the Terai in 1850 the southern part was positioned under Purnea District, but in consequence of the dislike of the inhabitants to this transfer it was cancelled and the whole area was attached to Darjeeling. At the time of annexation there were Bengali officers in the Terai called Chaudhuris who exercised civil and criminal powers.

The change was welcomed by the inhabitants who now had to pay only small fixed sums into the treasury in Darjeeling instead of having to meet uncertain and fluctuating demands in kind and for personal service made by Raja of Sikkim and his Dewan. Thus the tract between Siliguri and Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling gradually came under the hands of the British Government by 1850. Because of its geographical location Siliguri served as a gateway to Darjeeling hills

2.1. The Development of Railways in Siliguri in the Colonial Period

Transport plays a vital role in ‘structure and organisation of space and structures of a city’¹⁰¹ In the nineteenth century the purpose of forms of transport was to expand coverage, create and consolidate national market, in twentieth century objectives shifted to selecting itineraries prioritising transport modes, increasing the capacity of existing network and responding the mobility need, however, in the Twenty-first century transportation must cope with globally oriented economic system in a timely and cost effective way but also with several local problems such as congestion and capacity constraints.¹⁰²

The first passenger train flagged off from Howrah station for Hooghly, a distance of 24 miles, on 15th August 1854 and the first section of the East Indian Railway (EIR) was opened to public traffic on the Eastern side of the sub-continent.¹⁰³ From February 3rd, 1855 the railway had progressed westwards covering a distance of 120 miles from Calcutta and reached up to Raniganj. In October 1859 the EIR had advanced to Rajmahal in Bihar and as early as in 1860 a distance of 219 miles from Howrah was covered and Sahibgunge, the terminus of the visitor to Darjeeling, was reached.¹⁰⁴ The Eastern Bengal Railway (EBR), a private company, got concession for construction and management of railway lines commencing from the left bank of Hooghly towards the Eastern and Northern part of Bengal, including a line to Darjeeling. Construction of EBR lines commenced in April, 1859. The first train steamed out of the Sealdah platform for its then terminus - Ranaghat (45) miles on September 29th, 1862. By 15th November of the same year, the line passed through Poradah Junction on its way to Kushtia. Its extension to Jagati (62 miles) was opened in November, 1862. The line was further extended to Goalundo (45 miles) in January, 1871. In the original contract of Eastern Bengal Railway with the

¹⁰¹Rodrigue, Jean-Paul, et al. *The Geography of Transport Systems*. 4th ed., Routledge, 2016, p.1.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 2006

¹⁰³Mukerjee, M. *Railways and Their Impact on Bengal's Economy, 1870-1920. Railways in Modern India*. Edited by Ian J. Ker, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.127

¹⁰⁴Dozey, E.C. *A Concise And Complete History of the Darjeeling District since 1835*, Jetsum Publishing House, Calcutta, 1922, p.8.

Secretary of State for India, this guaranteed Railway Company was to open up a rail-line to Darjeeling. In the early 1870's such good dividends were being obtained from these lines of EBR that the directors were not willing to invest money in extension including the one to Darjeeling as that might not be profitable.¹⁰⁵

On 28th August, 1877, the Northern Bengal State Railway was opened for traffic between Atrai¹⁰⁶ and Jalpaiguri. Prospect of scarcity in Bengal, owing to the failure of rains, caused urgency and construction of a line from Ganges to Jalpaiguri was pushed forward vigorously by NBR [Table: 4.1]. On 19th January, 1878 Sir Ashley Eden, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, opened the traffic thus establishing communication between Sealdah and Jalpaiguri and on 10th June of the same year the line was extended up to Siliguri.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the Northern Bengal State Railway attracted to itself the merchandise trade of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Rajshahi and Pabna, almost monopolising the cotton piece goods traffic and participating in a large way in the transport of tea and food grains.¹⁰⁸ For the travellers the route from Calcutta to Darjeeling was first by rail from Howrah to Sahibganj, a distance of 219 miles. Then it was followed by a steam ferry across Ganges to Karagola and by bullock cart to the river opposite Dingra Ghat. After crossing which again the traveller had to take a bullock cart or palkee ghary and crossed Purnea, Kisangani, Titalya, Siliguri and the slope commenced via Pankhabari Road, which connected the cart road at Kurseong that led the traveller to its final destination, Darjeeling.¹⁰⁹

'The opening of the rail line from Calcutta to Raniganj in 1855 reduced the laborious cart journey to Darjeeling by 120 miles, and the East Bengal State Railway pushed steadily

¹⁰⁵Bhandari, R.R. *Darjeeling Himalayan Railway*, National Rail Museum, New Delhi, 2000, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Atrai was a few miles to the north-east of Sara Ghat.

¹⁰⁷O'Malley. *Op.Cit.*, reprint 1999, p.133

¹⁰⁸ Mukerjee, M. *Op.cit.*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁹*Illustrated Guide for the Tourists to the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and Darjeeling*. London (1896) reprinted by Pagoda Tree Press, England, 2005, p.7.

northward in the following decades.¹¹⁰ Until the advent of the railways in the hills, ‘*Tongas*’ continued to be the only faster means of travelling from Siliguri to Darjeeling. The two most significant factors in the growth of the Railways have been the choice of Darjeeling for a health resort and the subsequent planting of tea in the hills. Those people from the neighbouring countries of Nepal had heard that ‘in Dorje-ling money is grown’ in the tea- bushes. As such more immigrants came to the district in search of such lucrative jobs. In return the immigrants’ requirements of food, clothes and shelter were to be meted out and that necessitated trade. Further tea and Cinchona plantations needed heavy machinery. ‘The hill men had to be taught the mysteries of the steam engine and the marvels of European engineering; blacksmiths, carpenters and other workmen had to learn the higher branches of the callings followed by their ancestors, and from these simple hill people had to be made the engine –drivers necessary to keep the machinery going.’¹¹¹To carry the supplies of the plantation industry in the hills and to bring back the produce for sale in India and abroad the *tonga*, the old bullock-cart, the pack-pony, and the coolies were found insufficient. As a result the planters strongly felt for the introduction of railways in the hills.

The difficulty of journey and the time taken by the Tonga i.e. two laborious days taking them to the sanatorium perhaps might have struck Franklin Prestage with an idea of a mountain tramway which could bring him fame and fortune. Prestage was working as an Agent of the Eastern Bengal Railway. As EBR had thought about such ventures in the hills of Darjeeling, Prestage being associated with the East Bengal Railway, the possibility of such an idea cannot be ruled out. For which he took the help of Cary, a civil engineer in the Eastern Bengal Railway; to make plans for a groundwork scheme. While the price of rice was Rs. 98 a ton at Siliguri and Rs. 238 that in Darjeeling, he believed that a line could considerably reduce the cost of transport between the plains and Darjeeling. A railway could bring down the cartage rate by

¹¹⁰ Kennedy, Dane. *The Magic Mountain Hill Station and the British Raj*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, p. 90.

¹¹¹ O’Malley. *Op.Cit.*, reprint 1999, p.133

half and still could be profitable.¹¹² Finally he submitted his proposal to the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir Ashley Eden. According to Newman's Guide to Darjeeling and its surroundings Sir Eden 'with his practical commonsense, recognized the fact that a light railway, if it could only be constructed to Darjeeling, would infinitely develop that town, as well as the country through which it passed, and also put Calcutta and the whole of Lower Bengal in rapid, cheap, and easy communication with its only existing sanatorium.'¹¹³

Table 1.5: Expansion of East Bengal Railways.

Eastern Bengal Railway (B.G.)		
Main Line (Eastern Section)	Date of opening	Miles
Calcutta to Ranaghat	29-09-1862	45 ^{1/4}
Ranaghat to Jagati Jn.	15-11-1862	62
Jagati Jn. To Goalundo	01-01-1871	45
Northern Bengal State Railway Poradaha Branch (B.G.)		
Poradaha (1023/4 miles from Calcutta) to Damukdiya Opposite Sara, on the right bank of Ganges	19-01-1878	12
Main Line (M.G.)		
Sara to Atrai	19-01-1878	38 ^{1/3}
Atrai to Jalpaiguri	28-08-1877	134 ^{1/4}
Jalpaiguri to Siliguri (for day traffic for goods)	10-06-1878	23
For general traffic	01-11-1878	

Source: Bhandari, R.R. 'Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. *National Rail Museum Publication*, New Delhi, 2000.

One interesting fact about this Railway has been mentioned by Sri Himanshu Chakraborty that during these days North Bengal suffered from severe food Shortage. The labourers were employed to construct the line and it was considered as the Relief operation for the starving people. In other words, a large part of the Railway line was laid as a part of a

¹¹² Newman, W. *Newman's Guide to Darjeeling & its Surroundings*. Newman And Co., Calcutta, 1900, p. 4.

¹¹³ Ibid.

programme for the relief operation.¹¹⁴ Siliguri became a very important Junction for going south (namely Calcutta) to the North (namely Darjeeling) and east (namely Duars and Assam). Siliguri became a terminus for both the Railway and Road Journey.

2.2. The Making of the Roadways in and around Siliguri during Colonial Period.

Before 1835 A.D. means of communication was in a very rudimentary stage and the pioneers who visited Darjeeling after an arduous journey from Calcutta, had to pass a stretch of woodland infested with wild animals and deadly insects formed the present heart-land of Siliguri. "Guide to Darjeeling" published in 1838 points out 98 hours of journey from Calcutta. This arduous journey is described by Hooker, who in 1848 travelled from Karagola Ghat on the Ganges to the foothills.

The Making of Hill Cart Road and Other Roads

The British wanted to establish communication between Darjeeling and plains. This endeavour took shape between 1839 and 1842 when Lord Napier of Magdala, a Lieutenant in the engineers, was deputed to construct a road from Siliguri to Darjeeling.¹¹⁵

O'Malley says that this road was laid in the midst of very thick forests and also along steep ridges of 40 miles. The project was built at an expenditure of eight hundred thousand rupees.¹¹⁶ Heavy cost of transporting the military stores finally led to the construction of 'Cart Road'. The work began in 1860 and the whole road was completed by 1869.¹¹⁷ This Siliguri-Darjeeling Road approximately 25 feet in width was completed at the cost of £6,000 per mile.¹¹⁸ O'Malley points out that the most important road in the district was the 'Cart Road' from Siliguri to Darjeeling. The road was approximately 49 mile and also had a running ruling

¹¹⁴Chakraborty, H. *The History of Railways of Jalpaiguri*. District Centenary Souvenir, Jalpaiguri, 1970, pp. 349-369

¹¹⁵ O'Malley. *Op.Cit.*, reprint 1999, p. 132.

¹¹⁶ Dozey, E.C. *Darjeeling: Past and Present*, Calcutta, 1922, p. 3

¹¹⁷ Banerji, A.K, et al. *Darjeeling District Gazetteer*, 1980, p 289.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 289.

gradient of 1 in 31. It was believed by O' Malley to be one of the best mountain roads in India. Among many reasons behind the construction of this Cart road, one of them was to replace the old military road built by Lord Napier of Magdala. The road was opened to Traffic in 1869. Many hindrances came while constructing this road and the most obnoxious impediment was the fearful female anopheles mosquitoes, the carrier of plasmodium parasites.

Other than Hill Cart Road there were different pockets connecting Siliguri. The most important was Siliguri - Sevoke Road. Siliguri sevoke road was an extension of Teesta Valley Road that connected Sevoke to Teesta bridge and thus it continued to Sikkim via Rango and then to Kalingpong and Tibet by Rishi Road. Thus at the southern extremity of this road is the Valley Road where we find an extension leading from sevoke to Siliguri, a distance of 12 miles. O'Malley writes that other important roads within the vicinity of Siliguri were those of Siliguri to Naxalbari (13 miles), Kurseong to Matigara via Pankhabari (22 1/2 miles), Tirihan to Bagdogra (6 miles), Naxalbari to Garidhura (11 miles).

The Siliguri Naxalbari road passed through Matigara after it left the Darjeeling Hill Cart Road which was just over a mile from Siliguri. It is measured to be 13 miles long and Dash remarks that it was fit for heavy traffic approximately 5 tons Laden at all seasons round the Year.¹¹⁹ The Provincial Government maintained three roads north of Siliguri, these were the Matigara Kurseong Road, the Trihan Naxalbari road and Trihan Bagdogra Road. These roads were 22.5, 8.5 and 5 miles long respectively.¹²⁰ The last two carried traffic up to 5 tons laden weight yearly and were metalled throughout. The Matigara Kurseong road took 5 ton traffic for the first 9 miles and was usable for the lighter traffic up to Pankhabari. Another important road maintained by the District Board was the road from Bagdogra to Ghughijhora, which was 8.31 miles and Naxalbari to Khoribari (10.93 miles). These roads were metalled and bridged throughout. Four and a half miles of route from Khoribari to Phansidewa of total length 12.5

¹¹⁹ Dash, A.J. *Op.Cit.*, 1947, p. 183

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

miles was metalled. The road from Matigara to Phansidewa is 8.25 miles and from Naxalbari to Ambari was unmetalled.

Three local District Boards played an important part in the maintenance of the roads. These local boards were: the Sadar Kurseong Local Board, the Siliguri Local Board boards which controlled 116 miles of Terai roads and the Kalingpong Local Board..

Table 1.6: Showing the Roads maintained by the Public Work Department.¹²¹

From	To	Length
Siliguri	Sivoke	12 miles / 19.3 km.
Sukna	Adalpur	3 miles 321 ft. / 4.9 km.
Matigara	Darjeeling Hill Cart Road	2 miles 355 ft. / 3.3 km.
Station Yard Road, Siliguri		540 ft / 162 metres.
Siliguri Bazar Road		1,464 ft. / 439.2 metres
Siliguri Feeder Road		4000 ft. / 1200 metres.
New Kutchery Road, Siliguri		1792 ft. / 537.6 metres.
Matigara	Naxalbari	11 miles 3090 ft./ 18.6 km.
Ganges-Darjeeling Road (portion)		2miles 331ft. / 3.3 km.
Tirihauna	Naxalbari	8 miles 2710 ft 9 / 13.7 Km.
Tirihauna	Bagdogra	5 miles 4412 ft / 9.4 km.
Panighata	Kadama	3 Miles 720 ft. / 5 km.
Matigara to Kurseong via Pankhabari (portion)		13 miles 2640 ft / 21.7 km
Panighata	Dubhijhora	2 miles 2325 ft. / 3.9km.

Source: Mitra, J.C. *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement operation in the Darjeeling Terai (1919-1925)*. Calcutta, 1927.

Table 1.7: Showing the Roads Maintained by the District Board, Darjeeling.¹²²

Road No.	From	To	Length
32	Naxalbari	Debiganj via Kharibari	14 miles
33	Khaprail	Hill Cart Road	2 miles 4 fur (4.0 km.)
34A	Garidhura	Junction of Bagdogra-Tirihana Road with Naxalbari Tirihana Road	2 miles 6 fir. 87 yds.
35	Old Siliguri	Rangapani	3 miles 3fur.(5.4 km.)

¹²¹ Mitra, J.C. *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement operation in the Darjeeling Terai (1919-1925)*. Calcutta, 1927.

¹²² Ibid.

36	Rangapani	Goaltuli	5 miles (8.1 km.)
37	Matigara	Salbari	2 miles 1 fur. (3.4 km.)
38	Junction with Road no. 32(Kharibari)	Adhikari	2 miles (3.2 km.)
39	Hill Cart Road	Shahpur T.E.	2 miles (3.2 km.)
39A	Madnaguri Jote (Hill Cart Road)	Bhaismari	6 miles 1 fur. (9.9 km)
40	Dumriguri Inspection Bungalow	Phansidewa via Bagdogra hat and Harlia Bridge	8 miles 5 fur. (13.9 km.)
41	Bagdogra	Ghugujhora	7 miles (11.3 km.)
42	Tepu	Junction with Road No. 28	2 miles (3.2 km.)
43	Manjwa	Turibari	3 miles (4.8 km.)
44	Khaprail	Tirihana	4 miles (6.4 km.)
45	Hansquar	Ghugujhora	3 miles (4.8 km.)
46	Hansquar	Chaupukhuria	4 miles (6.4 km.)
47A	Junction with Road No. 41	Khoribari upto Road No. 29 in Bandarjuhli	4 miles 6 fur. 134yds. (7.8 km.)
48	Matigara-Siliguri Road near Panchanai Bridge	Champasari Forest Depot via Bhaismari	6 miles (9.7 km.)
49	Atal	Cambrian	6 miles (9.7 km.)
50	Matigara-Naxalbari Road	Bagdogra-Atal Road	1 mile 2 fur. 112 yds. (2.1 km)
51	Tirihana	Panighata via Old Terai	2 miles (3.2 km.)
52	Road No. 41	Road No. 47 via Mudi Bazar Chenga Bridge and Pahargumia	4 miles 2 fur. 112 yds.(6.9 km.)
52A	Panighata Bridge	Longview	2 miles 100 yds. (3.3 km.)
47	Atal	Junction with Road No. 31 (Narijote), Cross Roads, bye roads and ordinary Village roads (Terai)	6 miles 4 fur. 30 yds (10.5 km.)
1	Hill Cart Road	Damragram	2 miles (3.2 km.)
2	Subtiguri	Garidhura via Tarabari	2 miles (3.2 km.)
3	Old Siliguri	Matigara Hat	2 miles 1 fur. (3.4 km.)
4	Mudi Bazar	Bagdogra Thakurganj	(Merged with road no. 52)

Source: Mitra, J.C. *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement operation in the Darjeeling Terai (1919-1925)*. Calcutta, 1927.

Table 1.8: Showing List of Roads under the Siliguri Local Board

ROAD NO.	FROM	TO	LENGTH
27	Matigara (Matigara-Naxalbari Road)	Phansidewa	8 miles 4fur. 3 yds. (13.7 km.)

28	Bagdogra	Atal	4 miles 5 fur. 83 yds. (7.5 km.)
29	Kharibari	Phansidewa	12 miles 4 fur. (20.1 km)
30	Garidhura	Panighata	3
30A	Panighata	Mechi	5 8 miles (12.9 km.)
31	Naxalbari	Ambari(Thakurganj)	8 miles 4 fur. (13.7 km.)

Source: Mitra, J.C. *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement operation in the Darjeeling Terai (1919-1925)*. Calcutta, 1927.

Road communication was considered to be very important in this area by the government and army and because of this reason various authorities controlled the roads of Siliguri in particular and the Darjeeling district as a whole. The Central Public Work Department controlled a portion of certain major roads and some other important thoroughfares well maintained by the Public Works Department of the State Government. The final report on the Survey and Settlement Operation (1919-1925) in the Darjeeling made the following points:

“The Cart Road, the Siliguri-Sevoke road, the Siliguri-Naxalbari Road and the Naxalbari-Gayabari road were metalled and maintained by the Public Work Department. The kutcha road from Matigara to Phansidewa needs immediate improvement because of the traffic and the metallic road of the Bagdogra Thakurganj road is a chronic necessity. The intention of the District Board should be the gradual metalling of all branch and feeder roads.”¹²³

The Jayaka Committee and the Kings Plan

Jogesh Chandra Mitra report gives a detailed account on the cost of construction and maintenance of roads.¹²⁴ By the end of 1920 the bridging techniques in the hills changed considerably. Suspension bridges were taken care of and bamboos were replaced with steel wires for durability. The strategic location of the region increased the importance of roads and it was never regarded as only of local importance. The maintenance of these roads was very expensive, so expensive that the Provincial Government placed many roads for maintenance under Local Bodies and Forest Departments. In the year 1928, the Road Development

¹²³ Ibid., p. 3

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 4

Committee chaired by M. R. Jayaka recommended for a change in the road strategy of the government. In response to an appeal made by the Jayaka Committee a Central Road Fund was established.

A.J. King, special officer for Road Development, proposed minor improvements in technical road making issues in 1934. The King Plan envisaged the provision of Feeder roads as an integral part of the communication system. He found that by making some changes to road surfaces. The report of 1938 stated that there were 109.5 miles of Railways and 3179 miles of metalled and un-metalled roads in the Darjeeling district.¹²⁵

Table 1.9: Showing the mileage of the roads under each administrative authority and the average annual expenditure of them were given as follows.¹²⁶

Authority responsible for upkeep	Metalled Roads			Unmetalled Roads		
	Mileage on 31/3/1937	Annual expenditure per mile (In Rs.)	Average annual expenditure per mile (In Rs.)	Mileage on 31/3/1937	Annual expenditure per mile (In Rs.)	Average annual expenditure per mile (In Rs.)
Government roads maintained by Communications & Works Department	244.30	3,64,611	1,492	108	8,107	76
District roads maintained directly by District Board & Sub-Divisional roads maintained by Local Boards working under the District Board	21.17	8,731	412	344	33,521	98
Urban roads maintained by	25.20	(Not Available)	..	14	(Not Available)	..

¹²⁵ King, A.J. *Comprehensive Report on Road Development Projects in Bengal, Vol. VI., Rajshahi Division, Darjeeling District.* Calcutta, 1938, p. 116.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

municipalities		e))	
Village roads maintained by Union Boards	2,423	28,880	12
Total	2890.67	3,73,342	..	2,889	70,598	..

Source: Mitra, J.C. *Op.Cit.*

As per the report of the king the width of Hill Road varied from 12th to 25th feet and the usual being 16 feet between the parapet and the rain. Mr. King drew a plan of 309 miles of improved roads in the district consisting 182 miles of prevailing metalled and 83 miles of current un-metalled and 44 miles of new road. This arrangement provided a mile of upgraded road and there was for every 3.92 square miles of a tree or every 1034 has a population serving 1091 square miles or 19.02 percent of total area. Only 118 square miles were left unreserved. This scheme provided for a direct road link between the district and sub-divisional/*thana* headquarters.

The Nagpur Road Plan

The emergencies of the Second World War necessitated a very quick build-up of the strategic roads. Meanwhile in 1940 -42, the Government of India had frozen the Central Road Fund giving way to the Nagpur Plan in 1943. The Nagpur plan envisaged the construction of three main categories of road National, Provincial and Local.

Table 1.10: Showing the length of the different categories of road scheduled to be built and the revised plan in Darjeeling district in West Bengal

Category of Roads	In Darjeeling	In West Bengal
National Highway	66 KM (41 miles)	953KM (592 miles)
Provincial Highway	171 KM	1718 KM (1067 miles)
Major District Roads	323 KM	4755 KM (2953 miles)
Other District Roads	NOT AVAILABLE	4540 KM (2820 miles)
Village Roads	NOT AVAILABLE	9417 KM (5849 miles)

Source: Mitra, J.C. *Op.Cit.*

The Nagpur Road Plan was a landmark in the history of road development and for the first time an attempt was made to prepare a coordinated road development plan. The national

highway carried continuous road traffic across the states, the Provincial Road aided as the main arteries of trade, commerce. The District Roads were grouped into 'major' and 'other' and the village roads. The District Road branched off from National or State Highways lying within 2 to 5 miles of important villages. The village roads were the outer links connecting all rural settlements. The Recommendation of Nagpur Road Plan had a deep Impact on Kings Plan. Thus, came the provisions for village roads and considering the Railways complementary to the Highways was added

2.3. The Development of Tea Industry in Colonial Siliguri

Dr. Campbell in the beginning of the second half of the 19th century had started experiments with the Tea Plantation in Darjeeling. The success encouraged others to experiment with seeds distributed by the Government and this had a huge impact on Siliguri and adjoining areas. Government offered land to investors on favourable terms and by the end of 1866 there were 39 gardens in production with 10,000 acres under cultivation and an annual out turn of over 4,33,000 lbs of tea. In 1870 there were 56 gardens with 11,000 acres under cultivation employing 8,000 labourers and giving a crop of nearly 1,708,000 lbs. In the year 1910 the total area under tea leases was 123,853 acres of which 51,281 acres were under tea. In 1920 these areas had increased to 142,152 and 59,850 and in 1940 to 167,972 and 69,059. The area under tea rose to a maximum in 1948 when it was 63,227 acres; in that year the total area under lease was 165,680 acres. That is to say 258.75 square miles were under tea lease and 98.8 square miles under tea during 1948. The number of Tea gardens in Siliguri Sub-division at the time of independence was 51 in total shared by 27 gardens under Siliguri Thana, 11 gardens under Kharibari Thana and 13 gardens under Phansidewa Thana.¹²⁷ The labour force in the tea industry in 1870 was 8,000 and numbers employed, in 1921 was 44,279 and in 1940 it was 61,540. Actual population on Tea garden according to 1941 census was 1,46,508 and the Siliguri subdivision had a total labour force of 28,585 which included 13,867 workers under

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Siliguri Thana, Kharibari Thana had 5,999 and Phansedewa Thana had 8,719 workers as per census of 1941.

The British not only introduced tea in this area but for the first time in the history of India initiated “a scientific forest policy”. The successful introduction of tea plantations resulted in the clearing of large forests, necessitating the conservation of the remaining forest tract for ecological reasons. Accordingly the policy of “conservancy” was introduced in 1864. The British government noticed the danger of the reckless destruction of the forest reserves and consequently, the planning of “re-generation of trees” was given a high priority. A centre was opened at Sukna, near Siliguri for this purpose.

The introduction of forest policy and its headquarter at Sukna, near Siliguri opened up new possibilities for Siliguri Town.¹²⁸ With the locational advantage Siliguri and its suburb became an important centre of Timber selling. Before the Second World War a number of timber sawing mills on a small scale started. A Government owned mill was started in 1927 for the purpose “to break a ring of purchasers who were keeping down prices against Government and for the conversion of Second Grade Sal Log for which there was no market”¹²⁹. The description of this mill was given by Dash in 1942 is as follows:-

“The mill ran at a loss until it was remodelled in 1940. This resulted in an increase in daily output from 180 cubic feet in 1939 to 1000 cubic feet in 1944. Waste was reduced from 35 percent to 20 percent and since 1940 the mill has been working at a profit. It is a registered Factory under the Indian Factories Act and employs about 250 labourers of whom not more than 2 percent are hill men”. The two private mills, which Dash noted in Siliguri around 1940, were not registered. These mills had a circular saw for breakdown of round logs and 2 circular rip-saws. About 20 men are employed in each mill. Apart from these timber saving mills, there were plenty of saw yards at Siliguri, Naxalbari, Bagdogra and Sevoke.

¹²⁸ Dash. *op.cit.*, 1947, p. 196

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

The Second World War conditions brought a change in demand. Formerly, the demand for sawn sal was very high. But the war situation changed the demand pattern and there was a large demand for timber other than sal. With the growth of the Tea Industry the demand for plywood increased. Consequently, two small private factories started in this area from 1939 to 1945.

The Siliguri or Terai area was isolated for a long period of time. The place was malarious and people were unable to survive in the region. But with the growth of the tea industry the isolation was broken down. Great revolutionary Sri Satyen Majumdar who was brought captive in Siliguri town in that period wrote an auto-biography about Siliguri “town” of the 1920s. He says that Siliguri is a small town and nearly covered with forests on all sides. Whatever may be the direction of eyes, one can find nothing but green tall trees as if it is an island in the midst of green forests. There are streams out across Siliguri town here and there. The great “Paglajhora” (the “sad stream”) comes down to the plains and takes the name of “Mahananda”. Balason River is nearby and becomes ferocious during the monsoons. Apart from Balason and Mahananda there are small rivers with beautiful names like Rukmini and Panchandedi. During the winter one cannot imagine what those rivers became during the monsoon and the rainy season. In fact during the heavy rains Siliguri looks like a rain water loathed island.”¹³⁰ But the town becomes busy during the noon only. This is because the train from Calcutta arrives at that time. Many Europeans get down in Siliguri to take the toy-train to Darjeeling. Normally they go by first class. The Indians used to travel by second and third class. It took some time to change trains. and hawkers and vendors become very active at that time. Normally fish are brought through this train and Bengali *babus* come with their basket to buy fish. The fisherman may leave this place as soon as the next train starts and so there was a scramble to buy fish. The buying, selling, the bargainings, the hawkers, the vendors, the

¹³⁰ Majumdar, S. *Amar Biplab Gijnasa*. Manisha Press, 1973, pp. 13-27.

passengers of the train keep the place known as Siliguri busy and active at least for some time.¹³¹

Thus we see that jungles, hills, rivers, roads, railways, *haats* and almost everything in and around Siliguri participated in the growth and development of Siliguri. A mere village ‘unhygienic and , full of jungles and mosquitoes’, dreaded by Europeans, marauded by outlawed sanyasis, contested by Bhutanese and Kooch Rajas in the second half of the 19th century emerged as one of the largest and most developed towns of North Bengal. The main question arises, What would have been the fate of Siliguri, had General Lloyd and Dr. Chapman not decided to develop Darjeeling town into a sanatorium? What would be the urban discourse had Campbell not introduced the Tea industry in the region? Siliguri, a densely forested marshy land by virtue of her geographical location became a terminus traversed by roads leading to Kalimpong, Sikkim, and narrow gauge rail line along with cart road to Darjeeling. The history of the making of Darjeeling town into a sanatorium brought a new dawn for Siliguri. It seemed that though the torch of development was lit in the Darjeeling Hills by the Britishers, the light fell on the lap of Siliguri and paved a way for a new making of history. Siliguri romance with urbanisation had just begun. The journey to understand and comprehend the agencies of the historical processes in the making of this metropolis continues in the next chapter where population growth and the changing landscape of Siliguri are discussed.

¹³¹ Ibid.