

## Identity Movement and Urbanization

Ashok Das Gupta

Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of North Bengal, West Bengal

Abstract: If urbanisation and identity movement can influence each other is the main theme of this paper. Case study has been taken from northern West Bengal state of India and target group is Nepali speaking Himalayan people in respect to Siliguri township of sub-Himalayas.

Nepali-speaking hill people are basically from Central Himalayan country of Nepal where the concept of pan-Himalayan integrity in the name of Gorkha identity was emerged.

In British India and in post-independent times, many people of them have served Gorkha regiment and socio-politically formed a human shield in borderlands. They serve as the backbone alternatives like tea estates, forest departments, tourism, and settled agriculture: on the basis of that, several urban pockets were developed by the British in included Himalayan pockets and Terai-Duars foothills along with local watersheds from influences of Sikkim and Bhutan.

Gorkha people know very well the Shahi notion in Indian politics and the goodwill between Shahi and British Commonwealth needed for safety in South Asia.

Gorkhas always demand a separate statehood in the name of Gorkhaland over these territories once included in Bengal Presidency (now West Bengal state of India).

They keep good terms with country India. For the last hundred years, this demand of Gorkhaland was raised, whenever in British India or India with First, Second and First

Worlds in critical stages: to some the demand was of separatism and to many for inclusiveness.

Globalization, disparities and urban growth in Siliguri sub-Himalayas are accompanied by Gorkhaland movement.

### ***Introduction***

My paper is on if urbanization could increase separatist movement. I would not go through any holistic approach rather taking a specific way. India is a country with 29 states and 6 Union Territories. Out of these, West Bengal is an important state with 19 districts and of these 6 northern ones (Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar, Malda, North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur) here compose the northern part of the state, namely North Bengal. The Ganges River and its numerous distributaries have resulted in some of the most fertile regions in the world.

The second largest city of the state after Kolkata (Calcutta) is Siliguri that is located here in North Bengal. Due to population increase on regular basis, it has no option rather than to expand outwards. The two major townships under construction are Kawakhali-Porajhar by river Mahananda and Uttorayon (meaning *Destination North*) replacing the Chandmani Tea Estate. In this paper I am going to test the statement that urbanization could increase the scope of separatism and at the same time proper information to the local people could decrease this trend especially when development happens in a sustainable way.



MAP: India (Political)



MAP: West Bengal (not to scale)

Urbanization is a common phenomenon today. With globalization, things are changing rapidly. But it is true that urbanization is not new in the Indian Sub-Continent. From the time of the Indus Valley Civilization 5000 years back; urbanization is a common trend here. But

with the abolition of that civilization at about 2000-1500 BC, in most parts of India agriculture and cottage industries under the peasantry became the backbone of Indian economy: though urbanization proceeded on its own way as trade being the other major pillar of Indian society. Even we can see urbanization in the form of religious center or army cantonments or surrounding a fort or in the shape of an administrative center. Indians have communicated with the outside in the form of trade and also religion like Buddhism and Islam. Urban settlements were at a time surrounded by high walls and therefore with population increase, they became more densely populated without any proper planning in most of the time. They even behaved like certain centers and sub centers communicated through the networks of social bondage, political ties, business and religious pilgrimage. Towns and motels were there in ancient trade routes and the authorities often constructed roadways and took care of the safety of the caravans. Priest, robbers, police-administration and army were all there. Even, religious policies and relation with the traders were changed from time to time; but mostly there were no need of slavery as the labour resource, estate system as production machinery on business purpose and thirdly, rationalism in the entire society: major bulk of Indian population resided in their respective agrarian systems and created certain extra-caste, extra-class, extra-power complex sub-systems that maintained certain level nexus with urban settlements. But people in rural areas on the ground of strong solidarity (both horizontal and vertical) and factionalism provided self-sufficient characteristics to their village or village clusters. But they were not at all isolated groups and hence, networked with other such clusters providing a look of spider net. But in general, people in rural set up maintained a concept that urban life might be more luxurious

but not like as pious as the countryside. Property concept also changed from rural to urban: joint to fragmented family structure, technology input, community property sentiment, replacement of ascribed division of labour through achieved ones, social mobility, change in views, socio-cultural values and norms, and even structural transformations- everything being much affected. Wealth is also valued differently from place to place: crop, animal husbandry, gold and currency system. Even rural people staying with their folk lives within the triangle of Human-Nature-SuperNature have experienced certain levels of cosmopolitanism. After the establishment of British control over India (1757-1947 AD); the urbanization in India became more heterogeneous, westernized, modernized and global. They came out from the stagnation of elite and rich groups apart from the slum dwellers and strongly convinced by formation of intelligentsia, middle class, labour class, youth, gender consciousness, human right activities and pro-industrial mindset. Political science even agrees with the role of civil society. Every urban center has its own network system, own hinterland and own historicity. An urban center could never be restricted within its circumference or a specific location. So, apart from synchronic aspects; a diachronic discussion is always needed to properly understand the clauses behind formation of the urban center along with its hinterland- otherwise proper planning for its better future, good impact of its on the society and further development on a sustainable line could not be met with. There would generate a situation devoid of proper information system and clear cut policy. That could cause or even be misused to anti-development activities, social disruption and environmental protests; and under a heterogeneous condition lead to the ground of ethnic clashes/manifestation for all peoples' share and sustainability/urge for separatism. So, urbanization or economic growth with unequal share of distribution due to

discrimination or lack of proper management causes a separatist movement or at least influence it. Various points could be made available in justification or against such pattern of separatism. But behind the whole issue at least in present day context we could believe that the global economy with its boom, crashes and recession could influence the society for majority versus minority, secularism versus fundamentalism, ethnic versus pleural, localization versus globalization and such things. Here, Siliguri the emerging urban center in northern West Bengal under Indian Federation has taken under consideration. The notion of separatism and its link to various separatist movements in North Bengal demands a proper discussion on formation of North Bengal which is itself a result of so many geo-political separations.

Darjeeling in its very historical time has shifted from one power to another. Initially Darjeeling was a part of Sikkim. In 1780 it came under Nepal and in 1816 British restored it to Sikkim. It was 1835, when the British again acquired Darjeeling. The *Terai* portion was annexed in 1850. Duars (also *Doors*) and Kalimpong were included in 1865 and 1866 respectively from Bhutan. The district attained its present dimension in 1866; even the partition of 1947 left this district intact and as a part of West Bengal. Now-a-days the district has three hill sub-division viz. Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and a plain one-Siliguri (O'Malley 1907).

However, the Darjeeling district is therefore has 4 subdivisions and only Siliguri is in the *Terai* region and the rest three (Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Karsiyang/ Kurseong are the hill regions). Today the district expands its area to 3,149 square kilometers with a total population of 1,609,172 souls within more or less same latitude and longitude- 26°27'10" and 27°13'5" north latitude and between 87°59'30" and 88°53'0" east longitude

(Census of India 2001).The district head is Darjeeling town situated in Darjeeling subdivision, but the main trade center is here Siliguri which is the only way to North Eastern states and Bhutan from mainland India.

***Route causes of Separatist Movement in Darjeeling District (not “root” but “route”, as once this Himalayan track was fallen on ancient Silk Route)***

British authorities despite the Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling district established or encouraged establishment of tea gardens. Tea estates were set up in formerly Lower Sikkim areas (Darjeeling and Karsiyang subdivisions) and *Terai* extension (Siliguri subdivision). British also established similar tea estates throughout the *Doors*. Further they brought people from Deccan Shahi and Gorkha Shahi there as the labor category. Those people were tribes, *Matoalis* and *Adivasis*. Higher categories also came to those places from those Shahi extensions for other employments. Later higher category of Nepali speaking communities treated as *Tagadharis* entered to the place along with more and more *Matoalis* having lower status. They together and also incorporating some others like Lepcha, Limbu, etc. constituted the Gurkha identity. Many of other groups like Bhutia, Tibertan, Kashmiri Muslim and Chinese diaspora, and mainland Indians made collaboration with this Gurkha common identity and established in this frontire region. Nepalis or Gurkhas flourished mostly in Darjeeling hills, Kurseong hills and also Kalimpong hills. They were also sporadically existing in Siliguri Terai and entire Duars. But there they had no numerical strength except a few mountainous Indo-Bhutan borderland areas. In these foothills, *Adivasis* were much more in number. Both Gurkha or Nepali speaking elements and *Adivasis* were primarily working at tea garden estates and therefrom started settled cultivation in tiny river patches where Bengalis and Rajbanshis could not reach. Oraon, Munda and Santhals among the *Adivasis* preferred settled cultivation the most. Santhals are many other



places in North Bengal. Santhals, Mundas and Oraons are also staying at Dinajpur and Malda watershed areas. Nepali, *Adivasi*, Rajbanshi and Bengali communities introduced settled cultivation in the plains, watersheds, uplands, forest-torned regions, foothills and hills to overcome slash-and-burn, shifting, bush fallow and agro-forestry type of cultivations practiced by communities indigenous to these lands in real sense. Transnational trade was also faced challenges from tea, timber, tourism, and transportation based economies. British settled new townships in Duars and ensured their connectivity with Siliguri Town at Siliguri Terai by means of bridges, roadways and rail tracks. Nepali speaking people could demand on entire Darjeeling district and Bengal Duars of Jalpaiguri district, but they had the numerical strength in three hilly sub-divisions of Darjeeling districts like Kalimpong, Kurseong and Darjeeling Sadar. These three subdivisions in the post-independent period have been enjoying autonomy in the name of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council and Gorkhaland Territorial Administration. Proposals were also there for implementation of Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution. Many ask for creation of separate district, unification with Sikkim and even pan-Himalayan expansion of Gorkhahood. Gorkha or Gurkha people are also there in many pockets of North East India and they are the numerical majority in Sikkim state also.

Actually, in pre-colonial times, the most influential powerhouse was the Mughal Padshahi that in combination with Rajput Shahis decided to unify entire region. They were assisted by so many princely states of Sub-Shahi types. There were other minor Shahis like Turk- Afghan Shahi in Indus valley and Afghanistan that previously spread over a huge part of India. Kushanas ruled that Shahi since ancient historical times through Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic times. Dinajpur-Rajshahi was another Shahi in Indo-Bangladesh region that is now shared by North Bengal and North Western part of Bangladesh (Rajshahi Division). This is actually a

watershed with various rain fed rivers separating Gangetic plain and Brahmaputra valley. This is geographically too closer to mouth of Brahmaputra and Gangetic Delta (Bengal Delta). Other rivers from Chhotonagpur plateau and so many watersheds and plateaus and hills and eastern part of Himalayas within the Tibeto-Burmese conclave also make their ways to this river network formed by ultimate union of Brahmaputra mouth and Bengal Delta upon Bay of Bengal. Koch Bihar was an indigenous state in North Bengal of India that maintained good terms with Mughal Padshahi and Rajput estates. The entire Indo-Nepal borderline which is actually a foothill region or *Terai* above the Gangetic plain of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar heartland is linked up closely with ancient Epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, Little Republics, origins of Buddhism and Jainism and Nathism as well as colonization of Indo-Greeks and Turk- Afghans. This also has some Shahi attitude and known as Lucknow Shahi too closer to Delhi as the center of Turk-Afghan Sultanate in South Asia, Agra as that of the Mughals, and Mathura that of Kushana Shahs in India and center of Vaishnavism- a quasi-egalitarian sect in Hinduism. Along these Shahis like Lucknow and Dinajpur as well as Mughal, Rajput, Turk-Afghans, Kushanas, Indo-Greeks, Little Republics, followers of Parasurama, that of Kashyapa, Vedics, Pre-Vedics, pre-agriculturists, agrarian castes, offshoots of transnational trade and indigenous communities often broadly categorized into Kirata, Mon, Bodo and Bhati in several names; during the British rule in India so many Gurkhas (Gorkha) of Nepal and *Adivasis* (aborigines) from Deccan entered into North Bengal and their maximum concentration was found in included parts from Sikkim and Bhutan. Bhutan is still a kingdom but with friendly ties with India. Sikkim is now a part of Indian federation. Bangladesh is a separate country covering major parts of Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Bengal Delta, Brahmaputra mouth, Barak-Surma-Meghna-Feni

water body, and minor part from Arakan-Myanmar coast by the name of Chittagong. Pakistan is another country mainly covering Turk-Afghan Shahi on Indus valley just next to Kashmir, Afghanistan and Iran. Pakistan opens at Arabian Sea and Bangladesh at Bay of Bengal. Nepal is also an independent country. India today is composed of Mughal, Rajput, Lucknow, and Deccan Shahis along with pockets of Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Gorkha habitation in Indian Himalayas and foothills, sub-Shahis or formerly Princely States that joined into Indian Federation and also other pockets that might once be kind of Nation States with their own economy and relationship with transnational business routes. Island of Sri Lanka and isles of Maldives are two and only the two such examples that are influenced by magical, Buddhist and Arab notions with a few Christian populations also. Tibet was also a Nation State now under China. Sub-Himalayan republics are shared by India and Nepal. Bengal is now an Indo-Bangladesh territory. Punjab is an Indo-Pakistan region. Kashmir is not beyond controversial claims and counter claims. India as a country believes in democracy and unity in diversity. And from grievances, a sense of separatism often emerges out that the State handle according to its policies towards the reasons responsible. Darjeeling district and Bengal Duars in Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal are basically included territories. From their formation, Gorkhas (Gurkhas) and Adivasis acted like human barricade in these territories in favour of India. Even in Indian Army from the time of the British, there has been the Gurkha regiment. So, this is very simple to understand that these people would definitely agitate if they feel that their interest according to them is violated. That protest may not lead to the level of separatism. Odisha, Bihar and Jharkhand states of India today were once within the Bengal Presidency during British rule in India. In 1911 AD, these places along with princely states there and tribal pockets were out of Bengal. During

1930s, Myanmar or Burma under British Commonwealth was isolated from India officially. During independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, Bengal was partitioned. West Bengal state was formed in India. Its northern part or North Bengal including Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts remained as only communication to North East India- the Indian parts of Brahmaputra, Barak and Feni along with hills, eastern part of Himalayas, watersheds, plateaus, forests, mines, croplands and tribal pockets. Tribal dominated pockets of Kashmir were captured by pro-Pakistan groups immediately after independence. China occupied Tibet and Dalai Lama took shelter into India in 1960s. Sikkim was incorporated into India and Bangladesh as an independent country was formed in 1970s. East Bengal was previously controlled by Pakistan since 1947. In this long history from 1911 to 1971, there was a demand of autonomy for or separation of the Gurkha dominated pockets from Bengal and then from West Bengal. Gurkhas unlike the Adivasis were more concentrated in hill portions of Himalayan range falling in Darjeeling and Bengal Duars. Adivasis also agitate from time to time but in foothill Duars and Siliguri sub-division and yet now they have not demanded a separation. Gurkhas demanded from *Pranta Parshad* or frontier province and later name as Gorkhaland. This demand of Gorkhaland got a new pace in 1980s.

Rajbanshis, Koch-Rajbanshis, Bengali caste groups and Muslim folks from different parts of Bengal Presidency and other peoples from South Asia are following Gurkhas and *Adivasi* people and as a result of this, indigenous communities like Dhimal, Toto, Drukpa, Lepcha, Limbu, Garo, Bodo, Mech, Rabha and Koch have become highly marginalized. Rajbanshi is rather a caste group, greater social fold to incorporate other social fractions, agriculturists, and time to time formed indigenous statehoods on ancient transnational

routes collaborating to mainland Indian polity and bridging it with Tibeto-Myanmar belt. Rajbanshis as sub-Shahi and pro-British elements are believers in India. They are the third human shield after Gurkha and Adivasi. North Bengal pockets were also origin of so many agitations with historical references. So, in a sense, demands of Gorkhaland by Nepali-speaking Gorkhas as well as Kamtapur or Koch Bihar by the Rajbanshis are separatist approach. And at the same time, that could be agitation by the people there against the state machinery of West Bengal government that could again be in favour or against the National interest. But going against national interest would not be so easy in such a geo-strategically important territory, especially by the Gorkhas having a regiment in Indian army. Sometimes, separatist movement can be due to failure of the previous policy and transmission into a newer one. We cannot forget that since independence, India has gone through mixed economy, macro-economy, microfinance, and global market economy that again could be fully or partially controlled or on neo-liberal lines. The concepts may be of human resources, gold, cattle, crop, cash and credit. The basis of these all is generally *Swadeshi* or Gandhian way of living very much successful in countering Great Depression of 1930s and World Wars. India politically passes on Third and Second World to reach into the First World. North Bengal is such a cross road where different sentiments may work in favor of the Western World, Muslim World and even Buddhist World. Indians believe in Shrine and non-Shrine gold and have conceptuality regarding Roman gold, El Dorado, Buddhist gold and Arab gold from historicity. And gold is the symbol of globalization for all pre-Vedics, Vedics and post-Vedics. So, demand for separation may be multidirectional.

### ***Importance of Tea Economy in Darjeeling***

Tea estates not only provides alternative to transnational routes, forests and mines, but competed to Chinese monopoly in tea trade and first step towards making the frontier human shields and multicultural.

The people entered in Darjeeling district but not directly participated in tea gardens have used tea based economy (auction center, etc.) as their platform before they could further spread here and there in tourism and timber industries. That gradually increased importance of the Siliguri urban center in Siliguri subdivision that is a foothill area and not on the steep Himalayas, thus easy for communication. Later on, this region has become a major trade zone, cosmopolitan in nature and the Gateway to North East India besides Bhutan, Sikkim and Chumbi valley of Tibetan Autonomous Territory. Chumbi valley has an average elevation of 9,500 feet (2,900 metres), forested slopes, and a pleasant climate most of the year (Ref: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1526563/Chumbi-Valley>).

Information on Land of Tea Gardens(in acres)- Darjeeling District	
Total no of Tea Gardens	144 (Darjeeling, Kurseong and Siliguri subdivisions + Kalimpong Sub-Division comprising of only 4: Samabeong Tea Estate, Ambiok Tea Estate, Mission Hill Tea Estate and Kumai Tea Estate)
Retained Area	141056.02
Area Under Tea	74843.82
Area Under Housing, etc. Unuse Area	12499.98
Area under Forest	16308.93
Doubtful Area	17217.27
	20186.02

(Ref: <http://www.darjeeling.gov.in/tea-garden.html>)

Besides tea; timber and tourism are other economies for the Darjeeling hills. The tea economy in 19<sup>th</sup> Century became a challenge to Chinese monopoly over tea trade. China until anti-opium movement in 1853 AD had been economically undergone into the hands of British Company. Along that revolt in China we could simultaneously see tribal revolts in Chhotonagpur plateau of Deccan Shahi especially at the Rajmahal areas of ChhotoNagpur followed by Sepoi Mutiny of 1857 AD initiated from Bengal. These revolts in India resulted into complete end of Mughal Padshahi and Company's role in Indian politics in practical. The Gorkha Shahi from Nepal-Darjeeling area along with the Sikh and Rajput Regiments were found assisting the British that in post1857 became the British Raj in context of the Commonwealth; whereas the free trade zones of extreme south of Indian peninsula also remained more or less unaffected. In Nilgiri Hills of that extreme south and Sri Lanka; British also established tea estates followed by Kenya hills in Africa.

However, the vacuum in Indian polity was compensated by British Raj for another 90 years (1857-1947 AD) and in the meantime, more tea estates were flourished in entire *Terai*, *Doors*, Meghalaya hills (Upper Assam) and various other pockets of Assam. In this way Tea industry has been globalized. Darjeeling tea has a world wide reputation. The interesting thing is that during phases, the *Doors* and *Terai* regions have become truly multicultural.

*Plucking tea leaf in Darjeeling*



### ***Gorkha Regiment***

The Gorkha people of Darjeeling-Karsiyang region (upper valley of Mahananda-Mechi river system) are also found joining in the Indian Army (Gorkha Regiment) and often behaving like a part of global market economy even as a toiling class over there. And therefore the hill people despite of all the harmony with the cosmopolitan plain people seldom could negotiate with the state economy. The later is basically considered as one kind of micro-economy going well in highly concentrated areas. The state under a Leftist Government since 1977 AD uninterruptedly left only some macroeconomic pockets including the Darjeeling-Karsiyang hill area.

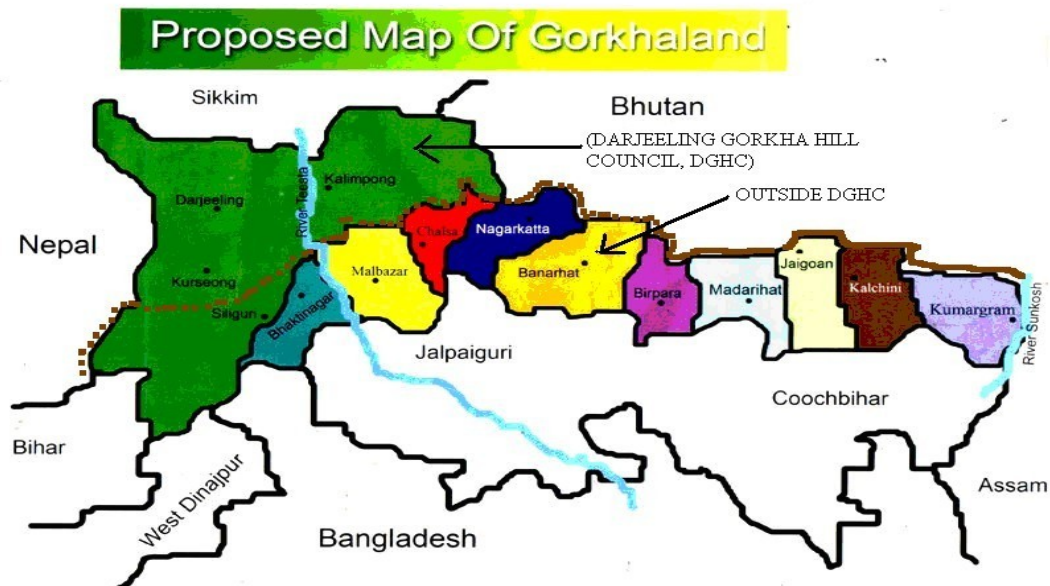
### ***Kalimpong***

On the other hand; lacking of tea gardens in Kalimpong (formerly of Bhutan) has its own significance. Nearby Jelep-La pass has made Kalimpong accessible to Tibet geographically through Chumbi valley. Kalimpong is basically an agro zone. Here, the slash-and-burn type of cultivation has been being gradually replaced by step cultivations on contoured trenches and bench terraces, horticulture of orange and various spice and vegetable cultivation. Forest resources and bad quality coal are also there.



The economy of Duars-Siliguri Terai-Darjeeling Hill (DTH) is based on tea, timber and tourism (3T) that are definitely related with Global Economy or at least macro-economy. Both the communities Adivasi and Nepali in Tea Estates are dealing with trade union movements; but in hill areas that would be more ethnocentric (on Gorkhahood) as compared to that in cosmopolitan foothill region. Ethnocentrism is countered in foothills

by multiculturalism, lesser access to global market economy and its harsh recession and overlap between macro and micro economy.



The proposed map of Gorkhaland includes not only the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling districts but the entire *Terai* and *Doors* area including Siliguri municipality is rapidly growing these days and hence, a kind of destination for construction business (out of many) than any other urban setup in the entire region.

No doubt, the economic progress in a comparatively higher pace in Siliguri would attract the hill people before they become completely starved and feel poor. Hill people all over the world had to struggle for existence against cold, malnutrition and remoteness. Always such a demand for separation might not be either a whole conspiracy against the Nation or an easy way to be rich and richer for certain individuals in leadership.

Volatile political condition in North East India; slowing down in the policy of a unified trade block considering China, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar; failure (?) in the *Look*

*East Policy* of Government of India in increasing trade with the ASEAN countries followed by initiating transnational trade routes are also depressing.

### ***Siliguri in Progress***

Siliguri stands on the verge of Terai and at the foothills of Himalayas and situated in Darjeeling district, West Bengal. Because of its strategic location straddling NH31, it is the most important town in West Bengal and is rightly called Gateway of the North-Eastern States. The entire road & train traffic to the north-east passes through the narrow corridor that is North Bengal which links it to the rest of India. Its proximity to the international borders of Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and China further increases its importance and is evident in the explosive growth seen in recent years and is now considered the second capital of West Bengal.

The advantageous location of Siliguri makes it an ideal centre for trade, commerce and transit tourist traffic. Major trade and commerce infrastructure exists in the three most northerly districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar with Siliguri as the main hub. Historically, Siliguri lies on the traditional trade route to Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet, and even in its initial growth period, it attracted people from its vast hinterlands stretching as far as Bihar, eastern fringes of Uttar Pradesh and Assam. As a result Siliguri has acquired a cosmopolitan character.

**Some Basic Data about Siliguri Municipal Corporation :**

Name of the Corporation	Siliguri Municipal Corporation.
Address	Bagha Jatin Road, P.O. – Siliguri. Pin – 7334401.
District	Darjeeling.
State	West Bengal
Area	41.90 Sq. Km.
Number of Wards Number	47
of Councillors Number of	47
Male Councillors	28
Number of Female Councillors	19
Population as per Census of India - 2001	4,72,374
Average Annual Growth Rate	4.87 %
Decadal Growth Rate (1991-2001)	48 %
Population Density	11,224 persons per sq. km.
Literacy rate	79.31 %
Male Literacy rate	84.03 %
Female Literacy rate	73.86 %
Slum Population	1,68,214
Slum Population	35 %
BPL Population	22.4 %
Number of Slums	154
Major Rivers	Mahananda, Fuleswari ,Jorapani
Seismic vulnerability	High ( Zone – IV )
Administrative Units	47 wards, 5 Boroughs.
Mayor – In - Council	Mayor, Deputy Mayor and 7 other Members Mayor –In – Council.
Administration	Commissioner,Secretary, Executive Engineer, Finance Officer.
Economic Base	Service, Trade, Industry etc.

(Source: <http://www.siligurismc.com/>)

Siliguri of Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district is a city with 47 wards under Siliguri Municipal Corporation and of these 15 are falling in neighbouring Jalpaiguri district. The Indian army, Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Shashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and the Assam Rifles have bases around the city. The Bagdogra Airport is located within the Indian Air Force (IAF) cantonment area. Siliguri has an Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. (IOC) oil depot near the southern edge of the town.

The main water source for the perennial rivers of the district is the snowmelt from the Himalayas and hence, there is plenty of water on their beds throughout the year. Main water channels in this area are Teesta, Jaldhaka and Mahananda. Other important rivers include Leesh, Geesh and Chel to the east of Teesta and Mahananda, Balason and Mechi to the West of it. This river network provides sufficient surface water all over the district. Underground water in huge quantities is also readily available within a maximum depth of 10-15 ft. in the plains. As far as quality of water is concerned river water is soft but underground water has little hardness.

Siliguri is well connected by road, rail and air. Siliguri has developed as an important node for all surface communication systems of this region. Siliguri is linked to the other parts of India and the neighboring Himalayan Kingdoms by NH-31, NH 31A, NH-55, Lateral Road and a number of major state highways (SH-2, 12A). All the three types of railway links viz. broad gauge, meter gauge and narrow gauge connect

Siliguri is hence connected with the national Capital and a large number of other state Capitals and the Darjeeling District Hill Stations. Important trains such as the prestigious Rajdhani Express and Darjeeling Mail touch its major railhead at New Jalpaiguri (NJP). Siliguri is also connected by Air-links from Bagdogra with the national capital and a

number of other state capitals by daily services and plans are afoot to connect it with Nepal and Bhutan too. A helicopter service also flies regularly to Gangtok, Sikkim.

Siliguri and its surroundings has surplus power served by (at least) one 132/33/11 KV substation, one 132/33 KV substation, six 33/11KV substation and one 66/11 KV substation. Further two 132/33 KV and one 220/132/33 KV substation are already under commissioning to meet the future demand of this area.

However a summary of various facilities available in Siliguri subdivision:

Medical College-1

Engineering College-1

Polytechnic-1

Sub Division Hospital-1

Nursing Homes, Cinema Halls

Open Air Theatres, Market Complexes

Recreational Parks, Public Schools Good

Hotels and Restaurants Suggested

Industries:

Food Grade Potato Flour and Flakes

Bottles & Mineral Water

Canned Juice / Jam /Jellies

Fruit Concentrates & Dehydrated

Vegetables

Freeze-dried Fruit Slices

Blended Spices

Whole Peeled / Diced / Tomato Puree

Modern Integrated Rice Mill

Jute Composites/Bags/Laminated bags

PVC Bags & Speciality Polymers

Alcoholic Products

Floriculture

Hotels / Motels

Eco-Tourism / Resort Complex

Cement / Paper

Clocks & Watch Assembly

IT & Knowledge based industries

Plastic Water Storage Tanks

Digital Press

Multi-speciality Hospitals

Disposable Syringes and Needles

Wooden Furniture

Rubber-based Industries

Sericulture

Timber-based Industries

Bio-Fertilizers

Amusement Park

Adventure Tourism

Tea Bags



People are coming from everywhere in Siliguri not just because it is the gateway to North East and Bhutan or a business center; but for the very fact that it has become the power center of North Bengal keeping close eyes on Mid Bengal, Dinajpur, Jharkhand, Bihar, Nepal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, DTH, Sikkim, Bhutan, Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar, Bangladesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Surma-Meghna region, Mynamar and China.

Parallel to this, comparatively less equipped bulk from neighboring rururban and suburban areas and slums of the same heterogeneous urban economy have thrived in for search of mostly blue collar jobs.

If we keep aside the matter of Global Economic Recession from our mind for a while; like all other cities and towns in West Bengal and India, Siliguri has a potential amount of corporate-prone people. These people in and around the city have been previously attached to white collar jobs and now are ready to spend their wealth whatever they have earned through generations in order to become a part and parcel of the Corporate World. No doubt the area has a historical significance and in just little mile distance from the present city, Matigara was an important trade center regulated by Purnea since the pre-British time. The location of Matigara is on the Mahananda-Balason basin. It is world famous for its pottery industry and in past, the place was known for its timber industry, especially for the wooden plough made from teak of local forest areas. Wooden plough was cottage industry here and had a great demand throughout Purnea, North Bengal and northern Bangladesh. British established Siliguri nearby Matigara on the bank of Mahananda again close to Dinajpur highland extensions at Rajgunj Block now in Jalpaiguri district. The Dabgram area now grown up as an industrial sector in Rajgunj Block was said to be once an important power

center by the Mech(e) there and also fell under the *Baikunthopur* estate of Jalpaiguri-CoochBehar formation in pre-British time.

Siliguri after partition of India and Bengal in 1947 AD have remained the only way to get into the North East India and Bhutan from the mainland. The inclusion of Sikkim in India as a democratic set up instead of being a separate country till 1975 AD has increased Siliguri's importance. Due to the international boundary with Bangladesh, Siliguri has got more priority (especially after the opening of Fulbari trade route and a dry port there just 30 Km. away from Siliguri). Nepal is directly connected with the subdivision likewise Purnea district of Bihar.

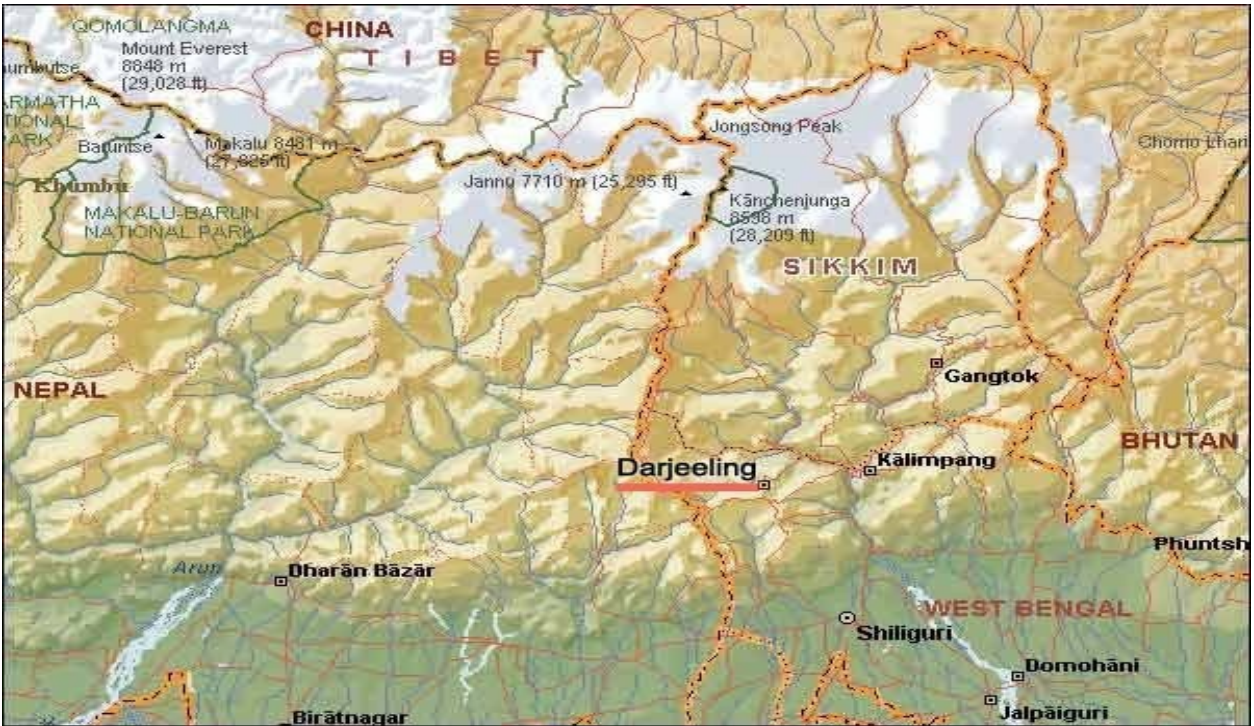
MAP: Location of Siliguri



Map of India and South Asia shows Eastern India in the box. See the map below for an enlargement of Eastern India.



This map shows the Eastern Himalayan region around Darjeeling. Darjeeling and the Sikkim region are shown in the red box.



Siliguri (Shiliguri) is shown near the center of the map





Siliguri and Matigara (new township area) beside Baikunthapur forest

4 "T" s - Tea, Timber, Tourism and Transport are the main businesses of Siliguri. Opening of *Nathu La* pass in Sikkim has made China and Tibet autonomy linked up with the region through lower Sikkim area (Dajeeling-Kurseong) already included in the district. Siliguri has therefore become an important trade center for not only northern West Bengal but for the whole Sub-Continent included by South Asia Subcontinental Economic Cooperation (crucial among various Regional Cooperation Initiatives in globalized Asia). Siliguri is the headquarters of FOCIN (Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of North Bengal). Opening of shopping and entertainment malls like COSMOS, ORBIT & City Centre has affected a change in lifestyle. The city recently also witnessed the arrival of its first set of multiplexes - CINEMAX, INOX at ORBIT and Big Cinemas. The rapidly growing city also has showrooms of numerous automobile companies such as Maruti Suzuki, Honda Siel, Toyota Kirloskar, Ford, Tata, JCB, Mahindra & Mahindra, Hyundai, Skoda, General Motors, Fiat, Mahindra Renault, Chevorlet, Eicher, Ashok Leyland, Sonalika etc. There are numerous two wheeler showrooms also of companies: Hero Honda, Kinetic, Honda scooters, Yamaha, Tvs, Suzuki, Bajaj, LML. A large number of retail jewellers have opened showrooms in Siliguri: Tanisq, P.C. Chandra, M. P. Jewellers, Senco Gold, Damas etc. With the growing commercial transactions there has opened up some major banks in the city namely Standard Chartered, HDFC, ICICI, Allahabad, State Bank of India, Axis Bank, UCO, Vijaya, IDBI and UBKG bank. There are also some other banks such as Bank of Maharashtra, Bank of Baroda, Canara Bank, Andhra Bank, PNB, Indusind Bank, Sonali Bank etc. In a recent gesture of international co-

operation and friendliness the road network of Siliguri is being used by the government of Nepal and Bangladesh so as to facilitate easy transportation of essential and urgent commodities (like rice etc.). The Silk Route of India i.e. trade route between India and China is accessible only after crossing Siliguri (Nathula and Jeleppla); thus making it important for international trade between India and other countries and also among other countries. There also are business routes to Bhutan and security manned border with Bangladesh. Siliguri is experiencing a rapid expansion of its population. According to estimates for 2008, 1,559,275 people live in the city. Siliguri is predominantly a Bengali-speaking city, minorities include Nepali, Marwaris and Biharis (mainly migrant labourers). Siliguri has seen waves of massive immigration over the years [the most prominent being the migrants from Nepal and Bihar]. In addition, people from Jharkhand and other parts of India have also come to the city in search of livelihood.

Rapid urbanization witnessed in Matigara block in the past one decade because of its proximity to Siliguri has prompted the residents to demand municipal status for the area. The adjoining Matigara block is spread over five panchayats (rural governing bodies), covering an area of 128.09sqkm. According to the 2001 census, the population in the block was 1, 19,408 and the growth witnessed in the previous decade was 40.90 per cent against the state's 17.84 per cent. Many think that the recorded number of people will go up once the ongoing census is completed and the data collected are collated and published. The block has also the North Bengal Science Centre, Savin Kingdom — an entertainment park, Paribahan Nagar, where several state and central government offices are located and the electronic manufacturing unit of Videocon, besides top schools, offices of the state secondary education board and the higher secondary council, Himul plant, a government

science college, a small industrial park and the Himanchal Bihar, a composite residential area followed by Uttorayon township. From North Bengal University and the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital (NBMCH) to Uttorayon Township and the North Bengal Frontier headquarters of the BSF, all are located in Matigara block. Demands have been made to upgrade certain areas of the block into a municipality.

Like other urban centers worldwide, this region has also a global exposure. The urban bulk in Siliguri is realizing that once you become the corporate, you fall into a cycle of consumerism- you are earning to spend within a nearly closed structure which is something different from traditional Indian market and has a global fragrance. But this Corporate World has lastly failed to remain unharmed and got over-loaded with huge economic burden. People are being aware and becoming conscious of the fact of money-saving which is a typical Indian character. Impulse is there to set up new townships with certain ultra-modern facilities near Siliguri; so that the corporate bulk spread throughout the country and the globe could return back to their homeland, invest safely and wish feedback despite of only outflow. At the same time, the Global Market would try to pierce into the local market and expand itself so as to revive from the recession scar. But chief question remains the same that if such neo-urbanization with both advantages and disadvantages can become a cause of separatist movement?





The economy of tea, timber, transport and tourism (4T) was once established in Darjeeling hills to compensate the trans-national trade economy. But at this time of Global Market Economy with a phase of recession, this 3T model can not fulfill all the requirements of such an exposed hill community. So, one kind of disappointment is getting higher entropy within the tough hilly livelihood. And the people there cannot remain satisfied with just any Hill Council and so a demand of Sixth Schedule or Autonomous Territory and even a call for separate State with wider geographical jurisdiction including the entire Sub-Himalayan tea belt have been made. But the main target remains always the demand for incorporation of Siliguri foothills plus investment friendly new townships (real estates and construction business). It is therefore evident that how a separatist movement could be revived with a new pace due to the crisis in macro economy and also from the fear that they would be underestimated and thrown into the misery with no voice for Gorkhaland and Gorkha identity.

### ***Remarks***

Sociologically saying, these identity movements in the name of common way of expression (such as, language) and secondly, by means of common historical background (rather than class interests) and even racial features have expressed solidarity. They might hypothetically bring many under a common umbrella, urge to stop exploitation, ensure human resource development and capacity building, set free from underestimated situation by more privileged condition and assure human rights. With time the aim has radically changed so as to become the majority over other minor groups and to ensure the biggest

piece of development cake. That may take the shape of demand for separate statehood on ethnicity. The main problem is here that this kind of absolute dependence on global market economy can reversibly hamper the system built upon the common sentiment of cultural identity and nothing else. Culture itself is like a book where each page says something about the knowledge system and experiments on trial and error through generations as written in the scripts of symbol and value-loaded experience. So, any hamper to the culture, especially the non-subsistent portion could exert a lethal effect on the community. One type of fundamentalism from the sense of isolation followed by separatist movement automatically originates. The problem becomes more complex if temporary ups and downs in the market further extend into global economic recession. People may get more and more frustrated, exclusively when in such a situation they have found themselves helpless to revive their traditional institutions which they have neglected long and considered less- profitable. In such a situation, social anarchy may arise and rebel groups fighting for justice can transform into terrorists and accept terrorism as the crudest and the worst path of earning money. Absolutely, this system belongs to macro-economy rather micro- economy. Only economic reforms in a sustainable all-acceptable manner and proper awareness among the people could solve such problems.

## ***Bibliography***

Bhowmik SK (1981). Class Formation in a Plantation System. P.P. Limited: New Delhi. Das Gupta A (2006). Ontology and Epistemology of Tribal Groups in North Bengal. Paper presented in 38th Annual Conference of Indian Anthropological Society, 9-11 December, 2006. University of North Bengal.

O'Malley LSS (1999). Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling. ISBN 817268018X

<http://thehimalayanbeacon.com/resourcecentre/2011/01/10/book-bengal-district->

[gazetteer-darjeeling/](http://thehimalayanbeacon.com/resourcecentre/2011/01/10/book-bengal-district-gazetteer-darjeeling/)

Sanyal CC (1965). Rajbanshi of North Bengal. Kolkata: Asiatic Society.

Sharma K (1995). The Himalayan Tea Plantation Workers. Dibrugarh: N.L. Publishers.

