

THE MAKING OF THE HISTORY AND IDENTITY OF NORTH BENGAL

Volume-1
(Society and Economy)



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First Published 2023

ISBN: 978-93-95651-42-4

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Published in India by **Prem Singh Bisht** of **Kunal Books**, and printed at **Trident Enterprises**, Noida, U.P.

Evolution of the Civic Administration in Jalpaiguri Town and its Colonial Overtone

Sheshadri Prosad Bose

Till now the historical investigation pertaining to North Bengal urbanization is not a vibrant field of activity, inspite of the valuable observations made by Ranajit Das Gupta and Asim Chaudhuri regarding the plantation-centric urbanization in the Jalpaiguri in the colonial period.¹

Till 1951 although in official vocabulary Jalpaiguri town was declared to be the District Headquarter but the severe paucity of any official financial grant belied the prospect for betterment of civic administration or the chances of providing civil amenities to its citizens were dim. Jalpaiguri town hardly had any electricity before 1933 and absolutely had no water-works before 1935. Alipurduar town, the second largest settlement acquired the status of a non-municipal town as late as 1951 had urban characteristics however in an embryonic form in the colonial period. Apart from these two urban centres, Jalpaiguri district was dotted with some trading centres or Ganjas. The 1911 District Gazetteer stated only six chief trading centres in the Duars—Jorpakri, Mainaguri, Falakata, Madarihat, Buxa and Alipurduar. In the regulation part the number of trading centres were only six i.e. Jalpaiguri town, Tetulia, Rajnagar, Saldanga, Debiganj and Buxa.² Besides Domohani situated on the left bank of the Tista attained the characteristic of a railway settlement.

Among these settlements, Jalpaiguri town deserves special mention. The place served as headquarter of the Railway since the second decade of the 19th century. The British had a long cherished dream to make Jalpaiguri town a district headquarter. During the Anglo-Bhutan war in the southern part of the town an army cantonment was established to collect revenues from the North-Eastern regions and to assess the potentialities of trade and commerce