



HISTORY OF TRANSFORMATION OF SILIGURI FROM UNION BOARD TO MUNICIPAL CORPORATION AND ITS URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract : Siliguri is the gateway to North-East India. It is not only of vital importance to the state of West Bengal but to India as a whole. The town is popularly known as the chicken neck of north-east India because its corridor establishes a connection between the rest of India and the north-eastern states. It also links hill stations such as Gangtok, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and Mirik and the northeast states with the rest of India. Siliguri town is bounded by international borders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. It is also connected with the traditional trade route of Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet. During the initial period of its growth, Siliguri attracted migrants from its hinterlands like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Assam and with the passing of time Siliguri acquired a cosmopolitan character. This indicates the rapid pace of urbanisation in Siliguri Urban Area. But in 1901, Siliguri was a tiny village of less than 800 populations. Siliguri was upgraded as a Municipal town with a population of 32,480 with the area of 15.54 sq. km in 1951 and it extended further to 41.90 sq. km in 1994 when it was incorporated to Siliguri Municipal Corporation. Meanwhile, Siliguri Municipality was established on 24th May, 1949 through a gazette notification under the Bengal Municipal Act of 1932. The purpose of this paper is to study the history of transformation of Siliguri town from Municipality to Municipal Corporation. The proposed study intends to find out the nature of political participation of various political parties to governing the Local-self Government in Siliguri Municipality. The present study is based on primary sources; mostly unpublished materials were consulted either in District Magistrate Office of Darjeeling, or Divisional Commissioner's Office in Jalpaiguri, or in West Bengal State Archive in Calcutta. Besides primary sources, several books, Memories, local journals, magazines, souvenirs, newspapers, historical journals, unpublished Ph. D thesis has been used to enrich the study.

IndexTerms - Siliguri, Chicken-neck, Urbanisation, Municipality, Corporation, Local-self Government, Municipal Corporation.

INTRODUCTION:

Siliguri is located in the plains of Himalayas and on the banks of the river Mahananda. The city is popularly known as the gateway of north east India because its corridor is connected with the north-eastern states to the rest of India.¹ (Basu and Saha, 2011) It was mere village with a population of 784 in 1901 and from where it has emerged as a town by reason of its importance as a centre of communication and transshipment. When the North Bengal State Railway was extended to Siliguri in 1878, the village was transferred from the Jalpaiguri district to Darjeeling. The Darjeeling Hill Railway on a different gauge was very soon completed and the cart road to Darjeeling was thereafter steadily improved. Siliguri thus became a transshipment point from the meter gauge railway to the narrow gauge railway and the Cart Road. Roads and railways were later opened out in the Terai and up the Teesta valley, thus increasing the business importance of Siliguri. Such administrative importance as Siliguri has secured is due to its position as a focus of communication² (Dash, 1947:263). The earlier writers, travellers, historians called Siliguri as Sannyasikata or Baikunthapur or Brattish Hazari. The word 'Siliguri' is comes from 'Sili' and 'guri'.³ According to Shailen Debnath 'Siliguri' means a stack of pebbles or stone. Siliguri region was called as 'Silkhaguri' until the 19th century, when it was under Baikunthapur forest and there was dense Dolka forest covering the area. The name 'Silkhaguri' was popularised by 'Rajbongshi' peoples. According to British records, the early name of the place 'Silchaguri', which morphed into 'Siliguri'.⁴ J. D. Hooker in his travelogue described "Siligoree stands on the verge of the Terai, that low malarious belt which skirts the base of the Himalaya."⁵ In the words of L.S.S. O' Malley Siliguri is "a tract of reeking moisture and rank of vegetation, it has always been

dreaded by Europeans, who used, in the days before the railway, to hurry through it as fast they could travel, and if possible in the early morning, in order to get beyond the fatal fever zone.”⁶

Growth of Siliguri as urban Centre:

In 1907 the Sub-Divisional headquarter was established in Siliguri. The people from different parts of the Sub-Continent had cantered around Siliguri particularly due to tea, timber and transport. The attraction of the business prospect removed the fear of malaria from the hearts of business loving people. Besides tea and timber companies like Mark Mayer, North Bengal Jute Mill, Rsim & Co, Landen Clerk, Reilly Brothers and others related with jute business were established in Siliguri.⁷ Siliguri 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 tea industry the isolation was broken down. Even 1920 Siliguri was not developed. Sri Satyendra Narayan Majumdar, a great revolutionary, who was brought up in Siliguri town in that period wrote in autobiography about Siliguri “town” in the 1920s. According to him at that time the population of Siliguri was about 3000 to 4000 soul and most of them were belong to the Bihari community.⁸ He also wrote on the nature of isolation and life of Siliguri in the early 1920’s “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. The life of Siliguri was sleepy and everybody was afraid. They were afraid of malaria, afraid of tigers and most of all by the elephants. 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 the train and hawkers and vendors become very active at that time.” He also added that, “Almost all the houses were built with wood and timber. Not a single brick-cement structured house was found in Siliguri. There was no electricity. At night kerosene lamps used to be lighted. Only in Sundays Siliguri was crowded because of the market. But during all other times of the week Siliguri remained deserted and peaceful.”⁹

Though the population of Siliguri till the thirties of 20th century had increased gradually but its overall development was not noteworthy, yet till the first decades of the 20th century there was only one single private owned two-storied pucca building named ‘Harihar Kutir’ owned by a lawyer and jotedar Harasundar Majumdar.¹⁰ Apart from some Government building like railway quarter, hospital etc. almost all the houses were made out of wood which was easily available and in this earthquake-prone region the practice of making brick houses was restricted by the Colonial Government which proves that Siliguri though had by then a larger population; there had been little improvement in its.¹¹ It may be note that during this period the Burdwan Road, Station Feeder Road, Hill Cart Road, and Hospital -Court Road till prison had stone and brick surface roads. The other of the Siliguri Municipal area had a sporadic habitation, uninhabited land and jungles. Khalpara with many other areas of Siliguri was covered with water and water-hyacinth for most of the year.¹²

Siliguri was declared as IV class town for the first time in 1931 by the Census of India.¹³ the total number of population in Siliguri town was 6067 persons among them 4182 males and 1885 were females as per the Census Report of 1931. Siliguri town covered an area of 3.6 sq. miles and the total number of occupied houses was 1604 in numbers.¹⁴ This urban growth has taken place in spite of unhealthy conditions and has no doubt been due to Siliguri’s increasing importance as a focus of communications. The population Siliguri is just under 12 per cent of the population of the Siliguri Sub-division.¹⁵ The Governance Darjeeling District which also included Siliguri Subdivision suffered from peculiarities due to the special application of various legislations. The Bengal Tenancy Act was not in action and Act X of 1859 and Act VIII of 1879 regulated the rights and liabilities of the rural population. The Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919 was in adopted only in Siliguri town area in the Darjeeling district.¹⁶

Establishment of local Self-Government in Siliguri:

The ‘Siliguri Union Board’ was established as the first form of official local self-government in Siliguri in 1938. However, prior to that some form of locally organized institution was present which looked after the public utility services, though in a meager way. In 1915 a “Sanitary Committee” was formed in Siliguri. Surendranath Bhattacharjee, a renowned lawyer was the first President of this Committee and Kartik Chandra De was the first Secretary of this Committee. The main responsibilities of this Committee were to clear the garbage from non-sanitary latrines and clean the roads. Actually its initial activities involved overseeing the sweeper in the disposal of night soil near the banks of Mahananda and Phuleswari rivers and later on Tikiapara. The method of disposal was simple digging the ground, depositing and covering it. Street lamps were installed for the first time in Siliguri¹⁷ Installation of night lamps on wooden poles on the major roads was implemented by George Mehbert, President of Union Board in 1929. Streetlights were erected on Hill cart Road and Station Feeder Road with Bamboo poles and daylights were hung in the evening by the Local Board, and the area around the main road was the then called as the Town.¹⁸Till 1921 there was no District Board, Local Board or Union Committee in the Darjeeling District unlike other districts. Various responsibilities of the District Board like medical and veterinary relief and village sanitation were met by the Darjeeling Improvement Fund under the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling.¹⁹ This Darjeeling Improvement Fund existed even after the formation of District Board and Local Boards. In the year 1921 the District Board in Darjeeling District was introduced under the Bengal Local Self-Government Act, 1885. This Board came into effect from 1st of April, 1922. Three ‘Local Boards’ were also constituted and one of them was Siliguri Local Board Under the same Act, Out of ten elected members, three were elected by the Siliguri Local Board in the District Board of Darjeeling. The Siliguri Local Board consisted of 12 nominated members and out of them two were officials as ex-officio members, four were representatives of the Tea Industry, and the remaining six were non-officials.²⁰

In fact, the Siliguri Local Board acted as agent of the District Board and did not have any independent source of income. The most important work was the repair and maintenance of minor roads. Siliguri Local Board was formed for replace the Sanitary Committee in 1926. On 15th June, 1935, the following news was published in Daily Amrita Bazar Patrika—“ The following gentlemen were duly elected to form the Union Board this year viz. 1) Mr. L. N. Majumder M. A. BL. 2) Mr. P. K. Basu BL. 3) Maulavi Syed Mahamed BL. 4) Babu Bindeswari Misra 5) Babu Hanuman Prasad 6) Babu Shewmangal Sing (Sharma).The following three gentleman have been nominated by the Government to the above Board 1) Mr. A. N. Bhattacharya BL.2) George Mehbert 3) Maulavi Saharuddin Ahmed. The election of President and Vice-President will soon be undertaken. The old President Mr. L.N. Majumdar is also a candidate for a fresh election as President.²¹ On 10th July, 1935, another article also was published on Union Boards and New Amendments Bill to save anomalous position –“The Bengal village Self Government (Amendment) Act 1935 which was published in the Calcutta Gazette of the 4th July 1935 and came into force with effect from that date, provides ‘interalia’ for an extension of the franchise qualifications for Union Board Elections and extends the term of office of members of Union Boards from three to four years. In a number of cases however elections have been already but the New Boards could not be declared as duly constituted under section 11 of the Bengal Village Self-Government Act before the

Amending Act came into force. This has been given rise to an anomalous position the term of Union Boards having been automatically extended from three to four years, the election already held which Government are advised, remain valid even after the commencement of the Amending Act cannot now be given effect to and the persons who have been declared duly elected will have to wait for about a year before the new Boards can be constituted. Government are of opinion that the best way of removing the anomaly will be to have the Union Boards in respect of which elections have already been held, be duly reconstituted as early as possible. It would not be desirable to put these Union Boards to the trouble and expense of holding fresh elections. Government have therefore decided to introduce a Bill at the forthcoming session of the Legislative Council to provide that in the case of such Union Boards the provisions of clause (1) of Section 6 of the Amending Act shall not come into force until nominations have been made and the new Boards have been declared by the District Magistrate to be duly constituted under section 11 of the Act.”²² Finally the first form of self-governance in Siliguri town area was the establishment of the ‘Union Board’ in March, 1938 and its first president was advocate Laxminarayan Majumdar.²³ He was followed by George Mehbort who acted as the president of the Union Board till 1949. However, it is to be noted that though a Union Board was established in Siliguri in March, 1938 under the Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919, it was not endowed with enough technical ground and financial strength to cope effectively with the pressing problems of sanitation and drainage, particularly in the Bazar area. It is worth noting here that the Darjeeling Improvement Fund realized nearly Rs. 12,000 from the Siliguri Bazar but its contribution to the Union Board was too meager.²⁴

Nonetheless, the activity of the Board was fair enough with regard to the conservancy system. The conservancy of the Bazar area was handed over to the Union Board by the Darjeeling Improvement Fund in 1938. In this regard a contribution of Rs.2000 was made by the Fund.²⁵ The Board spends about Rs.1, 400 on Chaukidars and establishment and for other purposes raised Rs.5,400 in taxation and received grants of about Rs.1, 600 in 1940-41.²⁶ The Union Board was responsible for providing public utility services before independence in India. Water supply was not available beyond Railway Station and Railway Colony despite the fact that the quality of drinking water was unhealthy during that time and thus the region was prone to many deadly diseases like malaria and kala-azar. The same was true with provision of electricity.²⁷

Formation of Siliguri Municipality:

Siliguri town area was governed by the Local Board from 1926 to 1938 and Union Board from 1938 to 1949. But due to lack of efficiency in the functioning of Siliguri Union Board, the demand for establishment of ‘Municipality’ has been growing since 1934. The Siliguri Union Board could not take any effective steps to solve the problems of public health, especially the modernization of sanitation and drainage system. Pradyut Kumar Basu, one of the members of Siliguri Union Board and renowned lawyer, started to write articles in newspapers like Amritabazar, Anandabazar, Forward, etc. to highlight the failure of the present Union Board. Not only were those, various strategies adopted by Rate Payers Association to draw the attention of the Deputy Commissioners of Darjeeling district and beyond. Following this article of Pradyut Basu was published in Amritabazar on May 2, 1934- “The lighting of the streets of the town is under the management of the Union Board. The arrangement of lamp-posts on some particular streets seems to be inequitable in as much as some other streets are not getting equal amount of advantage along with them. Moreover lamp-stands have been posted at places where there is not much necessity for a stand. Above all, lamps in some particular streets get extinct not long after they are lit up exposing the Streets to visible darkness. Replacement of lamp-stands according to maximum amount of suitability to all streets will be quite welcome.” An article on same topic was also published in the newspaper ‘Forward’ on 12th May, 1934. A letter of complaint which was written by Pradyut Basu on ‘Drainage of Siliguri’ published in the ‘Forward’ on 1st August in 1934. He wrote- “Torrential rains render the town and its surroundings almost water-logged. There is no canal or systematic drain along the roads to pass and flash away the rain-waters. Unless the authorities give effective to their contemplated scheme of drainage ere-long the health and condition of the people and especially of those who reside by the station feeder road will be greatly affected.” Another article of Pradyut Basu on ‘Lighting of Streets’ was published in Anandabazar Patrika on 22nd October, 1934. Not only that, Pradyut Basu formed ‘Siliguri Rate Payers’ Association’ in 1939. Pradyut Basu was elected as the General Secretary of this association’ and Bijaykrishna Ghosh was the president. Brajendranath Basu Roychoudhuri and Priyagopal Sen acted as the Vice-President of this organisation. Basanta Kumar Sarkar was elected as the Assistant Secretary of the ‘Rate Payers’ Association’. Other members of this association were Prasad Kumar Nandi, Swarnakamal Dasgupta, Chittamohan Biswas, Harakumar Bagchi, Sheo Mangal Singh. It is known from the book ‘Ekti Janapader Kahini’ written by Pradyut Basu that in between the last phase in the year 1939 to early days in the year 1940, Sri Sisir Kumar Gupta, Sub-Divisional Officer of Siliguri called a public meeting at Siliguri Court House. The purpose of this convention was to know the opinion of the people about the establishment of a municipality at Siliguri. People from different communities like Bengali, Panjabi, Marwari, Bihari, Muslims of Siliguri and also the lawyers, members of the Siliguri Union Board, Government Officers, Doctors, and Jotedars took part in it. George Mehbort, president of the Union Board, and other wealthy and influential Bengalis and non-Bengalis like Birendranath Roy Sarkar, Mangtaram Agarwal, Hanuman Prasad were strongly opposed to the formation of a ‘municipality’ in the city. On the other hand, Pradyut Basu, general secretary of the Rate Payers’ Association, spoke strongly in favour of the formation of the municipality. He argued in his speech that in support of his views, he pointed out the disability and limitations of the Union Board in the overall development of Siliguri. After that, Pradyut Basu, Basanta Kumar Sarkar, Swarnakamal Dasgupta, Priyanath Chakraborty and others organised several meetings and conventions to form public opinion in favour of establishing ‘municipality’ in the city. Not only that, from 1939 to 1946 the Rate Payers’ Association led by Pradyut Basu started a movement to demand the formation of Siliguri municipality. Pradyut Basu and other members of Rate Payers Association surveyed every house in the city and determined its holding number. Then they made an assessment list of each house and repeatedly sent it to the Local-self department of the Bengal Provincial Government through the Darjeeling deputy commissioner to apply for the establishment of a municipality for the overall development of Siliguri. Actually the Rate Payers’ Association played an effective role in strengthening the demand for the formation of municipalities.²⁸

In this context, on 22nd November, 1946, the British government issued a letter to Pradyut Kumar Bose, the General Secretary of the Rate Payers’ Association and the Town Development Committee to discuss regarding the establishment of Siliguri Municipality at 4 pm on 26th November, 1946. The letter was signed by the deputy commissioner on behalf of the government. On July 7th, 1947, the government sent a letter to the committee. The letter was signed by the Director, Department of Self-Government on behalf of the Commissioner of the Rajsahi Division. It said the plan to bring Siliguri under the municipality had been adopted, and the government would take immediate steps to implement it. But this assurance did not work due to transfer of power and the Independence of India. In the next two years from 1947 to 1949, the new government was busy in shaping the

system of governance in India.²⁹ On 24th May, 1949 the Siliguri Municipality was established through a gazette notification under the Bengal Municipal Act of 1932. It was located in an abandoned wooden house of Md. Khuda Baksha on the Hill Cart Road, opposite of Meghdoot Cinema Hall. Mr. Sachindra Mohan Guha, Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) was the first chairman of the Siliguri municipality and Birendra Nath Roy Sarkar was the Vice-Chairman. Besides the above the other State Government nominated Commissioners were Abanindranath Bhattacharjee, Pradyut Kumar Basu, Bimal Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Digendranath Roy Sarkar, Manturam Agarwal, Bindheswari Misra, Rampada Chattopadhyaya, Dr. Khirodh Nath Chattopadhyay, Dr. Gopal Chandra Ghosh and George Mehbort. According to the rules of that day three-fourth of the Commissioners were elected and the rest one-fourth were appointed by the Deputy Commissioner. The Chairman of the municipality used to be a government servant, but this procedure was abolished in 1956.³⁰ On 26th October 1952, the then Governor of West Bengal, Mr. Harendra Kumar Mukhopadhyaya laid the foundation stone of the Pour Bhawan at its present location which was inaugurated by Mr. Bireswar Majumdar on 26th January, 1960.³¹

Urban Growth factors in Siliguri:

After partition of India, due to reorganization of the boundaries between India and Pakistan, the commercial importance of Jalpaiguri declined and within four decades the commercial importance of Siliguri had largely increased.³² But before partition, for fancy goods and large amount of purchase the residence of Siliguri had to go to Jalpaiguri.³³ Even to by school text books Jalpaiguri was the only nearest options in those days.³⁴ The devastating flood of Jalpaiguri in October, 1968 further declined the importance of Jalpaiguri for a couple of years while on the other hand trade and commerce was flourishing in Siliguri. Infect traders migrated from Jalpaiguri to Siliguri to conduct trade because Jalpaiguri became basically a sleepy town as Siliguri was in the pre-Colonial period. According to Dr. C.C Sanyal the flood of 1968 completely washout the hundred years old town Jalpaiguri.³⁵ Apart from these after the independence of Burma in 1948 and beginning of the military regime in Burma in 1962 under General Ne Win, a large number of Bengalis migrated to Siliguri with many others part of India.³⁶

One of the major factors of this transformation of Siliguri is the Sino-Indian War of 1962. As a result of this to provide security of North-East India, a different outlook towards Siliguri had developed by the than Central Government of India. For the national security a number of Military Offices and Divisions were setup. Along with this a number of Military a number of Military stations and Camps for soldiers of the Indian Army, Air Force, B.S.F and S.S.B were established in this region. In connection with this a number of development programmes and economic assistance were provided which helped in the development of this area. Further, the partition of India in 1947 disconnected North-East India from Northern India similarly the central part of Bengal (West Bengal) was separated from northern part of Bengal. In order to solve this problem the than Government of India had set up the Assam Railway Link Project in November, 1947 as a result of which North Station was established in Siliguri which popularly known as Siliguri Junction. In later period with the formation of New Jalpaiguri railway station in 1964 the impotence of Siliguri further increased. Moreover, due to partition of India the geographical importance of Siliguri increased because it became a central place of North Bengal with Balurghat and Malda in western side and Cooch Behar and Alipurduar in eastern side.³⁷

the Indo-Pak War of 1965, the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, the Anti-Foreigner Movement or “Bengal Khedao Andholan” during the late 70s and early 80s of the past century in Assam and North-East India, the communal violence of Bangladesh during the early 90s in 20th century helped for the enormous change in the demographic structure of Siliguri town and persuaded rapid urbanization in Siliguri.

Actually in the post-partition period of India in 1947 the rapid growth of commercialization in Siliguri is the development of the town as an important traffic and transportation function of North Bengal as well as North-East India. Not only does all road traffic to and from Assam and from frontier areas pass through the town but it is also a major rail road terminus in North Eastern India.³⁸ Further after the building up of Farakka Barrage in 1971, train communication became an uninterrupted feature between Siliguri and Calcutta. It may note that New Jalpaiguri became the first railway station in India to have all the three gauges i.e. broad, middle and narrow gauge rail lines.³⁹

Due to above circumstances in the post-1947 period Siliguri's population started increasing at a very fast pace beginning with the settlement of thousands of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan following the partition of the country. As a result during 1951-1961, Siliguri town witnessed a 101.5 per cent population growth. This unprecedented influx to Siliguri town was mainly due to the urbanization process which started taking place prior to Independence and expansion of the territory sector. According to 1961 Census Report Siliguri Municipality covered an area of 4.97 sq. miles and were inhabited by 65,471 persons. Further according to the said Census Report the town had a total number of 464 factories and the establishment of employing about 4814 workers. The principal industries of the town were the rice and flour mills, bakeries, fruit, plywood industry, furniture industry, automobile servicing industry, soap manufacture, sodium silicate manufacture, aluminium utensils manufacture and tea industry. The whole area is rapidly developing into an industrial complex. The growth of the towns had started centring round the railway station area with the setting up of godowns and dwelling-cum-commercial establishments. This core of the town has poor accessibility by road and also suffers from bad drainage. The open space in the west and south has rapidly been filled up by large-scale industries like rice-mills, saw mills and setting up of houses for industrial workers. The others areas were mainly residential with a few office buildings interwoven in between the residential houses.⁴⁰ After the construction of the pipelines by the Burma Oil Company in Siliguri town wake come a demand for better housing and the company paid local landlords to build brick and cement houses with modern sanitary fittings. Till then Siliguri did not know of septic tank.⁴¹ Further for rehabilitation of these refugees the then State Government had sanctioned Rs.1,50,000 to the Siliguri Municipality to construct new roads, make sanitary arrangements and arrange water supply in the refugee concentrations within the municipal limits. In addition the Refuge Rehabilitation Department opened a market on a three acres plot of land at an expense of more than Rs.10,000,00 for the benefit of about 800 refugee traders and named after the then Chief Minister of West Bengal Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy as Bidhan Market. Half of the eight refugee colonies were within Siliguri Municipality and the persons staying there were mostly employed in urban occupations pertaining to the tertiary sector of the economy.⁴²

Apart from Siliguri's rapid urban growth the main reason behind this were the 'Anti- Foreigner Movement' which was started in the early part of the 80s of the 20th Century in the North-Eastern part of India especially in Assam and Meghalaya. This drove out the Bengali speaking persons bound to search their new settlement which was nearly identical with their religion, caste, custom etc and in this regard Siliguri was their first choice. On the other hand the political disturbance in those areas (N.E. India) persuaded the business community mostly Marwaris and Biharis to set up their new commercial hub, and in this connection after

1962 Sino-Indian war Siliguri became the transit point of entire North-East India on the one side and hills and Dooars on the other. As a result a large number of shops and godowns were opened in both side of Hill Cart Road, Sevoke Road and Bidhan Road of Siliguri. In this connection numerous Medicine Shops and Store business are noticeable. Bhutan also drove the Nepali specking people, who were popularly known as 'Bhupali' made their settlement in the rural areas of Terai.⁴³

Municipal Election and Urban Governance:

Siliguri had only eight wards in 1952. 'Para' means only few areas like Babu Para, Milanpalli, Khalpara, Deshbandhupara, Mahanandapara, Khudiramipalli, Ashrampara, Hakimpara and Subhaspally, Shaktigarh Colony (also called as Old Siliguri) and Bharatnagar Colony under Jalpaiguri district were part of this town. On the other hand, Gurungbasti and Pradhannagar are to the northeast of Mahananda.⁴⁴ Preparations for the Siliguri municipal elections began in October 1952. The local self-government authorities in West Bengal announced the date of municipal elections on November 22 this year. According to the announcement, elections were held on December 12 in eight wards of Siliguri municipality. Veteran Congress leader Brajendra Kumar Basu Roy Chowdhury was elected as the first elected Vice-Chairman of Siliguri Municipality. At the beginning of the year 1953, the first elected municipal board took charge of Siliguri Municipality. In this election, mainly two political parties participated in the municipal elections, Indian National Congress and Communist Party of India. Pradyut Kumar Bose, the nominee for the post of Vice Chairman nominated by the Congress party was defeated by Brajendra Kumar Basu Roy Chowdhury. Members of the Communist Party supported Brajendra Kumar Basu Roy Chowdhury and there is a lot of confusion about this.⁴⁵

Around 1953, in the interest of development of Siliguri town, it was decided to remove DHR's Railway line from Hill Cart Road, because it was the main road of the town and failure to extend this road would disrupt traffic in this growing city. The only paved roads in the town at that time were Hill Cart Road, Station Feeder Road, Burdwan Road and Sevoke Road.⁴⁶ But the development work of the city is not very much, but nearly 2-4 unpaved roads were paved with stones by the municipal authority. The roads of Dabgram Colony No. 1 and 2 were paved with bricks. At the same time the work of Baghajatin Park and Suryanagar Park was started.⁴⁷ The first electricity connection was given at Siliguri hospital on 28th September in 1955. Besides hospital, electricity connections were also given to some business establishments and houses.⁴⁸

The first elected Chairman under the new amendment Act was Jagdish Chandra Bhattacharya. Thereafter, leaving aside administrator Chairman on few occasion, the successive Chairman of the Siliguri Municipality were Jiban Krishna Dutta, Krishnendra Narayan Choudhury, Swapan Kumar Sarkar, Asok Narayan Bhattacharya and Bikash Ghosh. In 1994 with the conversion of Siliguri Municipality to Siliguri Municipal Corporation (S.M.C), the nomenclature of Chairmen changed to Mayor. The Siliguri Municipality started with 8 wards and gradually increased to 19 in 1964, 30 in late 80s of the past century and finally 47 in 1994 when it was elevated to the status of a Corporation.⁴⁹ It had no Standing Committee function in the decades of 1950s and 1960s. The administrative set up of the Municipality comprised of five departments namely General Administration, Collection, License, Public Works and Sanitation and Public Health.⁵⁰

With the amendment of the Municipal Act in 1956, provision was made for three-fourth elected commissioners and remaining one-fourth members nominated by the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling District. Under the amended Act, the municipal election of Siliguri Municipality was held in 1957. On 9 December, the results showed that out of 19 wards of Siliguri Municipality, 13 candidates from Congress party, 3 candidates from Communist Party and 3 Independent candidates have won this election. Notable candidates include Jagdish Bhattacharya, Panchanan Talukder, Jagdish Ghosh (all Congressmen), Charu Majumdar, Samar Sarkar and Dr K. N Chatterjee (Communist Party) and Pradyut Kumar Basu (independent) Veteran Congress leader Jagdish Bhattacharya was appointed as the first elected Chairman of Siliguri Municipality. Another Congress candidate Panchanan Talukder was appointed as the Vice-Chairman of the Siliguri Municipality.⁵¹

The preparation of next Siliguri municipal elections was started earlier in 1964. Candidates have been campaigning since January. Individuals are more influential than political parties in municipal election. Although the Congress and the Communist Party have fielded their own candidates, a number of Independent candidates have contested the election. The election ended in the third week of February. When the results were announced on the 25th, it was seen that most of the 14 wards had been occupied by the Indian National Congress. Upendra Nath Das of the Communist Party was the only winning candidate. On the other hand, Khirodh Roy Chaudhury, Parshvanath Ghosh and Panchanan Talukdar, Jibankrishna Dutta (Montu Dutta), Amulya Kumar Saha had elected as the Congress candidate. Montu Dutta and Panchanan Talukder were appointed as the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Siliguri Municipality.⁵² New municipal board took over the charge in 1964, but there were no plan to develop the city. Municipal officials were concerned about the under development of Siliguri town. Sanitary system is conventional. The condition of the toilet was very poor. The drains were also made of clay. Outbreaks of mosquito-borne diseases were severe. Medical services at Siliguri Sub-Divisional Hospital were limited. Although the Siliguri Planning organization was formed for the development of Siliguri, but it did not take much initiative in planning. Although the land was surveyed as per the rules, in reality no activity was observed in carrying out any work.⁵³

The Siliguri Municipality started with 8 wards and in 1964 it increased to 19 wards. In 1980s the total number of wards was 30 and finally 47 wards in 1994 when it was upgraded to the status of a Municipal Corporation. It had no standing Committee function in the decades of 1950s and 1960s. The administration of the Municipality consists of five departments namely General Administration, Collection, License, Public Works and Sanitation and Public Health.⁵⁴ Apart from this, in the context of the fast pace of urbanization of Siliguri town it was late realization on the part of the Siliguri Municipality to envision a development plan. The obvious result was the unplanned, haphazard growth with its bearing on the public and utility services. On 13th June, 1964, Siliguri Planning Organization was established under the Development and Planning Department of the Government of West Bengal after the fifteen years of the establishment of the Siliguri Municipality. For the purpose of future land use pattern of Siliguri, the S.P.O prepared an Interim Development Plan for Siliguri in 1965. This plan also sought to provide a futuristic mapping of the Environmental Impact assessment of the town. The S.P.O prepared a Comprehensive Development Plan of the town in 1967. But it was rightly felt that SPO was unable to deal effectively the manifold urban problems facing Siliguri primarily due to two reasons. Firstly, the Siliguri Planning Organization was recommending authority and not an implementing authority. Secondly, the area of the town was not confined to administrative jurisdiction of Siliguri Sub-division as urbanization process resulted in its expansion to the neighbouring Jalpaiguri district.⁵⁵

Till the early 70s of the 20th century the main responsibility of the Municipality was to clean the road, providing electric light, providing sanitation and other various reforms. After a decade Siliguri municipal elections were held at the end of November 1974. The Indian National Congress won the election. In December 1974 Krishnendu Narayan Chaudhuri was elected as the

chairman of the Siliguri Municipality. After becoming the chairman of the municipality, Krishnendu Narayan Chowdhury started various developmental works of the city. In this period due to enormous growth of population in Siliguri Municipality various steps were taken by the Municipality. Rehabilitating the Harijans at Ashrampara, constructing roads, supplying water, providing sanitation, lightening the main roads, watering the roads in summer was done during this period. The major development plans which were taken during this period under the Chairmanship of Krishnendu Narayan Chaudhuri are as follows:

1. To set up a Central Bus terminus in the vacant land of Burma Shell, Caltex and Standard Vaccam Oil Company on the southern side of the Town Station .
2. Proper town planning and water sewage system, to include Shaktigarh, Dabgram, New Jalpaiguri, Haiderpara, Ghogomali and some other adjoining areas of Darjeeling district but administratively belong to Jalpaiguri district came under Siliguri Municipality .
3. To set up market at Pradhan Nagar, Rabindra Nagar; Babupara and also at Road Station triangle.
4. To build up a stadium at Tilak Maidan which was at that time was owned by the Defence Department and a proposal was adapted to made a fly-over near kachari road.⁵⁶

It is also noted that the Siliguri-Jalpaiguri Development Authority was established on 1st April 1980 under the West Bengal Town and Country (Planning and Development) Act of 1979. The earlier S.P.O got subsumed into this newly formed S.J.D.A. The S.J.D.A prepared an Outline Development Plan in 1986 for 260 sq.km of the S.J.D.A area which included the whole of 15.5 sq.km of Siliguri Municipality. This plan got the approval of the State Government in 1992. Further in 1994 Siliguri Municipal Corporation and S.J.D.A jointly planed out an "Approach Paper" on urban development of Siliguri.⁵⁷

The next Siliguri Municipal election was held in July, 1982. The result is undoubtedly in favour of the Left Front. The Left Front won the Siliguri Municipality for the first time in the history of Siliguri Municipality. Swapan Kumar Sarkar, local renowned lawyer was appointed as the Chairman of the municipal board. Rabin Pal was also appointed as the Vice Chairman of the Municipality.⁵⁸ Under the Chairmanship of Swapan Kumar Sarkar the foundation stone of the Kanchanjunga Krirangan was laid in place of Tilak Maidan and consequently some development plans was taken like to reform the roads adjoining the Maidan, to construct a second rail gate beside Town Station and prepare the connecting roads and broadened Kachari road, Station Feeder Road, Burdwan Road, Bidhan Road and Sevoke Road. The plan to bifurcate the only broad road of the city i.e Hill Cart Road, from Road Station to Howrah Petrol Pump was undertaken during this period. The road was decorated by sodium vapour lamps and tube lights and foot path was constructed. Vapour Lamp was also used in adjoining roads of the Municipality and on Bidhan Road, Haren Mukherjee Road, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Road, Station Feeder Road and Sevoke Road. Some parks, libraries, markets, community halls were established by the Municipality. In 1982 a plan was approved to construct an Electric Crematorium and to beatify the Kiran Chandra Shamshan Ghat.⁵⁹

In 1987, Ashok Narayan Bhattacharjee was elected as the chairman of the Siliguri Municipality. After becoming the chairman of the municipality, He started various developmental works of the city. Under the tenure of Ashok Narayan Bhattacharjee beautification works of the main roads were done, community toilets were constructed and few bridges were built. Adult education centres were set up in various colonies and various literacy educational plans were undertaken. In the Assembly Election on 20th May 1991 Ashok Bhattacharjee was elected an MLA and became the Municipal Affairs and Urban Development Minister of West Bengal. In his place Bikash Ghosh became the Chairman of the Municipality.⁶⁰

Establishment of Siliguri Municipal Corporation:

On 12th May, 1990, the West Bengal Legislative Assembly announced the upgradation of Siliguri Municipality as Siliguri Municipal Corporation. The Corporation was constituted on 12th January, 1994 under the Siliguri Municipal Corporation Act, 1990. The Siliguri Municipal Corporation was constituted with 47 wards, adding 17 wards more to the erstwhile 30 wards of the Siliguri Municipality. At the time of its establishment as Corporation, its population was approximately 3.7 lakhs as per 1991 census. However, the population of 30 wards of the earlier Municipality was a high 2.27 lakhs with area being 15.54 sq. km. On the other hand, the added area constituting 17 wards with 14 in Jalpaiguri district and 3 in Darjeeling district consisted of 1.49 lakhs population within 26.36 sq. km. area. The first election to the Siliguri Municipal Corporation was held on 15th May, 1994. Incumbent Chairman of Siliguri Municipality, Bikash Ghosh of left front, was elected the first Mayor of the city.

Provision of the Siliguri Municipal Corporation Act, 1990 was same to that of the West Bengal Municipal Act, 1993 with the following changes: (i) The Mayor will be honoured as the First Citizen of the Siliguri Municipal Corporation. (ii) Deputy Mayor will be nominated by the Mayor among the Councillors (iii) The elected Chairman will exercise the powers in the Corporation similar to that of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.(iv) The governance of the Corporation is to be run by the Mayor-in-Council consisting of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor and maximum of ten other elected members of the Corporation. (v) In order to run the administration of the Corporation in a smooth and decentralized manner, there will be the provision of Borough Committees at the intermediate level between the Corporation and the Ward. (vi) The Chief Executive Officer will be acted as Chief Administrative Officer of the Corporation.⁶¹

CONCLUSION:

After brief study urban growth of Siliguri city, it is clear that from the historical period to present time, it faced a higher urban growth rate. Siliguri city has a great chronological history from small village to large urban agglomeration area. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Siliguri was a large village with a few hundred too few thousand people. According to census of India, 1931, Siliguri had only 6,067 persons and in 1941, it had only 10,487 persons. But after partitioned India in 1947, a huge number of refugees came into this region from neighbouring areas and Siliguri turned into a municipal town with 32,480 persons in 1951 census. In these decades, Siliguri received highest decadal growth rate that is 213.15 per cent from 1941 to 1951 with total area 9.32 sq. km. After the foundation of Siliguri municipal town, it received continuously huge number of migrants every decade. In 1981 census, Siliguri town was converted from a municipal town to a city, from 97,484 persons to 154,378 persons with increasing the area from 9.32 sq. km to 15.54 sq. km. After rapid growth of urban population into Siliguri city, it upgraded into Siliguri Municipality Corporation in 1994 with extended area of 15.54 sq. km to 41.90 sq. km and it became the second largest city in West Bengal after Kolkata. From this point of view, Siliguri city needs a proper, modern, hygienic and future smart-city planning for future urban growth.

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