

The Changing Demographic Profile in Jalpaiguri Duars (1867-2001)

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At present the Duars area is not an administrative unit or any separate region of North- East Indian territory; but the duars was and still is a geographical descriptive name. But historically, politically and economically 'Duars' is an important area, not only for Bengal but for India as a whole. The word 'Duar' means door and these are the doors to Bhutan and the Duars area refers to vast territory of Jalpaiguri abutting the remaining Indian territory. The total numbers of Duars are 18. Among which 11 Duars are in Jalpaiguri District (West Bengal) and the remaining 7 are located in Assam. The Jalpaiguri Duars or Bengal Duars are (11 Duars) called Western Duars and the 'Assam Duars' (in Goalpara District) or 7 Duars called 'Eastern Duars'. For the administrative purpose, after the arrangements of British, this division (Jalpaiguri Division) was very significant because after the creation of the district a new type of administrative system was introduced. By these administrative policy the Western Duars (Bengal Duars) or eastern bank of Tista to Sankos was a non-regulated part and the Western bank of Tista was regulated area¹. The Jalpaiguri Duars is the chicken's neck of India connecting the north east including Assam with the rest main body of India.

The Western Duars is the integral part of the District Jalpaiguri as well as West Bengal. 'Jalpaiguri' is said to have derived its name from the Olive (jalpai in Bengali) trees. The suffix 'guri' means a place². Some researchers said that the name might well be associated with 'Jalpes', the deity Siva. The present district of Jalpaiguri was separated from Rangpur (now in Bangladesh) district in 1869AD³. This area was annexed by British in 1865 at the termination of Second Anglo-Bhutan war in 1865. The Western Duars comprises an area at 6245 square kilo meters as in 1971AD⁴.

Under the British rule the Western Duars became a part of the district of Jalpaiguri in 1869; and after the attainment of independence as a part of Jalpaiguri, the Duars became a part of West Bengal. Before arrival of the British, most of the area was covered by dense forest and coppice or bush⁵. There was no political stability because ruling dynasty had changed frequently. Different dynasty like Kamrup, Coochbehar and Bhutan ruled this area through the ages. Though the Duars was a thin populated area - but some aboriginal tribal peoples such as Mech, Shabor, Pulind, Orao, Rava and Garo were living. Their language and culture of one ethnic community influenced the others and vice versa but their life style and culture remain unaltered.⁶

After the advent of the British rapid transformation in social life of this region took place.⁷ In this context the changing demographic pattern was very significant. With the establishment of the British rule in Duars the population of this area was gradually increasing. So the changing demography had created a new atmosphere of social equilibrium.

In the colonial period the strategic and economic importance of the Duars attracted the British and they decided to settle in this area. Strategically the Jalpaiguri Duars (eleven Duars) were the gate ways to Bhutan as well as to Chumbey Valley, Sikkim and Tibet. Following the economic opportunity of Duars under the British the people from adjoining places ungraded to Duars and this trend still continues even today and this influx of new people changed the demographic conditions or pattern of this area. The population had increased day by day and it had tremendous impact on polity, economy, education, culture of the peoples of Western Duars. Attempts have been made to search the motive to grow the population and how the demographic pattern had been influenced in this area.

The first enumeration of the people or a survey of the Western Duars was made in 1865-67, and a rough census report was published by the survey officers in 1867AD. According to that survey

the population of the Jalpaiguri Duars was 49620.⁸ But census could not satisfy to the authority. So in 1870AD the deputy Commissioner of Western Duars conducted a special census. After that census operations, returned the population at 100111.⁹ The two censuses showed that the population of western Duars was increasing at a very rapid rate. Since the first enumeration was started or a rough census report was published in 1867AD, so the beginning period of the tropic have selected from this year.

In Jalpaiguri Duars (11Duars) population went on increasing as witnessed in the table below:

Table-1¹⁰

Year	1867	1870-72	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1971
Increase the total number of people in Duars	49620	90063	182687	296348	410606	519372	558971	661068	747356	1404005
Increase inpercentage in Duars	-	81.50%	102.84%	62.21%	38.55%	26.49%	7.62%	18.26%	-	-

From the above table it is proved that the first two or three decade the population increased rapidly. The first five years population growth was more the 81% and next ten years i.e. from 1872 to 1881 the growth of population was more than 102%; and in the next ten years it was more than 62%. Though the climate of the Western Duars was unhealthy yet with the establishment of British rule the population of the Duars increased by leaps and bound; because after annexation, the Duars become an integral part of the Indian Territory. Just after the British conquered (before 1874) the people from neighbouring area such as; Coochbehar, Rangpur, Darjeeling and Nepal came into Duars and constant flow of people into the Western Duars continued. The main cause was that the land was fertile and the rate of rent was low. The other cause for the influx was the aria's proximity to the thriving city of Siliguri¹¹.

It may classify some determinant factors which led to grow the population in Western Duars or Jalpaiguri Duars. The important factors were – a) Migration, b) Economic (Tea plantation, Forest, Agriculture, Trade etc.), c) Illiteracy, d) Death & Birth rate, e) Religious superstition etc. The migration factors may be divided into two categories; one is 'push' factor and another is 'pull' factor. During the partition of India and after the independence large number of Refugee migrated from Bangladesh and they took shelter into the different refugee camps. In Jalpaiguri district there were 603 legal refugee camps in 1971 and in 1994 the number of camp increased into 931.¹² This small number of Refugee Camp was not sufficient for the surplus refugees. So many people began to settle in the different location of the Duars. They had bought the uncultivated waste land and cultivated land from Jotedars and from landed people under cultivation and they permanently settled all over the plane area of the Duars. Secondly, after the independence, since the 1960's riot on the Bengalis in Assam led to further increase of immigration of people from the east. Thirdly, during the year 1990's the people of Nepali origin in Bhutan evicted from Bhutan by Bhutanese authority and migrated to Western Duars. These three factors may be categorized as 'Push' factors. On the other hand for the strategic importance and economic significance of Duars was attracted by the conqueror, neighbouring peoples as well as other Indians also. The British came in this area because they realized the strategic and economic importance of the Duars. The immigrant people from neighbouring coochbehar state, Rangpur (now in Bangladesh) and Darjeeling district, Dinajpur, Pabna (Bangladesh), Malda, Rajshahi (Bangladesh), Goalpara Maymensing (Bangladesh) came to the Duars area for economic opportunity as well as peaceful political environment of the Duars. So the peaceful political surrounding, cultivable waste land and other profitable economic activities were

attracted large number of people from the neighbouring areas. This attractive force of Duars that caused rapid rise in of population may be colled as ‘pull’ factors.

Economic – Economic activities had consisted Agriculture, Forestation and Tea Plantation, Business etc. Before 1885 neighbouring Coochbehar and Baikunthapur had already been virtually in subordinate relation with British. So they had easily introduced new imperial economic policy in Duars.

Before the establishment of tea garden in Jalpaiguri district (between -1865 to 1874) in 1874 agriculture and allied activities sustained the population in the Duars area. The census of the first decade of 20th century showed that large number of people had continued migrate into the Duars from neighbouring area. The population of some tahsil area like Maynaguri, Falakata, Alipurduar and Bhalka was increasing fast and cultivation extending to every direction.

The growth of population of some police station in Bengal Duars is given below:

Table-2¹³

Name of p.s. of Western Duars.	Mayanaguri	Nagrakata	Dhupguri	Mal	Matiali	Madarihat	Falakata	Kalchini	Alipurduar	Kumargram
1881 Total population	35395	16492	34440	36923	14776	9136	10235	7793	11982	5515
1891 ..	57416	26753	55867	59895	23970	14820	16603	12641	19436	8947
1911 ..	82263	38330	80043	82870	33165	35900	40221	39005	59968	27607
1921 ..	81447	37949	79249	83627	33468	40069	44891	48771	74981	34519
1941 ..	94061	39974	101588	95128	42637	53417	52394	77853	95495	41659
1951 ..	88315	42389	110910	88158	49188	59486	55700	85609	119038	48563
1971 ..	159764	66002	216330	166142	61045	271766	130529	137467	734722	97211
1991 ..	238155	101782	345359	230000	93253	152199	207842	203054	1127383	153891
2001 ..	281700	115907	418461	265392	105906	185470	254273	252571	1337575	178047

The every census of the early phase of the Duars had shown (Table-2) that the increasing rate of population in the agriculture base thana (police station) i.e. Maynaguri, Dhupguri, Mal, Falakata, Alipurduar were more than the tea plantation area; like Nagrakata, Matiali, Madarihat, Kalchini, Kumargram etc. The population of Western Duars showed a large increase which was most in the Alipurduar Subdivision of Jalpaiguri.

Natural resources pulled down the people to the Duars from outside of Jalpaiguri. After the conquest of this area the forest remained under the direct control of British government. There was a reserved forest, which is situated entirely in the Western Duars between the Tista and Sankos River, is large measuring 81 square miles.¹⁴ The selection of forests reservation was began in 1872-73. For the

management and for protection of forest the large number of efficient officers and labours was appointed by the British Government and for that a large number of people were brought from the other parts of Bengal.

Tea plantation was the other determining factor which led to grow the population in Jalpaiguri district. The first tea garden in the Western Duars was grown in 1874.¹⁵ Growth of tea plantation led to the rise labours and educated people. So the British government and the owner of the tea gardens began to invite people from Coochbehar, Nepal, Chotanagpur, the Santal Parganas, Ranchi and farther planes of Bengal to settle in this area. The new tea garden were growing with the help of excess labour. It is evident that the tea plantation led to the rapid change in the demographic pattern and on other hand the increased population helped to grow the tea garden in Western Duars. In 1951 the total number of tea garden owners, managers and workers was 178066 persons in Jalpaiguri district.¹⁶ Most of them were immigrants.

A table of increasing tea garden and growth of employer is given bellow:

Table-3¹⁷

Year	No. of tea garden	Number of labours employed	area
1874-1875	First grown	–	–
1876-1877	13	–	818 acres
1882	60	–	4670 acres
1895	182	–	–
1901	235	68619	–
1909	235	–	76403 acres
1911	191	75315	–
1921	131	88564	–
1931	151	116853	–
1941	189	141387	–
1951	158	178066	–
1991	–	–	118707 hector.
2001	6047	–	–

Every successful new economic activities, either agriculture or tea plantation or forestation, was adopted by the British government.

Birth rate and death rate (health) - Under the British rule the birth rate of people of Jalpaiguri became higher than death rate. The censuse report of 1951 showed that number of people born was 231953 in 1941 to 1951 and number of death was 215589. So with the development of medical facility or health care this led to decrease the death rate. On the other hand in course of time the educated peoples became conscious about their health and sanitation.

Illiteracy and religious superstition- The census of 1961 had recorded that 91.67% people were illiterates in Jalpaiguri district.¹⁸ Most of the illiterates' persons were not aware of the family planning .According to them the birth of child is a blessing of God. The child marriage was prevalent. So the people of this area were married off their girls at a very tender age. So the married girls became pregnant before her consciousness about her family and pregnancy. All this factors led to growth of population of Jalpaiguri Duars.

Imigration-The early Western Duars or Jalpaiguri Duars was thinly populated area and most of area was covered by dense forest or jungle. The fear of wild life, dacoit, thieves etc. was the cause of terrified of the people. Be rescue from that situation the local people mainly land holder classes cooperate with the immigrant people to settle in the Western Duars which led to growth of population.

As a whole in Jalpaiguri district population went on increasing as witnessed in the table below:

Table-4¹⁹

Year	Total population
1872	417855
1881	580570
1891	680736
1901	546764
1911	663222
1921	695946
1931	740993
1941	847841
1951	916747
1961	1359292
1971	1750159
1981	2214871
1991	2800543
2001	3401173

For the natural superiority of character and conquest of the British and their economic activities in the Western Duars, the remarkable increase of population had tremendous influence on the society in a distinct way. It had diversely affected the polity, economy, education, language, health, dress, food habit and livelihood etc.

Polity – After the creation of Jalpaiguri district and with the growth of population, the Western Duars has experienced many administrative changes and redistribution or re-settlement of administrative boundaries. The district town, Jalpaiguri became the Jalpaiguri Divisional town in 1963(after Coochbehar). Jalpaiguri district was divided into two sub-division viz. Jalpaiguri Sadar and Falakata. The Falakata sub-division was shifted to Boxa (Bholka) in 1874 and finally it shifted to Alipurduar in 1876.²⁰ Probably the population had increased rapidly in Alipurduar thana area from the very beginning. In 1912 a member of Indian Civil Service was appointed for the first time as sub-divisional officer at Alipurduar.²¹ With the course of time another subdivision i.e. Mal subdivision was created in April, 2001. With the establishment of tea garden the plantation labour also was increasing in number. So in order to look after their public health and sanitation in 1912 the Duars Labour Act was passed.²² From the time of Mr. Sunder's survey a few modifications were made in the thana boundaries e.g. the creation of a new outpost at Atiabari, the establishment of the head quarters of Damdim thana at Mal and sum up the geographical side of the case.²³ After independence in order to maintain law and order, new thana or police station was created. It is remarkable that in the first decade of 20th century the Jalpaiguri District consisted 8 (eight) thana or police station after that police station increase into number 17.²⁴ At first the court of civil procedure was established in Rangpur(now in Bangladesh) than it shifted or extended to Dinajpur. From Dinajpur the court of civil procedure was extended to Western Duars in 1895.²⁵ The sub divisional officer of Alipurduar had the power of a Munsif and of a small case Court Judge up to Rs. 50 within his sub-division and he was authorized to sit at Alipurduar. The administration of criminal Justice was given to the sub-divisional officer of Alipurduar; in addition to these the sub-deputy collector and theTahasildar at Alipurduar had the power as Magistrate of the Second class and the Tahasildar at Maynaguri and Falakata had the power as a Magistrate of the Third class.²⁶

At first municipal administration was set up in Jalpaiguri district town in April 1885.²⁷ But in Duars area the Alipurduar town became the first municipality town on 7 February 1957.²⁸

According to census report 2001 the number of municipalities are 3 (three) and there are 11 non-municipalities towns in Jalpaiguri district.

Some constituencies were created and re-distributed with the growth of population of Jalpaiguri district. For example, according to the Indian Government Act of 1935, a constituency was reserved for the labour of tea plantation in Western Duars. In that election Litta Munda Oraon was elected as a legislative member. In course of time the inhabited village, Panchayet Samities, Gram Panchayet, Municipalities were re-settle and re-distributed with the increasing population.²⁹ For the first election of the Bidhan Sabha(Legislative Assembly) of West Bengal there were 10 seats or constituency in the district. In the Fourth General election seats were increased 11. In the Sixth General Election it was further increases into 12.³⁰

In Jalpaiguri district the number of post offices of 36 in 1919. According to the census Report of 1951 Jalpaiguri district consisted number of 38 post offices.³¹ At present the post office has been raised to 337.³²

With the increasing population the roads for communication and number of vehicles also has extended and increased. In 1971 the number of registered Motor Vehicles was 7737 and it rose into the number of 28969 in 2001.³³ So to maintain the influx population the number of motor vehicles have also increased.

A table of extended road is given bellow:

Table -5³⁴

Year	Road maintained P.W.D. in km.	Road maintained Zila Parisad in km.	Road maintain municipality in km.
1971	1644 km	634 km	119 km
2001	3296 km	743 km	330 km

Economy- Jalpaiguri district is called as the land of '3T' (Tea, Timber and Tourism). The Western Duars consist the above three characters apparently. The increasing population helps the growth of new tea gardens and also makes it profitable because cheap labour is available for tea plantation. Therefore during the last three or four decade large number of small tea garden grew up. The last decade of 20th century and 1st decade of 21st century at the Maynaguri block and the other part of Duars area a large of number small tea gardens had been growing up and is still growing. In the context it is remarkable that the daily wages of the labourers was very low which was profitable to the tea planters and it also led to the growth of the tea garden in this area. Most of the labours were seasonal (part time) and their daily wages was between 50 to 65 Rupees for male and 40 to 50 Rupees for female labour .

The growth of population was a great threat to the forest and forest life. There was an increased demand of timber for fire and to build the house of the tea garden workers and of the local people. The woodcutters took their work as a profession and smugglers were felling the trees illegally. Apart from these, house posts thatch and other minor produces were also obtained from the forests. There was a great demand of canes for basket making. All these above activities had led to deforestation which was great threat on green forest and wild life.

The development of agriculture under the British rule and the post Independence era was the striking features of the regional economy of the Western Duars. These developments were inevitable because a good number of displaced (efficient also) persons had settled in this area before independence and in the days that followed Independence in 1947. With the changing demography, for the accessory requirement, it was necessary to take up intensive cultivation in the existing arable

lands by the use of chemical manure and by the selection of improved seeds. According to the report of the Deputy-commissioner in 1870 it may be said that the extension of cultivation in the Western Duars area was remarkable and it would be possible because the influx of new settlers from Coochbehar State and Rangpur district (now in Bangladesh).³⁵ The migrated people's inhabited the land on the basin of the Tista and Jaldhaka River which was more fertile and most profitable. It was brought under cultivation but not easily. At first they had to work hard to clear the jungle of common reed. So the influx peoples settled in this area permanently and accessory crops met the requirements of the increase of population of the district as well as the other part of the neighboring area. The names of such rich cultivated area e.g. Gajoldoba(in Mal P.S.), Chourangi (in Mal P.S.), Mouyamari(in Maynaguri P.S), Barnish(in Maynaguri P.S.) etc. in Tista Basin and Dhupguri(some part), Nathua etc. in Jaldhaka Basin are remarkable.

Certain factors led to the extension or to the development of the agricultural condition in the Western Duars.

Firstly, with the increase in population, to meet the accessory requirements surplus agricultural production was necessary.

Secondly, the immigrant's cultivators of Western Duars were more efficient than the local cultivators.

Thirdly, before the advent of the outsiders' peoples, the implements of agriculture and irrigation system of Duars was traditional. It was not much advanced and was not adequate. So the new comers had introduced new implements and irrigation system for cultivation in Duars which was more scientific and more efficient.

Fourthly, in Western Duars, cultivation had extended rapidly and it was extending at an even faster rate because of the availabilities of labour.

Fifthly, high demand of the produce of fields at the neighbouring tea gardens and hill area led to develop the cultivation in the Western Duars.

Sixthly, in the course of time, with growth of population, numbers of employees and business men have largely increased. So the accessory crop for surplus people, who was not involved in cultivation, was necessary and for this requirement cultivation had extended.

Seventhly, the government, Banks, co-operatives societies also have launched many schemes for development or advance of cultivation and they helped the cultivators on certain conditions or terms.

Before the colonial period the village was self-sufficient production village. But at present it has changed and some crops are being exported from Western Duars to the neighboring area even into foreign country. All these factors led to the rapid change of human ecology and society in the Duars.

Industry-Tea was the most important industry in the district of Jalpaiguri. Before the establishment of tea industries or factories there was no manufacturing community in Jalpaiguri district. But the people made their own mats, agricultural implements and many of them made their own clothes. Jugi, Tanti weaved the common country cloth; boats were made principally Mech people.³⁶ Apart from these from there was no remarkable industry in Jalpaiguri district before 1874.

After the establishment of tea garden, the industries around tea were main. Apart from this some Gunny, like andi(for home use) was made by silk which obtained from worms grown on the Custer oil plants. Another striped cotton cloth called phota was made by rural people for the simple needs of a rural population.³⁷

In the course of time, with the growth of population, the demand of different type of manufacturing productions was very high. So simultaneously with the tea industries, many other small industries were growing. They were still manufacturing for home consumption, rice and oil milling; wheat and spices grinding, stone crushing, saw-mills, automobile workshops, engineering

workshops, carpentry, hosiery, leather tiles, suitcase making, bidi making, bakery, making of steel trunks, manufacture of candles, bricks and tiles, pottery, toy making and bamboo works, clay modeling, tea-chest manufacturing etc.

After Independence loans under the Bengal State Aid to industries Act had been sanctioned to develop the different type of Industries. Loans were sanctioned by the state government, the District or, Additional Directors of Industries, West Bengal Industrial and Block Development officers. The hand loom weaving industry was growing in different Blocks of Jalpaiguri, vise, Alipurduar- I and Alipurduar- II; Kumargram, Rajganj and Maynaguri; But this textile industry is now in decline.

Up to 31st March 1965 only two towns and 16 villages had electric connection but now this facility has reached to every town and 734 villages .³⁸

A table is given of the growing small industry in this district:

Table-6³⁹

Year	No. of unit of industry	Person employment daily
1949	244	19323
1970	251	20357
2001	12755	72130

Bank and co-operative society- With the change of demographical pattern in this area number of Banks and Co-operative societies was increasing. According to the account of W.W.Hunter, there was no Bank in Jalpaiguri district (before 1870), loans were chiefly conducted by Jotedars, shopkeepers, Marwari traders and others.⁴⁰ In 1911 there were two non-scheduled Banks like Bengal Duars Bank Ltd., which had been taken over by the state Bank of India in 1966 and the Jotedar's Banking and Trading Corporation which had been connected with Non-banking Company in 1976. There were 28 commercial Bank offices in the district. The average population served per offices in 1976 was 63000.⁴¹ In 2001 the total number of Banks in the district rose to 136.⁴²

The co-operative society was at first established in the village Bonapara. There were some other old co-operative societies of the district were Mahakalguri Samavay Samiti (Alipurduar-1912).⁴³ Most of the societies were established or registered under the co-operative laws to fight against the village Shylocks. These co-operative societies used to advance agriculture loans, small industrial loans etc. Central co-operative Bank was also established which had a membership of 461 affiliated society on 30 June, 1971.⁴⁴ The Jalpaiguri co-operative range office came into existence in 1961, and prior to that it was included in the Darjeeling range. There were altogether 720 Co-operative Societies in this district in 1971. Most of them were agricultural credit societies.⁴⁵

Education- Till the Jalpaiguri district was lagging behind in education sector three or four decade ago. The population was almost entirely agricultural and poor were made to serve in the fields instead of being to schools. Another reasons was that the people did not live in villages but in groups of houses on the different parts of the district, scattered at some little distance from one another and it was difficult to choose a central site for a school which would be convenient to all residents in the vicinity.⁴⁶ In spite of that the government and local people established some school in the village area but the distance between the two schools was not less than three kilometers (according to the government rule). So children specially the girls child were not sent to schools situated at a long distance from their homes; and taken away whenever much work was to be done in the fields.

In spite of that backwardness, initiative was taken by Jotedars, local people, government to develop the education in this area. The institution was required for the influx population. After the arrival of the British according to the first census of 1872, the number of Primary School was 19 in this district having 283 students and 22 teachers. 'Jalpaiguri Zilla School; the first high English school was established in 1876.⁴⁷ In 1875-76, 153 schools were established and the total students were 3,263.

In 1907-08 the number of Schools rose to 418 and the number of students increased to 12196. There had been an all round quantitative development in education since 1947.

During the last decade of the 19th century some of the schools were aided by the District Board. According panchayati union scheme which was formed during the first decade of the 20th century, a Primary School named 'Model Primary School' was established in each Panchayati Union and government granted money for the development of those schools were looked. As such type of schools was looking after by the District Board, so they were called 'Board School'.⁴⁸

In 22nd March 1916 the government ordered that schools should be established in the tea garden for the children of the workers of tea garden. Later such types of schools were handed over to the tea garden authorities. In 1934 tea garden schools increased 106, students were 1875.⁴⁹

A table of increasing schools and colleges is given bellow:

Table – 7⁵⁰

	Primary	School	High School	College
Year	No. of school	Student	No of school	No. of college
1872	19	283	-	-
1879	64	1372	01	-
1907-08	345	10234	-	-
1947	589	31937	16	01
1957-58	-	-	22	03
1963-64	1086	104880	35	05
2001	1968	-	197	11

Apart from Boys and Co-educational Schools, to develop the female education, numbers of Girls Schools were also established. In 1907-08 the number of girls schools were 35 with 597 pupils.

Different Christian Missionaries, like American Baptist Missionary Society (1888), Kalimpong Mission of Church of Scotland, the Scandinavian Alliance Mission, had done much towards the spread of education in Western Duars.⁵¹

Apart from these there was Teachers Training Schools, Industrial schools, Medical School, Pharmacy Training Centre, Nurses Training centre, Schools for Backward classes, Sanskrit Education, Adult Education Centre, Social Welfare Education Centre, Social Education Centre etc. in Jalpaiguri district.

In course of time people began to take interest education and for that the literacy rate was increasing. In 20th century the Duars area had developed educationally and culturally. That literacy was progressing among both the male females of the district can well be seen from the following table:

Table-8⁵²

Year	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971
Persons	3.92	5.57	5.67	4.79	8.77	12.40	19.22	24.22
Males	6.98	9.89	9.92	7.92	14.15	18.00	27.07	32.38
Female	0.36	0.44	0.72	1.08	2.41	5.61	10.01	15.03

Dress- The people of the district were satisfied with their distinct dresses. But some dress was typical of the people of Western Duars. With the change of demographic pattern of the Western Duars, some dress had been disappeared altogether and some have lost their popularity now a days.⁵³

Some dress like nangti(a narrow strip of cloth round the loins, keeping the buttocks fully exposed and a thick short strip of the loins cloth hangs in front up to one and a half foot from the waist),⁵⁴ jotakapat(sadis over the breast and let it hang a little above ankles), gown(bakku), hanju.⁵⁵ etc. have almost all are disappeared. The local people like Rajbansi, Mech,Rabha and Garo peoples began to wear the dress of the Bengali Hindu and Muslims.

At present the people changed most of their old things like wooden clogs (kharam), mathal(dhzapi)⁵⁶ and began to use shirt, trousers, dhuti, Panjabi etc. Almost all people of each group of both the sexes now began to use shoes, sandals etc.

Culture

Language- In the first decade of the 20th century colonial rule in Duars the spoken languages of 77% people of this area was a corrupt dialect of Bengali, known as Rangpuri or Rajbansi. Rajbansi, Mahammadans, most of Meches people was spoken by this language. Mech and Toto were the native languages. Apart from this language Bhutan or Tibetan, khas(Nepalis),Oraon, Mundari and Santhali and Hindi were also prevalent. Bengali was the common language.⁵⁷

At present Bengali becomes the common language and the spoken languages of the majority people is Bengali. Some other national level languages like Hindi, English, also became becomes popularity. It may be said that the different spoken languages were being mixed up.

It has been said that the Duars or this area was 'Pandav Barjit Desh'(the country abandon of Pandav).⁵⁸ Some even said that this area is a mini-edition of the 'Mahabharata' (Greater India) and some writers referred to 'The Duars as the 'Ethnological Museum' of India'. From time immemorial people from many parts of the world came here and settled in this area. So the character of the society of Jalpaiguri bears all the vices of the immigrant's society.⁵⁹ The people of this area have been living all together from very long time. So the races of the district assimilated the culture of different groups of people. So a mixed culture was growing. Before 1885 mostly the people of a distinct race resided in this area with their distinct racial characteristics, but at present they look to be a mixed people because of marital and social admixture with other stocks of people who migrated afterwards from all directions.

Food- With the change of demographic pattern in the Western Duars the food habit of the people has also changed. Some foods are gradually losing their popularity and some are being new ones included in their daily diet. Few decades ago the Hindus did not take fowl, pork etc and clarified butter (ghee) was rarely taken.⁶⁰ But at present all these three items are included in their daily food. Some food like 'chheka' and 'sidol' are going lose their popularity. All people do not take the Bhadai rice. People at present have modernized their food.

Here we have seen an overall change in the Western Duars from the time of colonial period. But with the change or transition, the people of this area are facing a lot of problems. The Central and the State Government have failed to tackle the political problem in this area. As a result at present Western Duars is facing different political agitations, like Naxsal movement, KLO(Kamtapur Liberation Organisation), Kamtapur movement, Kshatriya Movement, Gurkha Movement etc. Some terrorist groups of people are creating troubles, posing a dangerous to the peaceful environment. It is a political threat to the peace-loving people of the Duars. With the increase of the educational institution the number of educated boys and girls are also increasing very much. But the governments have not solved the unemployment problems. So the unemployment in this area put the educated boys and girls to inconvenience. Young boys are now going to other states for seeking their job. After immigration most of the local land lord(Joteders) lost their land on the other hand in the sources of inheritance the land of Joteder were fragmented into different parts; some time few land lords could not hold their land and lost their land, and they became landless labourers. Somewhere small

cultivators handed over their land to the tea garden owners to compensate their job or service. But they became lower class workers and at present their living condition is very miserable. Some old tea gardens have been closed and the labourers of the tea garden became jobless posing a great problem for Jalpaiguri Duars. Many people of the old tea gardens are dying without food. Medical facility of Duars is also not sufficient. Communication is very poor and maximum village are without electricity and at present day cultivation also is not profitable due to lack of government facility.

At last it may be said that Jalpaiguri Duars is advancing on its own path with its own features. After the establishment of the colonial rule in his area the progress of development was slow and now being it is more or less is same. In this situation if the government takes initiative to improve the situation the problem will be solved to some extent. It will be more successful if the people join hands work together without taking recourse to unfair means. Some self seeking people are creating many troubles or unrest for their vested self interest. Few credulous common people or general people get involved with them from ignorance. With the increasing population or with the change of demography pattern most of the problems have been solved but some new problems have also cropped up. But these problems are not regional; rather they are the problems of the whole country. The problem may be solved not only through writings or giving fruitless assurances, but by doing something positive.

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